

# Adult Bible Class

## The Book of Deuteronomy - Chapters 19 - 22

### Deuteronomy Chapter 19

We have read about the cities of refuge in Numbers 35. In that chapter Moses commanded that six cities should be set apart as sanctuary cities where someone who killed another person (whether intentionally or accidentally) could flee until he could stand trial. If he was found guilty of murder, he was to be executed by the next of kin of the victim. If he was guilty of manslaughter (or unintentional murder), he could remain in the city of refuge until the death of the reigning high priest. At that point, he could return to his home.

There is another passage on this subject in Joshua 20 where the cities are named. Three of the cities were on the east side of the Jordan River (Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan). Three were in the Promised Land (Kadesh, Shechem, and Hebron).

**Deuteronomy 19:1** "When the Lord your God destroys the nations whose land he is giving you, you will take over their land and settle in their towns and homes. **2** Then you must set apart three cities of refuge in the land the Lord your God is giving you. **3** Survey the territory, and divide the land the Lord your God is giving you into three districts, with one of these cities in each district. Then anyone who has killed someone can flee to one of the cities of refuge for safety.

*Three* cities are mentioned above (not six) because the passage is talking about the three cities in the Promised Land (not the three east of the Jordan River).

**4** "If someone kills another person unintentionally, without previous hostility, the slayer may flee to any of these cities to live in safety . . .

**6** "If the distance to the nearest city of refuge is too far, an enraged avenger might be able to chase down and kill the person who caused the death. Then the slayer would die unfairly, since he had never shown hostility toward the person who died. **7** That is why I am commanding you to set aside three cities of refuge.

**8** "And if the Lord your God enlarges your territory, as he swore to your ancestors, and gives you all the land he promised them, **9** you must designate three additional cities of refuge. (He will give you this land if you are careful to obey all the commands I have given you—if you always love the Lord your God and walk in his ways.) **10** That way you will prevent the death of innocent people in the land the Lord your God is giving you as your special possession. You will not be held responsible for the death of innocent people.

God wanted to protect his people. A city of refuge should always be nearby in Israel. If the territories of Israel should greatly increase, then three more cities should be appointed.

**11** "But suppose someone is hostile toward a neighbor and deliberately ambushes and murders him and then flees to one of the cities of refuge. **12** In that case, the elders of the murderer's hometown must send agents to the city of refuge to bring him back and hand him over to the dead person's avenger to be put to death. **13** Do not feel sorry for that murderer! Purge from Israel the guilt of murdering innocent people; then all will go well with you.

## Concern for Justice

**Deuteronomy 19:14** "When you arrive in the land the Lord your God is giving you as your special possession, you must never steal anyone's land by moving the boundary markers your ancestors set up to mark their property.

After Joshua led the conquering of Canaan, the land was divided among families. The land was to be handed down in families from generation to generation. To move a landmark that showed boundary lines was forbidden. The book of Job says, *"Evil people steal land by moving the boundary markers"* (24:2, NLT).

The land was everything to God's people. In the first place, the Lord called the land His own, and He allowed His people to live there. In the second place, the divisions of the land were not to change, but they were to be handed down in families.

**15** "You must not convict anyone of a crime on the testimony of only one witness. The facts of the case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

**16** "If a malicious witness comes forward and accuses someone of a crime, **17** then both the accuser and accused must appear before the Lord by coming to the priests and judges in office at that time. **18** The judges must investigate the case thoroughly. If the accuser has brought false charges against his fellow Israelite, **19** you must impose on the accuser the sentence he intended for the other person. In this way, you will purge such evil from among you. **20** Then the rest of the people will hear about it and be afraid to do such an evil thing. **21** You must show no pity for the guilty! Your rule should be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

The crime of false witness (perjury) was to be severely punished. The Ninth Commandment warns against false witness. Lying about someone or spreading malicious gossip is very hurtful in everyday life as well as in a court of law.

In the case of perjury, God commanded ancient Israel to impose upon the false witness the same sentence that he intended for the other person. The reason for this is that the example would put the fear of God in people and cause them to tell the truth.

In the New Testament, Jesus brought us from an emphasis on fear to an emphasis on love. *We love Him because He first love us* (1 John 4:19). Our desire to follow and obey the Lord Jesus Christ is not based on fear but on love.

## Deuteronomy Chapter 20

**Deuteronomy 20:1 (NLT)** "When you go out to fight your enemies and you face horses and chariots and an army greater than your own, do not be afraid. The Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, is with you! **2** When you prepare for battle, the priest must come forward to speak to the troops. **3** He will say to them, 'Listen to me, all you men of Israel! Do not be afraid as you go out to fight your enemies today! Do not lose heart or panic or tremble before them. **4** For the Lord your God is going with you! He will fight for you against your enemies, and he will give you victory!'

