



Deuteronomy 19:1-13
Christ our Refuge

NKJ Deuteronomy 19:1 "When the LORD your God has cut off the nations whose land the LORD your God is giving you, and you dispossess them and dwell in their cities and in their houses,

2 "you shall separate three cities for yourself in the midst of your land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess.

3 "You shall prepare roads for yourself, and divide into three parts the territory of your land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, that any manslayer may flee there.

4 " And this is the case of the manslayer who flees there, that he may live: Whoever kills his neighbor unintentionally, not having hated him in time past --

5 "as when a man goes to the woods with his neighbor to cut timber, and his hand swings a stroke with the ax to cut down the tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies -- he shall flee to one of these cities and live;

6 "lest the avenger of blood, while his anger is hot, pursue the manslayer and overtake him, because the way is long, and kill him, though he was not deserving of death, since he had not hated the victim in time past.

7 "Therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall separate three cities for yourself.'

8 "Now if the LORD your God enlarges your territory, as He swore to your fathers, and gives you the land which He promised to give to your fathers,

9 "and if you keep all these commandments and do them, which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and to walk always in His ways, then you shall add three more cities for yourself besides these three,

10 "lest innocent blood be shed in the midst of your land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and thus guilt of bloodshed be upon you.

11 " But if anyone hates his neighbor, lies in wait for him, rises against him and strikes him mortally, so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities,

12 "then the elders of his city shall send and bring him from there, and deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die.

13 "Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with you.

In this chapter of Deuteronomy Moses turns here from pressing upon God's people the importance of the laws concerning their duties to God, to pressing their duties towards their fellow man. So in this chapter he will talk about their duties in regard to the 6th commandment – “you shall not murder” in verses 1-13, the 8th commandment – “you shall not steal” in verse 14 and the ninth commandment – “you shall not bear false witness” in verses 15-21.

Clearly as you read through the law of God it becomes easy to see how important the sanctity of Human life is to Him. The world may not think much of the value of a single human life, but in the Law of God the value of a human life is very precious. That difference happens because the world, rejecting the testimony of scripture sees man as just another animal, a little more intelligent and armed with an

opposable thumb. But God tells us that as grand as all animals may be, people are very different from all of them. Only people that are made in God's image, they alone in all creation have been given an immortal soul, this spark of divine life that never dies. They alone have been created for communion with their creator. We can see how precious man is to God in the fact that while God was not willing to send his Son to redeem the fallen angels, he was willing to send him to redeem fallen men!

So when someone murders another person, they are destroying the only thing in creation created in the image of God. Therefore the Lord had commanded, when an animal kills a person, that animal is to be put to death, and when a person murders a person, the murderer's life is forfeit. God had instituted this policy to safeguard the sanctity of human life. In Genesis 9:5 immediately after the flood, God had said to Noah – ***“Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.”***

So in Israel when a person was murdered that person's nearest male relative became the Goel Ha'dam or avenger of his blood. It was the avenger's responsibility to vindicate his murdered relative by bringing his killer to justice by executing the death penalty upon him. This follows what was known as the Lex Talionis, or law of retribution. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or in the case of murder, a life for a life. This was a proportionate response that stressed retributive justice not vendetta, or clan warfare, when someone murdered someone you didn't crush his entire village or wipe out his tribe for something he alone had done. Rather he alone bore the penalty for his crime. Now that was a considerable improvement over the way justice was administered in other nations even today where a murder can lead to an entire group of people being killed in retaliation and even some of the laws of our own country that allow murderers to escape justice.

But just as wrong as allowing a murderer to go free, would be putting someone who hadn't intended to kill someone to death. For instance, in Numbers 35 and here again God gave a list of circumstances in which someone who killed another person wasn't guilty of murder but manslaughter, and while the murderer was to be punished with death at the hand of the avenger of blood, the manslayer was not. Instead he was given a place to flee to where he might await a fair trial in safety.

The first iteration of this law of refuge is actually found in

Exodus 21:12 - Exodus 21:12 " He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.

13 "However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee.

14 " But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die.

The place where they were to flee to was the tabernacle where they would take hold of the horns of the altar, it was to be their sanctuary.

We see an example of this in 1 Kings 1:50 Now Adonijah was afraid of Solomon; so he arose, and went and took hold of the horns of the altar.

