

What were the cities of refuge in the Old Testament?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/cities-of-refuge.html>

The cities of refuge were part of the distribution of the Promised Land among the twelve tribes of Israel. Only one tribe, the Levites, was not given land to develop. Instead, they were to be the priests of the Lord and the overseers of the tabernacle and all its rites and furnishings. Only the Levites could carry and set up the tabernacle (Numbers 2:5-13). As the Levites were to have no territorial domain allocated to them like the other tribes in the conquest of Canaan, they were to be distributed throughout the land in certain cities appropriated to their use. Part of their inheritance consisted of forty-eight cities spread throughout the land (Numbers 35:6-7). Of these forty-eight cities, six were designated as cities of refuge. The cities were Kedesh, Shechem, Hebron, Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan (Joshua 20:7-8).

The Mosaic Law stated that anyone who committed a murder was to be put to death (Exodus 21:14). But for unintentional deaths, God set aside these cities to which the killer could flee for refuge (Exodus 21:13). He would be safe from the avenger—the family member charged with avenging the victim's death (Numbers 35:19)—until the case could go to trial. The congregation would judge to find if the attacker acted unintentionally. If he did, he would return to the city of refuge and live there safely until the death of the high priest who was in office at the time of the trial, at which point he could return to his property. If the attacker left the city of refuge before the death of the high priest, however, the avenger would have the right to kill him (Numbers 35:24-28).

The establishment of those privileged sanctuaries among the cities of the Levites is probably traceable to the idea that the Levites would be the most suitable and impartial judges, that their presence and counsels might calm or restrain the stormy passions of

the blood avenger. By their consecration as priests, the Levites were mediators between the Israelites and God. As such, they would have been gifted to calmly mediate between the attacker and the victim's family, ensuring that no further bloodshed would occur.

The cities of refuge can be seen as types of Christ, in whom sinners find a refuge from the destroyer of our souls. Just as a person could seek refuge in the cities set up for that purpose, we flee to Christ for refuge (Hebrews 6:18). We run to Christ to escape the danger we are in from the curse and condemnation of the law, from the wrath of God, and from an eternity in hell. Only Christ provides refuge from these things, and it is to Him alone that we must run. Just as the cities were open to all who fled to them for safety, it is Christ who provides safety to all who come to Him for refuge from sin and its punishment.