

# Deuteronomy 19 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

**CLICK VERSE**  
To go directly to that verse

- [19:1](#)
- [19:2](#)
- [19:3](#)
- [19:4](#)
- [19:5](#)
- [19:6](#)
- [19:7](#)
- [19:8](#)
- [19:9](#)
- [19:10](#)
- [19:11](#)
- [19:12](#)
- [19:13](#)
- [19:14](#)
- [19:15](#)
- [19:16](#)
- [19:17](#)
- [19:18](#)
- [19:19](#)
- [19:20](#)
- [19:21](#)

Moses on Mt Nebo (Deuteronomy 34:1+)  
Listen to [Mt Nebo](#) as you Ponder How Moses' [May Have Felt](#)

Deuteronomy by [Irving Jensen](#)- used by permission  
deut

Source: Ryrie Study Bible

## Deuteronomy

Dt 1:1-4:43	Dt 4:44-26:19	Dt 27:1-34:12	
Moses' First Discourse	Moses' Second Discourse	Moses' Third Discourse	
Historical Review	Legal Exposition	Prophetical Promises	
Looking Back 40 Years	Looking Up What God Expected of Israel	Looking Ahead What God Will Do for Israel	
Recapitulation of Wanderings	Rehearsal of Israel's Law	Ratification of Israel's Covenant	Historical Appendices
Remembrance of the past	Commandments for the Present	Dt 27:1-30:20 Blessing and Cursing	Dt 31:1-34:12 Death of Moses
Take Heed Don't forget	Ten Commands	Related Commands	Two Choices Affecting the Future
			Moses' Parting Words

Dt 1:1-4:43 Looking Back	Dt 4:44-11:32 Exposition of Decalogue	Dt 12:1-16:17 Ceremonial Laws	Dt 16:18-20:20 Civil Laws	Dt 21:1-26:19 Social Laws	Dt 27:1-28:68 Ratification of Covenant	Dt 29:1-30:20 Terms of Covenant	Dt 31:1-34:12 Moses' Song, Blessing, Death
<b>Plains of Moab</b>							
<b>ca. 2 Months</b> <b>Moses: Author</b> (Except Dt 34)							

**Deuteronomy 19:1 "When the LORD your God cuts off the nations, whose land the LORD your God gives you, and you dispossess them and settle in their cities and in their houses,**

- **cut:** De 6:10 7:1,2 12:1,29 17:14
- **dispossess,** De 12:29-30
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passage:

Deuteronomy 12:29-30+ "When the LORD your God **cuts off before you the nations** which you are going in to **dispossess**, and you **dispossess them and dwell in their land**, 30 beware that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?'

#### Outline of Chapter 19

- Three Cities of Refuge - Dt 19:1-3
- Avenger of blood Dt 19:4-13
- Property Boundaries Dt 19:14
- Law Concerning Witnesses Dt 19:15-21

**When the LORD your God cuts off the nations-** **Cut off** is the verb [karath](#) (same verb in Dt 12:29+) and in context is used figuratively, although there is a sense in which there would be a literal cutting because the pagans were to be destroyed which might involve some literal cutting.

**Cut off** ([03772](#)) [karath](#) literally means to cut, to cut off or to sever an object from its source or cut into parts and implies a violent action. For example, Zipporah "cut off her son's foreskin." (Ex 4:25) or the Jews "cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes." (Nu 13:2-24). **Karath in Deuteronomy** - Deut. 4:23; Deut. 5:2; Deut. 5:3; Deut. 7:2; Deut. 9:9; Deut. 12:29; Deut. 19:1; Deut. 19:5; Deut. 20:19; Deut. 20:20; Deut. 23:1; Deut. 29:1; Deut. 29:12; Deut. 29:14; Deut. 29:25; Deut. 31:16;

**Whose land the LORD your God gives you** - The pagan's land was a gift of grace from the God to Israel.

**And you dispossess ([yarash](#)) them and settle in their cities and in their houses** - Notice although God gives it and cuts off the nations reflecting His sovereign disposition of the land, Israel was still responsible to **dispossess** them and to **settle in their cities**.

**Utley** - God was now giving them the land as He had promised Abraham (Gen. 12:1; 15:12–21; Ex. 6:8), but they had to possess it. Notice the conditional aspect of even this foundational covenant (e.g., Dt 4:1; 5:33; 6:18; 8:1; 16:20; 30:16, 19)..([Deuteronomy 19 Commentary](#))

---

#### Utley - SPECIAL TOPIC: COVENANT PROMISES TO THE PATRIARCHS

This initial promise of a special covenant relationship was made to:

1. **Abraham**, Gen. 12:1–3
  - a. land, Gen. 12:7; 13:4–15; 15:18–21
  - b. people, Gen. 13:16; 15:4–5; 17:2–6; 22:18
  - c. blessing to the world, Gen. 18:18; 22:18

2. **Isaac**, Gen. 26:2–4
  - a. land
  - b. people
  - c. blessing to the world
3. **Jacob**, Gen. 28:2–4, 13; 35:9–12; 48:3–4
  - a. land
  - b. people
4. the nation of **Israel** (a land), Exod. 3:8, 17; 6:8; 13:5; 33:1–3; Deut. 1:7–8, 35; 4:31; 9:3; 11:25; 31:7; Josh. 1:6

**Deuteronomy 19:2 you shall set aside three cities for yourself in the midst of your land, which the LORD your God gives you to possess.**

- **three cities:** De 4:41-43 Ex 21:13 Nu 35:10-15 Jos 20:2-7 Heb 6:18
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### **Related Passages: THREE CITIES OF REFUGE ON THE EAST SIDE...**

Deuteronomy 4:41-43+ Then Moses **set apart three cities across the Jordan to the east**, 42 that a manslayer might flee there, who unintentionally slew his neighbor without having enmity toward him in time past; and by fleeing to one of these cities he might live: 43 **Bezer** in the wilderness on the plateau for the Reubenites, and **Ramoth** in Gilead for the Gadites, and **Golan** in Bashan for the Manassites.

Numbers 35:10-15 “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, 11 then you shall select for yourselves cities to be your cities of refuge, that the manslayer who has killed any person unintentionally may flee there. 12 ‘The cities shall be to you as a refuge from the avenger, so that the manslayer will not die until he stands before the congregation for trial. 13 ‘The cities which you are to give shall be your **six cities of refuge**. 14 ‘You shall give **three cities across the Jordan (EAST SIDE) and three cities in the land of Canaan (WEST SIDE)**; they are to be cities of refuge. 15 ‘These **six cities shall be for refuge for the sons of Israel**, and for the alien and for the sojourner among them; that anyone who kills a person unintentionally may flee there.

Joshua 20:2-9 “Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘Designate the **cities of refuge**, of which I spoke to you through Moses, 3 that the manslayer who kills any person unintentionally, without premeditation, may flee there, and they shall become your **refuge from the avenger of blood**. 4 ‘He shall flee to one of these cities, and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city and state his case in the hearing of the elders of that city; and they shall take him into the city to them and give him a place, so that he may dwell among them. 5 ‘Now if the avenger of blood pursues him, then they shall not deliver the manslayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor without premeditation and did not hate him beforehand. 6 ‘He shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, until the death of the one who is high priest in those days. Then the manslayer shall return to his own city and to his own house, to the city from which he fled.’” 7 So they set apart (1) **Kedesh** in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali and (2) **Shechem** in the hill country of Ephraim, and (3) **Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron)** in the hill country of Judah. 8 Beyond the Jordan east of Jericho, they designated (4) **Bezer** in the wilderness on the plain from the tribe of Reuben, and (5) **Ramoth** in Gilead from the tribe of Gad, and (6) **Golan** in Bashan from the tribe of Manasseh. 9 These were the appointed cities for all the sons of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them, that whoever kills any person unintentionally may flee there, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood until he stands before the congregation.

**Grant** has an interesting comment but be a Berean - the names of the cities are significant. Kedesh (holy) implies the holiness of the Lord Jesus, our refuge; Shechem (shoulder) that the government is upon His shoulder (Isa 9:6); Hebron (fellowship) that believers are called into the fellowship of Christ; Bezer (a fortress) that Christ is a fortress to all who trust in Him; Ramoth (high) that God has exalted Him to His right hand; Golan (joy) that we "exult with joy unspeakable and filled with the glory" (1 Pet 1:8, JND).



Levitical Cities (Green Dot) and Cities of Refuge (Red Square) - click to enlarge  
From Holman Bible Atlas (available for purchase in [digital](#) or [hardcover](#))  
© 1998 B&H Publishing Group used by permission.  
Please do not reproduce.

### THREE CITIES OF REFUGE ON THE WEST SIDE

you shall set aside three cities for yourself in the midst (middle) of your land, which the LORD your God gives you to possess - NIV says the cities are to be "centrally located," which would make them easily accessible. These three cities are Kedesh of Galilee, Shechem, and Hebron (Josh 20:7-9) and are in addition to the 3 on the east side of the Jordan River.

**Grant** - the ultimate purpose of the cities of refuge was that innocent blood was not to be shed in the land. To do so would as much break the Law as would the act of murder. There is always the danger of committing further sin when seeking to deal with alleged sin in others. ([What the Bible Teaches](#))

**Henry Morris** - The "three cities more" (Deuteronomy 19:9) were evidently to be added later after further expansion of Israel's territory, but no further mention of them is made

**Utley** - These were Levitical cities of refuge, discussed in Nu 35; Josh. 20, where someone accused of murder (i.e., "manslayer") could flee to protect himself from the dead person's relatives (i.e., "blood avenger"). The leaders of these cities were to hold a trial (cf. vv. 11-13) to determine the facts of the case. A list of the cities of refuge is found in Joshua 20:7-8: **Trans-jordan** - Bezer in

Reuben, Ramoth-Gilead in Gad, Golan in Manasseh (Bashan) and **Canaan** - Kadesh in Naphtali (Galilee), Shechem in Ephraim, Hebron in Judah. The idea of a place of safety or refuge was not unique to Israel. Most ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures provided these special places. Usually they were located at religious shrines. Israel also had this concept by one grabbing the "horns of the altar" (cf. Ex. 27:2; 30:10) at the central shrine (cf. Ex. 21:14; 1 Kgs. 1:50–53; 2:28–34). However, special cities were unique to Israel. YHWH was concerned with the death of innocent manslayers..([Deuteronomy 19 Commentary](#))

**Wiersbe** - Jesus Christ is our "city of refuge" (Heb. 6:18). When we trust Him, our sins are all forgiven and judgment is past (Rom. 8:1). Salvation is not probation. If the fugitive left the city, he was in danger of death. In Jesus Christ, we have eternal life (John 5:24). Our High Priest will never die; therefore, we are saved eternally (Heb. 7:23–28). (With the Word Bible Commentary)

**Rod Mattoon** has an interesting explanation (some of his details are extra-biblical) that "Because of the importance of the cities, several conditions were met. The cities were spread out throughout the land where residents would be within a day's journey. They were placed on hills where they could be easily seen. They were for all men whether Jew or Gentile. The access to the cities were to be as easy as possible. The Sanhedrin was responsible to maintain the roads to these cities. The roads had to be free from any stumbling blocks, obstacles, or anything that would hurt the feet. Bridges were to be at least 32 cubits (48 feet) wide. Large signs were erected on every corner with the words miklac which means "**refuge**." The sign had to be large enough so they could be easily seen or read if in hot pursuit or flight. Two law students were placed on the route to accompany a fleeing refugee to the city in the event a blood avenger should catch up with the refugee. The lawyers would try to pacify the goel until there was a legal investigation. The gates of the cities were always open and attended 24 hours a day by men whose duty was to receive fugitives. The doors were always unlocked at night even in war time. Most gates of the cities were locked at night. The fugitive upon arrival would plead his case to the elders for a trial. He would be taken in and would be provided with shelter and food. The trial was usually within days. He would be judged by at least 23 officials. This was the amount needed for a guilty verdict. If the fugitive was found guilty of intentional murder, he was turned over to the blood avenger for execution. Bribes were not allowed (**ED: AND NEITHER WAS RANSOM PAYMENT**). If the fugitive was found innocent of the charges of premeditated murder, the fugitive could live only in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest. He could then return home. If the fugitive died in the city, the bones were turned over to the family upon the death of the High Priest. If the fugitive was confined to the city, he was assigned convenient habitation, rent free. If he knew no trade, he was taught a trade for self-support. The mother of the High Priest would help feed and clothe this unfortunate victim so that they might not be impatient and pray for the death of their son (High Priest), upon whose death the fugitive's liberty and property were restored." (Numbers Commentary)

**Cities of Refuge** were a foreshadowing of the refuge we find in Christ...

Psalms 91:2 I will say to the LORD, **'My refuge** and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!'"

Isaiah 25:4 For You have been a defense for the helpless, A defense for the needy in his distress, **A refuge from the storm**, a shade from the heat; For the breath of the ruthless Is like a rain storm against a wall.

Hebrews 6:18+ so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, **we who have taken refuge** would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.

[IVP Bible Background Commentary](#) - Six of the Levitical cities were to serve as places of refuge for persons who had committed an unintentional homicide (see also Deut 4:41–43). This solution, which provides asylum to the accused and prevents the "blood avenger" from killing him, may be an extension or alternative to the use of asylum altars mentioned in Exodus 21:12–14+. The priestly community would have been concerned about polluting the altar and the sanctuary when a lawbreaker grasped the horns of the altar. Thus by extending the asylum zone to the entire city of refuge, this pollution would not happen, and the person accused would also have better accommodations until the trial was completed. Sacred cities or royal cities with privileged status are evidenced throughout the ancient Near East, but the protection they offer is often in terms of freedom from certain government imposed obligations, though one text speaks of a prohibition against shedding the blood of anyone under such protection. The concept of asylum is also found in classical sources and suggests an attempt on the part of the government to tighten control over the judicial system, removing the rights of revenge from families, and insuring due process....The concept of asylum and refuge is quite old. Babylonian and Hittite texts both speak of sacred space where all are to be protected. The inhabitants of the great temple cities of Nippur, Sippar and Babylon were granted special status because of the protection afforded by patron deities of these places. The principle was that only the god could withdraw protection from persons here, and thus no one could shed their blood without an omen or sign from the god (Herodotus has an example from the classical period). Egyptian tradition regarding asylum appears to apply only to the temple precinct rather than to the entire city. This would parallel the biblical examples in which a fugitive takes refuge at the altar (1 Kings 1:50–53; 2:28–34).

---

**G Campbell Morgan** - The provision of these cities of refuge was a proof of the mercy and justice of God. These people were naturally fierce and vindictive. The law of God had made life sacred, and the punishment of taking it had been solemnly declared in the words: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Yet it was quite possible that in connection with the

taking of human life there might be extenuating circumstances. For premeditated murder there was no forgiveness, and for the murderer in such case, no city of refuge was provided. For killing in haste, under sudden impulse of passion, such provision was made. These cities were not provided that men might evade justice, but that justice might be ensured. It is quite possible to do unjust things in the name of justice. It was against such a possibility that these cities were provided. Further, the fact that a man-slayer reached one of these cities did not ensure him against enquiry and investigation. It provided for the possibility thereof, and indeed made it obligatory. Thus the man had an opportunity of explanation, and the nation the certainty of just action. The wrong of taking human life was marked in the case of the man-slayer who was not found worthy of the death-penalty, in that it was provided that he must remain in the city until the death of the high priest. It is a wonderful illustration of the strict and impartial justice of God in all His dealings with sin. While it cannot be excused, the sinner is never punished unjustly.

---

### **What were the cities of refuge in the Old Testament?**

The cities of refuge were part of the distribution of the Promised Land among the twelve tribes of Israel. Only one tribe, the Levites, was not given land to develop. Instead, they were to be the priests of the Lord and the overseers of the tabernacle and all its rites and furnishings. Only the Levites could carry and set up the tabernacle (Numbers 2:5-13). As the Levites were to have no territorial domain allocated to them like the other tribes in the conquest of Canaan, they were to be distributed throughout the land in certain cities appropriated to their use. Part of their inheritance consisted of forty-eight cities spread throughout the land (Numbers 35:6-7). Of these forty-eight cities, six were designated as cities of refuge. The cities were Kedesh, Shechem, [Hebron](#), Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan (Joshua 20:7-8).

The Mosaic Law stated that anyone who committed a murder was to be put to death (Exodus 21:14). But for unintentional deaths, God set aside these cities to which the murderer could flee for refuge (Exodus 21:13). He would be safe from the [avenger](#)—the family member charged with avenging the victim's death (Numbers 35:19)—until the case could go to trial. The congregation would judge to find if the attacker acted unintentionally. If he did, he would return to the city of refuge and live there safely until the death of the high priest who was in office at the time of the trial, at which point he could return to his property. If the attacker left the city of refuge before the death of the high priest, however, the avenger would have the right to kill him (Numbers 35:24-28).

