

THE MURDERER SHALL SURELY BE PUT TO DEATH

On January 13, 1984, President Ronald Reagan issued a proclamation designating January 22 as the **first** National Sanctity of Human Life Day. January 22nd was chosen because it was that day—in the year 1973—that the U.S. Supreme Court made the decision to **legalize abortion** in all 50 states.

President Reagan concluded his proclamation with the following words:

*I, Ronald Reagan, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim Sunday, January 22, 1984, as National Sanctity of Human Life Day. I call upon the citizens of this blessed land to gather on that day in homes and places of worship to give **thanks for the gift of life**, and to reaffirm our commitment to the dignity of every human being and the sanctity of each human life."*

Since then, churches continue to recognize the third Sunday in January as Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. The third Sunday this year is **today**, but some churches will observe it **next Sunday** instead because that day will be closer to the anniversary of *Roe vs Wade*.

We'll see how the Lord leads, but I may end up preaching on the **sanctity of human life** again next week, too! **Is two weeks**—out of 52—**too much time** to spend reminding us of what God says about life—and His hatred for the shedding of innocent blood? I don't think so!

Instead of focusing on the **murder of the unborn**, though, this morning we are going to look at what God says about **murder in general**. How much does God **value life**? What **punishment** does God require for those who take someone else's life? Is there a different punishment for someone who **accidentally kills** someone versus the punishment for someone who **intentionally kills** another person? God's Word answers those questions and that is what we are going to look at this morning.

Please take your Bibles and turn to Numbers 35; follow along as I read verses 9-15.

Let's notice first...**1. The people who kill other people**

As we go through this chapter, you will notice that God makes a clear distinction between those who kill someone **accidentally**—and those who kill someone **intentionally**. He also gives them **names**; He labels them.

The first group is referred to in the verses I just read. In the middle of vs 11, the person who kills someone "unawares"—accidentally—is called a "**slayer**." In the middle of vs 12, that same person is called a...

A. Manslayer. "Manslayer" is the one I'll be using as opposed to just "slayer."

What are the characteristics of a manslayer?

i. He kills someone "unawares"—accidentally

--We see that in the end of vs 11—and in the end of vs 15.

--We have another example in vs 23 "Or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing him not, and cast it upon him, that he die...."

The picture is this: You're on your roof and working on the chimney. You throw a stone off the roof and unbeknownst to you, someone is walking below you and you accidentally kill them with the stone you just threw. Because it was an accident—he was not previously your enemy—you are **not considered** a murderer.

ii. He kills someone that he did not previously hate

--Vs 22 "But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity,"

This means that in the heat of the moment, that if you **pushed someone**—and they died as a result of being **pushed** by you—you were not considered a murderer.

--"or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait"

This seems to indicate that even if you **throw something** at him—and he dies—you are not considered a murderer because this man was not your enemy prior to this.

In summary, then, the manslayer is someone who accidentally kills another person that they did not previously hate. The killing was not intentional; it was not premeditated.

Let's consider another category of people that kills other people—one that I've already referred to—and that is... B. A murderer. What are the characteristics of a murderer?

i. He sometimes uses a weapon

--vs 16 smites someone with an instrument of iron; vs 17 with a stone; vs 18 a "hand weapon of wood"

ii. He hated him in the past

--vs 20 he pushes someone—or throws something at him—just like the manslayer. What is the difference? He had hatred for him *before this*.

--vs 21 "Or in enmity smite him with his hand" I take that to mean what we used to call "pounding the snot" out of someone—so much so that he killed him! But it was *not* a heat-of-the-moment kind of fight—it was done *intentionally* and *out of hatred*.

iii. He planned to kill him

Vs 20 refers to "laying of wait"—waiting for him. It was a pre-meditated—planned—attack.

Next let's consider... **2. The pronounced punishment for killing someone**

What was the punishment to be given to the manslayer and murderer for taking the life of another person? First, we'll look at the *manslayer*. Did God require that a man be punished for *accidentally* killing someone? The answer is "Yes!" It is different than the punishment for murder, but it certainly was a punishment.

A. Manslayer was given conditional protection from death

In one sense, the penalty was the same—he could be *put to death* because he killed someone! We see that in vs 12: "And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger; that the manslayer *die not*..."

How would the manslayer *die*? He would be *killed by the avenger*—a family member of the person that the manslayer had accidentally killed! But because it was accidental, God did not *require* that the manslayer *be killed*. God *protected him* from being killed—under *certain conditions*. Here are the conditions:

i. The place of protection

--Vs 11 "Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither..."

He couldn't run to *his home* to be safe—and he couldn't flee to the *nearest city*. He had to go to a *city of refuge*—specific cities that were designated for this purpose. According to vs 14, 3 were on one side of the Jordan River and 3 were on the other side. Their location was such that none of them was more than a day's journey. But you still had to *get there*—and you *were not safe* until you did!

ii. The parameters for protection

So what were the parameters; what were the conditions and rules you had to keep in order to be safe? In a nutshell, you had to stay within the "border" of the city once you got there!

