

## LESSON FIFTEEN 19:1-21; 21:1-9

### f. THE SANCTITY OF LIFE AND PROPERTY (19:1-21; 21:1-9)

#### (1) CONCERNING MURDER (19:1-13; 21:1-9)

##### (a) The Cities of Refuge (19:1-13)

When Jehovah thy God shall cut off the nations, whose land Jehovah thy God giveth thee, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their cities, and in their houses; 2 thou shalt set apart three cities for thee in the midst of thy land, which Jehovah thy God giveth thee to possess it. 3 Thou shalt prepare thee the way, and divide the borders of thy land, which Jehovah thy God causeth thee to inherit, into three parts, that every manslayer may flee thither.

4 And this is the case of the manslayer, that shall flee thither and live: whoso killeth his neighbor unawares, and hated him not in time past; 5 as when a man goeth into the forest with his neighbor to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbor, so that he dieth; he shall flee unto one of these cities and live: 6 lest the avenger of blood pursue the manslayer, while his heart is hot, and overtake him, because the way is long, and smite him mortally; whereas he was not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past. 7 Wherefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt set apart three cities for thee. 8 And if Jehovah thy God enlarge thy border, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, and give thee all the land which he promised to give unto thy fathers; 9 if thou shalt keep all this commandment to do it, which I command thee this day, to love Jehovah thy God, and to walk ever in his ways; then shalt thou add three cities more for thee, besides these three: 10 that innocent blood be not shed in the midst of thy land, which Jehovah thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and so blood be upon thee.

11 But if any man hate his neighbor, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally so that he dieth, and he flee into one of these cities; 12 then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. 13 Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away the innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 19:1-13

311. Note the strong element of specific faith in verses 1 and 2. What example is in this for us?

312. Suppose the avenger of blood was not of the temperament to take vengeance?
313. In the example given, why would there be a problem if the nearest of kin knew it was only an accident?
314. What three cities were involved in the description here? What three were added later?
315. First degree murder was always punished. Why?

### AMPLIFIED TRANSLATION 19:1-13

When the Lord your God has cut off the nations whose land the Lord your God gives you, and you dispossess them and dwell in their cities and in their houses;

2 You shall set apart three cities for you in the land which the Lord your God gives you to possess.

3 You shall prepare the road, and divide the territory of your land, which the Lord your God gives you to possess, into three parts, so that any manslayer can flee to them.

4 And this is the case of the slayer who shall flee there that he may live. Whoever kills his neighbor unintentionally, for whom he had no enmity in time past;

5 As when a man goes into the wood with his neighbor to hew wood, and his hand strikes with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slips off the handle and lights on his neighbor, and kills him; he may flee to one of those cities and live;

6 Lest the avenger of the blood pursue the slayer, while his [mind and] heart are hot with anger, and overtake him, because the way is long, and slay him; although the slayer was not worthy of death, since he had not been at enmity with him previously.

7 Therefore I command you, You shall set apart three [refuge] cities.

8 And if the Lord your God enlarges your territory, as He has sworn to your fathers to do, and gives you all the land which He promised to your fathers to give,

9 If you keep all these commandments to do them, which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to walk always in His ways; then you shall add three other cities to these three,

10 Lest innocent blood be shed in your land, which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, and so blood guilt be upon you.

11 But if any man hates his neighbor, and lies in wait for him, and attacks him and wounds him mortally so that he dies, and the assailant flees into one of these cities,

12 Then the elders of his own city shall send and fetch him there, and give him over to the avenger of blood, so that he may die.

13 Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall clear Israel of the guilt of innocent blood, that it may be well with you.

### COMMENT 19:1-13

See also Ch. 4:41-43 and notes. There we had the east-side cities set apart. Now provision is made, not only for the first three, but a second three, and also "three cities more" (v. 9) on the west side. The controversy as to whether the former passage is chronologically out of place, is not worth the energy of debate. We will leave it where it is, as a part of the divine record, and leave this where it is for the same reason. As will be seen below, there is no good reason for changing the order of the two passages.

WHEN JEHOVAH . . . SHALL CUT OFF THE NATIONS (v. 1)—This beginning phrase makes it seem obvious that the refuge cities Moses now refers to are the *west* side cities, not the east, for the conquering of the east side, as well as the setting aside of the refuge cities on that side of the Jordan, was *history*, and Israel was now camping near the banks of the Jordan, yea, not far from the water's edge! See 1:1, 3:27, etc. In view of the fact that the tribes of Ephraim, Gad and Manasseh (except those able to go forth to war, who were to assist Israel) were to stay on the *east* side, it would only be natural for Moses to go ahead and set apart the cities on that side (4:41-43).

