

Mishpachah Beit Midrash

An Introduction to the Parashat HaShavuah (Weekly Torah Portion)

Understanding the Torah From a Thematic Perspective

Mattot/Masei (Tribes/Journeys)



BY TONY ROBINSON

—The Family House of Study— Examining the Parashat HaShavuah by Thematic Analysis

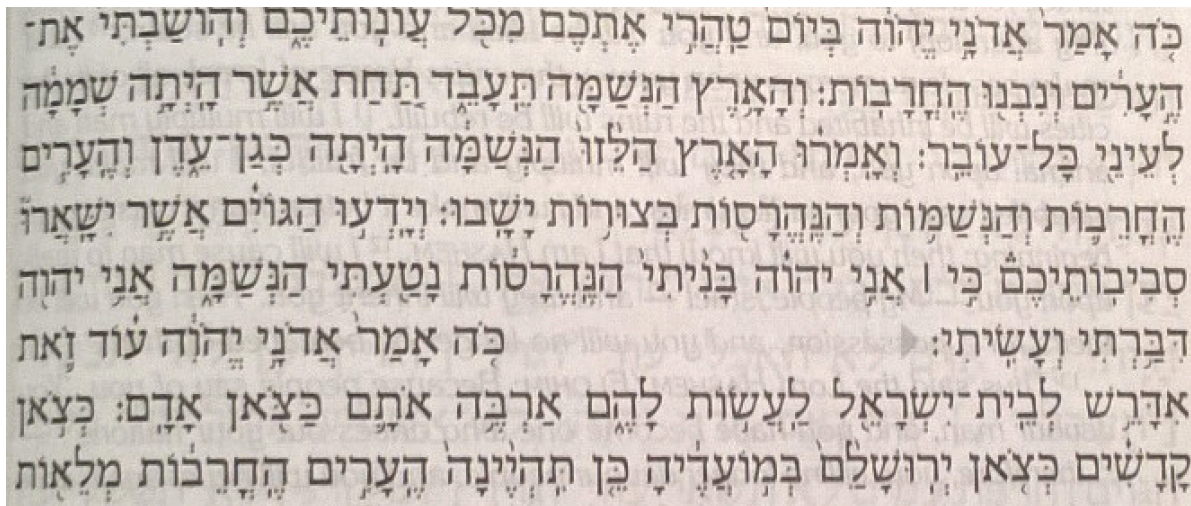
Welcome to Mishpachah Beit Midrash, the Family House of Study. Each Shabbat¹ we gather in our home and study the Scriptures, specifically the Torah.² It's a fun time of receiving revelation from the Ruach HaKodesh³. Everyone joins in—adults and children—as we follow the Parashat HaShavuah⁴ schedule. We devote ourselves to studying the Torah because the Torah is the foundation for all of Scripture. Therefore, a thorough understanding of the Torah will help us more fully understand the rest of the Tanakh⁵ and the Brit Chadasha.⁶ Furthermore, as Yeshua stated Himself, the Torah teaches about Him. So we study the Torah in order to be drawn closer to Yeshua, the goal of the Torah.

As believers in the Messiah we have discovered the richness of the wisdom of the sages of Israel. These men, who devoted themselves to the study of the Torah, have left us a rich heritage. Part of that heritage is a unique method of learning and interpreting the Scriptures. It's called thematic analysis. In thematic analysis we search for the underlying theme/topic of each passage of Scripture. By studying Scriptures related by a common theme, line upon line and precept upon precept, the Scriptures open up to us in a unique manner that is clearly inspired by the Ruach HaKodesh. Passages that seemed obscure begin to make sense, and numerous levels of wisdom and understanding unfold before us.

