

1. Welcome to my final lesson on the book of Numbers. Most of you know by now that this book mainly explains how the Israelites first traveled from Egypt to Israel. At this point in the story those Israelites are close to their destination. These two chapters give the last set of instructions to them in this book. My job is to explain why any of us should care about this ancient history.
  - a) Remember the key to studying the bible is not just to read it, but also to understand how these stories apply to our lives. In these final two chapters of this book, we will read of a handful of regulations given to them. To be honest, this is a strange way to end the book.
    - i) If we understand why they are here, we will get the purpose of this lesson. My job is to explain all of that and hopefully teach all of us a few things about what God desires of us in our relationship with Him. With that said, let me explain further.
  - b) These two chapters start by stating that cities are to be set aside throughout Israel for their priests. It then spends a lot of text discussing murderers and those who accidentally kill a person(s). The Israelite priests are to judge such cases and give appropriate punishment.
    - i) After all of that, the final chapter brings up the case of five Jewish sisters who have no brothers. The issue is what should these women do with their possessions after they get married. Like I said, it is strange way to end the book.
  - c) I suppose all of this would be interesting if I lived in Israel back then. Tell me why should I care about any of this stuff when I have my own problems to deal with? In order for me to answer that question, I need to explain where we left off and give a quick summary of these two chapters. That will lead well to explain why we should care about this stuff.
    - i) To begin, let us remember where we last left off in the last lesson of Numbers. The previous chapter was all about the physical boundaries of the land of Israel. Those boundaries are designed to teach us about rewards we will get for trusting in God. Recall that the Israelites have yet to set foot in that land, let alone conquer it. That is why God is effectively telling them in advance, "The war against sin is already won. Let me describe your reward for that victory before any battle even begins". That is a summary of Chapter 34 from the last lesson. That leads us to this lesson:
      - ii) In Chapter 35, the focus is on the one tribe of Israelites who are to be the priests for the rest of them. The chapter essentially says to them, you priests will get specific plots of land scattered throughout Israel. However, you priests will not be united as single tribe like the rest of the Israelites. Those priests will also have the job to judge murderers and determine who is and who is not to live based on that crime.
      - iii) When one reads about these ancient Jewish priests, we need to study the text as it applies to us Christian believers. A principal Jesus taught is that, we as Christians are to be in, but not of this world. That principal is not quoted directly in the bible, but it based on what Jesus said in John 18:36. Just as those Israelite priests are told they must live scattered throughout the land of Israel, so God the Father desires us Christians to be in this world (think "scattered"), but not of this world.
        - a) The idea is that their main function as priests (and our job as Christians) is to help people draw closer to God. They too are to be "in" the land of Israel but realize is not their permanent home. When one reads of these priests being scattered through Israel, think of Christians being scattered through out our world in order to make a difference for Jesus.
    - d) Believe it or not, this leads to the section about the priests being judges in murder trials. As I love to state, the concept of the Promised Land is about one's complete trust in God for every aspect of one's life. Once we live in a state of complete trust in Him, we all still have to deal with sin. Helping people deal with sins is essentially the priests function.

- i) My point is that if God has called Christians to live amongst the rest of the world, our main job is to lead others closer to Him. That again is how those priests and us Christians are to be "in, but not of this world". That concept includes helping people deal with the consequences of sin. How we help others in that regard, is an underlying lesson in this section about judging murderers.
    - ii) This leads me back to the topic of murder. The basic idea is that if this is God's land, then it must be kept clean. One of the last verses of Chapter 35 is, "Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement can not be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it." John's translation: God has no tolerance for murder happens be it an accident or not, here is how it is to be dealt with.
  - e) Please continue to bear with me while I explain the final part of these two chapters. I then promise to explain how any of this is relevant to us. Next, we have Chapter 36.
    - i) The main point here is that five sisters bring up a good point. If any women marry men of other Jewish tribes, what those women would inherit would then belong to another tribe once they are married. That means the amount of land given to each tribe would change regularly depending upon who marries whom. Therefore, one of the final commands of this book is essentially that one has to marry within one's own tribe so that the size of the land give to each tribe does not change over time.
2. OK, now for the tough part. Why should we care about all of this?
- a) If you get nothing else out of this study, remember the rule that if a passage of the bible is confusing, try putting Jesus in the middle of that passage and see if it makes sense.
  - b) I've already done a little of that explaining how the priests being scattered through out the land of Israel is a little like our role as Christians being "in, but not of this world".
  - c) But what about the whole section about murder? How does that tie to Jesus? The strange part about that section is if someone accidentally kills someone, they must then live in one of six cities controlled by the priests until the death of the High Priest. Jesus is referred to as our high priest throughout the New Testament book of Hebrews. This leads us back to Numbers. Those who are guilty of accidental murder (that is, manslaughter) are to live amongst the priests until the death of the high priest. When people today fail to trust in Jesus to guide their lives, they need the guidance of us "priests" to draw closer to Him.
    - i) It is then Jesus death that sets us free in effect to go out from among the priests and go live like priests in order for them too, to make a difference for Jesus.
    - ii) My point here is that these ancient criminals living among the priests were to learn how to live a better lifestyle until the death of the high priest of the week. ☺
    - iii) As Christians, God wants us to help others come to Him to learn about His death and how that benefits their lives. Trusting in His death frees us of our sins just as the death of the High Priest frees those guilty of manslaughter back then.
    - iv) If that concept is still confusing, I'll discuss it in more detail in this lesson.
  - d) The book ends with a short chapter about five sisters worried that their family inheritance would be lost if they married men from other tribes. By requiring Jewish people to marry within their own tribe, that way, no rewards of any of the tribes are transferred. So what does any of that have to do with our Christian faith? Another good question.
    - i) If the second to last chapter is about our job as priests being scattered in this world and leading others to Jesus, then this final chapter is about continuing our roles as priests. A fairly well known New Testament principal is that believers should not marry nor be in any partnership with nonbelievers. (See 2nd Corinthians 6:14.)
    - ii) The idea is that if we have separated our lives for Jesus, we should stay separated for Him and not be married our have business partners who are unbelievers.
    - iii) This leads me back to Numbers. The idea of not losing our inheritance is about not partnering with others who are unbelievers.

