

June 9

Scriptures: Read Numbers 35 & 36

Key Verse: “therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit... for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel.” (Numbers 35:34)

Overview

Since the Levites were not to receive any inheritance of land like the other tribes, God made provision for them with the allotment of forty-eight cities scattered throughout the land wherein they could live with their families. They were also to receive land wherein they could life with their families. They were also to receive land surrounding each of the cities for their livestock. In Joshua chapter 21, we read of the fulfillment of this command that the Lord gave to Moses, even though Moses Himself would not live to see it. The reason behind this command was probably to keep a spiritual influence felt in all the land.

Six of the forty-eight cities were to be designated as “cities of refuge”. This was a gracious provision from God to protect a suspected murderer from the “avenger” until he could come to a fair trial (35:12). A close relative of the deceased was expected to take upon himself the responsibility for avenging the blood of his kinsmen. This would prevent large family feuds that might cause the unnecessary deaths of several. The same person who was the blood avenger was also to be the kinsman redeemer. He would redeem, or buy back, a relative sold into slavery, or redeem a lost inheritance of his kinsmen. All this would be done to maintain the honor of the family.

If the death was found to be accidental, the slayer could flee for safety to one of the cities of refuge. These were located strategically throughout the land so that one could be reached within a short period of time. God graciously allowed for three of the cities to be located in Transjordan to protect those who had remained there; the other three were in the land of Canaan. Though a death might have been caused unintentionally, the slayer had still spilt a man’s blood and was to remain in the city of refuge, for if he left he was fair game for the avenger of blood. However, upon the death of the high priest, he was granted pardon and could safely return to his home, and any avenging would be unlawful. If the slayer was found guilty of willful murder by using a hard item or weapon (35:16-18), with the testimony of more than one witness he was to be put to death by the avenger of blood and not afforded any protection.

With these laws and others, Israel had the highest form of justice compared with their heathen neighbors. They had a high regard for the sanctity of life, since they knew they had been made in God’s image. It was such a serious thing to kill and shed the blood of a man that it would bring defilement upon the land; and the land in which the Lord dwelt was to remain pure. They were to respect God and other people as well.

The last chapter of the book of Numbers wraps up the account of the five brothers less daughters of Zelophehad (27:1-11). The men of their tribe were considering the ramifications of the women’s rights to the inheritance. What would happen if they married outside of the tribe? The land would then be lost to its original inheritors. Moses again sought the Lord’s answer; He responded that if any woman became an heiress, she was obliged to marry a man from within her own tribe, so the family allotments would not “change hands from one tribe to another” (36:9). We read that the noble daughters of Zelophehad did as the Lord commanded. Considering all the occasions of disobedience in the book of Numbers, this is a happy not upon which to end.

Prayer

We flee unto You for refuge, O God. Thank You for Your provision of a safe place in Jesus where we fear no evil.