

AS THEY SETTLED THE PROMISED LAND, God told Israel to designate cities of refuge. In that era, relatives had the right to avenge the murder of a loved one. If a death was accidental, the person blamed could flee to the nearest city of refuge.

In their grief and anger, avengers might not verify whether a death was intentional or not. Fleeing to a city of refuge not only protected the accused but also set in motion a process for determining the proper verdict and punishment. There would be a preliminary hearing before town elders and a later trial before the citizenry.

God's law spelled out the difference between manslaughter and murder. A person would be charged with murder if he used a weapon against his victim, was known to hate the victim, struck him in enmity, or ambushed him. If the victim was a friend and the killing unplanned, it could be considered manslaughter.

People guilty of murder had no right to refuge but were handed over to the avenger. Manslayers, on the other hand, could reside in a city of refuge without fear. They were only free to go home after the death of the high priest. If found outside during the current high priest's lifetime, they could be killed without the avenger bearing guilt.

This process is rooted in Genesis 9:5, where God says,

*Surely I will require your lifeblood;
from every beast I will require it.
And from every man,
from every man's brother
I will require the life of man.*

What do cities of refuge reveal about God?

- 1 God hates the shedding of innocent blood. He wants human deaths to be examined and mourned.
- 2 God is "the righteous Judge." Only guilty parties should be punished.
- 3 God is merciful to create oases of peace and safety for troubled souls. Inside the walls are security and life; outside – accusation and danger.
- 4 God involves people in carrying out His justice and mercy.

Throughout Scripture, God is called a refuge, a rock, a shelter. People flee to Him for forgiveness, sanctuary, and rest. When they turn from sin and place their faith in Jesus Christ, they find peace with God.

Because of what He's done for them, God's

people create places of refuge for others – in their homes and churches. Pro-life ministries preserve the dignity of human life and show God's grace to those who are struggling. Through the care of Christians in pregnancy care centers and the respite offered by LIFT, they regain hope. Learn more about ministry opportunities at lifemattersww.org.

LIFE MATTERS WORLDWIDE exists to articulate biblical values, such as the pro-life ethic found in Genesis to Revelation. These principles are increasingly under attack in America and other parts of the world, but God's Word is still relevant. Help us spread the Truth!

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Scripture sources: Numbers 35:9-34; Deuteronomy 19:1-13, 21:1-9; Joshua 20; Psalm 7:1,11-12, 9:8-12, 10:8-13, 106:37-43; Proverbs 6:16-17; Joel 3:21; Revelation 6:9-11, 22:14-15; Matthew 11:28-30; 1 John 1:7-9.