3. OK, I've been talking for over two pages now and haven't covered one verse yet. Let me put all of this together in one thought and then we can get rolling: The idea of these final two chapters is in essence, "Go out in the world and make a difference for Jesus. Teach others how the death of our High Priest frees of us our sins. Finally, don't partner with nonbelievers so that we can keep on working together making that difference for Him".
  - a) That concept of living to make a difference for Jesus is in effect how this book ends. Of course, there are some literal interpretations for those Israelites living back then. It is the principals behind these concepts that are important to us, and that is what I'm trying to get across in describing these two chapters.
  - b) Oh and my lesson title: "How we live to make a difference for Jesus".
4. Chapter 35, Verse 1: On the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho, the LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> "Command the Israelites to give the Levites towns to live in from the inheritance the Israelites will possess. And give them pasturelands around the towns. <sup>3</sup> Then they will have towns to live in and pasturelands for their cattle, flocks and all their other livestock.
  - a) Time for one of my loose translations: Moses was told some chapters back by God that he himself was not going to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. See Numbers 27:12.) In the last chapter he described that the land itself was to be divided up by tribe. One of the 12 tribes of Israel was to be the priests. This group was not to get a section of land like the rest of the tribes. They are to be scattered throughout the area.
  - b) Therefore, Moses is saying to the rest of the Israelites "Don't hog up the land for yourself". Give some cities to the priests scattered where you live. Also give them some farmland where they live so that they have a place to keep their own livestock.
  - c) For those of you who skipped reading my introduction, the principal of these verses for us Christians is to think of believers as being the priests. God wants us to live amongst the world in order to help people draw closer to Him. It is the idea of being "in" but not "of" the world. In effect, think of this section of Numbers as being like when Jesus gave the "Great Commission" to make disciples of all nations. (See Matthew 28:19.)
    - i) To put it another way, our main job as Christians is to lead others to God and help others grow closer to Him. We should use our lives to make a difference for Him. To do that to state the obvious, we need to live in this world, but in effect not be a part of it. That means not to live as how nonbelievers live.
    - ii) So how do we live differently? The idea is about using our lives to bringing glory and using our time and resources to make a difference for Him.
5. Verse 4: "The pasturelands around the towns that you give the Levites will extend out fifteen hundred feet from the town wall. <sup>5</sup> Outside the town, measure three thousand feet on the east side, three thousand on the south side, three thousand on the west and three thousand on the north, with the town in the center. They will have this area as pastureland for the towns.
  - a) In some English translations such as this one, the area given to the Levites is described in feet. Other versions use meters. The original Hebrew had a term transliterated "cubit". This was a standard unit of measure that is the distance from an elbow to one's fingertips.
    - i) If one is to take a city (or a village) that was given for the Levites to use, they are to measure 1,000 cubits in any direction from that city. That additional area of land is to also given to the priests, so they could use that land for their animals to graze.
    - ii) From the sky, the distance from the top left corner to the top right corner of their land would be 2,000 cubits. If you can picture this, the entire area of one if these cities including the farmland was 2,000 cubits "square". If a cubit is about one and one half feet, it is about 3,000 feet "square".
    - iii) You can see that my real estate appraisal skills are coming to the surface here. ☺
    - iv) Let me describe these cities from another perspective. We will read in a few verses that a total of 48 cities are to be given to the priests. This total amount of land for the priests is about one fiftieth of the total area that the Israelites were to live in.

