

Message #37**Numbers 35:1-34**

God wants His people living life, enjoying life and enjoying Him. For that to happen, God's people need to obey Him. They need to obey Him where they live, how they live and they need respectful law and order. People need to recognize that there is a sanctity to life and that sanctity includes the right for people to live.

GOD PROVIDES CITIES FOR THE LEVITES WHO WERE HIS PRIESTS AND HE PROVIDES CITIES OF REFUGE.

There are two key provisions God makes in these verses:

PROVISION #1 – God provides cities for the Levites. 35:1-8

According to **verse 1**, when Israel was camped on the other side of the Jordan, opposite Jericho, the Lord spoke to Moses.

I don't want to jump over this. Moses is old and is near death and yet he is still God's man and God is still speaking to him. Those young men coming out of seminaries and those young in churches need to remember this. They do not replace those older men who have been greatly used by God. They are just an addition to them. God still favors those older saints who have spent years studying and applying God's Word.

In **verse 2**, God told Moses to command the sons of Israel to give the Levites a specific place to live in the suburbs of their cities. The Levites would be scattered all throughout the land and their job was to teach the Word of God and minister for God and God wanted them to have provisions.

I want us to specifically observe in **verse 2** that the words "inherit, inheritance and portion" are not specifically used in regard to the Levites, but are used in connection to the "sons of Israel." The Levites were specifically not to receive a "land inheritance" like the other tribes (Num. 18:23-24). However, they were to be supported and given specific places to live. The Israelites were to see to it that they give the Levites the pasture lands around the cities in which to live. By having pasture lands of their own, they could sustain their own flocks and herds.

According to **verse 3**, the sons of Israel were to see to it that the Levites were to be given cities in which to live. The Levites were to be given houses in the cities and those houses in those cities were never to be sold (Lev. 25:32-34). It was of tremendous benefit to have a Levite in the city because he could teach and instruct and lead the city in a way that it could become a shining light for the glory of God.

God gives the precise dimensions of the land in **verses 4-5**. This would prevent arguments or speculation. The pasture land for the Levites was to extend out from the walls of the city 1,000 cubits or 1,500 feet or 500 yards.

Now in **verse 5**, the measurement for the east, south, west and north was to be 2,000 cubits, which has presented a problem to some interpreters. The simplest solution to this is discovered in the phrase “outside the city.”

What apparently was supposed to happen is from the walls of the city you marked off 1,000 cubits. Then outside the city you have a total of 2,000 cubits (3,000 feet or 1,000 yards) on each side. So 1,000 cubits away from the wall you have a total of 2,000 cubits on the east, south, west and north from the center of the city. This would allow for suburbia housing and pasture for the Levitical Priests (See diagram).

According to **verses 6-7**, there was to be a total of 48 cities given to the Levites. Of those 48 cities, six were to be designated cities of refuge.

In **verse 8** we learn that depending on which tribe had the larger inheritance, more was to come from them.

PROVISION #2 – God provides cities for Refuge for those who commit unintentional murder.
35:9-34

One commentator said one thing is clear from these verses; the sin of murder is enormous in the sight of God. There is a difference in the mind of God between intentional and non-intentional murder.

In **verses 9-10**, again the Lord is speaking to and through Moses and He told him what he was to do and say. Before we launch into this, let me say that abortion is intentional murder. It is the murder of a life created by God.

God gave Moses the following instructions:

Instruction #1 - When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, cities are to be selected to be cities of refuge. **35:10-11**

Verse 11 says that they were to select cities themselves. In other words, they had the responsibility to choose the cities and they had the responsibility to appoint them and designate them as Levitical cities and as cities of refuge.

Instruction #2 - The cities of refuge is a city for someone who unintentionally killed someone. **35:11**

Now these refuge cities were to be asylum cities for those who had unintentionally killed someone. Now at this time, there was no police department or forensic departments and prosecutor's office and if someone was killed, the family could implement an eye-for-eye punishment.

The purpose of this city is to provide a safe haven for one who committed unintentional homicide. The cities are actually named in Joshua 20.

Instruction #3 - One purpose of the city is to be a place of refuge until there has been a trial. **35:12**

The "avenger" was usually a near kin relative who was responsible to oversee the restoration of loss to a family who had been killed.

