

Righteousness Demonstrated in Respect for Human Life
Deuteronomy 19:1-13
Veritas Class; February 23, 2014

Introduction

1. The Background to the Passage
2. The Structure of the Passage
3. The Style of the Passage
4. The Themes of the Passage
5. The Historical Context of the Passage
 - a. Within months or weeks of having received the prescriptions in Numbers 35.
 - b. After the victory over the Amorite kings east of the Jordan (4:41-43).
 - c. Before the conquest of the land (Joshua 20:7-8)

Interpretation: The Provision of Asylum for Innocent Manslaughter (vv. 1-13)

A. The Nature of the Provision (vv. 1-3)

1. The Context (v. 1)
2. The Required Actions (vv. 2-3b)
 - a. Designate three asylum towns in the heartland of the territory that YHWH is giving them (v. 2).
 - b. Establish the routes to these towns (v. 3a).
 - c. Divide the territory into three parts (v. 3b)
3. The Purpose (v. 3c)

B. The Need for the Provision (vv. 4-7, 10)

1. The Announcement (v. 4)

2. The Primary Case (vv. 5-7, 10)

- a. The Unfortunate Incident (v. 5)
- b. The Problem (v. 6)

The Functions of the *gō'ēl* in Israel

 - (1) Ensure that the hereditary property of the clan never passes out of the clan (Lev 25:25-30).
 - (2) Maintain the freedom of individuals within the clan by buying back those who have sold themselves into slavery because of poverty (Lev 27:47-55).
 - (3) Receive restitution money on behalf of a deceased victim of a crime (Num 5:8).
 - (4) Ensure that justice is served in a lawsuit involving a relative (Job 19:25; Ps 119:154; Jer 50:34).
 - (5) Secure the integrity of the family as a levir, marrying a childless widow of a deceased person, and providing the deceased with a survivor (Ruth 3:13; cf. Deut 25:5-10).
 - (6) Track down and execute murderers of near relatives.
- c. The Solution: Asylum Towns (v. 7)
- d. The Rationale (v. 10)

- (1) To prevent shedding of innocent blood.
- (2) To maintain the purity of the land.

3. The Secondary Case (v. 11)

- a. The Nature of the Criminal's Action (v. 11)
 - (1) He lies in wait for his neighbor;
 - (2) He jumps up against him;
 - (3) He delivers a fatal blow;
 - (4) He flees to one of the towns of asylum.
- b. The Prescribed Response to the Criminal's Action (vv. 12-13a)
 - (1) The Prescribed Action (v. 12)
 - The elders from the man's home town shall go after him.
 - They shall hand him over to the avenger of blood.
 - He must execute him.
 - (2) The Prescribed Disposition (v. 13a) The "No-Pity Formula"
7:16 13:8 19:13 19:21 25:11-12
- c. The Rationale for the Response to the Criminal's Action (v. 13b)

C. The Expansion of the Provision (vv. 8-9)

1. The Occasion
 - a. The Presupposed Divine Action (v. 8)
 - b. The Presupposed Human Action (v. 9a)
2. The Required Action (v. 9c)

To what extent did the Israelites listen to Moses' instructions here?

1. After the land was conquered they set aside six asylum towns (Josh 20:7-8)
2. While later narratives are silent on the asylum towns, the notion of asylum survived, albeit in different form: 1 Kings 1:50-53 1 Kings 2:28-34

Do Christians need to keep this policy?

God's people recognize that:

1. Righteousness is not demonstrated in the abstract, but in obedience to God and in respect for those who are created as his images.
2. Righteousness is demonstrated in uncompromising respect for human life, which extends to those who inadvertently cause another's death.
3. Righteousness demands that we not let sentimentality interfere with the administration of justice toward the guilty.
4. Righteousness is demonstrated in "love." Hatred is an unrighteous disposition of the heart and rage is her ugly sister.
5. Righteousness recognizes the importance of community, both at the domestic and at the wider level, and especially in the administration of justice.

