

Numbers 35:1 ¶ And the LORD spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan *near* Jericho, saying,

Numbers 35:2 Command the children of Israel, that they give unto the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and ye shall give *also* unto the Levites suburbs for the cities round about them.

Numbers 35:3 And the cities shall they have to dwell in; and the suburbs of them shall be for their cattle, and for their goods, and for all their beasts.

Numbers 35:4 And the suburbs of the cities, which ye shall give unto the Levites, *shall reach* from the wall of the city and outward a thousand cubits round about.

Numbers 35:5 And ye shall measure from without the city on the east side two thousand cubits, and on the south side two thousand cubits, and on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits; and the city *shall be* in the midst: this shall be to them the suburbs of the cities.

In this chapter the LORD instructs Moses regarding the assignment of cities to the Levites and also providing for cities of refuge.

The LORD commanded that the Levites were to be assigned specific cities in which to live as well as the surrounding suburbs of these cities for their livestock. The suburbs are defined as the area extending outward from the city wall in every direction for 1000 cubits or about 1500 feet.

Verse 5 seems to contradict verse 4. Chuck Smith explains it as follows: "So the city itself and then extending out from the city a thousand cubits for their farm area and then out another two thousand cubits for their cattle."

Maimonides, a famous Torah scholar, gave a similar explanation: "The suburbs of the cities are expressed in the law to be 3,000 cubits on every side from the wall of the city and outwards. The first thousand cubits are the suburbs, and the 2,000, which they measured without the suburbs, were for fields and vineyards."

Numbers 35:6 And among the cities which ye shall give unto the Levites *there shall be* six cities for refuge, which ye shall appoint for the manslayer, that he may flee thither: and to them ye shall add forty and two cities.

Numbers 35:7 So all the cities which ye shall give to the Levites *shall be* forty and eight cities: them *shall ye give* with their suburbs.

Numbers 35:8 And the cities which ye shall give *shall be* of the possession of the children of Israel: from *them that have* many ye shall give many; but from *them that have* few ye shall give few: every one shall give of his cities unto the Levites according to his inheritance which he inheriteth.

The Levites were to be given a total of 48 cities along with their suburbs, six of which were to be designated as cities of refuge. These cities provided a place of protection for anyone that had accidentally killed someone. The tribes that had more land inheritance were to provide for more cities, and the tribes with less land to provide for fewer cities.

Guzik made a great application of this section in recognition of the spiritual

influence the Levites were meant to have among the people of Israel: "...God does not intend that there be a Christian country or state where all the Christians live together in spiritual bliss, and simply say to the world, 'come and join us if you want.' Instead, God wants Christians to be sprinkled throughout the whole world, influencing people for Jesus Christ."

Coffman provides more information in his commentary concerning these cities: "Nine of the 48 cities eventually came from the large joint-inheritance of Simeon and Judah; three came from the territory of Naphtali; and the other tribes contributed four each."

**Numbers 35:9 ¶ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
Numbers 35:10 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan;
Numbers 35:11 Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares.
Numbers 35:12 And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger; that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation in judgment.**

At this point the focus turns to the LORD's instructions regarding the cities of refuge. It is made clear that the cities of refuge were intended to provide safe sanctuary for anyone that had accidentally killed someone. The person would, however, have to stand trial to determine whether such sanctuary was deserved. Implied is that one who was not cleared by such judgment would be killed by the avenger.

The "avenger" was the family member responsible for avenging the life of a family member by killing the one responsible for that death. This principle was established early on in scripture.

Genesis 9:6 "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."

**Numbers 35:13 And of these cities which ye shall give six cities shall ye have for refuge.
Numbers 35:14 Ye shall give three cities on this side Jordan, and three cities shall ye give in the land of Canaan, *which* shall be cities of refuge.
Numbers 35:15 These six cities shall be a refuge, *both* for the children of Israel, and for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them: that every one that killeth any person unawares may flee thither.**

There was to be a total of six cities of refuge—three cities on the east side of Jordan and three cities in the land of Canaan. The cities of refuge provided for both the people of Israel and any foreigners among them who were responsible for accidentally killing someone.

