



Assignments and Expectations

Scripture Focus

Joshua 20–22

Summary

The narrative continues with the assignment of cities of refuge and levitical cities. Those assignments communicate that God expected love, justice, giving, and worship to be demonstrated in the Promised Land. A conflict shows that Israel met God's expectations for life in the land.

Topic

God's expectations

Theme

God's commands reveal both His attributes and His expectations of His people.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will consider whether he has lived as a loving, just, and giving person.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 13

Outline

I. The Lord Expected Love and Justice in the Land (20)

- A. The Lord required cities of refuge (20:1–6)
- B. The people appointed cities of refuge (20:7–9)

II. The Lord Expected Giving and Worship in the Land (21)

- A. The people gave cities to Levites (21:1–3)
- B. The Lord assigned Levites to cities (21:4–45)

III. The People Met God's Expectations (22)

- A. Joshua encouraged the possessors (22:1–9)
- B. The tribes established a proof (22:10)
- C. Israel explored the altar's purpose (22:11–20)
- D. The tribes explained their point (22:21–29)
- E. Israel expressed their pleasure (22:30–34)

Memory Verse

"There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass"
(Joshua 21:45).

GETTING STARTED

Splat!

Make small talk with your learners as you toss an egg back and forth between your hands over a container. Then, as if by accident, drop the egg. Show the splattered egg to the learners. Point out that before falling the egg's shell, yoke, and white existed in unity. After falling, only a mess remains.

ASK: What would you say strengthens unity in a group? *An attitude of love, giving, and trust.*

ASK: What threatens unity? *Selfishness, impatience, suspicion.*

This lesson focuses on a near disaster that threatened Israel's unity as they began life in the Promised Land.

Where Would You Go?

ASK: Where would you go if you accidentally killed someone? (Q1)

ASK: Who would you try to avoid? (Q2)

This lesson focuses on God's instructions for the beginning of Israel's life in the land. His instructions include setting up cities of refuge for those who accidentally kill someone else. Those instructions reveal His expectations and His character.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

The Lord's plan was for the Promised Land to become Israel's permanent earthly dwelling place. So properly following through on the settlement of the land becomes the dominant idea in Joshua 20–22.

I. The Lord Expected Love and Justice in the Land (20)

A. The Lord required cities of refuge (20:1–6)

In a nation as large as Israel's, there would be plenty of relational problems that would arise. Some would be rather serious. For example, the different situations in which one person caused the death of another, whether on purpose or by accident. The Mosaic Law distinguished between what we would call *murder* and *manslaughter*, and it provided instructions on how to deal with both instances (Num. 35:9–34). Those instructions were tied to the land, for the law demanded the children of Israel set up cities of refuge for those who killed someone inadvertently. A city of refuge was a place where the accused could go and be safe from anyone seeking revenge or vindication (Exod. 21:12–21; Deut. 4:41–43; 19:1–13).

The Lord brought up the topic of cities of refuge again once Israel was in the land (Josh 20:1, 2). God wanted Israel to understand the connection between the newly occupied land and the Mosaic laws on murder and manslaughter. The Mosaic Law

called for capital punishment for someone found guilty of murder (Num. 35:16–19). But the law did not consider all killings as acts of murder. If a person killed another in a manner that was unintentional and accidental, then the act was considered neither deliberate nor premeditated and the person was guilty of manslaughter rather than murder (35:22–25). However, even the person guilty of manslaughter was not free to return to his normal life. He had to stay in the city of refuge. If he left, then the avenger of blood, usually the victim's next of kin, could kill him without being guilty of murder himself (35:26–28).

READ: Deuteronomy 19:4, 5. **ASK:** What example of manslaughter is given in the law of Moses? (Q3) *The head of an ax flying off a handle and killing a bystander.*

READ: Numbers 35:22–24. **ASK:** What are some other instances in which a person could accidentally kill another person? (Q4) *Pushing someone without enmity; throwing something at someone without lying in wait for him; throwing a stone at someone without realizing the person is there.*

Sometimes there was very little difference between a murder scene and the scene of an accidental death. Each situation would need to be examined so as to ascertain the truth. The city of refuge would be a safe retreat for the accused while the truth was being ascertained. The accused would need a safe place to go because the *avenger of blood* might come seeking retribution (Josh. 20:3).

READ: Joshua 20:4. **ASK:** How were those in the city of refuge to treat the accused who came to them for safety? (Q5) *They were to hear their case, give them a place to live, and treat them as one of them.*

The officials in the city of refuge were to refuse to hand over the accused to the avenger of blood, protecting the suspect from physical harm or death (20:5) until the city had an opportunity to judge his case (20:6). If found innocent of murder, the slayer would be allowed to return to his city once the high priest had died. This delayed return to one's city should have motivated the Israelites to consider the life of their fellowmen as precious and to do all they could to protect the lives of others.

