

Family Worship Study Guide: Removing the Guilt of Innocent Blood

Deuteronomy 21

Introduction to the Study

As we look at this detailed section of the law in Deuteronomy 21, we come to a case law concerning an unsolved murder. This passage is intimately connected to the Sixth Commandment, which declares, "Thou shalt not kill." It deals directly with the protection of human life and the grave consequences when innocent blood is shed.

While the exact ceremony of the heifer in the valley belongs to the civil administration of ancient Israel, the moral law and the ethical theology that underlie this text are permanent. Because man is made in the image of God, murder is a desperately wicked act. This week, we will guide our families through this sobering text, teaching our children the sanctity of human life, the biblical concept of jurisdiction, the tragedy of abortion in our land, and ultimately, the beautiful story of redemption found only in the innocent blood of Jesus Christ.

Day 1: The Sanctity of Human Life

Deuteronomy 21:1 (NKJV)

"If anyone is found slain, lying in the field in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess, and it is not known who killed him..."

Devotional Teaching

If we are going to understand this text, we need to begin by considering the biblical and theological context that forms the foundation for it. We must go all the way back to the book of Genesis. Man is made in the image of God. Therefore, murder is a desperately wicked act that strikes at the very image of God and, consequently, at God Himself. To murder a fellow human being is essentially an attempt to kill God in effigy. It is a man saying to his Creator, "I hate you, and because I cannot get a hold of you, I will destroy someone made in your image."

Because of this, biblical justice requires the death penalty for murder. This is the clear and consistent doctrine of the law of God. Only this will satisfy the offended honor of the Creator. Whenever a man is murdered, there must be satisfaction for the life of the dead man. The biblical formula is blood for blood.

In this case law, a man has been found slain in a field, and after a careful inquiry, the killer cannot be found. Is this a matter that should concern us? The text of the Scripture provides an answer. It is a matter of profound concern, so much so that God devoted an entire

section of His law to address it. We cannot be at ease on the matter of murder. We must teach our families to hold a deep, holy reverence for human life, recognizing that every person bears the mark of the Creator.

Questions for Children

1. Why does God hate murder so much?
2. When we remember that other people are made in the image of God, how should that change the way we treat them?

Parent and Adult Reflection Questions

1. How does the biblical truth that man is made in the image of God contrast with the way the modern world views human life?
2. Do we cultivate a true abhorrence for violence and murder in our homes, or have we allowed entertainment and culture to desensitize us?

Family Prayer Prompt

O Lord, You are the Creator of all life, and You have made man in Your own image. Forgive us for the times we have failed to value the lives of others. Give us a holy reverence for human life, and help us to treat every person we meet with the dignity that honors You as their Maker. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 2: The Importance of Jurisdiction

Deuteronomy 21:2-3 (NKJV)

"Then your elders and your judges shall go out and measure the distance from the slain man to the surrounding cities. And it shall be that the elders of the city nearest to the slain man will take a heifer which has not been worked and which has not pulled with a yoke."

Devotional Teaching

Notice the very first thing that happens before the law can be carried out: the elders and judges are to measure the distance to the surrounding cities to determine who has jurisdiction in the case. Until jurisdiction is established, nothing else can be done. What do we mean by this? Jurisdiction refers to having the authority, the legal status, and the right to declare and apply God's law in a particular sphere.

In God's order, in God's way, He has given us four governments: self-government, family government, church government, and civil government. Whenever the law of God needs to be applied, it must be applied by those who have been appointed to that specific

jurisdiction. It is not enough that God's law be carried out; it must be carried out by those ordained to do so.

Parents, God has given you jurisdiction over your children. You have the responsibility to act on their behalf, to discipline them, and to apply God's Word to their lives. We cannot surrender this jurisdiction to the state, to the public schools, or even to the church. We cannot say, "I am too busy, I will let somebody else do it." When we abandon the sphere of authority God has given us, the result is societal breakdown. We must faithfully govern the sphere God has entrusted to us, doing what is right in the sight of the Lord.

Questions for Children

1. What does it mean that your parents have "jurisdiction" or authority over you?
2. Who gave your parents the responsibility to teach and discipline you?

Parent and Adult Reflection Questions

1. Are there areas in your family life where you have been tempted to surrender your God-given jurisdiction to outside influences?
2. How does understanding jurisdiction protect us from trying to control situations or people that God has not placed under our authority?

Family Prayer Prompt

Father, we thank You that You are a God of order and peace, not of confusion. We pray for the parents in this home, that they would faithfully exercise the jurisdiction You have given them. Give them the wisdom to lead and protect this family, and give the children a willing heart to submit as unto the Lord. Amen.

Day 3: The Defilement of the Land

Deuteronomy 21:7-8 (NKJV)

"Then they shall answer and say, 'Our hands have not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen it. Provide atonement, O LORD, for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, and do not lay innocent blood to the charge of Your people Israel.' And atonement shall be provided on their behalf for the blood."

Devotional Teaching

The Scripture teaches that murder defiles the land that opens its mouth to receive a man's blood. When Cain slew Abel, God told him that his brother's blood was crying out from the ground for justice. The good land that was made to sustain life becomes polluted when it is

stained with innocent blood. In this case law, the elders were required to put an animal to death vicariously, wash their hands, and plead with God for mercy so the guilt of innocent blood would not rest on their city.

