

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

NUMBERS 31-36

Babe Ruth's last hurrah occurred while playing for the Braves.

In a game against Pittsburgh on May 25, 1935, the Babe came to bat in the first inning and hit a home run. In the third inning he hit another homer. In the fifth he singled. And in the seventh inning he hit his third home run of the day. The ball sailed out of the Forbes Field, and landed in an adjacent street.

The aging slugger displayed one final flash of his former greatness.

A few days later in Philadelphia, the Babe injured his knee, and took himself out of the game in the first inning. It was the last game Babe Ruth ever played.

Well, chapter 31 is Moses' last hurrah... And he too has a banner day. God allows Moses one final opportunity to lead the nation of Israel to a victory.

A few days afterward Moses is forced into heavenly retirement.

Verse 1, "And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Take vengeance for the children of Israel on the Midianites. Afterward you shall be gathered to your people.

So Moses spoke to the people, saying, "Arm some of yourselves for the war, and let them go against the Midianites to take vengeance for the LORD on Midian. A thousand from each tribe of all the tribes of Israel you shall send to the war."

So there were recruited from the divisions of Israel one

thousand from each tribe, twelve thousand armed for war. Then Moses sent them to the war, one thousand from each tribe; he sent them to the war with Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest..." Remember Phinehas was the priest who was into body piercing... In Numbers 25 Phinehas performed a two for one body piercing.

A Hebrew man named Zimri, and his Midianite mistress, Cozbi, were flaunting their rebellion. Zimri had embraced Cozbi's idolatry. They were also having illicit sex - perhaps in the Tabernacle. It was a X-rated episode of the Cozbi show....

When Phinehas became aware of their sin, he said "*enough is enough*"...

He grabbed a javelin, chased Zimri, and thrust it through both he and the girl. He wanted them both to get the point! *You don't run roughshod over God's laws.*

Phinehas' decisive action stopped the plague God had brought on His people.

And now God sends a zealous Phinehas to lead Israel to take vengeance on the Midianites - those who perverted their minds and corrupted their morals...

And notice what Phinehas takes with him into battle...

Rather than bows and arrows, and spears, and battleaxes... He goes out "**with the holy articles and the signal trumpets in his hand.**" Phinehas took the Ark, and the menorah, and perhaps the other Tabernacle furniture into the battle.

Remember, Zimri and the Midianites had mocked God's standards and defiled the Tabernacle with their immoral acts. Now the Tabernacle strikes back. Call it, *Revenge of the*

Tabernacle. God's presence and holiness executes judgment.

Verse 7 tells us, “And they warred against the Midianites, just as the LORD commanded Moses, and they killed all the males. They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of those who were killed - Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword.”

Balaam, *ole Harry Potter*, was the soothsayer who brought harm to Israel.

Balak, king of Moab, hired Balaam to curse Israel - instead God manipulated his mouth. All he could utter was a blessing. Four times Balaam blessed Israel.

Balaam never *curse*d Israel, but he still cashed in on the *purse*...

Balaam hatched a seductive scheme... Though he'd been forbidden to curse Israel, if Balak sent his temple prostitutes into Israel's camp – if these women lured the Israeli men to bed, and seduced them to bow to their idols - then God would curse His own people. What Balaam couldn't do God would do Himself.

Obviously, the plan succeeded, and Balaam received his payday.

Guys, there's only one problem with sin's payday – it's the next day – payday is always eventually followed by judgment day. Balaam wealth was short-lived. It never pays to sell out your integrity, and betray God's truth – not at any price.

Balaam is a sad story. In his first prophecy, Numbers 23:10,

Balaam had prophesied, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!”

That’s not how it ended for Balaam. He was judged with the unrighteous! He died the death of the unrighteous – and was executed by an Israeli sword.

“And the children of Israel took the women of Midian captive, with their little ones, and took as spoil all their cattle, all their flocks, and all their goods. They also burned with fire all the cities where they dwelt, and all their forts.

And they took all the spoil and all the booty - of man and beast.

Then they brought the captives, the booty, and the spoil to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the children of Israel, to the camp in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho.”

“And Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the congregation, went to meet them outside the camp. But Moses was angry with the officers of the army, with the captains over thousands and captains over hundreds, who had come from the battle. And Moses said to them: "Have you kept all the women alive?"

