
TIME OF ISRAEL'S RESTORATION

PART I

ISRAEL'S RETURN TO THE LAND OF HER POSSESSION

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“Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die.

Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction [ransom] for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death.

And ye shall take no satisfaction [ransom] 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 [the high priest (v. 25)].

So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it” (Num. 35:30-33).

For over six decades, since May 14, 1948 — for the first time in almost nineteen centuries, dating back to the days when Rome ruled the world — a Jewish nation has again existed in the Middle East. The Old Testament is filled with prophecies pertaining to a future time when God would restore His people to their land (e.g., Deut. 30:1-3; Isa. 2:1-5; 54:1ff; Ezek. 36:24ff; 37:1ff; 39:25ff; Zech. 8:1ff;). And many have understood the present restoration of the Jewish people to be a fulfillment, or a progressive beginning fulfillment, of these numerous prophecies.

But is this true? Or, is this restoration during modern times something else? Scripture does not leave one in the dark concerning different things surrounding Israel's prophesied restoration to the land, and Numbers chapter thirty-five is one place which deals with the matter.

In this chapter, a “time” during Man's Day, during the 6,000 years allotted to man, is given *when Israel can return*. Until this “time” arrives, *Israel cannot return*; but after this “time” arrives, *Israel can and will return*, though only following certain other revealed events coming to pass.

The “time” dealt with in this chapter is only *one part* of the overall equation, though a *very important part*. Thus, one can understand one facet of the matter from that revealed in this section of Scripture.

The Cities of Refuge

Numbers chapter thirty-five relates the account of God instructing the children of Israel to set aside six cities to be “cities for refuge.” And within this account one will find central truths pertaining to that future time — which is seen in Hebrews chapter five — when the present high priestly ministry of Christ, *after the order of Aaron*, is concluded and Christ comes forth from the heavenly sanctuary as the great King-Priest, *after the order of Melchizedek*.

Three of the cities of refuge were to be on the east side of Jordan, and the three remaining were to be on the west side of Jordan (Num. 35:14). The three cities on the east side of Jordan were selected by Moses, prior to his death and the subsequent entrance of the Israelites into the land of Canaan (Deut. 4:41-43); and the three cities on the west side of Jordan were selected by the children of Israel under the leadership of Joshua, following their entrance into the land (Joshua 20:1-7).

These cities were set aside to provide a *sanctuary* for any man who killed another man through an unpremeditated act. The Divine decree given to Noah and his sons following the Flood required *the death*

of the slayer at the hands of man:

“Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (Gen. 9:6).

And God's injunction concerning capital punishment for a capital crime was later reiterated to Moses and is part of the Mosaic Economy as well (Ex. 20:13; 21:12ff).

The command concerning capital punishment for a capital crime was thus given to Noah and his sons over eight hundred years before it was delivered to the children of Israel under Moses. Consequently, man not being under the Mosaic Economy today has *nothing* to do with the validity or nonvalidity of capital punishment for a capital crime, for not only does the Biblical origin of this injunction *precede* the giving of the Law through Moses but the command given to Noah and his sons (approx. 2,300 B.C.) *has never been repealed*.

Although capital punishment for a capital offense has never been repealed, provision was later made for a man who killed another man unintentionally. This was the Divinely established purpose for setting aside the six cities of refuge (*cf.* Ex. 21:12, 13). These cities were to be located at places where at least one city would be easily accessible to any Israelite living in the land of Canaan. And should one Israelite kill another Israelite through accidental means — unintentionally — he could flee to the nearest city of refuge and be provided a sanctuary from the near kinsman of the person who had been slain.

It fell the lot of the near kinsman to fulfill God's injunction concerning capital punishment for a capital crime. The near kinsman was to confront the slayer and, in turn, slay him. God's requirement in the matter was *blood for blood* (Num. 35:16-21; *cf.* Deut. 19:21).

God's previous instructions to Noah and his sons remained *unchanged* within the framework of God's instructions to Moses. Something though was added to these instructions within the Mosaic Economy.

Provision was made for the person guilty of accidental, unpremeditated manslaughter. And once the Israelite guilty of such an act had taken advantage of that provision — once the slayer had fled to and was inside the walls of one of the six designated cities of refuge — the near kinsman, as long as the slayer remained in this place, couldn't touch him.

