

THE COVENANT CODE: SPIRITUAL SLAVERY, PERSONAL INJURY EXODUS 21:1-14

There is also a spiritual component to the concept of slavery. Mankind has been in perpetual bondage to Satan and sin since the Fall of Adam and the only way anyone can experience true freedom is through Christ Jesus. Even the world has been groaning under slavery to corruption. Perhaps this is why God has allowed slavery to exist in the world; it is an object lesson for understanding the bondage in which mankind is mired apart from Christ which is a condition of slavery far worse than being in bondage in this life. Apart from Christ, spiritual slavery exists for eternity and that condition will never be limited by time as physical slavery is limited by time because once one dies, that form of slavery ceases. Spiritual slavery can never cease except in the Savior.

Lending some exegetical support to this concept is the fact that Yahweh reminded the Israelites several times that He had redeemed them out of slavery.

Deuteronomy 7:8 ⁸but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed [פָּדָה, λυτρόω] you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Redeem, פָּדָה, λυτρόω, in Hebrew means to achieve the transfer of ownership from one to another through the payment of a price or an equivalent substitute. The freedom of slaves must be purchased. Egypt is a type of the world and the Israelites were slaves in it just as people are slaves to sin in the world. This concept is

expressed in the New Testament in terms of the price paid by Christ in order to pay the sin debt for the world and to redeem all who accept that payment on their behalf.

1 Peter 1:18–19 ¹⁸knowing that you were not redeemed [λυτρόω] with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, ¹⁹but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood of Christ*.

Redeem, λυτρόω, in the Greek means, in the middle voice, to release by payment of a ransom; to redeem, and in the passive voice to be redeemed or ransomed.

In the Old Testament, the word refers only one time to redemption used in relation to redeeming Israel from her sins rather than from slavery. This Psalm is ultimately looking forward to the Second Coming and the ultimate redemption of Israel.

Psalm 130:7–8 ⁷O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is loving-kindness, And with Him is abundant redemption [יְהוָה]. ⁸And He will redeem [יְהוָה] Israel From all his iniquities.

“[T]here is coming a time when the LORD will deliver his people from their sins, once and for all; accordingly, until then every act of forgiveness, every deliverance, is but a preview or a harbinger of that time. So Israel is called to keep on hoping for this, expecting it, looking for it, preparing for it. In that regard this expectation falls in line with the New Testament emphasis on the hope of the believer for the second coming of the Messiah.... [T]his expression of redemption is not used for sin alone, but for deliverance from some crisis or catastrophe, of-

ten caused by sin. Thus, in the future, the LORD will redeem his people from all their crises. How so? By removing any iniquities that caused them and setting them free. So once again the emphasis is that there is forgiveness with God, a forgiveness that will be realized through redemption from all sin and its effects."¹

In terms of our salvation, the Bible uses the language of the slave market. The difference is most of us are not in bondage to other people, but, much worse, we are in bondage to Satan, sin, and the world system. However, Christ has purchased us out of our bondage to sin and freed us in Him. That's why Paul and John could correctly say we have been bought with a price. Being purchased by Christ carries with it the responsibility to act as He wants us to act, namely, walking by the Spirit (Gal. 6:16) and in so doing glorifying God.

1 Corinthians 6:20 ²⁰For you have been bought [ἀγοράζω] with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Revelation 5:9 ⁹And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased [ἀγοράζω] for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

Bought/purchased, ἀγοράζω, means to buy and it is derived from ἀγορά which means market place, hence the idea that believers have been purchased out of the market place or the slave market of sin. The concept is the one purchasing the person out of the slave market procured the right of possession. Because Christ paid the price for the world's sin debt, the sinner is no longer obligated to pay it, and, if the sinner accepts that payment on his behalf, he becomes free in

¹ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms, vol. 3 (90-150)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2016), 717.

Christ. He can refuse the payment and the subsequent freedom it provides and instead remain in bondage to sin, but he doesn't have to do that. If anyone chooses to remain in slavery, in slavery he will remain, but if he chooses to be free in Christ, he can do that and be spiritually free.

