

**September 8, 2019 - Num. 34:1- 35:34 - Israel's Borders Defined, Cities of Refuge  
Torah Reading: Numbers 34:1- 35:34 - Israel's Borders Defined, Cities of Refuge  
Psalm 106:28-33  
Haftarah: Ezekiel 45:1-8, 14-15, Joshua 20:1-9 + 21:3**

### **The Borders of the Promised Land**

**Numbers 34:1-2** - "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land of Canaan; (this is the land that shall fall unto you for an inheritance, even the land of Canaan with the coasts thereof:)"

Rashi - Since many precepts apply to the Land [of Israel] and do not apply outside the Land, Scripture found it necessary to chart the outer limits of its boundaries from all sides, to inform you that the precepts apply everywhere within these borders.

"shall fall to you": Since it was apportioned by lot, the division is described in terms of נִפְּלָה, falling [a word commonly used in connection with lots]. The Midrash Aggadah says that [this expression is used here] because the Holy One, blessed is He, cast down [lit., caused to fall] from heaven the celestial ministers of the seven [Canaanite] nations, and shackled them before Moses. He said to him [Moses], See, they no longer have any power. — [Mid. Tanchuma]

**Another Reason** - The boundaries are delineated for Israel to take notice of the limits God had fixed, that they might know how far they were to go on every side, whom they were to drive out, and what they were to divide and inherit, and see what was their right, and preserve it from the encroachments of their neighbors, as well as observe the goodness of God unto them, in thus providing for them. - *Gill's Exposition*

**Numbers 34:3** - "Then your south quarter shall be from the wilderness of Zin along by the coast of Edom, and your south border shall be the outmost coast of the salt sea eastward:"

The Targum of Jonathan paraphrases it, "from the wilderness of the palm trees of the mountain of iron." Palm trees of the mountain of iron are mentioned in the Mishnah (Misn. Succah. c. 3. sect. 1.) as fit to make the bunch of branches of trees, called the "*lulab*", carried in the hand on the Feast of Tabernacles.

### **Representatives of the Tribes Appointed**

**Numbers 34:17-18** - "These are the names of the men which shall divide the land unto you: Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun. And ye shall take one prince of every tribe, to divide the land by inheritance."

i.e. to help acquire or distribute it. Rashi - To take possession of the land and apportion it in your [Moses'] stead. They are the ones who shall divide the inheritance among you according to its portions.

Eleazar and Joshua were symbolic of Christ as high priest and king, governing the civic and religious affairs of Israel. Division of the inheritance was both a civil and sacred work.

The tribal princes (with the exception of those from Gad, Reuben and the half tribe of Mannaseh) were to take possession of each tribe's inheritance in their name and stead, as their representatives, and then distribute it unto them, or divide it to be inherited by them. Joshua 19:51 describes the completion of this task.

Christ has overseen dispensing the allotment of our spiritual inheritance to all believers.

### **The Levite Cities**

Land for 48 cities were to be given to the Levites by all the tribes.

**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."

Rashi - "open spaces": Empty belts of land surrounding each city, so as to beautify the city. It was forbidden to build a house, plant a vineyard or sow seed there. — [Arachin 33b]

Although they would be urban dwellers, the Levites were to leave undeveloped green space around them to remind them of God's creation and perhaps of the Garden of Eden. Although their flocks could graze there, they would not otherwise gain materially from that land, but only reap the spiritual and psychological benefits.

Ecclesiastes Rabbah: "In the beginning, the Holy One created the first person, and caused Adam to pass before all the trees of the garden. God said to Adam, "See My works, how fine and excellent they are. Now all that I created was created for you. Think about this, and *lo taschit* — do not harm or desolate the world; for if you do, there will be none to fix it after you."

The green area would extend 1,000 cubits from the city. Another area of 1,000 cubits beyond that was allotted where crops could be grown and vineyards planted.

### **Cities of Refuge**

Six of the Levite cities were to be designated "cities of refuge" - sanctuaries and asylum for those suspected of murder to flee to until trial could be made of their case.

- Kadesh – in Naphtali
- Shechem – in West Manasseh
- Hebron - in Judah
- Golan – in East Manasseh

- Ramoth – Gilead in Gad
- Bezer – in Rueben

**Numbers 35:11-12** - "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. 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."

"refuge" = *miqlat* - asylum, a place of refuge; from a root that means "to receive a fugitive to oneself," to diminish (sometimes used to describe a dwarf). Get small.

The actual establishment of the Cities of Refuge is described in **Joshua 20-21**.

Road were to be built, wider and smoother than other roads, to each city of refuge to assist those fleeing. Clearly marked signposts were found at crossroads which read "*Miklat*" meaning "Refuge." The Cities of Refuge also offered asylum to foreigners.

As population increased, eventually all the Levite cities were considered Cities of Refuge.

## **Murder**

**Numbers 35:33-34** - "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. Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel."

As in the murder of Abel by Cain, the earth "opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood" and then the victim's blood "cries out" to God from the ground (**Genesis 4:10-11**). If justice is not meted out, the land may "spew you out" as it did the Canaanites at God's command.

Murder is a sin against God and man, because humans are made in the image of God. (Genesis 9:6)

- **Genesis 9:5-6** - "And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed': for in the image of God made he man (adam)."

Why is this prohibition against murder inserted here, as Israel prepares to enter the Promised Land?

