

(Through the Bible) Numbers 29-36

by Chuck Smith

Chuck Smith's sermon explores the sacrificial system in Numbers, emphasizing the significance of atonement, the importance of vows, and God's judgment on the Midianites.

Duration: 1:14:08

Scripture: Numbers 28:1-2, Numbers 28:9-10, Numbers 28:16-17, Numbers 28:26-27, Numbers 29:1-6

Topics: "Biblical Obedience", "Covenant Law"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by praying for the listeners to understand and remember the teachings they have studied. He emphasizes the importance of sowing good seeds and warns that sins will eventually be exposed. The speaker then discusses the covenant made with Moses and the journey of the Israelites out of Egypt. He highlights the significance of following God's laws, including the death penalty as a means to prevent pollution in the land. The sermon concludes with a story from the Bible about Jonathan and his armor bearer bravely attacking the Philistines.

Transcript

Let's turn in our Bibles to Numbers chapter 29. Beginning in chapter 28, Moses gave to them the various sacrifices that were to be offered every day. And then the sacrifices that were to be offered on the Sabbath day, the extra sacrifices on the Sabbath day.

And then the extra sacrifices even more that were on the first day of every month. And then the sacrifices that should be offered during the Feast of the Passover, and then during the Feast of Pentecost. Now, as we get into chapter 29, he deals with the sacrifices that are to be offered in the seventh month of the year.

Now, you're well aware by now that the number seven is a very significant number, as far as the Bible goes. And thus, the seventh month was a special month. It is the month of October, approximately in our calendar, or our calendar differs some from the Jewish calendar, which they, of course, have a spiritual calendar, more or less, and a secular calendar.

And their spiritual calendar begins in the month of April. So, that makes October their seventh month. And it was to begin the first day of that month with the blowing of trumpets and with extra sacrifices beyond the daily sacrifices.

Those extra sacrifices are given for us at the beginning of chapter 29. And then he goes on to the sacrifices that would take place on the tenth day of the seventh month, which was the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. And the special sacrifices on that day.

It is interesting to note that on Yom Kippur, the high priest would do all of the sacrificing himself. Now, during the rest of the time, the other priests were usually offering the sacrifices. But on Yom Kippur, it was the high priest that would offer all of the sacrifices and so he was a very busy man on this particular day because there are some 34 animals that he had to butcher and sacrifice on Yom Kippur.

And this he had to do by himself. There was to be no helpers for him on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Which, of course, was to bespeak of the work of Jesus Christ in making atonement for us that he had to do it alone.

There was really none to help him. It was something that was necessary that he do alone for us. Then on the seventh month, they had a special feast, the Feast of Sukkoth or Booths or also called the Feast of Tabernacles.

As they remembered their wilderness experience and living in tents. And this Feast of Tabernacles went for eight days. And on each of the days of the feast over, well, one day there was only 25 animals offered, another one 28.

But most of the time, over 30 animals were offered on these days, the eight days of the Feast of the Tabernacles. And so, these are all given each day, how many of what kind of animals were to be offered through chapter 29. It has very little to do with us, except that it makes us appreciate the fact that Jesus Christ was offered for our sacrifice once and for all.

There are interesting parallels to be made with the high priest going in with the sacrifice of the animal for the atonement for the people. To be contrasted, of course, he had to first of all make sacrifice for his own sins before he could make the sacrifice for the sins of the nation. And the contrast is with Jesus Christ, our great high priest, who made one sacrifice and for all.

It was necessary that the high priest go in every year. But Jesus, having once offered himself, has sat down forever at the right hand of the Father, waiting until the promise be fulfilled that his enemies be made his footstool. Waiting until all things are brought into subjection unto him.

And so, the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ, compared with the yearly annual sacrifices for sin, the atonement that was made for the nation, and there are tremendous contrasts to be made, which are made for us in the book of Hebrews. And so, having now gone through the book of Leviticus and Numbers again, it would be very helpful for you to go through the book of Hebrews and you'll understand it much more clearly now that you've had this background in Leviticus and Numbers with all of these offerings and sacrifices and all that were made, and you realize what Christ has done for us more completely. So, in verse 39, these things ye shall do unto the Lord in your set feasts, beside your vows and your freewill offerings, for your burnt offerings and your meal offerings, and for your drink offerings and for your peace offerings.

So, these other offerings, the burnt offerings, peace offerings, were all individual kind of offerings. These were all above these that have been commanded here in chapter 29. Now, as we get into chapter 30, we are dealing with the law of vows.

