

Joshua 20 Cities of Refuge



▲ Location of the cities of refuge in relation to the territory permanently held by the Israelites: Kadesh in Galilee; Shechem in Ephraim; Hebron in Judah; Bezer in Reuben; Ramoth-gilead in Gad; Golan in Manasseh. This is map 41 of the *New Moody Bible Atlas*.

Highlights from the law of the manslayer

The two major descriptive passages are **Num 35:9-34** and **Deut 19:1-13**.

- Anyone who killed someone else could flee to one of these cities and be ensured of a fair trial “before the congregation” (Num 35:12).
- A person found guilty of murder on the evidence of multiple witnesses would be put to death – no ransom, no pity (Num 35:30; Deut 19:11-13).
- The manslayer would not be killed, but was confined to the city of refuge (i.e. house arrest) until the death of the current high priest (Num 35:25-28). If he left the city before that, the blood avenger had the right to kill him (Num 35:26-27).
- The distinction between murder and manslaughter was intent and malice. Murder was the one who hated and “lies in wait” (Num 35:20-21; Deut 19:11). Manslaughter was killing that was unintentional, not previously an enemy, not hating him previously (Num 35:22-23; Deut 19:4).
- Num 35:25 indicates that the actual trial took place in the killer’s home town, but that if he was not convicted of murder, he was to be returned to the city of refuge.
- These rules applied to both Israelites and aliens (Num 35:15; Josh 20:9).
- The cities were to be designated, and roads were to be constructed leading to them (Deut 19:3) so that the manslayer could easily and quickly flee there.

Why were these cities important?

- They reveal a concern to protect the innocent and ensure a fair trial.
- They reveal a concern to make justice accessible to everyone: 1) they were spread throughout the land, 2) they were for both Israelites and non-Israelites; 3) roads ensured they were easy to get to.

