

## Deuteronomy 19:1-21:9 (January 29, 2021)

**Reflection:** *Why is human life valuable to God? Why does God have the power to decide matters of life and death?*

*i. Why is human life valuable to God?*

Genesis 9:5–6 – made in God’s image

- Man has a soul give to him by God
- God has given life as a gift, and can take that life back
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*ii. Why does God have the power to decide matters of life and death?*

God is sovereign over all life. Not only is he in control over life, but he also has sovereign say about life (1 Chronicles 29:11-12). Only He can create it, and only He has determined the number of our days (Ps. 90:10–12) and has “appointed” the day of our death (Heb. 9:27).

### **Read Deuteronomy 19:1-14 – Asylum Cities**

**1. What are Moses’ instructions for the asylum cities? (v.1-9) What should the asylum cities do with intentional murder? (v.11-13)**

*i. What are Moses’ instructions for the asylum cities? (v.1-7)*

- When the Israelites destroy the nations, whose land is given to them and driven them out, and settled on land
- Set aside 3 asylum cities in the land of Canaan, build roads, divide into three parts the land three parts.
- So anyone can flee there
  - o Example: someone goes into forest with neighbour to cut wood, and as he swings his ax to fell a tree, and head of ax flies off and kills neighbour. The man may flee to one of these cities.
- Otherwise, the avenger in blood might pursue him in a rage, overtake him even though he is no deserving of death

### **Notes to Leader:**

**Avenger in blood:** In the Bible, an avenger of blood is a person legally responsible for carrying out vengeance when a family member has been unlawfully killed or murdered. The avenger of blood is usually the nearest male relative of the murdered person. This family executioner seeks justice by killing the individual responsible for the death of his relative.

The Mosaic Law regulated the actions of the avenger of blood by providing cities of refuge for the accused. An individual who committed manslaughter, or the unintentional and accidental killing of a person, could find sanctuary in any of the six designated cities of refuge throughout the land of Israel (Numbers 35:10–15, 22–25; Deuteronomy 19:4–6; Joshua 20:1–6). In these towns, the avenger of blood’s quarry was legally protected and guaranteed a fair trial. ~Gotquestions

*ii. What is the exception for the Asylum cities for manslaughter? (v.11-13)*

- But if he hates his neighbor and kills him, flees
- Elders of those towns send for him bring him back from the city and hand him over to the avenger of blood to die
- Show him no pity. You must purge from Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood, so that it may go well with you

**2. Why would their boundaries be enlarged, and what was the purpose of building 3 more refuge cities? (v.8-10) What did Moses say about moving the boundary stones? (v.14)**

*i. Why would their boundaries be enlarged, and what was the purpose of building 3 more refuge cities?*

Their land would be enlarged if they did what them by following all these laws, I command you today – to love the Lord your God and to walk always in his ways because it was a promise God made to their forefathers

The reason they should build 3 more cities is so that innocent blood will not be shed in your land, which the lord your God is giving you as your inheritance, and so be guilty of bloodshed

*ii. What did Moses say about moving the boundary stones? (v.14)*

To not move the boundary stone set up by predecessors in Canaan

**3. How should we look at taking revenge or vengeance as Christians in the New Covenant? What is a biblical way to look at retribution? (cf. Matt 5:38-48, Rom 12:17–13:4)**

*i. How should we look at taking revenge or vengeance as Christians in the New Covenant?*

It is an Old Testament belief – God is the avenger, he just allowed avengers in blood (Deu 32:43)

- we are called to love our enemies and allow God to be the ones who judge people good or ill. He can do so by using governing authorities, or we may need to wait for second coming

*ii. What is a biblical way to look at retribution? (cf. Matt 5:38-48, Rom 12:17–13:4)*

- We are to love our neighbours, but this doesn't preclude our desire for God to bring justice
- Our desire for justice should not be bent towards individuals

**Notes to Leader:**

- Numbers 35:24-38 speak more about this. The town asylum should respond to the fugitive. These regulations call for its citizens to hear the case, and adjudicate between the fugitive and the avenger of blood, and respond accordingly to the judgement.
- Blood avenger – “hot” could be based on hardness of heart that it was there, and a life was taken.

**Read Deuteronomy 19:15-21 – Court and Laws**

**4. What is the instructions about a witness to a crime? (v.15), What if the witness is a false witness? (v.16-21)**

*i. What is the instructions about a witness to a crime? (v.15)*

- One witness is no enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense
  - it must be established by two or three witnesses

*ii. What if the witness is a false witness? (v.16-21)*

If witness is hostile, the two men will stand before priests, judges, and presence of the Lord. The judges will investigate the situation, and if the witness is a liar, then the sentence for his brother will be against him.

We must purge evil from our sight, and let the other people be afraid to not do this evil. Show that person no pity, life for life, eye for eye, tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot

**Notes to Leader:**

- Righteousness in Old Testament in resolving situations – Eye for an Eye, tooth for a tooth
- The concept of “an eye for eye,” sometimes called *jus talionis* or *lex talionis*, is part of the Mosaic Law used in the Israelites' justice system. The principle is that the punishment must fit the crime and there should be a just penalty for evil actions: “If there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise” (Exodus 21:23–25). Justice should be equitable; excessive harshness and excessive leniency should be avoided.~Gotquestions

## **Read Deuteronomy 20:1-20 – Warfare**

### **5. Why should Israel be encouraged when they go to war? (20:1-5)**

- When they have chariots and greater army than you do not be afraid because of the Lord
  - o Because he brought you out of Egypt
- Priest will address the army “Do not be afraid because God is who fights for you against your enemies to give you victory”

### **6. What are some life situations that allowed soldiers not to go to battle? Why do you think these life situations might exempt men from battle? (v.5-9)**

#### *i. What are some life situations that allowed soldiers not to go to battle?*

- In first grouping, house dedication, vineyard, marriage.
- The second grouping, fear of a warrior from military service out of respect for the psychological effect of his presence on his comrades.
  - To faint hearted, the brutality and life-threatening nature of war cause fear.