When you make a promise unto God, God takes it seriously. And God expects you to keep your vow. God is not an Indian giver, and He doesn't want you to be an Indian giver.

He doesn't want you to make a vow or a promise and then break it. In fact, in the Bible it said, it's better not to vow at all than to vow and to break it. Now, let it be known that God doesn't require you to make vows.

Vows are something that a person does voluntarily. God doesn't demand that you make a vow of certain things unto Him. A vow is always something that is done on your part, purely voluntarily.

It is something that people often do. I promise that I'm going to give to God this, that, or the other. I promise I'm going to do this for God.

Lord, I make a vow with You, you know, and I'm going to do this and all. God doesn't require it. And it's better not to do it than to do it and break it.

If you make a vow unto the Lord, it is very important that you keep that vow. And so, chapter 30 actually deals with the vows that are made unto the Lord. And if a man vows a vow unto the Lord, verse 2, and swears an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word.

He shall do according to that which has proceeded out of his mouth. Now, if a woman also vows a vow unto the Lord and binds herself with a bond, being in her father's house in her youth, her father, if he hears it, can disannul it. Now, a young girl living in her father's house could make a vow unto God.

And if her father is there and hears the vow, he has the capacity of disallowing it. But if he hears it and doesn't disallow it, then the vow is to stand. In other words, he hears it, he doesn't disallow it.

It means that it is binding now and she must keep that vow to the Lord. We have in the Old Testament cases where vows were made which were very unfortunate. You might say bad vows.

Quite often when a person was going into an uncomfortable situation, he vowed, Lord, if you will help me win this battle, then I will. Jephthahna said, Lord, if you will give me victory over the enemy, then I will offer unto you as a sacrifice the first thing that comes out of my house. What a tragic thing.

His daughter, virgin daughter, was the first thing to come out of his house to greet him in his victory when he came home. And it was just a horrible vow. It had been better that he never make that kind of a vow.

It was a ridiculous vow, actually. Saul was guilty of a ridiculous vow. When Jonathan woke up early one morning and feeling just really great, looking around, finding the rest of the army still asleep, he woke up his armor bearer and he said, you know, I've just been lying here thinking, maybe the Lord wants to give the Philistines into the hands of Israel today.

And if the Lord wants to give the Philistines into the hands of Israel, he doesn't need the whole army. He could deliver the Philistines into the hand of two people as well as the whole army. It doesn't matter to God.

If he wants to defeat the Philistines today, he doesn't need the whole army. He can just do it with a couple of us. So let's go over and see if the Lord wants to deliver the Philistines today.

And so Jonathan and his armor bearer got up and they slept out of the camp and they headed over to the camp of the Philistines. Jonathan said, now this is risky business. We want to make sure that God's in this thing and he wants to deliver them.

So when we get close to the Philistines, if they say to us, hey, you guys come up here and we'll show you a thing or two, then we'll know that God wants to deliver them and we'll, you know, take off after them. But if they say, hey, you guys, you wait down there, we're going to come down and show you a thing or two, then we'll know that God isn't going to deliver the Philistines today and we'll get back to camp just as fast as we can. Sort of a venture in faith.

I love them. So Jonathan and his armor bearer headed over towards the Philistines. When they got close to the Philistines, the sentries spotted them and they said, hey, you guys come up here, we'll show you a thing or two.

And Jonathan said, all right, man, that's what we're looking for. So he and his armor bearer scabbled up the hill, the scripture said. They were anxious to get to those guys.

Man, they jumped into the camp of the Philistines and they began to smite those guys. The Philistines began to fall back from before them. They began to retreat.

And over on the other side of the hill or the other side of the valley, on the hill on the other side, Saul woke up. Rubbing his eyes, he looked over to the camp of his enemies and he saw the Philistines in disarray and running and two guys in the middle wiping them out. And Saul said, quickly, number, who's missing? And so they counted off and they said, it's Jonathan and his armor bearer.

And Saul made a foolish vow. He said, curse should be the man who eats anything today until Saul has been avenged of all of his enemies. Foolish vow.

Cursing, putting a curse upon anybody who would eat anything that day until Saul had been avenged of his enemies. So it's better not to make vows, really. But some people like to make them.

Makes you feel better or something. So if you make them, make sure you keep them. But with a man, you make a vow and that's it.

It's binding. But with a young girl living at home, she makes a vow. It's not binding except her father let it go.

