

11/23/03

No Refuge For Murderers
Josh. 20:1-9

As we look to the past forty years of our nations history, the one characteristic that is very obvious is the measure of violence and horrific murders.

They range from the cold hearted murder of babies in the womb, senseless killing of a person for their car and the majority of these individuals think nothing of it. Violence has become a way of life and life has become cheap and without value.

If that were no enough, the various amount of violence and murder that is witnessed in forms of entertainment is staggering.

The common answer for solving the problem of violent crimes is more policemen on the streets but that is as foolish as saying that the way to stop cavities is to put more dentist in business.

The problem is not the presence of the police in small numbers but the lack of and failure to execute justice regarding the ones who break the law, so as to fit their crime.

The problem of evil starts at the top with our legislators, the judicial system and the executive

branch of our authorities, be they federal, state or local government.

* All that has to occur for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. (Edman Blake)

There are three things that are absolutely essential for law and order to be present which ensures a safe and orderly society.

1. A recognized authority.
2. A recognized submission to authority.
3. A recognized consequence for breaking authority.

If you circumvent, compromise or fail to execute consistently the consequences, you destroy authority and encourage rebellion and self will!

This applies to all forms of crime but how much more to the crime of murder in the land!

God had given to Joshua and all the people of Israel all of the land and now they would have to begin to live in the land and among one another.

Therefore God knowing the sinfulness of man, He commanded that there would be placed throughout the land "cities of refuge", to insure justice for murderers who were guilty and protection for those who killed someone by accident, accidental manslaughter.

The Levites were to be dispersed throughout the land, so as to have a spiritual influence that would affect and stabilize society.

This is clearly laid out in chapter twenty and twenty one in the book of Joshua.

1. Chapter twenty gives us the six refuge cities and their purpose.
2. Chapter twenty-one gives us the forty-two cities and common lands for the Levites.

The book of Exodus mentions them and the book of Numbers gives us the record of the detailed provisions that were made, prior to coming into the land. Ex. 21:13, Num. 35

1. They are in reverse order, the cities of the Levites being first. Num. 35:1-8
2. The cities of refuge second, with greater detail. Num. 35:9-34

In view of the fact that the book of Numbers provides for us the fuller account, we will point out merely the abbreviated description in Joshua but use the record in the book of Numbers, to insure that we understand the complete significance of the “Cities of Refuge” and their provisional laws. Josh. 20:1-9, Num. 35:9-34

- I. The provision was to appoint the cities of refuge. Vs. 1-2, 7-8
- II. The provision was for the innocent to flee to the cities of refuge. Vs. 3, 9

- III. The provision was to insure a just and fair trial in the cities of refuge. Vs. 4-6

Lets look at what the Bible has to say about the crime of murder through God’s provisions of the refuge cities, they are as follows: Num. 35:9-34

- I. The provisions for the case of murder. Vs. 9-15
- II. The particular cases involving murder. Vs. 16-28
- III. The principles for the cases of murder. Vs. 29-34

I. The provisions for the cases of murder. Vs. 9-15

- A. The provision was given by God Himself not Moses. Vs. 9-10
 1. The phrase “The Lord spoke to Moses” is found throughout the Pentateuch as well as the entire bible showing the authority of the revelation and inspiration of the Scriptures.
* The phrase appears 52 times in the book of Numbers!
 2. The provision was for the time after they crossed over the Jordan and occupied the land. Vs. 10
 3. This is exactly what is confirmed by Joshua, God is the one who spoke to Joshua to appoint for themselves the

cities of refuge He had spoken to Moses about. Josh. 20:1-2

B. The purpose is stated by God. Vs. 11-12

1. The cities of refuge were in order that the person who killed someone accidentally could flee there for safety. Vs. 11
2. The cities were a temporary sanction in two ways. Vs. 12
 - a. To protect the slayer from the avenger, the gaal of blood who had the duty and right to pursue and kill the slayer.
 - b. To ensure a legal and just trial for the accused.
3. This is again is what we are told in Joshua.
 - a. This is again confirmed by the text in Joshua, “That the slayer who killed a person accidentally or unintentionally might flee there; as their refuge from the avenger of blood”. Josh. 20:3
 - b. The person would flee to one of those cities, and stand at the entrance of the gate of the city, and declares his case in the hearing of the elders of that city, they would take him into the city as one of them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. Josh. 20:4

- 1) The elder would conduct all business and judgments at the gates of the city. Ruth. 4
- 2) The priestly cities as well as all the Levites were dispersed throughout the land, that they might constantly have a permeating effect on the people.
- c. The policy was that if the avenger of blood pursued him, they were not to deliver the slayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor unintentionally, but did not hate him beforehand. Josh. 20:5
 - * All the cities were one day’s journey, centralized throughout the land!