Through the Fall, the entire created order has been subjected to slavery. Whatever the world was meant to be when it was created of which the Garden of Eden seems to be the prototype, it fell into decay and discord at the Fall. Earthquakes, volcanos, tornados, and other natural disasters were not supposed to be part of the created order. Redemption of the created order will solve these issues.

Romans 8:20–21 ²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

As the result of the Fall, every human being has been subjected to slavery and the slave master is none other than Satan who is called the prince of the power of the air and the god of this world. Right now and to the extent God allows, the whole world is subjected to the slavery of Satan.

2 Corinthians 4:4 ⁴in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Ephesians 2:2 ²in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

1 John 5:19 ¹⁹We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

The Bible makes it very clear that slavery is a heavy yoke, a burden, and to be in this form of slavery is to be in bondage to sin and to the elemental things of the satanic world system.

Galatians 5:1 ¹It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Acts 8:23 ²³“For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.”

Romans 7:14 ¹⁴For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

Galatians 4:3 ³So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.

The things of the world can be a very powerful draw, tempting believers to fail to stand firm and return to slavery. Do not think it cannot happen to you; other believers have succumbed to the temptations Satan is continually putting before us. Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:1-11) are prime examples. Demas, who was a coworker with Paul during his imprisonment, fell away because he could not stand firm and he returned to the world (2 Tim. 4:10).

Paul revealed in no uncertain terms that people are slaves of the one to whom we present ourselves and there are only two options. We can be slaves of Satan, sin, and the world system, or we can be in bondage to Christ Jesus. One system, Satan's, is incomprehensibly evil and the other system, Christ's, is merciful and loving, also beyond comprehension, but in a very good way. The final reali-

zation of these truths will not be personally, completely comprehended until people are either in the presence of Christ for eternity or in the lake of fire forever separated from God, but the truth of these things will be fully manifest at that time. For those who have rejected Christ, there will be no going back; their rejection of Him is finalized at the moment they physically die. For those who will be in His presence for eternity, their belief in Him at a moment in time resulted in passing from death to life with all that entails for eternity.

Romans 6:6-7 ⁶knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷for he who has died is freed [δικαιόω] from sin.

Once we believe, we are baptized into His death by means of Spirit baptism and our body is no longer enslaved to sin as it was before we came to faith. Freed, δικαιόω, means to be justified, to be declared righteous. That is legal, courtroom terminology meaning we have been declared innocent and righteous, not of ourselves but in Christ.

Romans 6:16–19 ¹⁶Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

Those who worship idols are enslaved to them, and we know that the idols in and of themselves are nothing, but they do represent demons and demonic

forces which are very real; therefore, worshiping idols is simply another manifestation of being held captive in spiritual slavery. We don't have to worship idols in the form of pagan images as the ancients did, we have our own idols today. If we allow something to become an idol in our lives, then we have submitted to that thing and are in bondage to it. For example, money is not evil in and of itself, but when we idolize it and thereby become enslaved to it, it becomes the root of evil and causes us to wander away from the faith in pursuit of it (1 Tim. 6:10).

Galatians 4:8 ⁸However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.

1 Corinthians 10:20 ²⁰No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons.

The Bible also makes it very clear that Christ broke the spirit of slavery and believers are now in bondage to Him because we have been placed in the family of God by means of adoption. The spirit of slavery causes people to live in fear. The spirit of slavery in unbelievers is replaced by a spirit of adoption accomplished through the avenue of faith. The spirit of adoption is a spirit of love and kindness expressed in terms of the familial relationship. Fear has no place in the life of a believer when surrounded by the love and righteousness the spirit of adoption brings.

Romans 8:15 ¹⁵For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

Romans 6:22 ²²But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

Ephesians 6:6 ⁶not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

The sad fact is believers can voluntarily place themselves back under the yoke of slavery. They can't lose their salvation, but they can certainly lose rewards and blessings at the judgment seat of Christ because while engaging in sin we cannot be glorifying Christ which is the criteria for rewards. Unbelievers can deceive believers and lead them back into slavery.

