

Deut. 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:

Deut. 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:

Deut. 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;

Deut. 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:

Deut. 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*:

Deut. 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:

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

Deut. 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.

Deut. 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 section of verses needed to be taken as a whole. They outline instructions as to the proper response to discovering a dead person in the land and no one has knowledge as to how he/she died. The appointed rulers of the land are to determine what city is closest to where the body was found. The elders of that city are to take a young cow that has never been used for any type of work to a valley area with a running stream that is not used for crop purposes. They are then to chop off the cow's head. They are to bring in priests from the tribe of Levi, whom God has designated as judges among the people, to preside over these actions. The elders are then to wash their hands over the beheaded cow and declare that they are innocent of that person's death. They are to ask for YHWH to show mercy to His people and not hold them accountable for that person's death. Point is made that God will then not hold them accountable for the death of that person.

Everywhere in scripture is taught God's sovereignty over life and death and the great value that God places on every human life. I think this ritual was important to driving home this truth.

It's interesting to note that in their declaration to God of their innocence, they are to make reference to the truth that God is Israel's Redeemer. That redemption in their recent experience was physical regarding their deliverance from Egypt. More importantly, however, is the reference to God's plan of spiritual redemption that at that moment in history is already accomplished in the mind of God.

I was about to move on when the phrase "when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the LORD" arrested my attention. I couldn't help but make

application to what is happening in America today. I'm afraid that the church as a whole has to accept some accountability toward the establishment of a culture that allows the wholesale slaughter of human beings through abortion and fosters morals that lead to murder through the "entertainment" we embrace and the character of the people we elect to leadership at all levels of government. Once we allowed the lie to prevail that God does not belong in our schools or government, the floodgates for evil to enter in were opened wide.

Deut. 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,

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

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

Deut. 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.

Deut. 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.

Well, this one is going to be difficult for me. It is directly connected to the women who have been taken captive as prisoners of war according to the guidelines established in the previous chapter. Obviously, there would be some beautiful women among the conquered who would appeal to some of the men. Rather than requiring them to burn with lust, permission is given for them to take these women as wives. Before consummating the marriage, however, they were to take her home and shave her head, cut her nails and give her normal clothes to wear. She is then to be allowed to mourn the loss of her father and mother for a full month. After that, the marriage may be consummated. Now comes the most disturbing part to me—If, however, the man decides that she doesn't please him, he is to free her; he is not to sell her for profit since he has acted in accordance with his own selfish desires--without regard to what pleases her I think is implied.

Some commentators indicate that all was done with the compliance of the woman and that these acts of cleansing indicated a public break of her ties to her former culture and a desire to become a Jewish proselyte. I just don't see that in the natural reading of these verses.

Suffice it to say that this section of scripture is a bit disconcerting to me. My mind did make a connection to the words of Jesus regarding divorce.

Matthew 19:7-8 "They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so."

This seems to be in recognition of the fact that the law as delivered by Moses takes into account that the law does not empower one to live by it. Therefore,

provision was made to address some issues (usually involving the lust of the flesh) so as to limit those acts from leading to even worse actions. The true intent of the law as revealed by Jesus would take into account the provision of the Holy Spirit to empower the individual to be obedient.

Deut. 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:

Deut. 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:

Deut. 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.

Again, we are addressing instruction according to allowances made in recognition of the “hardness of the hearts” of the people as addressed in the verses from Matthew above. God established marriage to be between one man and one woman.

Matthew 19:4-6 “And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Still, if a man chose to take on two wives, and he loved one more than the other, he could not show favoritism to the son of the favorite regarding the right of the firstborn. The firstborn son was to receive the double portion of inheritance even if he was the son of the least loved wife.

Deut. 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:

Deut. 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;

Deut. 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.

Deut. 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.

Another hard section of scripture. And again, I think one has to try and understand the reason for such harsh judgment. The description is of parents who are fed up with their son who has refused to respond to all their attempts to chasten or discipline him; he persists in being stubborn and rebellious. He is evidently old enough to defy them in practicing gluttony and drunkenness. The Hebrew for *gluttony* includes a reference to loose morals. Yet, he is still subject to being physically brought before the elders of the city. The parents are obviously God-fearing and concerned about how his actions may impact others; otherwise, they surely would not consider such drastic actions. In bringing him before the elders and making public accusation, they are basically declaring that they have

no hope in effecting change in his character. The resulting judgment is that the men of the city stone him to death.

I was surprised that the directive did not require the father and mother to cast the first stones. I would imagine that the reputation of the son would be well known. Also, in that culture the more sons a man had it was considered a blessing. This action would be one of obvious last resort and done in fear of God.

Swift execution of judgment is a definite deterrent to evil.

Ecclesiastes 8:11 "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

I think that is one of the contributing factors to the spread of crime throughout our nation today. The legal system allows crime to go untried for months or years; and punishment is often far too lenient to serve as a deterrent even when carried out. On the other hand, the justice system is so inconsistent that sometimes people guilty of lesser crimes are given harsher swifter sentencing than those who commit more heinous crimes. I, of course, think this all stems from the fact that we as a society have so alienated ourselves from God and the principles established in His word.

Deut. 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:

Deut. 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.

Scripture is clear in establishing the death penalty for certain offenses / crimes. Emphasis needs to be given to the fact that offenses subject to capital punishment were determined by God—not man. Some examples of offenses punishable by death as established by God include:

Exodus 21:12, 15-17, 29; 22:19; 31:14 "He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death....And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death....And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death....And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death....But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death....Whosoever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death....Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people."

I'm not going to address any of these criteria except to say that God expected the people to yield to Him as Lord in such actions. The body of the person executed was sometimes hung on a tree; I would assume this was to serve as further deterrence regarding the consequences of disobedience to God. The body is to be buried the same day the person is executed. Why the body was considered

cursed by God for hanging from a tree makes no sense to me except in light of the fact that His precious Son would be hung from a tree in sacrifice for our sin.

All instruction given to the people through Moses were vivid in declaring the holiness and righteousness of God in comparison to the character of man. Dealing with sin according to the guidelines He established gave evidence of wanting to maintain a pure relationship with Him. It served as a way of cleansing the land from the consequences of sins committed by the people in it.