- b) OK, so the priests got sections of land scattered throughout Israel. Why should I care?
    - i) First, the reason the priests needed farmland is that the Israelites were a society that traded in crops and animals. They had no currency so they bought and sold things by trading crops and animals. The priests would need their own farmland in order to raise their own crops and their own animals could graze.
    - ii) The point for us as Christians is that we are to be scattered amongst nonbelievers and other believers in order to draw others closer to God. That is why their land is scattered throughout Israel. I've now beaten that point to death, so I can move on.
- 6. Verse 6: "Six of the towns you give the Levites will be cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone may flee. In addition, give them forty-two other towns." <sup>7</sup> In all you must give the Levites forty-eight towns, together with their pasturelands. <sup>8</sup> The towns you give the Levites from the land the Israelites possess are to be given in proportion to the inheritance of each tribe: Take many towns from a tribe that has many, but few from one that has few."
  - a) John's Loose Translation #2: The Levites are to get a total of 48 cities. Of those 48 cities, six of them are to be "cities of refuge". These are those places where one could run to if one is guilty of accidentally killing someone. Remember that the land of Israel was to be divided up by "lot". That means larger tribes get a larger slice of Israel and smaller tribes will get a smaller slice of Israel. The tribes must give up land in proportion to their size.
  - b) OK, since the book of Numbers, is well full of numbers, I thought it is important to take a quick moment and discuss why there are 48 cities. Why not 10 or 100? Why give to this tribe this specific odd number of cities? The answer is that the numbers mean something. Like most men when I hear 48, I think "What is 6 times 8?" That is the secret of "48".
    - i) In the bible, the number seven is associated with God's completeness as in the fact that He rested from creating the world on the 7th day.
    - ii) To state the obvious, the number six is one less than seven. Therefore the number six is associated as being incomplete before God's eyes. With six cities for refuge, it is teaching about our own incompleteness before God the Father.
    - iii) If the number seven is associated with God's completeness, the number eight is associated with a new beginning. In other words, priests are to lead other people closer to God by giving them a "new beginning" in life. When people understand how the death of our High Priest (Jesus) benefits their lives, it gives them a new start on life. That is why the number of cities is "6 x 8". It teaches about how our life as being incomplete without God can have a new start in life by getting the concept about the death of our high priest.
    - iv) With that interesting little bit of trivia in our heads, we are ready to move on.
- 7. Verse 9: Then the LORD said to Moses: <sup>10</sup> "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: `When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, <sup>11</sup> select some towns to be your cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee. <sup>12</sup> They will be places of refuge from the avenger, so that a person accused of murder may not die before he stands trial before the assembly.
  - a) At this point in the text, the emphasis is going to focus more on the six cities of refuge. In other words, it is understood that the priests are to get a total of 48 cities scattered where the Israelites are living. The text is now going to explain in more detail the purpose and function of these six separate cities (of the 48) that are to be cities of refuge.
  - b) To understand the principal here, one has to remember a few things about the nation of Israel when they first entered the land: There was no police force. There were no jails and there was no system of justice. These cities of refuge don't exist in modern Israel simply because today they have courts of law, police and a jail system to deal with accusations of a crime. This is the system that they used for judging people.
  - c) With that said, let me explain who is the "prosecuting attorney". If someone is killed, it is the job of the nearest relative to try to kill the person who committed that murder. Think of that relative as also having the function of being the lead witness against the accused.

- d) This comes back to the idea that a murderer is not allowed to live. (Note that the one law that each of the first five books of the bible have in common is that a murderer shall not live.) It was the job of the nearest relative to the dead man to get the revenge back then.
  - i) The question then becomes, "how do we know if someone is guilty of murder as opposed to just accidentally killing someone?" That is why God set up this idea of having six cities of refuge. If one killed someone, that person would then need to run to one of these cities as fast as possible before the relative of the dead person could kill them. If that person made it to one of these special cities of refuge, they would be allowed to live there and then stand trial before the leaders of that city.
  - ii) Again these cities belong to the priests, so therefore, one of the jobs of the priests were to be "judge and jury" to determine whether or not someone killed someone else on purpose or by accident. If it was on purpose, that murderer is to die. If the murderer did it by accident, that person is to stay living in that city of refuge until the High Priest dies. Understanding about the High Priest death is a key point.
  - iii) This leads me to explain how this is relevant to us. Let's say we haven't killed anyone either by accident or on purpose. The key is to remember the rule that when a passage of the bible is confusing, put Jesus in the middle of that passage.
  - iv) When Jesus was about to be crucified and the Roman soldiers were dividing up His clothes as their fee for their service, Jesus then prayed to God the Father, "Forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing". (Based on Luke 23:34).
    - a) Also consider when Steven was being stoned to death in the book of Acts for being a witness for Jesus, his final words before going to heaven was in effect for God to forgive his accusers of doing that act. (See Acts 7:60).
  - v) Both of these verses teach that to deny Jesus is God and that He died for our sins is in effect "manslaughter". To put it another way, when we deny that Jesus died for our sins, we are in effect saying, put Jesus to death, as we don't want His death to bear the punishment for our sins. To deny Jesus as paying the price for our sins is in effect to commit manslaughter. Our only hope at that point is to run to a "city of refuge" so that we can have new life once our High Priest has died for our sins.
  - vi) Therefore, the whole point about a city of refuge is to teach us to run there in order to get forgiveness of our sins. One can also read this whole section about being in the role of priests helping others draw closer to Jesus by understanding His role as our high priest. Either way we should get that by now and we can move on.
- 8. Verse 13: These six towns you give will be your cities of refuge. <sup>14</sup> Give three on this side of the Jordan and three in Canaan as cities of refuge. <sup>15</sup> These six towns will be a place of refuge for Israelites, aliens and any other people living among them, so that anyone who has killed another accidentally can flee there.
  - a) The key point of these verses is that three of those six cities are to be located in the land of Israel itself. The other three are to be east of Israel where the other two and one half tribes live. If nothing else, one gets the idea this is not an equal distribution of where these cities are to be located. So why are three cities east of the land of Israel? Good question.
  - b) This does not mean that a murder is more likely to occur outside of the land of Israel. It does mean that those who are not that close to God (i.e., living outside of the land) need people to help them draw closer to Him. Again, think of the "Great Commission" of going into the world to tell people about Jesus. Three of these cities are to be "in the land". The other three cities are to be "in the world". To put it another way, God calls on some of us to be a witness for Him right where we are and others are called to go travel elsewhere in order to teach others about how to draw close to Him with our lives.
  - c) Again the reason there are six of these cities, is to show our "incompleteness" before God. Of course, in ancient Israel at one time there were three literal cities in the land of Israel and there were three more just east of that land. What it represents to us is what matters.

