



## Understanding the Parsha

B'midbar Numbers 35:9-34

We will Learn how to

- 1) interpret the main theme (subject) of a Parsha (weekly reading from the Torah),
- 2) make thematic connections to that Parsha (study the Scriptures related by a common theme [subject], line upon line and precept upon precept)
- 3) learn how to gain greater understanding of the Parsha we are looking at through its thematic connections to other portions of Scripture.

## Cities of Refuge

Read Numbers 35:9-34. This is a Parsha P'tuchah. Let's fill out our outline to see its general flow.

- A. Numbers 35:9-15— Sanctification of L LAND as Cities of R Refuge and their purpose.
- B. Numbers 35:16-21— Examples of intentional m murder murder.
- C. Numbers 35:22-28— Conditions for the e exile of the unintentional killer to a City of Refuge
- D. Numbers 35:29-30— Criterion for the d death p penalty for intentional murderers.
- E. Numbers 35:31-32— Preventing g guilt upon the land.

The Torah uses its own literary techniques, which we need to do our best to understand. This Parsha is organized as a **chiastic structure**. You will remember this from our studies before. **A chiastic structure is a pattern organized as like this, a story is divided into two halves. The themes of the first half of the story are repeated in the second half of the story in reverse order.** Let's apply this to our story, which has twenty-six verses.

Okay now it's time to get out your colored pencils and color the boxes of our chiastic chart as indicated. Fill in the missing words where it is needed.

**A1**— Numbers 35:9-15—Sanctification of L אָרְצוֹת as Cities of Refuge and their purpose. **COLOR YELLOW**

**B1**— Numbers 35:16-21—Examples of intentional m רַצּוּחַ.

**C**— Numbers 35:22-28—Stipulations for e עֲרִיצָה of unintentional killer. **COLOR RED**

**B2**— Numbers 35:29-32—Criterion for the d מוֹת penalty for intentional murderers. **COLOR ORANGE**

**A2**— Numbers 35:33-34—Preventing g עֲוֹן upon the LAND. **COLOR YELLOW**

See how the theme of the Land presented in **A1** is repeated in **A2**. See how the theme of punishment for the intentional murderer in **B1** is repeated in **B2**. In a chiastic structure, the first and second halves of the story usually point us to the most important part of the story, the central axis— which for this structure is, section **C**. Numbers 35:9-34 is a classic example of a chiastic structure. There are probably hundreds of them in the Tanakh! It is a literary device the Holy One developed to help us understand the themes of His Eternal Word.

### Looking at the elements of the chiastic structure.

Let's study **A1**. From section **A1** (Numbers 35:9-15) we learn that the City of Refuge is a place where an unintentional murderer may flee. Can you think of one word that describes the thought of an Israelite fleeing from their ancestral land?

E עֲרִיצָה.

That's right. When the unintentional murderer flees to the City of Refuge, it can be seen as an exile from their ancestral plot.

From our chiastic structure, we know that section **A1** (Numbers 35:9-15) is thematically related to section **A2** (Numbers 35:33-34); so, we should be able to connect these two passages thematically. Looking at section **A2**, how is guilt brought upon the Land of Israel?

Guilt is brought upon the Land whenever there is

b בְּדָמַיִם.



Numbers 35:33 says that bloodshed upon the Land of Israel can only be atoned for through the spilling of blood of the one who shed blood. Where have we seen this principle before?

G \_\_\_\_\_ 9:6.  
Genesis

4 But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. 5 Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man.

6 "Whoever sheds man's blood,  
By man his blood shall be shed;  
For in the image of God  
He made man.

According to Genesis 9:5-7, bloodshed on the earth must be paid for by the blood of the person who committed the murder. The verses in Genesis are for the intentional murder. From this Parsha, we see that all acts of bloodshed must be atoned for— whether intentional or unintentional— in Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel). Taken together, sections **A1** and **A2** teach us that **exile is thematically connected to death**. How? We know that the theme of section **A1** is exile because of unintentional murder. Also, we know the theme of section **A2** is death of the person who murders intentionally. Since these two separate verses are chiastically related, we know that they share a common theme; So, we can make the connection that exile is somehow equivalent to death.

The equivalence between **death** and **exile** is also seen in **Numbers 35:31-32**. Look at the these connections between these verses.

- Intentional killer vs. unintentional killer
- Ransom of the intentional killer vs. ransom of the unintentional killer
- Giving life to the intentional killer (who is supposed to die) vs. allowing the unintentional killer to return to his ancestral land.

As we can see, life is equated with being able to live on one's ancestral plot! The opposite should be true as well. Death is equated with exile from one's ancestral plot of land in Eretz Yisrael. In Searching the Parsha, we will examine the connection between death and exile some more. For now, understand that the unintentional killer experiences a type of death as a result of the accidental death he caused.

Sections **B1** and **B2** talk about intentional killers. Why does the Torah mention the subject of intentional killers during its teaching on how to deal with unintentional killers? Let's find out.

After teaching about the Land, section **A1**, the Torah moves to the teaching of intentional killers, **B1** (Numbers 35:16-21). In the past, we have learned that the Torah uses repetition to teach us its important lessons. What phrase is repeated over and over in Numbers 35:16-21?