And this is also why, David called the Lord the “horn of my salvation” when he was protected from the wrath of Saul. The Lord had been David's City of Refuge when he was a hunted man so he rejoices saying in Psalm 18:2 ***The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.***

Now going to the tabernacle and taking hold of the horns was easy enough when all of Israel was camped in the same place but would become far more difficult when they entered the land and were geographically spread out. The tabernacle might be so far away that few could reach it before they were overtaken by a zealous Avenger. So the people were instructed that when they entered the land they were to set up cities of refuge that were to be extensions in effect of the altar. These were Levitical cities so they would have elders who knew and could apply the law. There must be quick and easy access to these cities for the manslayer - there had to be a city of refuge no more than a half-days journey from any point in Israel, and the Levites were commissioned to establish and maintain a road system so they could all be safely reached. So God told them to appoint three cities of refuge on the east side of the Jordan and three on the West Side of the Jordan. NORTH / MIDDLE / SOUTH. The cities on the east side had already been established and when the people enter in they will establish Kadesh – in Galilee, Shechem – in the central hill country, and Hebron in the south

On fleeing there he would state his case at the gate and eventually receive trial by the assembly of the city. Now the person was presumed innocent. If he was found guilty on the testimony of two or more witnesses he MUST be handed over to the Avenger of Blood, so that the LEGAL System would not become a travesty. Only for people who commit accidental homicide not willful murder!

If they were to decide he was innocent of murder, he must wait in that city until the death of the current high priest, which made atonement for the shedding of blood, and then he might be free to leave without fear. However, if the manslayer left the city of refuge before that time and the avenger of blood found him he was allowed to put him to death.

Application: God is a God of Justice – Justice must prevail! There is a direct application of this principle to what we were talking about this morning. *“Each of us is a sinner, having broken covenant with God, and deserving of punishment unto death. But God has provided a refuge for the sinner, and that is Jesus Christ. Justice, however, must be served. Thus Jesus Christ went to the cross to take on the punishment that his people deserve for their sin in breaking the covenant and in living lives of iniquity. Sin must be dealt with and Christ has done that. God himself is our refuge and strength (Ps. 46:1) Will you not run to that fortress and refuge this very day?”* – John Currid

Brothers and sisters, you and I are in desperate need of a city of refuge as well. The law of God is to us like the avenger of blood, we are all guilty of breaking it and our only refuge from the penalty of the law is to be found in Jesus Christ, it is absolutely necessary that therefore we flee to him immediately as our refuge from the wages of sin.

If we do not do that, if we do not begin the journey to heaven you will surely perish.

But there are many who are just outside, who feel that their nearness to refuge is enough, playing with the things of God without trusting him as Spurgeon warned:

It will be an awful thing to die just outside the gate of life. Almost saved, but altogether lost! This is the most terrible of positions. A man just outside Noah’s ark would have been drowned. A manslayer close to the wall of the city of refuge, but yet outside of it, would be slain. The man who is within a yard of Christ, and yet has not trusted Him, will be just as surely lost.

If we are in Christ though we have refuge

“As of old, the manslayer, when pursued by the avenger of blood, fled to the city of refuge, whose gates were open night and day, and whose highways were always unencumbered; so the soul, under the sense of

its guilt, and convinced that it must perish if it remains where it is, flees to Jesus Christ, as the appointed refuge, and finds peace and security in him. There the avenger cannot touch him; there the law, which before denounced vengeance, spreads its ample shield around him, and gives him the assurance of safety.”
– Charles Hodge

Then as Pink says “He is no longer under the condemning power of the Law, but is “under grace.” As the manslayer on having entered the city of refuge was, by a special constitution of mercy, secure from the avenger of blood (Num. 35:12), so the sinner who has “fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us” in the Gospel (Heb. 6:18), is, by the gracious constitution of God, forever secured from the curse. All the threatenings which until this time belonged to him, no longer stand against him, but are reckoned by the Judge of all as having been executed on his Substitute, who was made a curse for His people. But more: the favor of God, Divine blessing, is now his status and portion.” - AW PINK

2) Brothers and Sisters it is up to you and me therefore like the Levites to make a road in the wilderness to Christ the city of refuge. To clear away all the obstructions, etc.