9. Verse 16: "If a man strikes someone with an iron object so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death.<sup>17</sup> Or if anyone has a stone in his hand that could kill, and he strikes someone so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death.<sup>18</sup> Or if anyone has a wooden object in his hand that could kill, and he hits someone so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death.<sup>19</sup> The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death.<sup>20</sup> If anyone with malice aforethought shoves another or throws something at him intentionally so that he dies<sup>21</sup> or if in hostility he hits him with his fist so that he dies, that person shall be put to death; he is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.
- a) While I was busy discussing why three cities of refuge were in Israel and three are located outside of Israel, Moses is explaining how the priests are to judge a murderer. The short version here is in effect, "If someone killed someone on purpose, the murderer is to be put to death. If it was an accident, the murderer is then to live in a city of refugee."
  - b) Think of it this way: Most people who commit murder do not want to die themselves. A common defense is that it was an accident. They will then flee to one of these cities before a close relative of the dead person tries to kill them. That is why there has to be a specific set of rules in place to determine if a person committed murder or if they just accidentally killed someone. These verses given here are those guidelines for determining murder.
    - i) It may also be helpful to remember that one of the 10 Commandments is that "one shall not murder". (See Exodus 20:13.). The proper English translation is the word "murder" and not the word "kill". In other words, if one kills someone in war or in self defense that is not a punishable crime in most societies including this one. To murder someone is a crime and a sin and is to be punishable by death. The idea is that life is to be sacred. The appropriate price for "spilled blood" must be death.
    - ii) What about in the previous set of chapters when the Israelites were told to kill all those that live in the Promised Land? Isn't that a violation of this commandment? No, in the sense it was a "mercy killing". That was a specific punishment given to a specific group of people whom where literally beyond help. That does not mean in anyway that we are to do likewise. These verses here give God's standard on what to do with murderers, which is to put them to death, end of issue.
  - c) OK John, most of us reading this hold that view that if God says it is a death penalty to commit murder, we agree. You are preaching to the choir. Why state the obvious here?
    - i) The idea of the verses is to teach us that God has a different standard for murder committed on purpose than if committed by accident. If someone back then did accidentally kill someone, they had to understand that their family suffered for that loss and that is why they had to live within a city of refugee until the next head priest died, however long that took as a punishment for that accident.
    - ii) At the same time, it did teach that those people who were closest to God (that is, the priests) were given the duty of judging whether or not a person was guilty of first-degree murder or just manslaughter. That is why these locations were set up in the priestly cities and not just any city within Israel.
    - iii) The underlying point of all of this is for all people to realize that in effect we are guilty of manslaughter when we reject Jesus from ruling over our lives. After we accept the idea of Jesus as God, as we grow as believers and discover areas of our lives where we say in effect, "OK God you are in charge of this aspect of my life, but that aspect, I want control." That too can be thought of as manslaughter when we don't want Jesus to rule over part of our lives. Remember that when I use the term "manslaughter" I am referring to Jesus, being rejected as ruling over us.
  - d) Coming back to the literal aspect, it was the role of the nearest family member to the dead person to kill the one who did the murder. If the murderer made it to this city, then and only then could he or she stand trial. Outside of the city, that murderer could be killed.