Usually, in ancient times victorious armies killed the men and allowed the women to live. Men were a threat to retaliate. Women were no danger.

But just the opposite was the case in this instance...

The Midianite women were the direct reason for Israel’s downfall – and now here come the men of Israel strutting back to camp with their seducers.

Moses tells them, “Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.”

How quickly Israel forgot God’s judgment. The Midianite maidens proved to be a greater threat to Israel than the curses of Balaam or an army of mighty warriors.

Hey, sometimes our greatest threats are not the most apparent.

The most lethal enemy to our Christianity is not the ACLU, or the liberal media, or the leftist politician, or the atheistic school board member – it’s probably the link that pops up on the internet that can lead you astray, or your remote controller, or the wink from the girl in the office, or the so-called friend who wants to have fun.

The obvious enemy is not always the most lethal. *Guard the backdoor.*

God orders Israel, “Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones...”

This sounds harsh but understand every Middle Eastern male was bound by two duties - to avenge his father’s death and to preserve his cultural heritage.

And this is why God sent Israel to battle... Midianite culture was depraved, and wicked, and idolatrous. God wanted it obliterated from the earth, not propagated by a future generation. Midianite males would grow up to repeat their father’s sin.

Understand Israel had a unique role in Old Testament times. Israel was God's instrument of judgment against the nations in and around the land of Canaan.

When God told Abraham that his descendants would remain in Egypt for 400 years He used as His reason "for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

In other words, Israel's conquest of Canaan was ordained by God as a means of wiping out one of the most perverse and demonized cultures the world has ever seen. The nations Israel will battle in Canaan were sold out to evil, brutal, satanic practices. When God orders kids slaughtered He's literally doing them a favor. He is rescuing them from a culture that will yoke them to Satan and send them to hell.

Think of Israel as the ground that swallowed Korah and his rebels - or the fire destroyed Sodom - or the forty days of rain that flooded the earth. Israel was God's tool of vengeance on cultures He wanted punished and exterminated.

Moses also orders, "and kill every woman who has known a man intimately." Anyone who had likely participated in the seduction of Israel they were to kill.

"But keep alive for yourselves all the young girls who have not known a man intimately." They would become slaves and servants and hopefully adopt the worship of the one, true God. "And as for you, remain outside the camp seven days; whoever has killed any person, and whoever has touched any slain, purify yourselves and your captives on the third day and on the seventh day.

Purify every garment, everything made of leather, everything woven of goats' hair, and everything made of wood." In other

words, don't bring anything that could be idolatrous, or even a source of disease or infection, into the camp.

Verse 21, "Then Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone to the battle, "This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD commanded Moses: Only the gold, the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin, and the lead, everything that can endure fire, you shall put through the fire, and it shall be clean; and it shall be purified with the water of purification." They melted down their idols.

But all that cannot endure fire you shall put through water. And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day and be clean, and afterward you may come into the camp." Everything had to be purified either by fire or water...

And the same is true for us... *the fire is the Spirit - the water is the Word.*

We need the intense heat of the Holy Spirit to purge and purify our desires. We need the water of God's Word to wash our dirty minds and renew our thoughts.

Everything needs to be purified by the fire and the water.

Verse 25, "And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Count up the plunder that was taken - of man and beast - you and Eleazar the priest and the chief fathers of the congregation; and divide the plunder into two parts, between those who took part in the war, who went out to battle, and all the congregation."

This starts an interesting principle that resurfaces throughout the Bible.

Recall only 1000 men from each of the tribes fought against

the Midianites – a total of 12,000. The remaining 590,000 men were not involved in the combat.

Yes Moses decides that everyone should get a share of the spoils – both those who fought on the frontlines and those who stayed behind to protect the camp.

This is the same principle used by David in 1 Samuel 30:24... When his army came back from routing the Philistines he said, "As his part is who goes down to the battle, so shall his part be who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike."

And this applies to us today... It's not just the missionary or the pastor that God rewards. God knows, for a Christian worker to be successful, it takes people back home who are willing to stay with the supplies and send support to the frontlines. Both the man who goes, and the man who stays, deserves a portion of the spoil.

