

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-  
Presbyterian Church, 10 Downing St.  
Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS  
LESSON 11**

**DEUTERONOMY**

**CHAPTERS 19& 20**

**INTRODUCTION**

From chapters 19 to 26 of Deuteronomy, Moses dealt with a variety of issues. In Deuteronomy 19, the issue dealt with is justice for people who were defenceless. Three categories of such people are addressed: one who kills unintentionally, one who owns farmland, and one who is accused of a crime. The specific regulations concerning these issues indicate God's concern for His people. Israel was going to enter and possess the land. There would always be sinners in the land. For the people of a nation to live in peace, progress and prosperity, the lawbreakers and criminals have to be appropriately dealt with and punished. Matters can get out of hand and the situation becomes worse. So God gave Israel good laws for their own well-being. Deuteronomy 20 touches on the subject of war. Israel would have to face the nations within the land of Canaan. Moreover, Israel, being sandwiched by the Aramaeans and the Babylonians in the north and north east, and the Egyptians in the south, constantly faced the threat of invading and hostile nations.

God gave them rules on how they ought to go to war against their enemies. Many practical and valuable lessons can be learned and applied to our present day life.

**OUTLINE**

**A. The Protection of the Manslayer (19:1-13)**

1. The promised land finally in their possession (19:1).
2. The Israelites were to build three cities of refuge equally separated (19:2-3).
3. The purpose was for the protection of the manslayer (19:4-7).
4. When God expanded their territory, they were to add three more cities of refuge (19:8-10).
5. The murderer had no right of protection in a city of refuge (19:11-13).
  - a) His premeditated killing of a person (11).
  - b) The elders of the city to hand him to the avenger (12).
  - c) No pity for a murderer (13).

**B. The Protection of the Landowner (19:14)**

The landowner was protected from his land being taken away.

**C. The Accused was to be Protected from False Witnesses (19:15-21)**

1. An accusation against a person must be established by two or more witnesses (19:15).

2. The judgement of a false witness (19:16-20).
  - a) A false witness appeared (16).
  - b) The witness must be presented before the LORD, the priests, and the judges (17).
  - c) A thorough investigation would be conducted (18a).
  - d) The witness found to be false (18b).
  - e) The false witness would penalise the same as the accused would have been penalized (19).
  - f) The purpose was to remove every evil in the community (20).
  - g) No pity would be shown, and the penalty must be just (21).
3. The appointment of captains to lead the newly recruited soldiers (9).

#### **E. The Treatment Against The Cities And The Inhabitants (20:10-20)**

1. The far away cities (20:10-15).
    - a) Make an offer of peace with the city (10).
    - b) If the offer was accepted, the inhabitants would be spared to serve under Israel (11).
    - c) If the offer was rejected, the Israelites were to lay siege to the city (12).
    - d) The LORD would give the city to Israel (13a).
    - e) All the men would be killed (13b).
    - f) The women and children, and the livestock would be spared (14).
    - g) These were the laws of war against a city far away (15).
  2. The cities of Canaan (20:16-18).
    - a) The Canaanite cities should be completely destroyed with all the inhabitants (20:16-17).
    - b) This was to prevent Israel from learning the abominable ways of the Canaanites and sinning against God (18).
  3. The trees to be protected in war (20:19-20).
    - a) Trees that produced fruit should be spared (19).
    - b) Trees that produced no fruit for food could be cut down to make war equipment (20).
- #### **D. Guidelines on Going to War Against the Enemies (20:1-9)**
1. The preparation before going to war (20:1-4).
    - a) Be not afraid because of the superiority of the enemies (1a).
    - b) The LORD would be with them (1b).
    - c) The priest should encourage the warriors before they marched off to fight (2-4).
  2. Some Israelites were exempted from being recruited (20:5-8).
    - a) A man who had just built a house (5).
    - b) A man who had just planted a vineyard (6).
    - c) A man who had just married (7).
    - d) A man who was fearful and fainthearted (8).

## COMMENTARY

### Protecting the Defenceless

Israel would settle in the land which God had promised them and when God would have cut off its inhabitants. Moses reminded them that when they crossed over and had settled in the land, they were to establish three more cities of refuge on the west side of Jordan. Three cities had already been established on the east side. The Israelites must also “prepare thee a way,” meaning that they must build roads to these cities of refuge. In other words, these cities of refuge must be accessible to a manslayer, who could flee to the city and take refuge from the avenger.

