

# Numbers 35:34

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel.

## Analysis

**Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel.** This verse concludes God's instructions about cities of refuge and laws concerning murder and manslaughter (Numbers 35:1-34). The Hebrew verb *lo tame'u* (לא תטמאו, "do not defile") is in the imperfect, expressing ongoing command. The word *tame* (טהר) means to make ceremonially unclean or polluted, often through moral corruption.

The phrase *asher atem yoshevim bah* (אשר אתם ישבים בה, "which you inhabit") emphasizes Israel's tenancy, not ownership—the land ultimately belongs to God. The powerful clause *asher ani shokhen betokhah* (אשר אני שוכן בתוכה, "wherein I dwell") reveals the theological foundation: God Himself dwells among His people in the land. The verb *shakhen* (שכן, "to dwell") is the root of Shekinah, referring to God's manifest presence.

This verse establishes that unpunished bloodshed defiles the land where God dwells. The land cannot simultaneously be holy (set apart for God's dwelling) and polluted by innocent blood. This principle underscores the seriousness of human life created in God's image (Genesis 9:6) and the necessity of justice. The land itself cries out for righteousness—an unresolved murder makes the ground unfit for God's presence. This foreshadows the New Testament truth that Christ's blood cleanses what animal sacrifices could not (Hebrews 9:13-14).

## Historical Context

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Numbers 35 was given during Israel's encampment on the plains of Moab, just before entering the Promised Land (approximately 1406 BC by conservative dating). The cities of refuge system God instituted was unique in the ancient Near East. While other ancient law codes (Hammurabi, Hittite laws) distinguished between intentional murder and accidental killing, none provided the comprehensive asylum system described in Numbers 35 and expanded in Deuteronomy 19 and Joshua 20.

Ancient Near Eastern cultures recognized that bloodshed polluted land. Hittite texts describe rituals to purify land defiled by murder. However, Israel's understanding was distinct: the land was defiled specifically because Yahweh dwelt there. God's presence among His people (manifested in the Tabernacle and later the Temple) required holiness. The concept that God's dwelling required the land's moral purity emphasized covenant relationship—Israel's obedience or disobedience directly affected God's presence among them.

Archaeological evidence from ancient Israelite cities shows careful attention to justice administration. City gates, where legal cases were heard (Ruth 4:1; Deuteronomy 21:19), have been excavated at sites like Dan, Megiddo, and Beersheba, revealing elaborate structures for public legal proceedings. The six cities of refuge (three west of Jordan, three east) were strategically distributed so that any Israelite could reach one quickly. Rabbinic tradition calculated that no one in Israel lived more than 30 miles from a city of refuge, ensuring access to justice and asylum.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

## Study Questions

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1. How does God's dwelling among His people create obligations for holy living and justice in the community?
2. What does this verse teach about the seriousness of human life and the necessity of just punishment for murder?
3. In what ways do we allow unresolved injustice or moral compromise to defile communities where God's people dwell?
4. How should the principle that God dwells among us shape our pursuit of justice and righteousness today?
5. What does this Old Testament requirement for land purity teach us about God's holiness and the need for atonement?

## Interlinear Text

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אַתָּה תְּפִלֵּם אֵלֶּךָ  
H3808 Defile H2930 H853 not therefore the land H776 H834 H859

אָנָּי בְּתֵךְ שָׁכַן אָשָׁר בְּהַיְשָׁבֵם  
which ye shall inhabit H3427 H0 H834 H589 I dwell H7931 H3588 H8432 H589

יְהִי בְּתֵךְ שָׁכַן בְּנֵי בָנָי שְׁכָן אֶשְׁר־אָלָה  
for I the LORD H3068 I dwell H7931 among H8432 the children H1121 of Israel H3478

## Additional Cross-References

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**Numbers 5:3** (Parallel theme): Both male and female shall ye put out, without the camp shall ye put them; that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell.

**Psalms 135:21** (References Lord): Blessed be the LORD out of Zion, which dwelleth at Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.