Galatians 2:4 ⁴But *it* was because of the false brethren [ψευδάδελφος] secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.

The false brethren, ψευδάδελφος, are unbelievers, posing as believers, preaching a gospel of faith plus works which cannot save anyone and leaves people in slavery to the world. One of the major problems with that situation is the people who believe the false gospel don't know they are still enslaved to sin; they erroneously think they have been saved. These deceived people are often the hardest to get to believe the true gospel of grace. They remain in deception because they don't know the Word of God well enough to be led back to the truth.

2 Peter 2:17–22 ¹⁷These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. ¹⁸For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, ¹⁹promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. ²⁰For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in

them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. ²¹For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. ²²It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT," and, "A sow, after washing, *returns* to wallowing in the mire."

Paul is referring to unbelieving false teachers, those "for whom the black darkness has been reserved," who steal into the sheepfold and deceive the sheep into falling back into the slavery of the world system. When that happens, the state of the believer becomes worse for them than before they came to faith. It is possible for believers to fall away and return to the bondage of sin. Those who propagate the false gospels of Lordship salvation and the perseverance of the saints cannot understand the truth presented in this Scripture because their theology will not allow for believers to return to the slavery of sin. Even though the Scripture reveals these people came to faith because "they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," the Lordship salvation advocates must claim these people were only professing believers and not among the truly saved. Once a believer returns to the bondage of sin, he ceases to be an effective instrument of the Lord, his personal testimony is damaged, he faces the temporal consequences resulting from the commission of personal sins, he risks the temporal disciplinary chastisement of the Lord, and the loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The next section of the Covenant Code (Ex. 21:12-36) deals with the issue of personal injuries whether intentional or accidental. These things can happen

in a myriad of ways and this section does not cover every contingency, but it does cover some issues that were common to that time and place and provides guidelines for the procedure to follow in similar cases. Judges are referenced in this section, the inference being that impartial arbiters were to investigate cases and use their judgment in deciding those cases; therefore, it wasn't necessary for the Lord to set rules for every situation that may or may not come to pass. These commands were intended to facilitate an orderly Israelite society wherein justice and fairness prevailed and the people could safely and tranquilly live their lives. Spiritually, this related to the fact that Israel was to be a nation of priests to the rest of the world therefore, Israel as a nation of peace and justice, would have stood out in sharp contrast among all the pagan nations in the rest of the world.

The first set of commands concerned murder and manslaughter.

Exodus 21:12,14 ¹²“He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.... ¹⁴“If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die.

Verses 12 and 14 deal with an intentional act of homicide which we call premeditated murder. This relates to the sixth commandment, “You shall not murder” (Ex. 20:13). No one who committed a murder was to go unpunished. The death penalty for murder was predicated on the fact man was made in God's image. Killing a man is therefore an attack on the holy God who created man.

Genesis 9:6 ⁶“Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.

It is solely the prerogative of the Creator God to take a life and it is up to God to determine the life span of a person; it is not up to other people to decide another person's life span in either God's place or in the victim's place. When a man decides to replace God and take a life, God demands that his life be forfeited in return.

A Jewish theologian named Hayim S. Nahmani made some observations concerning murder based on the Law. "... in the case of homicide, in the harm that was caused by the *actus reus* [perpetrator], three parties are involved. God, as the owner, the dead man represented by his kinsman, and the murderer, i.e., the killing has violated God's right of ownership and also violated the dead man's right to life that was leased to him by God and also the rights of the dead man's kinsman by depriving him of his services. This attitude is reflected in the manner of punishment. In the case where there is a challenge to God's authority only, the whole community, as agents of God, inflicts the death penalty usually by stoning and in the case of homicide it is the duty of the kinsman to inflict the death penalty. He is called the "avenger of blood."²

The manner in which the death penalty was to be imposed was not specified in this Scripture, but in the Old Testament stoning for offenses other than murder was the method used for infractions requiring the imposition of death. In

² Hayim S. Nahmani, *Human Rights in the Old Testament* (Tel Aviv: Joshua Chachik Publishing House, Ltd., 1964), 53 quoted in John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1986), 231.

