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**BIBLE STUDY**

**Refuge Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith, Inc.**

601 NW 2nd Street, Gainesville, FL 32601; 352.336.7602

Web Site: [www.Refugegainesville.com](http://www.Refugegainesville.com)

**Elder Michael J. Williams, Pastor**

**Bishop Dr. M. Ruel McCoy, Sr., Diocesan**

**“PUT AWAY THE [GUILT OF] INNOCENT BLOOD FROM AMONG YOU”**

**Deuteronomy 21:1-23**

***Deuteronomy 21:1 "If [one] be found slain in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it, lying in the field, [and] it be not known who hath slain him:"***

Moses expanded his exposition of the sixth commandment, “You shall not murder,” by covering a number of issues meant to maintain order. These verses discuss a specific case law regarding an unsolved murder.

These verses show us the sacredness of human life to God. No detail of Israel’s life escaped God’s notice and concern, as Moses’s address makes clear. The cold case of an unsolved murder required a sacrifice because life was precious to God and because the victim’s blood had to be atoned for. So, God instituted the unique ceremony described in these verses to satisfy his holiness and purge the land of the innocent blood spilled.

***Deuteronomy 21:2 "Then thy elders and thy judges shall come forth, and they shall measure unto the cities which [are] round about him that is slain:"***

***Deuteronomy 21:3 "And it shall be, [that] the city [which is] next unto the slain man, even the elders of that city shall take an heifer, which hath not been wrought with, [and] which hath not drawn in the yoke;"***

***Deuteronomy 21:4 "And the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer unto a rough valley, which is neither eared nor sown, and shall strike off the heifer's neck there in the valley:"***

This measuring of the distances to the cities, is to find out who is responsible to take care of this. Someone has a responsibility for it. The elders of that city are then to be notified, and they are to take over by bringing an unbroken (never plowed or sown) heifer down to a valley with running water. This would be a young heifer, which has not been with a bull. The heifer would be young enough that they had never worked her with a yoke either. The elders and judges are seeing which city is the closest to the dead body. The heifer must come from the nearest city. The elders will bring the heifer to the sight of the dead body. This has to be a field that is not in cultivation. The elders will cut off the head of the heifer there. Apparently, the valley did not have to be adjacent to the crime scene because running water was necessary for the following ritual. In the valley the elders were to break the neck of the heifer (perhaps with an ax). This was not a sacrificial act because the blood was not to be poured out on the ground or manipulated in any way. Breaking the neck of the heifer symbolized that a capital crime had occurred and the guilty one, even though unknown at that time, was worthy of death.

***Deuteronomy 21:5 "And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near; for them the LORD thy God hath chosen to minister unto him, and to bless in the name of the LORD; and by their word shall every controversy and every stroke be [tried]:"***

***Deuteronomy 21:6 "And all the elders of that city, [that are] next unto the slain [man], shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley:"***

***Deuteronomy 21:7 "And they shall answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen [it]."***

The priests, the Lord’s representatives in this matter, were to be summoned to the valley where they would wash their hands (with the running water nearby as a symbol of purity) over the dead heifer. Taking a life is not just criminal but is a spiritual sin. The priests are to settle this matter. The whole town would be counted guilty of this sin, if it is not settled. This is like Pilate washing his hands of Jesus' crucifixion. When they wash their hands over the heifer, they are proclaiming their innocence of the shedding of this man's blood. They are saying, they have no knowledge of this murder.

***Deuteronomy 21:8 "Be merciful, O LORD, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel's charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them."***

***Deuteronomy 21:9 "So shalt thou put away the [guilt of] innocent blood from among you, when thou shalt do [that which is] right in the sight of the LORD."***

This is a plea for God to forgive them of all blame of this innocent blood. After they have killed the heifer and washed their hands over her, their conscience is clear. The blood of the heifer causes God to believe and forgive them. This ritual signifies the need for Israel to deal with all bloodguilt matters, even in cases where the perpetrator was not known. The land was to remain undefiled, and this ritual was the prescribed means of removing bloodguilt in unsolved murder cases.