THOU SHALT SET APART THREE CITIES (v. 2)—McGarvey remarks on the sequence of setting these cities aside thus:

"As the Pentateuch now stands, the first command on the subject is in the thirty-fifth chapter of Numbers. There the order to appoint cities of refuge is given, the number then is stated, and the law by which their use is to be regulated is elaborated. No one of the cities is named. Next, in Deut. iv. 41-43, it is said that Moses, after the conquest of the country east of the Jordan, selected three of them, and their names are given. Next, in Deut. xix. 1-13, Moses directs that after they shall have possessed the country west of the Jordan, they shall select three cities of refuge on that side; he repeats the law less elaborately, and orders that if Jehovah shall enlarge their borders, and

give them all the land promised to their fathers, they shall add three other cities on that side [v. 9], so that all the manslayers may have the benefit of a place of refuge. Their borders were never thus extended until the reign of David, and they remained so only till the close of Solomon's reign, and consequently these three additional cities were never appointed."

In Josh. 20:1-9 these three west-side cities are set apart: Kedesh in Naphtali, Shechem in Ephraim, and Hebron in Judah. The east-side cities are again listed.

Ex. 21:12, 13, it has been mistakenly thought, provides that the *altar* was appointed by God as a refuge for a manslayer. But that law, instead of making the altar of God an asylum for the manslayer, positively forbids its use as such. It was to furnish no protection, not even temporary protection, from death. A murderer might *think*, "Surely no one would have the gall to kill a man on God's altar!" Or, "Surely I will not be killed here, lest human blood defile the altar!" But God would say of a "presumptuous" murderer, "take him off the altar—do not spare him." So Adonijah and Joab both fled to the altar with the *hope* of being spared—but were slain, I K. 1:50-53; 2:24, 25; 28-34.

The cities of refuge, on the other hand, were not appointed to provide permanent asylum for murderers, but that every man who killed his neighbor might find protection there until the time of his trial, and might remain there after his trial, if he was not found worthy of death, until the death of the high priest. He could then return to his home if he wished.

THOU SHALT PREPARE THEE THE WAY (v. 3)—The Amplified O. T. renders v. 3, "You shall prepare the road, and divide the territory of your land, which the Lord your God gives you to possess, into three parts, so that any manslayer can flee to them." With a careful division of the land into thirds, and roads to the cities, access to them would be easier.

THREE CITIES (v. 7) . . . ADD THREE CITIES MORE FOR THEE, BESIDES THESE THREE (v. 9)—See note above. We have assumed that these last three are not again mentioned in the Bible, and probably were never appointed. The appointment of the six cities was "when . . ." but the appointment of the last three was "IF thou shalt keep all this commandment," etc. (v. 9). These periods were such brief flashes in Israel's history the job apparently never got done.

BUT IF ANY MAN HATE HIS NEIGHBOR (v. 11)—Whether this were true or not would be determined during his trial. Cf. Num. 35:9-34.

THOU SHALT PUT AWAY THE INNOCENT BLOOD (v. 13)—See 21:9 and notes, below.

(b) Expiation for an Unknown Murderer's Crime (21:1-9)

If one be found slain in the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee to possess it, lying in the field, and it be not known who hath smitten him; 2 then thy elders and thy judges shall come forth, and they shall measure unto the cities which are round about him that is slain: 3 and it shall be, that the city which is nearest unto the slain man, even the elders of that city shall take a heifer of the herd, which hath not been wrought with, and which hath not drawn in the yoke; 4 and the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer unto a valley with running water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley. 5 And the priests the son of Levi shall come near; for them Jehovah thy God hath chosen to minister unto him, and to bless in the name of Jehovah; and according to their word shall every controversy and every stroke be. 6 And all the elders of that city, who are nearest unto the slain man, shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley; 7 and they shall answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it. 8 Forgive, O Jehovah, thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and suffer not innocent blood *to remain* in the midst of thy people Israel. And the blood shall be forgiven them. 9 So shalt thou put away the innocent blood from the midst of thee, when thou shalt do that which is right in the eyes of Jehovah.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 21:1-9

316. Responsibility was such a vital part of the life of all Israel, all human life was of supreme importance. How are these two thoughts dramatized in this text?
317. Who was to pay for the heifer?
319. Why specify the particular type of heifer?
319. Why: the running water?; a field that has never been plowed nor sown?
320. The washing of hands to clear guilt is found elsewhere, name two.
321. How is the expression "innocent blood" used in verse 8 and 9?