To the reader, the sudden attention given to the cities of refuge might seem out of place or as if someone had added Joshua 20 at a later time. But there are good reasons for the introduction of the topic. Conquering the Promised Land was not the only reason for the conquest. The ultimate goal was for Israel to be in the land and living according to the law of Moses as spelled out in the Mosaic Covenant. God's plan all along was for Israel to live by His law in the Promised Land. Setting up cities of refuge was part of the Mosaic Covenant. Carrying out the command at the beginning of Israel's occupation of the land reminded them that though the land was theirs, they were not free to live as they pleased in the land. God's law provided Israel with instructions on how to treat one another. The command to set up cities of refuge was the first step in Israel's development of a culture that was pleasing to God. Justice and civility were to be part of that culture in the land. The people within each tribe were to treat each other with love and respect. And the tribes were to treat each other the same way.

The reference to the death of the high priest in Joshua 20:6 might suggest the land was healed in a sense by the death and that the person guilty of manslaughter would then be free to leave the city of refuge and return to his home.

ASK: What might have happened if cities of refuge weren't set up and Israel dealt with accidental deaths according to their emotions? (Q6) *Revenge and retaliation would have become the norm. That could have led to a civil war eventually.*

The cities of refuge were the beginning of the implementation of the law. They were also a means of revealing God's nature to Israel.

ASK: What would the cities of refuge reveal to Israel about God's nature? (Q7) *God is loving, caring, and just.*

Israel was to live with each other in a manner that reflected God's holy nature. His commands for their interpersonal relationships revealed His attributes.

So were the instructions on the cities of refuge an intrusion in the Joshua narrative? Not at all, for they both communicated principles for life in the land and revealed God's attributes.

B. The people appointed cities of refuge (20:7–9)



MAP: Display resource 2 to point out the distribution of the cities of refuge throughout the Promised Land.

Israel established six cities of refuge (20:7, 8). They situated them throughout Canaan so no one in Israel would have more than a day's journey to find refuge. On the west side of Jordan, they established Kedesh in the north, Shechem in the center, and Kirjath Arba in the south. On the east of Jordan, they recognized Golan in the north, Ramoth Gilead in the central, and Bezer in the south as the cities previously appointed by Moses (Deut. 4:41–43). The law provided these cities specifically for *Israelites*. The instruction in Joshua added that the *stranger* who dwelt among the Israelites could also take advantage of the cities of refuge (Josh. 20:9). This provision is an indication of God's love for all of humanity and His acceptance of all those who put their faith in Him and joined His people in the Promised Land. Rahab would have been one of those strangers.

II. The Lord Expected Giving and Worship in the Land (21)

A. The people gave cities to Levites (21:1–3)

Having identified the inheritances of each of the tribes and having appointed six cities of refuge, it was time for the selection of levitical cities. The heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites came to Eleazar the priest, Joshua, and the rest of the heads of the tribes to ask for cities to dwell in (21:1, 2). The Lord had commanded that this be done (Num. 35:1–8). The meeting took place at Shiloh, the center for Israel's religious and political decisions.

READ: Joshua 21:3. **ASK:** Why do you think God had the tribes give land for levitical use instead of having Joshua take the land from them? (Q8) *God wanted Israel to learn to give out of the abundance He had given to them.*

Giving to the Lord was important for Israel to learn to do. It became a means

of recognizing that all they had had come from God. Their giving was actually an expression of gratitude for the Lord's blessings on them.

ASK: If Israel continued to give to the Lord, what might that do to their propensity to fall into idolatry? (Q9) *They would be much less likely to credit another god for their blessings if they repeatedly recognized God for their blessings by giving to Him.*

Giving was always to be a matter of obedience to God's commands. Offerings were to be brought to God, not taken from the people. An offering that is demanded and taken by force essentially becomes a tax and a source of resentment. Later in Israel's history king Rehoboam would split the kingdom by promising to use his authority to levy heavy taxes on the people (1 Kings 12), a practice started by his father Solomon. The northern kingdom immediately fell into idolatry and never did follow after God.

B. The Lord assigned Levites to cities (21:4–45)

Each of the tribes identified four towns to be designated as levitical cities. The only exceptions were the tribe of Naphtali, which designated three towns, and Judah and Simeon, which had nine levitical cities combined. Each of the levitical cities were to give half of a square mile to the Levites to use for pasture for their livestock (Num. 35:4, 5).

