

principle. Does it fit with the idea that it means that wherever you build an altar, that is the place I am going to appoint?

“But if a man comes presumptuously upon his neighbor to slay him with guile, thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.” Does that necessarily mean that God’s altar is the place that He will appoint or does it mean that no matter what a man tries to do to protect himself, even if he goes up and puts his arms around God’s altar and clings to it, you are to tear him away from that without hesitation, because he is a murderer who deserves to die? It does not say that God has made a rule, but wherever there is an altar, that is the place of refuge or trial. The law is given for the cities of refuge. A person comes in to this city and may stay there for a number of years and be safe. It is a reasonable arrangement, given when they enter the land, according to the Bible as it stands. A person kills somebody accidentally, and provision is made for his safety from the avenger of blood.

In this country in the early days, if a person killed someone accidentally, that person’s brother would kill him, and then his cousin would kill the person that killed him, and we have had blood feuds in which hundreds of people have been killed in this country. They have them among the Arabs today. God wanted to prevent that sort of thing in Israel. He says if a man commits a murder, the law is to deal with him, but if a man kills someone accidentally, he is to be protected so that no relative can kill him, and so that no one will start a blood feud. According to the critics, the regular rule during all the centuries before Josiah’s time was: if a man killed someone accidentally, he could run to the altar and hang on to it for ten or fifteen years, until the relatives of the man who was killed, forgot their enmity against him and it became safe to leave. This would not really provide much of an asylum! The Bible tells about two or three cases where an endangered man fled to the altar in Jerusalem, but we do not find any case where it protected such a refugee, and there is not even one case in the Scripture where there is an account of anyone running for safety to any other altar except the one in Jerusalem. In one of these few cases we read that Solomon said, “Tear him away from the altar and kill him.”