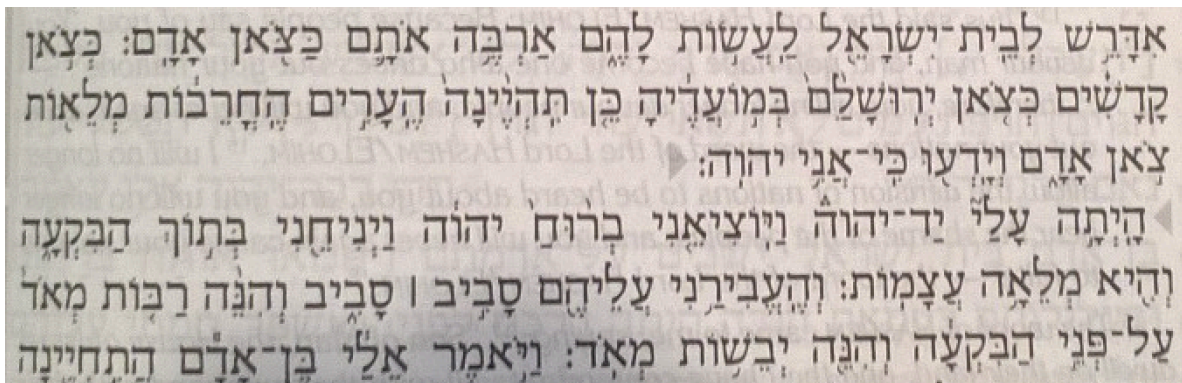
Thematic analysis of Scripture is based on the following premises. 1) Moses wrote the Torah as five *separate* books as the Ruach HaKodesh inspired him. 2) Since Adonai had him separate those words into five separate books, we surmise that each book has a unique message or theme. 3) Within each book, the words are written with two paragraph-like divisions⁷ interrupting the flow of the words. 4) Since Adonai commanded Moshe to separate the individual books into smaller paragraph-like sections or *Parshiot*, we surmise that each Parsha was written as a separate unit because each of those Parshiot is trying to convey a unique thought, theme, concept or understanding. Therefore, since Adonai inspired these divisions, we think they are *VERY* important. We use these God-breathed divisions as the basis of our thematic analysis of Scripture. Once you begin to interpret the Scriptures thematically, you will immediately *SEE* that Adonai wrote His words in a manner consistent with the intent that they be interpreted thematically.

Here is an example of what the Parsha divisions look like ...

ס—Parsha Stumah (plural, stumot)—A paragraph-like break inspired by the Ruach HaKodesh, still preserved on kosher Torah Scrolls, where there are at least nine blank spaces between a word and the next word, all on the same line of text.



פ—Parsha P'tuchah (plural, p'tuchot)—A paragraph-like break inspired by the Ruach HaKodesh, still preserved on kosher Torah Scrolls, where there are blank spaces extending to the end of a line of text and the subsequent text does not begin until the next line. (Hebrew is read from right to left)



—Parashat HaShavuah—

מַטֹּת/מַסֵּעִי

Mattot/Masei

(Tribes/Journeys)

B'midbar 30:2-32:42 & 33:1-36:13

(Numbers 30:2-32:42 & 33:1-36:13)

Understanding the Parsha

[*Numbers 35:9-34*](#)

Objective—Learn how to 1) interpret the main theme of a Parsha, 2) make thematic connections to that Parsha and 3) learn how to gain greater understanding of the Parsha under consideration through its thematic connections to other portions of Scripture.

Cities of Refuge

- I. Read [Numbers 35:9-34](#). This is a Parsha P'tuchah. Let's outline its general flow.
 - A. Numbers 35:9-15—Sanctification of **LAND** as Cities of Refuge and their purpose.
 - B. Numbers 35:16-21—Examples of intentional murder.
 - C. Numbers 35:22-28—Stipulations for the exile of the unintentional killer to a City of Refuge
 - D. Numbers 35:29-30—Criterion for the death penalty for intentional murderers.
 - E. Numbers 35:31-32—Preventing guilt upon the land.

The Torah uses its own literary techniques, which we would do well to understand. This Parsha is organized as a chiastic structure. We've seen this many times before. A chiastic structure is a pattern organized as follows. Generally, a story is divided into two halves. The themes of the first half of the literary unit are repeated in the second half of the unit in reverse order. Let's apply this to our story, which consists of twenty-six verses.