Everyone gets a portion, but everyone should also pay a tax. Verse 28, "And levy a tribute for the LORD on the men of war who went out to battle: one of every five hundred of the persons, the cattle, the donkeys, and the sheep; take it from their half, and give it to Eleazar the priest as a heave offering to the LORD.

And from the children of Israel's half you shall take one of every fifty, drawn from the persons, the cattle, the donkeys, and the sheep, from all the livestock, and give them to the Levites who keep charge of the tabernacle of the LORD."

So Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the LORD commanded Moses.

The next few verses itemize the spoil... and list the tax that was levied.

Verse 48, "Then the officers who were over thousands of the army, the captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, came near to Moses; and they said to Moses, "Your servants have taken a count of the men of war who are under our command, and not a man of us is missing." There were no casualties.

And they wanted to say thanks to God. "Therefore we have brought an offering for the LORD, what every man found of ornaments of gold: armlets and bracelets and signet rings and earrings and necklaces, to make atonement for ourselves before the LORD." The last few verses of the chapter count up their offering.

Chapter 32, "Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of livestock; and when they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead..." These were regions of grassy hills, and lush pasture. They were not considered part of the Promised Land. They were east of the Jordan River.

But they saw "that indeed the region was a place for livestock, the children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spoke to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Shebam, Nebo, and Beon, the country which the LORD defeated before the congregation of Israel, is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock." Numbers 21 recalls that on their march to Canaan, Moses fought battles with King Og and King Sihon of the Amorites. And in

defeating these kings the east bank of Jordan came under Israeli control.

Now Reuben and Gad want to settle in this region.

“Therefore they said, "If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as a possession. Do not take us over the Jordan."

Verse 6, “And Moses said to the children of Gad and to the children of Reuben: "Shall your brethren go to war while you sit here?" Their stated reason for wanting to settle on the east bank is the pasture land that will feed their herds, but Moses jumps to conclusions. He thinks they're lazy, and faithless, and too afraid to fight.

The giants lived primarily on the west bank, not the east bank.

“Now why will you discourage the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the LORD has given them? Thus your fathers did when I sent them away from Kadesh Barnea to see the land. For when they went up to the Valley of Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, so that they did not go into the land which the LORD had given them.

So the LORD's anger was aroused on that day, and He swore an oath, saying, 'Surely none of the men who came up from Egypt, from 20 years old and above, shall see the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because they have not wholly followed Me, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite, and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have wholly followed the LORD.'”

Moses thinks history is repeating itself. The problem with the first generation is they got to the edge of the Promised Land and succumbed to fear. They refused to fight. Now their back to the edge again, and two tribes want to stay put...

Hey, sometimes history repeats itself in our lives. We make the same mistake.

Rather than going all the way with God, we get right on the *brink of blessing* – and since the brink of blessing is better than the *sink and stink of sin* – we figure that's as far as we need to go. We stop short... Don't settle for second best.

Press on. Have faith. Enter in to all the goodness God has for you.

Moses reminds Gad and Rueben of the price the first generation paid for their unbelief. "So the LORD's anger was aroused against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the LORD was gone. And look! You have risen in your father's place, a brood of sinful men, to increase still more the fierce anger of the LORD against Israel. For if you turn away from following Him, He will once again leave them in the wilderness, and you will destroy all these people." Moses threatens Israel with another 40 years in the wilderness if they cave-in to fear and refuse to fully follow.

Let me say, Moses' concern is certainly legitimate, and it applies to the church.

I run into too many Christians with a "*me first*" attitude. As long as I am being blessed – as long as my family's needs

are being met... They have no sense of responsibility for other brothers and sisters in the family of God. *Why fight somebody else's battle – when the outcome won't benefit me?*

Sadly, the church is full of east bank Christians.

Why help in the nursery? My kids are grown. I've done my duty.

Who cares about a Christian School? We don't even have kids.

Why should I pray for the marriages in the church? I'm single.

Why carry on a relationship with a single friend? I'm married now.

Sometimes we say we're serving God, but we limit our service to what will directly benefit me and my family. I call that *an east-bank mentality*.

Thankfully, that was not Gad and Reuben's underlying attitude.