God was highly interested in the assignment of levitical cities. He directed the process by having Israel cast lots to determine where each group of Levites would live. The tribe of Levi was comprised of three groups called the Gershonites, Kohathites, and Merarites. Their assignments are given in detail in Joshua 21:4–42. It is worth noting that the first lot fell to the Kohathites, the children of Aaron the high priest (21:4). Their cities were all near Jerusalem. While the capital of Israel was not Jerusalem at that time, God providentially placed Aaron's descendants near the future capital, making it convenient for the descendants to get to the tabernacle and eventually the temple to carry out their priestly duties.

Also worth noting is the fact that all of the cities of refuge were also levitical cities. It was God's design to have a priestly influence in those cities where important cases were tried.

The fact that God had priestly influence throughout the Promised Land showed the importance of Israel's relationship with Him. Israel was a theocracy. Their relationship with God was of utmost importance. The people were to worship and adore God, remembering His faithfulness to the Abrahamic Covenant in giving them the land and recognizing the Mosaic Covenant as their instruction for life in the land.

RESORUCE: Display resource 13 to summarize God's expectations in setting up cities of refuge and levitical cities.

The section on the designation of levitical cities ends with a statement about God's fulfillment of His promises to Israel. Verse 43 sounds like Israel possessed all of the Promised Land. But we know from other clear texts that they left Canaanites in some areas of the land (13:2–6; 14:12; 17:12–18; 18:2). The passages that reflect



negatively upon the Israelites' campaigns sometimes indicate that the conquest was undone because of the Israelites' unfaithfulness (15:63; 16:10). At other times, these negative statements simply indicate that the conquest had not yet been completed. When both of these themes are taken into account, we understand that throughout the book of Joshua the Lord held up His end of the bargain. Every time the Israelites obeyed the Lord, He came through and gave them the victory. Yet when the Israelites strayed from His will, negative consequence generally ensued.

The book of Joshua was not written to function as a moral handbook on what to do and what not to do (for then or now). Joshua was written as a theological handbook that records the lengths to which the Lord will go to fulfill His covenant with His people.

ASK: Why should a chapter like Joshua 21 be a reason to praise God? (Q10) *It is evidence of His faithfulness; the same faithfulness He extends to us today.*

Joshua 21 is a passionate praise report based upon God's goodness that is meant to encourage the people of God to live faithful to the Lord according to the measure He has been faithful to them.

III. The People Met God's Expectations (22)

A. Joshua encouraged the possessors (22:1–9)

Having established the cities of refuge and the levitical cities, Joshua released the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh to return to their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan. They had fulfilled their duty to help with the conquest of Canaan (22:1–4). Before they left, Joshua encouraged them to obey the law of Moses.

READ: Joshua 22:5. **ASK:** What was to motivate the tribes' obedience to God's law? (Q11) *Their love for God.*

God laid out His law with precise clarity. It was not open for personal interpretation. Nor was it okay to add to it or subtract from it. Furthermore, obedience to God's law was never to be a heartless, mechanical response to God. Israel was to be devoted to God with all their heart and soul. Joshua concluded his encouragement of the tribes by encouraging them to share their bounty from war with their brethren who had stayed on the east side of the Jordan (22:6–9). Sharing would be evidence of their hearts for God.

B. The tribes established a proof (22:10)

As the Transjordanian tribes were returning to their inheritances, they set up a gigantic altar on the east side of the Jordan.

READ: Joshua 22:10. **ASK:** What conclusions would you expect the tribes in Canaan to come to as they watched the Transjordanian tribes set up their giant altar near the Jordan? (Q12) *That they were setting up an alternate place to worship God outside the tabernacle.*

The altar was a landmark that could be clearly seen and that the Transjordanian tribes obviously intended to convey a message to the tribes living in the

Promised Land. But the altar didn't come with a note explaining its purpose. It just stood there mysteriously as a pointer to something.

C. Israel explored the altar's purpose (22:11–20)

Before long the giant altar was reported to Israel's leaders (22:11). In response, Israel mobilized their troops at Shiloh to battle the Transjordanian tribes. Mobilizing the troops might seem rather harsh. But the troops would be acting to rescue the Transjordanian tribes from rebelling against God. The troops were a sign of Israel's love for each other. They understood the grave consequences of having some of the tribes developing their own worship. In this instance, they would be carrying out tough love to try to turn the Transjordanian tribes back to God. But before sending the army across the Jordan to attack, Israel sent Phinehas the priest along with the heads of the ten tribes from the west side of the Jordan in order to investigate the purpose of the altar (22:12–15). Rumors should never be the basis for action, even if the situation seems to indicate that the rumor is most likely true. Think of the consequences if the ten tribes attacked their fellow countrymen based on what they thought was true.