A1— [Numbers 35:9-15](#)—Sanctification of **LAND** as Cities of Refuge and their purpose.

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

C— Numbers 35:22-28—*Stipulations for exile of unintentional killer*.

B2— Numbers 35:29-32—Criterion for the death penalty for *intentional murderers*.

A2— Numbers 35:33-34—Preventing guilt upon the *LAND*.

Note how the theme of the Land presented in A1 is repeated in A2. Note 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—in our case, 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.

II. Looking at the elements of the chiastic structure.

- A. 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 captures the thought of *an Israelite fleeing from their ancestral land*?⁸ That's right. When the unintentional murderer flees to the City of Refuge, it can be seen as an exile from their ancestral plot.
- B. From our chiastic structure, we know that section A1 (Numbers 35:9-15) is thematically related to section A2 (Numbers 35:33-34); therefore, we should be able to connect these two passages thematically. Looking at section A2, how is guilt brought upon the Land of Israel?⁹ Numbers 35:33 states 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?¹⁰ 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 passage in Genesis pertains to intentional murder. From this Parsha, we surmise 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. Furthermore, we know the theme of section A2 is *death* of one who murders intentionally. Since these two separate passages are chiastically related, we know that they share a common theme; therefore, we can make the connection that exile is somehow equivalent to death.
- C. The equivalence between death and exile is also seen in Numbers 35:31-32. Note the following 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 you can see, life is equated with being able to abide on one's ancestral plot! The inverse should hold 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 even further. For now, understand that the unintentional killer experiences a type of death as a result of the accidental death he caused.

III. 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.

A. After discussing the Land, section A1, the Torah moves to the discussion 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](#)?¹¹ The emphasis in section B1 is that the killer must be put to death. Thus 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). As noted above, we've seen this connection before in Genesis 9, where the Holy One states that those who shed blood (onto the earth) must have their bloodshed. The Torah uses the example of the intentional murder to teach us that those who shed blood **MUST** die!

IV. The Torah now moves on to the discussion of the central axis. It has already equated death and exile. Furthermore it has taught us that those who shed blood (intentionally) must die. I can immediately think of a question that needs to be answered. What about the person who accidentally shed blood—should they also receive the death penalty?

A. Read [Numbers 35:22-28](#). Based on your understanding of this passage (and the thematic connections we've made thus far) does the *demand for the death penalty* for intentional murderers encompass unintentional killings, and why or why not?¹² 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.

B. 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.

C. 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?¹³ 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.

In summary, 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

Objective—Learn how to 1) uncover the theme of a passage, 2) relate them to other passages and 3) gain new insight on how to interpret the original passage based on its thematic connection to those other passages.

Of Death and Exile

- I. I would like to examine the thematic connection between death and exile a little more closely. Do you remember the first time the Torah equates death and exile?¹⁴ 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 note 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. The essence of this week's sidra can only be understood within the framework of the equivalence of death and exile, and the account 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 *expulsion from the place where the Holy One dwelt*. This is also true in the Parsha we analyzed in the previous section. [Numbers 35:34](#) makes the same point when it states that Adonai dwells in the Land.
- A. 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.¹⁵
- B. 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?¹⁶ Explain two ways [Genesis 4:11-14](#) is thematically connected to this week's sidra.¹⁷ How is Genesis 4:15 thematically connected to this week's sidra?¹⁸ 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 pertaining to unintentional death have roots that reach all the way back to Genesis 4!
- C. 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.

Making the Connection Between the Parashat HaShavuah and the Haftarah

Objective—Learn how to relate Scriptures thematically, thereby learning how to think Hebraically. Become rooted in the importance of thematic analysis by seeing it in action as you relate the Torah portion to the Haftarah portion.

The Haftarah reading is found in [Jeremiah 2:4-28](#). I will list some verses from the Haftarah reading. Your job will be to relate them thematically to the Parashat HaShavuah reading.