The establishment of those privileged sanctuaries among the cities of the Levites is probably traceable to the idea that the Levites would be the most suitable and impartial judges, that their presence and counsels might calm or restrain the stormy passions of the blood avenger. By their consecration as priests, the Levites were mediators between the Israelites and God. As such, they would have been gifted to calmly mediate between the attacker and the victim's family, ensuring that no further bloodshed would occur.

The cities of refuge are types of Christ, in whom sinners find a refuge from the destroyer of our souls. Just as the guilty person sought refuge in the cities set up for that purpose, we flee to Christ for refuge from sin (Hebrews 6:18). We run to Christ to escape the danger we are in from the curse and condemnation of the law, from the wrath of God, and from an eternity in hell. Only Christ provides refuge from these things, and it is to Him alone that we must run. Just as the cities were open to all who fled to them for safety, it is Christ who provides safety to all who come to Him for refuge from sin and its punishment. [GotQuestions.org](#)

### **Related Resources:**

- Charles Feinberg - [Cities of Refuge - Part 1](#); [Cities of Refuge - Part 2](#)- journal articles
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Refuge, Cities of](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Cities of Refuge](#)
- Kitto Biblical Cyclopedia [Cities of Refuge](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [City of Refuge](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Cities of Refuge](#)
- C H Spurgeon on The Sinner's Refuge

---

### **Torrey's Topic - Cities of Refuge**

- Design of Exodus 21:13; Numbers 35:11; Joshua 20:3
- Names &c of Deuteronomy 4:41-43; Joshua 20:7,8

### **REQUIRED TO BE**

- Easy of access Deuteronomy 19:3; Isaiah 62:10
- Open to all manslayers Joshua 20:4
- Strangers might take advantage of Numbers 35:15

## THOSE ADMITTED TO

- Were put on their trial Numbers 35:12,24
- Not protected outside of Numbers 35:26,27
- Obligated to remain in, until the high priest's death Numbers 35:25,28
- Afforded no asylum to murderers Exodus 21:14; Numbers 35:16-21

## ILLUSTRATIVE

- Of Christ Psalm 91:2; Isaiah 25:4
- Of the hope of the gospel Hebrews 6:18
- (The way to,) of Christ Isaiah 35:8; John 14:6

---

## James Smith Handfuls of Purpose - THE CITIES OF REFUGE

"The child that to its mother clings  
Lies not all safely on her breast  
Till she her arms around it flings,  
Sweetly caressing and caressed.  
Ev'n so, my God, Thy mighty arms,  
Not aught of mine, shield me from harms."

Doubtless the apostle had these cities of refuge in his mind when he wrote these words in Hebrews 6: "We have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." So the cities of refuge are typical of the hope set before us in Jesus Christ. "A man shall be an hiding place." As such they were—

**1. Appointed by God.** "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying," &c. (Nu 35:1). Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour (Acts 5:31). "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." A prophet chosen out of the people.

**2. In charge of the Levites** (Nu 35:6). The Levites had charge of the holy things in connection with the worship of God, and may represent the ambassadors for Christ, into whose hands the Gospel of salvation has been committed, as taught in 2 Corinthians 5:20.

**3. Set apart for manslayers.** "Which ye shall appoint for the man slayers" (Nu 35:6). O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself—a manslayer. The man who commits sin is a manslayer. All have sinned, all are in need of a place of refuge. How many are killing themselves unwittingly?

**4. To be entered in haste.** "That he may flee thither" (Nu 35:6). There is great danger in delay. Death may overtake the sinner before he reaches the refuge that is in Christ. Escape for thy life. Behold, now is the accepted time. I flee to Thee to hide me. (2 Cor 6:2)

**5. A protection against a lawful avenger.** "Cities for refuge from the avenger" (Nu 35:12). The avenger of the murdered one had the authority of God to kill the murderer outside the cities of refuge. The avenger fitly represents the law (Ro 7:9), which cannot save, but has power to kill. By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified.

**6. In convenient places.** "Three cities on this side of Jordan, and three in the land of Canaan" (Nu 35:14). Within easy reach of all, and were located in conspicuous spots, so that they might be easily seen at the distance. The Gospel of Christ is to be preached to every creature. "Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets, she crieth in the chief places of concourse" (Pr 1:20–26). "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1:29).

**7. Open for all.** "For every one that killeth any person" (Nu 35:15). The stranger as well as the children of Israel had the privilege of the refuge. The salvation of Christ is offered to all. There is room enough in this atoning death for every guilty, trusting soul. If any man thirst let him come unto Me. By Me if any man enter in he shall be saved.

**8. For all those who were sorry for their deeds These cities afforded no shelter to the wilful murderer.** "He shall surely be put to death" (Nu 35:16). They were appointed for those who had killed unawares, and the man who had killed his neighbour unawares would certainly be a very sorrowful man. The death of Christ, apart from repentance and faith, cannot shelter the guilty soul. Repent, and believe the Gospel.

**9. Places of justice and judgment.** "The congregation shall judge between the slayer and the avenger of blood, according to these

judgments” (Nu 35:24). There is a very solemn thought here. To become our refuge Christ must take our place. The just judgments of God were meted out to Him, and the question of sin eternally settled. So that He is now a just God and a Saviour. “I have betrothed thee unto Me in righteousness” (Hosea 2:19).

**10. Abiding places for the slayer.** “He shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest.” This is a precious thought. The life of the slayer who had fled to the city for refuge was henceforth connected with the life of the high priest, who was anointed with the holy oil (Nu 35:25). As long as the high priest lived, he lived in the place of safety. As long as Christ our Great High Priest lives, we shall live by Him. Because I live, ye shall live also (Jn 14:19). Abide in Me (Jn 15:4) . The language of David is very beautiful in this connection. “Abide thou with me, fear not; for he that seeketh my life, seeketh thy life; but with me thou shalt be in safeguard” (1 Sa 22:23).

**Deuteronomy 19:3 "You shall prepare the roads for yourself, and divide into three parts the territory of your land which the LORD your God will give you as a possession, so that any manslayer may flee there."**

- Isa 35:8 57:14 62:10 Heb 12:13
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## Avenger of Blood

**You shall prepare the roads for yourself, and divide into three parts the territory of your land which the LORD your God will give you as a possession, so that any manslayer may flee there.** Roads leading to the cities of refuge were in some way to be made readily accessible. **Utley** on what **prepare the roads** meant - There are three possible meanings: (1) equal distance apart, (2) easy access, (3) “provide road signs pointing the way” (Rashi quoting a Maccabean document) (**Wiersbe** adds “Rabbinical tradition states that there were signs at all the crossroads pointing the way to the nearest city of refuge.”)

**THOUGHT** - The question arises as to how this applies to NT believers. I'm glad you asked! The short answer is that in the Garden of Eden Satan murdered Adam (Jn 8:44) and since that fateful day all mankind has in effect been murdered, born dead in our trespasses and sins (Ro 5:12+, Eph 2:1+). We were in need of a blood avenger, a near kinsman to avenge our murder. Jesus Christ became a Man that He might become our Kinsman-Redeemer (see Table depicting Jesus as our Kinsman-Redeemer), but not only did He become our Kinsman-Redeemer but He also became our **Blood Avenger** (See [discussion](#))

**Clarke** - “The Jews inform us that the roads to the cities of refuge were made very broad, thirty-two cubits; and even, so that there should be no impediments in the way; and were constantly kept in good repair.”

**Grant** - The Jews maintained that these roads had to be kept in good condition, that the directions to the cities were to be clear, and that the gates of the cities were never to be bolted and barred, so that they could be entered at any time by day or night. In this way anyone could travel to the cities without difficulty, and, therefore, quickly. They were all to be cities of the Levites (Num 35:6), selected from the Levites' forty-eight cities. That they were occupied by Levites would give those who had fled there confidence that their case would be handled in accordance with the Word of God. ([What the Bible Teaches](#))

**Manslayer** (murder) ([07523 ratsach](#)) means to murder or slay, all 47 uses (in 40v and 18 refer to “manslayer”) speaking of one human being killing another and never of a person killing an animal. Ratsach is never employed in contexts of war, capital punishment, or self-defense. The taking of a human life is the primary concept behind this word. The first use is in the commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” (Ex 20:13) **Ratsach** refers to premeditated murder (Deut. 5:17; 1 Kgs. 21:19; Jer. 7:9), accidental killing (Nu. 35:11; Josh. 20:3), an act of revenge (Nu 35:27) and death from animal attack (Pr. 22:13). “Provocatively, Hosea refers to the lewdness of the priests that led people astray as being equal to murder (Hos. 6:9).” (Baker) **Ratsach in Deut** - Deut. 4:42; Deut. 5:17; Deut. 19:3; Deut. 19:4; Deut. 19:6; Deut. 22:26;

**So, is there a difference between murder and killing?** First, it is important to note that not all killing is wrong. For instance, the apostle Paul talks about the right of the state to take the lives of evildoers (Romans 13:1-7). This relates to what is commonly referred to as capital punishment. Most countries have consequences for murder. In some cases this requires the life of the perpetrator and a suitable means of putting one to death is chosen and administered (Matthew 5:21; Exodus 21:14). Another instance of acceptable “killing” is that which is done during times of war and at the command of superiors. There were quite a few instances in Scripture where God endorsed and allowed the taking of other lives



(1 Samuel 11; Judges 6–7). And finally, although far from acceptable, manslaughter is yet another form of killing someone. This unintentional act apparently happened so often in biblical times that cities of refuge were designated for the manslayer to seek refuge in (Exodus 21:13; Joshua 20). Again, it was never God's intent to have to use such a drastic measure as taking one's life to rectify a situation. So, God does make exceptions for the taking of another's life as long as it lines up with His will. However, premeditated murder of an individual is never God's will. ([Gotquestions](#))

**Grant** - there is a reference to the cities of refuge in Hebrews: "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Heb 6:18). The writer is encouraging the readers that the promise of God can never fail. He refers back to the great promise made in Genesis 22:16-17. God had made the promise and had confirmed it by an oath, and "an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife" (Heb 6:16), that is an end of all argument. This promise from God is an encouragement to those who "have fled for refuge". We have fled to the Lord for refuge, but there is one great difference. Whereas those who found shelter in the cities of refuge were not guilty of premeditated sin, we have been guilty, not only of what we may regard as "accidental sin" in the sense that we were overtaken by it, but also by deliberate sin. The Lord Jesus, therefore, provides refuge, even when we have deliberately sinned, although only those who repent from their sins enjoy such refuge. The purpose of fleeing was to "lay hold upon the hope set before us". The cities of refuge provided a temporary place of safety, but that provided by the Lord Jesus is eternal. ([What the Bible Teaches](#))

**Deuteronomy 19:4 "Now this is the case of the manslayer who may flee there and live: when he kills his friend unintentionally, not hating him previously--"**

- **manslayer** : De 4:42 Nu 35:15-24
- **previously**, De 19:6 Ge 31:2 Jos 3:4 1Ch 11:2 Isa 30:33
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **MANSLAYER SAFE IN CITY OF REFUGE**

**Now this is the case of the manslayer ([ratsach](#)) who may flee there and live: when he kills his friend unintentionally** (Heb = who strikes his neighbor without knowledge), **not hating him previously** (NLT - without previous hostility) -- Today we refer to this as [manslaughter](#). In other words the city of refuge kept the person free of being avenged by a relative but only if the killing were accidental and not premeditated. However the manslayer was required to live in that city of safety until the death of the current High Priest (cf. Josh. 20:6).

**Unintentionally** (KJV = ignorantly, NET = accidentally) is two words in Hebrew **1097. יָדָאֵל** **beliy** a negative particle meaning not, without and **1847. דָּאֵל** a feminine noun meaning knowledge, knowing, learning, discernment, insight, and notion

**Utley** - This is an expansion of Exod. 21:12–14, which relates to the central sanctuary. This expanded the safety of the central sanctuary to the six Levitical cities of refuge. ([Deuteronomy 19 Commentary](#))

**Guzik** - The cities of refuge were for the protection of the person who killed another accidentally or in self-defense. In ancient Israel, when one was killed, it was the responsibility of the avenger of blood to make certain the murder was punished. This practice was based upon a correct understanding of Genesis 9:6: Whoever shed's man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God, God made man.

**NET Note** on **previously** - Heb literally "yesterday and a third (day)" (likewise in Dt 19:6). The point is that there was no animosity between the two parties at the time of the accident and therefore no motive for the killing. Cf. NAB "had previously borne no malice"; NRSV "had not been at enmity before."

**NET Note** on **manslayer** - The "manslayer" is the verb "to kill" in a participial form, providing the subject of the clause. The verb means "to kill"; it can mean accidental killing, premeditated killing, or capital punishment. The clause uses the infinitive to express purpose or result: "to flee there the manslayer," means "so that the manslayer may flee there."

**Utley** - "unintentionally" The negated term refers to the death of a fellow Israelite accidentally, without premeditation or prejudice. We would call it manslaughter. The lack of evil motive is the key element. It becomes the theological heart of the sacrificial system. Any sin committed intentionally had no sacrifice available (cf. Exod. 21:12–14; Lev. 4:2, 22, 27; 5:15–18; 22:14; Num. 15:27, 30; Deut. 17:12–13; Josh. 20:1–6). Even the national sacrifice by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) did not cover premeditated sin (cf. Ps: 51:14–17)! Are you not glad we are under the NT sacrifice of Jesus?! At this point I would like to add a

quote from **NIDOTTE**, vol. 2, discussing the concept of: “ **Unintentionally**’ or **inadvertently**’ (Lev. 4:2) is both strategic and problematic (cf. Dt 4:13, 22, 27; 5:15, 18; 22:14; Num. 15:22, 24–29). Because of it some scholars have concluded that the sin offering only treated inadvertent sin, that is, sins that were committed by mistake or sins which were done not knowing that the particular act was sinful (see Melgrom, 1991, 228–29). However, the word ‘unintentionally’ means basically ‘in error’ (the vb. means to commit an error, go astray). Although it can also mean that the error was unintentional or inadvertent (see e.g. Num. 35:11, 15, 22–23; Josh 20:9), this is not necessarily the case (see 1 Sam. 26:21; Eccl. 5:6)” (p. 94).([Deuteronomy 19 Commentary](#))

**THOUGHT** - Keep in mind that the cities of refuge are a picture of Christ, our refuge from death and from the storms and threats of life. The enemy that would seek to kill us is Death, but because of Jesus' death in our place, we no longer need to fear death.

"For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, **“DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55 “O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?”** 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but **thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (OUR KINSMAN REDEEMER).** 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, **be** steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor 15:53-58+)

**Deuteronomy 19:5 as when a man goes into the forest with his friend to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down the tree, and the iron head slips off the handle and strikes his friend so that he dies--he may flee to one of these cities and live;**

- **head:** 2Ki 6:5-7
- **flee:** Nu 35:25 Pr 27:12 Isa 32:2
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### EXAMPLE OF A FLYING AXEHEAD

Here is an "[ironclad](#)" example.

**as when a man goes into the forest with his friend to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe**(Heb = he raises his hand with the iron) **to cut down the tree, and the iron head slips off the handle and strikes his friend so that he dies--he may flee to one of these cities and live** - Note that while he has his life, he himself does not have use of his land (his family of course would have access) as long as the high priest was alive (Nu 35:25+) "After the death of the high priest the manslayer shall return to the land of his possession." (Nu 35:28+)

[Guzik](#) - This, if properly understood and applied, could be an effective deterrent to murder and not a bad institution. Yet, the system had a fatal weakness: What if a death was accidental, yet difficult to prove that it was accidental?. We can picture the situation easily: Two men work together, chopping down trees, when one man swings an ax and the ax head flies off, striking the other man in the head and instantly killing him. The surviving man had good reason to believe the avenger of blood from the dead man's family would track him down and kill him, believing the death was murder.. Therefore, such a man could flee to a city of refuge—an appointed Levitical city, where he could stay, safe from the avenger of blood, until the issue was settled and he could leave the city of refuge safely.

**Joshua** adds

‘He shall flee to one of these cities, and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city and state his case in the hearing of the elders of that city; and they shall take him into the city to them and give him a place, so that he may dwell among them. (Josh 20:4)

**Deuteronomy 19:6 otherwise the **avenger of blood** might pursue the manslayer in the heat of his anger, and overtake him, because the way is long, and take his life, though he was not deserving of death, since he had not hated him previously.**

- **avenger:** Nu 35:12 Jos 20:5 2Sa 14:7
- **not deserving:** De 21:22 Jer 26:15,16

- **previously** , De 19:4
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Numbers 35:12+ 'The cities shall be to you as a refuge from the **avenger**, so that the manslayer will not die until he stands before the congregation for trial.

