26-1108p - Detailed Summary

26-1108p - *Cities of Refuge, John Nousek*

Bible Reader: Mike Mathis

See the transcript: Transcript HTML - Transcript PDF

Cities of Refuge

Scripture Reading

Scripture Reading (0:04 - 2:33): Mike Mathis **John 21:1-14**: Mike read the evening's Scripture from the New King James Version, Numbers 35:6–12. The passage instructs that among the cities given to the Levites, six are to be appointed as cities of refuge to which a manslayer may flee, with forty-two additional cities making a total of forty-eight. These cities, with their common land, are to come from the possession of the children of Israel, proportioned according to the size of each tribe's inheritance.	**continued** The Lord then speaks to Moses, directing him to tell the children of Israel that when they cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan they are to appoint cities of refuge. A manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there. These cities are to protect the manslayer from the avenger until he stands before the congregation in judgment. Mike concluded the reading at that point.

Summary of Transcript (0:04 -33:20), Preacher: John Nousek

(2:37–5:22) Introduction and Setting of the Cities of Refuge

John thanked Mike for the reading and announced the sermon title, "Cities of Refuge." He noted that Numbers 35 is the primary text, while Joshua 20 names the six specific cities, and he would turn to that passage later. He remarked that asking an accountant to preach naturally led to a text from Numbers.

He set the historical context: the Israelites have wandered forty years in the desert, following the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day. Now they are about to cross into the Promised Land. Special instructions are given. Each tribe is to receive a designated portion of land except the Levites. The Levites have a special purpose serving at the temple and related duties. Instead of a contiguous territory, they receive forty-eight cities scattered among the other tribes—cities currently occupied by Canaanites who will be driven out. These Levitical cities are sprinkled throughout the regions of the Promised Land.

(5:23–10:48) Three Cities on Each Side of the Jordan and the Transjordan Grant

John returned to Numbers 35:9–12, which repeats the command to appoint cities of refuge for the accidental manslayer so that he will not die until he stands before the congregation in judgment. He emphasized that this is not a system of vigilante justice; accidental killings occur, and a trial is required.

Verse 13 specifies six cities of refuge: three on this side of the Jordan and three in the land of Canaan. John raised the question why three cities are placed on each side of the river when the people are about to cross into Canaan. The answer is found in Numbers 32. Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh already possessed land east of the Jordan.

Numbers 32:1 records that the children of Reuben and Gad had a great multitude of livestock. Seeing that the land of Jazer and Gilead was suitable for livestock, they asked Moses, Eleazar the priest, and the leaders not to take them across the Jordan but to give them that country as a possession. After negotiation, Moses agreed to grant them land east of the Jordan on the condition that their fighting men still cross over and help conquer the Canaanites; only afterward could they return to their eastern inheritance.

Numbers 32:33 states that Moses gave to the children of Gad, the children of Reuben, and the half-tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, with its cities and surrounding territory. Thus Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh settled east of the Jordan. The remaining tribes—Naphtali, Asher, Zebulun, Issachar, the other half of Manasseh, Ephraim, Dan, Benjamin, Judah, and Simeon—received their inheritance west of the Jordan.

(10:49–13:42) The Six Named Cities and Their Geographic Setting

Joshua 20:7–8 lists the six cities of refuge by name and tribal territory. East of the Jordan are Bezer in the wilderness of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead of Gad, and Golan in Bashan of Manasseh. West of the Jordan are Kedesh in the mountains of Naphtali near Galilee, Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and Hebron in the mountains of Judah.

John noted that Golan in Bashan is associated with the modern Golan Heights, a high-elevation area. He mentioned the Hermon Hotel, a United Nations post on Mount Hermon at 9,232 feet above sea level, describing it as a buffer zone in a region one would not enter unarmed. He contrasted this height with the Dead Sea, which lies below sea level, observing that the elevation difference exceeds 10,000 feet within a relatively short distance. The cities of refuge are characteristically difficult to reach—located in mountains, high places, or wilderness—so that a person fleeing the avenger of blood would find them hard to access yet worth the effort if his life were at stake.

(14:01–17:15) Distinguishing Accidental Manslaughter from Murder

John returned to Numbers 35:15, which states that the six cities are for the children of Israel, the stranger, and the sojourner, so that anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there. God then provides specific criteria distinguishing intentional murder from accidental killing.

If a person strikes another with an iron implement so that he dies, or with a stone in the hand by which one could die, or with a wooden hand weapon by which one could die, and death results, he is a murderer and shall surely be put to death. The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death when he meets him. John identified the avenger of blood as typically a family member or acquaintance of the deceased who seeks to avenge the killing.

