

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 21

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

CHAPTER 35-36

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Numbers ends with these two significant chapters. The LORD had given many commandments and instructions to the twelve tribes. One tribe, which was not counted as a part of the twelve tribes, was the Levites. The Levites had a special place among the children of Israel. They were sanctified unto the LORD. They were separated to serve the LORD. Each time when the LORD had dealt with the twelve tribes, the LORD would address the Levites. In chapter 35, the LORD gave specific instructions to the Levites pertaining to the places where they would live in the Promised Land. The LORD also gave them important guidelines concerning their relationship and work to the children of Israel.

The final chapter deals with the divine purpose and pattern relating to land inheritance to the children of Israel. The theme of the chapter concerns the land inheritance given to the five daughters of Zelophehad. A problem arising out of the inheritance to these five sisters was brought to the attention of Moses by their male relatives. Moses' answer to them gives some practical directions that are beneficial to our spiritual growth.

OUTLINE

A. The Inheritance of the Levites (35:1-8).

1. The LORD spoke to Moses concerning the inheritance of the Levites (vv.1-2).
2. The LORD commanded the children of Israel to give to the Levites cities and their suburbs for them to dwell (vv. 2-5).
 - a) The cities for them to live in (v. 3a).
 - b) The suburbs for their livestock (v. 3b).
 - c) The suburbs were the land one thousand feet cubits round about the cities (vv.4-5).
3. Six cities that were given to the Levites would be designated cities of refuge (v.6a).
4. Another forty-two cities were added, making a total of forty-eight cities (vv. 6b-7).
5. The cities would be divided proportionately according to their population, and every tribe was to give cities to the Levites (v. 8).

B. The Reason and the Provision of the Cities of Refuge (35:9-34).

1. The LORD instructed the children of Israel through Moses concerning the cities of refuge (vv. 9-11).
2. Any person who accidentally killed a man might flee to a city of refuge and be protected from the avenger until he was judged (vv. 11b-12).
3. There were six cities of refuge, three on the west

and three on the east bank of Jordan (vv. 13-15).

4. The death penalty imposed on all who murder a person (vv. 16-21).
5. The life-sentence of a high priest would be imposed on those who unpremeditatedly killed a person (vv. 22-29).
6. The judgement on the accused must be corroborated by more than one witness (vv. 30-32).
7. The shedding of blood of a person would corrupt the land (vv. 33-34).

C. The Permanency of the Inheritance of the Land to the Tribes (36:1-12).

1. The chief fathers of the tribe of Manasseh raised a point concerning land given to the daughters of families vv.1-4).
 - a) The case brought up was land given to Zelophehad (vv. 1-2).
 - b) The complaint was that if the daughter married a man from another tribe, her inheritance would be taken away (v. 3).
 - c) This transfer of land would be confirmed in the year of jubilee (v.4).
2. Moses responded with the words of the LORD (vv. 5-12).
 - a) Moses commended the point raised (v. 5).
 - b) The solution was for the daughters to find husbands within their own tribe (v.6).
 - c) In this way the inheritance of the land would not be transferred to another tribe (vv. 7-9).

3. The daughters of Zelophehad obeyed the commandment to marry within their own tribe (vv. 10-12).

D. Thus the LORD commanded the Children of Israel (36:13).

COMMENTARY

The Levitical Cities

The Levites had no land inheritance. The LORD was their inheritance. The LORD said to Aaron, the high priest, (Numbers 18:20): *Thou shalt have **no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel.*** And to the Levites, The LORD said, (Numbers 18:24): *But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, **Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.*** Their inheritance was not land but the LORD Himself. The Levites were provided for by the offerings of the children of Israel to the LORD. After giving the final instructions to the other tribes that would be entering the Promised Land, the LORD attended to the Levites.

The LORD commanded the children of Israel to give up part of their land inheritance, cities to the Levites to dwell, and the suburbs surrounding the cities for their herds and flock. The suburbs would stretch for 1,000 cubits (about 450 metres) all round the city. The combined contribution of

the number of cities for the Levites would be forty-eight. They would be scattered throughout the land. Six of these forty-eight cities would be designated as cities of refuge. The detailed location of these cities is given in the Book of Joshua (ch. 20:7-9; 21:1-8). Three cities of refuge would be evenly spread on each side of Jordan, that is, three in Canaan, and three on the east of Jordan. The East of Jordan were populated by the Manassites, Gadites and Reubenites.

