

QUESTION: Why should I care about a refuge for the manslayer?

TRN TO NM 35

INTRODUCTION

ILL—The Fugitive (1963 crime drama tv series; created by Roy Huggins; about Dr. Richard Kimble, wrongly convicted of his wife’s murder; sentenced to death, escapes en route to death row; goes on search for the “one armed man”.)

My personal exposure to *The Fugitive* wasn’t really through the television show—my exposure was through the movie with Harrison Ford and Tommy Lee Jones. But whether you’re talking about the movie or the TV show, the central story is the same: a man on the run—pursued tirelessly by a cop: Philip Gerard.

I think part of the reason this is so fascinating to us is that we empathize with “*the Fugitive*”—we can’t help but place ourselves in his shoes, seeking answers and seeking refuge.

BACKGROUND: God’s Promise (EX 21.12-15; NM 35.1-5; 7-8)

Today, we have multiple law-enforcement agencies: the CIA, the FBI, the Secret Service, and, of course, the police. These agencies have, at their heart, a mission to bring the guilty to justice—and not one of them existed in ancient Judea.

Instead, most commonly, it would fall to the family of the victimized to bring about justice for those victimized and killed. The family would assign an “**avenger of blood**”. But there’s a problem with having the family of the victim being permitted to be the “**avenger of blood**”: mistakes happen, and sometimes, a man causes the death of another by mistake. But to the “**avenger of blood**”, dead was dead. And that could result in the guilty party being doomed to a death of vengeance. **What chance could they have of finding refuge?**

EX 21.12-14 ~ “Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. ¹³ But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee. ¹⁴ But if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar, that he may die

EX: I think back to Moses and the death of the guard in Egypt. Following his killing of the man in protection of his kinsman, Moses found himself doomed to the death of the murderer. But his death hadn’t been planned by evil cunning—he’d struck the man out of a desire to protect. But that didn’t matter for the “avenger of blood”. For that reason, Moses had to flee. And

now, as he's preparing the people for their new law in the new land, Moses presents **God's promise** to the people: a promise of a chance—an opportunity to have their lives spared!

NM 35.1-5 ~ *The Lord spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, saying, ²“Command the people of Israel to give to the Levites some of the inheritance of their possession as cities for them to dwell in. And you shall give to the Levites pasturelands around the cities. ³The cities shall be theirs to dwell in, and their pasturelands shall be for their cattle and for their livestock and for all their beasts. ⁴The pasturelands of the cities, which you shall give to the Levites, shall reach from the wall of the city outward a thousand cubits all around. ⁵And you shall measure, outside the city, on the east side two thousand cubits, and on the south side two thousand cubits, and on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits, the city being in the middle. This shall belong to them as pastureland for their cities.*

EX: We fast forward many years, and now, Moses is preparing the people for life in the Promised Land. And he begins by presenting the property that will be provided for the Levites—the only people who didn't have a traditional **“inheritance”** in the Promised Land.

NM 35.7-8 ~ *All the cities that you give to the Levites shall be forty-eight, with their pasturelands. ⁸And as for the cities that you shall give from the possession of the people of Israel, from the larger tribes you shall take many, and from the smaller tribes you shall take few; each, in proportion to the inheritance that it inherits, shall give of its cities to the Levites.”*

What a great blessing that He had provided to the Levites—a dedicated place, 48 cities across the promised land amongst all the tribes of Israel. But along with providing a promise through these cities, He would also provide a fulfillment of His **EX 21.12-14** promise: amongst the cities of the Levites would be *a place to which [the manslayer] may flee.*

AP: I find it interesting that God would care about the manslayer. When I think of harm caused to my family and the people I love, my concern for the person who brought it upon them is next to zero. And yet, God made a promise even to the manslayer: **a place of refuge, a place of justice, a place of mercy**, and is ultimately, **reflected in the church.**

BD1: A Place of Refuge (NM 35.6, 9-15)

HEBREW WORDS/Hasah/Meaning

NM 35.6 ~ *“The cities that you give to the Levites shall be the six cities of refuge, where you shall permit the manslayer to flee, and in addition to them you shall give forty-two cities.*

JUDEA/Cities of Refuge/Identity and Placement

of Christ—His church. There you're safe. There you're redeemed. There, you're saved. The only requirement: the church becomes your home.