## AMPLIFIED TRANSLATION 21:1-9

If one be found slain in the land which the Lord your God gives you to possess, lying in the field, and it is not known who has killed him.

2 Then your elders and judges shall come forth and measure the distance to the cities around him who is slain;

3 And the city which is nearest to the slain man, the elders of that city shall take a heifer, which has never been worked, never pulled in the yoke;

4 And the elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with running water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley.

5 And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near, for the Lord your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to bless in the name [and presence] of the Lord, and by their word shall every controversy and every assault be settled.

6 And all the elders of that city nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley;

7 And they shall testify, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it.

8 Forgive, O Lord, Your people Israel whom You have redeemed, and do not allow the shedding of innocent blood to be charged to Your people Israel. And the guilt of blood shall be forgiven them.

9 So shall you purge the guilt of innocent blood from among you, when you do what is right in the sight of the Lord.

## COMMENT 21:1-9

Note that in v. 3, the city's leaders nearest the slain man were responsible for making expiation. The ritual outlined here was applicable to cases where murder was not (and perhaps *could* not be) expiated by the apprehension, conviction, and execution of the murderer. Until the mystery was unravelled, this formula would exonerate the city's inhabitants.

THE ELDERS . . . SHALL TAKE A HEIFER (v. 3)—It is to be one in full vigor and health, which has not seen domestic work, and consequently expressed in the fullest form the life-producing power to which the violent death stood as a contrast.

THE ELDERS . . . SHALL WASH THEIR HANDS (v. 6)—An assertion of their innocence and repudiation of their guilt. Cf. Ph. 26:6, 73:13; Matt. 27:24.

SO SHALT THOU PUT AWAY INNOCENT BLOOD (v. 9)—Or, (as in 19:13) the guilt of shedding innocent blood. By the formula prescribed, they would not be held guilty for the blood *already shed*, nor of *taking another man's blood* before he was proved guilty. When the process of justice was properly carried out, no innocent person's blood would be shed.

#### (2) CONCERNING LANDMARKS (19:14)

14 Thou shalt not remove thy neighbor's landmark, which they of old time have set, in thine inheritance which thou shalt inherit, in the land that Jehovah thy God giveth thee to possess it.

#### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 19:14

322. Why would anyone want to move a landmark? There might be more than one reason. Consider.
323. Read 27:17; Job 24:2; Proverbs 22:28; 23:10. The right of private ownership was an important factor in the prosperity and security of Israel. Remember this is a divine principle.
324. Is the same analogous comparison for some of the ancient Biblical land marks and their removal?

#### AMPLIFIED TRANSLATION 19:14

14 You shall not remove your neighbor's landmark, in the land which the Lord your God gives you to possess, which the men of old [the first dividers of the land] set.

#### COMMENT 19:14

As the proper inheritance of one's property was determined by the landmarks, they were not to be altered by another. The old, or original one was to remain. See 27:17, Job 24:2, Prov. 22:28, 23:10. The story of Ahab and Jezebel seizing Naboth's vineyard (I K. 21) surely represents a flagrant disregard for this law.

#### (3) CONCERNING WITNESSES AND JUDGMENT (19:15-21)

15 One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall a matter be established.

16 If an unrighteous witness rise up against any man to testify against him of wrong-doing, 17 then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before Jehovah, before the priests and the judges that shall be in those days; 18 and the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and have testified falsely against his brother; 19 then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to do unto his brother; so shalt thou put away the evil from the midst of thee. 20 And those that remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil in the midst of thee. 21 And thine eye shall not pity; life *shall go* for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 19:15-21

325. Here is a safeguard against libel.
326. Read: Matthew 18:15-17; II Corinthians 13:1; I Timothy 5:19 for the New Testament application of this principle.
327. Once again: *responsibility* is the key word here. Specify the areas of responsibility.
328. A witness against a man put himself on trial and opened the possibility of his own punishment. He knew what possible punishment was in store; how?
329. The law as here stated was for prevention of crime. There was no revenge, spite, or hate involved, i.e. from the viewpoint of the innocent. Show how this was true.

### AMPLIFIED TRANSLATION 19:15-21

15 One witness shall not prevail against a man for any crime or any wrong in connection with any sin he commits; only on the testimony of two or three witnesses shall a charge be established.

16 If a false witness rise up against any man to accuse him of wrongdoing.

17 Then both parties to the controversy shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days;

18 The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely,

19 Then you shall do to him as he had intended to do to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you.

20 And those who remain shall hear, and (reverently) fear, and shall henceforth commit no such evil among you.

21 Your eye shall not pity; it shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

### COMMENT 19:15-21

17:2-13 should also be carefully reviewed and compared here, as well as 13:6-11. See lesson ten. But the present scripture covers "any iniquity . . . any sin" (v. 15).