If he hears it and doesn't say anything, then it becomes a binding vow. Now, the same is true if a girl is engaged to a husband and he hears the vow that she makes. He is able also to disallow that vow.

But if a widow or a divorced woman makes a vow, then they are bound to that vow. And then a married woman making a vow, her husband can disallow it. He can say, oh no, you don't do that.

You know, she can say, well, I'm going to give our house to the Lord. He says, oh no, you don't. So the husband can disallow the vow that the wife makes.

If he doesn't, then it becomes a binding vow. Uh, so the law of vows here in the 30th chapter of Numbers. Then as we get into Numbers chapter 31, the Lord orders the destruction of the Midianites.

Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites. Afterward, thou shalt be gathered to your people. So this was to be sort of the final act of Moses.

They are just about ready to enter into the land that God has promised. And God orders the avenging against the Midianites who actually created a problem with the children of Israel that we were studying last week. Balak the king sending the girls into the camp causing the children of Israel to commit fornication and idolatry.

And so now God is taking out judgment against the Midianites for those actions. And so Moses ordered a thousand men from each of the tribes to arm themselves for battle. And so there were a thousand from each of the tribes, 12,000 men armed for war that came to Moses.

And they were ordered to go in against the cities of the Midianites. Now Eliezer was the high priest. His son Phinehas went with the armies to fight against the Midianites.

And the Lord delivered the Midianites into the hands of these 12,000 men. And they warred against the Midianites as the Lord had commanded Moses. And they killed all of the males.

And this also included this prophet Balaam. Now you remember in the first prophecy that Balaam had uttered over the children of Israel. He said, let me die the death of the righteous and let my last days be as his.

That request wasn't granted. He did not die the death of the righteous. Balaam was guilty of greed.

He allowed that greed to master him. And allowing the greed to master his life, he removed himself from the place of God's blessing. And rather than dying the death of the righteous, he was slain when the children of Israel conquered over the Midianites.

Balaam also was slain. So they took the women of Midian as their captives and the little ones. And they took the spoil of all of their cattle, their flocks and their goods.

They burnt the cities where they were living and all of the beautiful castles with fire. And they took all the spoil and all the prey, both of the men and beasts. And they brought the captives and the spoil.

Now Moses was angry with the officers of the army and the captains over the thousands and the captains over the hundreds, which had come to the battle. And Moses said unto them, Have you saved all of the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, and here we have it, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was the plague among the congregation of the Lord. Therefore, kill all of the male babies and all of the women who are not virgins.

You can save the little girls and the virgins alive, but the rest of them are to be slain. Because these are the women that were used in this subterfuge to bring a curse upon the children of Israel. Now at this point, it should be noted that there are many people who have difficulty with the Old Testament, and especially in the areas where we are going to be entering into next, as we get into Joshua and Judges and into the kings and all.

People have difficulty with the orders for extermination of the people. How is it that God would order that they totally wipe out a nation, the children and all, the women and the children in many cases. In some cases, even the animals, everything was to be obliterated.

How is it that God would order such an extermination? When they came into the land, they weren't to make a league or a covenant, a treaty with any of the peoples within the land. They were to utterly destroy them or drive them out. Why would God command such a thing? In order to understand these commands, it would of course be necessary to understand a little bit about the culture of these people and especially their religious practices.

In all of the history of the world, these people were probably living on the lowest kind of moral levels that man ever lived. Every kind of sin you could possibly imagine was practiced by these people. Marriage vows were nothing.

They lived as animals and even to the point of bestiality as a common practice. Their manner of living was so polluted and so corrupted that it was impossible that they could survive. They believed in human sacrifice and offered their children as sacrifices unto their gods.

The things that were done by these people are so polluted, so vile that it would be impossible to tell you in a mixed company the practices that were common among the people called the Canaanites. Those that inhabited the land that God ordered exterminated. God ordered their extermination lest their pollution would also pollute his children.

God is bringing them into a land using them first of all as a tool of judgment against these people. Because of the horrible, abominable practices, they all were deserving to die. You say, well, what about the little children, the babies, the infants? Without their parents and all to raise them, they would have had a horrible, miserable life if they were allowed to continue to live.

It was in mercy that the children were taken. But God ordered their extermination lest they would become a polluting influence to his people and his own people would be dragged down into the same moral pits that these people were living in. God used the children of Israel as his instruments of judgment to destroy an exceedingly vile group of people.

