

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
8-24-22

Deuteronomy 19

Cities of Refuge – Verses 1-3

¹ When the LORD your God has destroyed the nations whose land he is giving you, and when you have driven them out and settled in their towns and houses, ²then set aside for yourselves three cities in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess. ³Determine the distances involved and divide into three parts the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, so that a person who kills someone may flee for refuge to one of these cities.

19:1-2 You shall separate three cities for yourself in the midst of the land: God instructed Israel to make three cities of refuge in the Promised Land, and instructed them to make them "centrally located" (in the midst of the land). There are two other important passages dealing with the cities of refuge: Numbers 35:9-28 and Joshua 20:7-8; a full understanding of the purpose and practice of the cities of refuge must be based on all of these passages.

19:2-3 Moses had already established Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan as the cities of refuge on the east side of the Jordan River (Deuteronomy 4:41-43); this command is to establish three more cities of refuge on the west side of the Jordan.

19:3 Prepare roads for yourself: The people of Israel were to make good roads to each city of refuge, so the cities would be accessible. "The roads to the cities of refuge were made very broad, thirty-two cubits; and even, so that there should be no impediments in the way; and were constantly kept in good repair."

The Purpose For The Cities Of Refuge – Verses 4-7

⁴ This is the rule concerning anyone who kills a person and flees there for safety—anyone who kills a neighbor unintentionally, without malice aforethought. ⁵ For instance, a man may go into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and as he swings his ax to fell a tree, the head may fly off and hit his neighbor and kill him. That man may flee to one of these cities and save his life. ⁶ Otherwise, the avenger of blood might pursue him in a rage, overtake him if the distance is too great, and kill him even though he is not deserving of death, since he did it to his neighbor without malice aforethought. ⁷ This is why I command you to set aside for yourselves three cities.

19:4-7 Every society must deal with the problem of murder. But how should society treat those who have innocently or accidentally killed someone? God had an answer for the Israelites. Since revenge was common and swift in Moses' day, God had the Israelites set apart several "cities of refuge." Anyone who claimed to have accidentally killed someone could flee to one of these cities until he could have a fair trial. If he was found innocent of intentional murder, he could remain in that city and be safe from those seeking revenge. This is a beautiful example of how God blended his justice and mercy toward his people. (For more information on cities of refuge, see the note on Numbers 35:6.)

Appointment Of Additional Cities Of Refuge – Verses 8-10

⁸ If the LORD your God enlarges your territory, as he promised on oath to your ancestors, and gives you the whole land he promised them, ⁹ because you carefully follow all these laws I command you today—to love the LORD your God and to walk always in obedience to him—then you are to set aside three more cities. ¹⁰ Do this so that innocent blood will not be shed in your land, which the LORD your God is giving you as your inheritance, and so that you will not be guilty of bloodshed.

19:8 Now if the LORD your God enlarges your territory: As Israel expanded, there were to be more cities of refuge. If a city of refuge was too far to be readily reached by the manslayer, it did him no good - the avenger of blood would overtake him before he could reach the city of refuge.

19:9-10 Then you shall add three more cities for yourself: Ultimately, there were to be six cities of refuge; with three on each side of the Jordan River. Each of the three cities on either side would be positioned as north, central, and south. Joshua 20:7-8 tells of the actual cities chosen; they fulfilled the plan of being evenly distributed perfectly.

What To Do With The Guilty Who Seeks Protection In The City Of Refuge – Verses 11-13

¹¹ But if out of hate someone lies in wait, assaults and kills a neighbor, and then flees to one of these cities, ¹² the killer shall be sent for by the town elders, be brought back from the city, and be handed over to the avenger of blood to die. ¹³ Show no pity. You must purge from Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood, so that it may go well with you.

19:11 But if anyone hates his neighbor, lies in wait for him, rises against him and strikes him mortally: We can easily imagine that those truly guilty of murder would, at some time or another, seek protection in the city of refuge. So, whenever a manslayer came to seek protection at a city of refuge, the elders of the city were to judge his case and determine if he was truly worthy of protection.

19:12 Deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood: If it was determined at this trial that the man was really guilty of murder, then he would be delivered to the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. There was no protection of the guilty within the walls of a city of refuge.

19:13 Put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with you: God was just as concerned that the guilty be punished as He was that the innocent be protected (lest innocent blood be shed in the midst of your land, Deuteronomy 19:10).

19:13 The cities of refuge as a picture of Jesus. The Bible applies this picture of the city of refuge to the believer finding refuge in God on more than one occasion. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are within easy reach of the needy person; they were of no use unless someone could get to the place of refuge.

Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are open to all, not just the Israelite; no one needs to fear that they would be turned away from their place of refuge in their time of need (Numbers 35:15). Both Jesus and the cities of refuge became a place where the one in need would live; you didn't come to a city of refuge in time of need just to look around (Numbers 35:25).

Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are the only alternative for the one in need; without this specific protection, they will be destroyed. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge provide protection only within their boundaries; to go outside meant death (Numbers 35:26-28). With both Jesus and the cities of

refuge, full freedom comes with the death of the High Priest (Numbers 35:25). A crucial distinction: The cities of refuge only helped the innocent; the guilty can come to Jesus and find refuge!

The Principle Of The Landmark – Verse 14

¹⁴Do not move your neighbor's boundary stone set up by your predecessors in the inheritance you receive in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess.

19:14 You shall not remove your neighbor's landmark: God here established and supported the basic right to private property. When your neighbor has a lawful landmark, you must respect it - and are forbidden to change it as you might please.

This command supports an important foundation for human society: The right to personal property. God has clearly entrusted certain possessions to certain individuals, and other people or states are not permitted to take that property without due process of law.

The Principle Of True And False Witness – Verses 15-20

¹⁵One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

¹⁶If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse someone of a crime, ¹⁷the two people 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. ¹⁸The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against a fellow Israelite, ¹⁹then do to the false witness as that witness intended to do to the other party. You must purge the evil from among you. ²⁰The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you.

19:15 One witness shall not rise: One witness was never enough to establish a fact in a Biblical court of law. One needed two or three witness to establish a matter. This isn't just because it is possible for one witness to lie without having his story corroborated. It is because one witness can be confused, or mistaken in his testimony. It is a basic measure of reliability that it must be more than a simple case of "my word against theirs."

19:18 If a false witness rises against any man to testify: False witness was discovered by careful examination (the judges shall make diligent inquiry) and was punished by giving the false witness the same penalty which would have gone to the man he falsely accused (you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother).

19:20 And those who remain shall hear and fear: Many modern people doubt that the punishment of others is an effective deterrent to crime; but the Bible clearly says that it is. Weak or inconsistent punishment does not deter crime, but effective punishment does.

Eye for Eye, Tooth for Tooth – Verse 21

²¹Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

19:21 This principle was for the judges to use, not a plan for personal vengeance. This attitude toward punishment may seem primitive, but it was actually a breakthrough for justice and fairness in ancient times when most nations used arbitrary methods to punish criminals. This guideline reflects a concern for evenhandedness and justice—ensuring that those who violated the law were not punished more severely than their particular crime deserved. In the same spirit of justice, a false witness was to receive the same punishment the accused person would have suffered. The principle of making the punishment fit the crime should still be observed today.