

DT. 21:5-9 -- THE IMPORTANCE OF SANCTITY OF LIFE; GOD'S HATRED OF MURDER; PUTTING AWAY OF GUILT; PRAYING FOR GOD'S MERCY!

Deu 21:1 "If anyone is found slain, lying in the field in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess, and it is not known who killed him,

Deu 21:2 then your elders and your judges shall go out and measure the distance from the slain man to the surrounding cities.

Deu 21:3 And it shall be that the elders of the city nearest to the slain man will take a heifer which has not been worked and which has not pulled with a yoke.

Deu 21:4 The elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with flowing water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and they shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley.

Deu 21:5 Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to bless in the name of the LORD; by their word every controversy and every assault shall be settled.

Deu 21:6 And all the elders of that city nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley.

Deu 21:7 Then they shall answer and say, 'Our hands have not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen it.

Deu 21:8 Provide atonement, O LORD, for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, and do not lay innocent blood to the charge of Your people Israel.' And atonement shall be provided on their behalf for the blood.

Deu 21:9 So you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you when you do what is right in the sight of the LORD.

The Biblical Setting: - In chapter 19-23, God is reminding Israel of His heart for His rules, His law that would serve and keep them in good stead. Five areas are given in chapter 21:

1. The Law Concerning unsolved Murder
2. Female Captives
3. Firstborn Inheritance Rights
4. The Rebellious Son
5. Miscellaneous Laws

This morning we will consider the Law Concerning unsolved Murder and the prayer contained therein; (Deuteronomy 21:1-9)

The reason for grouping together these five laws, which are apparently so different from one another, as well as for attaching them to the previous regulations, is to be found in the desire to bring out distinctly the sacredness of life and of personal rights from every point of view, and impress it upon the covenant nation.

Concerning the unsolved murders that would take place even in the Promised Land, rather than shrugging their shoulders and ignoring them, the children of Israel were to investigate and make atonement for them. The elders closest to the scene of the crime were to offer a heifer and intercede in order that the people of the region could be protected.

Deu 21:1-2 *"If anyone is found slain, lying in the field in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess, and it is not known who killed him, [2] then your elders and your judges shall go out and measure the distance from the slain man to the surrounding cities.*

Expiation, (making atonement, making amends for) of a Murder Committed by an Unknown Hand. If anyone was found lying in a field in the land of Israel, having been put to death without its being known who had killed him, the elders and judges of the neighboring towns, - the former as representatives of the communities, the latter as administrators of right, - were to go out and measure to the towns which lay round about the slain man. They were to measure the distance of the body from the towns that were lying round about, to ascertain first of all which was the nearest town.

Deu 21:3-4 *And it shall be that the elders of the city nearest to the slain man will take a heifer which has not been worked and which has not pulled with a yoke.[4] The elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with flowing water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and they shall break the heifer's neck (strike off the head) there in the valley.*

This nearest town was then required to expiate the blood-guiltiness, not only because the suspicion of the crime or of participation in the crime fell soonest upon it, but because the guilt connected with the shedding of innocent blood rested as a burden upon it before all others.

To this end the elders were to take a heifer (young cow), with which no work had ever been done, and which had not yet drawn in the yoke, that is, whose vital force had not been diminished by labor, and bring it down into a brook-valley with water constantly flowing, and there break its neck. The *"the elders of the city shall bring the heifer..."* The elders were to perform the act of expiation in the name of the city. **As the murderer was not to be found, an animal was to be put to death in his stead, and suffer the punishment of the murderer.** The slaying of the animal was not an expiatory

sacrifice, and consequently there was no slaughtering and sprinkling of the blood; but, as the mode of death, that is, breaking the neck, clearly shows, **it was a symbolical infliction of the punishment that should have been borne by the murderer, upon the animal which was substituted for him.** To be able to take the guilt upon itself and bear it, the animal was to be in the **full and undiminished possession of its vital powers.** The slaying was to take place in a valley with water constantly flowing through it, which was not worked (cultivated) and sown. This regulation as to the locality in which the act of expiation was to be performed was probably founded upon the idea, **that the water of the brook-valley would suck in the blood and clean it away, and that the blood sucked in by the earth would not be brought to light again by the plowing and working of the soil.**

Deu 21:5 *Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to bless in the name of the LORD; by their word every controversy and every assault shall be settled.*

The priests were to come near during this transaction; priests from the nearest Levitical town were to be present at it, **not to conduct the affair, but as those whom Jehovah had chosen to serve Him and to bless in His name,** and according to whose mouth (words) every dispute and every stroke happened, that is, **simply as those who were authorized by the Lord, and as the representatives of the divine right, to receive the explanation and petition of the elders, and acknowledge the legal validity of the act.**

Deu 21:6-8 *And all the elders of that city nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken (whose head had been struck off) in the valley. [7] Then they shall answer and say, 'Our hands have not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen it. [8] Provide atonement, O LORD, for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, and do not lay innocent blood to the charge of Your people Israel.' And atonement shall be provided on their behalf for the blood.*

The elders of the town were to wash their hands over the slain heifer, i.e., to cleanse themselves by this symbolical act from the suspicion of any guilt on the part of the inhabitants of the town in the murder that had been committed, and then answer to the charge involved in what had taken place, and say,

- **“Our hands have not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen it”**, the shedding of blood. That is, we have neither any part in the crime nor any knowledge of it:
- **“Provide atonement, O LORD” (grant forgiveness), (Literally, 'cover up,' the blood-guiltiness) for Your people Israel...**
- **“and do not lay innocent blood to the charge of Your people Israel”** That is, **lay not upon us the innocent blood** that has been shed by imputation and punishment.
- **“And atonement shall be provided on their behalf for the blood”**.. i.e., the bloodshed or murder shall not be imputed to them.

Deu 21:9 *So you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you when you do what is right in the sight of the LORD.*

In this way **Israel was to wipe away the innocent blood (the bloodshed) from its midst.** If the **murderer were discovered afterwards, of course the punishment of death** which had been inflicted vicariously upon the animal, simply because the criminal himself could not be found, **would still fall upon him.**

SUMMARY:

- **We see God’s heart here so clearly regarding His position regarding the sanctity of life!**
- **Man has been created in His image and each is so important and is so loved by Him!**
- **We see His intended penalty for the taking of a life.**
- **In the case of an unsolved murder, the elders of the nearest city are to administer the punishment to a heifer that was intended for the murderer.**
- **A prayer of atonement and the asking for forgiveness, putting away the guilt of innocent blood from the people.**

How Great Thou Art Hymn – Elvis Presley

*Oh Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder/ Consider all the worlds Thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,/ Thy power throughout the universe displayed;*

*When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation/ And take me home- what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration/ And there proclaim, my God, how great Thou art!*

Refrain

*Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee,/How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee,/ How great Thou art, how great Thou art!*