- i) Let me try this from another angle: Who does the "avenger of blood" represent in these verses? My answer is to consider who is trying to keep us from drawing close to Jesus in the first place? In the literal sense, these verses refer to the relative of the dead person who's job it was to revenge the death. In the spiritual sense, it is demonic forces that don't want Christianity to spread. Let me explain further:
  - a) Satan understands all too well that his time in this world is finite and not infinite. He does all he can do to slow down the spread of Christianity to delay Jesus' return. I'm not saying he tries to murder nonbelievers. What he does do is say to people in effect, "There is always time later to repent, in the meantime go have fun and do what you want". In that sense he is trying to commit murder against people all the time to keep us from Him.
  - ii) The effective idea for us is that our protection from our own "avenger of blood" is to run to a city of refuge. Jesus is our refuge in that He knows we are guilty of sin. God does not say to us, "You are not guilty". What He does say to us in effect is that Jesus is paying the price for our sins instead of us. For our own protection, we run to Him for that forgiveness. His death is what sets us free. That is why the punishment for the manslaughter is over, when the "high priest" (Jesus) dies.
- e) Let me change the topic one more time and then I can move on. What if I, or someone I know is really guilty of murder? Are they automatically in hell? Most Christians argue that while that person has to suffer and should be killed for the sake of their crimes, it is a forgivable sin. That is why in these verses, murderers who kill on purpose must be put to death for their crime and they can't keep on living in a city of refuge.
  - i) I put it this way: If heaven is God's domain, then He, not us get to decide who is to be with Him forever. If He chooses to forgive a murderer, that is His decision to make and not mine. From the Christian perspective, what matters to the murderer is whether or not they trust in Jesus payment for the forgiveness of that crime.
  - ii) That is why the only unforgivable sin is the lifetime denial of Jesus as God.
  - iii) What if someone I know suffered due to a loved one being murdered? Yes it is up to law officials to catch those people and punish them, but it does always happen that way. There is a sense of closure when the murderer is punished. However, the pain of the loss has to be dealt internally in terms of giving that pain over to God. I am not saying it is easy or doesn't take time. I am saying that God is big enough to help us get through such pain. To put it another way, when we fail to give that pain to God, the murder is still hurting us by what they have done.
  - iv) What about those who are crippled for life due to someone else injuring them? They need to give God that physical pain to help them let go of how others have hurt them. I'm not denying other forms of help. I'm just saying that God tells us in effect, "Let Me help you deal with whatever it is we have to deal with in life." He never says that life will be easy. He just promises to see us through our issues.
- f) You might think all of this discussion about living with murder or just living with pain has nothing to do with these verses, but you are wrong. The verses are saying in effect, that the job of us "priests" is to judge murder. If a person is guilty of murder, then they let the "avenger of blood" kill them. For the Christian, our job to judge sin, not in the sense of eternal judgment, but just in the sense of who we should allow to be among us.
  - i) Consider that before the Christian church ever existed Jesus said in effect that the church decides who will and will not be a part of that group. (See Matthew 18:17.) Does that mean murderers cannot go to church? Of course not. God says to us in effect, I want you as a Christian to lead others to Him, and if they refuse to change their lifestyle, pray for them, but also let the "avenger of blood" have them. The idea is we let such people have what they want and live as nonbelievers until they are willing to repent. That is in effect what Paul taught in 1st Timothy 1:20.

10. Verse 22: " `But if without hostility someone suddenly shoves another or throws something at him unintentionally <sup>23</sup> or, without seeing him, drops a stone on him that could kill him, and he dies, then since he was not his enemy and he did not intend to harm him, <sup>24</sup> the assembly must judge between him and the avenger of blood according to these regulations. <sup>25</sup> The assembly must protect the one accused of murder from the avenger of blood and send him back to the city of refuge to which he fled. He must stay there until the death of the high priest, who was anointed with the holy oil.
- a) OK, while I was busy describing how these verses about judging murder apply to us today, Moses is still explaining to the Israelites the difference between murder and just "manslaughter" which again is about killing someone accidentally.
  - b) When you read these verses, notice the emphasis is not on the person who actually killed another person. The emphasis is on the judges. It is almost as if Moses is just speaking to those people who are from the priestly tribe and saying to them, part of your priestly duty is to judge if someone is guilty of accidental or purposeful murder.
  - c) If they are guilty of "murder on purpose", in effect too bad for them, then they must be punished for that murder. Again the "prosecuting attorney" is the nearest living relative who's job it is to literally kill that person on behalf of the person who died.
  - d) Notice that even if a person commits manslaughter, they are still punished in the sense they can only live in that city of refuge until the next high priest dies. In a literal sense, that could be one day or their entire lifetime. It makes the person who accidentally kills another person realize, there is a steep price to be paid for killing, accident or not.
  - e) Coming back to the priests, part of their duty is to protect the manslaughter living in their midst. Think about this from the perspective of those priests: By having that accidental murderer live amongst them, it teaches them that the only way to relieve the guilt of what they did is to give that pain to God. Let's face it, by hanging around a bunch of priests all day it would get the guilty person to focus more on God whether they want to or not.
    - i) This leads me back to our role as Christians. Our job is to teach the "guilty" that God is more than willing to help us deal with our pain. That includes the pain we have inflicted on others as well as the pain others have inflicted upon us. It comes back to the idea that we can't change our past. All we can do is in effect have God help us deal with our issues. That does not mean I believe in ignoring professional help to deal with real pain. My point is that our role as Christians is to help others draw closer to God in order for Him to help people deal with their problems.
    - ii) That is why these criminals must live amongst the priests and that is why our job as Christians is to help others deal with their own pains that we get in life.
  - f) Let me come back to the literal aspect of these verses again. How did they know when the high priest dies? I suppose big news travels fast. For those Israelites back then to have their sins forgiven, they had to go to the main tabernacle to sacrifice for their sins. Therefore, word must get out when someone new is now in charge of the process.
    - i) The point for us is of course about the death of our "High Priest". In the book of Hebrews, the author refers four times to Jesus as our High Priest. (See Hebrews 3:1, 4:14, 6:20 and 7:27, for those references). To beat the point home again, it is His death that frees us of our sins. It frees us in the sense that we are still guilty, but no longer have to suffer for that sin as the price has been paid. That is why the person guilty of manslaughter could now go home after the High Priest dies.
    - ii) Once we let go of the pain caused by sin by letting Jesus pay the price for our sins, we are now free to go out and make a difference for Him and we no longer have to live "under the care" of other priests. In other words, if we just spend our whole lives learning from others, we are not using our time to go make a difference for Jesus. That is why we are free to "leave" after our High Priest dies.