Now, God brought the flood to destroy people who had lived in such a horrible way. And all were destroyed by the flood with the exception of Noah and his immediate family. God used the flood as an instrument of judgment.

Now God is using the nation Israel as his instrument of judgment against these people whose practices had sunk so low that it was necessary that God's judgment fall upon them. And that is why God ordered their extermination. It was his judgment against their horrible sin that they were committing and to destroy them lest they be a polluting influence upon his people.

It was to protect his own children from the mad dog culture of the Canaanites. So, Moses was angry because they kept the women alive. And he ordered them to kill all of the little baby boys and just save alive those women who were virgins, the little girls, and they were to become slaves to the Israelites.

Now, Moses said, take the spoil that they have gotten in the battle and divide it in two. And a half of the spoil is to go to all of Israel. And a half of the spoil will go to the 12,000 men who went to battle.

Now, of the 12,000 men who went to battle, the half of the spoil that they received, one in 500 was to go to Eliezer the high priest. Which meant that Eliezer became overnight a very wealthy man because there was about 337,500 sheep alone for the half of the amount, for their 675,000 total sheep that they took. So, the half of those that went to the 12,000 that went to battle, one in 500 of those 337,500 went to Eliezer.

So, suddenly he had just an awful lot of sheep. And then, of course, it gives the number of cattle and the number of donkeys that they had taken. There were 72,000 beef and 61,000 donkeys and 32,000 persons in all, that young women who were virgins.

So, these were divided as the spoil to the children of Israel. Now, from the half that went to all of Israel, one in five was to go to the rest of the Levites. So, that was their portion, a twentieth of that which was taken in the battle.

And so, they divided up the spoils of war. Now, when the fellows came back from war, they numbered off and they found out there wasn't one man missing. They had destroyed all of these Midianite cities, had taken all of these captives, had killed all of these men without a single casualty impossible in the natural.

But we're not dealing with natural things. We're dealing with God's hand and God's intervention. And thus, grateful for the fact that there wasn't a single casualty among them, that all 12,000 returned from the battle, the captains brought unto the Lord an offering of the portion of the gold and the silver and the brass, the precious metals that they had taken.

They brought a portion to the Lord to offer to the Lord in thanksgiving for His preservation of their troops in the battle. That's in the latter portion of chapter 31. So, Moses verse 51, And Eliezer the priest took the gold and all of the jewels, the offering that they offered to the Lord from the captains over the thousands and hundreds.

And there was 16,750 shekels. Now, as we get into chapter 32, we find that Reuben, that is the tribe of Reuben, and Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh, came to Moses and they said, Hey, we are quite content to stay in this territory we have conquered over here. Now, they had conquered the area that is present day Jordan.

So, if you have any mind at all of the Mideast, the area that is presently Jordan is the area that was captured by the children of Israel before they ever went into the promised land. The area that was inhabited by Moab, the Midianites and the who? No, not the Canaanites. This is another, the Ammonites, Gileadites.

The area that begins at about the southern end of the Sea of Galilee and going eastward on down to about midway through the Dead Sea eastward again. Now, in the southernmost part, the tribe of Reuben settled. In the middle area was the tribe of Gad.

And then up in the northern area, the river Jabbok, that area eastward is where half the tribe of Manasseh took and desired as their inheritance. It was great cattle grazing country. They came to Moses and they said, Look, we are very content to stay here.

Give us permission. Now, of course, they had all of these herds and flocks. They had taken all of this spoil.

And they said, We'd like to build houses and fences and all. And we'd like to stay right here. We're perfectly content to remain on this side of Jordan.

And we'd like to have this for our inheritance. And that'll just give more land to the rest of the tribes on the other side. Moses couldn't believe it.

He said, What are you trying to do? This is the second time we've come to the border of the promised land. And 40 years ago when we came to the border and the people, because of the spies, got fearful and wouldn't go in, it cost us this 40 years and the death of all of those that came out of Egypt that they're over 20 years old. What in the world is wrong with you characters? I can't believe you.

And so they rethought the thing and they said, Well, I'll tell you what. We will arm our men for war and they will go over and they will fight. Let us build cities and all so our wives and children will be safe here.

And we will send our men over to fight the battles. And we'll stay with you until the land has been conquered. And then we'll come back and take our inheritance over here.

And so the thing pleased Moses and he said, All right, that's okay. For you to go ahead and come over and help us take the territory. And after it is taken, then you can come back.