Leviticus 24:10-16, one who blasphemed God was stoned to death, in Numbers 15:35-36, a man who violated the Sabbath in the wilderness was stoned, and in Deuteronomy 17:2-7 idolaters were to be stoned. It is reasonable to conclude that stoning was the generally prescribed method for imposing the death penalty, but other Scriptures concerning murder simply inform us the murderer was to be put to death at the hands of the blood avenger without specifying the means. It is an oversimplification to suggest that the only method of death sanctioned for use by the Israelites was death by stoning. Murder seems to have been an exception to that and the offender could have been killed by whatever means the kinsman had at his disposal when he found him. Moses elaborated on the act of premeditated murder in Numbers 35 in which the manner of execution was not specified.

Numbers 35:16–21 ¹⁶But if he struck him down with an iron object, so that he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. ¹⁷If he struck him down with a stone in the hand, by which he will die, and *as a result* he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. ¹⁸Or if he struck him with a wooden object in the hand, by which he might die, and *as a result* he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. ¹⁹The blood avenger himself shall put the murderer to death; he shall put him to death when he meets him. ²⁰If he pushed him of hatred, or threw something at him lying in wait and *as a result* he died, ²¹or if he struck him down with his hand in enmity, and *as a result* he died, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death, he is a murderer; the blood avenger shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.

It is noteworthy that God's commands concerning murder among the Israelites was not conditioned on class or on economic status. This was unusual because other nations in the Ancient Near East did just that. In those nations, the

death penalty was imposed only in cases where a person murdered someone who was of equal or higher class. When someone in a lower socio-economic class was murdered, the upper class could pay damages to the lower-class kinsman and put an end to the incident, or they could have a lower-class person who was a member of their household put to death instead of the actual murderer.³ In contrast, among the Israelites, anyone, apart from class distinction, committing a murder was to be put to death.

The concept of paying off the kinsman of the deceased was specifically prohibited. The murderer had to pay for his crime and he couldn't buy his way out of it.

Numbers 35:31 ³¹Moreover, you shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death.

A similar, but not exactly analogous, situation occurred in Israel concerning the Gibeonites which also illustrates the concept of blood feud or blood vengeance. Saul had put some of them to death and David inquired of them about making atonement in order to mend relations with them (2 Sam. 21:1-9). Their request was to put seven of Saul's descendants to death.

2 Samuel 21:4–5, 9 ⁴Then the Gibeonites said to him, "We have no concern of silver or gold with Saul or his house, nor is it for us to put any man to death in Israel." And he said, "I will do for you whatever you say." ⁵So they said to the king, "The man who consumed us and who planned to exterminate us from remaining within any border of Israel, ... ⁹Then he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the mountain before the LORD, so that the

³ Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Exodus*, gen. ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 485, n. 120.

seven of them fell together; and they were put to death in the first days of harvest at the beginning of barley harvest.

In the societies of that time, in terms of blood vengeance, no distinction was made between a premeditated murder and an accidental death. Israel set a positive example in that regard. In Israel, facts and circumstances dealing with the death of a person were used to differentiate between the two circumstances. In one situation, an accidental death, the death penalty was not to be exacted but in the case of murder, it was to be enforced. Exodus 21:13 deals with the fact of accidental death.

Exodus 21:13 ¹³“But if he did not lie in wait *for him*, but God let *him* fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee.

This verse reveals a hint concerning sanctuary cities or the cities of refuge which will be fully revealed in Numbers 35:6-34. The cities of refuge were not for those who committed premeditated murder; they only were for those who accidentally killed a person. For murderers, refuge was not available. The person was to remain in the city of refuge until he could stand trial before the congregation in order to determine whether or not he was culpable for the death.