11. Verse 26: " `But if the accused ever goes outside the limits of the city of refuge to which he has fled <sup>27</sup> and the avenger of blood finds him outside the city, the avenger of blood may kill the accused without being guilty of murder. <sup>28</sup> The accused must stay in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest; only after the death of the high priest may he return to his own property.
  - a) I looked at these verses and realized I jumped ahead and have already discussed them. The short version here is one guilty of manslaughter must stay living in a city of refuge until the top priest dies. If they leave before then, the "avenger of blood" may kill them. I suppose if one wants a motivation to stay put that would be a good reason right there. ☺
  - b) In practically, it makes the person guilty of manslaughter live like a priest for a while. It makes the guilty person focus more on God just be living amongst the priest. I suppose it also reminds the priests what life is like away from God's influence when one is spending time around someone who did kill someone else, even if it was by accident. My point is this whole method is designed to draw people closer to God. I'm not saying that we have to commit manslaughter to draw close to Him. I am saying that rejecting Jesus from ruling over every aspect of our lives is in effect manslaughter. That is because when we do that, we are refusing His complete payment for our sins to cover every aspect of our lives.
  - c) The key point is one could read this entire section about an ancient ritual that is no longer practiced today, or we can see it being about our relationship with God and how we can help others draw closer to Him. Hopefully I've beaten that point to death by now so we can move on to the next topic. Speaking of which:
12. Verse 29: `These are to be legal requirements for you throughout the generations to come, wherever you live.
  - a) John, you just said, this practice is not done in Israel today. Yet this verse says that this is to be a permanent law. Today in Israel as in most of the world, the crime of manslaughter is treated differently than the crime of murder. So in that sense, these laws about how to judge someone are still on the books today. Because modern Israel uses law enforcement like most countries, they no longer need to the nearest relative of the murdered person be in charge of revenge for that murder. Therefore the principal of judging murder is still on the books today, but actual cities of refuge are not part of modern Israel.
  - b) This is also permanent in that the death of our Jesus, our High Priest roughly 2,000 years ago is still sufficient for all of our sins today, even the one's we haven't committed yet.
  - c) God still wants us to lead others to Him and help others deal with the pain caused by sin. That is how these laws are "on the books" today as they were when they were written.
13. Verse 30: " `Anyone who kills a person is to be put to death as a murderer only on the testimony of witnesses. But no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.
  - a) The idea here is that if one person says another is guilty of murder that is not enough to convict them. Let's be honest, a person doing the accusing could simply hate the accused and make up a crime. That is why God set up the idea of two witnesses being in complete agreement with each other to successfully accuse someone of murder. Does that make a system of justice is perfect? Of course not. But it does help justice get done by having this two or more people in agreement principal.
  - b) By the way, this idea of "agreement of two or more" is found throughout the bible when it comes to the idea of being a witness. Even when the Pharisee's accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath rules, Jesus said in effect He had "two witnesses" that he was not sinning. He claimed that God the Father also testifies that how He lived back then was the will of God the Father. My point is a purpose of the resurrection was to prove to the world that what Jesus said is true and that God the Father verified that fact by publicly resurrecting Jesus.
    - i) So how do we know the resurrection is true? Most of the disciples who witnessed that act died violently testifying it to be true. Many people are willing to die for what they believe is the truth. No one is willing to be tortured to death for what they know is a lie. That is great evidence that the disciples saw Jesus alive again.

- c) That leads me back to this point about two witnesses. Yes it applies in the literal sense of trying to convict someone of a serious crime requires two witnesses. It also applies to the idea that the most important thing we believe as Christians, the resurrection of Jesus, also had two witnesses. Let's fact it, humans don't have the power to bring others back to life. Only a power much greater than ours can bring someone back to life again. That is why God the Father is in effect the second witness to what Jesus says is true: that Jesus is the one who paid the complete price for our sins and He is also the Son of God. My point is simply that the resurrection proves God the Father as that second witness.
- d) OK, a couple more footnote verses and we have finished the chapter.
- 14. Verse 31: " `Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer, who deserves to die. He must surely be put to death.
- a) John's bottom line: If one is guilty of murder, one cannot buy their way out of it.
- 15. Verse 32: " `Do not accept a ransom for anyone who has fled to a city of refuge and so allow him to go back and live on his own land before the death of the high priest.
- a) John's bottom line #2: If one is only guilty only of manslaughter, they cannot leave the city of refugee where they stood trial until the current high priest dies.
- b) Let me explain this again one final time: To reject Jesus is in effect manslaughter because we are rejecting Him from ruling over our lives. To leave a city of refuge before the death of the high priest is like God eternally forgiving someone without trusting in Jesus blood.
- c) In practical terms back then, it simply meant that if someone guilty of that crime did leave the city early, they were free to be killed by the nearest relative to the one who died.
- 16. Verse 33: " `Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it. <sup>34</sup> Do not defile the land where you live and where I dwell, for I, the LORD, dwell among the Israelites.' "
- a) These last two verses explain why it is such a big deal to put murderers to death and why there is this whole "city of refugee" system to put murderers (accidental or on purpose) on trial. It is because God considers bloodshed pollution to His land. Let me explain:
  - i) As I explained earlier, the God who created everything considers this little piece of real estate to be His. Despite all the battles fought there over the millenniums, and despite the fact the Jewish nation collectively have turned from Him, God still says in effect, "This is My land and any murder performed here must be dealt with".
  - ii) Think about it this way: God called on the Israelites to kill the existing residents at that time were guilty of child sacrifices. When the Israelites themselves committed the same crime many centuries later, God in effect kicked them out as well.
  - iii) So why hasn't God judged, say the United States for all the abortions? Remember that God gave the original residents of this land 400 years to repent. My point is I believe judgment will come here one day just as it did for Israel in its history.
  - iv) My point is this is both an individual judgment against anyone guilty of murder and a collective judgment to say in effect God has no tolerance for murder.
- b) If God is going to live amongst those of us who trust in Him, part of that deal is for us to confess our sins when we know of them. Since murder is arguably the biggest forgivable sin (eternally), this is showing God's standard for dealing with sin. That is why the death of our High Priest is necessary for the eternal forgiveness of all of our sins.
  - i) Let us remember the difference between eternal forgiveness and punishment. Do I believe God can forgive murder? Yes He does if we seek him. Should a murderer be put to death for that crime? Yes. That is not a contradiction. We punish people for their crimes to society. A perfect God can be definition forgive perfectly. What these verses do is lay out God's standards for murder amongst His own people.
- c) Meanwhile we still have 13 verses left to go in the entire book. Since we are close, let me see if I can get through these fairly quickly.