But Moses declared unto them, But if you do not do this, behold, you have sinned against the Lord and be sure your sin will find you out. Now, the request is an interesting request. When you look at it from a spiritual standpoint, these people are content to take their inheritance outside of the land on the other side of Jordan.

As we're looking at the whole movement of the children of Israel out of Egypt into the promised land, looking at it as typical history, which the Bible declares that it is, it all happened to them as examples for us. And Egypt typifies the old life of bondage in the world, the life in sin. Coming out of Egypt through the Red Sea typifies being born again and being baptized and entering in now to a new relationship with God delivered from the bondage of sin, bondage of Egypt.

Now they are coming towards the promised land and their failure at Kadesh Barnea to enter into the land. And the subsequent 40 years wandering in the wilderness is typical of those Christians who have indeed come out of the life of bondage in sin, but have never entered into the fullness of the life in Christ. They are in an in-between state, not yet entered into the fullness that they can know in Jesus Christ, the full promises, the full life and walk of the Spirit, but still problems with their flesh, battles with their flesh, wandering in the wilderness.

And so many people have a Christian experience that is sort of a wilderness experience, a barren experience. Now the river Jordan typifies the death of the old life, the old man, the death of the life of the flesh. And coming into the promised land is typical of coming into the new life and the walk in the Spirit.

Yes, we still have battles to fight, but we have a captain that has gone before us who is leading us and who strengthens us. And God has promised that every place we put our foot, that He said, I have given unto you for a possession. So the land is here in front of all we have to do is go in and claim it and possess it.

The life of victory in Christ, the life of joy and blessing, that life of the spiritual relationship with God, it's yours for the claiming. The victory over the old life, the flesh, yours for the claiming. Now, there were those who were content to remain on the other side of Jordan, Reuben and Gad, part of Manasseh.

And they said, we'll dwell on this side. We're content to remain here. It is significant to note that they were the first tribes to go into captivity because they had not the protection really of the Jordan River, which was a natural barrier against the enemies.

The first to go into captivity. So often many people failing to enter into that which God has promised to us, that life of abundance in the Spirit, their failure to enter in, content to just live on the other side of the cross, the death of the old nature, the old life, not willing to reckon the old man dead, are often the first to go into captivity. So, an interesting spiritual parallel with the tribes of Reuben and Gad and Manasseh.

Now, the statement of Moses, all right, see that you do it. Now, I'm not going to be here to see that you do it. Lord's told me I'm not going to go into the land.

So, you see that you do this. And if you fail, you have sinned against the Lord and you can be sure your sin will find you out. My, what a powerful truth that is.

You can be sure your sin will find you out. Jesus said, that which is done in secret shall be shouted from the housetop. The Bible says everything is open and naked before Him with whom we have to do.

There is really no secret sin. That's a delusion. You can be sure your sin will find you out.

Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Come harvest time and it's very obvious the kind of seeds that you've been sowing. You can be sure your sins will find you out.

Thank God for Jesus Christ having removed our sins and transgressions as far as the east is from the west. And so, they made the covenant with Moses that they would pass over and help them to take the land. Now, in chapter 33 you have a summary of their exodus out of Egypt.

Moses sort of wrote down all of the places where they had stopped as they made this journey from Egypt to the promised land. And for the most part, it's just a lot of names that you don't recognize. Some of them are new.

Some of them are the first time we see them. Some of them we remember from our journey in the book of Exodus. Now, in verse 51 of chapter 33, the Lord commanded Moses, speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them, when you are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan, then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you and destroy all their pictures and destroy all their molten images and quite pluck down their high places.

And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell therein for I have given you the land to possess it. Now, God wanted all of the artifacts destroyed because the pictures for the most part were extremely lewd, lascivious. The molten images for the most part were their gods that they worshipped, which were in many cases grotesque and exaggerated sexual features.

And the high places where they offered the sacrifices unto their gods and they went through their religious rites were ordered utterly destroyed lest there remain that polluting influence in the land. Because again, whatever a man sows, that he's also going to reap. And if you are planting in your mind the images of sexual lasciviousness, then you're going to be reaping to your flesh.

God wanted all of those things to be obliterated, to be wiped out. And so he ordered them to utterly destroy the pictures, the molten images and the places of worship, the high places that were in the land. And you're to divide the land by lots for the inheritance.

In other words, dividing off the land and then casting lots to see which tribes would get which area. And then the tribes were to divide up the land and to divide it to the families. In other words, each family within

the tribe was to be given its land grant.