They address Moses' concern in verse 16, **"Then they came near to him and said: "We will build sheepfolds here for our livestock, and cities for our little ones, but we ourselves will be armed, ready to go before the children of Israel until we have brought them to their place; and our little ones will dwell in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land. We will not return to our homes until every one of the children of Israel has received his inheritance."** They'll settle on the east bank, and leave their families and flocks, but they promise to fight with the other ten tribes until all of Canaan has been taken, and all Israel occupies their land.

"For we will not inherit with them on the other side of the

Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has fallen to us on this eastern side of the Jordan."

"Then Moses said to them: "If you do this thing, if you arm yourselves before the LORD for the war, and all your armed men cross over the Jordan before the LORD until He has driven out His enemies from before Him, and the land is subdued before the LORD, then afterward you may return and be blameless before the LORD and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the LORD. But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out." *Your sin will find you out...*

It reminds me of the mom who went to visit her single son. She was surprised to find that John's new roommate was a girl named Julie. Of course he assured her that they were just friends. Nothing immoral was going on between them.

Several weeks after her visit Julie mentioned to John one day, "Ever since your mom visited I've been missing the silver gravy ladle we use to serve dinner. Do you think your mom took it?" John said he didn't think so, but he'd ask.

John wrote a letter, "Dear Mom, I'm not saying you "did" take the gravy ladle from my house, and I'm not saying you "did not" take the gravy ladle. But the fact remains that one has been missing ever since you were here for dinner."

Several days later, John received a reply from his mom, "Dear Son, I'm not saying you "do" sleep with Julie, and I'm not saying you "do not" sleep with Julie. But the fact remains, if she was sleeping in her own bed, she would have found the

gravy ladle by now." As Moses said, "be sure your sin will find you out."

Understand though, the context of Moses' comment. Not ever sin will always find you out. There are sins that people keep secret and take to the grave.

But what Moses says is the sin of *me-first* – of always *looking-out-for-number-one* – the *east bank mentality* of following God only as it benefits me - will always find you out. Eventually your faith will be test and your true colors will show.

Moses continues, "Build cities for your little ones and folds for your sheep, and do what has proceeded out of your mouth." And the children of Gad & the children of Reuben spoke to Moses, saying: "Your servants will do as my lord commands.

Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our livestock will be there in the cities of Gilead; but your servants will cross over, every man armed for war, before the LORD to battle, just as my lord says." Reuben and Gad are ready to fight.

"So Moses gave command concerning them to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the chief fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel.

Moses will be long gone by the time the conquest of Canaan is complete.

This is why he briefs Eleazar and Joshua on the terms of the deal – so when he's gone they can carry it out. "And Moses said to them: "If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben cross over the Jordan with you, every man armed for

battle before the LORD, and the land is subdued before you, then you shall give them the land of Gilead as a possession. But if they do not cross over armed with you, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan."

"Then the children of Gad and the children of Reuben answered, saying: "As the LORD has said to your servants, so we will do. We will cross over armed before the LORD into the land of Canaan, but the possession of our inheritance shall remain with us on this side of the Jordan." So Moses gave to the children of Gad, to the children of Reuben, and to half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph..." Half of the tribe of Manasseh was also a partner on the east bank.

These 2½ tribes will possess "the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land with its cities within the borders, the cities of the surrounding country." *But in the end, was it a good idea to stop short of the Promise Land and settle on the east bank?* History confirms it was not.

Every time a northern invader launched an assault on Israel the tribes east of the Jordan would catch the full brunt of their fury and wrath. The eastern tribes had no protection. They would've been better off settling west of the Jordan.

Verses 34-42 list the cities of Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh. And note the cities of Reuben sandwiched between Gad and Manasseh... Call it, a *reuben sandwich*.

As some of you know my family is in the process of moving – *not far, we're looking at a house in the same school district.*

But after 15 years in one place we're finding moving to be a chore. I'm glad I only do it once every 15 years.

It could be, though, that you're the opposite. If you had a dad in the military - or in the mafia - you may've moved constantly. Yet no matter how many times your family has moved I'm sure nobody compares to the family of Israel. Chapter 33 tells us that the children of Israel moved 42 times in 40 years in the wilderness.

And we think we live in a mobile society!

Chapter 33, "These are the journeys of the children of Israel, who went out of the land of Egypt by their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Now Moses wrote down the starting points of their journeys at the command of the LORD. And these are their journeys according to their starting points:

And he starts in Egypt... "They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the 15th day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians. For the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had killed among them. Also on their gods the LORD had executed judgments." Remember each of the ten plagues was designed to show God's superiority over one of the false gods of Egypt.