17. Chapter 36, Verse 1: The family heads of the clan of Gilead son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, who were from the clans of the descendants of Joseph, came and spoke before Moses and the leaders, the heads of the Israelite families. <sup>2</sup> They said, "When the LORD commanded my lord to give the land as an inheritance to the Israelites by lot, he ordered you to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters. <sup>3</sup> Now suppose they marry men from other Israelite tribes; then their inheritance will be taken from our ancestral inheritance and added to that of the tribe they marry into. And so part of the inheritance allotted to us will be taken away. <sup>4</sup> When the Year of Jubilee for the Israelites comes, their inheritance will be added to that of the tribe into which they marry, and their property will be taken from the tribal inheritance of our forefathers."
- a) Ok, time for the short version again: If a Jewish girl marries a man from a different tribe than her own, what she owns becomes part of the tribe of the man she marries. In other words, these women are complaining about a loophole in the law. They were afraid that by marriage, one tribe can get less land and another tribe can get more.
  - b) Verse 4 mentions the "Year of the Jubilee". This is a law that was first discussed back in Leviticus 25. The essential idea was that every fifty years, all debts are to be paid off or forgiven and things revert to how they were before debts began. That affects marriages in the sense that for example if "boy x" is from the tribe of Gad and he marries "girl y" who is from the tribe of Judah, what was her inheritance becomes his inheritance in year fifty.
  - c) Also know that the land of Israel today is not divided up by tribe. Most Jewish people today don't know what tribe they are from. Let me discuss God's solution to this issue through the next set of verses and that will explain why the book ends the way it does.
18. Verse 5: Then at the LORD's command Moses gave this order to the Israelites: "What the tribe of the descendants of Joseph is saying is right. <sup>6</sup> This is what the LORD commands for Zelophehad's daughters: They may marry anyone they please as long as they marry within the tribal clan of their father. <sup>7</sup> No inheritance in Israel is to pass from tribe to tribe, for every Israelite shall keep the tribal land inherited from his forefathers. <sup>8</sup> Every daughter who inherits land in any Israelite tribe must marry someone in her father's tribal clan, so that every Israelite will possess the inheritance of his fathers. <sup>9</sup> No inheritance may pass from tribe to tribe, for each Israelite tribe is to keep the land it inherits."
- a) The short version here is simply that Israelites back then had to marry within their own tribe in order to not affect their inheritance. To state the obvious, the Israelites did not always obey this law. The parents of Jesus did obey this law in that they were both of the tribe of Judah. Joseph legally adopted Jesus due to these laws of inheritance. My lesson on Chapters 30-31 explains this in more detail.
  - b) OK, enough ancient history. What does any of this have to do with us non-Israelites?
    - i) The important principal for Christians is that God calls us to marry other believers. It also applies to the business world of not having partnerships with nonbelievers. Paul referred to this principal as to not be "unequally yoked" to use the King James Version of the bible in 2nd Corinthians 6:14.
    - ii) Some quick advice to those who are single and reading this. Take seriously the idea of only marrying believers. I can't tell you how many unhappy people I am aware of that thought, "I'm sure he or she would change once we were married". Marriage is hard enough as it is in terms of constantly working in order to make our partners happy. It is extra difficult when one or both doesn't trust in God in order to guide their lives. This doesn't mean we should marry the first Christian who comes along. It just means we should only marry believers.
    - iii) What if one gets saved after one is married? This is a common problem. Paul also teaches on this subject and says in effect, "if we get saved after we are married, we should stay married in order to try to win over our spouse". However if a spouse wants to leave due to an after marriage conversion, it is not considered a sin if the marriage ends for that reason. (This is all based on 1st Corinthians Chapter 7).