Guzik provides some further insight: "Joshua 20:7-8 records the actual choice of the cities. They fulfilled the plan of being evenly distributed perfectly. Deuteronomy 19:3 also tells us that proper roads were to be built and maintained

to these cities of refuge. A city of refuge was no good to the slayer if they could not get there quickly.”

Numbers 35:16 And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.

Numbers 35:17 And if he smite him with throwing a stone, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.

Numbers 35:18 Or if he smite him with an hand weapon of wood, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.

Numbers 35:19 The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him.

If the killer used an instrument of iron to strike a person and it resulted in death, the murderer was to be put to death. The same held true if he threw a stone at someone or hit them with a piece of wood resulting in their death. It is obvious that such actions could not be categorized as unintentional. The revenger of blood was responsible for seeing that the killer’s death sentence was carried out.

Numbers 35:20 But if he thrust him of hatred, or hurl at him by laying of wait, that he die;

Numbers 35:21 Or in enmity smite him with his hand, that he die: he that smote *him* shall surely be put to death; for he is a murderer: the revenger of blood shall slay the murderer, when he meeteth him.

One who killed another by striking at him in hatred or waiting to ambush him and throwing something at him and it results in death, he is guilty of murder and should be killed in turn by the avenger of blood.

Numbers 35:22 But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait,

Numbers 35:23 Or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing *him* not, and cast *it* upon him, that he die, and *was* not his enemy, neither sought his harm:

Numbers 35:24 Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood according to these judgments:

Numbers 35:25 And the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil.

This section identifies the contrast with the previous section—between intentional and unintentional killing. If you killed someone by accident, one with whom you were not angry and had no intention of harming, you were entitled to a fair trial.

The wording implies that the killer was brought from the city of refuge to stand trial in the area in which the death occurred. If the person was found “not guilty,” he was to be safely returned to the city of refuge and was to remain there until

the death of the high priest.

Numbers 35:26 But if the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled;

Numbers 35:27 And the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty of blood:

Numbers 35:28 Because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest: but after the death of the high priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession.

If the killer left the borders of the city of refuge, he was at the mercy of the avenger of blood. If the avenger of blood killed such a person outside the borders of the city of refuge, he was not guilty of murder. Only after the death of the high priest could the one who had killed unintentionally safely leave the city of refuge.

Numbers 35:29 So these *things* shall be for a statute of judgment unto you throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

The command of the LORD concerning the cities of refuge was to remain in force throughout Israel's existence as a nation.

Numbers 35:30 Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die.

Numbers 35:31 Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which *is* guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death.

Numbers 35:32 And ye shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest.

Concerning the trial of one accused of murder, guilt could not be established without the testimony of at least two witnesses.

“Satisfaction” is a reference to a bribe or ransom. You could not spare the life of a murderer for a bribe or ransom. Neither could a bribe be used to allow an unintentional killer to leave the city of refuge before the death of the high priest.

Numbers 35:33 So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye *are*: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.

Numbers 35:34 Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel.

Rightfully executing justice for the death of someone kept the land free from pollution or defilement. The only way to cleanse the land from the blood of one who had been intentionally killed was to shed the blood of the murderer. It was important to keep the land clean because the LORD dwelt among His people.

I really liked Chuck Smith's closing comments on this chapter: "Now, we've got a lot of sociologists today that say that the death penalty is no deterrent against crime; it's a horrible thing to put men to death and all this kind of stuff. And so what has happened? We say the law of God really isn't valid; it really isn't good. With our social sciences we know much better than the law of God and we're able to establish law that is superior to the law of God. How would you describe our land today? Pretty polluted; isn't it? That's what God said, He established a force so the land wouldn't be polluted. And we have found out that rather than knowing better than God, he knew best but we've gone so deep into it there seems to be now no way out."

Guzik made some great observations of how the cities of refuge picture Jesus.

- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are within easy reach of the needy person; they were of no use unless someone could get to the place of refuge.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are open to all, not just the Israelite; no one needs to fear that they would be turned away from their place of refuge in their time of need.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge became a place where the one in need would live; you didn't come to a city of refuge in time of need just to look around.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are the only alternative for the one in need; without this specific protection, they will be destroyed.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge provide protection only within their boundaries; to go outside meant death.
- With both Jesus and the cities of refuge, full freedom comes with the death of the High Priest.