

# Deuteronomy 4:42

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

That the slayer might flee thither, which should kill his neighbour unawares, and hated him not in times past; and that fleeing unto one of these cities he might live:

## Analysis

**That the slayer might flee thither, which should kill his neighbour unawares, and hated him not in times past...**

Moses specifies the cities' purpose: refuge for the rotseach (רָצֵחַ, 'manslayer') who kills bivli da'at (בִּבְלֵי דָעַת, 'without knowledge/unintentionally'). Two conditions qualify for refuge: unintentional death and absence of prior hatred (velo soneh lo, וְלֹא שָׁנָא לוֹ). Premeditated murder forfeits sanctuary; accidental death without malice receives protection.

The Hebrew legal system distinguished intent from outcome—a remarkably sophisticated jurisprudence. Ancient Near Eastern cultures often practiced blood vengeance without examining motive; the blood-avenger (go'el hadam) could kill the slayer regardless of circumstance. Israel's law interrupted this cycle by requiring investigation and providing interim protection. Justice demanded examining the heart, not merely the result.

The manslayer who reached the refuge city vachai (וְחַי, 'shall live'). Life is preserved pending proper legal process. This system anticipates gospel realities: Christ is our city of refuge (Hebrews 6:18), to whom sinners flee for protection from the just consequences of transgression. In Him, those deserving death find life—not because they are innocent, but because sanctuary has been provided for the guilty who run to Him.

## Historical Context

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The cities of refuge provided asylum for those guilty of manslaughter but not premeditated murder. This law, rooted in earlier revelation (Numbers 35), balanced justice with mercy in Ancient Near Eastern culture where blood vengeance was customary. Moses' implementation of these cities before entering Canaan established legal infrastructure for the new society.

## Related Passages

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**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

**Psalm 19:1** — Heavens declare God's glory

## Study Questions

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1. How does the cities of refuge system anticipate the gospel truth that sinners can flee to Christ for protection from judgment?
2. What does it mean that biblical justice examines intent and motive, not merely outcomes?

## Interlinear Text

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את ירכץ ח אשר ית ס  
and that fleeing H8033 That the slayer H834 That the slayer H853  
H5127 H7523 H7523

לא והוא לא עת בבל רע זה  
his neighbour unawares H1847 H1931 H3808 and hated H0  
H7453 H1097 H8130

בבל ים מן הבעל ים מן  
him not in times past and that fleeing אל אם ת unto one H4480 cities H5892  
H8543 H8032 H5127 H413 H259 H4480 H5892

יתן בא לא  
of these he might live  
H411 H2425

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