

**Second Baptist Church of Doylestown**  
**Bible Study Notes**  
**3-30-22**  
**Numbers 35**

**Towns for the Levites – Verses 1-3**

**<sup>1</sup> On the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho, the LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup>“Command the Israelites to give the Levites towns to live in from the inheritance the Israelites will possess. And give them pasturelands around the towns. <sup>3</sup>Then they will have towns to live in and pasturelands for the cattle they own and all their other animals.**

**35:2-3** The Levites were ministers. They were supported by the tithes of the people, who gave them homes, livestock, and pasturelands. Likewise, we are responsible to provide for the needs of our ministers and missionaries so they can be free to do their god-ordained work.

**Common-Land Around Each City & Levitical Cities – Verses 4-8**

**<sup>4</sup>“The pasturelands around the towns that you give the Levites will extend a thousand cubits from the town wall. <sup>5</sup>Outside the town, measure two thousand cubits on the east side, two thousand on the south side, two thousand on the west and two thousand on the north, with the town in the center. They will have this area as pastureland for the towns. <sup>6</sup>“Six of the towns you give the Levites will be cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone may flee. In addition, give them forty-two other towns. <sup>7</sup>In all you must give the Levites forty-eight towns, together with their pasturelands. <sup>8</sup>The towns you give the Levites from the land the Israelites possess are to be given in proportion to the inheritance of each tribe: Take many towns from a tribe that has many, but few from one that has few.”**

**35:6** Of the 48 cities given to the Levites, six were cities of refuge. These six cities were probably put under the Levites' supervision because they would be the most impartial judges. Such cities were needed because the ancient customs of justice called for revenge in the event of the death of a relative or loved one (2 Samuel 14:7). The Levites would hold a preliminary hearing outside the gates while the accused person was kept in the city until the time of his trial. If the killing was judged accidental, the person would stay in the city until the death of the high priest. At that time, he would be allowed to go free, and he could start a new life without worrying about avengers. If it was not accidental, the person would be delivered to the slain person's avengers. This system of justice shows how God's law and his mercy go hand in hand.

**Cities of Refuge – Verses 9-12**

**<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses: <sup>10</sup>“Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, <sup>11</sup> select some towns to be your cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee. <sup>12</sup> They will be places of refuge from the avenger, so that anyone accused of murder may not die before they stand trial before the assembly.**

**35:9-10** That the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there: In the ancient culture of Israel, it was not left entirely up to the government to avenge a murder. Each extended family had a recognized avenger who would ensure that one who murdered a family member would likewise be killed. 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.

**35:11** Who kills any person accidentally: 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.

### **The Placement Of The Cities Of Refuge – Verses 13-14**

**13** These six towns you give will be your cities of refuge. **14** Give three on this side of the Jordan and three in Canaan as cities of refuge.

**35:13-14** You shall have six cities of refuge: There were to be six cities of refuge, with three on each side of the Jordan River. Each of the three cities on either side would be positioned as north, central, and south. Joshua 20:7-8 records the actual choice of the cities. They fulfilled the plan of being evenly distributed perfectly. Deuteronomy 19:3 also tells us that proper roads were to be built and maintained to these cities of refuge. A city of refuge was no good to the slayer if they could not get there quickly. The cities were close to all; no one was very far from a city of refuge. This was obviously important when the avenger of blood chased you.

### **The People Eligible For Protection In The Cities Of Refuge – Verse 15**

**15** These six towns will be a place of refuge for Israelites and for foreigners residing among them, so that anyone who has killed another accidentally can flee there.

**35:15** That anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there: Anyone - a stranger or a citizen of Israel - anyone who needed to find protection in the cities of refuge could. Their protection was not limited to the children of Israel.

### **How To Judge If A Death Was Truly Murder – Verses 16-21**

**16** “If anyone strikes someone a fatal blow with an iron object, that person is a murderer; the murderer is to be put to death. **17** Or if anyone is holding a stone and strikes someone a fatal blow with it, that person is a murderer; the murderer is to be put to death. **18** Or if anyone is holding a wooden object and strikes someone a fatal blow with it, that person is a murderer; the murderer is to be put to death. **19** 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. **20** If anyone with malice aforethought shoves another or throws something at them intentionally so that they die **21** or if out of enmity one person hits another with their fist so that the other dies, that person is to be put to death; that person is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when they meet.

**35:16** He is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death: Significantly, the Bible makes the clear distinction between killing and murder. All murder is killing; but not all killing is murder. Society needs laws to establish the principles that decide a death to be either an unfortunate killing or true murder. If he strikes him with an iron implement: Murder could be judged depending on the weapon used; if it was an iron implement (likely to kill), or if it were a stone or a wooden hand weapon, by which one could die, then the killer could be found guilty of murder.

**35:20** If he pushes him out of hatred or, while lying in wait, hurls something at him so that he dies: Murder could also be judged by discerning the state of heart and presence of premeditation in the killer. If the killing happens while lying in wait or if the killer strikes in enmity, murder can be judged.