Numbers 35:9-15 ⁹Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁰“Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, ¹¹then you shall select for yourselves cities to be your cities of refuge, that the manslayer who has killed any person unintentionally may flee there. ¹²‘The cities shall be to you as a refuge from the avenger [גְּאוּלִּים גְּאֹל גְּאֹל], so that the manslayer will not die until he stands before the congregation for trial. ¹³‘The cities which you are to give shall be your six cities of refuge. ¹⁴‘You shall give three cities across the Jordan and three cities in the land of Canaan; they are to be cities of refuge. ¹⁵‘These six cities shall be for refuge for the sons of Israel, and for

the alien and for the sojourner among them; that anyone who kills a person unintentionally may flee there.

Avenger has several forms, גָּאֵל גָּאֵל גְּאֹלִים, which, in the context of the kinsman or blood avenger refer to the one who is responsible for avenging the murder of a relative. This is also the same word used for Naomi's relatives, Boaz and the closer relative, who had the opportunity to redeem Elimelech's estate in the book of Ruth.

The parallel passage in Deuteronomy 19:1-7 makes it clear that one who accidentally kills a person is not deserving of the death penalty.

Deuteronomy 19:4–6 ⁴“Now this is the case of the manslayer who may flee there and live: when he kills his friend unintentionally, not hating him previously—⁵as when a *man* goes into the forest with his friend to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down the tree, and the iron *head* slips off the handle and strikes his friend so that he dies—he may flee to one of these cities and live; ⁶otherwise the avenger of blood might pursue the manslayer in the heat of his anger, and overtake him, because the way is long, and take his life, though he was not deserving of death, since he had not hated him previously.

The congregation was to determine whether or not the death was a murder or an accident. If they found the death to be accidental, the person was to return to the city of refuge until the high priest died at which time he was free to leave without fear of retaliation from the deceased's kinsman. If congregation refers to the cities of refuge, then most of the assembly would be composed of Levites because these cities were the cities given to that tribe.

Numbers 35:22–25 ²²“But if he pushed him suddenly without enmity, or threw something at him without lying in wait, ²³or with any deadly object of stone, and without seeing it dropped on him so that he died, while he was not his enemy nor seeking his injury, ²⁴then the congregation shall judge between the slayer

and the blood avenger according to these ordinances. ²⁵The congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the blood avenger, and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge to which he fled; and he shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil.

However, if the person decided to leave the city of refuge before the high priest's death, he could be killed by the kinsman blood avenger.

Numbers 35:26–28 ²⁶But if the manslayer at any time goes beyond the border of his city of refuge to which he may flee, ²⁷and the blood avenger finds him outside the border of his city of refuge, and the blood avenger kills the manslayer, he will not be guilty of blood ²⁸because he should have remained in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest. But after the death of the high priest the manslayer shall return to the land of his possession.

No person who was relegated to the city of refuge could have his freedom from that city ransomed or secured by means of bribery; he had to stay there until the high priest died otherwise he could legitimately be put to death by the surviving kinsman.

Numbers 35:32 ³²You shall not take ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to live in the land before the death of the priest.

The only person who was to suffer the death penalty for murder was the person who committed the murder; no one else was to pay the price he was obligated to pay.

Deuteronomy 24:16 ¹⁶“Fathers shall not be put to death for *their* sons, nor shall sons be put to death for *their* fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.

One other very important element that was added to the procedure for determining guilt or innocence dealt with the testimony needed for a conviction. There had to be more than one witness in order to convict someone.

Numbers 35:30 ³⁰If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death at the evidence of witnesses, but no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness.

Deuteronomy 19:15 ¹⁵"A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.

This has a very important application for the administration of criminal justice today, or at least it should. A lot of news is made in this country about innocent people who have been wrongly convicted of crimes. I have noted that this is almost always the result of faulty evidentiary procedures that would not happen if the testimony of more than one witness was required. Frequently, a faulty conviction is the result of a mistaken identification of the suspect and that is the only piece of evidence used to convict. Eyewitness identifications are somewhat unreliable and should never be the sole witness at trial. A witness may be physical evidence or a confession in addition to personal testimony, but more than one witness would be a check against any mistakes made by using only a single witness.

