



What do cities of refuge reveal about God?

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a publication of

Life Matters
WORLDWIDE

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

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

God's law differentiated between manslaughter and murder. A person would be charged with murder if he plotted the killing, used a weapon against his victim, was known to have hated the victim, and struck him in enmity. If the victim was a friend and the killing unintentional, it was considered manslaughter. At least two witnesses had to attest to the facts of the case.

People guilty of murder had no right to continue residing in a city of refuge but were handed over to the avenger. Manslayers, on the other hand,

could live there without fear. They were, however, only free to leave for home after the death of the current high priest. If found outside the city of refuge during the high priest's lifetime, they could be killed without the avenger bearing guilt.

This process is rooted in Genesis 9:5-6, where God demanded an accounting for every lost human life and involved people in the delivery of justice:

*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.*

So, what do the cities of refuge show us about God?

1 God hates the shedding of innocent human blood. He wants every human death 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 both justice and mercy.

Good news for the guilty!

Murder is a serious crime, but in Christ even the sin of murder can be forgiven. 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.

Passages about justice: *Numbers 35:9-34; *Deuteronomy 19:1-21, 21:1-9; *Joshua 20; Psalm 9:8-12, 10:8-14, 106:37-45; Proverbs 6:16-17, 28:17; Joel 3:21; Luke 11:49-51; 1 John 3:10-18; Revelation 6:9-11, 9:21, 18:24, 20:4, 22:14-15. ****Passages about God's mercy:** 2 Samuel 12:13; 2 Chronicles 33:1-13; Ps. 32:5, 51:14; Isaiah 26:21, 53:5, 12; Acts 3:13-19, 9:1-22; Matthew 11:28-30; 1 Jn. 1:7-9.

MORE ON OUR WEBSITE:

- **The Case of the Unknown Killer**
lifemattersww.org/Portals/0/Documents/MurderMysteryBibleStudy.pdf
- **Does God forgive the sin of abortion?**
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