***Deuteronomy 21:10 "When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the LORD thy God hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou hast taken them captive,"***

***Deuteronomy 21:11 "And seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldest have her to thy wife;"***

Moses legislated a number of family related laws, the first dealing with regulations regarding captive women. The next item involved an Israelite soldier who wanted to marry a woman among the captives from one of the cities outside of Canaan. Earlier the law stated (20:14) that women and children from captured cities were to be spared. The possibility arose, as described here, that one of the soldiers might find one of the captive women attractive enough for marriage. This is spoken as if it had already happened. It will happen because it is the will of God for it to happen. The message they are about to hear is for the time, after they have won the war. Caution was in order here because intermarriage was expressly forbidden with women from the Canaanite nations (7:3) and should not have been even possible if all the inhabitants, including the women, were put to death as the Lord had instructed. The background for this situation (although not explicitly stated) is that some of the captive women might wish to associate themselves with the God of Israel (like Rahab), and now the possibility of an Israelite marrying one of these women was an option.

***Deuteronomy 21:12 "Then thou shalt bring her home to thine house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails;"***

***Deuteronomy 21:13 "And she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife."***

The woman was allowed to undergo a certain physical and spiritual ritual to separate her from her old life, including a month-long period of mourning for her father and mother, either because they had been killed or in recognition of the fact that she would not be going back to them. This month will, also, give her a time to get accustomed to her captor. At the end of the month of mourning, he can take her to wife. She will be treated as a wife, and not a slave. Several stipulations, however, were in order. She was to shave her head and trim her nails and get rid of her wardrobe. This is a sign of extreme mourning. The purpose of these acts is not clear. Some think that if the only reason the woman was desirable in the first place was that she was physically beautiful, the removal of adornments would mean she would be less attractive.

***Deuteronomy 21:14 "And it shall be, if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will; but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her."***

If after a short time, he finds that he does not really love this woman, he shall let her go wherever she wants to go. Even though she was a foreigner, she had certain rights and was not to be mistreated in anyway because she had been humbled (let go) he may not humiliate her further. She was his wife. He must treat her with respect. She was not a slave to be bought or sold, but his wife. Though other nations often brutally mistreated women during times of war, this law provided a woman of a subjugated country with protection if a soldier wanted her for a bride.

***Deuteronomy 21:15 "If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, [both] the beloved and the hated; and [if] the firstborn son be hers that was hated:"***

Discussion of marriage to a foreign captive led to another marriage issue, the case of polygamy and fathering sons by more than one wife. Genesis 2:22-24 states that monogamy is God’s standard for marriage, Polygamy was tolerated in Old Testament times, but it was never God’s will for marriage.

***Mark 10:5-9***

***5 And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.***

***6 But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.***

***7 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife;***

***8 And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh.***

***9 What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.***

Importantly, the culturally accepted practice of taking more than one wife always led to problems among God’s people. Scripture reveals the experiences of grief and family dysfunction that polygamy brought into the lives of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Elkanah, Hannah, Peninnah, Jacob, Rachel, Leah, David, Bathsheba, Solomon, etc.

***Deuteronomy 21:16 "Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit [that] which he hath, [that] he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, [which is indeed] the firstborn:"***

***Deuteronomy 21:17 "But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated [for] the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he [is] the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn [is] his."***

Jealousy was just one of those problems; it could cause one wife to push her son forward as the favorite, even if he were not the firstborn. Nevertheless, fathers were strictly forbidden to play that game and were commanded to give their firstborn sons two shares of their estates, because those sons, whether or not their mothers held their fathers’ hearts, had the rights of the firstborn. This is saying that, even though he hates the woman who bore him a son first, he cannot take the firstborn heritage away from the son, and give it to the son of the woman he loves. He cannot choose who his firstborn is. God does that. He must give to his son, who was born first, the double portion, which is the heritage of the firstborn son. The firstborn inherited twice as much as any of the other sons. This provision for the firstborn to receive a double portion is not mentioned elsewhere. This current stipulation seeks to regulate polygamy when it does occur in order to protect the family rights of the firstborn. The placement here after vv. 10-14 may suggest that she is the unfavored wife in a polygamous marriage. Family order was to be maintained and was not to be manipulated to achieve a different outcome from what was clearly mandated.