Notice vs 26, "But if the slayer"—meaning the manslayer—"shall at any time come *without the border* of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled; And the revenger of blood find him *without the borders* of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of the blood *kill the slayer*, he shall *not be guilty* of blood: Because he should have remained in the city of his refuge..."

According to vs 4-5, there were "suburbs" that were included as part of the city and those were *considered inside the borders* of the city—even though you were *outside the walls* of the city. But if you went *outside of those borders*, you could be killed by the revenger of blood—a relative of the person you accidentally killed—and they would *not be guilty* of wrong-doing.

Let's turn for a moment to Deuteronomy 19 where we have the same teaching. Here we have an example of an accidental death—and the importance of getting to one of the cities of refuge.

Follow along as I read verses 4-6. Imagine cutting wood with your neighbor. The axe head flies off the handle and hits your neighbor in the head! Frantically, you rush over to check on him and discover that he is dead! If it was only you and him in the woods, you *might* have a chance to run home and say good-bye to *your family* before *his family* finds out he is dead. It is possible, though, that you don't take a chance and head straight for the nearest city of refuge. You get there safely, state your case, and are allowed into the city.

The avenger comes but you are safe until a trial is held to determine whether it was intentional or not.

How long are you confined to the city of refuge? Until the death of the high priest! We see that back in Numbers 35. Imagine being **exiled from your home**—and confined to this city—**for years!**

--mid of vs 25 "...and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it until the **death of the high priest...**"

So what are the parameters—the conditions—for not being killed if you accidentally kill someone? You have to **get to a city** of refuge—and **stay there**—until the death of the high priest!

Are there any "loop-holes;" any work-arounds? Nope!

Look at vs 32 "And ye shall take no satisfaction"—meaning no ransom or payment—for him that is fled to the city of his refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest."

What happens after the death of the high priest?

iii. Permanent pardon—after the death of the high priest

Notice in the middle of vs 28 "...but after the death of the high priest the slayer shall **return into the land of his possession.**" Imagine—**being thankful** when someone dies! He hears the news that the high priest has died—and he can now go home! He does not have to worry about his neighbor's relatives **finding him** and **killing him**—he is a free man and **permanently pardoned** for the accidental death of his neighbor!

But what about the murderer? Is he given the same protection? No; he is not!

B. Murderer had no protection and was punished by death

Let me say that again: **The murderer had no protection and was punished by death!**

Look at vs 16. The phrase "he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death" is also found in vs 17 and 18. The death penalty requirement for the murderer is also stated in verses 19 and 21, but in slightly different words.

Now vs 30. The only protection that the murderer had was that there had to be **more than one witness**. And in vs 31, we see that just as **there was no "work-around"** for the **manslayer** to get out of his punishment, **the murderer** could not get out of his either!

To recap, the punishment for the **manslayer**—the one who accidentally killed someone—was **death**: unless he fled to a city of refuge and stayed there until the death of the high priest. The punishment for the **murderer** was **death**—but there was **no protection**—unless there were not enough witnesses to prove his prior hatred and that the killing was pre-meditated.

3. The Pronouncer of the punishment I think it is good to be reminded **who** made this announcement. **Who** is the One who decided how the manslayer and murderer would be **punished**?

Moses, right? After all, **Moses wrote** the book of Numbers—as well as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. But it really wasn't Moses' idea, was it? Look at vs 9: "And **the LORD spake** unto Moses, saying"
--**God is the One** who pronounced the punishment—not Moses!

--And God pronounced the punishment **because God decided it!** The punishment was not passed down **to God** by someone else. It **was God's decision**—and He passed it down to Moses—and put it in the Bible!

Why is that important? Because **God is perfect**—and so are **His judgments!**

We've all heard the phrase "the punishment should fit the crime!" Sometimes men and the legal system **get it wrong**—but **God never does!** **God always gives** the perfect punishment! If God **got it wrong**—even once—He would **not be perfect!**

God's declaration, then, that "the murderer shall surely be put to death" is the **perfect punishment!** It is fair...and just...and right! It is **not excessive**...or harsh...or wrong! It is perfect because the perfect God pronounced it!

The punishment also points to how **valuable life** is to God! If the punishment was a \$1000 fine—or a year in jail—it would mean that that is all a life is worth. But because the punishment is "life for life," it really shows how precious human life—**all human life**—is to God! Even accidental death carried a **huge price tag!**

What about children that are **murdered** in the womb? Murder is the **right word**, isn't it? **It is pre-meditated**—not accidental—and **an instrument** is used for **the intent of killing**. Don't apologize for calling it **murder** because that is what it is! Does God say anything about the murder of the unborn? He certainly does!