The Israelites were not a warlike nation, although God commanded them at this point in their history to completely conquer the Canaanites. *This was a special command for a special time.* In the future, wars would once again be fought to

protect their land from aggressors. War should be avoided, but there will be times that it cannot be avoided. In such times in Israel's future - after they have possessed their land - God gives them instructions concerning war.

In the first place, God was with them and He was the one who will fight for them and give the victory. This was to be a great principle in Israel. They were not going to win by many or by few - but by the Lord.

**Deuteronomy 20:5** "Then the officers of the army must address the troops and say, 'Has anyone here just built a new house but not yet dedicated it? If so, you may go home! You might be killed in the battle, and someone else would dedicate your house. **6** Has anyone here just planted a vineyard but not yet eaten any of its fruit? If so, you may go home! You might die in battle, and someone else would eat the first fruit. **7** Has anyone here just become engaged to a woman but not yet married her? Well, you may go home and get married! You might die in the battle, and someone else would marry her.'

**8** "Then the officers will also say, 'Is anyone here afraid or worried? If you are, you may go home before you frighten anyone else.' **9** When the officers have finished speaking to their troops, they will appoint the unit commanders.

Military service was to be voluntary in Israel. It was to be fought by those who were sold out to the cause of Israel. Those who had their minds back at home were not to fight. Only the brave who had no reservations (or who were not thinking about what they were missing at home) should fight Israel's future battles. Several scenarios are given of those who have reason not to fight, but the worst is those who are afraid. God's army is not for cowards.

There is a spiritual application in our time. Our battles are not flesh and blood conflicts, but they are spiritual battles in prayer. They are not for the distracted, the weak, or the fearful, but our spiritual battles are won when we know that the Lord fights for us as we wage war in prayer against principalities and powers in the spiritual realm. Just like ancient Israel, without the Lord we will lose the battle; but with the Lord we are more than conquerors. Jesus spoke a parable that relates to this passage:

**Luke 14:25** A large crowd was following Jesus. He turned around and said to them, **26** "If you want to be my disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. **27** And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple.

**28** "But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? **29** Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money, and then everyone would laugh at you. **30** They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and couldn't afford to finish it!'

**31** "Or what king would go to war against another king without first sitting down with his counselors to discuss whether his army of 10,000 could defeat the 20,000 soldiers marching against him? **32** And if he can't, he will send a delegation to discuss terms of peace while the enemy is still far away. **33** So you cannot become my disciple without giving up everything you own.

Just as Moses' law said that Israel must "*count the cost*" before fighting battles, Jesus said that the Christian must "count the cost" and be convinced that

the Lord would go before him. Christians should find their right place in the kingdom and serve bravely, trusting the Lord to see them through to victory.

**Deuteronomy 20:10** "As you approach a town to attack it, you must first offer its people terms for peace. **11** If they accept your terms and open the gates to you, then all the people inside will serve you in forced labor. **12** But if they refuse to make peace and prepare to fight, you must attack the town. **13** When the Lord your God hands the town over to you, use your swords to kill every man in the town. **14** But you may keep for yourselves all the women, children, livestock, and other plunder. You may enjoy the plunder from your enemies that the Lord your God has given you.

In Israel's future, peace is to be sought, but when it is not possible, they are to fight. A peacemaking spirit is pleasing to God. Jesus said, "*Blessed are the peacemakers.*"

**15** "But these instructions apply only to distant towns, not to the towns of the nations in the land you will enter. **16** In those towns that the Lord your God is giving you as a special possession, destroy every living thing. **17** You must completely destroy the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, just as the Lord your God has commanded you. **18** This will prevent the people of the land from teaching you to imitate their detestable customs in the worship of their gods, which would cause you to sin deeply against the Lord your God.

The mission ahead was a special mission for that time. They were to completely destroy the Canaanites and possess their land by the command of God. These nations forfeited their land because of their continued wickedness and idolatry, and God was using the Israelites to judge them. They were to be removed, and Israel was to have their land. But in the future when outlying nations threatened Israel, God said they were to try to make peace, but if that was not possible, they must fight.

**19** "When you are attacking a town and the war drags on, you must not cut down the trees with your axes. You may eat the fruit, but do not cut down the trees. Are the trees your enemies, that you should attack them? **20** You may only cut down trees that you know are not valuable for food. Use them to make the equipment you need to attack the enemy town until it falls.

Israel was to fight and preserve life and the blessings of life. The women, children, livestock, fruit trees - all were to be preserved. This was contrary to the way the heathen in their day fought battles.