And so this is the dividing out of the land, giving a portion of land to everybody, each family getting its own land grant. And this land was to then remain in those families perpetually. Now in verse 55, the Lord warns them, but if you will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come to pass that these which you let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes and thorns in your sides and shall vex you in the land where you're dwelling.

Moreover, it shall come to pass that I shall do unto you as I thought to do unto them. In other words, these people will drag you down. And ultimately, I will have to destroy you out of the land, even as I destroyed them out of the land.

Sin always has a polluting influence. When I was a kid, my mom used to always tell me about the one rotten apple in the barrel, how it can spoil the whole barrel, and how it is important to choose your friends and to select them. Because you get one who's bad, his influence can be bad on the entire group.

So God ordered them to drive out the people completely, lest that they would vex them. Now, Israel failed to obey the Lord in this. A lot of times we think we know better than God.

We think that we can handle it. We think that God really doesn't understand the case completely, or he doesn't understand us completely. And yes, that rule might apply, you know, to others, but surely it doesn't apply to me.

And we learn to our own dismay and shame the folly of disobedience. And we discover that God knew us better than we knew ourselves. And we realize how foolish it was for us to not to completely obey God.

So as we move into chapter 34, we find the borders of the land described now. In the south, the border of the land was to go down into the Sinai as far as Kadesh Barnea, the place where they had come south from Hebrew, actually down around south of Beersheba, coming into the land, down into the desert. The Mediterranean was to be the border on the west side.

On the north side, the mountains of Lebanon at about Akri or Akko, that mountain range of Lebanon that comes around was to be the border on up to Mount Hermon. You'll find in, if you want to read it carefully here, there is the mention of Ein, which means fountains, which no doubt is a reference to the headwater of the Jordan River at the base of Mount Hermon. So that whole upper, what they called the Hula Valley, was to be Israel's, bordered on the west side by the mountains of Lebanon.

Much the border that they have today with Lebanon was the border that was described here in the Bible. Now the uppermost area in the upper Hula Valley near where the Jordan River begins, it's coming out of the Mount Hermon there, was where the city of Dan was built. Dan occupied the northernmost part of the Hula Valley.

And then coming on down around the Sea of Galilee, the tribe of Naphtali. And you can get a good Bible map and you can see how the tribes were apportioned in the land. But the boundaries of the land are given to us here in chapter 34.

This is the land that God had promised to Abraham. And this is the land that now belonged to these people. It was theirs.

God had given it to them. There was only one thing. They had to go in and take it.

They had to go in and possess it. Even as God has given to you so many rich and precious promises, and all you have to do is step in and claim them. Just go in and take that which God has promised to you by faith.

So the heads of the tribes are listed again in the latter portion of the chapter. As we get into chapter 35, it describes the cities of refuge that they were to establish. Verse 2, command the children of Israel that they give to the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in.

And you shall give unto them also suburbs of the cities round about them. And the cities that they shall have to dwell in and the suburbs of them shall be for their cattle and their goods and for their beasts. So the city itself and then extending out from the city a thousand cubits for their farm area and then out another two thousand cubits for their cattle.

These were the suburbs of the city and 48 of these cities were to be given to the Levites. They were not to get any huge chunks of land, nor were the families given portions of land. The Levites received no inheritance.

God said, I am their inheritance. They got the best deal. The rest of the people got a property.

The Levites got the Lord as their inheritance. And so they were given these 42 cities to live in and the suburbs around the city to graze their cattle and to grow their crops and so forth. 42 cities given to the Levites.

Now, among the 42 cities, there were to be six cities that were appointed as cities of refuge. Three on either side of the Jordan River placed strategically through the land so that no matter where you were living in the land, you were never more than a half day's run from the city of refuge. Now, the purpose of the city of refuge was to take care of a cultural practice that was deeply ingrained within the people.

You know, one of the hardest things to become free of is tradition. There are certain cultural things that are so deeply embedded in our whole thinking processes that they are the hardest things in the world to root out. And I can give you one offensive illustration.

Christmas is a pagan holiday. It has nothing to do with the birthday of Jesus Christ in its original forms. They celebrated Christmas long before Jesus ever came along.

They called it by a different name. The Romans called it Saturnalia. But you can trace its origin clear on back to Nimrod shortly after the time of Noah.