***Deuteronomy 21:18 "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and [that], when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them:"***

***Deuteronomy 21:19 "Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place;"***

Next Moses dealt with another difficult family situation. It’s important to understand that this passage isn’t advocating the death penalty for mere juvenile delinquency. The son in view here was not a teenager who had been acting foolishly once in a while or fell into sassy speech on occasion. This was a son who, though his parents would discipline him, refused to repent of his rebellion. To have a rebellious son, was a disgrace with the Hebrews. One of the ten commandments was to obey father and mother. It seemed the parents had chastened him, to no improvement. This type of rebellion was thought of as witchcraft.

***I Samuel 15:23 "For rebellion [is as] the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness [is as] iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from [being] king."***

***Deuteronomy 21:20 "And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son [is] stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; [he is] a glutton, and a drunkard."***

***Deuteronomy 21:21 "And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear."***

It seems, his parents forcefully brought him to be judged. This is a place of judgement. Now, we see more sins added to the fact that he is rebellious. He is a glutton and a drunkard. Glutton, in the verse above, is not just speaking of over-eating, but of him being a reprobate son. Such rebellion was a capital offense in God’s eyes, because left unpunished it would destroy Israel’s home life and eventually the entire covenant community. The bottom line here is that this young man refused to submit to the Lord as his King and to his parents as his God-ordained authority. The elders of the parents’ city were to recognize the seriousness of this sin and stone the rebel themselves to purge the evil from Israel. Once again, Scripture uses the threat of capital punishment as a deterrent. The punishment is severe. He is stoned to death by the men of the city.

***Deuteronomy 21:22 "And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree:"***

These verses describe a sentence reserved for those who received the death penalty. Their bodies were hung on a tree, probably as a warning to others not to repeat whatever offense had led to their demise. Man is made in the image of God. Then, it would be a terrible thing to hang man on a tree. This cursed thing must be buried in the ground before dark. Hanging was one form of putting someone to death. At a much later time, crucifying was spoken of as hanging on a tree.

***Deuteronomy 21:23 "His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged [is] accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee [for] an inheritance."***

Interestingly, the corpse could not be left there overnight because anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse. To leave them there would defile the land. Undergoing God’s curse is what Jesus Christ did for us. But he died for our wrongs, not his. He redeemed us by his death on the cross—being hung on a tree—and enduring God’s curse against sin in our place.

***Galatians 3:13 "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed [is] every one that hangeth on a tree:"***

Several times throughout Deuteronomy capital punishment was set forth for certain behavior (13:10; 17:5; 21:21), but no instructions were given in those passages regarding the disposition of the criminal’s corpse after execution. Here Moses presented a case study of what was to be done in those situations. If someone was executed and hung on a tree, the body was to be removed and buried before sundown on the same day as his execution. Hanging on a tree was not the means of execution (stoning was the typical means), but often the bodies of executed criminals were hoisted up on a stake as a demonstration of their death as well a deterrent for any who sought to emulate their behavior. The executed criminal was considered cursed by God, not because he was hung on a tree but because of the behavior that brought about his punishment. While there is a clear object lesson in these situations to warn people about the consequences of their behavior, the body of the criminal was still to be treated in such a way that Israelites did not defile their land.

**QUESTIONS**

1. What have they found in verse 1?
2. It appears this person has been \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
3. What shall the judges and the elders do?
4. Who is responsible for this?
5. The heifer they brought had not been with a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
6. What was another sign this was a young heifer?
7. This is a field that is not in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
8. Who comes near to bless?
9. Taking a life is not just criminal but a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ sin.
10. Be merciful, O LORD, unto thy people \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
11. The beautiful woman among the captives, he desired to be his \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
12. What was he to do to her, when he first got her to his house?
13. How long was she allowed to mourn for her relatives?
14. What happens to the firstborn son, if he does not love his mother?
15. Rebellion is thought of as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
16. What should his mother and father do with the rebellious son?
17. What was another type of death that was classified as hanging?
18. Why should the person who is hung not remain on the tree overnight?