- I. Which passage in the Haftarah most *clearly connects* it to this week's sidra?¹⁹ As you can see, this week's Haftarah is connected to the sidra mainly through the theme of harlotry/idolatry. We did not concentrate on this theme in the previous sections of this commentary.
- II. Can you think of a verse in the Haftarah that connects with the Parsha we analyzed in *Understanding the Parsha*?²⁰ This verse is primarily dealing with contamination of the Land by the worship of Baal gods. But remember, the land can also become contaminated if the blood of intentional and unintentional murderers is not atoned for.

Messiah in the Parsha

Objective—Learn how the Torah teaches about the life and ministry of Yeshua HaMashiach. Yeshua said that Moses wrote about Him²¹. Since the Torah never even mentions the word *Messiah*, this section will help you see the Messiah in the Torah. This is primarily done using thematic analysis and midrash.

The Cities of Refuge and the Messiah

- I. In Parashat Metzora we learned that anytime you see 1) pictures of *resurrection*, 2) pictures of renewed *life* as a result of deliverance from impending *death* and 3) pictures of victory and renewed *life* as a result of *death*, we know the Torah is about to give us a teaching concerning the Messiah. I call these themes of ***The Resurrection and the Life***, and they are especially strengthened when coupled in some manner with the number *three*.
 - A. The first **LIVING** things (plants, grass, etc.) were created on day **THREE**! This is not strictly life from the dead; however, the principle of life coming from a state where there is no life is clear.
 - B. The Torah's picture of the RESURRECTION of the Messiah is found in the Holy Days. The Holy Day that is a shadow of Yeshua's RESURRECTION is the THIRD Holy Day, the Day of the Omer Wave Offering (Leviticus 23)! The offering of the barley sheaves on the day after the first Day of Unleavened Bread (the day after the Shabbat) is a prophetic picture of the resurrection of the Messiah.
 - C. Jonah, who was in the belly of a great fish, should have been **dead**. But on the **THIRD** day he came forth **ALIVE**! Truly, *death* was swallowed in victory!
 - D. The Akeida (binding of Isaac) found in Genesis 22—Abraham was supposed to offer Isaac as an olah (whole burnt offering). Although Adonai prevented him from actually sacrificing Isaac on the **THIRD** day, the manner in which the Torah relates the story hints that Isaac **died** and was **RESURRECTED**. That's why Hebrews 11:17-19 records that Abraham *received Isaac from the dead through RESURRECTION figuratively*!

If you are new to Mishpachah Beit Midrash, I suggest you go and read [Parashat Metzora](#). In that lesson, I catalog many examples of Messianic foreshadows that clearly use the theme of life from the dead and the number three.

- II. The Parsha we studied in *Understanding the Parsha*, is clearly Messianic, providing us with a remarkable teaching on the work of Messiah Yeshua! Read [Numbers 35:9-34](#). This Parsha P'tuchah pertains to Cities of Refuge, which we previously studied. Let's remember WHY Am Yisrael needed Cities of Refuge. Read [Numbers 35:33-34](#). According to [Numbers 35:34](#), what happens when bloodshed upon the Land of Israel is not atoned for?²² That's right. This contamination is the same type of contamination we read about in Leviticus 11-15. The remainder of Numbers 35:34 teaches us that contamination is an serious issue precisely because ***the Holy One dwells there!*** In Parashat Tazria, we learned that one becomes tamei, or ritually impure, by sinning (e.g., disobeying the commandments), *by coming into contact with death, or by some form of the loss of life*. When one is tamei they cannot come into Adonai's holy presence (specifically the Mishkan). That is absolutely forbidden. You can only approach Adonai when you are tahor (ritually clean). But, since Adonai dwells *in the Land of Israel also*, it only makes sense that bloodshed (death) needs to be atoned *for in the Land!*

- A. We have already seen one connection between death and exile. Can you think of another section of Scripture that thematically connects death and exile—hint, think of a major type of uncleanness?²³ That's right. Remember, we learned the following in Parashat Tazria:

- One becomes tamei, or ritually impure, by sinning (e.g., disobeying the commandments), by coming into contact with death, or by some form of the loss of life.
- When one becomes tamei they cannot come into Adonai's holy presence. That is absolutely forbidden. You can only approach Adonai when you are tahor (ritually clean).
- Tzara'at (erroneously translated as *leprosy*) is an affliction visited upon a person by Adonai.
- The metzora was essentially ***THE WALKING, LIVING DEAD!*** That's right. If we want to see what death is like, then we look to the metzora, who was totally cut off from the presence of Adonai in the Mishkan as well as all human relationships.

