

Deuteronomy 19:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt separate three cities for thee.

Analysis

Wherefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt separate three cities for thee (עַל־כֵּן אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְעָה לְאֶמֶר שְׁלֹשׁ עָרִים תִּבְדִּיל לָךְ, al-ken anochi metzavvecha lemor shalosh arim tavidil lach)—badal (separate) means to set apart, consecrate for a specific purpose. These cities were holy in function, not in cultic sense—set apart to preserve innocent life.

The command for three cities (in Canaan proper; three more existed in Trans-Jordan, Numbers 35:14) ensured geographical accessibility. No Israelite should be more than 30 miles from refuge. Deuteronomy 19:3 commands making roads and dividing the land into districts to facilitate quick access. Talmudic tradition says signposts reading 'Refuge' marked the way. This practical infrastructure demonstrated God's concern that justice be accessible, not merely theoretical. Christ is our ultimate city of refuge—'God is our refuge and strength' (Psalm 46:1); we 'have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us' (Hebrews 6:18).

Historical Context

Joshua 20:7-8 identifies the six cities of refuge: Kedesh, Shechem, Hebron (western side); Bezer, Ramoth, Golan (eastern side). All were Levitical cities (Joshua 21), placing them under priestly oversight. Strategic placement ensured that anyone in Israel could reach refuge quickly. The system functioned throughout Israel's history and was still recognized in Jesus's time, though by then Roman law had superseded it.

