

Deuteronomy 21

Verses 1 – 9

“If a person who has been killed *by someone* is found lying in the open country in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess, *and* it is not known who struck him, ² then your elders and your judges shall go out and measure *the distance* to the cities which are around the one who was killed. ³ And it shall be that the city which is nearest to the person killed, that is, that the elders of that city shall take a heifer of the herd that has not been worked and has not pulled in a yoke; ⁴ and the elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with running water, which has not been plowed or sown, and they shall break the heifer’s neck there in the valley. ⁵ Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come forward, because the Lord your God has chosen them to serve Him and to bless in the name of the Lord; and every dispute and violent crime shall be settled by them. ⁶ And all the elders of that city which is nearest to the person killed shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley; ⁷ and they shall respond and say, ‘Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see *who did*. ⁸ Forgive Your people Israel whom You have redeemed, Lord, and do not place the guilt for innocent blood in the midst of Your people Israel.’ And the guilt for bloodshed shall be forgiven them. ⁹ So you shall remove the guilt for innocent blood from your midst, when you do what is right in the eyes of the Lord.

“If a person who has been killed *by someone* is found lying in the open country in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess, *and* it is not known who struck him, ² then your elders and your judges shall go out and measure *the distance* to the cities which are around the one who was killed. ³ And it shall be that the city which is nearest to the person killed, that is, that the elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with running water....

This chapter is also describing laws that will take effect after Canaan has been settled.

Normally, when a crime has been committed and the responsible party has been properly punished, the guilt has been removed.

But in this situation, the person responsible for this crime is not known and no punishment can be administered.

Therefore, the community (represented by the elders) which is closest to the scene of the crime becomes responsible and must seek God’s forgiveness.

And they shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley.

This ceremony was definitely symbolic. The heifer received the punishment that was due to the unknown murderer.

Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come forward, because the Lord your God has chosen them to serve Him and to bless in the name of the Lord; and every dispute and violent crime shall be settled by them.

Apparently the judges and elders that ruled on civil cases in the wilderness would be replaced by the Levitical priests in the settled land of Canaan.

The judges and elders probably oversaw financial transactions and other affairs that were not part of the legal system.

And all the elders of that city shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley; ⁷ and they shall respond and say, 'Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see *who did*.

The elders were speaking for the community as a whole and as far as they knew, no one in the city had committed the crime.

By following this law the town could escape the guilt for innocent blood.

Verses 10 - 14

¹⁰ **“When you go out to battle against your enemies, and the Lord your God hands them over to you and you take them away captive, ¹¹ and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and are strongly attracted to her and would take her as a wife for yourself, ¹² then you shall bring her into your home, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails. ¹³ She shall also remove the clothes of her captivity and shall remain in your house, and weep for her father and mother a full month; and after that you may have relations with her and become her husband and she shall be your wife. ¹⁴ But it shall be, if you are not pleased with her, then you shall let her go wherever she wishes; and you certainly shall not sell her for money, you shall not treat her as merchandise, since you have humiliated her.**

When you go out to battle against your enemies, and the Lord your God hands them over to you and you take them away captive, ¹¹ and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and are strongly attracted to her and would take her as a wife for yourself.

This obviously applies to war with other nations after Canaan has been settled because the Jews were told not to intermarry with the Canaanites.

In chapter 20, God told the Israelites that if a city refused their offer of peace all of the men in the city should be killed but the woman and children would become their plunder.

This must be love at first sight, at least on the part of the man.

Isn't it great how honest the bible is when it comes to the actions of men?

And all the women said Amen. 😊

This is what men should be looking for.

See Proverbs 31:10-31

Now to a more serious question that comes to mind.

Did the woman have a choice in this matter?

Then you shall bring her into your home, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails. ¹³ She shall also remove the clothes of her captivity and shall remain in your house, and weep for her father and mother a full month; and after that you may have relations with her and become her husband and she shall be your wife

The man had to wait for a month to marry her.