The decking of trees, all of the customs are not Christian in origin at all. And yet to suggest that we abandon the celebration of this pagan holiday would bring great incense and censure from the church. You mean not going to celebrate Christmas? Because it's so deeply embedded in our whole traditional patterns.

We hold on to it, though we recognize that it is becoming more paganized all the time. How many people really honor Jesus Christ on Christmas if it was his birthday? It isn't. But if it was his birthday, how many are truly honoring Christ? As we look at the celebration, the police department have to put on extra duty.

All of the reserves are called in. Why? Because there are going to be so many drunks on the road, people going home from the Christmas party. We've been celebrating Jesus is born.

And yet we find extreme difficulty in trying to deforce ourselves from it because it's so much a part of our culture, tradition, the hardest things in the world to root out. And so God, rather than seeking to root out totally the tradition, though he wasn't in favor of it, placed restrictions upon it. And to these people, a part of their cultural process was revenge killing.

That was just a part of their whole culture. If a member of your family was killed by someone else, you were honor-bound to kill him. You owed it to your dead relatives.

The honor of the family is at stake. And you must pursue him until you find him and put him to death. And the family honor cannot be maintained until his blood has been spilt.

And if you're the oldest son in the house, then you become the avenger of blood. And it's your duty, your family duty, to avenge the blood of your dead brother or sister or mother or father. And this idea of revenge killing was deeply embedded in their whole cultural process.

Now, in some cases, the killing was totally accidental. There was no malice. There was no anger.

There was no premeditation. It was just an accident. But this idea of revenge killing was so deep that even though it was an accident, the avenger of blood was prone to catch the guy and kill him anyhow.

I didn't mean to do it. It was just an accident, friend. I didn't... You know, you had it anyhow.

They had no mercy. It's honor. It's duty.

I've got to kill you. So, in order to modify this deeply ingrained practice, God established the cities of refuge so that if you, by accident, should kill someone, you could flee to the city of refuge. And if you could get to the city of refuge before the avenger caught up with you, if you could come within the borders of the city, you were safe.

He could not come into the city to take your life. And the Levites, it was the city of the Levites, the Levites would shelter you and protect you. And they would guarantee your opportunity to have a free trial and a fair trial.

Now, unless you got to the city, you didn't have a fair trial at all. It was the law of vengeance and revenge, and they would catch you and kill you. So, you had to flee to the city of refuge.

There, you would have a fair trial. Now, if it could be proved that it was not an accident, that you had been planning it, that you had hatred and animosity, and it could be proved that it was an action, that it was done in anger, malice on your part, then you were delivered from the city of refuge and the avenger put you to death. But if you could show that it was purely an accident, you had no intention of doing it, it was just an accident, then you could remain in the city of refuge and they could not touch you.

You would then live in the city of refuge. And as long as you stayed in the city of refuge, you were protected. But if you should leave the city of refuge, then if the avenger would catch you, he would put you to death.

You were only safe as long as you stayed within the borders of that city of refuge. There was another provision because man needs hope. And living in a city can feel like living in a prison.

And you could soon despair. I'm away from my family. I want to be home and I'm never going to go home again.

So, there was another provision to give hope for that person. And that is, if the high priest should die, then you were freed and you could go home. God was making these options and all because really he was opposed to the whole practice of revenge killing.

But it was so deeply ingrained in their culture, he then created the limitations and loopholes for the innocent parties that became then a part of the tradition and the culture of the people. I believe that God is not incensed or angry if you celebrate Christmas, if you have a Christmas tree. I thank God that I have great liberty in Jesus Christ.

And when we celebrate Christmas, we're not thinking of Tammuz or Nimrod or Semiramis or the pagan gods that are usually celebrated this time of the year, nor Saturn, nor the sun. I think that it is good to remember that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. And in as much as we don't know when Jesus was born, it really doesn't matter which day you might set aside to celebrate his birth.

The date itself isn't important. But I thank God that I have that freedom to celebrate with the family a day of giving, a day of expressions of love. But I'm also thankful that I have the freedom not to enter into certain pagan aspects of the holiday if I don't want to.

It's great to have freedom in Christ. I'm free to have a tree or I'm free not to have a tree. And it doesn't condemn me if I have one.

And it doesn't make me more righteous if I don't have one. But these things are tradition. They become deeply embedded in our whole family culture processes.

And God understands how deeply embedded they're in. And so he just, you know, makes the rules whereby oftentimes he modifies some of the poor aspects of those practices. So where traditionally Christmas is a time for getting drunk, the Lord modifies that.