If he pushes the victim out of hatred, or while lying in wait hurls something at him so that he dies, or in enmity strikes him with his hand so that he dies, he is a murderer and the avenger of blood shall put him to death. However, if he pushes him suddenly without enmity, or throws anything at

him without lying in wait, or uses a stone by which a man could die, throwing it at him without seeing him, so that he dies while he was not his enemy or seeking his harm, then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood according to these judgments.

John posed the questions: Can the sinner be cleansed? Is there any chance of redemption for the guilty? He answered yes, and pointed to the provision of refuge.

(17:19–22:55) Protection Until the Death of the High Priest

Numbers 35:25 instructs that the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood and return him to the city of refuge where he had fled. He shall remain there until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil. John paused over this detail. The usual expectation might be that the accuser dies of natural causes and the offender is released because no one remains to accuse him. Here, however, release is tied to the death of the high priest.

John observed that unintentional sin is still sin and deserves death, for the wages of sin is death. The killer is not declared innocent or absolved of wrongdoing; he is kept safe from the consequences of his sin only while remaining inside the city of refuge or under its protection, or until the death of the anointed high priest. If the manslayer goes outside the limits of the city at any time and the avenger of blood finds him and kills him, the avenger is not guilty of blood. The manslayer should have remained in the city until the high priest's death. After that death, the manslayer may return to the land of his possession.

John reflected that once the high priest dies, the man is, so to speak, off the hook. He can return to his former land, work, family, and livelihood. The avenger of blood might still be alive and unhappy with the outcome, yet the decisive event is not the avenger's death but the death of the high priest anointed with the holy oil. John recalled Matthew 2:19–20, where after Herod's death an angel tells Joseph in Egypt to take the young child and his mother back to the land of Israel because those who sought the child's life are dead. He noted that this was the kind of example he might have expected, yet the Numbers text points elsewhere.

(22:55–25:05) Type and Antitype: The High Priest and the Accuser

John identified the passage in Numbers as a type of salvation—a type and antitype. He defined a type as a symbolic foreshadowing of a future event or person, and an antitype as the fulfillment or realization of that type. He suggested the text presents nearly a double type and antitype. The accuser or avenger of blood corresponds to the evil one. The high priest anointed with the holy oil corresponds to Jesus Christ. When the anointed high priest dies, the offense is removed, and the offender who was previously guilty of sin and worthy of death can be made clean and free of condemnation. The accuser no longer has power over those who are in Christ.

John identified Jesus Christ as our high priest anointed with oil. He stated that the anointing of Jesus is recorded in all four Gospels: Matthew 26:6–13, Mark 14:3–9, Luke 7:36–50, and John 12:1–8, the anointing at Bethany.

(25:05–31:25) The Anointing at Bethany and the Costly Oil

John read Matthew 26:6–13. While Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came with an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil and poured it on his head as he sat at the

table. The disciples were indignant, asking why the waste, since the oil could have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor. Jesus replied that they should not trouble the woman, for she had done a good work for him. The poor are always present, but he would not always be with them. She had poured the oil on his body in preparation for his burial. He declared that wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she had done would be told as a memorial to her. John noted that he had the privilege of offering that memorial by preaching these words.

He examined the meaning of "very costly." Mark 14 identifies the oil as spikenard (nard) contained in an alabaster jar. John displayed an alabaster egg he had brought, explaining that alabaster is a type of stone, here cut and polished in the shape of a chicken egg; he owned two such eggs, one pink and one bluish-green. While modern alabaster items can be purchased inexpensively, the ancient stone served as the container for the oil. Spikenard was regarded in ancient times as one of the most precious oils, used as perfume, medicine, and in religious contexts from India to Europe. It comes from a flowering plant related to the honeysuckle family that grows in the Himalayas of Nepal, China, and India. The cost arises from growing, processing, containerizing, and safely shipping the oil over long distances. It has been used for centuries as perfume and traditional medicine.

John observed that spikenard is an antifungal that promotes skin health and helps heal ailments caused by fungal infections. He then noted the setting: the anointing took place in the house of Simon the leper. Leprosy is a skin disease. A leper would have had little opportunity to work productively and would have been required to announce his uncleanness so that others would avoid infection. The woman brought the costly oil into that house and poured it on Jesus' head and feet. John suggested that Simon the leper might have had thoughts when the disciples called the act a waste, though he offered this only as an observation.

(31:25–33:20) Application: Cleansing through Christ's Death and the Call to Repent

John summarized that we have our high priest anointed with oil, and at his death we can be made clean through his death. He then turned to Acts 17:30–31. God overlooked the times of ignorance but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained—Jesus Christ. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead.

John prayed that all who can hear the gospel and who have a heart willing to accept the truth and follow what it says will do so, so that when that day comes they will not be outside of Christ. The consequences are final and eternal. He concluded the sermon with the prayer that God's word would pierce hearts as needed, and closed with "Amen."