

Into the Promised Land - Joshua's Story

Lesson #33 - "Priests, Prophets & the Cities of Refuge" - Deuteronomy 18 & 19

· H A N D O U T ·

► In our new study passage, Moses continues his oratory, which reviews everything God has set up for Israel, as a preparation for them to enter the Promised Land. We are at the end of the 40 year-sentence of wandering, and since Moses was addressing the Second Generation who had little or no first-hand experience, this review was absolutely necessary. The one thing we will notice is that there are many details included in Deuteronomy that were not included in the original incidence or situation in Exodus and/or Numbers.

In Chapter 18, Moses gives instructions regarding the provisions for the priests and Levites, and how they are to function in the Promised Land. This is followed by a discussion of the role of Prophet and includes both the true and the false prophet. Our study will end with a discussion on the purpose of the Cities of Refuge, which God is in the process of setting up throughout the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 18:1-8 • The priests, who are Levites – indeed the whole tribe of Levi – are to have no allotment or inheritance with Israel. They shall live on the offerings made to the LORD by fire, for that is their inheritance. They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; the LORD is their inheritance, as He promised them.

This is the share due the priests from the people who sacrifice a bull or a sheep: the shoulder, the jowls and the inner parts. You are to give them the firstfruits of your grain, new wine and oil, and the first wool from the shearing of your sheep, for the LORD your God has chosen them and their descendants, out of all your tribes, to stand and minister in the LORD's name always.

If a Levite moves from one of your towns, anywhere in Israel where he is living, and comes, in all earnestness, to the place the LORD will choose, he may minister in the name of the LORD his God like all his fellow Levites who serve there in the presence of the LORD. He is to share equally in their benefits, even though he has received money from the sale of family possessions.

Q: Is there a difference in the designation between "the priests who are Levites" and the "whole tribe of Levi?"

Q: What does it mean that the tribe of Levi were to have no allotment or inheritance with Israel?

Q: In what way was not receiving an allotment to be viewed as a blessing for the Levites?

Israel must not be imitators of the practices of the pagan nations around them ...

Deuteronomy 18:9-13 • When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you.

You must be blameless before the LORD your God.

Q: What is it that Israel is specifically prohibited to practice?

Deuteronomy 18:14-22 • The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so. The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."

The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.

But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."

You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

Q: What reason does Moses give for God promising to raise up an Israelite prophet, like him, to lead the people in the ways of the Lord?

Q: What was the people's responsibility toward the prophet God would raise to lead them?

Q: What was the caution listed here?

Q: Who can be considered an authentic Prophet of God?

Q: What is the answer to the question the Lord asked: "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?"

► Note: This questions relates only to a prophet's predictive messages. If what the prophet proclaims by saying "thus sayeth the Lord" but it does not happen, then he is a false prophet.

► Sometimes, people just get caught up and they are brash and speak presumptuously, but we are not to be afraid of one like this; instead we are to turn away from his proclamations.

Q: In what ways does the N.T change or add to the issue of identifying the truth of a message that was supposed to be spoken by the LORD?

Establishing the Cities of Refuge in Canaan ...

► This brings us to Chapter 19 and the establishment of the Cities of Refuge within the Land of Promise. God had previously directed Moses to establish three Cities of Refuge on the east side of the Jordan River in the cities of Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan, respectively. Now God directs Israel to establish three more Cities of Refuge, centrally located on the west side of the Jordan, once Israel's control extended over the whole land.

Q: What was the purpose of a City of Refuge?

► Specifically, the Cities of Refuge _____ God established with Noah in Genesis:

Genesis 9:6 • "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man."

The Principles of Law & Order within the Cities of Refuge ...

► These three additional Cities of Refuge were to be centrally located, in three different division of the country, so that anyone who accidentally killed another would be close to a place of sanctuary. There he was safe from the vengeance of the family of the deceased. According to Numbers 35:15, the Cities of Refuge were for Israelites, aliens and any other people living among Israel, so that anyone who has killed another accidentally could flee there.

But, the person's innocence or guilt still had to be determined. It must be firmly established that it was an accident and was not premeditated or fueled by any kind of underlying hatred.

There are not many details in this passage regarding the proper process of determining the innocence or guilt of the one who had killed another and was seeking refuge. Also, taking refuge in one of the Cities was not meant to be a permanent solution.

The guilt or innocence of the person seeking refuge was to be determined on the testimony of at least two or three witnesses. The elders were to act as the administrator of the decision of the assembly. Those found guilty would be shown no pity. But, those found innocent, could leave the city of refuge safely, or they could stay and live there; the matter was permanently settled.

What these Cities of Refuge demonstrate to us is that God is just as concerned that the guilty be punished as He is that the innocent be protected.

Q: In what ways could the Cities of Refuge be viewed as symbolic of Jesus?

More Legal Principles Established ...

► This next portion of scripture involves the matter of territorial disputes and the people's rights to hold property. In fact, the right to hold property is a cornerstone of Israel's inheritance from the Lord.

This passage begins with the statement: "You shall not remove your neighbor's landmark..." Essentially, this stated principle was preventative in nature. Moses was looking ahead to the time, after Israel was settled in the land, after the tribal and family boundary lines had been distributed, and boundary lines had been firmly established with stone markers.

Moses knew that, inevitably, there would be disputes over these boundary lines. So, he makes it clear that it was strictly forbidden for anyone to move a boundary stone. Moses reminds them that it was the Lord who gave the land to the people. Their descendants were to accept and not change these boundary lines.

Q: What is significant about God giving the people the right to hold property and then providing the protection to keep that right?

► Moses now addresses rules of Jurisprudence – the philosophy of law to be used not only in the Cities of Refuge, but throughout Israel. For people to live successfully with others, there must be honesty and respect between them and rules to guide them. When there dissension between people, the rules are there to guide them to a solution that is fair, truthful and honoring to God.

Thus the Lord set up Israel's Jurisprudence to be based on evidence and at least two witnesses – one would not be considered sufficient.

But what was to happen if one of the witnesses was suspected of lying? Here is how the Lord wanted that situation handled:

Deuteronomy 19:16-19a • If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother.

Q: What was a “malicious” witness?

Q: How was this to be handled?

Deuteronomy 19:19b-21 • You must purge the evil from among you. The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you. Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Q: What are the two bottom-line purposes of these Laws of Jurisprudence?

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2.

Q: In Matthew 5 Jesus seems to negate the Deuteronomic rule of an “eye for an eye,” substituting it with the principle of “turning of the other cheek.” How are we to understand this change in the principle of the Deuteronomic Law?

► Moses turns to the subject of warfare, and gives Israel's army encouragement with practical and spiritual instruction with an amazing amount of detail.
This is where we pick up the story next time.



Next Time • Lesson #34

“Warfare”

Deuteronomy 20