Numbers 35:19+ 'The **blood avenger** himself shall put the murderer to death; he shall put him to death when he meets him. 20'If he pushed him of hatred, or threw something at him lying in wait and as a result he died, 21 or if he struck him down with his hand in enmity, and as a result he died, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death, he is a murderer; the **blood avenger** shall put the murderer to death when he meets him. 22 'But if he pushed him suddenly without enmity, or threw something at him without lying in wait, 23 or with any deadly object of stone, and without seeing it dropped on him so that he died, while he was not his enemy nor seeking his injury, 24 then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the **blood avenger** according to these ordinances. 25 'The congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the **blood avenger**, and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge to which he fled; and he shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil. 26 'But if the manslayer at any time goes beyond the border of his city of refuge to which he may flee, 27 and the **blood avenger** finds him outside the border of his city of refuge, and the **blood avenger** kills the manslayer, he will not be guilty of blood 28 because he should have remained in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest. But after the death of the high priest the manslayer shall return to the land of his possession.

Joshua 20:5 'Now if the avenger of blood pursues him, then they shall not deliver the manslayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor without premeditation and did not hate him beforehand.

### **RUN FOR YOUR LIFE FROM THE BLOOD AVENGER!**

**Running for your life** - To run as fast as one possibly can, as if (or because) one is in a dangerous or grave situation.

**THOUGHT:** God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (Ps 46:1+) and we can run to Him for...

The name of the LORD is a strong tower;

**The righteous runs into it and is safe** (lifted up - [sagab](#)).

--Proverbs 18:10+

DO YOU RUN TO HIM FOR REFUGE WHEN THE STORM COMES? OR DO YOU RUN TO MAN AND HIS "WISDOM"?

In the ancient culture of Israel, it was not left entirely up to the government to avenge a murder. There was no organized Each extended family had a recognized avenger who would ensure that one who murdered a family member would likewise be killed.

**Otherwise the avenger of blood (goel/ga'al) might pursue the manslayer (ratsach) in the heat of his anger** (literally - while his heart is hot), **and overtake him, because the way (road) is long, and take his life, though he was not deserving of death** (Heb = no judgment of death) - Remember that there was no police force in ancient Israel so the avenger of blood functioned somewhat like a policeman in death cases. Can you imagine the adrenalin rush in the manslayer running as fast as possible to reach the nearest city of refuge. Talk about running for your life!

**Avenger** - Nu 35:12; Nu 35:19; Nu 35:21; Nu 35:24; Nu 35:25; Nu 35:27; Dt. 19:6; Dt. 19:12; Jos. 20:3; Jos. 20:5; Jos. 20:9; 2 Sam. 14:11; Ps. 44:16; Ps. 99:8

The basis for the avenging of blood is found in Genesis 9:5-6

"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. 6 **"Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed** For in the image of God He made man."

**NET Note** - The participle גֹּאֵל (goel/ga'al) is the one who protects the family by seeking vengeance for a crime. This is the same verb used for levirate marriages and other related customs.

**McIntosh** - This provision is spelled out in much greater detail in Numbers 35:9-28, which includes the additional provision that the

elders of the city of refuge must hold a hearing to determine the legitimacy of a person's claim that the death in question was accidental. If his claim was upheld, he was permitted to stay in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest. He wandered outside its walls, however, at his own risk. ([Holman Old Testament Commentary – Deuteronomy](#))

**Norman Geisler** - What is forbidden in Exodus 20:13+ is the recognized **crime of murder**, and what is permitted in Numbers 35 (AND DEUT 19) is the recognized **responsibility of capital punishment**

**Guzik** -The **avenger of blood** ([goel/ga'al](#)) was an appointed member of the family (the goel), designated to protect the honor and lives of the family. His interest would not be in gathering evidence, but it avenging the honor of the family—so, in the case of an accidental killing, the manslayer would need protection from the avenger of blood.

**POSB** - A clear illustration was given: a man and his neighbor were in the forest cutting trees. As one man swung the ax, the head flew off and killed his neighbor (Deut. 19:5-6). The man could flee to a city of refuge for safety from the "avenger of blood." In ancient days it was the responsibility of the nearest relative to protect the family rights of any victim who had been killed. The nearest relative was known as the "revenger of blood" or the "redeemer" or "kinsman." The nearest relative or "kinsman" was responsible by law to save his relative from any trouble he faced. He was essentially the protector of the family. For example, the "kinsman" or "redeemer" was responsible...

- for buying or redeeming a relative from slavery (Leviticus 25:48-49)
- for buying back or redeeming the property of a relative (Leviticus 25:25)
- for marrying a dead relative's widow and bearing children in order to carry on the name of the deceased (Ruth 3:12-13; Ruth 4:5-10)
- for avenging the death of a relative (Numbers 35:19; Deut. 19:6)

The kinsman or the avenger of blood became the avenger for the person who had been killed. By law, it was the responsibility of the avenger to execute justice upon the person who had committed the killing. But revenge would run wild and sweep the nation without a place of safety for the manslayer. Accidental killings do happen: the heads of axes do fly off and kill neighbors; cut trees do fall and accidentally kill bystanders. All kinds of accidental killings occur. Consequently, to take revenge against the person who accidentally killed a neighbor is to commit a gross injustice. This was the purpose for establishing the cities of refuge. ([Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Deuteronomy](#))

**NET Note** on **take his life** - literally "smite with respect to life," that is, fatally.

**Utley - not deserving of death**" This is a theological development of Gen. 9:5–6. Here the motive behind the action is taken into consideration. That which was accidental and unpremeditated is reprieved from "eye-for-an-eye" retaliation. There were consequences (had to live in the city of refuge until the death of the current High Priest). Israel, like YHWH, was to be concerned with justice and revenge!. ([Deuteronomy 19 Commentary](#))

**Since he had not hated him previously** - Not premeditated.

**Two modes of execution were specified in the Mosaic Law:** (1). Death at the hand of the blood avenger (Nu 35:19, 26, 27; Dt 19:11-12) (2). Death by stoning (Ex 21:29; Lv 20:2, 27; Nu 15:32-36; Dt. 13:6-10; 17:2-5; 21:18-21; 22:13-21), neither of which would have been as painless as present-day methods.

**Avenger** ([01350](#)) ([goel/ga'al](#)) The main word is the verb **gaal** ([01350](#)). **Goel** ([01350](#)) is the active participle of the verb **gaal** and conveys a primary sense of "restored to an original state". A Goel therefore was one who not only delivered but who effected restoration to an original state. The **Goel** is to do the part of a kinsman and thus to redeem their kin from difficulty or danger by the payment of a price. **Ga'al = Blood Avenger** in Dt 19:6, which describes the individual who had the duty to execute the murderer of his relative. Ga'al is used with this same sense in Nu 35:19, 21, 24, 27 35:12 (see [Commentary](#)). Apparently the idea is that the next of kin must effect the payment of life for life. As a house is repurchased or a slave redeemed by payment, so the lost life of the relative must be paid for by the equivalent life of the murderer. The kinsman is the avenger of blood. This system of execution must be distinguished from blood feuds for the **blood avenger** was a guiltless executioner and not to be murdered in turn.

**BDB** - A primitive root, to *redeem* (according to the Oriental law of kinship), that is, to *be the next of kin* (and as such to *buy back* a relative's property, *marry* his widow, etc.)

**Goel** - Gen. 48:16; Exod. 6:6; Exod. 15:13; Lev. 25:25; Lev. 25:26; Lev. 25:30; Lev. 25:33; Lev. 25:48; Lev. 25:49; Lev. 25:54; Lev. 27:13; Lev. 27:15; Lev. 27:19; Lev. 27:20; Lev. 27:27; Lev. 27:28; Lev. 27:31; Lev.

27:33; Num. 5:8; Num. 35:12; Num. 35:19; Num. 35:21; Num. 35:24; Num. 35:25; Num. 35:27; Deut. 19:6; Deut. 19:12; Jos. 20:3; Jos. 20:5; Jos. 20:9; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9; Ruth 3:12; Ruth 3:13; Ruth 4:1; Ruth 4:3; Ruth 4:4; Ruth 4:6; Ruth 4:8; Ruth 4:14; 2 Sam. 14:11; 1 Ki. 16:11; Job 3:5; Job 19:25; Ps. 19:14; Ps. 69:18; Ps. 72:14; Ps. 74:2; Ps. 77:15; Ps. 78:35; Ps. 103:4; Ps. 106:10; Ps. 107:2; Ps. 119:154; Prov. 23:11; Isa. 35:9; Isa. 41:14; Isa. 43:1; Isa. 43:14; Isa. 44:6; Isa. 44:22; Isa. 44:23; Isa. 44:24; Isa. 47:4; Isa. 48:17; Isa. 48:20; Isa. 49:7; Isa. 49:26; Isa. 51:10; Isa. 52:3; Isa. 52:9; Isa. 54:5; Isa. 54:8; Isa. 59:20; Isa. 60:16; Isa. 62:12; Isa. 63:9; Isa. 63:16; Jer. 31:11; Jer. 50:34; Lam. 3:58; Hos. 13:14; Mic. 4:10

**Anchor Bible Dictionary** has an interesting note - The "blood avenger" was literally "**taker back of the blood**," that is, a redeemer with a specialized function. The killing of one clan member was construed by the remaining members not only as a shedding of the group's blood (de Vaux 1965:11) but as misappropriation of blood which properly belonged to the entire group. The responsibility of the blood avenger was to win back that misappropriated blood by killing the original blood shedder (Daube 1969:123–24). Although blood vengeance for a relative slain in battle was not justified (2 Sam 3:27–30), return of other blood was required by the clan (Heb *mišpāhâ*), or by an agent acting on its behalf even when both slayer and victim were clan members (2 Sam 14:6–7). It appears that the rise of the monarchy limited blood vengeance in that the king could, in effect, pardon the slayer by restraining the avenger of blood (2 Sam 14:5–11).

**Blood Avenger - Hastings Dictionary** - The practice of blood-revenge has been very widely spread among societies in a certain stage of civilization, where there has been no central authority to enforce law and order, and where the certainty of retaliation has been the only guarantee for security of life. Among the Semites the custom was in full force from the earliest times, and it is still the only spring of order in Arabia. It depends for its maintenance upon the solidarity of the clan or tribe. All the members of the tribe, whatever may be the immediate parental relationship, are counted as being of one blood; a wrong done to one is a wrong done to all, to be avenged if necessary by all the offended clan upon all the clan of the offender. The phrase used by the Arabs is, 'Our blood has been shed.' Of the form of blood-revenge that involved the whole clan or tribe in the murder of a single individual there are still traces in the OT (Joshua 7:24 , 2 Kings 9:25 ). Naturally, however, the duty of avenging the shedding of blood fell primarily upon him who was nearest of kin to the slaughtered man. This next of kin was called the *gā'āšî* . The word in Hebrew law was used in a wide sense for him whose duty it was to redeem the property or the person of an impoverished or enslaved relative ( Leviticus 25:26; Leviticus 25:47-49 , Ruth 4:1 ff.), but it came to be used specially of the man who had to perform this most tragic duty of kinship. The steady effort of Hebrew law was to limit this ancient custom so as to ensure that a blood feud should not perpetuate itself to the ruin of a whole clan, and that deliberate murder and accidental homicide should not come under the same penalty. It is possible to trace with some definiteness the progress of this sentiment by which the *gā'āšî* was gradually transformed from being the irresponsible murderer of a possibly blameless manslayer to being practically the executioner of a carefully considered sentence passed by the community.

**Watson's Biblical & Theological Dictionary Avenger of Blood** - He who prosecuted the manslayer under the law was called the avenger of blood, and had a right to slay the person, if he found him without a city of refuge.

**IVP Bible Background Commentary** - While the biblical law clearly indicates the responsibility of the "blood avenger" to avenge the death of a kinsman, this practice of blood feud could be disruptive to the administration of justice, and thus the six cities of refuge were established to provide a "cooling off" phase as well as due process for the accused. Two witnesses were necessary to convict (Num 35:30), and then it became the responsibility of the "blood avenger" to execute the felon (Num 35:19–21; Deut 19:12). No ransom for the convicted murderer was possible (Num 35:31–32). This contrasts with laws formulated elsewhere in the ancient Near East. Both the Hittite laws and the Middle Assyrian laws provide for the payment of a ransom to buy back the life of the murderer. The Assyrian law reflects a middle ground, giving the deceased's next-of-kin the option of executing the murderer or accepting a ransom.... It is possible that the title "avenger of blood" evolved out of the family obligation to engage in blood revenge when one of their clan members was slain. Such a process, while typical of tribal society, is extremely disruptive to the maintenance of order within an organized state. As a result, the "avenger of blood" (a term which appears only in the context of the cities of refuge) may have been appointed by the government to serve the needs of both the family and the state by apprehending the accused and then carrying out the sentence if the verdict was murder.

---

**Jewish Encyclopedia** - (Hebrew "go'el"): The Hebrew name for the clansman, "next of kin," upon whom devolved the duties: (1) of avenging, on the person of the murderer, the blood of a murdered kinsman—in this capacity the more specific term "go'el ha-dam" (blood-avenger) was generally used—and (2) of redeeming the property or the person of a relative that had fallen into debt.

#### **Among Primitive Peoples.**

(1) Among primitive peoples of low political development—such as the ancient Greeks, Germans, and Slavs, some North American tribes, the modern Sicilians, Corsicans, and Arabs—the clan or family had to assume the right to protect itself. One of the most important clan duties then was plainly for the nearest of kin to hunt down and carry out the death-penalty on a person that had slain

a member of the sept or family. That this idea of family retribution—which even to-day is by no means extinct in some comparatively civilized communities—was also current among the ancient Hebrews may be seen from Genesis 27:45, where the existence of the custom is clearly taken for granted. It appears, furthermore, from Joshua 7:24, and 2 Kings 9:26, that, in the most primitive period, such a vendetta was extended to the entire family of the murderer, as is still the custom among the desert Bedouins. The Hebrew religious justification for the system of family blood-revenge was undoubtedly the firm belief that God, in order to insure the sacredness of human life, had Himself fixed the death penalty for murder (Genesis 9:5 et seq.; Leviticus 24:17). In the earliest times blood-money was not accepted either for murder or for excusable homicide. Such a payment would have made the land "polluted by blood" (Numbers 35:31 et seq.). Una venged blood "cried out" for vengeance to God (Genesis 4:10; Isaiah 26:21; Ezekiel 24:7 et seq.; Job 16:18). The Avenger of Blood, then, was regarded as the representative, not only of the murdered man's family, but of Yhwh Himself, who was the highest avenger (Psalms 9:13 [A. V. 12]).

### **Modification of the System.**

Such a stern system, however, could not, of course, survive unmodified after the community had begun to advance from the purely savage state. Abuses of the privilege of blood-revenge must have soon become evident to the tribal chiefs, as one finds in Exodus 21:12 (compare Genesis 9:6) that the commonly accepted formula that a life must be given for a life is modified by a careful legal distinction between wilful murder and accidental manslaughter. In order to establish a case of wilful murder, it must be shown that weapons or implements commonly devoted to slaughter were used, and that a personal hatred existed between the slayer and his victim (Exodus 21:12; compare Numbers 35:16; and Deuteronomy 19:4). The law enumerates three exceptions to this general principle: (a) The slaying of a thief caught at night in flagrante delicto is not punishable at all; but if he is captured by day there is blood-guilt which, however, is not liable to the blood-revenge (Exodus 22 et seq.). (b) If a bull gored a human being to death, the punishment was visited upon the animal, which was killed by stoning. Its flesh in such a case might not be eaten. If gross contributory negligence could be proved on the part of the animal's owner, he was liable only for blood-money (Exodus 21:28). (c) Where the master kills his slave, the offense is punishable only when the latter dies at once, and then probably not by the death-penalty, as some of the rabbinical writers thought (Exodus 21:23).

### **Six Cities of Refuge.**

The later codes develop at some length the very just distinction between wilful murder and accidental homicide (see see MURDER). Six CITIES OF REFUGE were appointed for the purpose of affording an asylum to the homicide, where he might be secure from the hand of the avenger (Deuteronomy 19:12) until the elders of the community of which the accused was a member should decide whether the murder was intentional or accidental (Numbers 35:9-34; Deuteronomy 19:1-13; Joshua 20). According to the later procedure, at least two witnesses were necessary to establish a case of wilful murder (Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 19:15). In case, however, it was not possible to apprehend the murderer or manslayer, the adjudication might take place and a verdict be rendered in his absence.

It appears from Joshua 20:4 that the elders of the city of refuge chosen by the slayer had the right to decide as to whether he should be permitted to have a temporary asylum or not. If the case were simply one of unintentional manslaughter the slayer was immediately accorded the right of asylum in the city of refuge, where he had to remain until the death of the reigning high priest (Numbers 35:25), whose death, in ancient Hebrew law, marked the end of a legal period of limitation (Numbers 35; Deuteronomy 19; Joshua 20). If the "go'el ha-dam" were to find the slayer of his kinsman outside the limits of the city of refuge, he had the right to kill him at sight.