And why was the metzora cut off from all relationships (even familial)? Because they had to live outside the camp of Israel! And therein lies the connection between the metzora and the unintentional killer. Both were exiled from their ancestral land, doomed to live away from family and Adonai until... Now our thematic analysis has painted a complete picture. The metzora and the unintentional killer are related through death and exile, two sides of the same coin.

- B. Pertaining to the actions of the High Priest, how else are the metzora and unintentional killer thematically related?²⁴ The metzora remained “dead” until the High Priest declared them tahor (clean) again. The unintentional killer remained in the death of exile until the death of the High Priest. Clearly, the metzora and the unintentional killer are linked strongly by themes.

- III. In Parashat Metzora, we also learned that the cleansing of the metzora was a full-blown teaching concerning Messiah Yeshua's work of regeneration of the sinner who is *dead in sins and trespasses*! Since 1) the unintentional killer is so strongly thematically linked to the metzora and 2) the teaching of the metzora was Messianic in significance, we should automatically guess that the instructions concerning the unintentional killer also teach us about the work of the Messiah! Let's see how.
- A. Knowing that the exile of the unintentional killer is a picture of death, can you see the Sign of the Messiah in those instructions?²⁵ This is clearly the sign of the Messiah. And guess what? How many Cities of Refuge were there?²⁶ There you have it. The Sign of the Messiah—deliverance from death unto life—and the number three! Let's look further into this.
 - B. How do the instructions of the unintentional killer relate to pictures of victory and *renewed life* as a result of *death*?²⁷ As you can see, this is a clear picture of the resurrection of the unintentional killer.
- IV. As you read the B'rit Chadasha, are you struck by the number of times it uses the phrase, *in Messiah*? Well, let me show you how the Torah teaches that we have life *in Messiah*.
- A. According to the Torah, the unintentional killer needed to die because he was responsible for shedding blood. However, Adonai is merciful and understands that the unintentional killer shouldn't be treated the same as the intentional killer by administration of the death penalty, i.e., physical death. He therefore decreed that the unintentional sinner could remain alive as long as he remained ...

IN

...the City of Refuge, which just so happened to be a Levite city. See the picture. The unintentional sinner had to remain in the area of the Levites until the death of the High Priest. This is a picture of how we must remain *IN* Messiah Yeshua to receive eternal life!

- B. When was the unintentional killer allowed to leave the covering of the City of Refuge?²⁸ Do you see what has just happened? The unintentional killer's debt has been paid for by the death of a substitute! A High Priest at that! Is this not a picture of the work of Yeshua Messiah! It is through His death that we receive LIFE! Remember, Yeshua is our High Priest and the mediator of the B'rit Chadasha (Renewed Covenant). The connection is obvious. The High Priest was the mediator between the people and the Holy One. Through his death, the unintentional sinner received "life." He was allowed to return from exile, and his sin was atoned for. What an awesome picture of our mediator, Yeshua the Messiah!
- C. Lastly, do you realize that all of us are unintentional killers? That's right. For all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of the Holy One. Furthermore, Yeshua had to die on our behalf so that we could receive life; so that we would no longer live in exile from His presence! We never sinned thinking, "I'm doing this sin so that the Son of Elohim (God) will have to die for me." We didn't know that our sins would cause Adonai to send His Son as the Lamb to die for us! It was clearly unintentional sin—yet sin nevertheless—that caused Yeshua to die. Yes, we are all unintentional killers of Yeshua. But the good

news is this. We too have a High Priest ***IN*** whom we may seek refuge! He has died and secured eternal life for us all, every one of us unintentional killers.