And he says, be not drunk with wine wherein is excess. Be filled with the Spirit. And teaches us moderation in all things.

So here God deals with a cultural practice, modifying it, bringing it within borders, within limitations, providing for the innocent. And yet the murderer was in no way to be set free. They were not to actually put to death a man with one witness.

There had to be at least two witnesses. They could not take the testimony of one witness and put a man to death in the mouth of two witnesses at least. It had to be established.

Then if it was established, they were not to take any ransom for the guilty. In other words, he was not to be able to buy his way out. Thus, the guilty were to be put to death and the land would be freed from pollution.

Now, we've got a lot of sociologists today that say that the death penalty is no deterrent against crime. It's a horrible thing to put men to death and all of this kind of stuff. And so what has happened? We say the

law of God really isn't valid.

It really isn't good. With our social sciences, we know much better than the law of God. And we're able to establish laws that are superior to the law of God.

How would you describe our land today? Pretty polluted, isn't it? That's what God said He established it for so the land wouldn't be polluted. And we have found out that rather than knowing better than God, He knew best. But we've gone so deep into it, there seems to be now no way out.

Now, in chapter 36, you remember this ERA movement. These daughters of Zelophehad, the guy had seven daughters, no sons. And they said, hey, it isn't fair that we don't get an inheritance in the land just because there are no boys in the family.

Our family should have an inheritance just like everybody else. And thus, the girls ought to be able to have an inheritance just as much as the boys. Moses took it before the Lord and he said, those girls are right.

You know, they shouldn't be cut off just because they're girls. So give them the inheritance too within the land. When you come to the land, those girls are to get an inheritance in the land.

Well, they were from the tribe of Judah. And some of the other fellows in the tribe of Judah came to Moses and they said, now look, this thing could create some real problems. What if these girls marry guys from, say, the tribe of Benjamin or the tribe of Manasseh and all? Then, after the year of Jubilee, when everything reverts back to the original ownership, it means that the part that is allotted to Judah will also be given partially to Manasseh or to these other tribes that these girls have married into.

So they could get into all kinds of trouble. Our portion could be divided out to other tribes because these gals want an inheritance here. So Moses said, all right, this is a rule.

The girls, the daughters of, what is it, Zelophehad, they have to marry fellows from the tribe of Judah. Otherwise, they don't get their inheritance. And so all the girls marry guys from the tribe of Judah rather than marrying outside of tribes.

And that became the law of the land when the inheritance went to a girl. In order to have the inheritance, she had to marry within the tribe that she was from so that there wouldn't be dividing of the lands between the tribes, but all the tribes had their definite defined borders and there wouldn't be a mixing up of the land by marriages and so forth. So whenever the girls inherited the land, then it was necessary for those girls to marry someone from that tribe in order to keep the inheritance of the land.

Otherwise, it was to be given away to those of the tribes so that the land would not, the borders within the land would not become all confused. Now, these are the commandments and the judgments which the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses unto the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho. So this is the end of the road for Moses.

He's brought him as far as he can. These are the commandments. And now Moses is to lay down the rulership and Joshua is to take over to lead the people into the promised land.

But now as we go into the book of Deuteronomy, the word Deuteronomy means the second law. And so it is sort of a summation of that which we have gone through in Deuteronomy, just a sort of a summation now. And we're going to go rapidly through the things pretty much that we've already covered as we go

through the second law, the book of Deuteronomy.

And then we come back to the same point at the end of Deuteronomy. We're at this same point of history that we are right here. And then so you think and you see in our minds, traditionally, we think chronological order.

You know, because the book of Deuteronomy follows numbers that it took place after numbers. But the Bible doesn't always follow the culture of tradition of the Western mind. Quite often, the Bible lays out a whole scene and then it comes back and fills in the details.

That's why people oftentimes have difficulty with the book of Revelation, because it doesn't always follow a set chronological order like we're used to thinking of in our own Western minds. And so, Deuteronomy, we're going to now jump back and come back through it again very rapidly. And then when we get into Joshua, we then start moving ahead in a chronological order again.

So, next week, we'll take the first 10 chapters of the book of Deuteronomy. Shall we stand? And now may the Lord help you to assimilate that which we have studied. And may He bring to your remembrance those things which He has commanded.

And may you be enriched in the knowledge of God and His will and His plan for your life. May the Lord be with you, to bless you, to guide you. And may you be kept by that power of God through faith and trust in Him.

In Jesus' name.

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