Any individual though who fled to one of the cities of refuge must, at a later time, be returned to the area where the slaying occurred and appear before a judicial court. And, in order for that individual to be found guilty of wilful murder, at least two witnesses were required to testify against the man in this respect.

If the slayer was found to be *guilty of wilful murder*, he would be turned over to the near kinsman to be slain; and the near kinsman, slaying the man, would not be guilty of blood himself.

But if the slayer, on the other hand, was found *guilty only of involuntary manslaughter*, he would be delivered out of the hands of the near kinsman and be returned to the safety of the city of refuge to which he had previously fled (Num. 35:22-28).

Then there was the matter of a *ransom*. This ransom constituted a payment for the life of the one found to have committed involuntary manslaughter. No ransom though was provided for the life of a person found guilty of wilful murder. Rather, he was to forfeit his own life (*blood for blood*), apart from a ransom.

But though the ransom was a provision for the one having committed involuntary manslaughter, there was a stipulation: *The slayer could not avail himself of the ransom until the death of the high priest* (Num. 35:28, 32).

Once the high priest in the camp of Israel had died and the ransom had been paid, the individual who had previously been found guilty only of involuntary manslaughter was then *free to leave the particular city of refuge where he had been provided a sanctuary and return to the land of his possession*. And once this had occurred, the near kinsman no longer had any claim on that individual.

Israel, the Slayer

In the Old Testament (in the type) it was *individual Israelites* who found themselves guilty of manslaughter (wilful or involuntary) and, consequently, in a position where they would either be slain or be granted protection in a city of refuge.

Today (in the antitype) it is *the entire nation of Israel* which finds itself guilty of manslaughter and in a position to either be slain or be granted protection.

The nation of Israel is guilty of *blood*. The nation is guilty of *the death of their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ*.

The paschal lamb was given to Israel, and *only Israel could slay this lamb* (Ex. 12:1ff). "Jesus" was *the Paschal Lamb* (I Cor. 5:7), to Whom all the sacrificial lambs in the Old Testament pointed; and *only Israel could have slain Jesus*, which is exactly what, according to Scripture, occurred (Acts 2:23, 36; 3:12-15).

Israel today is *unclean* through contact with the dead body of God's Son, with cleansing to be provided *on the seventh day* — the seventh 1,000-year period, the Messianic Era (Num. 19:11, 12). But how is Israel's act, as the slayer, to be reckoned? Was it a *premeditated act*? Or was it an *unpremeditated act*?

If it was a premeditated act, the nation would have to be cut off. No ransom could be provided (it would have to be *blood for blood*; the nation would have to pay with its own life); nor, if a *premeditated act*, could the nation *ever* be allowed to return to the land of her possession (which would mean, in the final analysis, that God's promises to Abraham, beginning with Gen. 12:1-3, could *never* be realized).

However, if Jesus was delivered into Israel's hands after a manner which would allow the nation's act of crucifying her Messiah to be looked upon as *unpremeditated manslaughter* — *i.e.*, allow the nation's act to be looked upon as having been done through *ignorance* — then Israel could be granted protection and a ransom could be provided. And beyond that, the nation could one day avail itself of the ransom, at which time Israel would be free to return to the

land of her possession (allowing God's promises to Abraham, beginning with Gen. 12:1-3, to be fulfilled).

The Biblical testimony concerning the manner in which the nation's act must be viewed was given by Jesus Himself at Golgotha; and the same testimony was later provided by Peter, following the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

Note the words of Jesus:

"...Father, forgive them; *for they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:34a).

Then note the words of Peter:

"Ye men of Israel..."

But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;

And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses...

And now, brethren, I wot that *through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers*" (Acts 3:12a, 14, 15, 17).

Thus, Jesus was delivered into the hands of Israel (*cf.* Ex. 21:13; Acts 2:23) after a manner which not only allowed the Jewish people to act after the described fashion but also prevented them from acting after any other fashion as well. Consequently, Israel is to be granted protection, a ransom will be provided, and the Jewish people will be free to one day avail themselves of this ransom and return to the land of their possession.

But this will occur *only after the antitype of the death of the high priest*. And it will be at this time — not before — *that all of God's promises to Abraham through Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons, beginning with Gen. 12:1-3, will be fulfilled*.

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