

Into the Promised Land - Joshua's Story
Lesson #34 • “Warfare” - Deuteronomy 20 & 21
• H A N D O U T •

▶ Lesson #34 now changes to the subject of warfare, which will give Israel's fighting force encouragement, along with detailed practical and spiritual instruction. God knows that there will be a battle for Israel to take the Promised Land. So, through Moses, God prepares, in detail, the people for the battle ahead. His first instruction is to fear not but trust God for the journey ahead.

▶ Chapter 20, has a somewhat spontaneous character to it. There was nothing new in Moses' actual message, but the rules of warfare he gives are quite extraordinary. Not only do they run counter to ancient methods of warfare, but they are contrary to modern procedures as well. However, the psychological battle-preparation Moses gives has a definite modern spirit to it. What is predominant in this preparation is reliance on the Lord, against all odds. This will become the main theme of the books of Joshua and the Judges, and this attitude will be reflected by the more Godly kings during the years of monarchy.

Deuteronomy 20:1-4 • When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you.

When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army. He shall say: *"Hear, O Israel, today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory."*

Q: Of all the ways the Lord could have encouraged Israel, why does He begin with the issue of fear and trusting the Lord beyond any and all circumstances?

Q: What reasons should Israel have for trusting God for the coming battles?

Q: The priest was to prepare the army for battle by telling them what four things they should not do and why?

What they were not to do:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

The reason why:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Israel was not a conscripted army. Only men ready and willing for battle were wanted.
The officers were to articulate the ways a man might be excused from service ...

Deuteronomy 20:5-9 • The officers shall say to the army: "Has anyone built a new house and not dedicated it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may dedicate it. Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else enjoy it. Has anyone become pledged to a woman and not married her? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else marry her." Then the officers shall add, "Is any man afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too."

When the officers have finished speaking to the army, they shall appoint commanders over it.

Q: Considering their history, why would God give men these extraordinary ways to be excused from serving in the army?

The next section is addressed to the cities that were beyond the boundaries of Canaan. [Vs.15]
The rules of battle for them were different than the cities of the Transjordan and Canaan proper.

► In verses 10-18, God instructs the army to first make an offer of peace to the outlying cities, before attacking them. If they accept the offer of peace, they will be put into servitude and will work for Israel. However, if they refuse, Israel is to lay siege to the city, and after the battle, all the men in the city are to be killed. The women, children, livestock and everything else in the city belongs to Israel as spoils of war.

On the other hand, in cities of the Transjordan and Canaan proper – those areas which God is giving to Israel as their inheritance -- everything that has breath is to be utterly destroyed. God explains why: *"lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the LORD your God."*

Q: What is God's underlying motivation for such a harsh edict?

The Chapter concludes on a practical, long-term view of the Land after the battles are won ...

► Warfare in both ancient and modern times is often filled with violence, anguish, and inhumanity. The directions given to Israel must be understood relative to the war tactics of the ancient world in which Israel exists. God gives specific instructions which addresses the atrocious nature of the sins of the cultures found in Canaan.

But at the same time, God is not just viewing the battles to come; He views the future that will be Israel's, if they are trusting and obedient. Therefore, God wants them to have a fruitful and productive land to work after the battles have been won.

With that in mind, when Israel found themselves in a position where they needed to besiege a city for a substantial period of time, it was logical for them to build siege ramps from wood, which they found in and around the countryside. It was expected that Israel, the besieging army, to cut down trees in the area to provide the needed wood for cooking and for building the ramps. God cautions them not to cut down any food-bearing tree. They would need the food in the future.

Q: How would you summarize God's instructions regarding the cutting down of trees?

Our study now takes us to the next Chapter - #21 -- which begins to address the subject of interpersonal relationships in Israel.
We begin with the Law of Unsolved Murders ...

► Israel was to take crime seriously, because crime was against the Lord and His law. When murder or manslaughter was committed, the justice of God is affronted. Unless the criminal is punished, justice is not met.

As Numbers 35:33 says, "Atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it." However in the case when the perpetrator of the crime cannot be detected, some method of removal of the guilt must be secured. Atonement must be made for the unsolved murder. The elders of the town closest to where the body was found are the ones required to make atonement for the bloodshed.

This was how atonement was to be made: An unworked heifer was led as near as possible to where the body lay. The heifer's neck was then broken and the elders washed their hands over the heifer's body while they declared that they, representing the people, were innocent of the homicide.

Then they prayed: "Our hands have not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen it. Provide atonement, O LORD, for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, and do not lay innocent blood to the charge of Your people Israel."

Q: We note that the blood of the heifer was not offered in this ritual. So ... how could breaking the Heifer's neck be considered "an Atonement?"

Moses now turns to the Laws that are relevant to the family and home situations.
[These discussions are quite blunt – perhaps more than we usually expect from the Bible.]
First discussion is an Israelite soldier taking a wife from one of the conquered peoples ...

Deuteronomy 21:10-14 • When you go to war against your enemies and the LORD your God delivers them into your hands and you take captives, if you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife. Bring her into your home and have her shave her head, trim her nails and put aside the clothes she was wearing when captured. After she has lived in your house and mourned her father and mother for a full month, then you may go to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife. If you are not pleased with her, let her go wherever she wishes. You must not sell her or treat her as a slave, since you have dishonored her.

Q: Who are the enemies that referred to in this passage?

Q: What rules would the captured woman be subject to?

Q: What are the purpose of these rules for both the Israelite and the captured woman?

Next Discussion is the protection of inheritance rights ...

Deuteronomy 21:15-17 • If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other, and both bear him sons but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love, when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love. He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father's strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him.

Q: What historical narrative seems to almost perfectly reflect this discussion regarding the protection of inheritance rights?

Q: What does giving the firstborn son a double share signify?

The Last Discussion in this study lesson involves the penalty for a rebellious son ...

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 • If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town.

They shall say to the elders, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard."

Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.

Q: How would you describe this rebellious son?

Q: Knowing the punishment, why would any parent take the matter to the elders sitting in the place of judgment at the city gate?

The chapter concludes with Rules for Capital Punishment ...

► Generally speaking, in ancient times, when a person was put to death for wrongdoing, his corpse was often mounted on a tree or an other prominent place to expose the executed one to disgrace, humiliation, the elements, and also to scavenging animals and birds.

But with this law, God intervenes by commanding Israel bury a body the same day of death. As Moses points out, the criminal was already under indictment of death by God's judgment – referred to as the curse of God. He had already paid the ultimate penalty and no further humiliation would be permitted by God.

In Galatians 3:13, Paul uses the understanding of the humiliation of displaying a body on a tree or cross to illustrate, to us, the extent of Jesus' humiliation for our sake. Jesus accepted the ultimate shame of being put to death on the cross, and suffering the Father's curse [wrath] in order to He bear our sins, in our place, for our sake for the ultimate purpose of redeeming us.

We also see, in Jesus' death, this old law from Deuteronomy be enacted and the Father's intervention. The Romans traditionally kept the crucified dead on crosses for weeks as a deterrent to others. But, Jesus' body was removed from the cross and laid in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb the same day. From that tomb He gloriously arose, alive forevermore on the third day, satisfying the terms of Father God's Wrath and purchasing for us eternal redemption.

In Chapter 22, Moses begins a discussion on various laws and instructions including the treatment of domestic animals. This is where we begin next time.



Next Time • Lesson #35
“Various Laws & Instructions”

