

The ESV Study Bible:

Protecting Life. This section corresponds to the sixth commandment, “You shall not murder” (5:17).

- I. Intro to cities of refuge (Verses 1-3)
 - a. This is picking up after Moses talked about testing prophets.
 - b. Moses also had talked about the 4 offices of leadership
 - a. Prophet
 - b. Priest
 - c. judge
 - d. king
 - c. Deut. 4:41-43 also was about cities of refuge
 - d. New American Commentary: The cities selected—Kedesh,¹³³ Shechem, and Hebron—would not need to be built from scratch but would fall to the Israelites by conquest and be unscathed (cf. 6:10–11). Each would be centrally located within one of three districts into which the land would be divided (v. 2) and each must be of ready access to anyone in the land who needed sanctuary (v. 3). Kedesh served the Galilee region, Shechem the central hill country, and Hebron the highlands of Judah.¹
 - e. now, Moses comes back to when they enter the land.
 - f. Verse 1: this anticipates a time when the Lord brings victory by “cutting off” the other nations.
 - g. Notice Moses says that they settle into “their” cities and “their” houses.
 - h. Deut 6:10-11 talked about this.
 - i. Now, verse 2: they are to set aside 3 cities
 - j. These cities must be in the middle of the land
 - k. Notice it says that the Lord gives them to possess.
 - l. Verse 3 gives more detail: prepare the roads, divide it into 3 parts
 - m. There is a repetition of the idea that the Lord gives them this land as a possession.
 - n. Verse 3 tells the purpose: that any manslayer may flee there.
 - o. Joshua 20:2 talks about this
- II. Example of city of refuge need (verses 4-7); verse 7 is a summary
 - a. Numbers 35:9-34 expands on this.
 - b. Verse 4 begins the details of how this will happen.
 - c. A manslayer (one who kills) someone may flee there.
 - d. This is when the person kills someone UNINTENTIONALLY
 - e. SPECIFIED: NOT HATING HIM PREVIOUSLY
 - f. What would be equivalent to this today?
 - g. A court can protect someone when need be.
 - h. Verse 5 gives a case study
 - i. This envisions an accident in the forest when they are cutting wood
 - j. Verse 6: if there is no city of refuge the person will hunt down to kill him. However, the distance quenches the anger or prevents the vengeance.
 - k. Verse 7 is a summary.

¹³³ Of the many places by this name, the one in view here is Kedesh of Galilee (T. Qades), ca. seven miles northwest of Hazor. Cf. Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 222.

¹ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 276.

- I. The New American Commentary gives extra info: **but Num 35 provides explicit instruction about its implementation. It was forbidden in cases of accidental homicide (as here); but if the slayer was found with a weapon in hand or had been known to harbor malice toward the deceased, he must be put to death by the avenger himself (Num 35:16–21). All of this, of course, presupposes due process, the assembly of citizens having determined the guilt or innocence of the alleged murderer (Num 35:24). If the verdict was in favor of the accused, he was to be protected by the assembly and allowed to return to the city of refuge from which he had been earlier brought for trial (v. 25).**²

III. 3 more cities of refuge (verses 8-10); verse 10 is a summary

- a. This starts with “if”
- b. This is a case study based on the “if”
- c. If the territory is enlarged giving all the land promised, and “if” they follow the Lord’s commands (verse 9), loving the Lord and walking in His ways, then they get 3 more cities.

Ge 15:18 That day the LORD made a covenant with Abram: “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River—

- d. Verse 10 is another summary: innocent blood is not shed.
- e. Notice the continued repetition of “the land the Lord God is giving you to possess.”
- f. The Lord gives the land.