TWO WITNESSES . . . OR THREE (v. 15)—As also specified in 17:6 in the case of an idolater, in Num. 35:30 in the case of murder, and in Matt. 18:15-17, II Cor. 13:1, I Tim. 5:19, in the church. This is a divine safeguard against the individual throwing around idle or speculative accusations. And as we have already seen in the cases of the murderer and idolater, unless the prosecutor is willing to abide by the divine formula for justice, he should not be bringing accusations. If he is unable to back up his claim with evidence and witnesses, and pursue the matter to the casting of the first stone, let him "forever hold his peace."

IF AN UNRIGHTEOUS WITNESS RISE UP (v. 16)—A witness had to have a reputation for fairness and honesty. "Thou shalt not take up a false report: put not thy hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness" (Ex. 23:1). David could say,

Unrighteous witness rise up  
They ask me of things that I know not.  
—Ps. 35:11

And again,

Deliver me not over unto the will  
of mine adversaries:  
For false witnesses are risen up  
against me,  
And such as breathe out cruelty.  
—Ps. 27:12

Naboth could have testified in a similar vein (I K. 21:8-10).

In such a case, the punishment of the false witness was to be the same as that intended for his fellow-Israelite (v. 19). *Another* safeguard against petty, trivial or indefinite accusations! "And those that remain shall hear and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil . . ." (v. 20).

AND THINE EYE SHALL NOT PITY; LIFE SHALL GO FOR LIFE, EYE FOR EYE, TOOTH FOR TOOTH, HAND FOR HAND, FOOT FOR FOOT (v. 21)—See also Ex. 21:22-25, Lev. 24:17-21. In the *present* case, the meaning seems to be that whatever punishment the false accuser had intended for his brother, it should be given to him. This would stop gossip, careless accusations, and especially *lying*. If he had intended to put his brother's eye out (by pinning certain charges against him) *his* eye was to be put out, probably by the accused. This would be determined by the judges and priests. Israel was not to get sentimental or "soft-hearted" in the matter—"thine eye shall not pity . . ." (What *should*, for example, have been done to Jezebel and Ahab, in the case cited above?)

As a *general* rule, this law stands as a law of *prevention* all the way through. Note the other passages. It was *not* a law intended to "get even," or justify retaliation. It was a civil code, and was to govern the decision of the *judges* in "court." But the Jews perverted this original purpose, and extended this law to their own private conduct—warping and twisting its meaning, for purposes of revenge (Matt. 5:38-42). ("You hit me, you *touch* me, and I'll gouge your eyes out!") Jesus not only rebukes this concept, but goes beyond the old law entirely, teaching a basic doctrine of physical nonresistance.

As the law was originally given, it did not allow for a spirit of spite, revenge, or hate. It was simply an edict to be carried out, once justice had been determined.

## SUMMARY OF CHAPTER NINETEEN

*Three cities of refuge to be appointed in the midst of the promised land; the land being divided into three parts, a city is to be placed in each, a proper way to which is to be prepared, 1-3. In what cases of manslaughter the benefit of those cities may be claimed, 4-6. Three cities more to be added should the Lord enlarge their coasts, and the reasons why 7-10. The intentional murderer shall have no benefit from these cities, 11-13. The landmark is not to be shifted, 14. One witness shall not be deemed sufficient to convict a man, 15. How a false witness shall be dealt with—he shall bear the punishment which he designed should have been inflicted on his neighbor, 16-20. Another command to establish the lex talionis, 21.*

## QUESTIONS, LESSON FIFTEEN (19:1-21; 21:1-9)

(19:1-13)

1. What purpose did the cities of refuge serve?
2. How many cities did *God provide* for? (Careful!)
3. What protection was afforded the malicious murderer in Israel?
4. Did God also appoint the *altar* as a refuge? Explain.
5. Comment on this: "Thou shalt prepare thee the way, and divide the borders . . . into three parts" (v. 3).

(21:1-9)

6. How was it determined *which city* should make expiation for the unknown murderer's crime?
7. Why did the elders of the city wash their hands? Were they *dirty*?
8. Note v. 9. What is meant by putting away "innocent blood"?

(19:14)

9. What was not to be "removed" in this lesson?

(19:15-21, 17:2-13)

10. What safeguard(s) would be involved by having two or three witnesses?
11. What punishment was due a false witness?
12. Explain 19:21, its purpose *here*, how the Pharisees abused it, and what Jesus taught in contrast.