The purpose behind the death penalty was to cleanse the land. The spilling of blood pollutes the land and only the blood of the man who caused the shedding of blood could expiate it.

Numbers 35:33–34 ³³So you shall not pollute the land in which you are; for blood pollutes the land and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. ³⁴You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD am dwelling in the midst of the sons of Israel.'"

This is speaking about murder, but there is a sense that any blood spilled in any manner pollutes the land because death was not the intention of God's original creation. For example, David shed much blood in warfare that was sanctioned by God, yet he was not allowed to build the Temple because he had shed so much blood on the earth (1 Chron. 22:8). Some theologians suggest David unrighteously shed blood at times and that's why he was not allowed to build the Temple, but the Scripture doesn't reveal that as a reason. The entire problem of shed blood's pollution, in whatever fashion, may be why God required the person who accidentally killed someone to reside in the sanctuary city until the high priest died whose death symbolically expiated the blood that was accidentally shed. Some form of expiation was required, which is why the death penalty was allowed for murder, but it would have been unjust to subject a person to the death penalty for a true accidental death.

As noted, there was no protection for the murderer even in the cities of refuge. Somewhere along the way and apart from the Mosaic Law, the practice developed that a miscreant could go to an altar and grab onto the horns on the four corners of it and be protected there. Whether this applies to all altars in the land that were built to worship Yahweh, or just the Tabernacle/Temple is unclear. Since approaching the altar in an unworthy manner could result in death even for Aaron and his sons (Ex. 28:43), it is somewhat puzzling why anyone other than a priest thought they could approach the altar in an effort to es-

cape justice, but they did. There are two examples in the Old Testament where that happened.

In the first case, Adonijah feared for his life after he attempted to usurp David's throne and Solomon was anointed king instead (1 Kings 1:50-53). Solomon sent men to remove him from the altar and he was spared until he craftily tried to usurp the throne a second time and then Solomon had him executed. Simply going to the altar did not save him; if he had been found worthy, he would have been spared.

1 Kings 1:50–53 ⁵⁰And Adonijah was afraid of Solomon, and he arose, went and took hold of the horns of the altar. ⁵¹Now it was told Solomon, saying, “Behold, Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon, for behold, he has taken hold of the horns of the altar, saying, ‘Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.’” ⁵²Solomon said, “If he is a worthy man, not one of his hairs will fall to the ground; but if wickedness is found in him, he will die.” ⁵³So King Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and prostrated himself before King Solomon, and Solomon said to him, “Go to your house.”

The second time recorded in Scripture, Joab attempted to use the altar to find refuge and avoid execution for the murders of Abner and Amasa, but it didn't work (1 Kings 2:28-35). When he refused to leave the altar, he was executed on the spot.

1 Kings 2:28–32, 34 ²⁸... And Joab fled to the tent of the LORD and took hold of the horns of the altar. ²⁹It was told King Solomon that Joab had fled to the tent of the LORD, and behold, he is beside the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, “Go, fall upon him.” ³⁰So Benaiah came to the tent of the LORD and said to him, “Thus the king has said, ‘Come out.’” But he said, “No, for I will die here.” And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, “Thus spoke Joab, and thus he answered me.” ³¹The king said to him, “Do as he has spoken and fall upon him and bury him, that you may remove from me and

from my father's house the blood which Joab shed without cause. ³²“The LORD will return his blood on his own head, because he fell upon two men more righteous and better than he and killed them with the sword, while my father David did not know *it*: Abner the son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, commander of the army of Judah.... ³⁴Then Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up and fell upon him and put him to death, and he was buried at his own house in the wilderness.

The point is, there was no sanctuary for the person who committed pre-meditated murder either at the altar or in the cities of refuge.