Israel sacrificed at different places, but the altar the Transjordanian tribes set up would have apparently been a violation of God's prescribed pattern of worship. Phinehas reminded the Transjordanian tribes about Israel's idolatry at Peor, a city in Moab where Israelites committed harlotry with Moabite women and bowed down to their gods (22:16, 17). God ended the resultant plague when Phinehas drove a javelin through an Israelite man and a Moabite woman.

READ: Numbers 25:10–13. **ASK:** Why did God commend Phinehas? (Q13)

Because he was zealous for God.

The zeal Phinehas showed at Peor is the same zeal that motivated him to find out the truth about the altar. He took action because he knew God would certainly punish the Transjordanian tribes for their disobedience (Josh. 22:18).

Phinehas showed his genuine care for the Transjordanian tribes by offering land in Canaan if they thought the land east of the Jordan was outside the realm of God's blessing (22:19). His desire for justice and his display of love were exactly what God wanted to see displayed in His people.

Phinehas finished by reminding the Transjordanian tribes that Achan's sin led to the death of many. Their actions, if they were indeed rebellious, would surely bring widespread death (22:20).

D. The tribes explained their point (22:21–29)

ASK: How does a typical person respond when someone gets in his face and accuses him of doing something wrong? (Q14) *A typical person will take offense at the accusation and attack the accuser for thinking he would do something so wrong.*

The Transjordanian tribes answered Phinehas by stating that they should be killed if they indeed rebelled against God (22:21–23). There was no hint of a desire to retaliate for being accused of rebellion.

READ: Joshua 22:24–28. **ASK:** Why did the Transjordanian tribes build their altar? (Q15) *So future generations would know that the Transjordanian tribes are part of God's people and so the Transjordanian tribes would be faithful to God.*

The manner in which Gad and Reuben answered the delegation showed that they understood the importance of being *in* the Promised Land proper. Requesting to be outside the land on the other side of the Jordan could have eventually alienated them from the rest of the nation. They didn't want to be left out or ostracized as future generations grew up without a firsthand knowledge of the conquest. So they built the altar as a means of pointing to their connection with the Promised Land proper and with the rest of the tribes. What they did was wise. The Transjordanian tribes ended their response by leaving assuring everyone that they were not rebelling against God (22:29).

E. Israel expressed their pleasure (22:30–34)

Phinehas and the rest of the leaders of Israel wanted to avoid a civil war. They were glad to hear that the Transjordanian tribes had not rebelled against the Lord. They carried word of the resolution back to Canaan (22:30–33). The tribes of Reuben and Gad named their altar *Ed*, meaning *witness*, since it was a witness between the two sides of Israel that the Lord is God (22:34).

ASK: Would you agree that Israel showed love and justice in the incident involving the altar? Explain. (Q16)

ASK: Would you agree that Israel demonstrated the importance of worship in the land? Explain. (Q17)

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Living as Loving and Just People

God's instructions for Israel concerning the cities of refuge revealed that He wanted Israel to live as loving and just people in the land. God's desire that those who follow Him love one another and treat each other justly is an expectation that transcends all dispensations.

ASK: How does God's instruction concerning the cities of refuge help you see the importance of loving others? (Q18)

ASK: What might you need to change in your response to those who would cause you harm? (Q19)

Living as Giving People

God blessed Israel tremendously and then expected them to give from those blessings to support the Levites. God still expects His followers to be giving people.

ASK: How do you think you would have responded to giving cities and land to the Levites? (Q20)

ASK: What motivates your giving? What should motivate it? (Q21)

Summary and Memory Verse

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. Add the following statement about God's faithfulness: God expects us to be loving, just, and giving.

Encourage learners to memorize Joshua 21:45. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.

● God's Faithfulness	
1.	8.
2.	9.
3.	10.
4.	11.
5.	12.
6.	13.
7.	



Joshua's Farewell Address

Topic

Responding to God's faithfulness

Theme

God calls believers to be faithful to Him in light of His faithfulness to them.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will consider God's faithfulness in his life and consider areas of his life that he still needs to surrender to God's control.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 14

Scripture Focus

Joshua 23

Summary

Joshua, nearing the end of his life, encouraged Israel to be obedient because God had been so faithful to them. As they obeyed God and put their faith in Him, they would realize continued victory in the land and a peaceful possession of it. Joshua also warned Israel that choosing disobedience would result in terrible consequences and eventually the loss of the land.

Outline

I. Comforting Words (23:1–11)

- A. God's past work (23:1–3)
- B. God's present work (23:4–11)

II. Clear Warnings (23:12–16)

- A. About clinging to the Canaanites (23:12, 13)
- B. About breaking the covenant (23:14–16)

Memory Verse

"One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you. Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the Lord your God"
(Joshua 23:10, 11).