C. The particular number of cities is decide by God. Vs. 13-15

1. The total number is six. Vs. 13
2. The geographical location was three on the east side of the Jordan and three on the west side of the Jordan in Canaan. Vs. 14
 - a. The three on the west. Josh. 20:7
 - 1) Kedesh in Galilee, in the mountains of Naphtali, it means holy place.
 - 2) Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, means back or shoulder.

- 3) Kirjath Arba (which *is* Hebron) in the mountains of Judah, means city of great one.
- b. The three on the East. Josh. 20:8
- 1) Bezer by Jericho eastward, in the wilderness on the plain, from the tribe of Reuben., means fortress
 - 2) Ramoth in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad, means heights.
 - 3) Golan in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh., means their captivity.
3. The cities were for the children of Israel, the stranger and for the sojourner among them, if they killed a person accidentally. Vs. 15
- a. Joshua points this out, “These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel and the stranger who dwelt among them, that whoever killed a person accidentally might flee there, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood until he stood before the congregation.” Josh. 20:9
- b. The person would dwell in that city until he stood before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the one who is high priest in those days. Then the slayer may return and come to his own city and his own house, to the city from which he fled. Josh. 20:6, Deut. 4:40-43

Illustration

Few prison rituals are more common than putting a troublesome prisoner on bread and water. Then came Dale Carson, a former FBI agent, to Florida as sheriff of Duval County (Jacksonville)

He discovered that the young toughs gloried in being on bread and water, because it proved how tough they were. They even brag about the bread and water treatment. So Carson substituted baby food. They eat it because they were hungry but they did not brag about it. One day usually gets them on their best behavior,” observed Carson.

#509

* God’s provisions are to deter murder and injustice!

Application

1. If we examine our basic rule of law, we will see that it is based on the Judea-Christian faith for the most part, God is the One who has set the rule of law for man on the earth from the beginning in the Garden.

- a. The moral law and civil law in Exodus and Leviticus was to insure order in society and justice for long-term survival.
- b. The Ten Commandments that were once embraced and proudly displayed publicly are now ordered to be taken down, like the present case in Alabama with Judge Roy Moore, as has been charged with disobeying

to remove a small monument of the ten Commandments and is going to be tried.

* The Commandments are basic, they are established on honor and obedience to God and then and only then can man be honorable and obedient to man. Ex. 20:1-17

2. The laws of God are very just and right with punishable consequences.

a. God knows the evil nature of man, especially regarding vengeance, so He gave the Law of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”.

b. Many non-Christians misunderstand the law, as well as Christians, it is a limitation on revenge, not a command to do so.

c. You can only knock out one for one, not all of his teeth.

* “But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” Ex. 21:23-25

3. The provisions of God are not only on earth through the rule of government and rulers but the most important provision is to bring our case before Him.

a. God is not willing that anyone perish, so He died for all and all can repent if they choose. 1Pet. 3:9

b. God is the Advocate for the believer’s defense when a believer falls into sin. 1Jn. 2:1

c. God is the One who knows all absolute truth and when there are injustices, we must rest in His righteous and sovereign justice. 1Pet. 4:19

These are the provisions for the cases of murder!

