

**Deut. 19:1** ¶ When the LORD thy God hath cut off the nations, whose land the LORD thy God giveth thee, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their cities, and in their houses;

**Deut. 19:2** Thou shalt separate three cities for thee in the midst of thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it.

The prophet shifts gears again as he takes up the subject of cities of refuge. Three of these cities were established as recorded in chapter 4 on the east side of the Jordan for those of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh that were given inheritance in that area. The taking of the land will happen in stages, and in these verses he is addressing the first stage of possession. It's important to note that Moses uses language to address "when" not "if" they cut off the nations that are currently in the land and take possession of their cities and houses. Why? Because YHWH is giving them the land; they are not taking it in their own power. Just as on the east side of the Jordan, they are to establish three cities of refuge on the west side of Jordan.

**Deut. 19:3** Thou shalt prepare thee a way, and divide the coasts of thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee to inherit, into three parts, that every slayer may flee thither.

These three cities of refuge are to be strategically located so as to be accessible by all the people of Israel. The primary purpose for these cities is to provide safe haven for those who have taken the life of another accidentally.

Again, emphasis is made that it is "the LORD thy God" that is giving them the land.

**Deut. 19:4** And this *is* the case of the slayer, which shall flee thither, that he may live: Whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past;

**Deut. 19:5** As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live:

**Deut. 19:6** Lest the avenger of the blood pursue the slayer, while his heart is hot, and overtake him, because the way is long, and slay him; whereas he *was* not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past.

Moses leaves no doubt that these cities of refuge are to protect one who unintentionally causes the death of another. There is to be no evidence that they had once been enemies. He even gives the example of someone chopping down a tree; and as he is chopping, the head slips off and strikes a fatal blow to someone else in the area. The Lord knows the natural response of our human passions. He knows that it is quite likely that one of the loved ones of the victim might respond in anger resulting in the death of another innocent man. The cities of refuge are to be located so as to be reachable before being overtaken by the angry avenger.

**Deut. 19:7** Wherefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt separate three cities for thee.

**Deut. 19:8** And if the LORD thy God enlarge thy coast, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, and give thee all the land which he promised to give unto thy fathers;

**Deut. 19:9** If thou shalt keep all these commandments to do them, which I command thee this day, to love the LORD thy God, and to walk ever in his ways; then shalt thou add three cities more for thee, beside these three:

**Deut. 19:10** That innocent blood be not shed in thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee *for an inheritance, and so blood be upon thee.*

Moses is declaring that there are to be three cities established in the first stage of possessing the land. As the LORD continues to allow the nation to grow, they are to add three more cities as necessary to provide the necessary refuge.

It is important to note that Moses allows for the contingency of growth according to the obedience of the people in keeping God's commandments and living according to His instructions. That He would give His people land for a nation was a sure thing; that they would be given possession of all the land promised to the fathers was dependent upon their response to God in love and obedience.

Verse 10 clearly implies that the people would be held accountable for knowingly allowing innocent blood to be shed.

**Deut. 19:11** But if any man hate his neighbour, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities:

**Deut. 19:12** Then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die.

If, however, there is evidence of enmity between the murderer and the victim and that the murder was premeditated, the person seeking refuge is to be delivered into the custody of the elders of the city to allow the murder of the victim to be avenged. The judgment for premeditated murder is death.

**Deut. 19:13** Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away *the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee.*

No one is to have pity or spare (from the Hebrew) the life of the murderer. God had already established with Noah that one who takes a man's life is to pay with his own life.

**Gen. 9:6** Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.

The Lord is clear in repeatedly declaring that the prosperity of the nation was dependent upon their obedience to His commands.

**Deut. 19:14** ¶ Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it.

Again, Moses changes the subject—this time to the adherence to land allotments. The Lord specifically delegated the land areas to be inherited by each tribe. The families of each tribe were then given allotments in the designated area. These land allotments were not to be tampered with. In searching for the consequence for disobedience, the only verse I could find was in Proverbs.

Prov. 23:10-11 Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: For their redeemer *is* mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.

The Hebrew for *plead* makes it clear that God will be the defender of those who are wronged.

**Deut. 19:15 One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.**

The Lord provides a safeguard against false accusation by requiring the testimony of two or three witnesses to verify a charge of wrongdoing. Sadly, I think we have gotten to the point in today's society in which that is no longer a reliable safeguard. We have to remember that God is talking to His people who at this point are acknowledging Him as LORD. In a society that overwhelmingly acknowledges God as Lord, I believe this safeguard would still be sufficient. The truth is that in America today, this cannot be said to be the case.

**Deut. 19:16 If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him *that which is wrong*;**

**Deut. 19:17 Then both the men, between whom the controversy *is*, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days;**

**Deut. 19:18 And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, *if* the witness *be* a false witness, *and* hath testified falsely against his brother;**

**Deut. 19:19 Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.**

In this section of verses Moses is basically saying that one who is found to be making false accusation against another is to be judged according to the crime for which he made false accusation. Without the support of other witnesses, the determination of truth is to be made by the priests and judges that are in office at the time through "diligent inquisition." The Hebrew defines *inquisition* as not only verbal questioning, but also physical investigation.

**Deut. 19:20 And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.**

**Deut. 19:21 And thine eye shall not pity; *but* life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.**

These instructions are intended to serve as a deterrent to evil. God's directives for punishment are to be followed specifically—life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand and foot for foot.

I would imagine that if we had a truly just judicial system this principle would prove to be true today. There is no effective deterrent to evil because we are so bent on using man's wisdom vs. God's. We have determined it to be better to provide rehabilitation and/or show leniency when it comes to even major crimes. Even when we do decide to pass judgment the judicial system is so slow and laborious that deterrence is almost nil.