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Moshe Remembered the Three Cities of Refuge

4: 41-43

This is an introduction to Chapter 5 and the Ten Commandments.

But just before **the Ten Commandments** there is an interesting commandment that is given about **the cities** of refuge. Seemingly out of place here, there is a good reason why it is placed here. **The cities** of refuge carry within them important elements found in **the Ten Commandments**. Mankind is brought back to the respectable position as being created in **the image of God**. Opposed to the code of Hammurabi, which judged people by social status, the Torah elevated mankind as **ADONAI's** personal possession as seen in these cities of refuge.



Then Moses reminded **the Israelites** of the **three cities beyond the Jordan, toward the east** (see the commentary on **Numbers Bg - The Cities of Refuge**). **There the manslayer might flee, who kills his neighbor unintentionally and did not hate him previously. He may flee to one of these cities and live: Bezer in the wilderness on the plateau for the Reubenites, Ramoth in the Gilead for the Gadites, and Golan in the Bashan for the Manassites (4:41-43).** This commandment required that as soon as **one man** accidentally killed another, **he** would immediately run to one of these **cities** until the elders would investigate and determine if a murder had been committed (**to see link click Bq - Do Not Murder**). If **he** was found to be innocent, **he** would continue to **live** in that **city of refuge** until **the death of the high priest. But after the death of the high priest the manslayer could return to his land (Numbers 35:28).** Evidently, **the death of the high priest** must have symbolized a cancellation of **the manslayer's** sin.

The reason those cities of refuge were created is given to us in **19:10: Then innocent blood will not be shed within your land that ADONAI your God is giving you as an inheritance, and there would be blood upon you.** The life of mankind was extremely important in the eyes of **God**. There, a person was innocent until proven guilty; there the criminal was not to be abused. Here we see that the Torah became the affair of the state. It was not a matter of personal revenge. This commandment saved Isra'el from having to deal with two possible murders instead of one. What if a man killed another by accident? Then that man was killed out of revenge? You would then have two murders with guilt resting on the nation. This, in turn, would bring judgment on the nation.

In **His** great concern for the well being of mankind, **God** commanded that the roads leading to those cities of refuge were to be well maintained and equally spaced in such a way as to be reachable anywhere within **Isra'el** within a short period of time. History tells us that road signs were put up at all crossings directing refugees to those **three cities. What a compassionate way to introduce the Ten Commandments and demonstrate ADONAI's respect for justice.**¹³⁷