The purpose why the Levites were scattered throughout the land is mentioned in Deuteronomy 33:10: *They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar.* The Levites were set apart from the rest of the children of Israel to minister the Word of the LORD to them. It is quite obvious why their cities were spread throughout the land. The children of Israel would have easier access to the Levites to be instructed in the law, statutes, testimony, and judgements of the LORD. The LORD dwelt in the midst of His people. It is very important that the people, and their children, and their children's children learned who the LORD their God is, and obeyed Him. One effective principle of doing the work of the LORD can be drawn from this spreading of the Levitical cities throughout the land, instead of all the Levities being concentrated in one particular place. The Word of God must be taught to the people throughout the Land of Promise. It is imperative that the Levites carry out this spiritual task which was the backbone of Israel's existence and reception of God's blessing.

The people of God must walk in accordance to the law of God for they are a chosen people, different from the other nations. Learning the Word and obeying the LORD their God would give visible expression and testimony of their relationship with God. In fact, it is for their own welfare and blessings. No one who has honoured and obeyed God has been deprived of the blessings of life. To this end, the Levites had a great responsibility in shepherding the flock of God. Their function was a spiritual one, and was of paramount importance.

Six out of the forty-eight cities were appointed throughout the land as cities of refuge. The purpose of these cities was that a manslayer might flee to take refuge and be protected in these cities (35:6). They were set up for the manslayer and not the murderer. When a person's life had been taken from him, the deceased's nearest of kin could avenge his death. However, the LORD made a distinction between unintentional and intentional killing. Although the avenger could justifiably take the life of the person who killed his relative, the judgement upon the manslayer was the responsibility of the congregation in the city of refuge to which the manslayer fled for protection from the avenger. The LORD gave specific guidelines to help the people make a proper and righteous judgement.

If a person smote a fatal blow on another with an instrument, like iron, stone, or wood, that person was guilty of murder. Moreover if a person who hated another and intentionally waited for him to kill him either with his hand or any object, that person was guilty of murder. The murderer must surely

be put to death. The avenger could execute him (35:16-21). God takes a very high view of life. The life of a man is sacred for he is made in the image of God. The death penalty actually was imposed since the beginning: (Genesis 9:5-6): *And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: **for in the image of God made he man.***

The person who was convicted of murder could not seek protection from the city of refuge. If he fled to the city, the congregation would sit in judgement and if he were found guilty he would be handed to the avenger. However, the conviction of a murderer must be made by at least two witnesses (35:30). One witness was not enough. A further restriction was that the murderer could not pay a ransom to waive the sentence of death upon him (35:31).

The person who killed a man unintentionally, like suddenly hitting him with an object without lying in wait for him, nor was he an enemy of him, nor sought to hurt him, the congregation should deliver the manslayer from his avenger. The manslayer could stay in the city until the death of the high priest when the manslayer could be freed from the avenger. But if he at any time escaped or runaway from the city of refuge before the death of the high priest, he would forfeit the protection given to him. He ran the risk of being confronted and pursued by the avenger who could take his life. These were the guidelines in the matter of a man who killed another man.

The shedding of blood by killing a man corrupts the land or the community. It was therefore necessary to remove the defilement because God dwelt in the midst of the people. It must be stressed again that the provision of the cities of refuge was for the manslayer not the murderer. There was no pardon for the murderer, who took the life of another. This is the justice of God.

The Land Inheritance

The matter of land inheritance that was allotted to daughters because there were no sons in the family was brought up by the male relatives of the daughters of Zelophehad. They had a question for Moses and the princes of the people. They posed the problem that when the daughters of Zelophehad were to take husbands from another tribe, the inheritance of their land would go to the husband. And when the year of jubilee came, the land would be transferred to the husband. In this way the land inheritance of the tribe of the daughters would be reduced. If this happened for a long period, eventually that tribe would be left without land or its land would be greatly diminished. This was contrary to God's pattern that the land should become permanently the possession of each tribe.

Moses heard their case. He answered them according to the word of the LORD. He commended the male relatives of Zelophehad for bringing up the case. Moses then said that the daughters of Zelophehad were free to marry a man of their own choice. But they must marry within the tribe. They could not choose a husband from another tribe—only their own tribe. In this way, it solved the problem of

the danger that the land of the tribe might be reduced through marrying outside the tribe. The daughters of Zelophehad obeyed the commandments which Moses gave to them. They took husbands from within their tribe.

The resolution of the case of land inheritance to daughters teaches that God's pattern for living must be observed. These laws were given by God for their benefits and happiness. Christians can learn this precious guideline in the matter of marriage. A Christian should marry within the Christian community. If he marries one who is outside the Christian community, he has broken God's pattern for His children by being unequally yoked. Marrying within the Christian community would ensure the continuity of the children being brought up in the fear of the LORD. Marrying a person outside of the Christian circle would result in many untold problems and unhappiness. The Christian would soon capitulate from his or her faith.