### **The Family Executioner.**

In a case in which the verdict against the slayer was one of wilful murder, the murderer incurred the blood-revenge without any restrictions. If he were already in a city of refuge, the elders of his own city were obliged to fetch him thence by force if necessary, and to deliver him formally to the Avenger of Blood, who thus became little more than a family executioner (Deuteronomy 19:11 et seq.).

Two very important restrictions should here be noticed: (a) Although the entire family or gens to which the murdered man belonged were theoretically entitled to demand the blood-revenge (2 Samuel 14:7), still, in the practise of later times, only one member—for example, the next of kin, who was also legal heir—might assume the duty of carrying it out. According to the later Jewish tradition, when there was no heir, the court had the right to assume the position of the "go'el." (b) The law expressly states that the blood-revenge was applicable only to the person of the guilty man and not to the members of his family as well (Deuteronomy 24:16; compare 2 Kings 14:6). This is a most significant advance on the primitive savage custom that involved two gentes in a ceaseless feud. Anent this advance, it is interesting to note that, in the time of the kings, the king himself, as the highest judicial authority, was entitled to control the course of the blood-revenge (2 Samuel 14:8 et seq.).

It is difficult to decide exactly how long the custom of blood-revenge by the "go'el" remained in vogue among the Hebrews.

According to 2 Chronicles 19:10; Deuteronomy 17:8, the law of Jehoshaphat demanded that all intricate legal cases should come before the new court of justice at Jerusalem. It is not probable, however, that this regulation curtailed the rights of the "go'el haddam," which must have continued in force as long as there was an independent Israelitish state. Of course, under the Romans, the right of blood revenge had ceased (John 18:31).

### **The Redeemer of His Kinsmen.**

(2) As indicated above, the term "go'el" had also a secondary meaning. From the idea of one carrying out the sentence of justice in the case of blood-shed, the word came to denote the kinsman whose duty it was to redeem the property and person of a relative who, having fallen into debt, was compelled to sell either his land or himself as a slave to satisfy his creditors (compare Leviticus 25:25,47-49). It would appear from Jeremiah 32:8-12 that the "go'el" had the right to the refusal of such property before it was put up for public sale, and also the right to redeem it after it had been sold (Ruth).

From the Book of Ruth (4:5) it would appear that the duty of the nearest of kin to marry the widow of his relative in case of the latter's dying without issue was included in the obligations resting upon the "go'el"; but inasmuch as the term is not used in the passage in Deut. (25:8-10) in which this institution is referred to—the obligation resting upon the brother to marry his deceased brother's widow—the testimony of so late a production as Ruth can not be pressed. The usage in the book may not be legally accurate.

From this idea of the human "go'el" as a redeemer of his kinsmen in their troubles, there are to be found many allusions to Yhwh as the Divine Go'el, redeeming His people from their woes (compare Exodus 6:6, 15:13; Psalms 74:2), and of the people themselves becoming the "redeemed" ones of Yhwh (Psalms 107:2; Isaiah 62:12). The reference to God as the "go'el" and as the one who would "redeem" His people was applicable to the relationship between Yhwh and Israel in the exilic period, when the people actually looked to their God to restore their land for them, as the impoverished individual looked to his kinsman to secure a restoration of his patrimony. Hence, of thirty-three passages in which "go'el" (as a noun or verb) is applied to God, nineteen occur in the exilic (and post-exilic) sections of Isaiah—the preacher par excellence of "restoration"—for example, in 48:20, 49:26, 52:9, 62:12, etc. See ASYLUM; see CITIES OF REFUGE; JOB; MURDER J. Jr. J. D. P.

### **Bibliography:**

- A. H. Post, Studien zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Familienrechts, 1890, pp. 113-137;
- W. R. Smith, Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia, pp. 22 et seq., 38, 47, 52 et seq.;
- idem, Religion of the Semites, 2d ed., pp. 32 et seq., 272 et seq., 420;
- Nowack, Lehrbuch der Hebr. Archäologie, , ch. , 1894;
- Kohler, Zur Lehre von der Blutrache, 1885;
- Bissell, The Law of Asylum in Israel, 1884;
- Jastrow, Avenger, Kinsman, and Redeemer in the O. T., in The Independent, Aug. 27, 1896;
- Benzinger, Hebräische Archäologie, p. 335.

---

**Norman Geisler - When Critics Ask - NUMBERS 35:19—Why did God permit avenging blood and yet forbid murder?**

**PROBLEM:** God forbade murder (Ex. 20:13). Yet here He says, "The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death."

**SOLUTION:** First of all, this was not an act of murder, but an act of capital punishment which God had ordained before the law (Gen. 9:6), and Moses had reaffirmed it under the Law (Ex. 21:12). Further, notice that it was only to be done to a "murderer," not simply to anyone. Also, the avenger had to be the nearest male relative of the one who was murdered, not just anyone who wished to take justice in his own hands. In short, what is forbidden in Exodus 20 is the recognized crime of murder, and what is permitted in Numbers 35 is the recognized responsibility of capital punishment. These are not in conflict.

---

### **Nave's Topical - Avenger of Blood**

- Premosaic Genesis 9:5,6
- Cain fears Genesis 4:14,15
- Lamech fears Genesis 4:24
- Law concerning, set aside. by David 2 Samuel 14:4-11
- SCRIPTURES RELATING TO Genesis 9:5,6; Numbers 35:19-29; Deuteronomy 19:4-13; Joshua 20:1-9

---

**Jesus Christ - Our Blood Avenger "goel haddam."**

As outlined in the table on Kinsman-Redeemer ([click](#)), Jesus Christ is the NT fulfillment of the OT shadow of the **Kinsman Redeemer** as portrayed by Boaz in the book of Ruth. In the NT we learn that our Kinsman Redeemer will redeem and restore all that man lost when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden and will avenge Adam's "murder."

What happened as a result of man's fall in the Garden? When Adam and Eve sinned in that garden they became slaves to the power of **Sin**. (Ro 6:16+) What else happened in the Garden? Adam and Eve were "murdered"! You may never have thought of their "death" in the Garden as "murder", but God called it that in the NT. They were alive but when they sinned they died spiritually and from that time on they were dead in their trespasses and sins Ge 2:17, Ro 5:12+, Eph 2:1+). In John 8:43 we learn that Jesus turns to the Jewish religious leaders and asks them...

Why do you not understand what I am saying? (And before they can answer Jesus explains that...) It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the Devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a **MURDERER FROM THE BEGINNING**, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies."

And thus before the Fall of man, the earth was under the dominion of Adam and Eve, but Satan crept in the perfect environment and craftily deceived them, tempting them to commit sin, and in effect (to use Jesus' words) "**murdered**" them "**in the beginning**". (Ge 3:1-6+). Having accomplished his goal, Satan, the great usurper, became the ruler, the prince over the world (Eph 2:2+)

For more thorough discussion click **Jesus Christ - Our Blood Avenger**

---

**[What is an avenger of blood in the Bible?](#)** (see also [Law of Retribution below](#))

In the Bible, an avenger of blood is a person legally responsible for carrying out [vengeance](#) when a family member has been unlawfully killed or murdered. The avenger of blood is usually the nearest male relative of the murdered person. This family executioner seeks justice by killing the individual responsible for the death of his relative.

Mosaic Law allowed vengeance killings carried out by an avenger of blood: "The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death; when the avenger comes upon the murderer, the avenger shall put the murderer to death" (Numbers 35:19; see also 26–27 and Deuteronomy 19:11–12). If a family member was murdered, it became the duty of the avenger of blood to restore justice to the family and the land by pursuing and ultimately carrying out the death penalty on the person responsible. This Old Testament law is rooted in God's requirement of a life for a life in cases of murder: "And I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person's life. If a wild animal kills a person, it must die. And anyone who murders a fellow human must die. If anyone takes a human life, that person's life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings in his own image" (Genesis 9:5–6NLT).

The word translated "avenge," in Hebrew, is related to the word for "redeem," "reclaim," or "restore." As a representative of God and the family, the avenger of blood "redeemed" or "reclaimed" the blood of the relative by killing the original blood-shedder. An avenger of blood was to act only in cases of deliberate murder or the unlawful taking of an innocent life. Intent is a necessary element of murder. Six examples of intentional homicide are outlined in Numbers 35:16–21. The avenger of blood was not given license to act in instances of accidental manslaughter.

The Mosaic Law regulated the actions of the avenger of blood by providing cities of refuge for the accused. An individual who committed manslaughter, or the unintentional and accidental killing of a person, could find sanctuary in any of the six designated cities of refuge throughout the land of Israel (Numbers 35:10–15, 22–25; Deuteronomy 19:4–6; Joshua 20:1–6). In these towns, the avenger of blood's quarry was legally protected and guaranteed a fair trial.

Gideon became the avenger of blood for his brothers who had been murdered on Mount Tabor by the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna (Judges 8:18–21). Joab avenged the blood of his brother Asahel (2 Samuel 3:27–30). The men of Gibeon avenged the deaths of their countrymen at the hands of Saul by executing seven of the king's sons (2 Samuel 21:1–9). The avenger of blood concept also figures into the account of King Amaziah, who put to death the officials who had assassinated his father (2 Kings 14:5–6). The story of the Tekoite woman involved a plea for King David to stop the actions of the avenger of blood (2 Samuel 14:8–11).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul instructs, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:17–19).

Scripture promises that God will punish evildoers (1 Thessalonians 4:6). God has also appointed government authorities to execute vengeance on His behalf: "The government is God's servant working for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid. The government has the right to carry out the death sentence. It is God's servant, an avenger to execute God's anger on anyone who does what is wrong" (Romans 13:4, GWT).



Ultimately, the Lord is the Restorer and Redeemer of His people (Isaiah 41:14). In several places in Scripture, God is portrayed as the avenger of blood: "Rejoice, you nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people" (Deuteronomy 32:43; see also Judges 9:23–24; 2 Kings 9:7; Psalm 9:12; 79:10; Revelation 6:10; 19:2). [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

---

#### Related Resources:

- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Avenger of Blood](#)
- Morrish Bible Dictionary [Avenger, Avenger of Blood](#)
- 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica [Avenger of Blood](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Avenger of Blood](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Avenger of Blood](#)
- [What is the law of retribution? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What is the significance of burning coals in the Bible?](#)
- [What does the Bible say about retaliation?](#)

**Deuteronomy 19:7 "Therefore, I command you, saying, 'You shall set aside three cities for yourself.'**

- **cities:** Nu 35:6
- Charles Feinberg - [Cities of Refuge - Part 1](#); [Cities of Refuge - Part 2](#)- journal articles

### THREE ADDITIONAL CITIES OF REFUGE

**Therefore, I command you, saying, 'You shall set aside three cities for yourself.** - These are 3 in addition to the 6 already named. There is no record of Israel ever establishing 3 more cities.

**Nu 35:14 says "You shall give three cities across the Jordan."** Moses records them in Dt 4:41-43

"Then Moses set apart **three cities across the Jordan to the east**,<sup>42</sup> that a manslayer might flee there, who unintentionally slew his neighbor without having enmity toward him in time past; and by fleeing to one of these cities he might live: <sup>43</sup> [Bezer](#) in the wilderness on the plateau for the Reubenites, and [Ramoth](#) in Gilead for the Gadites, and [Golan](#) in Bashan for the Manassites." Joshua 20:8 also records these 3 cities - "Beyond the Jordan east of Jericho, they designated Bezer in the wilderness on the plain from the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan from the tribe of Manasseh."

**Nu 35:14 adds "and three cities in the land of Canaan; they are to be cities of refuge"**- Joshua records three cities west of the Jordan - "So they set apart [Kedesh](#) in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali and [Shechem](#) in the hill country of Ephraim, and [Kiriath-arba](#) (that is, [Hebron](#)) in the hill country of Judah." (Joshua 20:7)

The three cities promised here would have made 9 if they had ever come to fruition, but as stated there is no evidence that they did.

**Grant** comments "It is true that the authority of David and Solomon extended to the lands beyond the east bank of the Jordan, but this was of short duration. These lands were to be given to Israel only if the nation obeyed His word to "keep all these commandments to do them ... to love the Lord thy God, and to walk ever in his ways" (v. 9). The nation failed to do this and therefore three further cities of refuge were not necessary." ([What the Bible Teaches](#))

---

**Deuteronomy 19:8 "If the LORD your God enlarges your territory, just as He has sworn to your fathers, and gives you all the land which He promised to give your fathers--**

- De 11:24,25 12:20 Ge 15:18-21 28:14 Ex 23:31 34:24 1Ki 4:21 Ezr 4:20
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**If the LORD your God enlarges your territory, just as He has sworn to your fathers, and gives you all the land which He promised to give your fathers-** As Israel expanded, there were to be more cities of refuge. If a city of refuge was too far to be readily reached by the manslayer, it did him no good—the avenger of blood would overtake him before he could reach the city of

refuge. ([Guzik](#))

**POSB** - Note that another provision was made for three more cities of refuge if the territory was enlarged by God (Deut. 19:8-10). This point again stresses the importance of justice and shows God's concern for justice among His people. God looked ahead to the day when the promised land would be enlarged and His people would need three more cities of refuge, need the cities in order to assure justice for innocent people. Note that the enlarged territory was promised to the forefathers, but it was conditional. The people had to obey and love God, walking in His ways (Deut. 19:8-9). The reason for the additional cities is clearly stated: to prevent the death of innocent people and to avoid personal responsibility for the death of the innocent. There is national responsibility for this law. God was speaking to the nation as a whole: every person must make sure that innocent blood was not shed in the land. If innocent blood was shed, every person became guilty. For this reason, every person had to make sure that the cities of refuge were built and made available as asylums or places of safety for persons guilty of accidental murder. ([Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Deuteronomy](#))

**Deuteronomy 19:9 if you carefully observe all this commandment which I command you today, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in His ways always--then you shall add three more cities for yourself, besides these three.**

- **If:** De 11:22-25 12:32
- **then:** Jos 20:7,8
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### POTENTIAL FOR UP TO NINE CITIES OF REFUGE

**If - "If"** The hypothetical PARTICLE expresses the conditional nature of YHWH's covenant with Israel (cf. v. 9). He had given them the trans-jordan area and now if they obeyed He would give them Canaan. (Uteley)

**You carefully observe all this commandment which I command you today, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in His ways always--then you shall add three more cities for yourself, besides these three - All this commandment** refers here to the entire covenant in the Book of Deuteronomy as encapsulated in the Shema (Deut 6:4–5) and emphasizes the unity of the Law. In other words it is consider as if it were One Commandment for it had to be obeyed in its entirety. And James is based on this concept of the unity of the Law " For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. (James 2:10+)

**NET Note - You will add three more cities.** Since these are alluded to nowhere else and thus were probably never added, this must be a provision for other cities of refuge should they be needed (cf. v. 8).

**Ryrie** - three more cities. In addition to the six already designated. These were never added, because Israel did not occupy all the territory promised to Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:18). David subdued and took tribute from that larger area, and Solomon inherited it (cf. 1 Kings 4:21), but it remained foreign and was soon lost.

**Deuteronomy 19:10 "So innocent blood will not be shed in the midst of your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, and bloodguiltiness be on you.**

- De 19:13 21:8 1Ki 2:31 2Ki 21:16 24:4 Ps 94:21 Pr 6:17 Isa 59:7 Jer 7:6,7 Joe 3:19 Jon 1:14 Mt 27:4,5
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### MORE CITIES WOULD PREVENT SHEDDING INNOCENT BLOOD

**So innocent blood will not be shed in the midst of your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, and bloodguiltiness be on you - NLT** - "That way you will prevent the death of innocent people in the land the LORD your God is giving you as your special possession. You will not be held responsible for the death of innocent people." **NIV** - "Do this so that innocent blood will not be shed in your land, which the LORD your God is giving you as your inheritance, and so that you will not be guilty of bloodshed." He is explaining why God would provide 3 additional cities if the boundaries of Israel increased. The point of the additional 3 cities is to assure that there would always be a city within reach of the man who had brought about an accidental death. If the cities were not close enough for him to flee for refuge, the avenger of blood might catch him, kill him and in so doing shed

**innocent blood** in the land. If that happened the bloodguiltiness would be on **you**, meaning you the people of Israel.

**Bloodguilt** (Heb. *dām, dāmîm* "blood"). is the condition of being culpable for bloodshed, guilt incurred through an unnecessary shedding of blood (Deut. 19:10).