Instruction #4 - The total number of cities of refuge was to be six. **35:13**

When we think of the fact that there were twelve tribes representing millions of people, and hundreds of cities, the amount of places of refuge was small. Of course we know that there is only one place of refuge and that is Jesus Christ. We live in a world of millions of cities and millions of people all over the world and there is only one place of refuge—Jesus Christ.

Instruction #5 - There were to be three cities on the east side of the Jordan and three on the west side of the Jordan. **35:14**

Each side of the Jordan was to have refuge cities. These were city statements of God's grace.

On the west side of the Jordan, the cities were Kedesh in the north; Shechem in the center and Hebron in the south.

On the east side of the Jordan, the cities were Bezer in the south; Ramoth-Gilead in the center and Golan in the north.

Instruction #6 - These six cities were for anyone who unintentionally killed someone. **35:15**

From Kedesh to Shechem was about 70 miles. From Shechem to Hebron was about 50 miles. From Bezer to Ramoth-Gilead was about 55 miles and from Ramoth-Gilead to Golan was about 20 miles.

Instruction #7 - If someone killed someone with an object in his hand, he is a murderer and should be executed. **35:16-21**

What is described in these verses is what would actually qualify or disqualify one from going to one of these cities of refuge. There are two disqualifying issues described:

(Disqualification #1) - If someone killed someone with an iron object or a stone or a wooden object, he should be executed. **35:16-19**

If someone held something in their hand and then hit someone and killed them, it is to be considered intentional homicide and the person is not to go to a city of refuge, but is to be executed.

So if someone hit someone with an iron object, or a stone or a piece of wood that was large enough to be held in their hand and the person dies, it was murder. The family avenger was to see to it that the person who killed the person was executed.

(Disqualification #2) - If someone pushed someone out of hatred or enmity premeditation and he waited for him and shoved him or hit him with his hand, he is a murderer and is to be executed. **35:20-21**

The blood avenger has the right to execute the murderer. Motive clearly is in view here. If someone attacked someone out of hate and hostility, then the person is a murderer and is to be executed.

Instruction #8 - If someone pushed someone without any hatred or threw something without premeditation and the person dies who was not an enemy, then the congregation must judge and let him live in his refuge city. **35:22-25**

The congregation, probably a reference to key leaders of a city who made various judgments, must decide motive.

Instruction #9 - If the blood avenger finds the man slayer outside the city, he may execute him and is not guilty. **35:26-28**

When a person is involved in the death of another person and is given permission to live in a city of refuge, he needs to stay within the context of the city and if he goes out, he is subject to legal execution.

He should have stayed in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest, at which time he could return to his original land.

According to **verse 29**, this was to be the statutory law for all generations.

Instruction #10 - If anyone kills a person and there are witnesses, he is to be executed. **35:30**

The murderer must be convicted on the basis of evidence from many witnesses. No one is to be put to death on the basis of one witness. In a capital case, there needs to be witnesses. Murder convictions are serious and Deuteronomy says there needs to be two witnesses in capital cases (Deut. 17:6).

Instruction #11 - No one is to take ransom money to thwart justice in murder cases. **35:31-32**

Even if a person were permitted to live in a refuge city, no one was to take money so that the person could leave the city of refuge before the priest died.

Instruction #12 - No one is to defile the land or pollute the land by not dealing properly with one who sheds blood. **35:33-34**

Murder is atoned for by the death of a murderer. Any who fail to do this defiles the land in which His people live. God dwells in the midst of the sons of Israel.

God's people must always concern themselves with not allowing leaven into the property.

Years ago, I heard a person say that if you allow sin in the church that sin will spread to everyone. He used as his proof text I Corinthians 5:6. Now certainly there is a principle in Proverbs that if you walk on the path of a fool, the fool will pull you down.

However, I do not think Paul is saying that if you don't get an immoral person out of the church everyone in the church will become immoral. What he is saying is God views the church as leavened and He will not shower it with His blessings. God sees the whole church as corrupt when sinful things are not being addressed.

That is exactly what is said here. God wants things dealt with His way because He is present.