Moses concluded his record by stating that the LORD gave to the children of Israel through Moses the commandments and the judgements of the LORD. These commandments and judgements must be obeyed.

SUMMARY

The book of Numbers is about the journey of Israel from Egypt to the plains of Moab, and thence to the Promised Land. The account is told with transparent frankness. The successes and failures, the blessings and cursing, the victories and defeats of the children of Israel are recorded. This is unlike man's

record of his own accomplishments. Man would paint only a good picture of what he has done. At times he would even embellish things in order to inflate his own image, and at the same time cover-up the bad. That is falsehood that must be condemned. It is not God's way. If a report has to be recorded, then it should be as factual as possible where both successes and failures must be recorded truthfully.

We must learn to acknowledge our mistakes and shortcomings, and allow others to learn precious lessons even from our failures. In this way, we glorify our God. Spiritual growth does not occur by the mere natural process of ageing. Old age does not guarantee spiritual knowledge and maturity. There must be struggle and striving in life to do the will of the LORD, like the Israelites, to enhance spiritual growth. **Proverbs 16:31**, "*The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.*"

Surely we have learned a lot about God—His sovereignty, His righteousness, His anger and wrath, His hatred of sin, His faithfulness, His love and mercy toward His people. We also learn about ourselves. Like the Israelites, we murmur and complain when we encounter difficulties and troubles, instead of turning to the LORD and trusting in Him.

Now having gleaned through the Book of Numbers, it prepares us for the study of the Book of Deuteronomy, the fifth and last book of the Pentateuch.

AMEN

**DAILY READING & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

**MONDAY: Numbers 35:1-8;
Joshua 20:7-9; 21:1-8;
Deuteronomy 33:10.¹**

¹ Joshua 20:7 And they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjatharba, which *is* Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. 8 And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. 9 These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth *any* person at unawares might flee thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation.

Joshua 21:1 Then came near the heads of the fathers of the Levites unto Eleazar the priest, and unto Joshua the son of Nun, and unto the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel; 2 And they spake unto them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, The LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with the suburbs thereof for our cattle. 3 And the children of Israel gave unto the Levites out of their inheritance, at the commandment of the LORD, these cities and their suburbs. 4 And the lot came out for the families of the Kohathites: and the children of Aaron the priest, *which were* of the Levites, had by lot out of the tribe of Judah, and out of the tribe of Simeon, and out of the tribe of Benjamin, thirteen cities. 5 And the rest of the children of Kohath *had* by lot out of the families of the tribe of Ephraim, and out of the tribe of Dan, and out of the half tribe of Manasseh, ten cities. 6 And the children of Gershon *had* by lot out of the families of the tribe of Issachar, and out of the tribe of Asher, and out of the tribe of Naphtali, and out of the half tribe of Manasseh in Bashan, thirteen cities. 7 The children of Merari by their families *had* out of the tribe of Reuben, and out of the tribe of Gad, and out of the tribe of Zebulun, twelve cities. 8 And the children of Israel gave by lot unto the Levites these cities with their suburbs,

1. Why were the Levites not allotted lands?

2. How were the Levites provided for?

3. Where did the Levites live?

4. What was the purpose for scattering the Levites throughout the territories?

as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.

Deuteronomy 33:10 They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar.

TUESDAY: Numbers 35:9-21; Genesis 9:5-6.²

5. What were the cities of refuge, and how many were there?

6. Could both the murderer and the manslayer be protected in the cities of refuge?

7. What is murder?

² Genesis 9:5 And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. 6 Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.

8. Who will pass judgement and execute the guilty person?

WEDNESDAY: Numbers 35:22-29; Matthew 5:14.³

9. What is manslaughter?

10. How long must the manslayer be confined in the city of refuge? What was the consequence if he left the city?

THURSDAY: Numbers 35:30-34; Matthew 5:21-22.⁴

³ Matthew 5:14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

11. How does it affect the society when a person is killed?

FRIDAY: Numbers 36:1-13; 1 Samuel 2:30; Matthew 6:33; 2 Corinthians 6:14.⁵

12. How was God's divine purpose of the allotment of land to the Israelites permanently preserved when the inheritance of the land fell upon the daughters?

13. What spiritual lesson can we draw from the answer to question 12?

14. From our studies of the Book of Numbers, what kind of person can the Lord count on?

⁴ Matthew 5:21 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

⁵ 1 Samuel 2:30 Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed *that* thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

Matthew 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

2 Corinthians 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

15. What have we learned about ourselves from Israel's experience as recorded in the Book of Numbers?