Love at first sight may seem exciting but having a period of time to cool off might save the man from a disappointing decision.

Concerning the removing of the clothes of her captivity, this refers to the custom of women who faced captivity arraying themselves in the most appealing garments they possessed in order to be more attractive to their captors.

Isn't it great how honest the bible is when it comes to the actions of women?

And all the men said Amen. 😊

After that you may have relations with her and become her husband and she shall be your wife. But it shall be, if you are not pleased with her, then you shall let her go wherever she wishes; and you certainly shall not sell her for money, you shall not treat her as merchandise, since you have humiliated her.

Because she was a wife, the man did not have the authority to treat her like a slave.

Her again we see God allowing for the moral weaknesses of mankind. God wants every marriage to be until “death do we part” but God does not want the weaknesses of mankind to destroy either party in the marriage relationship. Divorce is not the solution God prefers but mankind is a fallen creature and sometimes the best that man can do is a long ways from what God desires.

We should also remember that God can forgive any sin if we are willing to confess our sin and try to live a better life for Him each day.

Verses 15 - 17

¹⁵ “If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and *both* the loved and the unloved have borne him sons, and the firstborn son belongs to the unloved, ¹⁶ then it shall be on the day that he wills what he owns as an inheritance to his sons, he is not allowed to treat the son of the loved *wife* as the firstborn, at the expense of the son of the unloved, *who actually is* the firstborn son. ¹⁷ On the contrary, he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved *wife*, by giving him a double portion of everything that he owns, for he *was* the beginning of his strength; to him belongs the right of the firstborn.

If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved

This is exactly what happened with Jacob and his two wives Rachel & Leah

See Genesis 29

In this case Jacob was not the guilty party since Laban deceived Jacob.

However, it is difficult not to place some blame at the feet of Jacob. He must have drank so much wine during the last day of the wedding feast that he didn't recognize the woman he was with was not the bride. Wow!

In any case, Rachel was loved and Leah was not.

Can Polygamy have any other outcome?

Then it shall be on the day that he wills what he owns as an inheritance to his sons, he is not allowed to treat the son of the loved *wife* as the firstborn, at the expense of the son of the unloved, *who actually is* the firstborn son

The man of the house did not have the right to choose which son was his first-born.

Verses 18 - 21

¹⁸ “If any person has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father or his mother, and when they discipline him, he does not listen to them, ¹⁹ then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his hometown. ²⁰ And they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he does not obey us, he is thoughtless and given to drinking.’ ²¹ Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall eliminate the evil from your midst, and all Israel will hear *about it* and fear.

If any person has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father or his mother, and when they discipline him, he does not listen to them

If a son cannot be corrected, he will eventually destroy himself, but in the meantime his actions will influence others.

And they shall say to the elders of his city, this son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he does not obey us, he is thoughtless and given to drinking.’ ²¹ Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death

Usually, the witnesses in a trial were responsible for casting the first stone.

In this case it was his parents but that responsibility was given to the men of the city.

God knows how hard it would be for any parent to do such a thing.

So you shall eliminate the evil from your midst, and all Israel will hear *about it* and fear.

Here again, God is using a severe punishment as a deterrent.

Verses 22 - 23

²² “Now if a person has committed a sin *carrying* a sentence of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, ²³ his body is not to be left overnight on the tree, but you shall certainly bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is cursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

Now if a person has committed a sin *carrying* a sentence of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, ²³ his body is not to be left overnight on the tree, but you shall certainly bury him on the same day

Stoning was the most common way of putting someone to death in Israel.

But the dead body of a notorious criminal was sometimes hung on a tree as a warning to others.

Paul linked these two verses with the crucifixion of Christ

See Gal. 3:13

The Jews of Paul's day argued that Jesus could not be the Son of God because he was hung on a tree, and was therefore cursed.

What they failed to understand was that He was cursed for the sin of others.