

Day 8 – Feb. 8, 2023

In today's reading we are introduced to the idea of the Cities of Refuge. Though there is some debate whether these cities acted as asylums or prisons, their purpose was to prevent sin, the breaking of God's law, among God's people.

Whenever a situation arose where someone accidentally killed another, it was likely the family of the victim would come looking for blood. Vengeance was theirs, they thought. God knew the propensities of humankind, so He created six Cities of Refuge throughout the land. When the family came for vengeance, the killer could flee to one of these cities, and after sharing his story with the town's elders, they would admit him and keep him safe in the city. Again, whether this was as a pre-trial incarceration or safe asylum is debated among some, but regardless the person could not be harmed in a City of Refuge. If the family came for vengeance, they would be turned away. And the person accused of manslaughter would live inside these city walls until their trial before the high priest. At the trial, if they are found guilty of murder, then the punishment was death. If not, they could live in the City of Refuge, safe from further harm, until either they died or the high priest died. When the high priest died, they were released (expelled?) from the City of Refuge and free to resume their normal life.

These 6 cities were under the jurisdiction of the Levites, the temple workers and teachers, and the only tribe who did not inherit any land. They were instead given 48 cities, 6 of which were the Cities of Refuge, and they were expected to run them according to the Law.

God always knows God's people. Nothing we do surprises God or catches God off guard. And throughout history we see God making allowances for our sinfulness, from divorce (Matt. 19:8) to the requirement of forgiveness (Col. 3:13) to these Cities of Refuge. Apparently, God is not an idealist who deals with us according to God's ideals, but a realist, who deals with us as we are. Praise God for that!