IV. If hatred turn them over (verses 11-13)

- a. Now, here is a case study.
- b. Hatred is considered equal to murder (Numbers 35 and Matthew 5:21)
- c. The question might be asked, “what do we do if someone flees to the city of refuge but that person is guilty. This explains that.
- d. Verse 11 tells just that: a man hates his neighbor.
- e. The man lies in wait for him--- **this is premeditated murder**
- f. Then the man flees to a city of refuge
- g. Verses 12-13 tell us what should happen.
- h. The elders of the city shall send and take him from there and deliver him into the hand of the avenger.
- i. Interesting in this case he is to go into the hand of the avenger.
- j. Verse 13: no pity
- k. Purge the blood from the innocent
- l. This makes it go well with them.

V. Don’t move boundary markers (verse 14)

- a. Verse 14 has to do with a land boundary dispute.
- b. Back them, as today, they had markers for property.
- c. The New American Commentary shares: *At first glance v. 14 appears to be irrelevant to either its preceding or following context, for it speaks of moving a neighbor’s boundary stone (or, better, encroaching upon a neighbor’s property, as Heb. nāsag in the hiphil suggests; cf. Prov 23:10). However, it is well known that a common cause of hostility between persons is a failure to agree upon common boundaries and to respect property rights.¹³⁷ **A major way of avoiding strife and even homicide among landowners would be to observe scrupulously the sanctity of personal landholdings and to desist from unlawful use or appropriation of one another’s territory. An example of failure in this regard is Ahab’s seizing of Naboth’s vineyard by perjury and murder, a transgression that***

² Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 277.

¹³⁷ Kaufman, “The Structure of the Deuteronomic Law,” 137.

eventually cost him his own life (1 Kgs 21:1–26; 22:37–38).¹³⁸ *The reason Ahab’s crime was so serious was that he was trying to rob Naboth not just of land but of his patrimony (1 Kgs 21:3), the inheritance originally allocated to his ancestors by the Lord himself. This is also what was at stake here in Deuteronomy as reference to “inheritance” (naḥlâ) makes clear (cf. Lev 25:23; Num 36:7).*³

- d. *In the ancient world boundary markers protected the property rights of individuals (v. 14). Many nations as well as Israel regarded them as sacred. Stones several feet high marked the boundaries of royal grants.*²¹⁵ *The Romans executed people who moved boundary markers.*²¹⁶ *Tribal boundaries were particularly significant in the Promised Land because Yahweh, the owner of the land, determined them.*⁴
- e. This is showing that it was okay to own property and ownership was respected.

VI. Witnesses (verses 15-21)

- a. This still related to cities of refuge as it deals with the judgment.
- b. The Moody Bible Commentary shares that this section relates to the 9th commandment “not to bear false witness against his neighbor.”
- c. *Even Jezebel knew that she had to hire more than one witness to testify against Naboth if her case were to have any merit (1 Kgs 21:10, 13). Nor was such a stipulation required, for only serious allegations such as murder for the law here speaks of “any crime or offense” (v. 15).*⁵
- d. A single witness does not “rise up against a man.”
- e. In other words, a single witness does not carry out judgment.
- f. This applies to iniquity and sin.
- g. Iniquity can carry the idea of gross sin. In this case it seems that it is just generic for guilt of sin.
- h. Sin is a general word for crossing a moral or divine law.
- i. A matter must be confirmed by the evidence 2 or 3 witnesses. Those 2 or 3 witnesses are the evidence.
- j. Verses 16-19 are about a false witness.
- k. Both of those who have the dispute, the accused and the malicious witness are to stand before the:
 - a. The Lord
 - b. The priests
 - c. And the judges.
- l. Verse 18: this is supposed to be investigated thoroughly.
- m. Verse 19: if false, he gets the punishment meant for his brother.
- n. Purge the evil is repeated.
- o. Verse 20 shows that as everyone observes this they will be warned and stray from this sin.
- p. Verse 21:
- q. Eye for an eye, etc.

¹³⁸ For the linkage between the present statute and the Naboth incident, see C. C. Carmichael, *Law and Narrative in the Bible* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1985), 117–22.

³ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 279.

²¹⁵ 215. Kline, “Deuteronomy,” p. 182.

²¹⁶ 216. Keil and Delitzsch, 3:399.

⁴ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 19:14.

⁵ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 280.