"Then the children of Israel moved from Rameses and camped at Succoth.

They departed from Succoth and camped at Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness. They moved from Etham and turned back to Pi Hahiroth, which is east of Baal Zephon;

and they camped near Migdol. They departed from before Hahiroth and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness...”

Here’s how I want us to go through the rest of the chapter... You can either turn to the map in the back of your Bible, or follow with me on the big screen, and I’ll read out the locations where the Israelites camped as you track their course...

Marah... Elim... by the Red Sea... Wilderness of Sin... Dophkah... Alush... Rephidim... Sinai... then numerous other cities between Mt. Sinai and Kadesh.

Verse 38, “Then Aaron the priest went up to Mount Hor at the command of the LORD, and died there in the fortieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, on the first day of the fifth month. Aaron was 123 years old when he died on Mount Hor. Now the king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the South in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the children of Israel.”

So they departed from Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah... Punon... Oboth... Ije Abarim, at the border of Moab... Ijim... Dibon Gad... Almon Diblathaim... (they) camped in the mountains of Abarim, before Nebo.

Finally they camped by the Jordan across from the city of Jericho.

Verse 50, “Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, de-

stroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places...”

The high places were pagan altars used to worship the false gods of the Canaanites. We'll talk a lot about the high places in the coming months.

“You shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess. And you shall divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families; to the larger you shall give a larger inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give a smaller inheritance; there everyone's inheritance shall be whatever falls to him by lot. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers.

But Moses issues a warning in verse 55, “But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell.” And this is also a warning to us.

Ignore the sin God wants to delete from your life, and it'll end up an irritant - a thorn – a hassle. The bad habit you keep clutching - the place you frequent – the non-Christian influence – if you tolerate it you'll end up constantly harassed.

I know believers who get so pestered - so defeated in the spiritual life – they end up giving up on God. *But who's the one to blame? They are.* They chose to live with the enemy rather than drive him out. Don't make the same mistake!

The chapter closes on an ominous note. God says to Israel if you compromise and don't drive out the pagans in the land “Moreover it shall be that I will do to you as I thought to do to

them." God's intention was to use Israel to judge the Canaanites, but if Israel compromises she's the one who'll be judged.

In chapter 34 Moses becomes a surveyor, and outlines for Israel the land God expects them move in and occupy. He provides for them the exact boundaries...

Verse 1, "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Command the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land of Canaan, this is the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance - the land of Canaan to its boundaries.'"

Verses 2-5 mark off the southern border.

The western border was simple. Verse 6, "You shall have the Great Sea (or the Mediterranean) for a border; this shall be your western border."

Verses 7-9 lay the pins on the northern border.

Then verses 10-12 survey the eastern border... From the Golan Heights to the "Sea of Chinnereth" – which is an Old Testament name for the Sea of Galilee. The word "Chinnereth" means harp. And the lake actually shaped like a harp. The eastern border follows the Jordan River to the "Salt Sea", or Dead Sea.

In verses 16-29 the Lord gives Moses a list of men who are to divide the land among the twelve tribes. Eleazar, the High Priest, and Joshua are to oversee the allocation – and each tribe should be represented by one of the tribe's leaders.

If you're paying attention you'll realize there's one tribe that's not mentioned in chapter 34. They seem left out... and

that's the priestly tribe... the tribe of Levi.

God does not promise them a parcel of land...

Remember, rather than farm or herd sheep, the Levites worked in the service of the Tabernacle. They were supported by the tithes of the people. God didn't give the Levi property because *they didn't need land – they had the Lord*.

Numbers 18:20 explained, "Then the LORD said to Aaron: "You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel." In a very real sense, God was their security. God wanted them dwelling in Him, not on a lot of land.

Yet the Levites needed some place to live. There was a laver, but no showers in the Tabernacle. God didn't want the Levites stinking up the Tabernacle so He appointed them cities throughout the land of Israel where they stayed.

