

Manner And Customs of Bible Lands

by
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CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE -

Raids and Blood Avenging

RAIDS

PRACTICE AMONG ARAB DESERT TRIBES. When there is no strong ruler among the desert tribes of Arabs, (who is able to keep peace between the tribes) then some of the tribes may revert to the old pastime of raiding another tribe. They will select a tribe that is well supplied with cattle and goods, and will send out scouts to familiarize themselves with the tribe they wish to raid. They will organize their forces and plan to arrive there on a set night and usually in the dark of the moon. They will come up in stealth.

One of the men or boys will approach the tents in order to attract the attention of the dogs, and then this young man will run in a different direction in order to attract the dogs away from the tents. When the place is sufficiently cleared of the dogs, then the men will rush in from different directions, untie the camels, drive off the sheep and cattle, and steal all the valuable property they can, to take home to their tents and give to their sheik. This will be done amid the screaming of the women. The men who oppose them are overcome. But the raiders are careful not to harm the women, and they are careful not to shed blood. Mohammedan religion permits raids, but does not allow lives to be lost in the process. If blood is shed then a "blood feud" is started, and this is a very serious matter, for they often run for generations. The tribe will endeavor to kill as many as were killed in the raid.¹

Practice in Old Testament days. In the book of Judges, bands of desert people called "the Children of the East," were a constant menace to the Israelites. When these pastoral encampments neared the borders of agriculture, a raid would be planned against the harvest of Israel, or any of their flocks, herds, or other valuable goods. Scripture says of these people: "**And so it was, when Israel had sown, that . . . the children of the east, even they came up against them; and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth . . . and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass**" (Judges 6:3, 4)²

The tent-dwelling robbers were known in the days of Job, for he says of them: "**The tabernacle of robbers prosper**" (Job 12:6). The prophet Obadiah tells of robbers stealing by night. "**If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night. . . would they not have stolen till they had enough?**" (Obadiah 5). These robbers of ancient times are in many ways similar to the Arab raiders of modern times.

The latter illustrate for us methods used by the former.

BLOOD AVENGING

Ancient character of this custom. The shedding of blood during a raid starts a blood feud which may continue for many years. The basis for this feud is a custom or law that is common among many Semitic people. The unit of society among these peoples is the tribe or clan. The members of any one tribe have a responsibility to punish anybody who wrongs a member of their clan.

The blood of a murdered member of the tribe "**crieth . . . from the ground**" (Genesis 4:10), and the nearest male relative is especially duty bound to avenge the murder.

In olden times, instead of the state executing a murderer, it became the duty of the kinsman to avenge the death of the relative. The law of Moses recognized this right of the kinsman, but it did protect one who killed by accident and not by purpose, and so provided the cities of refuge, where such a man might flee and receive justice. "**These six cities shall be a refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them: that every one that killeth any person unawares may flee thither**" (Numbers 35:15). But these cities of refuge were no protection for a real murderer. He was turned over to the kinsman for vengeance.

"The revenger of blood [i.e., the kinsman] himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him" (Numbers 35:19).

Application of the principle to Bible times. The Bedouin tribes of Arabs today govern themselves according to the old customs and laws. The whole tribe shares with the kinsman in the responsibility to avenge the shedding of blood. These old regulations need to be known in order to have an understanding of what happened in the twenty-first chapter of Second Samuel.

A famine came to the land of David three successive years, and when David inquired of the LORD for the cause of it, "**The Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites**" (II Samuel 21:1).

King Saul had broken the covenant Israel had made with the Gibeonites, and had cruelly murdered many of these people. As a tribe of people this band of men felt duty bound to avenge the crime of Saul, but had no opportunity to do so. According to the law of the kinsman, commonly accepted among them, since the guilty man was dead, certain of his descendants should pay the penalty for the crime.

Thus the death of seven male descendants of Saul atoned for Saul's sin, as far as this tribe was concerned.³

1. See H. R. P. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert*, chapter on "Raids."
2. Cpo Mackie, *Bible Manners and Customs*, p. 28.
3. See "Kinsman-Blood Avenger," *The People's Bible Encyclopedia*, pp. 621,622.

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