### **How To Judge If A Death Was Truly Manslaughter – Verses 22-24**

<sup>22</sup> **“But if without enmity someone suddenly pushes another or throws something at them unintentionally <sup>23</sup> or, without seeing them, drops on them a stone heavy enough to kill them, and they die, then since that other person was not an enemy and no harm was intended, <sup>24</sup> the assembly must judge between the accused and the avenger of blood according to these regulations.**

**35:22** If he pushes him suddenly without enmity: If there was the absence of murderous intent, or the absence of premeditation, or if the death was clearly accidental, then the man was not guilty of murder and could not be turned over to the avenger of blood.

**35:23** So the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood according to these judgments: Both sides of the story had to be taken into account. Judgment was not to be made on the basis merely any one side's story.

### **If The Killer Is Determined To Be Innocent Of Murder – Verses 25-28**

<sup>25</sup> **The assembly must protect the one accused of murder from the avenger of blood and send the accused back to the city of refuge to which they fled. The accused must stay there until the death of the high priest, who was anointed with the holy oil. <sup>26</sup> “But if the accused ever goes outside the limits of the city of refuge to which they fled <sup>27</sup> and the avenger of blood finds them outside the city, the avenger of blood may kill the accused without being guilty of murder. <sup>28</sup> The accused must stay in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest; only after the death of the high priest may they return to their own property.**

**35:25** So the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood: Having been judged innocent of murder, the manslayer could live in peace and safety - but only within the walls of the city of refuge. Significantly, someone who killed another - but was innocent of murder - still had their life profoundly affected. They had to move from their city, and presumably their family as well, and had to live the rest of their lives in that city of refuge. The tragedy also affected their life.

**35:25** He shall remain there until the death of the high priest: The only thing that could set the man free from the city of refuge was the death of the high priest; at the death of the high priest, the avenger of blood no longer had any rights over the man in the city of refuge.

**35:26-28** But if the manslayer at any time goes outside the limits of the city of refuge where he fled: Until the time of the high priest's death, if the man who sought protection in the city of refuge wandered outside the walls of the city, he was fair game for the avenger of blood - only within his place of refuge was he safe. The cities of refuge only helped the innocent; the guilty can come to Jesus and find refuge.

The cities of refuge as a picture of Jesus. The Bible applies this picture of the city of refuge to the believer finding refuge in God on more than one occasion: 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. 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.

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. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are the only

alternative for the one in need; without this specific protection, they will be destroyed. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge provide protection only within their boundaries; to go outside meant death. With both Jesus and the cities of refuge, full freedom comes with the death of the High Priest.

### **Two Witnesses Are Required Before The Punishment For Murder – Verses 29-30**

<sup>29</sup> **“This is to have the force of law for you throughout the generations to come, wherever you live. <sup>30</sup> “Anyone who kills a person is to be put to death as a murderer only on the testimony of witnesses. But no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.**

**35:29-30** One witness is not sufficient testimony against a person for the death penalty: One witness was never enough to condemn a murderer to death. Furthermore, the witnesses had to be so certain that one of them must be willing to initiate the actual execution - to "cast the first stone" (Deuteronomy 17:6-7).

This puts the words of Jesus regarding the woman taken in adultery in John 8 in perspective: He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first (John 8:7). Jesus asked for the official witness to step forward and go on record as having witnessed this act of adultery, yet show himself hypocritical enough to bring the woman, but not the man to judgment.

**35:30** One witness is not sufficient testimony: We may comfort ourselves that we would never judge someone guilty of murder so quickly, without proper evidence; but how often do we murder someone's reputation in our own minds or in the minds of others with no witnesses, much less one. God is concerned about the murder of reputation, as well as physical murder, and commands Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19) - the same standard as for proving murder!

### **A Murderer's Life Cannot Be Ransomed – Verses 31-32**

<sup>31</sup> **“Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer, who deserves to die. They are to be put to death. <sup>32</sup> “Do not accept a ransom for anyone who has fled to a city of refuge and so allow them to go back and live on their own land before the death of the high priest.**

**35:31** You shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer: If someone was guilty of murder, they could not make monetary restitution in the place of their life. The principle of Genesis 9:6 stands: Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.

**35:32** You shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge: This reflects an important principle; namely, that money cannot replace justice. Sometimes a monetary reward satisfies justice (as in Exodus 22:4, for example); but other times it does not, and should not be used as a replacement for justice.

### **The Urgency To Bring Murderers To Justice – Verses 33-34**

<sup>33</sup> **“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. <sup>34</sup> Do not defile the land where you live and where I dwell, for I, the LORD, dwell among the Israelites.”**

**35:33-34** For blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land: Unjudged murders defile a nation. When murderers are not brought to justice, there is a blot on a nation that only the severe judgment of God can cleanse.