**Bloodguilt** in NASB - Exod. 22:2; Exod. 22:3; Lev. 17:4; Lev. 20:9; Lev. 20:11; Lev. 20:12; Lev. 20:13; Lev. 20:16; Lev. 20:27; Deut. 19:10; Deut. 21:8; Deut. 22:8; Ps. 51:14; Hos. 12:14

**Philip Logan - Bloodguilt** made a person ritually unclean (Num. 35:33–34) and was incurred by killing a person who did not deserve to die (Deut. 19:10; Jer. 26:15; Jon. 1:14). Killing in self-defense and execution of criminals are exempted from bloodguilt (Exod. 22:2; Lev. 20:9). Bloodguilt was incurred (1) by intentional killing (Judg. 9:24; 1 Sam. 25:26, 33; 2 Kings 9:26; Jer. 26:15); (2) by unintentional killing (See Num. 35:22–28 where one who accidentally kills another may be killed by the avenger of blood implying that the accidental murderer had bloodguilt. See Avenger.); (3) by being an indirect cause of death (Gen. 42:22; Deut. 19:10b; 22:8; Josh. 2:19); (4) a person was under bloodguilt if those for whom he was responsible committed murder (1 Kings 2:5, 31–33); and (5) the killing of a sacrifice at an unauthorized altar imputed bloodguilt (Lev. 17:4). The avenger of blood could take action in the first two instances but not in the latter three. When the murderer was known in instance (1) above, the community shared the guilt of the murderer until the guilty party had paid the penalty of death. No other penalty or sacrifice could substitute for the death of the guilty party, nor was there any need for sacrifice once the murderer had been killed (Num. 35:33; Deut. 21:8–9). The one who unintentionally killed another [(2) above] might flee to a city of refuge and be safe. If, however, the accidental killer left the boundaries of the city of refuge, the avenger of blood could kill in revenge without incurring bloodguilt (Num. 35:31–32; Deut. 19:13). The community was held to be bloodguilty if it failed to provide asylum for the accidental killer (Deut. 19:10). In cases where the blood of an innocent victim was not avenged, the blood of the innocent cried out to God (Gen. 4:10; Isa. 26:21; Ezek. 24:7–9; cp. Job 16:18), and God became the avenger for that person (Gen. 9:5; 2 Sam. 4:11; 2 Kings 9:7; Ps. 9:12; Hos. 1:4). Even the descendants of the bloodguilty person might suffer the consequences of God's judgment (2 Sam. 3:28–29; 21:1; 1 Kings 21:29). Manasseh's bloodguilt and Judah's failure to do anything about it was the cause of Judah's downfall over 50 years after Manasseh's reign (2 Kings 24:4). Judas incurred bloodguilt by betraying Jesus ("innocent blood," Matt. 27:4). Those who called for the crucifixion accepted the burden of bloodguilt for themselves and their children (Matt. 27:25). Pilate accepted no responsibility for the shedding of innocent blood (Matt. 27:24). ([Holman Bible Dictionary](#))

**HCSB** - Innocent blood defiled the land so that the land figuratively became hostile toward the guilty person and resisted his attempts to make use of it. When Cain killed Abel, Abel's blood cried out to the Lord from the ground. It would thereafter withhold its yield from Cain (Gen 4:10-12). The soil of Israel would likewise become polluted by the blood of innocent victims (Num 35:33-34; Dt 19:13).

**NET Note - Heb** "innocent blood must not be shed." The Hebrew phrase דַּם נַקִּי (dam naqiy) means the blood of a person to whom no culpability or responsibility adheres because what he did was without malice aforethought (HALOT 224 s.v. 4 דַּם.n).

**Uteley** - YHWH is concerned about the death of people who do not deserve to die (i.e., "innocent blood," cf. 2 Kgs. 21:16; 24:4; Jer. 22:17). In the OT there is no distinction between ethical and ritual purity. Life is precious! Its loss has consequences ("blood-guiltiness," cf. Num. 35:33–34). It is this consequence and other ritual uncleanness that is dealt with (1) annually by the Day of Atonement, described in Leviticus 16 and (2) locally by the sacrifice of a heifer (cf. 21:1–9). As the cities of refuge dwelt with individuals, Deut. 21:1–9 deals with the ritual guiltiness of communities. ([Deuteronomy 19 Commentary](#))

**Inheritance** (possession, heritage) (05159) **nachalah** from **nāḥal** = signifies giving or receiving property which is part of a permanent possession and as a result of succession) means Inheritance, heritage, possession. A possession is any piece of property that passes by law to an heir on the death of the owner. It also speaks of God's promises to His people, such as the promise of the land to national (redeemed **remnant**) Israel. In Dt 4:20 we read "But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today." **Nachalah** in Deut - Deut. 3:28; Deut. 4:20; Deut. 4:21; Deut. 4:38; Deut. 9:26; Deut. 9:29; Deut. 10:9; Deut. 12:9; Deut. 12:12; Deut. 14:27; Deut. 14:29; Deut. 15:4; Deut. 18:1; Deut. 18:2; Deut. 19:10; Deut. 19:14; Deut. 20:16; Deut. 21:23; Deut. 24:4; Deut. 25:19; Deut. 26:1; Deut. 29:8; Deut. 32:9;

**Deuteronomy 19:11** "But if there is a man who hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and rises up against him and strikes him so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities,

- De 27:24 Ge 9:6 Ex 21:12-14 Nu 35:16-21,24 Pr 28:17
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## PREMEDITATED MURDER NOT PROTECTED

**But** - Term of contrast. Striking contrast (pun intended) for the foregoing manslayer's "striking" was not intentional but this man's "striking" is intentional. See [premeditated murder](#) in Wikipedia.

**if there is a man who hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and rises up against him and strikes him so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities** - Note hates, lies, rise, strikes, flees are all willful active verbs. This man is guilty of premeditated murder. The cities of refuge must not harbour murderers who deserved to die; they were not a refuge from the righteous retribution of the Law.

**Deuteronomy 19:12** then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die.

- 1Ki 2:5,6,28-34
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## NO PROTECTION FOR THE GUILTY

**then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood (goel/ga'al), that he may die** - In contrast to elders protecting the manslayer, they are to hand over the murderer to the **avenger of blood**. This is interesting as there is no description of a trial. Somehow the elders know he is guilty of murder.

**NET NOTE** - The עֵיֵן לְחַיִּים (go'el haddam, "avenger of blood") would ordinarily be a member of the victim's family who, after due process of law, was invited to initiate the process of execution (cf. Num 35:16–28) Hubbard adds "concerning the law of asylum (Num 35; Deut 19; Josh 20) treat a special family duty. If a relative is murdered, the עִֵיֵן לְחַיִּים, avenger of blood (usually the son of the deceased), has the duty to kill the murderer or a member of the latter's clan (Num 35:19). In essence this redeems the blood of the dead clansman, that is, it restores the clan's equilibrium and wholeness disrupted by the murder. If the killing was accidental, however, the killer may find protection from the avenger in one of the designated cities of refuge (Num 35:12, 22–25; Deut 19:4–7; Josh 20:2–3, 5, 9; see also the parable in 2 Sam 14:11).

**R. Hubbard, NIDOTTE** = "Instructional texts concerning the law of asylum (Num 35; Deut 19; Josh 20) treat a special family duty. If a relative is murdered, the עִֵיֵן לְחַיִּים, avenger of blood (usually the son of the deceased), has the duty to kill the murderer or a member of the latter's clan (Num 35:19). In essence this redeems the blood of the dead clansman, that is, it restores the clan's equilibrium and wholeness disrupted by the murder. If the killing was accidental, however, the killer may find protection from the avenger in one of the designated cities of refuge (Num 35:12, 22–25; Deut 19:4–7; Josh 20:2–3, 5, 9; see also the parable in 2 Sam 14:11."

**Uteley** - "the elders of his city" This refers to either the city nearest the crime or the city of the man's residence. [Deuteronomy 19 Commentary](#)

**Deuteronomy 19:13** "You shall not pity him, but you shall purge the blood of the innocent from Israel, that it may go well with you.

- **You shall not pity him:** De 7:16 13:8 25:12 Eze 16:5
- **but thou:** De 21:9 Ge 9:6 Lev 24:17,21 Nu 35:33,34 2Sa 21:1,14 1Ki 2:31
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JUSTICE MAKES THINGS GO WELL FOR A NATION

**You shall not pity him, but you shall purge the blood of the innocent from Israel, that it may go well with you-** NLT - "Do not feel sorry for that murderer! Purge from Israel the guilt of murdering innocent people; then all will go well with you." The verb **purge** ([baar](#)) means to burn, consume, destroy and here is used figuratively as it is in Dt 13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:13, 19; 21:21. Note that the **purge** is from Israel because murder affects others and alters the blessings of Yahweh to the entire covenant community!

**Guzik** - God was just as concerned that the guilty be punished as He was that the innocent be protected (lest innocent blood be shed in the midst of your land, Deuteronomy 19:10).

**POSB** - Note that the guilt of shedding innocent blood had to be purged from the people in order to receive God's blessing. If the people executed justice throughout the land, things would go well for them—far, far better. The execution of justice, not injustice, makes things go far better for any nation. Just as Scripture declares: the execution of justice will cause things to "go well with you." (**ED: O AMERICA, AMERICA, READ AND HEED THESE PROPHETIC WORDS!**) ([Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Deuteronomy](#))

**Wiersbe** - In the nation of Israel, shedding innocent blood defiled the land, and one way to cleanse the land was to punish the offender. "Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it" (Num. 35:33NIV). ([Be Equipped](#))

**Innocent** ([05355](#))(**naqi**) "free" (free from, exempt) or "innocent," it always refers to people who have been declared free of guilt or obligation. At times, *nāqī* simply means that a person is exempt from some obligation. For instance, Moses told the tribes who had chosen an inheritance on the east side of the Jordan that they must help their fellow tribes conquer the rest of the land; then they would be free from the obligation of further military service (Num. 32:22). Likewise, a man was exempt from military service during the first year of his marriage (Deut. 24:5). In 1 Ki. 15:22, King Asa grants no exemptions for those drafted to help clear away the ruins of the enemy city of Ramah. It appears that Joseph also uses the word in the sense of exemption from slavery when he is testing his brothers in Gen. 44:10.

A person might also be considered free from the obligation of an oath. When Abraham sent his servant on a search for a bride for Isaac, he specified that if the girl were unwilling to return, the servant would be freed from his sworn obligation (Gen. 24:41). Similarly, the spies who promised Rahab mercy in return for her help specified that they would be free from their oath if she were to fail to hang a scarlet cord in the window (Josh. 2:17, 19f).

**Nāqī** most often occurs in a context of legal guilt, penalty or innocence. At times, it can simply mean that a person escapes punishment, as in Exo. 21:28. More often, it carries the idea of one who is actually innocent, and not deserving of punishment. Exodus 23:7, for example, demands that the innocent be acquitted of false charges, and uses the word in tandem with "righteous." Job and his friend Eliphaz employed it often in their discussions of whether or not Job could be considered innocent (Job 4:7; 9:23; 17:8; 22:19, 30; 27:17).

The most common use of **nāqī** is in the phrase "innocent blood," an idiom to describe people who are threatened with violence or murder, sometimes actually being killed without provocation (e.g., Deut. 19:10; 27:25; 1 Sam 19:5; 2 Ki. 21:16; 24:4; Pss. 94:21; 106:38; Prov. 6:17).

**DBL Hebrew - 1. innocent**, i.e., pertaining to one free of blame and not guilty (Ex 23:7); **2. free from obligation**, i.e., not be held in a legal accusation (Ex 21:28); **3. דָּם נֹקִי (dām nā-qī) innocent person**, ("innocent blood,") formally, **blood free of blame**, i.e., a person morally pure and guiltless (2Ki 21:16)

**Naqiy** - clean(1), exempt(1), free(5), free of obligation(1), go unpunished(1), guiltless(1), innocent(31). Gen. 24:41; Gen. 44:10; Exod. 21:28; Exod. 23:7; Num. 32:22; Deut. 19:10; Deut. 19:13; Deut. 21:8; Deut. 21:9; Deut. 24:5; Deut. 27:25; Jos. 2:17; Jos. 2:19; Jos. 2:20; 1 Sam. 19:5; 2 Sam. 3:28; 2 Sam. 14:9; 1 Ki. 15:22; 2 Ki. 21:16; 2 Ki. 24:4; Job 4:7; Job 9:23; Job 17:8; Job 22:19; Job 22:30; Job 27:17; Ps. 10:8; Ps. 15:5; Ps. 24:4; Ps. 94:21; Ps. 106:38; Prov. 1:11; Prov. 6:17; Isa. 59:7; Jer. 2:34; Jer. 7:6; Jer. 19:4; Jer. 22:3; Jer. 22:17; Jer. 26:15

'So you shall not **pollute** the land in which you are; for blood **pollutes** the land and no **expiation** ([kapar](#)) can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, **EXCEPT** by the blood of him who shed it. (Nu 35:33+) (See commentary on Murder Mystery in Israel Dt 21:1-9)

**Pollute** ([02610](#))(**chaneph**) means to be defiled, to be profane, to pollute, to corrupt, to be godless. "This word most often appears in association with the defilement of the land, suggesting a tainting not by active commission but by passive contact with those committing sin." (Baker) **Chaneph** denotes the pollution of the land through the shedding of blood (Nu. 35:33); through divorce (Jer. 3:1); and through breaking God's

covenant (Isa. 24:5). The earth was "defiled" by the sins of Judah in the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa 24:5) and false prophets and priests were "profane" in Judah near the time of their exile to Babylon (Jer. 23:11). The land was considered "polluted" when adultery and wanton immorality were practiced. (Jer 3:1) The land "polluted" (Ps 106:38; Jer. 3:1, 9) as a result of sacrifice to idols and gross immorality. Baker adds that "Two notable exceptions to this linkage with the land further intensify the notion that the primary meaning is one of passive contamination. In Jeremiah, the Lord declared that the prophets and the priests were corrupted, seemingly by their association with the people's sin (Jer. 23:11)." (CWSD) Breaking of marriage vows to marry another precludes a return to the first mate; in the same way a favored people who drifted back and forth between devotion to idols and the Lord, pollutes the land (Jeremiah 3:1). The Hiphil stem describes the pollution of land. The murderer who had shed innocent blood was regarded as polluting the land (Numbers 35:33).

**Utley** - "**You shall not pity him**" This (Qal IMPERFECT) is a recurrent theme in Deuteronomy (cf. Dt 7:16; 13:8; 19:13, 21; 25:12). Human compassion or national feelings cannot change YHWH's laws. Israel must be holy! Israel's future prosperity (and even her remaining in the Promised Land) is conditioned on her obedience..([Deuteronomy 19 Commentary](#))

**Wiersbe** - Murder was one of several capital crimes in Israel. Others were idolatry and sorcery (Lev. 20:1–6), blasphemy (24:10–16), violating the Sabbath (Num. 15:32–36), willful and repeated disobedience to parents (Deut. 21:18–21; Ex. 21:15, 17), kidnapping (Ex. 21:16), bestiality (22:19), homosexuality (Lev. 20:13), adultery, and the rape of an engaged maiden (Deut. 22:22–27). We don't have this many capital crimes today, but Israel was a theocracy and her laws were God's laws. To break the law was to sin against the Lord and defile the land, and the people needed to understand the seriousness of such actions. In 1972, the United States Supreme Court declared capital punishment unconstitutional but then reinstated it in 1976. Capital punishment may not restrain every would-be murderer from taking a life, but it does magnify the preciousness of human life as well as honor the law. ([Be Equipped](#))

**Thus you shall purge** (put away, remove, banish) **the evil from Israel** - Key phrase in Deuteronomy for promotion of enjoyment and God's blessing in the Promised Land. **NET Note** adds that the purge is "Because of the corporate nature of Israel's community life, the whole community shared in the guilt of unavenged murder unless and until vengeance occurred. Only this would restore spiritual and moral equilibrium." **Purge** (remove, burn) **ba'ar** literally to burn, but most uses in Deuteronomy describe the state or action of destroying an entity into non-existence as a figurative extension of fire consuming an object. Thus it often means to kill. The first 3 uses in Deuteronomy describes Mt Sinai = "the mountain **burned** with fire to the very heart of the heavens." (Dt 5:23, 9:15)

**What is to be purged?** False prophet (Dt 13:5), false worshiper (Dt 17:7), one who show contempt for a judge (Dt 17:12), murderer (Dt 19:13), false witness (Dt 19:19), people's bloodguiltiness for an unsolved murder (Dt 21:6), a stubborn, rebellious son (Dt 21:21), girl who lied when she married and was not actually a virgin (Dt 22:21), kidnapper (Dt 24:7).

**Purge** (01197) (**ba'ar**) is a verb used more often figuratively than literally and is normally translated "to burn," "to be kindled" or "to consume."