Chapter 35, "And the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho, saying: "Command the children of Israel that they give the Levites cities to dwell in from the inheritance of their possession, and you shall also give the Levites common-land around the cities. They shall have the cities to dwell in; and their common-land shall be for their cattle, for their herds, and for all their animals. The common-land of the cities which you shall give the Levites shall extend from the wall of the city outward a thousand cubits all around.

And you shall measure outside the city on the east side two thousand cubits, on the south side two thousand cubits, on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two

thousand cubits. The city shall be in the middle. This shall belong to them as common-land for the cities.” A cubit was 18 inches, so 1000 cubits was 1500 feet. An additional 1000 cubits totaled 3000 feet.

That means the common land around the city was a little over 200 acres.

“Now among the cities which you will give to the Levites you shall appoint six cities of refuge, to which a manslayer may flee. And to these you shall add 42 cities. So all the cities you will give to the Levites shall be 48; these you shall give with their common-land.” There were 48 Levitical cities, and they’re listed in Joshua 21. Six of these Levitical cities were designated as *cities of refuge*.

Verse 14 tells us 3 of the cities were east of the Jordan River - 3 of the cities were west. You were never more than a half day’s journey to a city of refuge.

The *city of refuge* was a safe place for a man on the run from an avenger.

If you’ve ever watched an episode of *Law and Order* you know the difference between *first degree murder* and *manslaughter*. Murder in the first degree is intentional and premeditated. Manslaughter is unintentional or accidental.

In ancient times if you were guilty of manslaughter the family of the victim had the right to avenge their brother’s death, and kill you in cold blood. They’d chase you down. You were never safe. You were always looking over your shoulder.

But God provided a safe place for the man to flee. If he ducked into a city of refuge he was safe and protected. He

was shielded from the avenging party until he could be tried and declared innocent. These six cities were scattered across the land of Canaan and accessible from every corner of the Promised Land.

Verses 16-21 describe cases of murder in the first degree where the murderer deserved to die. Verses 22-24 give examples of manslaughter where a person qualified to run to a city of refuge. Verse 25 outlines the duties of the Levites...

“So the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall return him to the city of refuge where he had fled, and he shall remain there until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil.” Upon the death of the High Priest the pardon became permanent and the manslayer could return to his home – no longer vulnerable to vengeance.

Of course, Jesus is the ultimate city of refuge. This concept is a type of our salvation. Run to Jesus and you're safe. And like the manslayer of old our pardon also became permanent at the death of our High Priest. When Jesus died it sealed the deal on our amnesty. We're fully free. Jesus' blood saves us to the uttermost.

“But if the manslayer at any time goes outside the limits of the city of refuge where he fled, and the avenger of blood finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood, because he should have remained in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest. But after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his pos-

session.” Here again there’s a lesson for us. Salvation requires that we abide in Christ - continue in the faith. Perseverance, endurance are part of faith.

Verse 29, “And these things shall be a statute of judgment to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings. Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses; but one witness is not sufficient testimony against a person for the death penalty.” It took 2 or 3 witnesses.

“Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death.” Freedom should never be sold. All too often in our courts today, the verdict rests on who can afford the best lawyer.

“And you shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the priest. So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel.”

In chapter 27 we read about the four daughters of Zelophahad – where God sided ruled in favor of equal rights for women. In ancient times it was customary to pass down land to sons not daughters, but Zelophahad’s four daughters were his only offspring, and these women thought they should be able to inherit their father’s land. Moses asked the Lord, and the Lord sided with the girls.

Now in chapter 36 the case comes back up on appeal...

“Now the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near and spoke before Moses and before the leaders, the chief fathers of the children of Israel; and they said: "The LORD commanded my lord Moses to give the land as an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel, and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters.

Now if they are married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and it will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so it will be taken from the lot of our inheritance. And when the Jubilee of the children of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so their inheritance will be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers." If you give women property rights, and they carry their rights into their marriage. It could create an unequal distribution of the land...

“Then Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the LORD, saying: "What the tribe of the sons of Joseph speaks is right.”

And Moses has a solution. If a woman is the heir to a piece of property she should only marry within her same tribe. Lest one tribe lose territory to another.

The book of Numbers closes with verse 13, “These are the

commandments and the judgments which the LORD commanded the children of Israel by the hand of Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho.”

For 8 weeks now *we've been crunching numbers...* I hope you've enjoyed it!