Bloodshed was prohibited to all humankind beginning with Adam. But the prohibition was repeated after the flood as Noah and his family prepare to inhabit the earth again. He is told that both animals and plants are permitted to be eaten. But in case they misunderstand and believe they now have dominion over all life – it is a small step,

psychologically, to allow suicide and murder - Noah must be reminded that his control over life is limited. Murder is still forbidden.

Israel at this point is in the same situation, as they prepare to inhabit the land. Although warfare and killing to drive out the Canaanites is permitted (and commanded), murder is not.

Even an accidental or unintended loss of life must be investigated, and even so, there are still consequences.

Cities of refuge are to curtail the practice of kinship vengeance and the cycle of vendettas that result in most other ancient and some modern cultures.

God Himself "requires" the death of the murderer, after a trial, instead of leaving it up to the private retaliatory vengeance from the victim's relatives or clan.

### **Motivation Matters**

Ancient Greece, Sumer, Phoenicia, and other cultures all articulated a notion of asylum. In those civilizations, a murderer could flee to a local shrine and gain protection at the altar of the local deity. But eventually this blanket absolution became abused - the temples became hotbeds of crime. (Athens had to restrict this kind of asylum to just one temple, the temple of Theseus).

Fleeing to the sacred altar still lingered in Israel, but if a person was convicted by trial and found guilty, it offered no protection.

**Exodus 21:14** - "But if a man schemes and acts willfully against his neighbor to kill him, you must take him away from My altar to be put to death."

**1 Kings 2:28-29** - "Then tidings came to Joab: for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom. And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. And it was told king Solomon that Joab was fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD; and, behold, he is by the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go, fall upon him."

The six Cities of Refuge would protect only the unintentional manslayer. The willful murderer was to be evicted, tried, and punished. What was revolutionary was the assertion that inner intention determines the meaning of an action.

Also, punishment in Israel is not based on status. Murdering a free man, woman, child, slave, or foreigner, rich or poor all resulted in the same penalty, no matter who you were.

## Obvious Murder

If someone strikes another with an iron tool, or a large stone or a wooden club, or pushes him off a cliff, or "in enmity" smites him with his hand, this is obviously murder, and the kinsman avenger can execute him.

But not before his case has been heard, examined, tried, and judged; The Targum of Jonathan adds, "in judgment," - that is, as Targum Onkelos explains it, "when he is condemned by judgment by the court of judicature."

*The Mishnah* - "formerly, one that killed another ignorantly or presumptuously, they sent him before to one of the cities of refuge, and the sanhedrim sent and fetched him from thence: he who was condemned to death by the court, they slew him; he that was not condemned was dismissed; he that was condemned to banishment they returned him to his place, according to **Numbers 35:25**."

But if someone throw a large stone but didn't see that it would hit someone, then he can go to the city of refuge and "abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil." (**Numbers 35:25**)

## Why?

Because such was the general mourning for such a public loss as a high priest, that all private revenges would subside, and the cause of them be buried, in grief and forgetfulness. Thus the mothers of the priests used to supply with a sufficient quantity of food and raiment such who fled to the cities of refuge, that they might not pray for the death of their sons. (Misn. Maccot. c. 2. sect. 3. and 7.)

17th-century rabbi Jacob Abendana (Not. in Miclol Yophi in ver. 25.) observes that the death of the high priest atoned for the offence (of manslaughter), which was the reason the manslayer continued in the city of refuge till the high priest's death.

## Two or More Witnesses

**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."

Rashi - [i.e., the blood avenger may not slay the murderer unless there are witnesses that he committed the murder.]- [Sifrei Massei 26]

Compare **Deuteronomy 19:15** - "at the mouth of two or three witnesses everything may be established"

Not even his own confession could condemn a man without another witness, according to the rabbis.

**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."

No bribe or payment, no negotiation or reparation can be substituted for justice.

See <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/torah-portions/parashat-masei/>

### Spiritual Meaning

The cities of refuge were an imperfect type of the perfect Rock of Refuge we have in Christ. As High Priest, His death atones for all sin. At the same time, after His resurrection, He will never die.

David says (**Psalm 32:7**) "Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance."

"hiding place" = *cether* - a different word from refuge, but a similar idea implying a covert or shelter for protection.

- **Psalm 27:5** - "For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret (*cether*) of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock."

Other words are more commonly used to mean "take refuge" = *chacah* - to trust in, to make someone or something your refuge

- **Ruth 2:12** - "The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust (*chacah*)."

*machaceh* - refuge, shelter, the person to who one flees (usually God)

- **Psalm 46:1** - "God is our refuge (*machaceh*) and strength, a very present help in trouble.

- **Psalm 62:8** - "Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge (*machaceh*) for us. Selah."

and *manowc* - refuge, place of escape, a way to flee

- **Psalm 59:16** - "But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defence and refuge (*manowc*) in the day of my trouble."

- **Jeremiah 16:19** - "O LORD, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge (*manowc*) in the day of affliction"

We have fled to Jesus Christ, and He is our eternal "refuge." As our High Priest, He will

never die (**Hebrews 7:23-25**); and we have eternal salvation. No avenger can touch us, because He has already died and arisen from the dead.

These six cities of refuge are beautiful types of Christ, to whom we “have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (**Hebrews 6:18**).

- **Romans 8:33** - "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth."

- **Psalms 34:22** - "The Lord will rescue his servants; no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned."