

NUMBERS

Lesson 36 - Chapters 35 and 36 (End of Book)

This week we bring our study of the book of Numbers to a conclusion. I hope that you have been surprised by the amount of history, legal precedent and establishment of God's principles that we found here, and that this is anything but a bland accounting record as the name might imply.

Last week we began Numbers 35; and that chapter discusses the establishment of what amounts to the tribe of Levi's inheritance in the Promised Land; and this was to be the assignment of 48 cities to the Levites. These cities were to be scattered throughout the land holdings of the 12 tribes of Israel, their location selected by the 12 tribal leaders. Six of those cities would be designated as sanctuary cities, with 3 of them located OUTSIDE the Land of Promise EAST of the Jordan River within the territories of Reuben, Gad and 1/2 the tribe of Manasseh.

Let's re-read Numbers chapter 35:13 - the end.

RE-READ NUMBERS CHAPTER 35:13 - end

There is a concept here that needs some discussing and that concept is sanctuary. Another word that could be substituted for sanctuary is asylum. Where did this notion of asylum come from; this idea that there is a place where a person who is afraid of the government (whether that government be in the form of a tribal leader, a judge, a king, or whoever) can go to and be protected from arrest and punishment? The punishment that the asylum seeker is usually running from is the death penalty.

First (as you probably should have guessed by now) the concept of asylum (or sanctuary) was NOT invented by the Hebrews; it was a long established part of many Middle Eastern culture's justice systems. Yet the basic premise in its purest sense is a godly one.

Second, as a result of it being the norm for virtually all known Middle Eastern societies of that era, it existed among the Hebrews in one form or another. Various cultures enacted it in differing ways. Usually it involved fleeing to the priests and/or standing inside the Temple that was dedicated to whatever god was currently important or supreme to that nation. We find the earliest record of what the Hebrews accepted as the PLACE of sanctuary in the book of Exodus. And WHERE the sanctuary is located is a bit of a surprise.

NAS Exodus 21:12 *"He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. 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. 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.

In other words, like was so typical of those ancient cultures, it was the altar of burnt offering for their god that was their original place of sanctuary. So BEFORE the Lord gave the full Law to Moses, it was the practice for an Israelite man to run to the altar and (as we find out in later books of the Bible) to actually grab hold of the horns of the altar as a sign that he was seeking sanctuary. As long as he stayed glued to that altar he could not be touched.

Here in Numbers 35 Yehoveh ordains the way HE wants the principle of sanctuary to be carried out, which means BOTH that God accepts this principle AND that in order for it to be valid His people MUST follow His procedures of asylum.

Now since there WERE no sanctuary cities until they entered the Promised Land what was used before that time? Well, it's unimaginable that a regular Israelite was allowed to touch the Brazen Altar inside the Tabernacle compound and certainly he could not have gone inside the sacred tent. Likely the camp of the Levites itself served that purpose; however since the Torah doesn't tell us, this is but my speculation. SOMETHING served as the place of sanctuary, however, because it was not possible within the cultural norms of those days to NOT have a place of asylum.

Yet as the centuries go by we find that the Israelites never fully instituted the system the Lord gave to them. There were sanctuary cities, but in some eras they were either not in use OR there were other means of sanctuary in addition to the asylum cities. We read in David and Solomon's era that apparently the idea of coming to the Altar for sanctuary and grasping its horns still existed among Israel.

NAS 1 Kings 1:47 "And moreover, the king's servants came to bless our lord King David, saying, 'May your God make the name of Solomon better than your name and his throne greater than your throne!' And the king bowed himself on the bed. 48 "The king has also said thus, 'Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who has granted one to sit on my throne today while my own eyes see it.'" 49 Then all the guests of Adonijah were terrified; and they arose and each went on his way. 50 And Adonijah was afraid of Solomon, and he arose, went and took hold of the horns of the altar. 51 Now 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.'"

Let me also point out how diminished the priesthood must have been during David's and Solomon's reigns; and how, even though we ascribe this man David as close to God's heart, and Solomon as a very wise man, they were far from perfect. No priest EVER should have allowed a regular Israelite, let alone a criminal, to defile the altar by touching it; but apparently this episode in Kings means that the practice was known and accepted by both David and the priesthood at least for a period of time.

The question becomes then, what is it ABOUT the altar that caused heathens to use it as sanctuary, and then at times in Israel's history for Hebrews to do the same? It is because whatever touches a holy object becomes holy itself. This is a guiding Biblical principle. We saw it with the fire pans that Korah and the 250 men brought before the Lord (but because these men AND their fire pans were unauthorized all were destroyed); they were made holy by being so **near** to God, let alone touching any holy **object**. This falls within the Levitical law that holiness as well as impurity can be transmitted from person to person, object-to-object, or even person to object and object to person. Thus, the fire pans (which had contracted holiness) were beaten into a lid for the Altar. The coals and incense ashes that were in those fire pans were taken outside the camp and destroyed.

God's ordinance does not allow human hands to touch the Altar or any sacred implement; the one exception is that PRIESTS, for certain well-described purposes (such as transporting the objects) CAN at times necessarily touch these objects. But even then, because a human has touched them, a measure of defilement is passed along to it. And, that is one of the primary reasons for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement; that the High Priest can sprinkle the blood of atonement on the physical things of the Tabernacle and therefore cleanse them. Otherwise, the building up of defilement from the nearness to humans would eventually make the sanctuary and its ritual objects so impure that God could not dwell there anymore.

So the use of sanctuary cities for the Israelites could ONLY occur once they were inside the Promised Land; but like so many of God's ordinances they managed to ignore and modify God's laws in regard to asylum, and so exactly how asylum was accomplished changed to and fro over the centuries.

Now besides the basic importance of our understanding how the principle of sanctuary operated in Israel, I expounded on this matter because it's important to understand that just because we read of certain things happening in the Bible (as historical fact) it doesn't make what happened or what was stated by some Biblical character was automatically right or righteous before the Lord. I gave you the example of David and Solomon allowing the practice of ordinary Israelites grabbing the horns of the sacred altar (thus defiling it). We covered a couple of weeks ago the matter of vows and of Jephthah who made a rash vow to the Lord that wound up in his sacrificing his own daughter (no aspect of what Jephthah did being righteous).

So we must be very careful when reading the Bible to distinguish between the absolute perfection of the divine laws and ordinances and principles laid out by God, versus the imperfect way often GREAT men and women of the Bible thought of these laws or carried them out. We tend to get into a mindset that because a special person in the Bible (like an Abraham, or a David, or a Paul) did something a certain way that it was automatically godly. It is our duty (it is our JOB) as followers of the God of Israel to study Torah and all the Scriptures to thoroughly understand His character and His principles in order that we don't completely misconstrue what we read in the Bible, Old or New Testaments.

Beginning in Numbers 35:16 we receive the laws concerning manslaying, killing, and whether the slaying of a human is to be considered murder, manslaughter, or something else entirely. As we covered back in Leviticus, INTENT is the key to making this determination just as intent

is key to determining the seriousness of ALL sin. And in order that it can be made clear just what the Lord considers homicide versus accidental killing versus justifiable taking of human life, we get a series of examples of each.

The first example revolves around the implement used that caused the death. And the principle is that if such an implement was designed for the purpose of inflicting harm (a spear, a bow and arrow, a mace, etc.), then it is a weapon and if it was used in the killing the act should generally be seen as murder. If an implement that was NOT designed as a weapon, but if used improperly could certainly be a weapon (something with a handle like an axe) then it is still murder (and the Lord unequivocally and without apology says that a person who commits murder is to be executed). Further, this person cannot buy his way out of the sentence nor is he permitted the grace of being housed and protected in a city of refuge.

The reason for this attitude about killing the murderer is one that has come under fire around the world. Everywhere the cry is that while it is wrong to murder, it is also murder to put the murderer to death. Or another refrain is: what good is it to take another human life since that won't bring the dead back? Or that this is not rehabilitation it's retribution. Certainly it will not bring back the life of the one who was slain nor does it offer rehabilitation to the criminal; but in the bible that is not the issue. Sadly it is a huge portion of the church that has led this charge to rebel against God's instruction on murder. The reality is that God says plainly that a murderer is too immediately forfeit his own life. Why? Because life is invaluable and the only atonement for the illegal and unjust taking of life is the execution of the perpetrator. The act of executing a criminal guilty of murder is a JUST and necessary killing because the blood of the innocent defiles the land, and the only way to cleanse the land from its defilement is the atonement provided by the blood of the murderer. This is a Torah principle plainly stated in our bible, but it has lately been rendered as an ancient superstition, or barbaric and something that Jesus overturned. Further the biblical view is that the taking of the life of a criminal is (from a higher level) the preservation of life. That is a person who commits homicide is liable to do it again; and why should the next innocent victim pay the price for what the criminal has done? Or as we see today, why should we warehouse a murderer at a cost to the public of \$50,000 per year just so he can exist to attack prison guards or fellow inmates? Sadly, as our American society increasingly turns it back on what God has ordained as just punishment for violent crime, we see the criminal being turned back into society only for him to quickly find another victim because violence is his nature.

Church please hear me on this: there is only one way for us to justify NOT executing a murderer and that is by deciding we are against the Word of God and the way we have done this is by saying that the section of the Bible, the Torah, that deals with these matters so forthrightly is abolished; that it no longer applies.

Let me say straight away that if we are going to even entertain the notion that the Torah is dead and gone, then so are the 10 Commandments dead and gone because they are simply the first 10 of the 613 laws of Torah. Yet so hypocritically, many of us Believers will declare that the Old Testament isn't for us and yet how many of us would attend a church that didn't have a copy of those 10 Commandments hanging in some prominent place within their sanctuary? If a church really believed what they say they believe about the Law, how many sermons would have to be discarded because they mention the infallibility of the 10

Commandments, which is but the Law in Exodus?

We Believers are so confused on these matters BECAUSE we have demanded that the Old Testament be considered invalid, even though Yeshua Himself went out of His way to tell us point-blank that we should NEVER think such a thing. And that if we want to know IF there will ever **be** a time when the Torah and the Laws and the Prophets are abolished, it would not be until AFTER the heavens and the earth passed away.

I don't want to detour too long, but I had a local pastor say to me (not long ago) that when Jesus spoke those words about the Law and the Prophets not being abolished that He was at that time only talking to the Jewish people, and so it applied only to the Jewish people. I asked Him if he knew exactly in what passages those words were spoken. He said not off the top of His head. I then asked Him what he thought the most important message was that Jesus gave to the Church; he said that is was probably the Sermon on the Mount (which, by the way, I fully agree). Well to his surprise (and maybe to yours) those words of Yeshua steadfastly and plainly maintaining the validity of the Law and the Prophets were in Matthew 5:17-20..... smack-dab in the middle of The Sermon on the Mount. We throw away parts of the Bible that we don't agree with at our own peril. We've thrown away God's laws concerning His justice system, and now we're a world in chaos. And a horribly deceived church that prefers our own image of God instead of who He actually is, is generally to blame. And this is why Torah Class and so many other congregations around the world have been formed in hopes of restoring the sanctity and authority of the entire bible as our guide and written source of God's general will.

In verse 19 the Lord says that the person who is to be the executioner for the murderer is the blood-avenger. The Hebrew term is **ga'al (or go'el)**, or better, the **dam ga'al**. **Dam** means blood and although the word **ga'al** is usually translated as "avenger", it more correctly means "redeemer". So it is the blood redeemer, or blood avenger, who is assigned to kill the murderer.

Inherent in the Hebrew term **ga'al** is that this person is a relative, a member of the victim's immediate family or clan. And it is the **dam ga'al** who is to take action on the offender. Let's understand: this is not a tradition it is God's Law. Now, I do NOT want anyone leaving here saying that Tom Bradford says that we, in America, should take out personal justice on someone who has done violent crime to a family member or that if we don't do this, we are disobeying God's law. Rather the principle behind this law is that true justice is a life for a life; specifically when the life taken was done on purpose and unjustly. Once Israel began to have Kings, we'll find that those Kings invariably sought to STOP the practice of the **dam ga'al** going after the criminal that harmed his family member. And this was because in a structured and settled society with a well organized human government it would be chaos if every man determined another's guilt or innocence for himself, and then sought to also be the one who carried out the sentence.

But understand this as well: the principle remains. Just because of man's sinful nature and our imperfect justice systems, that doesn't mean that the Godly concept of the blood avenger is dead and gone. In fact it is but one of the primary duties of the Kinsman Redeemer to be a blood avenger. Did you hear that? Just as we Believers tend to discard those unwelcome

characteristics of God such as His severity and His wrath in favor or His mercy and love, we also tend to picture the Kinsman Redeemer as a very wonderful kindly fellow whose job is as a rich uncle who runs around rescuing his poor relatives from the bank who's coming to foreclose on their land. Certainly ONE function of the Kinsman Redeemer is to assure that land that was originally in his clan never leaves it; or if a family member were made a slave to pay off a personal debt that person would be purchased back out of that slavery. But ANOTHER equally as important role is as the blood avenger.

Is not Yeshua HaMashiach called our Kinsman Redeemer? Then understand: He wears the mantle of both aspects of that title, not just the one we prefer. When He came the first time it was as that aspect of the Kinsman Redeemer that selflessly buys back a person's life from slavery. And He bought our lives back with the only way God sees as a permanent solution: with His own life and His own blood. When Jesus comes again in the near future, it will still be as the Kinsman Redeemer; but this next time He will come in the role of the **dam ga'al**, the blood avenger. He has already purchased the souls of God's people, and did so some 2000 years ago; next He will take out God's wrath on those who persecute His people and refuse to submit to The Father. And we see this most starkly, as He becomes the fierce warrior leading the charge at the Battle of Armageddon, the formerly mild and meek Messiah taking lives at the rate of thousands every time he swings his sword. Filling the Jezreel Valley 3 feet deep with the blood of those against whom He is exacting the Lord's justice.

Yet what kind of justice would it be if a victim's life was taken accidentally, even if a low degree of negligence were involved, and the perpetrator was hunted down and killed for it? Therefore verse 22 gives circumstances as examples of accidental killing, such as someone getting angry and shoving someone, but without the intent to kill them. Or perhaps a person threw something at the victim but not with the intent of severely injuring that person, and certainly not intending to kill. Then provided a council decides that there was no malicious intent, the perpetrator is to be given safe harbor FROM the blood avenger. This type of killing is what us moderns might term negligent homicide or manslaughter.

If unintended killing is the judgment of the council then the perpetrator is to be ushered to one of the 6 Levitical cities of sanctuary where the blood avenger may NOT go after him. However this does NOT relieve the perpetrator of his responsibility for the death of that victim; and even more it does NOT relieve the duty of the **dam ga'al** to kill that person. It's just that there is a place that is off-limits to the blood avenger. So as verse 26 states, if that perpetrator of manslaughter stays safely inside the sanctuary city limits he is protected; but if he ventures outside the city limits of the asylum city he becomes fair game. And if the blood avenger kills him outside the city limits of a sanctuary city then it is but justice.

Then there is this interesting remark in verse 28 that adds a VERY important caveat to this whole procedure; the perpetrator of manslaughter remains in his blood guilt no matter how accidental it all might have been and therefore is exiled to the sanctuary city UNTIL the High Priest dies! When the current High Priest dies (whether that comes a day or 50 years after the perpetrator is sent into protective asylum) then the blood guilt is removed and forgiven, the **dam ga'al** is no longer allowed to take that person's life under any circumstances, and the perpetrator may return home not only free of fear of the **dam ga'al** but also cleared in God's

eyes of his blood guilt.

What a strange thing. What happened here? It is this: the ONLY way a manslayer can have his guilt before the Lord atoned for is for the High Priest to pay for it with his own life. The death of the High Priest (a natural death is envisioned) becomes the God-accepted atonement for the perpetrator of manslaughter.

But this eventually created a problem. Because it didn't take long for a manslayer to see the rather large advantage for a High Priest to die as soon as possible! Mothers of High Priests began bringing food and gifts to the perpetrators in exile so that they would be content enough in their asylum not to become so impatient that they might actually start to PRAY for the High Priest to die so that they could return to their families and resume their normal lives. We actually have record of this concern in the Mishnah.

Verse 30 says that a person can only be declared a murderer provided there are sufficient witnesses to the act. Hearsay or only one available witness is insufficient, for the matter is too serious.

Now the crux of the matter is stated in verse 33 (though I touched on it earlier): there is a spiritual reason for all this complexity concerning the loss of life. Blood spilled on the land of God pollutes and defiles that land. And of course the blood that is being spilled is assumed to be blood spilled unjustly. Further, every death pollutes and defiles and so the impurity of spilled blood and death piles up and piles up on the land (thus causing the ritual impurity of the land to become more and more) and the inherent understanding is that the Lord, in all His Holiness, cannot dwell on such thoroughly defiled land. And the Lord desires with all His being to dwell with His people so much so that He gave His only begotten Son that those who will trust in that reality will dwell with the Lord for all eternity. That is the whole point of His plan for mankind.

Let's move on to chapter 36.

READ NUMBERS CHAPTER 36 all

In an earlier chapter of Numbers Moses ruled that the daughters of Zelophehad could inherit their father's land portion because he died having no sons. But this has the potential for catastrophe: what would happen if any of his daughters married someone outside of Israel? Since it is the husband who owns whatever his wife has inherited, the land would be lost to foreigners (theoretically) for all time.

But the problem that is addressed in chapter 36 is not quite that global; the concern that is addressed is less about what happens if a Hebrew daughter who holds land in Canaan marries outside Israel than it is about what happens if that same girl marries outside of her Israelite tribe. That is, that a girl from the tribe of Simeon for instance might marry a man from the tribe of Gad. Then there would be a situation whereby the territorial allotment that God has assigned could be bled off into other Israelite tribes thus upsetting both the fairness and balance, as well as God's will, in the territorial assignments.

So here in verse 6 is the judgment of God, through Moses on such a situation: a female with land rights can marry anyone she chooses as long as it's within her own clan. Notice that the term used here is explicitly CLAN, not tribe. They not only had to marry within their own tribe but within their own extended family; and if they did otherwise they were to be stripped of their land inheritance.

And thus as the end of this chapter makes clear, the daughters of Zelophehad married their first cousins, obeying the Lord's ruling.

It is clear that (as one might expect) the unit of family that the people of Israel most cared about was not their entire tribe but their immediate clan. And in order that one dominant clan within a tribe not carry too much power (which in ancient times was expressed via land and livestock) God orders that daughters with inheritance rights must marry within their own extended families.

This is not the last of the instructions we'll get regarding the use and transfer of land within Canaan; Deuteronomy has several more instructions established by means of precedents on this subject.

We are so urbanized, today, that we tend to forget the importance of land. But, to God, land is important, and the Promised Land is a major ingredient to His overall plan. And, that land the Bible calls Canaan is specifically set aside for Israel; always has been, always will be. The Lord will go to great lengths in the Torah to ensure that the land is never to leave the possession of His people; but it happened anyway. The cause was multifold, but primarily it was Israel's apostasy against the Lord. From the moment the land was handed over to Israel, they would play fast and loose with God's ordinances regarding the land; and the consequences are still playing out every evening on our TV sets.

And, it is amazing, is it not, that all recent government administrations of both America and Israel are so blind to God's Laws concerning the land that their solution to the problem of violence against Israel is to continue to give it away to the descendants of the people God ordered that it be taken from.

As we continue our study of Torah in the book of Deuteronomy, the folly of this decision should become clearer. Next week, we'll begin the final chapter of Torah, Deuteronomy.