This brings us to a deeply sobering reality for our own nation. The guilt of state-sanctioned abortion must be defined as the shedding of innocent blood. Every time a child is killed in the womb, a murder is committed. Since 1973, millions and millions of children have been slaughtered with the approval of our authorities. The land is defiled, and the blood of the innocents cries to God for vengeance.

If one unsolved murder brought the land of Israel under God's displeasure, what is the deserved judgment of our nation today? We ought to tremble in the fear of God. We must not turn a deaf ear to this cry. We must plead with God to have mercy on us, recognizing that the guilt of innocent blood rests heavy upon our society.

Questions for Children

1. When someone does something wicked in secret, does God still see it and care about it?
2. Why should we pray for the babies in our nation who cannot protect themselves?

Parent and Adult Reflection Questions

1. How does the biblical reality that "blood defiles the land" change the way you view the political and social issues of our day?
2. Is your heart grieved over the shedding of innocent blood, or have you grown accustomed to it?

Family Prayer Prompt

Righteous God, we confess that our nation is defiled by the shedding of innocent blood, especially the blood of millions of unborn children. We deserve Your severe judgment. We plead with You for mercy. Change the hearts of our leaders, bring our nation to repentance, and end this holocaust. Have mercy on us, O Lord. Amen.

Day 4: True Justice and False Innocence

Deuteronomy 21:9 (NKJV)

"So you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you when you do what is right in the sight of the LORD."

Devotional Teaching

The only way to put away the guilt of innocent blood was to do exactly what was right in the sight of the Lord. The elders had to follow God's law precisely. This law does not encourage vigilantism. If a citizen takes the law into his own hands and executes a murderer without proper authority, he has committed a murder himself. God's justice must be carried out in God's way, by the civil rulers He has appointed.

When we read of the elders washing their hands to declare their innocence, it is hard not to think of Pilate. At the trial of Jesus, Pilate took water, washed his hands before the multitude, and said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person." But Pilate's actions were empty and cowardly. He was the chief magistrate. It was his duty to protect the innocent, yet he handed the Son of God over to a mob.

All the water in the world could not cleanse Pilate's hands from the guilt of innocent blood because he did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord. We cannot merely claim to be innocent of the sins of our culture; we must actively do what is right. We must govern our homes righteously, support leaders who honor God's law, and boldly stand for the truth of Scripture in a wicked generation.

Questions for Children

1. If someone does something wrong, should we punish them ourselves, or should we go to the proper authority like our parents?
2. Why didn't washing his hands make Pilate innocent of what happened to Jesus?

Parent and Adult Reflection Questions

1. Why is doing things "in God's order" just as important as achieving the outcome we desire?
2. How can we ensure that we are not acting like Pilate—washing our hands of a difficult situation rather than standing up for what is right?

Family Prayer Prompt

Lord, keep us from the cowardice of Pilate. Give us the courage to do what is right in Your sight, no matter what it costs us. We pray for our civil magistrates today, that they would govern according to Your law and punish wickedness properly. Keep our own hands clean from sin, and help us to trust Your perfect justice. Amen.

Day 5: The Innocent Blood That Saves

Matthew 27:25 (NKJV)

"And all the people answered and said, 'His blood be on us and on our children.'"

Devotional Teaching

When Pilate washed his hands, the crowds shouted for the guilt of Christ's blood to fall upon them. In Deuteronomy, the elders prayed, "Lord, do not lay innocent blood to our charge." But the mob in Jerusalem cried out, "We want Him dead! Put the guilt of His blood on us!" And God heard them. The guilt of that innocent blood was charged to that generation, resulting in the terrifying destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

But here we find the great mystery of redemption. The innocence of Jesus Christ was far beyond the innocence of any murdered man; His was the innocence of absolute, divine sinlessness. He was the spotless Lamb of God. He was unjustly condemned, pierced through, and slaughtered by wicked men.

Yet, this is the center of the gospel message: the very blood that was shed in perfect innocence is the only means by which guilty sinners can be forgiven. Abel's blood cried out from the ground for vengeance and judgment, but the blood of Jesus Christ cries out from the cross for mercy and atonement. If we repent of our sins and trust in the merits of His atoning sacrifice, we are washed clean. We now live on this side of the cross, and the mercy of God is abundant to all who will look to the Savior.

Questions for Children

1. Who is the only person who ever lived a completely perfect and innocent life?
2. Why did Jesus let wicked men shed His blood on the cross?

Parent and Adult Reflection Questions

1. How does the contrast between the blood of a murdered man (crying for vengeance) and the blood of Christ (crying for mercy) deepen your love for the Gospel?
2. Have you truly rested your hope entirely on the shed blood of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins?

Family Prayer Prompt

Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank You for the great mystery of the Gospel. We thank You that while we were guilty rebels, Jesus Christ laid down His innocent life for us. We praise You that His blood washes away all our sin. Keep us near the cross, and let our family live in joyful obedience to the Savior who redeemed us. In Jesus' name, Amen.