

July 7

Scriptures: Read Deuteronomy 19 & 20

Key Verse: “Do not be afraid,... for the Lord your God... goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.” (Deuteronomy 20:3b-4)

Overview

Moses knew that soon the children of Israel would be living under radically different circumstances in their new land. He wanted to prepare them, instruct them for holy living, and ensure that justice would prevail.

Before the establishment of the new governmental system and the appointment of township judges, justice was taken into the hands of the people. The kinsman redeemer (responsible to buy back the lost inheritance of a relative, or even the relative himself who was sold into slavery) also acted as the blood-avenger. He was to act out of a passion for justice on behalf of his dead relative; however, his passion could easily become misplaced if out of fury he sought the death of the manslayer, though he be innocent and the cause of death accidental. The new form of governmental that was to exist within the new land would wisely exert more control over the blood-avenger. This control would also help bring harmony, for it would help prevent a resulting feud and other unnecessary deaths.

The cities of refuge provided protection for the one who accidentally killed another, and they helped to prevent blood guiltiness for the shedding of innocent blood (19:10). However, the one who was found truly guilty of premeditated murder could find no refuge there. He was to pay the penalty of death since he intentionally spilled blood (19:12-13). The establishment of these cities, and the warning about moving a neighbor's landmark (19:14), as well as the law of witnesses (19:15-19), are evidence of God's concern for truth and justice in His land, for the sanctity and importance of a human life, and for the continual purging of the land from all evil (19:13, 19).

These three special cities were to be strategically placed so that all would have easy access to one in the case of emergency. They were to be chosen from among the Levitical cities, so the refuge found there would be understood as from God. This would show the judicial importance of the priests and Levites.

It is evident from chapter 20 that God had a secondary purpose in establishing Israel in Canaan, and that was to be an instrument of inhabitants in cities farther away, however, was to be quite different. If they accepted Israel's offer of peace, they were to be made tributaries of Israel (20:11), and out of kindness and consideration, even their fruit-bearing trees were not to be cut down (20:19).

In warfare, Moses wanted Israel to have courage and trust in the Lord, knowing He is stronger than any enemy, no matter how great the obstacles might be. The priests were to encourage the soldiers before the battle so they would be aware of God's presence with them and be assured of victory (see key verse).

The army itself was to be made up of only those who were both physically and mentally ready for battle. Cowardly men were to be released from military duty, for such men might influence others and be detrimental to morale. Gideon's example showed this was very wise and practical (Judge 7:3). Another exemption was permitted for men who had unfinished projects (20:5-7). This measure was to ensure total concentration on the battlefield. The believer today is to be as a soldier enlisted by the Lord and is to "endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier" (2 Tim.2:3-4). We must have a single-minded purpose that we may "wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience" (1 Tim.1:18-19).

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, that Your Name is a strong tower, and like the Israelites and their cities of refuge, the righteous run into Your Name and are safe. Help us to go forth into warfare knowing that You, Lord Jesus, are Captain of the Lord's hosts.