## Deuteronomy Chapter 21

God is a God of human rights, as we shall see in the following chapter. In God's sight, human life is precious.

### Cleansing for Unsolved Murder

**Deuteronomy 21:1** "When you are in the land the Lord your God is giving you, someone may be found murdered in a field, and you don't know who committed the murder. **2** In such a case, your elders and judges must measure the distance from the site of the crime to the nearby towns. **3** When the nearest town has been determined, that town's elders must select from the herd a heifer that has never been trained or yoked to a plow. **4** They must lead it down to a valley that has not been plowed or planted and that has a stream running through it. There in the valley they must break the heifer's neck. **5** Then the Levitical priests must step forward, for the Lord your God has chosen them to minister before him and to pronounce blessings in the Lord's name. They are to decide all legal and criminal cases.

**Deuteronomy 21:6** "The elders of the town must wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken. **7** Then they must say, 'Our hands did not shed this person's blood, nor did we see it happen. **8** O Lord, forgive your people Israel whom you have redeemed. Do not charge your people with the guilt of murdering an innocent person.' Then they will be absolved of the guilt of this person's blood. **9** By following these instructions, you will do what is right in the Lord's sight and will cleanse the guilt of murder from your community.

God let it be known that human life was sacred. When someone was found murdered, it was to be a national concern. It was a crime against heaven and against *all* of Israel. This is because in a well-ordered society, life should be safe.

In the above scenario, the innocent are grouped with the guilty. All were responsible in some way, and all bore the stigma of the murder.

In this New Testament age, Jesus Christ voluntarily accepted the stigma of sin. It was imputed upon Him for us. Just as the innocent heifer died so the national guilt could be taken away, *"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son . . ."*

### **Marriage to a Captive Woman**

**10** "Suppose you go out to war against your enemies and the Lord your God hands them over to you, and you take some of them as captives. **11** And suppose you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you are attracted to her and want to marry her. **12** If this happens, you may take her to your home, where she must shave her head, cut her nails, **13** and change the clothes she was wearing when she was captured. She will stay in your home, but let her mourn for her father and mother for a full month. Then you may marry her, and you will be her husband and she will be your wife. **14** But if you marry her and she does not please you, you must let her go free. You may not sell her or treat her as a slave, for you have humiliated her.

The woman taken after battle had rights. She was to go through rites of purification (as a former heathen), and she was to be given space to mourn, leaving her family. Though she was taken captive from war, she was to be treated well, not as a slave.

### **Rights of the Firstborn**

**15** "Suppose a man has two wives, but he loves one and not the other, and both have given him sons. And suppose the firstborn son is the son of the wife he does not love. **16** When the man divides his inheritance, he may not give the larger inheritance to his younger son, the son of the wife he loves, as if he were the firstborn son. **17** He must recognize the rights of his oldest son, the son of the wife he does not love, by giving him a double portion. He is the first son of his father's virility, and the rights of the firstborn belong to him.

God protected the rights of the firstborn son, no matter the circumstance. The Law of Moses did not promote bigamy, but it did govern it.

### **Dealing with a Rebellious Son**

**18** "Suppose a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or mother, even though they discipline him. **19** In such a case, the father and mother must take the son to the elders as they hold court at the town gate. **20** The parents must say to the elders, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious and refuses to obey. He is a glutton and a drunkard.' **21** Then all the men of his town must stone him to death. In this way, you will purge this evil from among you, and all Israel will hear about it and be afraid.

There were many capital crimes in ancient Israel, and the incorrigibility of a son was one of them, as stated here. We understand from the above passage that we are talking about an adult son.

Some of the laws of Moses were never carried out, and we can imagine that this might have been one of them because of the love of a parent for his son.

The young man described above is a “glutton and a drunkard,” or a person of excess (like the prodigal son in the New Testament). An incorrigible son is not only a problem for the home, but for the entire community. He is the type who is most likely to commit other crimes because he does not have himself under control, nor has he submitted to the authority of his parents or God.

God gives this instruction:

**Proverbs 22:6 (NKJV)** Train up a child in the way he should go,  
And when he is old he will not depart from it.

**Proverbs 13:24** He who spares his rod hates his son,  
But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.

No parent has the right to complain about his wayward son unless he has properly instructed and corrected him and asserted his God-given parental authority. In the above example from Deuteronomy, this is the case (vs. 18).

### Various Regulations

**Deuteronomy 21:22 (NLT)** “If someone has committed a crime worthy of death and is executed and hung on a tree, **23** the body must not remain hanging from the tree overnight. You must bury the body that same day, for anyone who is hung is cursed in the sight of God. In this way, you will prevent the defilement of the land the Lord your God is giving you as your special possession.

