

[it-1 Blood p. 344] "Because of God's view of the value of life, the blood of a murdered person is said to defile the earth, and such defilement can be cleansed only by shedding the blood of the murderer. On this basis the Bible authorizes capital punishment for murder, through duly constituted authority."

the arrangement of the cities of refuge, we learn Jehovah's view of sin, sinners, and repentance. First, let us get an overview of the purpose and function of these cities.

**"SELECT FOR YOURSELVES
THE CITIES OF REFUGE"**

³ Jehovah took seriously all cases of bloodshed in ancient Israel. Willful murderers were put to death by the victim's nearest male relative, known as "the avenger of blood." (Num. 35:19) This act atoned for the innocent human blood that had been spilled. Swift execution protected the Promised Land from becoming defiled, for Jehovah commanded: "You must not pollute the land in which you live, for [the shedding of human] blood pollutes the land."—Num. 35:33, 34.

⁴ How, though, did the Israelites handle cases of accidental bloodshed? Although his deed was accidental, an unintentional manslayer was still guilty of shedding innocent blood. (Gen. 9:5) Mercifully, however, he was allowed to flee from the avenger of blood to one of the six cities of refuge. There, he could find protection. The unintentional manslayer had to remain in the city of refuge until the high priest's death.—Num. 35:15, 28.

⁵ Designating these cities as cities of refuge was not a human idea. Jehovah himself commanded Joshua: "Tell the Israelites, 'Select for yourselves the cities of refuge.'" The cities were given "a sa-

3. How did the Israelites handle cases of willful murder?

4. How were cases of accidental bloodshed handled in Israel?

5. How can the arrangement of the cities of refuge help us to understand Jehovah better?

cred status." (Josh. 20:1, 2, 7, 8) Since Jehovah was directly involved in setting these cities apart for special use, we might ask: How does this arrangement help us to have a clearer view of Jehovah's mercy? And what does it teach us about how we can take refuge in him today?

**"HE MUST . . . PRESENT HIS CASE
IN THE HEARING OF THE ELDERS"**

⁶ After he accidentally killed someone, a fugitive first had to "present his case in the hearing of the elders" at the gate of the city of refuge to which he had fled. He was to be received hospitably. (Josh. 20:4) Some time later, he was sent back to the elders of the city where the killing had occurred, and those elders judged the case. (Read Numbers 35:24, 25.) Only after they had declared the killing accidental would the fugitive be returned to the city of refuge.

⁷ Why were the elders involved? They were to keep the congregation of Israel clean and to help the unintentional manslayer to benefit from Jehovah's mercy. One Bible scholar wrote that if the fugitive neglected to approach the elders, "it was at his peril." He added: "His blood was on his own head, because he did not make use of the security God had provided for him." Help was available to the unintentional manslayer, but he had to seek out and accept that help. If he did not seek refuge in one of the cities Jehovah had set aside, the closest relative of the person he had killed was free to put him to death.

6, 7. (a) Describe the role of the elders in judging an unintentional manslayer. (See opening picture.) (b) Why was it wise for a fugitive to approach the elders?

How was the land polluted? By NOT executing a murderer swiftly. (See it-1 reference at top of page.)

The scriptural addition would be more comprehensive if it read: "[the shedding of innocent human] blood pollutes the land" since the shedding of guilty human blood was actually required to prevent the land from becoming polluted. (see next page)

Capital punishment was not only 'authorized', it was mandatory.

replaced at Pentecost in the year 33. But the Law came from Jehovah. So from the arrangement of the cities of refuge, we learn how Jehovah views sin, sinners, and those who repent. First, let us find out why Israel had cities of refuge and how they functioned.

“SELECT FOR YOURSELVES THE CITIES OF REFUGE”

³ Jehovah was very concerned when anyone was killed. If an Israelite murdered someone, the victim's closest male relative, called “the **avenger of blood**,” had to execute the murderer. (Numbers 35:19) That way, the murderer would pay with his own life for the life of the innocent person he had killed. If the murderer was not executed quickly, the Promised Land could become polluted, or no longer holy. Jehovah commanded: “You must not pollute the land in which you live” by

3. What did the Israelites have to do to a murderer?

shedding human blood, that is, by killing someone.—Numbers 35:33, 34.

⁴ But what happened when an Israelite accidentally killed someone? Even though the death was an accident, he was still guilty of killing an innocent person. (Genesis 9:5) In such a case, though, Jehovah said that mercy could be shown. The unintentional killer could run away from the avenger of blood and go to one of the six cities of refuge. Once he was allowed to stay in that city, he was protected. But he had to remain in the city of refuge until the high priest's death.—Numbers 35:15, 28.

⁵ The arrangement for the cities of refuge was not the idea of a human. It came from Jehovah. He commanded Joshua: “Tell the Israelites, ‘Select for yourselves the cities of refuge.’” These

4. What happened when an Israelite accidentally killed someone?

5. Why can the arrangement of cities of refuge help us to understand Jehovah better?

So it was **un-avenged** innocent human blood that polluted the land.

Lessons or Symbolic Meanings?

The Watch Tower of September 1, 1895, explained that the cities of refuge had a symbolic meaning. It said that they represented “the refuge which the sinner may find in Christ.” It added that a person would be protected if he had faith in Jesus. One hundred

years later, *The Watchtower* said that the cities of refuge represented what God does to protect us from dying because we have broken his commandment about blood.

But *The Watchtower* of March 15, 2015, explained why our recent publications do not often mention types and antitypes, or symbolic meanings of Bible accounts: “When the Scriptures teach that a person, an

event, or an object represents something greater in the future, we accept that explanation. However, we should not give a symbolic meaning to a Bible account when there is no Scriptural reason to do that.” The Scriptures do not say that the cities of refuge would represent something greater in the future. That is why this article and the next one draw attention to the **lessons** Christians can learn from those cities.