#### *ii. Why do you think these life situations might exempt men from battle? (v.5-9)*

- First grouping – In the ancient world people who were in transition were seen as vulnerable. They could be distracted; their minds might be away from battle. Furthermore, these policies affirm family and domestic values and the right to enjoy the blessings of life.
- Second groupings, When Israel’s citizen army fights Yahweh’s wars, the characters of individual troops is more important than their numbers
  - o What matters is that the army are of those who trusted in the Lord rather than number of troops

### **7. What are the instructions for attacking a city? What are the instructions for attacking one of the cities God has given to Israel as an inheritance? (20:10-18), What should they do with trees when laying siege to a city? (v.19-20)**

#### *i. What are the instructions for attacking a city? Attacking one of the cities God has given to Israel as an inheritance? (20:10-18),*

- When attacking a city
  - o Offer people peace, subject to force labor and they shall work for you
  - o If they refuse, lay siege
  - o When God delivers it, put all men to the sword
  - o All women, children, and livestock and everything else may take as plunder
  - o Treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby
    - NTS: places in view Aramaeans
- Canaanite cities are an inheritance, do not leave anything that breathes alive
  - o Completely destroy them as the Lord your God has commanded
  - o Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do worshipping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God

#### *ii. What should they do with trees when laying siege to a city? (v.19-20)*

- When you lay siege, do not destroy trees that bear fruit
  - o Could be used as food supply
  - o For humankind depends on trees. Don’t bite the hand that feeds you, don’t kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. Trees symbolize life.

**Why?** Many ancient near east countries, such as Egypt, would lay waste to the land . Israel was to not follow in these practices, and be guided by a good sense of utility. Fruit trees were not to be cut down because they provided food for Israel after they had won the battle. “for are the trees of the field human” the land was not Israel’s enemy, the Canaanite nation was.

**8. Is God just when he commits all the Canaanites to destruction?(cf. Deu 18:9-14, 20:18),How does this lead us to think about Final Judgement?(Romans 3:23, 2 Cor 5:10, Rev 20:11-15)**

**i. Is God just when he commits all the Canaanites to destruction? (cf. Deu 18:9-14, 20:18)**

- God is sovereign over all life and has the absolute right to exercise his power in anyway he chooses.
- Canaanite was sinful Deu 20:18, They practiced such things as child sacrifice, incest, adultery, temple prostitution, and various other horrible acts.
- keeping Canaanites in the land would also pollute Israel, causing more wickedness.

**ii. How does this lead us to think about Final Judgement? (Romans 3:23, 2 Cor 5:10, Rev 20:11-15)**

- All of are sinners, we are guilty, and all of us will judged by God
- What God did justly to the Canaanites, many in our world will face at judgement

**Read Deuteronomy 21:1-9 – Unsolved Murder**

**9. What happens if there is an unsolved murder in the land? (21:1-9)**

- Your elders and judges shall go out and measure the distance from the body to the neighboring towns, and nearest town shall take a heifer that has never been working and has never worn a yoke
- Lead her down a valley that has not been plowed or planted and where there is a flowing stream
- There in valley and break the heifer’s neck
- The priests, sons of Levi, shall step forward because this is part of their role,
- All elders should wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley
  - o Declare: Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. Accept for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, O Lord, and do not hold your people guilty of the blood of an innocent man
- The bloodshed will be atoned for
- Sow you will purge from yourselves the guilt of shedding innocent blood, since you have done what is right in the eyes of the Lord

**Note to Leaders:**

this is a ritual for a land and people who have been disturbed by dealing with the criminal. It is to help people to atone for the people and to purge from their midst that has been violently shed.

- Though heifer never mentioned as unblemished, and the yoke would mean its purpose is dedicated.
- Flowing water stream, no service been preformed in it, has never been planted. It may best be understood as a re-enactment of the murder. An innocent life was taken, an innocent local.
- Elders declare their innocence and plead for mercy. They neither shed blood nor witnessed the crime.
- Priests would do their duty of to ensure its proper performance. And serve as witnesses. Likely, they may announce the lifeing of blood guilt and replacement of this curse with blessing of Yahweh behalf

**10. Reflect on why such a situation would require such a robust ritual.**

**1. Sanctity of human life**

- The blood of a person demands a response from the people, esepically if no one can be brought to account for a heinous act before God. This was how the people of Israel were to remain righteous before God, when the

**2. Corporate responsibility of the community before God**

- Something that we see throughout this passage is the corporate responsibility of God's people to address murder. No different with a unsolved murder, that the entire community should be involved.

**Note to Leaders:**

- Though the actions in these verses does not preclude the continuing investigation into the cause of the death by the officers of the law.

***Respecting human life is part of God's expectation for righteous living, and handling matters of human life and death requires the whole community. God has the power to dictate to his creation how they should see life, what deserves death, and how Israel is to respond to differing situations. Since at least 2007, our country has seen between 85-105,000 abortions a year, and those deaths are unanswered in our land. Do our hearts break over how we as a country value human life?***