It was the custom in ancient times that someone who had suffered capital punishment was to have his dead body put on a stake (tree) to be put to an open shame before the community. This showed the terribleness of their crime. Then, the body was to be taken down and buried.

This is alluded to in the New Testament:

**Acts 5:30 (KJV)** The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

**1 Peter 2:24** Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree . . .

**Galatians 3:13 (NLT)** But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” **14** Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, so that we who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith.

What is this curse that is mentioned above? We know that in families or societies there is right behavior and wrong behavior. In a family, the parent will smile on good behavior and discipline bad behavior. The wishes of the parent are made known, and the child is to follow them. In society, there are laws that protect that society. When a law-breaker commits a crime, he has the disapproval of the

society. The “curse of the law” is the disapproval and disgust of the society against the law-breaker.

Though we were under the curse because we were sinners, Jesus “*took upon himself the curse.*” Not only did He die the sinners death, but He took our shame as well - the shame that a criminal bears who is “*hung on a tree.*”

## Deuteronomy Chapter 22

**Deuteronomy 22:1 (NLT)** “If you see your neighbor’s ox or sheep or goat wandering away, don’t ignore your responsibility. Take it back to its owner. **2** If its owner does not live nearby or you don’t know who the owner is, take it to your place and keep it until the owner comes looking for it. Then you must return it. **3** Do the same if you find your neighbor’s donkey, clothing, or anything else your neighbor loses. Don’t ignore your responsibility.

**4** “If you see that your neighbor’s donkey or ox has collapsed on the road, do not look the other way. Go and help your neighbor get it back on its feet!

After the Israelites have conquered the Promised land and are settled there, God demands that His people care for their neighbors. In the above verses, Moses repeats the law formerly given in Exodus 23:4-5 - but this time additional details are given. Not only should an animal that has strayed be returned to its owner, but clothing or anything that was lost should also be returned. It was to be carefully kept until it could be restored to the owner.

In the passage from Exodus, God commands the Israelite to help his neighbor - even if he is an enemy!

**5** “A woman must not put on men’s clothing, and a man must not wear women’s clothing. Anyone who does this is detestable [KJV: abomination] in the sight of the Lord your God.

God created the sexes with their own peculiar differences. God was the first fashion designer in the Garden of Eden when he made coats or tunics for Adam and Eve out of animal skins to replace their fig leaf coverings. Though the Scripture does not specifically say it, God must have made their garments different from one another, because in the above Scripture in Deuteronomy, He commands that women must not wear men’s clothing, and men must not wear women’s clothing.

There are many aspects of dress. Modesty is one. Does the garment cover the body adequately so that the nakedness of the person is covered? The aspect of dress that is mentioned above is one of *the separation of the sexes*. First of all, masculine and feminine differences in clothing are supposed to be well established by society, and when a society diminishes these differences, it is on the decline morally. In addition, a man should not put on a woman’s clothes, nor should a woman put on a man’s clothes. To do so is a great sin - an “*abomination*” in the sight of God. For one sex to assume the dress of another has historically been regarded as unnatural or indecent.

**6** “If you happen to find a bird’s nest in a tree or on the ground, and there are young ones or eggs in it with the mother sitting in the nest, do not take the mother with the young. **7** You may take the young, but let the mother go, so that you may prosper and enjoy a long life.

God not only expected kindness to one's neighbor, but to animal life as well. The mother bird is respected as one that can produce more young. Animal life may be taken for food, but species should be protected.

**Deuteronomy 22:8** "When you build a new house, you must build a railing around the edge of its flat roof. That way you will not be considered guilty of murder if someone falls from the roof.

God commanded the Israelites to be sensible and safe, taking care to prevent accidents. This is another way of caring for others. In Bible days, the flat roof was an area that was an extension of the house and was another living space. Therefore, it must be made safe.

**9** "You must not plant any other crop between the rows of your vineyard. If you do, you are forbidden to use either the grapes from the vineyard or the other crop.

**10** "You must not plow with an ox and a donkey harnessed together.

**11** "You must not wear clothing made of wool and linen woven together.

God's people were to be genuine people, not a mixture of godliness and ungodliness, as pictured by the above Scriptures. Single-mindedness is of great value. The influences of others affect us greatly.

**12** "You must put four tassels on the hem of the cloak with which you cover yourself—on the front, back, and sides.

The tassels (or fringes) were a constant reminder to the Israelite that he was under God's law. It also showed the world that He was an Israelite. They were not to be ashamed to be God's people, and they were not to forget God's law.