Exodus 21:22-24 "If men **strive**, and hurt a woman **with child**, so that her **fruit depart** from her, and yet **no mischief follow**: he shall **be surely punished**, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he **shall pay** as the judges determine. ²³ And if **any mischief follow**, then **thou shalt give life for life**, ²⁴ Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,"

Self-explanatory, isn't it? If a man hurts a pregnant woman and causes an **early delivery**, he is **punished**—even if the baby is fine! But if the baby is **harmed—and dies**—then the man who caused that harm is **killed**. That is what "life for life" means.

4. Proper application of "life for life"

So how do we **apply** a message on manslaughter—and murder—to us that are here today? How is it relevant? Why does this matter? Here are a couple of thoughts:

A. We are not under the laws of Israel. Why do I bring that up? Because it's true! --Vs 10 "Speak unto the **children of Israel...**" The punishments that God outlines here were for the nation of Israel **at that time**. They are **not for America**—and they are **not for the church**—and they are **not for now!**

--It is **not okay** for you to kill someone who killed one of your family members.

--And it is **not okay** for you to kill a doctor that **performs abortions!**

--And it is **not okay** for you to kill a mother who had her baby intentionally murdered!

The "life for life" punishment was **required**—by God—for the **nation of Israel** at that time—but it is **not the required punishment now!** In fact, some of you might be surprised to learn that manslaughter and murder were **not the only crimes** punished by death at that time.

--If you **hit—or cursed—your father and mother**, you were to be put to death (Ex 21:15 and 17)

--If you **sacrificed to any god** other than the true God, you were to be put to death (Ex 22:20)

--**Adultery** was punishable by death (Lev 20:10)

--And **homosexuality** was punishable by death (Lev 20:13)

I said it once already, but I'm going to say it again: We are **the church—not Israel**—and we are **not under the commandments** that were given specifically **to Israel!**

--Just like the church is not obligated to follow the **sacrificial laws** of offering animals, we are not obligated to follow the **Sabbath laws**. Do you know that a man was **stoned to death** in Numbers 15:32-36 for **breaking the Sabbath**? What his **crime was**? Picking up sticks! Any idea how much wood is cut on Saturdays?

--And just like the **church is not under Israel's laws** for sacrifices...and the Sabbath...and feast days, we are not **under the dietary laws** either! We can eat bacon, ham, pork chops, pulled pork, and side-pork because the dietary laws given to Israel by God **do not apply to us!**

--And just to make sure we weren't confused on this issue, God had Paul write this to Timothy: **I Tim 4:4** "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:"

So the application is this: "life for life" **does not** apply to us! Some of you might be thinking, 'Wait a minute Pastor! You took all this time to teach us the difference between manslaughter and murder—and the punishment for both—only to tell us at the end that it **does not apply?**

Yes...and no! Although we are not under Israel's laws... **B. We can influence the laws of our land.** Listen carefully—just because the **punishment** for manslaughter and murder **has changed**, it does not mean that the **value of life** has changed. Life is **still precious** in God's sight—and it should be to us!

We have the opportunity in our country to **influence laws**—and we should! In fact, one of the roles of the church is to teach government what is good and what is evil! Don't have time to develop this, but notice part of **Romans 13:4** "...for he [the government] is the minister [servant] of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." The legal system punishes law-breakers—but they need to know what is wrong!

I know we're out of time, but one more thought from the text:

5. A Picture of our pardon

This is not the main point of the passage, of course, but the city of refuge does provide **a wonderful picture** of forgiveness in Christ.

--To escape the punishment of **physical death**, you had to **enter the city** of refuge.

--To escape the **punishment of hell and spiritual death**, we need to be born again; we need to be **in Christ!**

--The revenger of blood could not touch the manslayer as long as he **remained in the city**.

--The accuser of the brethren—Satan—can't condemn us because we are safe in Christ!

--The manslayer was **permanently pardoned** once the high priest died.

--We are **permanently pardoned**—eternally forgiven—because our High Priest **did die!**

Jesus' death set us free because He paid our penalty. Jesus did not remain dead, though, He rose again and now ever liveth to intercede on our behalf!

What a wonderful, loving, forgiving, and merciful God we have!

So, what would God **have us do** in light of His Word this morning?

1. First, are you **in Christ**? Have you fled to Him for forgiveness and safety from the punishment of your sins? For the children of Israel, knowing that there was a city of refuge was not enough—they had to **get there**. It is the same with Christ. Knowing you need Jesus is not enough—you need to **go to Him**. Have you done that?

2. Second, life is precious to God. Is it precious to you?

--Are you praying that the laws that currently legalize the murder of the unborn get changed?

--Are you financially supporting Pro-Life organizations like Baptists for Life?

--Do you respect human life—all life—regardless of whether that person seems "helpful" to society?