**DBL Hebrew Semantic Domains - I. בָּעַר (bā-ʿăr):** v.; ≡ Str 1197; TWOT 263—1. **(qal) burn, i.e., a state or action of placing fire to combustible material** (Ex 3:2); (piel) light a fire, kindle, set ablaze, i.e., burn material (Ex 35:3); (pual) be burning (Jer 36:22+); (hif) cause to burn, start a fire (Ex 22:5; Jdg 15:5, 5; Eze 5:2; Na 2:14); 2. **(qal) kill, destroy, consume, formally, burn, i.e., the state or action of destroying an entity into non-existence as a figurative extension of fire consuming an object** (1Ki 20:21); **(piel) kill, destroy, consume, formally, burn** (1Ki 21:21); (hif) kill, destroy, consume, formally, cause burning, (1Ki 16:3+); 3. **(qal) blaze forth, i.e., the action or state of a flame being or making a bright light from fire** (2Sa 22:13); 4. **(hif) make a burnt offering, i.e., make a sacrifice to a deity with an object which is burnable** (2Ch 28:3+); 5. **unit:** (qal) בָּעַר הַמַּה (hē-mā(h) bā-ʿăr)1 be very angry, formally, burn with anger, i.e., be in an intense state of anger as a figurative extension of fire as both a hot and consuming action (Esther 1:12)

**Complete Biblical Library** "To burn," "consume" or "be kindled" is used in recognizing Yahweh's presence. The burning bush on Mt. Sinai (Exo. 3:2, 3) was an intriguing and holy "burning" from which the voice of Yahweh was heard. At the giving of the Law, Mt. Sinai's burning was frightening and awesome. No one could touch the burning mountain and live (Deut. 4:11; 5:23; 9:15). David called upon Yahweh (Ps. 18:8) "to consume" his enemies (v. 3) with a devouring fire which comes out of the mouth of Yahweh. The awesome brightness of Yahweh (2 Sam. 22:7-16; Ps. 18:6-20) and the heavenly four living creatures in Ezekiel's vision were like white hot burning coals, brightly lit torches, and flashes of lightning (Ezek. 1:13). Second Samuel 22 and Psalm 18 emphasize the power of Yahweh's burning to rescue His people.

Anger is understood as a "burning," especially the terrible anger of Yahweh when He comes to judge His enemies and His disobedient people. The purpose of Yahweh's burning is to eradicate evil and to establish

holiness in His people. The burning of Yahweh's anger is seen almost exclusively in the Psalms (upon Yahweh's enemies) and the prophets (upon Yahweh's disobedient people).

In Num. 11:1-3, the anger of Yahweh burned against His children because of their insistent complaining. The fire of Yahweh burned against them and devoured the edges of the camp. Moses names the place Taberah, "burning." In Job 1:16, the burning fire from heaven that destroyed Job's flocks and shepherd servants was misunderstood as coming from Yahweh against the obedient and faithful Job, rather than from Satan, who was allowed to have his way with Job.

Psalms 2:12 is an open invitation for all to do obeisance before the son of Yahweh (vv. 7, 8, 11) in order to escape Yahweh's burning anger. The Psalmist also calls upon Yahweh to turn His burning wrath against the enemies of Israel, as a fire burns a forest (Ps. 83:14-18) in vindication for what has been done to the Israelites (ie. the exile including the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, Ps. 79:4-6; 89:38-51).

The imagery of Yahweh's burning in the Prophets is against the rebellious people of Yahweh. Isaiah pictures the destructive force of Yahweh's burning as fire destroying sheaves of wheat (the transgressors, sinners and all who forsake Yahweh, Isa. 1:28), and as the vines that bind up the sheaves (the princes and leaders, Isa. 1:23), and no one can quench them (Isa. 1:31). Isaiah 4:4-5 emphasizes the purging and cleansing effect of Yahweh's burning judgment on His people to prepare them for His all-covering, dwelling presence ("a canopy of all glory").

Isaiah chapters 10 and 30 depict the fire of Yahweh's judgment as a desert fire fanned by strong winds (10:17), a violent flashflood (30:30), and a burning torrent of brimstone (30:33), quickly devouring all that Israel depended on (31:1). All that remains visible is the glory of Yahweh (Isa. 10:16-18). As a result, the remnant that returns will return to the Mighty God, the Lord of Hosts, the Holy One of Israel (Isa. 10:20, 21, 23) and will lean entirely and exclusively on Him as their source of protection rather than political alliances. Then Yahweh shall vindicate Israel from their enemies (Isa. 10:5ff., 24ff) as in a terrible and violent storm of His majesty (Isa. 30:27-33). As a result, a festive song in the night shall once again return to Israel (Isa. 30:29).

The message of Isa. 42:25 is for a self-willed, disobedient people (v. 24), whom Isaiah depicts as blind and deaf (vv. 18, 19). Here the disobedient servant of Yahweh (Israel, not to be confused with the obedient Servant of Yahweh in 42:1) would not take to heart the visible signs (circumstances which indicate the beginnings of Yahweh's burning judgment). Nor would he hear the word of Yahweh (the warnings of Yahweh about His burning judgment through His prophets and the Torah) and return to a right relationship with Him, therefore He pours out the fury of His burning wrath. Jacob is still unwilling to change his mind (literally, "lay it on his heart," v. 25).

The message of Jeremiah is that a circumcised heart is far more important to Yahweh than the ritual signs of identification in which we place our trust in (Jer. 4:1-4). If they refused to repent, then Yahweh would pour out His wrath on them (Jer. 44:5-6) of "which no one can put it out" (Jer. 4:4; 7:20; 21:12; cf. Isa. 1:31).

Nahum's message is specifically for Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Nineveh was Israel's and Judah's enemy, the seat of the most powerful political entity on the earth. Nahum warns that there is a more supreme power and authority. Yahweh is the all powerful avenger and possessor of wrath and He will pour out His burning wrath on Assyria's proud hearts. He will burn up their chariots, the symbols of Assyria's strength.

Malachi's message in 4:1, is tied directly and importantly to 3:18 and 4:2. When Yahweh has His final say, there will be a visible difference between the prosperity of the righteous and the unrighteous. No more will the proud and unrighteous prosper above the righteous (cf. Ps. 73); for when the day of Yahweh comes (burning like a firepot), He will set ablaze those who do not serve Him, leaving them in total ruin (no root or branches from which to sprout regrowth).

There are three passages which speak of people's emotions as "a burning." In Ps. 39:3, David's heart was burning within him, in that he was upset with himself concerning his transgressing the Torah of Yahweh (vv. 2, 8). In Est. 1:12, the anger of King Xerxes (Ahasuerus) burned against Queen Vashti because she refused the king's command to display herself before the king's guests, and she was banished from his presence. To Jeremiah the message of Yahweh became as fire burning in his bones and he could no longer keep silent (Jer. 20:9).

Examples of a literal burning fire are on the altar (Lev. 6:12, Neh. 10:34, Isa. 40:16); burning sacrifices to the Baals (2 Chr. 28:3); to kindle a fire (Exo. 22:6, 35:3, Ps. 106:18, Isa. 50:11, Jer. 7:18); a burning hot oven (Hos. 7:4); a burning torch (Isa. 62:1); burning wood (Isa. 44:15); a burning lamp (Isa. 62:1); a burning forest

and land (Ezek. 20:48); burning fields of grain (Judg. 15:5); burning hair (Ezek. 5:2); and burning weapons as fuel (Ezek. 39:9-10). Jehoiakim burned up the words of Yahweh written on a scroll (Jer. 36:22). Josiah burned up the images of Asherah and Baal (2 Ki. 23:24). Jehu the prophet's accusation against Jehoshaphat that he had not burned up the Asherahs out of the land (2 Chr. 19:3).

Objects which burn are consumed. This latter meaning is not always distinct from the former. There is one instance when it is explicitly stated that an object was burning but "not consumed" (Exo. 3:3). Here, Moses watches in amazement as a bush is not consumed by fire, and it was the medium through which Yahweh caused his voice to be heard by Moses.

**Baker** divides the meanings of Ba'ar into 3 parts - I. A verb meaning to burn, to consume. The verb indicates the process of combustion. It describes fire itself flaming up (Jer. 20:9) or various objects: a burning bush (Ex. 3:2, 3); burning wood (Ps. 83:14[15]). It is used figuratively of the Lord's anger burning and consuming Jacob and Israel (Isa. 6:13; 30:27; 42:25) and the wicked (Ps. 106:18; Jer. 44:6). It describes wickedness consuming persons like a fire (Isa. 9:18]). In some contexts, it means to cause a fire or consume something, such as a field or olive trees (Ex. 22:6[5]) or to burn something to ashes (Nah. 2:13[14]).

II. A verb meaning to remove, to graze, to ruin. It depicts cattle feeding or grazing in a field (Ex. 22:5[4]) or an enemy of Israel being ruined or consumed (Num. 24:22). It describes dung being consumed or perhaps swept away (nasb; cf. niv, burns; kjv, take away; 1 Ki. 14:10). In certain contexts, it is best translated as remove, get rid of something, root out (Deut. 13:5; 2 Ki. 23:34).

III. A verb meaning to be stupid, brutish. This root denotes being deluded, stupid for worshiping idols (Jer. 10:8), being without common religious sense (Jer. 10:8, 14) and led astray. (Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament)

**Ba'ar** - 82x in NAS - blazed(1), burn(15), burned(12), burning(13), burns(3), clean sweep(1), consume(1), consumed(2), destroy(1), devoured(1), expelled(1), heated(1), kindle(2), kindled(5), light(1), make(2), make a clean sweep(1), make fires(1), purge(9), remove(3), removed(4), set(1), set ablaze(1), sets it afire(1), started(1), sweeps away(1), utterly sweep(1), utterly sweep you away(1). Exod. 3:2; Exod. 3:3; Exod. 22:6; Exod. 35:3; Lev. 6:12; Num. 11:1; Num. 11:3; Num. 24:22; Deut. 4:11; Deut. 5:23; Deut. 9:15; Deut. 13:5; Deut. 17:7; Deut. 17:12; Deut. 19:13; Deut. 19:19; Deut. 21:9; Deut. 21:21; Deut. 22:21; Deut. 22:22; Deut. 22:24; Deut. 24:7; Deut. 26:13; Deut. 26:14; Jdg. 15:5; Jdg. 15:14; Jdg. 20:13; 2 Sam. 4:11; 2 Sam. 22:9; 2 Sam. 22:13; 1 Ki. 14:10; 1 Ki. 16:3; 1 Ki. 21:21; 1 Ki. 22:46; 2 Ki. 23:24; 2 Chr. 4:20; 2 Chr. 13:11; 2 Chr. 19:3; 2 Chr. 28:3; Neh. 10:34; Est. 1:12; Job 1:16; Ps. 2:12; Ps. 18:8; Ps. 39:3; Ps. 79:5; Ps. 83:14; Ps. 89:46; Ps. 106:18; Isa. 1:31; Isa. 3:14; Isa. 4:4; Isa. 5:5; Isa. 6:13; Isa. 9:18; Isa. 10:17; Isa. 30:27; Isa. 30:33; Isa. 34:9; Isa. 40:16; Isa. 42:25; Isa. 43:2; Isa. 44:15; Isa. 50:11; Isa. 62:1; Jer. 4:4; Jer. 7:18; Jer. 7:20; Jer. 20:9; Jer. 21:12; Jer. 36:22; Jer. 44:6; Lam. 2:3; Ezek. 1:13; Ezek. 5:2; Ezek. 20:48; Ezek. 39:9; Ezek. 39:10; Hos. 7:4; Hos. 7:6; Nah. 2:13; Mal. 4:1

**Ba'ar** - 90x in KJV - Exod. 3:2; Exod. 3:3; Exod. 22:5; Exod. 22:6; Exod. 35:3; Lev. 6:12; Num. 11:1; Num. 11:3; Num. 24:22; Deut. 4:11; Deut. 5:23; Deut. 9:15; Deut. 13:5; Deut. 17:7; Deut. 17:12; Deut. 19:13; Deut. 19:19; Deut. 21:9; Deut. 21:21; Deut. 22:21; Deut. 22:22; Deut. 22:24; Deut. 24:7; Deut. 26:13; Deut. 26:14; Jdg. 15:5; Jdg. 15:14; Jdg. 20:13; 2 Sam. 4:11; 2 Sam. 22:9; 2 Sam. 22:13; 1 Ki. 14:10; 1 Ki. 16:3; 1 Ki. 21:21; 1 Ki. 22:46; 2 Ki. 23:24; 2 Chr. 4:20; 2 Chr. 13:11; 2 Chr. 19:3; 2 Chr. 28:3; Neh. 10:34; Est. 1:12; Job 1:16; Ps. 2:12; Ps. 18:8; Ps. 39:3; Ps. 79:5; Ps. 83:14; Ps. 89:46; Ps. 94:8; Ps. 106:18; Isa. 1:31; Isa. 3:14; Isa. 4:4; Isa. 5:5; Isa. 6:13; Isa. 9:18; Isa. 10:17; Isa. 19:11; Isa. 30:27; Isa. 30:33; Isa. 34:9; Isa. 40:16; Isa. 42:25; Isa. 43:2; Isa. 44:15; Isa. 50:11; Isa. 62:1; Jer. 4:4; Jer. 7:18; Jer. 7:20; Jer. 10:8; Jer. 10:14; Jer. 10:21; Jer. 20:9; Jer. 21:12; Jer. 36:22; Jer. 44:6; Jer. 51:17; Lam. 2:3; Ezek. 1:13; Ezek. 5:2; Ezek. 20:48; Ezek. 21:31; Ezek. 39:9; Ezek. 39:10; Hos. 7:4; Hos. 7:6; Nah. 2:13; Mal. 4:1

**Evil** (07451) רָעָה, רָעָה: An adjective meaning bad, evil. The basic meaning of this word displays ten or more various shades of the meaning of evil according to its contextual usage. It means bad in a moral and ethical sense and is used to describe, along with good, the entire spectrum of good and evil; hence, it depicts evil in an absolute, negative sense, as when it describes the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9; 3:5, 22)



- a. The Bible applies this picture of the city of refuge to the believer finding refuge in God on more than one occasion:
  - i. Psalm 46:1: God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. More than 15 other times, the Psalms speak of God as being our refuge.
  - ii. Hebrews 6:18: That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.
- b. 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.
- c. 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 (Numbers 35:15).
- d. 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 (Numbers 35:25).
- e. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are the only alternative for the one in need; without this specific protection, they will be destroyed.
- f. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge provide protection only within their boundaries; to go outside meant death (Numbers 35:26–28).
- g. With both Jesus and the cities of refuge, full freedom comes with the death of the High Priest (Numbers 35:25).
- h. A crucial distinction: The cities of refuge only helped the innocent; the guilty can come to Jesus and find refuge!

**POSB** - In a fallen world, accidents happen. Sometimes the accidents cause the death of loved ones. When we lose a loved one, our thoughts should never be upon revenge but upon seeking help from God. God is our refuge and strength. He loves and cares for us, and He will take care of us even in the most painful and grieving experiences of life. As stated, God Himself is our refuge and strength. He will sustain us through the loss of our loved ones. (Romans 8:28, 1 Peter 5:7, Deut. 33:27, Psalm 27:5, Psalm 40:17, Psalm 46:1, Psalm 57:1, Psalm 71:3, Proverbs 14:26, Proverbs 18:10). ([Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Deuteronomy](#))

"For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall" (Isaiah 25:4).

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isaiah 41:10).

"And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you" (Isaiah 46:4).

**Deuteronomy 19:14** "You shall not move your neighbor's boundary mark, which the ancestors have set, in your inheritance which you will inherit in the land that the LORD your God gives you to possess.

- **not move:** De 27:17 Job 24:2 Pr 22:28 23:10 Ho 5:10
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## LANDMARK LAW MOVING BOUNDARIES ~ STEALING

"AKA" - how to sneakily steal a neighbor's property! Here God's law puts a "hedge" around a person's property.

**Background** - Down through the centuries, the boundaries of property lines have probably been one of the most controversial issues among men, causing conflict after conflict. No doubt, this was especially true before the development of accurate surveys and property maps. It was far easier for a person to move a boundary stone than it is today. ([POSB](#))

**You shall not move your neighbor's boundary mark, which the ancestors have set, in your inheritance which you will inherit in the land that the LORD your God gives you to possess** ([yarash](#)) -This would have been easy to do because when walls and fences were not in use stones and pillars were used to mark the division between territories. To move the stone was equivalent to stealing the person's property! (cf. Job 24:2, Eph 4:28, Titus 2:10, 1 Peter 4:15, Exodus 20:15) Notice once again **the**

**land** is a gracious gift from the LORD their God. What was the penalty? Move a boundary stone and you receive a curse!

'**Cursed** is he who moves his neighbor's boundary mark.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' (Deut. 27:17)

**MacArthur** - These "**boundary marks**" referred to stones bearing inscriptions which identified the owner of the property. Moving a neighbor's boundary stone was equivalent to stealing his property. ([MacArthur Study Bible](#))

Proverbs 22:28 **Do not move the ancient boundary** Which your fathers have set.

Proverbs 23:10 **Do not move the ancient boundary** Or go into the fields of the fatherless,

**Guzik** has an interesting comment - God here established and supported the basic right to private property. When your neighbor has a lawful landmark, you must respect it—and are forbidden to change it as you might please.. This command supports an important foundation for human society: The right to personal property. God has clearly entrusted certain possessions to certain individuals, and other people or states are not permitted to take that property without due process of law. **Which the men of old have set:** This law also reflects an important spiritual principle: It isn't wise to ignore what the men of old have set when doing the work of the LORD. Many a young man, or a new man, has greatly hindered his own work by being a revolutionary—and ignoring the "landmarks" which the men of old have set.

