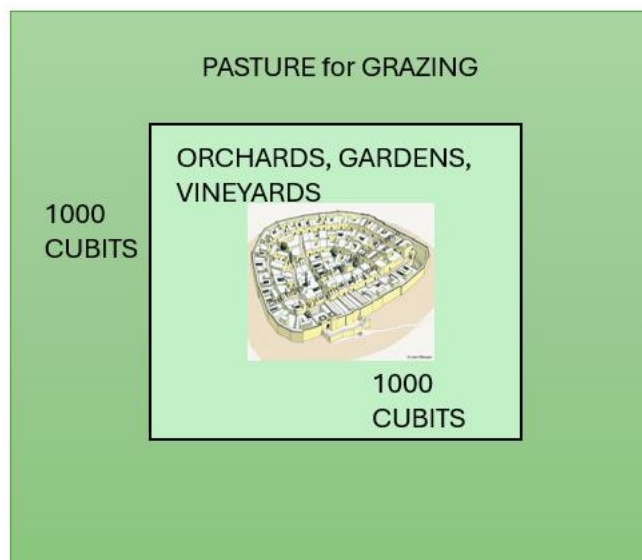




The first five verses in the chapter describe how cities given to the Levites were to be designed. The Levites we recall were not given any land to inherit, or pass down to their children. Instead being the Priests of the Lord was their inheritance. The nation were to pay tithes which would support this tribe, and they had to donate 48 cities to them to live in. In these verses, they are given instructions as to how these cities should be designed so as to give the Levites a degree of self sufficiency and convenience, seeing most of the time, they would be at work teaching or administering to the nation.



The cities would have looked something like this. The Bible over 4000 years old in parts, has examples of well thought-through city planning, long before the modern understanding of the need for optimisation of space, and design. Typically

for centuries, cities have just grown organically higgledy-piggledy, with no forethought. But the Scripture is all about forethought and planning and care, so to see municipal designers at work in scripture is to be no surprise.

This forethought care, extended even to the criminal justice system, and provision was made to those who had been accused of crimes they declared they were innocent of. It created space and a process whereby such tangled and difficult situations could become transparent and easier to deal with. The system devised also allowed for those who were genuinely innocent to be protected.

This system was the provision for six cities chosen at equi-distant locations within the land, so that no one was more than one days journey to reach these cities. The chosen cities as shown on the

above map were to be known as Cities of Refuge, three either side of the River Jordan.

The purpose of these cities was to provide a place of safety for someone who had been involved in a terrible incident, whereby they had caused the death of somebody else. It was designed to be a refuge for if this manslaughter had been committed by accident. They would be running for their life, to escape the avenger of blood. The Avenger of Blood was a member of the dead person's family, who was a near kinsman, (Hebrew *Gael*) who would take the family responsibility to ensure that justice was done. The drastic action of seeking vengeance, was not done out of spite – we might think it wrong. Especially when we consider the word of the Almighty in Romans 12:19 ... *Vengeance is mine, I will repay...* But as part of this prerogative, God instructed Israel, that the land belonged to Him, and that it should not be corrupted with the wicked ways of the nation, and that the land cannot be cleansed of blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it. See verse 33, this is a key verse. Thus God commanded that a murderer should be put to death, in order to acquit the land of the blood shed, to ensure justice was done.

Of course this posed a problem, what if an accident took place, and someone caused the death of somebody – unintentionally? Should they deserve to die? No, it was a mistake, there was no intention. But still a price would have to be paid. Typical to human nature, murderers would also claim asylum as well, so the system was designed to determine the difference.

Examples are given of a typical accident – an axe head flying off the end of the axe shaft, and smashing someone in the head. The Near Kinsmen of the dead person on hearing the news, would be given (or take) the responsibility of chasing after the killer to ensure the death of the relative was avenged, and that the land was not corrupted, and that evil would not befall the whole tribe. The killer, would be terrified for his life, not only had he just caused the death

of a friend, or a coworker, he was now in danger of losing his own life. He would know that justice would be served very quickly, so he would run for his life. He would have to abandon the job in hand, abandon his wife and family, parents, everything, for his very life, as he would drop everything, and gasping for his very breath, every energy, every effort, to reach the gates of the nearest city of refuge. Once within, he would be safe, and would have to explain the elders of the Levitical priest of the situation. Immunity would be granted him, until his case would be heard, and he would be forced to stand before the congregation.

When the facts of the case were carefully laid out and true and sincere witnesses found, the killer would be found to be either innocent or guilty. If guilty, then the Avenger of Blood would put him to death. If innocent, then the killer, would be acquitted of the charge of murder, but still guilty of manslaughter would have to remain in the City of Refuge until the death of the current High Priest.

This law outlined here in this chapter is also described in detail in Deuteronomy 19, and Joshua 20.

Though it is obvious and clear, that this was such an important law, that it is repeated three times, in detail, to ensure justice and equity in the land, it is also emphasised, because behind such a law, is a fundamental teaching of the gospel.

We recall a recent Bible class in Proverbs 18:10 *The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runs into it, and is safe.*

Hebrews 6:18 also: *...we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:*

As the nation of Isarel were shown by the law of Moses, there was no escape from the condemnation of the law. All were guilty of death. So it is today, in the era of the times of the Gentiles, just as it has ever been, all are guilty before God, and because of sin, comes the condemnation of death. Law as a school master bringing us to Christ

– He is the name to which we must run to seek a refuge for our own crimes – Acts 4:12 *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

Knowing we are condemned by our own sin, it is not long before the Avenger of Blood – the Judge in the last day, will come to cleanse the land of the sins we have committed by sentencing us to everlasting death.

Yet not all sins are committed deliberately, nor are all sins unrepentant of. The faithful Israelite – after the Spirit – knows there is only one way to go – to follow the strait and narrow pathway for his very life to reach the desired haven as soon as possible.

The city whose Builder and Maker is God, is that refuge. Whilst remaining within the refuge the sinner is safe. His case will be looked into carefully. At the time of Judgement, it will be determined if he was a fake all along, and defiant, seeking to cover his own sins. But those who admit they are culpable, and deplore the consequences of their actions, admit the weakness of the flesh, they are covered, by the life of another. They will not be found guilty. The death of the High Priest, is the moment by which they can be set free. *The truth shall make you free*, they set free by the *perfect law of liberty*, restoration to the family, to the land of his possession (verse 28) – even eternal life.

borders and boundaries was an act of love, and kindness, and an example to all those who seek the haven of the Promised Land.

Brother Terry