In those days, a person who took the life of another person was in danger of being executed by a relative - a brother or the father of the victim. It was within their right “to avenge” the death of their relative as a form of natural justice in the Promised Land. But the manslayer could have killed unintentionally or accidentally. Moses gave a graphic example of such a case (v.5). The manslayer’s only recourse was to flee to a city of refuge. In the city of refuge, his case would be investigated by the elders of the city. If the investigation revealed that he was innocent, that he killed unintentionally, he could live in the city and be protected from the avenger. After the death of the current high priest, he would be released and be free.

This indicates that God places a very high premium on human life. The Fifth Commandment clearly declares that killing is transgressing the law of God. It also shows that killing a person can happen

accidentally and unintentionally. It is still wrong for it takes away the life of another man. But in this case, since it was not intentional the penalty was that if he could escape the avenger, he had to live in the city of refuge until the high priest died. This was a form of imprisonment. The provision of the city of refuge was to protect the innocent manslayer from being avenged by a kinsman. If a kinsman managed to reach him first before he could flee to the city of refuge and kill him, it would cause another death, bring suffering to another family, and this might not end since feelings could flare up and more killings might ensue. The community would ultimately suffer. God knows the destructive power of sin. This sin of killing must be dealt with to end its cruel course.

God’s law does not only cover the innocent manslayer. The law also covers the guilty. The manslayer that fled to a city of refuge would have his case diligently investigated by the elders of the city. If investigation revealed that he was guilty of premeditated killing, the elders would hand him over to the kinsman who would execute him for he had shed innocent blood. No pity must be given to him. Note the progressive steps that lead to murder (v.11). The murderer first “hates” his neighbour. Murder begins within the heart and mind of a person first. It does not start with the act. It starts in the mind. That leads him to “lie in wait” for his neighbour. He prepares to kill him. And finally the act takes place; he rises and smites his neighbour to death. That is murder, premeditated killing of a person. The murderer deserves nothing less than that he

must be judicially punished by paying with his life. Any society that upholds capital punishment for a murderer will prevent more violence and promote peace and safety.

The next defenceless person concerns a person who owned land, possibly, farmland that supported his livelihood. In biblical times the boundaries of an Israelite's land were marked by stones. The land that belonged to him was given by the LORD God. Sometimes people who were rich and powerful were motivated by greed and covetousness. They robbed another person of his land from which he depended for his livelihood. The eighth commandment clearly declares, "Neither shalt thou steal" (5:19). Removing another's landmark was stealing his land. God's curse shall be upon him (27:17).

The third category of the defenceless is a man who was accused of a crime. Evidence against the accused must be from at least two witnesses. An accused could not be convicted on the testimony of only one witness. The witnesses and the accused would appear before the LORD, the priests, and the judges. It is a serious matter. A diligent investigation would be carried out to ascertain the truth of the accusation. And if the witness was found to be a false, who testified falsely against his brother, then the punishment that would have been given to the accused, the same would be inflicted on the witness. The purpose was to let the people know and fear so that such evil would not occur. Indeed, a church is sick if it has people who deliberately lie in order to inflict harm on others. When leaders find

out and do nothing about them then the leaders are just as guilty as the sinner himself.

The law of just retribution or punishment in verse 21: "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot," is not to be taken literally, except for the taking of a life. Theologians have a term for this law, "*lex talionis*" (Latin, *recompense in kind*). This law was to be carried out according to the principle of equal justice. The punishment must fit the crime is how we would describe it today. For example, an angry master who blinded an eye of a slave, that slave was not given to gouge out an eye of his/her master. Instead, the master paid for injuring his slave by setting him/her free (Exodus 21:26). Therefore the law of retribution was so worded to prevent any leniency or over-strictness in meting out punishment upon the guilty. It was given to encourage appropriate punishment to the guilty.

### **Principles of War**

The land of Canaan which would be given to the Israelites is sandwiched between the Assyrians and the Babylonians in the north and northeast respectively and the Egyptians in the south. Travelling between these two regions passes through the land of Canaan. Israel would from time to time be drawn into conflict with peoples from these regions. God gave Israel specific guidelines to follow when they went to war against their enemies.

Although Israel's enemies numbered more than they, and had more superior "war machines," they should not be afraid of them, because the LORD God was with them. Secondly, Israel should

remember what God had done in the past for them in Egypt. And moreover, before they marched off to battle, the priests would address them first. The purpose was to exhort them not to be fearful or fainthearted, and to assure them that the LORD their God would go before them, to fight for them, and to save them (v.4). Victory over the enemies, as we learn here, is not based on who has more soldiers or who has better and powerful war machines. Victory depends on whose side one is on. If God is with Israel, Israel would have the victory. In this case, God would be with Israel and the assurance was given that they would be victorious, only that they must not be fainthearted and fearful.

That being the case, God also gave some important instructions concerning the composition of the army. Three groups of people were exempted from being recruited to go to war. The man who had just bought a new home was exempted from going to war. It was not the time for such a man to be away from his family. He must settle his wife and children in their new home. If he should die in battle, the home would be without him.