EH 2.14-22 ~ *For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

INVITATION – God's Promise

2CR 2.19-22 ~ *For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. ²⁰For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. ²¹And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²²and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*

testimony of one witness. ³¹ Moreover, you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death, but he shall be put to death. ³² And you shall accept no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the high priest. ³³ You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it. ³⁴ You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell, for I the Lord dwell in the midst of the people of Israel.”

Moses closes out this section with a call of reminder of the importance of this command: of the importance of these cities being a **place of refuge** were **justice** is ensured and where **mercy** is offered. **Why discuss this today? Why talk about the cities of refuge when, today, every one of them is either a ruin or an unrelated modern city?**

There are moments and people and institutions that are described in the New Testament that are so bright, beautiful, and big that they cast a great shadow—all the way back into the Old Testament. This results in images, types, and foreshadows that point forward from Old Testament images into their New Testament reality. And the cities of refuge is one such thing. **But what do they point to?**

ILL—The Manslayer (picture yourself; living in the Judea, chopping wood; while chopping, the head slips from the handle and flies off and strikes a friend or stranger in the head, killing them) That morning, you were just a woodworker. Now, you’re a killer. The word spreads, and word comes down from the local council: you’re guilty. And then, the family assigns a man to be the **“avenger of blood”**—and they begin hunting you.

You’re a dead man walking, and it’s only a matter of time until you’ll be killed. So you run, place to place, city to city, seeking help—seeking life! And you can’t find it. Until, at last, you find one of six glorious cities: a place of **refuge**. There you’re safe. The only requirement: that city becomes your home.

ILL—The Sinner (picture yourself; living in the world, living life; before you know it, you slip up—hurting yourself or the loved ones around you) You started out life as an innocent child—full of potential. And now, you’ve messed up. You’re a sinner. All around you is the pain of your error—the affect of your sin breaking relationships between you and loved ones, and more importantly, between you and God.

You’re a dead man walking, and it’s only a matter of time until the sentence is carried out. You run, moment to moment, passion to passion, pursuing meaning after proposed meaning, seeking purpose—seeking life! And you can’t find it. Until, at last, you find it: a place of **refuge**. The body

EX: These six cities were perfectly placed to be not too far from any of the Israelite people. Regardless of their city, regardless of their location—they would be within a reasonable distance of a **place of refuge**.

NM 35.9-15 ~ *And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,* ¹⁰ “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, ¹¹ then you shall select cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person without intent may flee there. ¹² The cities shall be for you a refuge from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation for judgment. ¹³ And the cities that you give shall be your six cities of refuge. ¹⁴ You shall give three cities beyond the Jordan, and three cities in the land of Canaan, to be cities of refuge. ¹⁵ These six cities shall be for refuge for the people of Israel, and for the stranger and for the sojourner among them, that anyone who kills any person without intent may flee there.

AP: God understood something important about His people—a thing He understands about all people—sin is certain. If He was going to create a place of law and righteousness, He knew that, even amongst His people, there would be a need for a **place of refuge** when they broke that law. And for that reason, He insisted upon six relatively equidistant cities of refuge (starting with three, and then ending with six during the reign of David). He knew that all people had a potential need for refuge, for **all had sinned**.

RM 5.12-14 ~ *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—*¹³ *for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.*

Today, sin is every bit as certain as it was then. We see it in our families, in our schools, in our cities—wherever men breathe, men sin. And for that reason, we also find ourselves needing a place for safety—a **place of refuge!**

BD2: A Place of Justice (NM 35.16-21)

However, while these cities serve as a **place of refuge**, they were not a place for everyone. For we see that while these cities were a **place of refuge**, they were also a **place of justice**.