- c) So are you saying the principal of "marrying within one's one tribe" is the basis for the New Testament principal of not being "unequally yoked" with nonbelievers? Yes I am.
    - i) I would even take it a step further for single women and ask them to pray for their future husband that they be good leaders for them. Let me put it this way. If one is single and desires to marry one day, that means one's future husband is out in the world somewhere. Start praying for this unknown person now. Pray that God makes him or her into a person that trusts Him daily. I would also suggest praying for the future spouses of one's children. One can apply this to one's grandchildren as well. The point is to see our children as someone who should grow in order to make a difference for God. Pray for their future spouses to do likewise.
  - d) Think of this book ending this way: God cares about His people and how we should live our lives to trust Him in all that do. Therefore, He not only cares about how we live our lives, but how we pass on our Christian traditions to others. Therefore, the whole section about priests being scattered in the land (that is, us as Christians going out in the world in order to be a witness for Jesus) leads to the whole section about how to deal with sin and how the death of the High Priest sets us free from sin. That leads to the last section of this book about how to continue our relationship with Jesus by only being in partnership with others who want to live the same way that we do.
    - i) Therefore, the book of Numbers ends in effect with a statement of "Go be a good witness for Jesus, lead others to Him and have other Christians work in unity in order to make a difference for Him in the world." I believe that is a great summary of our purpose as Christians and a great way to end this book. I would love to end this lesson on that positive statement, but I still have four more verses to go.
19. Verse 10: So Zelophehad's daughters did as the LORD commanded Moses.<sup>11</sup> Zelophehad's daughters--Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah and Noah--married their cousins on their father's side.<sup>12</sup> They married within the clans of the descendants of Manasseh son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in their father's clan and tribe.
- a) If you have studied your bible for a while, one thing to notice is how much the bible loves to commend obedience. These verses say in effect, "God told these five sisters to go marry men from within their own tribe and they did so." When our children raised in Christian homes go and marry other believers, I believe God commends that as well. That principal also applies to any partnership we may have in life. The point is we are called to live our lives in order to make a difference for Him. Meanwhile, there is one more verse to go.
20. Verse 13: These are the commands and regulations the LORD gave through Moses to the Israelites on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho.
- a) The book of Numbers begins by counting the Israelites after they have left Egypt. The book ends by stating the fact they are where God wants them to be at this point in their journey, which is just outside of Israel. The next book of the bible is in effect Moses' big farewell speech to this generation to teach them what laws they have to learn in order to make a difference for God with their lives. Then comes the book of Joshua, where the Israelites actually start conquering the land. The first place they attack is Jericho. My point is Numbers ends with "Jericho" and the conquering will begin with "Jericho".
21. Before I end this lesson, since this is the last one on the book, I continue my tradition of listing my sources that I have used to prepare these lessons on the next page. Read if interested. With that said, let me wrap up how we are to be a good witness for Jesus in my closing prayer:
- a) Father, help us as believers to fulfill Your desire for our lives. Help us to use the most valuable thing You give us, our time to make a difference for You. Help us to be "in" but not "of" this world. Give us the boldness to share with others how the death of our High Priest sets us free from our sins. Help us to teach others about Your love. Finally, help us partner with other believers so that collectively we can make that difference for You in this world. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

## Supplement: Bibliography

"If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." (Isaac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My prayer as I prepare these lessons was for God to show me the things He wanted me to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to them further via the places listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the bible is the bible itself. Here are the bible versions I use in preparation of my lessons. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society; The New King James Version (NKJV), Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The King James Version (KJV) (no copyright on that version); the English Standard Version. (ESV). The copyright information for the ESV is in point #9 below. The Living Bible (TLB) Copyright © 1971, 1986 by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189; "The Message" copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. All the bible text used in these lessons (except the ESV) is taken from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved and from Zondervan Reference Software (32-bit edition) Version 2.6, Copyright © 1989-1998 The Zondervan Corporation.

Here are the commentaries I have referenced over these lessons. The specific commentaries on the book of Numbers are listed first, and then the bible-wide commentaries. They are listed in alphabetical order by author. The reference to audio commentary means the information was gathered via the Internet in MP3® Format, unless otherwise stated:

1. Commentary on Numbers by Jon Courson. It is in book form from Harvest House Publishing. It is also available in MP3® format at <http://www.joncourson.com/>.
2. Commentary on Numbers by Bob Davis. They are available for free in MP3® format at [http://northcountrychapel.com/audio\\_studies/tapelist.php?book\\_id=4](http://northcountrychapel.com/audio_studies/tapelist.php?book_id=4).
3. Numbers, (God's Presence in the Wilderness) by Iain M. Dugid (R. Kent Hughes, General Editor). Copyright 2006 by Iain. M. Dugid. Published by Crossway Books, 1300 Crescent Street, Wheaton, Illinois. ISBN 978-1-58134-363-2.
4. Commentary on Numbers by Chuck Missler, available at K-House Ministries 1-800-KHOUSE1. The web address is <http://www.khouse.org>.
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7. The Expositor's Bible Encyclopedia, Zondervan Publications, (via CD-ROM 1998 release). This is a multi-volume encyclopedia with notes on every bible verse. It is available through Zondervan. Paperback books are published on individual Bible books from this same source. The actual text that is copied and pasted is taken from this source. (The ISBN was listed in the paragraph above.)
8. The Life Application Bible, Zondervan Publishing: [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com). ISBN was listed already.
9. The MacArthur Study Bible with commentary by John MacArthur Nelson Bibles (1997) ISBN: 0849912229.
10. I also refer sometimes to J.P. Moreland apologetic ministry which is at [www.jpmoreland.com](http://www.jpmoreland.com) and Greg Koukl's apologetic ministry, which is Stand to Reason at [www.str.org](http://www.str.org). My apology if I have quoted someone else and I have forgotten to include them here.