Another man who was exempted from going to war was a man who had planted a vineyard. The vineyard needed watering and nurturing before it could produce fruits. If he should die in battle, his vineyard would be left unattended. His family and children, who depended on the produce of the vineyard for their income, would be destitute.

A third group of man who was exempted from going to war was a newly engaged man who was about to be married. If the man were to die in battle, he could not

have children and his family lineage would die.

Yet another group which is different from the above three was the fearful and fainthearted. The reason why they were not allowed to join the army was because their cowardice would demoralise the rest of the soldiers. Having done this, the officers then chose the captains.

Victory in war does not depend on numbers. Success rests on God. The Israelites must be sure that God is with them. The Israelites had experienced this once when they went up against the Amalekites when the LORD was not with them. They were defeated (Numbers 14:42-45). War is fought in order to protect a nation's houses and buildings, natural resources and products, families and children. These are the essentials of life that must be protected and be secured for without these things, war would be pointless. If these things are destroyed, a nation is weakened, devastated and destroyed.

If they went out to war against a foreign city, they should make an offer of peace to the enemy. If the enemy accepted the offer of peace, then the people would be subservient to them. However, if the offer of peace was rejected, Israel was to smite the city. The LORD God would deliver the city to them. They should kill all the men, but the women and children, and the cattle were spared. No reason is given here why the women and the children were spared. One possible explanation is that these women who live outside the land of Israel would follow the religion of their Israelite husband. Children would be taught the law of God.

This was not so with the Canaanite peoples. God gave them clear command to utterly destroy all the Canaanites. The reason was that they might lure the Israelites away from worshipping and serving the LORD God. Secondly it was because of the idolatries and evil practices that had become full bloom that the LORD God executed His judgement on the Canaanites (9:4).

Finally, God instructed His people that when they went to war, they must not cut down fruit-bearing trees for military purposes. Only those non-fruit-bearing trees could be cut down. This is the only law found in the annals of war of the ancient eastern countries. God is interested in the natural environment of the land.

### SUMMARY

There are many things of practical value to our living. God values the life of a human being. Therefore, diligent attempt must be made to save a life, when that life is in danger of being taken away. A manslayer is not guilty of murder until he is proven beyond a shadow of doubt. This law is being practised today by many countries. However, a murderer must accept the judgement of capital punishment, and the irrefutable reason is that this is the justice of God and that it would also be an effective deterrent to prevent more murders.

We must respect other people's property. Theft is condemned. We should not testify falsely against another person. To tell lies and slander another brother is to commit a serious sin against God. A church is "sick" if there are members who behave such. It will cause division, strife and conflicts,

and it undermines the work of the Lord. Members of the church must corporately stop such behaviour and conduct in the church.

A Christian can be a soldier. The Hebrew word for murder is "*rasa*." This word refers to killing by a person of another person. But the word for military killing is "*harag*." It is a different word. Going to war is to protect the home, the land and the family. However, if it be possible, live in peace with everyone. We have another kind of battle more tenacious. We fight spiritual battles every moment and every day. We must not fight it with our own resources. We must depend on God. Make sure that God is with us and we will have the victory. AMEN

**DAILY READING & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**MONDAY:** Deuteronomy 19:1-10; Joshua 20:7-9

**TUESDAY:** Deuteronomy 19:11-21; Matthew 5:38-42

**WEDNESDAY:** Deuteronomy 20:1-9; Romans 8:31-34

**THURSDAY:** Deuteronomy 20:10-15; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

**FRIDAY:** Deuteronomy 20:16-20; Ephesians 6:10-13

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What are the names of the six cities of refuge? Which cities were on each side of Jordan?

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2. How did the regulations of the cities of refuge protect against injustice and at the same time enforced a just penalty?

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3. What are the three defined stages of transgression that lead to murder?

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4. Why should judges investigate an accusation and interrogate a witness thoroughly?

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5. What can we do to help eradicate gossip and false accusations?

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6. What memory was to strengthen the Israelites?

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7. What is revealed to us about God's character in verse 4?

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8. Who were the three types of people exempted from going to war?

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9. What do you think was the reason(s) God exempted them from going to war?

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10. Why do you think God went to war against the Canaanites and sided with the Israelites?

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11. How was Israel to approach her enemies?

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12. Why do you think God commanded Israel to spare the women and children but killed all the men in battle?

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15. What competes for your love and obedience to God in your daily life? How do you resolve it?

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13. What was the reason God gave for instructing the Israelites to destroy all the Canaanites?

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14. What should we think of modern methods of warfare in the light of these verses?

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