I am very excited about starting the Book of Deuteronomy! It is my favorite book of the Torah. May Father YHVH truly, truly bless your Torah study.

As we state at the end of each book of the Torah...

חֲזַק! חֲזַק! וְנִתְחַזַּק!

Be Strong! Be Strong! And May We Be Strengthened!

Fun For the Whole Family!

Okay, time to show what you've learned. Word searches and crossword puzzles are available for you to test your understanding. The word search for adults (and older children) consists of 20-30 words taken from this week's sidra (portion). Some of the words may be common Hebrew words or English phrases. The crossword puzzle for adults (and older children) may also contain common Hebrew words or English phrases. There is also a ***word search for the little guys!*** And of course, the answer key is provided for the crossword puzzle.

Adult and children's crossword puzzles and word searches are available on Restoration of Torah's website: www.restorationoftorah.org. Click on the link entitled, *The Weekly Torah Portion Crossword Puzzles and Word Searches*.

Shabbat Shalom!

¹ Shabbat is Hebrew for Sabbath.

² In its most limited form, the Torah comprises the first five books of Moses.

³ Holy Spirit.

⁴ The Parashat HaShavuah, or weekly Parashat, are the weekly readings from the Torah. Each week, beginning on the Shabbat, we read specific selections from the Torah, such that we complete the entire Torah each year.

⁵ Tanakh is the entirety of what is commonly called the Old Testament. It is a Hebrew acronym taken from the three major divisions of the Tanakh: the Torah, Prophets (Neviim) and Writings (Khetuvim).

⁶ Brit Chadasha is commonly known as the New Testament Scriptures.

⁷ This paragraph-like division is called a Parsha (Parshiot, plural).

⁸ Exile.

⁹ Guilt is brought upon the Land whenever there is bloodshed.

¹⁰ Genesis 9:6.

¹¹ The killer shall surely be put to death.

¹² Yes. The Torah has already shown us how death is thematically connected to exile. Therefore, the exile of the unintentional killer from his ancestral plot is his “death penalty.”

¹³ The death of the Kohen HaGadol (High Priest).

¹⁴ Yes. Adam and Chava (Eve) died when they were kicked out of Gan Eden (the garden of Eden).

¹⁵ Medan, Rav Yaakov. “Redemption in Megillat Ruth.” *The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash*. Yeshivat Har Etzion. 1999. <http://etzion.org.il/en/redemption-megillat-ruth>.

¹⁶ Because Abel’s blood, which was spilled in the earth/land, cried out to Him.

¹⁷ The unintentional killer was exiled from his ancestral homeland. In Genesis 4:11, Cain is exiled 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.”

¹⁸ Just as the avenger could potentially kill an unintentional killer, so likewise, Cain fears that someone will kill him because of his murder of Abel!

¹⁹ Jeremiah 2:23, which states, “How can you say ‘I have not become contaminated; after the Baal-idols have I not gone?’ See your way in the Valley [of Peor]....”

²⁰ Jeremiah 2:7, which states that Am Yisrael **contaminated** the Land.

²¹ Yeshua said in John 5:46 that Moses spoke about him. Psalm 40:6-8, speaking of the Messiah said that the book is written about Him. Paul said that all of the feasts were prophetic shadows of Messiah Yeshua.

²² It contaminates the Land.

²³ The metzora (improperly translated **leper**) is thematically connected to the unintentional killer. Remember, a metzora is a person afflicted with tza’arat.

²⁴ Both remained “dead” until an action by the High Priest!

²⁵ Yes! The unintentional killer should have died, but instead, through the mercy of Adonai, he was allowed to live!

²⁶ Three! Three for the lands on each side of the Jordan, for a total of six!

²⁷ The “**death**” sentence of the unintentional killer (his exile) is turned into **life** (his ability to return to society) after the death of the High Priest!

²⁸ After the death of the High Priest.