II. The particular cases involving murder. Vs. 16-28

A. The case of murder was punishable by death. Vs. 16-18

1. If he strikes the individual with an iron implement and he die. Vs. 16

2. If he strike the individual with a stone in his hand and he die. Vs. 17

3. If he strike the individual with a wooden hand weapon and he die. Vs. 18

B. The one to execute the capital punishment was to be the avenger of blood. Vs. 19, 21d

1. The elders would turn him over to the avenger of blood and they were warned of not pitying the guilty person as the sample case in Deuteronomy. Deut. 19:1-13

2. The elders of the nearest city to the body of the deceased would be required to take

an oath of their lack of knowledge about the guilty party, if there was no person caught, and then purify the crime by the ashes of the red heifer. Deut. 21:1-9

- C.** The case of premeditated murder was punishable by death. Vs. 20-21
1. If he pushes the individual out of hatred, while lying in wait and he dies. Vs.20
 2. If he in enmity strikes the individual with his hand and dies. Vs. 21
- D.** The case of unintentional manslaughter was to be tried and judged by the evidence. Vs. 22-25
1. The particulars to qualify for unintentional manslaughter are clearly stated. Vs. 22-23
 - a. However, if he pushes him suddenly without enmity, or throws anything at him without lying in wait. Vs. 22
 - b. Or uses a stone, by which a man could die, throwing it at him without seeing him, so that he dies, while he was not his enemy or seeking his harm. Vs. 23
 2. The persons judging the case would consider, examine and bring a verdict based on the body of evidence. Vs. 24
 3. The persons judging the case after finding the person innocent of any premeditated or intentional wrong doing

to murder the individual would not allow the avenger of blood to kill him in revenge but would deliver the acquitted person to the city of refuge from which he sought refuge from, and he would have to remain there till the death of the High Priest, at which time he or she was free to return home. Vs. 25

* This would provide a long duration of time in hope of anger and revenge to of subsided!

- E.** The case of unintentional manslaughter had limited protection for the acquitted person. Vs. 26-28
1. The individual was not protected outside the walls of the city of refuge to which he was confined to and if he went out and was slain by the avenger of blood it would be just and legal. Vs. 26-27

* All the factors were to detour people from committing murder!
 2. The person in refuge was aware of the conditions of the law and the chances he took going outside the city. Vs. 28

* The interesting parallel is that we are all guilty before God and having fled for refuge to Jesus who is our High Priest, we must abide permanently for He will never die again! Heb. 6:11, 18-20

Illustration

Johnny Cockrine told an television interviewer the following about justice in America after the O.J case, “The color of justice is not black or white, it is green”.

* The time has come that the Lady of justice should be presented with her blindfold removed and a wallet in her scales.

Application

1. How frustrating it is for so many in society today, when it comes to equitable justice for cases of murder.

- a. The Lawyers fabricate and build cases that are insulting to the facts and evidence in the case.
- b. The Lawyers offer plead bargains for a lesser charge or lesser punishment if the accused provides information or cooperation.

* Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Is. 5:20

2. Justice on this earth has much to do with the amount of money a person has to defend themselves.

- a. To deny it is to be blind to the travesty of our court system.

- b. Don’t get me wrong, we still have the best judicial system in the world probably but, it is nothing what is used to be!
 - c. It is not to say that there is no justice executed at all, but neither can we say justice is executed on an equal level.
 - * When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan. Prov. 29:2
- 3.** One of the most basic reasons for the exercise of capital punishment is recorded in Genesis.
- a. God gave to Noah the first governmental laws for man and society, after the flood.
 - b. Among them was the command, “Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed; **For in the image of God He made man.**” Gen. 9:5-6
 - c. Man has removed God from his mind and existence, therefore his sense of values are warped and twisted, equating the life of an animal more or equal to that of a man or woman.
 - d. Yet at the same time they believe killing babies in the womb by the many forms of abortion, including “partial abortion” is not only right but their right, then the same person will be protesting animal cruelty,

something is definitely wrong in our society and world!

* “No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity.” Is. 59:4

These are the particular cases involving murder!

III. The principles for the cases of murder.

Vs. 29-34

A. The statutes were absolute and binding. Vs. 29

1. For all their generations.
2. For all their dwelling places.

B. The sentence of death required two witnesses. Vs. 30

1. The witness of one was too tempting for one who desired vengeance.

* If anyone gave false testimony and were found out, they would incur on themselves the punishment they attempted to bring on the accused.
Deut. 19:16-20

2. The witness of two established a matter.
Deut. 17:6, 19:15

* No person in their right mind would agree with another to testify falsely

when they knew they would be put to death if found out!