The killer shall surely be put to d \_\_\_\_\_  
death

The emphasis in section **B1** is that the killer must be put to death. So far, the Torah has talked about Land in Eretz Yisrael (section **A1**) and the necessity for the death penalty for those who kill intentionally (section **B1**). We've seen this connection before in Genesis 9, where the Holy One said that those who shed blood (onto the earth) must have their blood shed. The Torah uses the example of the intentional murder to teach us that those who shed blood MUST die!

The Torah now moves on to the point of the central axis. It has already taught us that death and exile are equally the same. And it has taught us that those who shed blood (intentionally) must die. So I bet you are wondering about **the person who accidentally shed blood— should they also receive the death penalty?**



**Read Numbers 35:22-28. Based on your understanding of these verses (and the thematic connections we've made so far) does the demand for the death penalty for intentional murderers include unintentional killings, and why or why not? Circle below**

Yes or No. The Torah has already shown us how death is thematically connected to E \_\_\_\_\_.

The exile of the unintentional killer from his ancestral plot is his "d \_\_\_\_\_ p \_\_\_\_\_."

As you can see, the death penalty does apply to the unintentional killer. However, the Holy One is merciful. He does not levy a literal death sentence upon the unintentional killer because of the circumstances. Nonetheless, the unintentional killer must experience death through exile.

The central axis of our story teaches us that unintentional killers must experience death, albeit, death through exile! This is the main point of the teaching on the Cities of Refuge; hence, it is the central axis upon which our chiasmic structure hinges.

**Numbers 35:34 teaches us that all blood spilled in Eretz Yisrael (whether from intentional murder or an unintentional death) must be atoned for. The central axis also teaches us how atonement is made. What allows an unintentional killer to be able to return to their ancestral plot from a City of Refuge?**

The d \_\_\_\_\_ of the Kohen HaGadol (High Priest).

As we can see, the unintentional killer is allowed to return to his ancestral plot after the death of the Kohen HaGadol.

It is the death of the Kohen HaGadol that in some manner atones for the deaths of all unintentional killers.

To sum things up, we have learned that all bloodshed in Eretz Yisrael must be atoned for. In His mercy, the Holy One made provision for those who've unintentionally killed someone. Instead of an actual physical death, the unintentional killer suffered "death" through exile from his ancestral plot of land.



## Searching the Parshiot

### Of Death and Exile

Let's first examine the thematic connection between death and exile a little more closely.

**Do you remember the first time the Torah equates death and exile?**

A \_\_\_\_\_ and C \_\_\_\_\_ (Eve) died when they were exiled out of Gan Eden (the garden of Eden).

In Genesis 2-15-17, the Holy One told Adam and Chava they would die on the day they partook of fruit from the forbidden tree. If you read Genesis 3, which records how they ate from the tree, you will see that they did not experience physical death on that day! What did they experience? They experienced death by exile from Gan Eden! This is the first instance when the Torah equates death with exile. This week's sidra can only be understood inside the framework of the how death and exile are equally the same, and the story of the fall of mankind clearly teaches this principle. Although Adam and Chava experienced death when they were banished from Gan Eden, **the real issue** was their being cast out from the place where the Holy One dwelt. This is also true in the Parsha we just analyzed. Numbers 35:34 makes the same point when it states that Adonai dwells in the Land.

In an excellent article on the book of Ruth, Rav Yaakov Medan explains that land inheritance "gives man his connection to eternity" because it can be passed on from generation to generation. [You can read more about this at Redemption in Megillat Ruth by Rav Yaakov Medan, <http://www.vbm-torah.org/shavuot/ruth.htm>.]

Now let's look at the first murder for even greater understanding. Read Genesis 4. How did the Holy One "know" that Abel had been slain?

Because Abel's בַּדָּם, which was spilled in the earth/land, cried out to Him.

Explain two ways Genesis 4:11-14 is thematically connected to this week's sidra.

The unintentional killer was עֵשָׂו from his ancestral homeland. In Genesis 4:11, Cain is עֵשָׂו from the earth in that it will no longer yield its strength (harvest) to him. The unintentional killer experienced death by living in a City of Refuge, away from his ancestral homeland. Cain was to become a wanderer on the earth, with no "ancestral homeland".

How is Genesis 4:15 thematically connected to this week's sidra?

Just as the avenger could potentially קָטַל an unintentional killer, so too, Cain fears that someone will קָטַל him because of his murder of Abel!

As you can see, thematic analysis has allowed us to see an important teaching. The themes are consistent, clear and easy to see. The instructions relating to unintentional death have roots that reach all the way back to Genesis 4!

The connection between exile and death is easily seen in the nation of Israel. They were scattered into exile among the nations of the earth for two thousand years. In 1948 the nation was reborn. Was this not life from the dead? Ezekiel 37 is a graphic picture of the nation of Israel being resurrected from the death of exile.



***Hazak, hazak, v'nit'chazek!***  
**Be Strong! Be Strong! And May We Be Strengthened!**

Can you find the words from this Parsha?

E A B L O O D S H E D S  
 X U D U R N E D E N A G  
 I C H A V A N S A I R H  
 L A N D M R M U R D E R  
 E I P Y E D E A T H C A  
 H I G H P R I E S T H L  
 E G U F E R F O Y T I C



EXILE  
 CITY OF REFUGE  
 MURDER  
 DEATH  
 LAND  
 BLOODSHED  
 HIGH PRIEST  
 GAN EDEN  
 ADAM  
 CHAVA