NM 35.16-21 ~ *“But if he struck him down with an iron object, so that he died, he is a murderer. The murderer shall be put to death. ¹⁷ And if he struck him down with a stone tool that could cause death, and he died, he is a murderer. The murderer shall be put to death. ¹⁸ Or if he struck him down with a wooden tool that could cause death, and he died, he is a murderer. The murderer shall be put to death. ¹⁹ The avenger of blood shall himself put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death. ²⁰ And if he pushed him out of hatred or hurled something at him, lying in wait, so that*

he died, ²¹ or in enmity struck him down with his hand, so that he died, then he who struck the blow shall be put to death. He is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.

EX: Justice is a funny thing. We claim to want justice, but in truth, it's only when we're on the right side of the executioner's axe. Moses gives us the example of a man who killed with intent—an act of hatred and evil, and he declares him not a “manslayer”, but a murderer. It's a shocking truth we see, then: that this **place of refuge** was only a refuge to the manslayer—but to the murderer, it was a **place of justice**.

1TH 4.3-8 ~ *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.*

AP: We often think of God as a God of grace, and He is. We think of Him as a God of love, and He is. But he's also a God of justice. He would not permit a guilty man to find unjustified shelter in his **place of refuge**. And the same is true when it comes to His kingdom on this earth (the church), and His kingdom, eternal, in Heaven.

RV 21.5-8 ~ *And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”*

God describes, through the vision to John, a picture of His church: a perfect symbol of our future heavenly home. And he says something of comfort to the innocent and the faithful—this is a **place of justice**: which will work wonderfully for those who accept Him, and terribly for those who reject Him.

PV 10.29-30 ~ *The way of the Lord is a stronghold to the blameless, but destruction to evildoers. ³⁰ The righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not dwell in the land.*

BD3: A Place of Mercy (NM 35.22-29)

So, we see that Moses first wants to make it clear what DOESN'T belong in the city of refuge: the intentional and unrepentant murderer. So, **who is the city for?** Moses continues to declare that it is a **place of mercy**.

NM 35.22-23 ~ *“But if he pushed him suddenly without enmity, or hurled anything on him without lying in wait ²³ or used a stone that could cause death, and without seeing him dropped it on him, so that he died, though he was not his enemy and did not seek his harm,*

EX: The city of refuge is built for the man who slips up—who kills a man, either in a moment of lack of judgment or by mistake. This person, who similarly took a life, is considered under a different standard from the person who willfully, hatefully, and evilly kills a man.

NM 35.24-29 ~ *then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood, in accordance with these rules. ²⁵ And the congregation shall rescue the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge to which he had fled, and he shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil.*

EX: The manslayer is brought to judgment between the people and the “**avenger of blood**”—the person who'd been given the authority to hunt down and bring the killer to justice for the honor and in the memory of the victim. And he must stay there—the city must be his home until the death of the high priest— *but after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession. (NM 35.28b) But what happens if he leaves?*

NM 35.26-27 ~ *But if the manslayer shall at any time go beyond the boundaries of his city of refuge to which he fled, ²⁷ and the avenger of blood finds him outside the boundaries of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood.*

SUM: The city of refuge was a place filled with the faulty, the failed, and the filthy. It was a **place of mercy**. Each of those who'd come to make it their home in their later lives had committed some terrible sin—causing harm and death and destruction to the innocent. But in this place, they found a chance at life—a protection from the “**avenger of blood**”. In this place, there was life, hope, safety, and **mercy**. *The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe. (PV 18.10)*

CONCLUSION – Reflected in the Church (NM 35.30-34)

In *The Fugitive*, the terrible thing about the story for Dr. Richard Kimble is that he couldn't find any way to show his innocence—any way other than to find the real killer. But Moses' had a way to ensure only the murderer should be put to death: through the requirement of witnesses.

NM 35.30-34 ~ *“If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses. But no person shall be put to death on the*