

**Second Baptist Church of Doylestown**  
**Bible Study Notes**  
**9-7-22**

**Deuteronomy 21**

**Atonement for an Unsolved Murder – Verse 1**

**<sup>1</sup> If someone is found slain, lying in a field in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess, and it is not known who the killer was,**

**21:1** If anyone is found slain: Presumably, death from natural causes had been ruled out and it was evident that the deceased had been murdered; yet, it was not known who killed him. This was important based on a principle stated in Numbers 35:33-34. This passage shows that the blood of unsolved, unavenged murder defiles and pollutes the land. Therefore, if there is a murder unavenged, some kind of cleansing is necessary, so the land will not be defiled.

**The Procedure For Atoning For Murder-Polluted Land – Verses 2-6**

**<sup>2</sup> your elders and judges shall go out and measure the distance from the body to the neighboring towns. <sup>3</sup> Then the elders of the town nearest the body shall take a heifer that has never been worked and has never worn a yoke <sup>4</sup> and lead it down to a valley that has not been plowed or planted and where there is a flowing stream. There in the valley they are to break the heifer's neck. <sup>5</sup> The Levitical priests shall step forward, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister and to pronounce blessings in the name of the LORD and to decide all cases of dispute and assault. <sup>6</sup> Then all the elders of the town nearest the body shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley,**

**21:2-6** When a crime was committed and the criminal got away, the whole community was held responsible. In much the same way, if a city has a dangerous intersection and someone is killed there, the community may be held responsible for both damages and repairs. God was pointing to the need for the whole community to feel a keen sense of responsibility for what was going on around them and to move to correct any situations that were potentially harmful—physically, socially, or morally.

**The Prayer Said By The Elders As They Washed Their Hands – Verses 7-9**

**<sup>7</sup> and they shall declare: “Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. <sup>8</sup> Accept this atonement for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, LORD, and do not hold your people guilty of the blood of an innocent person.” Then the bloodshed will be atoned for, <sup>9</sup> and you will have purged from yourselves the guilt of shedding innocent blood, since you have done what is right in the eyes of the LORD.**

**21:7-9** Provide atonement, O LORD: Again, Numbers 35:33-34 makes the principle clear, that unavenged murders defile and pollute the land and atonement must be made for the land itself. So you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood: When Israel followed God's instructions for atonement, He honored His word by taking away their guilt. But the removal of guilt was always based on blood

sacrifice, on a substitutionary atonement — looking forward to the work of Jesus on the cross for the entire world.

### **Laws Regarding The Taking Of A Wife From Conquered Peoples – Verses 10-14**

**<sup>10</sup>When you go to war against your enemies and the LORD your God delivers them into your hands and you take captives, <sup>11</sup>if you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife. <sup>12</sup>Bring her into your home and have her shave her head, trim her nails <sup>13</sup>and put aside the clothes she was wearing when captured. After she has lived in your house and mourned her father and mother for a full month, then you may go to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife. <sup>14</sup>If you are not pleased with her, let her go wherever she wishes. You must not sell her or treat her as a slave, since you have dishonored her.**

**21:11-12** And you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and desire her: In the ancient world, it was not uncommon for a man to take a wife from among the captives, especially if she was a beautiful woman. Yet obviously, this was open to great abuse, so God gave specific guidelines to govern this practice in Israel.

Shave her head and trim her nails: First, the captive woman had to be purified and humbled. This denoted a complete break with her past, and the willingness to start anew, humbly as a child.

**21:13** Put off the clothes of her captivity, remain in your house: Second, the captive woman had to show a change of allegiance. This showed that the captive woman no longer regarded her former nation and her former family; now she was a citizen of Israel.

Mourn her father and mother a full month: Third, the captive woman had to mourn her past associations. This would be time when she could resolve issues in her heart regarding her family, and when her husband-to-be could live with her a month without intimate relations — so he could see if he really wanted to take this woman as a wife, and to make sure he was not making a decision based only of physical appearance or attractiveness.

**21:14** You certainly shall not sell her for money; you shall not treat her brutally: After the month of mourning, the potential husband was free to marry the captive woman — yet, he did not have to. But if he decided not to, he had to set her free with dignity. This was a remarkable protection of the rights of a captive woman.

### **The Right of the Firstborn – Verses 15-17**

**<sup>15</sup>If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other, and both bear him sons but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love, <sup>16</sup>when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love. <sup>17</sup>He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father's strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him.**

**21:15-16** If a man has two wives: Obviously, there are going to be problems in a home like this, especially if there is one loved and the other unloved. Yet, God commanded that the inheritance rights of the firstborn son be respected, even if he were the son of the unloved wife.

**21:17** A double portion of all that he has: This was the right of the firstborn in ancient Israel; the firstborn son was to receive twice as much inheritance as any other son. For example, if there were three sons, the inheritance would be divided into four parts, with the firstborn receiving two parts, and the other three sons each receiving one part.

### **The Penalty For A Rebellious Son – Verses 18-21**

**<sup>18</sup> If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, <sup>19</sup> his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. <sup>20</sup> They shall say to the elders, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.” <sup>21</sup> Then all the men of his town are to stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.**

**21:18-21** Disobedient and rebellious children were to be brought before the elders of the city and stoned to death. There is no biblical or archaeological evidence that this punishment was ever carried out, but the point was that disobedience and rebellion were not to be tolerated in the home or allowed to continue unchecked. These principles must never be used to justify or overlook abuse or harsh treatment of children. While firm guidance may be needed with strong consequences for disobedience, the Bible does not condone physical, verbal, or emotional abuse of children.

### **The Curse Upon One Who Hangs On A Tree – Verses 22-23**

**<sup>22</sup> If someone guilty of a capital offense is put to death and their body is exposed on a pole, <sup>23</sup> you must not leave the body hanging on the pole overnight. Be sure to bury it that same day, because anyone who is hung on a pole is under God’s curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.**

**21:22** And you hang him on a tree: In the thinking of ancient Israel there was something worse than being put to death. Worse than that was to be put to death and to have your corpse left exposed to shame, humiliation, and scavenging animals and birds.

**22:23** His body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day: Therefore, if anyone was executed and deemed worthy of such disgrace (and you hang him on a tree), the humiliation to his memory and his family must not be excessive. This was a way of tempering even the most severe judgment with mercy.

**22:23** For he who is hanged is accursed of God: The punishment of being hanged on a tree, and left to open exposure, was thought to be so severe, that it was reserved only for those for which it was to be declared: “this one is accursed of God.”

Paul expounds on Deuteronomy 21:23 in Galatians 3:13-14: Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Jesus not only died in our place; but He also took the place as the accursed of God, being hung on a “tree” in open shame and degradation. He received this curse, which we deserved, and He did not, so that we could receive the blessing of Abraham, which He deserved, and we did not. We are redeemed from the curse of the law by the work of Jesus on the cross for us. We no longer have to fear that God wants to curse us; He wants to bless us, not because of who we are, or what we have done, but because of what Jesus Christ has done on our behalf.