C. The setting of a man free for money was not permitted. Vs. 31-32

1. The murderer could not be ransomed from his or her guilt but they were to be put to death. Vs. 31
 - a. Male or female.
 - b. Yong or old.
 - c. Jew or stranger.

* In 1953 there were about two-hundred prisoners on death row, in 2002 there were over 3,500 on death row!

2. The person in refuge could not be ransomed in order to be set free prior to the death of the High Priest. Vs. 32
 - a. No amount of money could save you.
 - b. No prominence of family could deliver you.

D. The Scriptural reasons for capital punishment. Vs. 33-34

1. The shedding of a persons blood defiled the land. Vs. 33a-b
2. The defilement of the land by blood can not be atoned, except by the blood of the guilty party. Vs. 33c-e

* As we have seen, the reason given to Noah after the flood, was that man was created in the image of God. Gen. 9:6

3. The Lord dwelt in the midst of the children of Israel. Vs. 34
 - a. He was a witness to the murders.
 - b. He was a witness to their execution of justice or the failure of it.
 - * The sixth commandment is, “You shall not kill”, which regards murder not capital punishment!

Illustration

Joshua told Achan, “Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day.” So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. Josh. 7:25

Application

1. There are those who think that the New Testament does not support capital punishment.
 - a. They say we are under grace and therefore the Law does not apply to us.
 - b. They categorically teach and oppose any person Christian or non-Christian who would favor capital punishment.
2. The words of Jesus are very important on the matter of capital punishment.
 - a. Jesus said that man is not to fear the one who can kill the body and afterwards have no power over the soul. Lk. 12:4
 - 1) Jesus could of been referring to man in general who would kill another.

- 2) Jesus could of been referring to the governmental powers at hand who had power to execute capital punishment.
- b. Jesus did not contest or object to the killing of some Galileans by Pilate who was in authority but declared, “Do you suppose they were worst sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such a thing? I say to you, no; but unless you repent you will likewise perish.” Lk. 13:1-3
- c. Jesus warned the disciples in a prophetic way about physical persecution that would result in death, as capital punishment for being a Christian. Math. 24:9
- d. Jesus Himself was put to death by the authorities of the land, both religious and civil being found innocent of any crime. Jn. 18:38
3. Paul’s writings are also important regarding capital punishment.
 - a. Paul acknowledged the ruling authorities of the land as those ordained by God, which the believer is to be subject to, even though the authorities are not Christian. Rom. 13:1-7
 - b. The only reason for disobeying the authorities is when they very clearly violated God’s word as a command to the believer. Acts 5:29
 - c. Paul points out that the government in authority *does not bear the sword in vain*;

for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Vs. 4

* Yet Paul and the others were aware that injustices, abuses and horrible crimes were committed by the ruling powers of Rome because they were fallen and in darkness!

4. Peter's words are in accord with Paul focusing on the believers obedience to the ruling authorities as a witness of Christ and that in fact, if we do suffer being innocent it is commendable before God, using Christ as our example. 1Pet. 2:13-17

- a. The all inclusive imperative command, "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme". Vs. 13
- b. Their source and purpose, "Or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good." Vs. 14
- c. The reason, "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men-- as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God." Vs. 15-16
- d. The perspective, "Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king." Vs. 17
- e. The example, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving

us an example, that you should follow His steps." Vs. 21

- f. The life of faith, "Those who suffer according to the will of God are to commit their souls to Him in doing good, as a faithful Creator." 1Pet. 4:19

5. The failure to bring about speedy justice and execute capital punishment only increases disorder and more murders.

- a. Many say that capital punishment is not a deterrent to murder, yet that is precisely what that others would fear consequences.
- b. The person who is deterred immediately is the murderer.
- c. The second person is the one who thinks on doing the same thing.
- d. If consequences are not a deterrent to disobedience and evil, then why do we have any laws, write tickets for speeding, fine people late charges, etc, it is basic common sense!

* "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Eccl. 8:11

These are the principles for the cases of murder!

Conclusion

Think about what the Bible teaches about murder, the way it is to be handled and how it produced a

safe and orderly society. Now think of what our laws teach today, how we handle murders and the type of society it has produced!

- I.** The provisions for the case of murder have the innocent in mind!
- II.** The particular cases involving murder are clearly stated!
- III.** The principles for the cases of murder are for today!