**Wiersbe** - In that day, officials didn't draw detailed real estate maps, what we today call "plats." Everybody was expected to honor the landmarks (boundary stones), because to move the stones meant to steal land from your neighbors and their descendants (Prov. 22:28). Unscrupulous officials could easily exploit poor widows and orphans and take away their land and their income (Prov. 15:25; 23:10–11). Since God owned the land and the people were His tenants, moving the stones also meant stealing from God, and He would punish them (Hosea 5:10). No wonder this crime was included among the curses announced from Mount Ebal (Deut. 27:17). ([Be Equipped](#))

**Utley - boundary mark**" In the ancient world villages farmed the land together (i.e., plowing, sowing, reaping). From a passerby's observation it looked like one big field. However, each family had its own field, which was marked by white stones. That family, though working the entire field with the village, received the produce of their land. If someone moved the stones, thereby giving themselves more land (i.e., produce), it was a crime against the whole community and YHWH, because He gave the land as an inheritance for each tribe and family (cf. Dt 27:17; Pro. 22:28; 23:10; Hos. 5:10)..([Deuteronomy 19 Commentary](#))

**TSK** - Before the extensive use of fences, landed property was marked out by stones or posts, set up so as to ascertain the divisions of family estates. It was easy to remove one of these landmarks, and set it in a different place; and thus a dishonest man might enlarge his own estate by contracting that of his neighbour. Hence it was a matter of considerable importance to prevent this crime among the Israelites; among whom, removing them would be equivalent to forging, altering, destroying, or concealing the title-deeds of an estate among us. Accordingly, by the Mosaic law, it was not only prohibited in the commandment against covetousness, but we find a particular curse expressly annexed to it in Dt 27:17. Josephus considers this law a general prohibition, intended not only to protect private property, but also to preserve the boundaries of kingdoms and countries inviolable.

**Morris on boundary mark** - Evidently, even though the children of Israel were to receive their promised inheritance by driving out the Canaanites who then inhabited the land, they were to divide it up on the basis of ancient "landmarks" already established. These were probably the same as "the border [same Hebrew word] of the Canaanites" (Genesis 10:19), established when "by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood" (Genesis 10:32).

**Inheritance** (possession, heritage) ([05159](#)) **nachalah** from **nāḥal** = signifies giving or receiving property which is part of a permanent possession and as a result of succession) means Inheritance, heritage, possession. A possession is any piece of property that passes by law to an heir on the death of the owner. It also speaks of God's promises to His people, such as the promise of the land to national (redeemed **remnant**) Israel. In Dt 4:20 we read "But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today." **Nachalah** in Deut - Deut. 3:28; Deut. 4:20; Deut. 4:21; Deut. 4:38; Deut. 9:26; Deut. 9:29; Deut. 10:9; Deut. 12:9; Deut. 12:12; Deut. 14:27; Deut. 14:29; Deut. 15:4; Deut. 18:1; Deut. 18:2; Deut. 19:10; Deut. 19:14; Deut. 20:16; Deut. 21:23; Deut. 24:4; Deut. 25:19; Deut. 26:1; Deut. 29:8; Deut. 32:9;

**Grant** - One sorry example of this behaviour was that of King Ahab who wished to possess the vineyard of Naboth (1 Kings 21:1-29). The murderous means used by Jezebel, his wife, and the childish resentfulness of the king show the length to which they were prepared to go to obtain that which Naboth rightly stated was "the inheritance of my fathers". Lust and covetousness led to the death of Naboth and to the judgment of God upon the royal couple, resulting in their deaths as well.

A happier example of how valuable the Children of Israel considered their portion of the Land to be is seen in the request of the daughters of Zelophehad (Num 27:1-11; 36:1-13; Josh 17:3-6). These five, Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah, feared that

their family would get no land allocated to them in Canaan because their father had died and he had no son to take up the family's inheritance. The solution was to give each of them a portion in the Land, but with the condition that they must marry within their own tribe so that the land did not pass to another tribe. The woman valued the land and claimed their portion.

The inheritance given to Israel in Canaan is but a picture of the great inheritance that believers enjoy today. This inheritance is enjoyed presently and consists of "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph 1:3). Those who removed the landmarks, the boundary posts, are like any today who act to cause other believers to lose some of their enjoyment of their spiritual inheritance. We must be careful to ensure that our conduct does not cause needless distress to others and reduce their joy in the things of the Lord. It ill behoves anyone to rob others of truth that they have practised and enjoyed in past. The purpose of teaching and shepherd care is to lead others to the full of enjoyment of the blessings that were inherited at the moment of being born again, and to encourage obedience to the Word of God. ([What the Bible Teaches](#))

[IVP Bible Background Commentary](#) - moving boundary stones. Since the land had been given to the people by God and apportioned according to a God-given formula, to move boundary stones and thus appropriate territory unlawfully was a crime of theft against God. The antiquity of laws concerning property rights is affirmed by inscriptions on sixteenth-century B.C. Kassite kudurru boundary stones, admonitions in eleventh-century B.C. Egyptian wisdom literature against relocating a surveyor's stone (Teachings of Amenemope) and in the curse in Hosea 5:10. Each example calls on the gods to protect the owner's rights against encroachment.

**Deuteronomy 19:15 "A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed."**

- De 17:6 Nu 35:30 1Ki 21:10,13 Mt 18:16 26:60,61 Joh 8:17 2Co 13:1 1Ti 5:19 Heb 10:28 Rev 11:3-7
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Matthew 18:15-17 "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16"But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

2 Corinthians 13:1 This is the third time I am coming to you. EVERY FACT IS TO BE CONFIRMED BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES.

Nu 35:30 'If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death at the evidence of **witnesses** (MORE THAN ONE), but no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness.

## LAWS FOR WITNESSES IN COURT OF LAW

**A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity (['avon](#)) or any sin ([chattat/chattath](#)) which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed** - Note this applies not just to murder but to **any iniquity or any sin**. This law is so important for justice in the land that Moses repeats Dt 17:6 "On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness."

[Guzik](#) - One needed two or three witness to establish a matter.. This isn't just because it is possible for one witness to lie without having his story corroborated. It is because one witness can be confused, or mistaken in his testimony. It is a basic measure of reliability that it must be more than a simple case of "my word against theirs.". Some have carried this principle to modern courts by saying that two independent lines of evidence can be valid "witnesses." For example, if there were a murder which no one witnessed with their eyes, yet there was a murder weapon with clear fingerprints, and additional blood evidence each pointing to one suspect, this would be counted as two independent "witnesses."

**Grant** - Testimony that is not true could be given for three reasons. First, it could be the result of a genuine misunderstanding of events. The witness could honestly believe that his testimony was true, but not have had a clear view of what took place. Second, with the passage of time since the events the witness could have built into the case things that did not take place, or words that were never spoken, and by the time of the trial genuinely believe that these actually happened. We see this sometimes when people recount stories, and some of what they thought was said, or took place, we know is inaccurate. Again there is no deliberate malice

in this. Third, there could also be witnesses who deliberately lie, either because they simply dislike the accused and wish him malice or because they would profit from a "guilty" verdict. "A false witness that speaketh lies" is one of the things that the Lord hates (Prov 6:19). To ensure that the truth was established, therefore, two or three witnesses were required to corroborate evidence before a verdict could be reached. If there was only one witness the case could not be heard. ([What the Bible Teaches](#))

**Utley** - This verse shows how careful they were to be in their judicial process (cf. 17:6; Nu 35:30). The VERB "rise up" (Qal IMPERFECT) is used three times in Dt 19:15-16..([Deuteronomy 19 Commentary](#))

**Ryrie** - Dt 19:15-21 The requirements concerning evidence, already given for capital cases (cf. Dt 17:6), were extended to all criminal cases. On the lex talionis (v. 21), see note on Lev. 24:20.

**Grant** - When the Lord Jesus sent His disciples out two by two this verified the truth of what was being preached (Mk 6:7). At the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, when the women came early to the tomb, "two men stood by them in shining garments: And ... they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen" (Lk 24:4-6). As the disciples watched the Lord Jesus ascend up to heaven "two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, 'Ye men of Galilee, Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:10-11). The resurrection and the return of the Lord Jesus are both attested by "two men", a sound and reliable witness. It is recorded in Revelation that in the future there will be two witnesses who will prophecy for "a thousand two hundred and threescore days". At the end of their days of testimony they will be put to death. After three and a half days their bodies lying in the street will stand up and be taken up to heaven (Rev 11:3-11). Again the principle of reliable witness will be displayed. (Ibid)

[IVP Bible Background Commentary](#) - the role of witnesses in the ancient judicial system. Witnesses were an essential part of the judicial system in the ancient world. One sign of this is that Israelite law required two witnesses to convict a person of a crime (Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; 1 Kings 21:13). Both Hammurabi's code and the Middle Assyrian laws rely heavily on the presence of witnesses to certify business transactions and to testify in civil and criminal cases.

---

## G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible -

One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity.—Deut. 19.15

This chapter contains certain applications of laws already given. It deals with the sacredness of life, the importance of the land, the necessity for truth, the obligation of justice in all human inter-relationships. The particular words which we have taken set up a principle which has been recognized and acted upon wherever laws have been based upon a passion for justice. They provided that no man could be condemned upon the testimony of one witness. There must be corroboration at the mouth of another. Moreover, every witness must be put to inquisition by the judges. If in the course of that investigation a man was found guilty of bearing false witness, he was to be severely punished. This spirit of strict and impartial justice breathes through all these laws, and helps us to understand God's ways of dealing with men. Only, we are safer in the hands of God than we can ever be in the hands of man. In spite of all precautions, justice does miscarry at times, in the best human courts; and that because there are things which the eye cannot see, or the ear hear, and it is only upon these evidences that man can bear witness. Our final judgments are with Him Who judgeth, not by the seeing of the eye, or the hearing of the ear, but with righteous judgment, which is based upon perfect knowledge of all the facts. That is a truth which comforts and warns W. With men we may be punished, or we may escape punishment, because all the facts are not known. It is never so with God.

---

## Deuteronomy 19:16 "If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing,

- **witness:** Ex 23:1-7 1Ki 21:10-13 Ps 27:12 35:11 Mk 14:55-59 Ac 6:13
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## FALSE WITNESS ARISES

**If a malicious (false) witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing** (a crime) - The Lord hates "a lying tongue" (Prov 6:17). Truth has to be established in a legal case. Perjury must never be allowed to rule the courts of the land. Normally a witness is one who will be accepted to bear a true testimony in various situations for various reasons. Not so in this case! **Malicious** means violence, wrong and implies cruelty, damage, and injustice.

[Guzik](#) - At the trial of Jesus, many false witnesses rose up against him, and were demonstrated to be false witnesses by their confused and contradictory testimony (Matthew 26:59-60). The false witnesses, under Jewish law, should have been put to death,

because that is the punishment they sought for Jesus.

**NET Note** - "This is a witness whose motivation from the beginning is to do harm to the accused and who, therefore, resorts to calumny and deceit." (NN)

**Utley** - "**malicious witness**" The NOUN "malicious" basically means "violence," but here it denotes a purposeful, false judicial witness (cf. Ex. 23:1; Ps. 27:12; 25:11), they speak in YHWH's name (legal oath), but knowingly distort the truth. Verse 19 shows the consequences of a false witness (cf. Deut. 5:20 and chapter 11).([Deuteronomy 19 Commentary](#))

**Malicious** (Q2555) **chamas/hamas** from the verb **chamas** = to treat violently or wrong) means wrong, violence (to God's law = Ezek 22:26, Zeph 3:4, "violent hatred" = Ps 25:19), malicious (witness - Ex 23:1, Dt 19:16), , and is used almost always in connection with sinful violence, not with the violence of natural catastrophes. Chamas signifies extreme wickedness and the first two uses are very instructive (especially God's reaction)... (Ge 6:11) Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with **violence**. (**Lxx** translates with **adikia** = an act that violates the standards of right conduct)(Ge 6:13) Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with **violence** (**Lxx** translates with **adikia**) because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.

---

### Deuteronomy 19:16-21 Alternatives to Revenge

One Sunday while preaching, a pastor was accosted and punched by a man. He continued preaching, and the man was arrested. The pastor prayed for him and even visited him in jail a few days later. What an example of the way to respond to insult and injury!

While there is a place for self-defense, personal revenge was forbidden in the Old Testament: "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18; see also Deut. 32:35). It was also forbidden by Jesus and the apostles (Matt. 5:38-45; Rom. 12:17; 1 Peter 3:9).

The Old Testament law exacted like for like (Ex. 21:23-25; Deut. 19:21), which ensured that judicial punishment was not unjust or malicious. But there was a larger principle looming when it came to personal revenge: Justice must be done, but it must be left in the hands of God or the authorities ordained by God.

Instead of returning injury and insult, may we live by Christ-honoring and Spirit-empowered alternatives: Live at peace with everyone (Rom. 12:18), submit to a spiritual mediator (1 Cor. 6:1-6), and leave it in the hands of authorities and, most of all, in God's hands.— by Marvin Williams (Our Daily Bread)

Lord, when I'm troubled by the insult of another,  
help me to let go of my desire for revenge. May I seek  
justice but also realize that it will happen in Your  
time. I want to learn to overcome evil with good. Amen.

**Leave final justice in the hands of a just God.**

**Deuteronomy 19:17** then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days.

- De 17:9 21:5 Mal 2:7 Mt 23:2,3
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## STANDING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

**then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days** - NET = "then both parties to the controversy must stand before the LORD, that is, before the priests and judges who will be in office in those days." So here is the situation where one witness accuses another man.

As **Wiersbe** says "Having to go to the priestly court would be deterrent enough, for the Lord could convey His truth to the priests and judges and expose the wickedness of the accuser. But knowing that they might receive the punishment they wanted for the accused would also make them hesitate, especially if it were a capital crime. "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish" (Pr. 19:5, 9NKJV)." ([Be Equipped](#))

**NET Note** - The appositional construction (“before the LORD, that is, before the priests and judges”) indicates that these human agents represented the LORD himself, that is, they stood in his place (cf. Deut 16:18–20; 17:8–9).

**Utley** - “**the priests and judges**” This refers to: local judges, Dt 16:18–20; 17:8–13 and Levitical priests of the central sanctuary, Dt 18:1–8. Notice that appearing before these appointed judges is the same as appearing before YHWH (cf. 17:9, 12).. ([Deuteronomy 19 Commentary](#))

**Deuteronomy 19:18** "The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely,

- De 13:14 17:4 2Ch 19:6,7 Job 19:16
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## FALSE WITNESS FOUND OUT

**The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely-** NET = " The judges will thoroughly investigate the matter, and if the witness should prove to be false and to have given false testimony against the accused." Investigate thoroughly is two words in Hebrew (darash yatab) is the Greek verb exetazo meaning to make a careful effort to get information search out, inquire diligently (Mt 2.8) as when interrogating someone (Jn 21.12).

**Investigate** - 1875. דָּרַשׁ *dāraśh*: A verb meaning to examine, to seek, inquire, consult, find out, i.e., learn information not previously known (Ex 18:15). Try to find out information about a person or event (Dt 4:29). The meaning “to seek with care” (cognitive) occurs in Lev 10:16. where Moses seeks to find out in detail what happened to the sin-offering, and in II Sam 11:3 where David seeks to find out who Bathsheba was (cf. Deut 23:6; Jer 29:7). Israel is told to seek carefully the place God would choose (Deut 12:5) and justice (Isa 1:17; cf. 16:5!). In the eschaton Jerusalem, the place no one seeks (Jer 30:17), will be the place “sought out” (Isa 62:12; or “cared for,” Deut 11:12). Furthermore, it is the Gentiles who would seek out the messianic king (Isa 11:10). His place of rest (Num 10:33; Deut 12:9) is glorious.

**Thoroughly** 3190. יָטַב *yāṭab*: A verb meaning to be good, to be well, to be pleasing. In the causative stem, it means to do good, to do well, to please, to make pleasing. In this context it means be thorough, be very, formally, do real good, i.e., perform an action to a complete degree (Dt 13:15).

**False** (08267) *sheqer* deception, disappointment, falsehood, lie, vanity. Speaks of words or activities which are false in the sense that they are groundless, without basis in fact or reality (Ps 38:19). The false witness of Exodus 20:16 (Dt. 19:18) involves a false accusation, an accusation that is groundless, not based on fact. The first use is by Satan's tool the Pharaoh in Ex 5:9 where the Septuagint translates *sheqer* with the word *kenos* which means empty, without truth, futile, without result. *Sheqer* defines a way of life that goes contrary to the law of God. The psalmist, desirous of following God, prayed: "Remove the false way from me" (Ps 119:29; cf false way in Ps. 119:104, Ps 119:128). Vine says "As "faithfulness" is a relational term, "falsehood" denotes "one's inability to keep faith" with what one has said or to respond positively to the faithfulness of another being. ONLY USE IN DEUTERONOMY.

