

Exegetical Notes, Deuteronomy 4:41-43

“Sanctuary Cities”

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Deuteronomy 4:41-43 (see notes from Numbers 35:6-34)

Verses 41-43

Then Moses set aside three cities east of the Jordan,⁴² to which anyone who had killed a person could flee if they had unintentionally killed a neighbor without malice aforethought. They could flee into one of these cities and save their life.

⁴³ The cities were these: Bezer in the wilderness plateau, for the Reubenites; Ramoth in Gilead, for the Gadites; and Golan in Bashan, for the Manassites.

- In Numbers 35, six cities were to be given to the Levitical or Priestly Family. These cities were to be under the control of the Church. Three of these cities were to be in Israel proper and 3 were to be on the eastern side of the Jordan in the territories given to Reuben, Gad, and Manassah. This passage deals with the setting aside of the three cities on the eastern side of the Jordan, Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan. Before leaving the east side of the river, Moses established the sanctuary cities there as he had been commanded to do.
- The passage in Numbers is clear. These cities are to be places of refuge for someone who has accidentally taken the life of another human being. Numbers makes it clear that if the death was caused deliberately with malicious intention, the person who took the life of another was to be executed. His life was forfeited. The “avenger of blood,” the next of kin to the murder victim was to execute the murderer. The Sanctuary City was not to protect the criminal.
- However, if the murder was accidental and unintentional, the person who committed it could flee to one of these cities to await trial. In the Sanctuary City, the accused person would be kept safe from the avenger of blood by the authority of the priestly family until he could have a fair hearing. His fate would be determined by the elders of that city, but until the trial he would be protected.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Sanctuary Cities*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)