**DBL Hebrew** - 1. LN 31.8–31.13 deception, misleading falseness, i.e., a state or condition which is utterly false, and causes a mistaken belief (Ex 20:16), see also domain LN 33.251–33.255; 2. LN 33.251–33.255 lie, i.e., a verbal communication which is false (Job 13:4); 3. LN 33.251–33.255 liar, i.e., one who utters falsehoods and lies (Pr 17:4); 4. LN 89.15–89.38 for no reason, formally, vanity, i.e., pertaining to there being no cause (Ps 119:86); 5. LN 65.30–65.39 vanity, uselessness, i.e., what has no value and is of no use (1Sa 25:21), note: for Pr 17:4

**Deuteronomy 19:19** then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.

- **shall**: Pr 19:5,9 Jer 14:15 Da 6:24
- **shall purge the evil**: De 13:5 17:7 19:20 21:20,21 22:21,24 24:7

- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## PURGE THE PERJURERS!

**then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother** - Equal justice executed on the perjurer! In other words the accuser would receive the punishment that would have been given to the one he accused and so he reaps what he sows! This also recalls the idea of an **eye for an eye** (Dt 19:21 below). Talk about a proverbial "boomerang" returning to hit you in the head! This is similar to the instruction in Leviticus 24:19 which says "If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him."

Why equal justice? (1) purge away the evil and (2) deterrent to evil.

This reminds us of the punishment the accusers of Daniel reaped for sowing a false witness...

The king then gave orders, and they brought those men who had maliciously accused Daniel, and they cast them, their children and their wives into the lions' den; and they had not reached the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. (Da 6:24+)

**Thus you shall purge (ba'ar) the evil from among you** - **Purge** is the verb **ba'ar** which literally means to burn (as the "burning bush" in Ex 3:2), but in this context is used figuratively and is translated in the Lxx with the verb **exairo** which means to remove, drive away, drive out and thus to exclude or remove someone from a group (as this verb was used in 1 Cor 5:13+). The [NET Note](#) says the Hebrew literally reads "you will burn out" (בִּעַרְתָּ, bi'arta). Like a cancer, unavenged sin would infect the whole community. It must, therefore, be excised by the purging out of its perpetrators who, presumably, remained unrepentant (cf. Deut 13:6; 17:7, 12; 21:21; 22:21–22, 24; 24:7). The Hebrew word for **evil** (ra) pertains to that which is not morally pure or good according to a proper standard, implying this evil hinders or severs a relationship to a person or principle which is proper.

**Purge the evil** - used only in Deuteronomy - Deut. 13:5; Deut. 17:7; Deut. 17:12; Deut. 19:19; Deut. 22:21; Deut. 22:22; Deut. 22:24; Deut. 24:7

**Remove the evil** - Dt 21:21, Isa 1:16

**Evil** - 7451. רַע *ra'*, רָעָה *rā'āh*: An adjective meaning bad, evil. The basic meaning of this word displays ten or more various shades of the meaning of evil according to its contextual usage. It means bad in a moral and ethical sense and is used to describe, along with good, the entire spectrum of good and evil; hence, it depicts evil in an absolute, negative sense, as when it describes the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9; 3:5, 22). It was necessary for a wise king to be able to discern the evil or the good in the actions of his people (Eccl. 12:14); men and women are characterized as evil (1 Sam. 30:22; Esth. 7:6; Jer. 2:33). The human heart is evil all day long (Gen. 6:5) from childhood (Gen. 8:21); yet the people of God are to purge evil from among them (Deut. 17:7). The Lord is the final arbiter of whether something was good or evil; if something was evil in the eyes of the Lord, there is no further court of appeals (Deut. 9:18; 1 Kgs. 14:22). The day of the Lord's judgment is called an evil day, a day of reckoning and condemnation (Amos 6:3). Jacob would have undergone grave evil (i.e., pain, misery, and ultimate disaster) if he had lost Benjamin (Gen. 44:34). The word can refer to circumstances as evil, as when the Israelite foremen were placed in a grave situation (Ex. 5:19; 2 Kgs. 14:10).

**F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily** - Deuteronomy 19:19

Then shall ye do unto him as he had thought to do to his brother.

There is a Nemesis in wrong-doing; evil comes home to roost; what we meditate against others returns on ourselves. They that take the sword shall perish with the sword. The publican who sells drink to debauch sons and fathers, lives to see the drink curse his own family. The man who is treacherous to women lives to see his own sons fall beneath their wives. Haman erects a gallows for Mordecai, but is hanged upon it himself. Adoni-bezek cut off the toes and thumbs of captive princes, and confessed the rightness of the fate which overtook himself. England imposes opium on China, but presently discovers that it is eating out the heart of her own subjects in India and Burnish. "Whoso causeth the upright to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit."

And why is all this? Because God sits behind the slight curtain of the present, judging the acts of men. It is not necessary to wait for the conclusion of the present age to see the sentence inflicted. Now the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, and before Him the nations are gathered. Nineveh, Babylon, Capernaum, Tyre, Pompeii, the power of Spain, the Empire of Napoleon, have already been condemned to Hades. Now the judgment is set, now the books are opened, now the "Come, ye blessed," and "Depart, ye

cursed," are being uttered. God has so made the moral world that the seed of punishment lies hid in each unkind word, each unchristian act; and it is only necessary to give time enough to show that the man who has sown to his neighbour's hurt will reap, that hurt in his own life. To every man will be rendered according to his deeds, even in this life.

**Deuteronomy 19:20 "The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you.**

- De 13:11 17:7,13 21:21 Pr 21:11 Ro 13:3,4 1Ti 5:20
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **FEAR OF PUNISHMENT IS A SIGNIFICANT DETERRENT**

**The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you** - Equal justice would make the people [think twice, think long and hard](#) before they would personally bear false witness. Equal justice would protect the public, punish the offenders, and deter committing crime. Righteous justice is clearly an effective deterrent to further evil. How I pray America can return to a judicial system that is righteous, impartial, non-political, Biblically based. Amen.

[Guzik](#) - Many modern people doubt that the punishment of others is an [effective deterrent](#) to crime; but the Bible clearly says that it is. Weak or inconsistent punishment does not deter crime, but effective punishment does.

**Deuteronomy 19:21 "Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.**

- **eye:** De 19:13
- **life :** Ex 21:23-25 Lev 24:17-21 Mt 5:38,39
- [Deuteronomy 18 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **Related Passages:**

Deuteronomy 13:11 "Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such a wicked thing among you.

Deuteronomy 17:13 "Then all the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act presumptuously again.

Revelation 21:8 "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and **all liars**, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Exodus 20:16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Exodus 23:1 "You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness.

Proverbs 19:9 **A false witness will not go unpunished, And he who tells lies will perish.**

## **LEX TALIONIS "THE LAW OF RETALIATION"**

[Wikipedia](#) - "An eye for an eye" (Biblical Hebrew: עַיִן תַּחַת עַיִן)[a] or the law of retaliation (Latin: lex talionis) is the principle that a person who has injured another person is to be penalized to a similar degree by the injured party.

**Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot** - No pity was granted to the false witness. Equal justice must be executed for every citizen within the nation. This law was to encourage balanced and just punishment so that it was neither too lenient nor too strict.

**Grant** - The principle of an eye for and eye, and a tooth for a tooth was to be upheld. The common view of this today is that it calls for judgment without mercy. This is not so. It was to protect the guilty from a sentence that was disproportionately greater than the offence, and also to prevent judges showing favouritism to the guilty. The expression "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth" is found elsewhere (Ex 21:24; Lev 24:20). In Exodus it is used as a principle in the payment for compensation for wrongs inflicted. A woman



who was injured in a dispute and who lost the unborn child that she was carrying was due compensation for her loss, and the judges would determine the sum that was righteous reparation. In Leviticus it is used as the basis of judgment in respect of wrongs of any kind committed. ([What the Bible Teaches](#))

**POSB** - Throughout the legal system of the Bible and some of the Near Eastern nations, there is this fundamental principle of law: the punishment must match the crime. This is known as the principle of *lex talionis*. It is sometimes called the principle of retaliation or retribution. In the Bible, however, it should be noted that the principle was seldom carried out literally. The basic principle in the Holy Scripture is that of restitution, except in the case of deliberate murder. Premeditated murder and serious sins against the family in God's holy name did merit the death penalty. But in most, if not all, other cases of crime, restitution that equaled the crime had to be paid. ([Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Deuteronomy](#))

**Wiersbe** - People who call this principle “barbaric” probably don't understand what it means. The sentence must be neither too strict nor too easy but must be suited to what the law demands and what the convicted criminal deserves. Honest judges don't give a murderer the same sentence they give the man who poisoned his neighbor's cat, nor is a shoplifter given the same punishment as a kidnapper. This judicial principle emphasized fairness and humane treatment at a time in history when punishments were terribly brutal. In eighteenth century England, there were over 200 capital crimes, and a person could be hanged for picking pockets. Children who broke the law were frequently treated as adults and imprisoned for minor offenses. ([Be Equipped](#))

**MacArthur** - Jesus confronted the Jews of His day for taking this law out of the courts and using it for purposes of personal vengeance (cf. Mt 5:38–42). ([MacArthur Study Bible](#))

**HCSB** - There is disagreement as to whether life for life, eye for eye, and the rest were to be taken literally or whether the principle was simply that the punishment must fit the crime. The latter seems more likely given other biblical laws that indicate that tit for tat was not always followed (Ex 22:21; Num 35:31).

**NET Note** - This kind of justice is commonly called *lex talionis* or “measure for measure” (cf. Exod 21:23–25; Lev 24:19–20). It is likely that it is the principle that is important and not always a strict application. That is, the punishment should fit the crime and it may do so by the payment of fines or other suitable and equitable compensation (cf. Ex 22:21; Num 35:31). See T. S. Frymer-Kensky, “Tit for Tat: The Principle of Equal Retribution in Near Eastern and Biblical Law,” BA 43 (1980): 230–34.

**Guzik** - Your eye shall not pity: This was an important principle for the Biblical court of law; here, connected to the punishment described for false witness, it shows that whatever evil was planned or practiced against another, a similar punishment should be brought against the false witness.. Life shall be for life, eye for eye: However, retribution was always limited by the eye for eye principle. This law was meant to be a check to our desire to revenge, not a license for revenge.. Our tendency is to want to do more to the offending party than what they have done to us. But we cannot punish from a motive of revenge, only from a motive of justice.. “Far from encouraging vengeance it limits vengeance and stands as a guide for a judge as he fixes a penalty suited to the crime. The principle was thus not license or vengeance, but a guarantee of justice.” (Thompson) Eye for eye, tooth for tooth: In Matthew 5:38–39, Jesus quoted this passage in His teaching on the true interpretation of the law. He does not say that the eye for eye principle is wrong; rather, He simply condemns the use of it to make it an obligation to exact revenge against someone who has personally offended me. Many Rabbis in Jesus' day taught that the eye for eye law meant you were obligated to avenge yourself of a personal insult or attack brought against you. Jesus rightly disallowed the application of this law in our personal relationships; it was a law intended to guide the judges in the law courts of Israel, not to guide our personal relationships.. “Jesus' criticism of this law (Mt. 5:38f.) arose from its use to regulate conduct between individuals. He did not reject it as a principle of justice which should operate in the courts of the land. For private relationships He proposed the ideal of brotherhood, a strong principle throughout the book of Deuteronomy. To extend the *lex talionis* to this interpersonal domain was to destroy the law of God.” (Thompson)

**Believer's Study Bible** - The *lex talionis* (Lat.), i.e., “law of retaliation,” is fully presented in Ex. 21:23-25 (see note on Ex. 21:24) and Lev. 24:17-20. It is here applied to the false witness, who tries to misuse “justice” to harm his neighbor.

**Utley** - The “eye-for-an-eye” justice of Israel, which seems so cruel (i.e., *Lex talionis*, which is also characteristic of the Code of Hammurabi, see Old Testament Times, by R. K. Harrison, pp. 57–59) was in reality meant to stop “revenge wars” between families and tribes as well as maintain the ritual purity of God's covenant people. One wonders about how literally this law was actually carried out. It seems that physical mutilation was replaced by appropriate compensation. This is based on the surrounding context of the parallel in Exod. 21:23–25. The immediately preceding and following contexts deal with compensation. The later rabbis assigned appropriate compensation for actions resulting in personal damage. However, murder retained its religious taboo. It negatively impacted the covenant of blessings from YHWH and had to be dealt with appropriately! ([Deuteronomy 19 Commentary](#))

**IVP Bible Background Commentary** - *lex talionis*. The legal principle of “an eye for an eye” or *lex talionis* (“law of retaliation”) is found in both the biblical law codes and the codes of Mesopotamia. Biblical examples (Ex 21:24; Lev 24:20) express the desire to eliminate a corrupting or unclean element in society. The admonition is to have “no mercy” on the culprit. Mesopotamian law

contains both the idealized version of *lex talionis* and an amelioration to set limits of compensation. For instance, the law collection of Eshnunna sets a fine of one mina of silver for the loss of an eye. In the personal liability laws found in Hammurabi's code, reciprocity for injury may be an exactly equivalent injury, a fine or mutilation, depending on the social status of the injured party and the accused. Even in the cases where exact reciprocity is required by Mesopotamian law, it is quite possible that a monetary equivalent was taken in compensation (if not explicitly included in the law), rather than an eye or a tooth being actually removed.

#### Related Resources:

- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Talionis, Lex](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Lex Talionis](#)

---

#### [What is the law of retribution?](#)

The law of retribution, also called the law of retaliation or [lex talionis](#), was part of the Old Testament Law given to Israel through Moses. Retribution was one of the cornerstones of Israel's penal code. The punishment was supposed to mirror the crime. The principle of *lex talionis* is clearly stated in Leviticus 24:19–21: "Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury. Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a human being is to be put to death." Monetary damages are to be paid for killing an animal belonging to someone else, but, if a person is murdered, then the murderer must forfeit his life in return. Exodus 21:23–25 and Deuteronomy 19:16–21 echo the same stipulations.

In ancient Israel, part of the law's enforcement fell to the family of the murder victim. According to Numbers 35:16–21, in some cases the "avenger of blood" (normally a close family member of the deceased) would be charged with carrying out the death sentence, possibly even tracking down the murderer if the murderer had fled. There was no police force in ancient Israel, so kinship posses were called upon to enforce the law. It is important to keep in mind that this system of retaliation operated within the legal system as it existed. The law of retribution was not a simple pretext for revenge, although it is easy to see how it could descend to that level. "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, and life for life" was the penal code and was never intended to justify a personal code of revenge or vigilantism. In fact, the Law warned against personal hatred: "Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:17–18).

In the New Testament, Christians in the Roman Empire lived under a different penal code. In Romans 12:17–13:4, Paul warns believers that they must not take the law into their own hands, but he also maintains that the government has the right and responsibility to enforce penalties, including the death penalty, for criminal acts. In that passage, quoted below, you will notice how Paul moves from personal vendettas to governmental enforcement of justice. Because the switch happens at a chapter break, many readers may not realize the connection. (Remember, the [chapter and verse divisions](#) are not inspired. They were added later to help facilitate easy study and reference, but sometimes a chapter break can obscure the connection with the previous chapter.)

- Do not repay anyone evil for evil.
- Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.
- Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.
- On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.
- Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
- Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

It is easy to see how, in ancient Israel, personal revenge and penalties administered under "due process" might be somewhat mingled. That's one of the reasons God chose the [cities of refuge](#) in Joshua 20:7–8. In New Testament times, Paul tells believers that they cannot take personal revenge. They must love and even serve their enemies, allowing God to retaliate in His time as He sees fit. Divine retribution may come through some "act of God" in this life (or certainly in the next), but it is also possible that the government functioning in its God-given role will be the agent God uses to bring about justice. It may be morally right for a government to execute a murderer, but it would be morally wrong for a family member of the victim to ambush the murderer and kill

him, even if he had already been convicted and sentenced to death in court. The personal response is to offer love and forgiveness while the governmental response is to enforce justice.

In Matthew 5:38–48 (during the Sermon on the Mount), Jesus rejects the “eye for an eye” principle as applied to personal ethics. As is clear from the explanation He gives, He is not rejecting or even commenting upon penalties administered by the government after “due process.” He is rejecting a personal code of revenge that would “do unto others as they have done unto me.” Rather than enforce the law of retribution in personal matters, Jesus requires individuals to love their enemies, “go the extra mile,” and “turn the other cheek.” In Matthew 7:12 He says, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.” This code of conduct leaves no place for personal revenge or even resentment.

In summary, the law of retribution or the law of retaliation may be a legitimate guide for criminal penalties administered by governmental authorities, but it is not to be used as the basis for personal revenge. Personal revenge puts the avenger in the place of God as Judge and Executioner making the avenger a usurper of divine authority. [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)