

Message #26**Deuteronomy 21:1-23**

For many years, we have communicated that the only thing any person needs for life is the word of God. Now most people don't believe this. In fact, most people are quick to look everywhere else except the word of God for situations in life.

In this ministry we do counseling, but it isn't your normal type of counseling. Our counseling is simple - here is what God's word says to do, obey it and life will be good. You would not believe some of the things we have listened to in the past 40 plus years. Every possible problem and every scenario you can think up I have heard. In almost every instance, in almost every situation of life, we are able to go to God's word and say here is the solution, obey it and enjoy life. Problem is, most people don't do it.

We are in a very practical part of the book of Deuteronomy. This part of the book is designed to show God's people how to honor God in various situations and contexts of life so that they always have the favor and blessings of God. God is very much interested in our daily existence and daily life. He is very much interested in what we do.

ANY NATION OR INDIVIDUAL, WHO WANTS THE BLESSINGS OF GOD, MUST SEEK TO OBEY GOD'S WORD IN ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE.

If a nation is to have the blessings of God, it must seek to know and apply God's word to real life situations. If a nation or individual is to experience the blessings of God, it cannot turn its head to sin. It cannot allow a free-for-all society to exist, in which there is no accountability for anything that anyone does or says.

There are five specific situations spelled out in this chapter:

SITUATION #1 – What to do when you find a dead body. **21:1-9**

God considers homicidal murder to be a serious shedding of innocent blood and He will not bless a nation that does nothing about it.

So far we have studied situations connected to homicide or manslaughter that have had some type of witness. But there would be times when there would not be any witness. There are times when a corpse is found and there is evidence that it was not a natural death and there are not any witnesses to testify of what happened. So what do you do? How do you handle it? What is the right thing to do before God?

Every now and then we learn of some body or skull that has been found in some remote area and no one even knows who the person is. Fortunately today, we have DNA and forensics that often can discover who the individual is, but not always. There are over 6,000 unsolved cases in the United States every year. According to Cold Case Homicide statistics from 1980-2019, there have been over 19,000 unsolved homicides in this state of Michigan. So this does happen.

According to **verse 1**, when God's people got into the Promised Land, there may be a situation in which a dead body was found somewhere out in open country. It is not found in a basement or trunk of a car or buried in a grave in the backyard; this body is found in open country. It could be found in the mountains or fields or woods.

The text says the body was that of a "slain person." That word slain (chalal) is one that refers to one who has been mortally wounded often by some piercing (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p.281). This word is used multiple times in this chapter - 21:1, 2, 3, 6.

When we track the use of this word in the O.T., it is sometimes used of one who is the victim of intentional homicide by sword (Num. 19:16; Ez. 31:17-18).

It is clear from this verse that the cause of death when you looked at this body was not natural. Apparently one could see that there appeared to be homicidal wounds on the body in that the person had been "struck." Now this word (nacad) in Hebrew means this one had been struck and killed (*Ibid.*, p. 549).

Perhaps the body had a fractured or crushed skull. Perhaps there were stab wounds, but what is clear is that when you looked at this body, you knew it had been a homicide.

By virtue of the fact that this crime was committed "in the land" indicates that this was committed in the sacred Promised Land that God had given to Israel. So this crime is a double homicide crime. **First, it is a crime against the victim, and second, it is a crime committed in God's appointed sacred land.**

So the question arises what do you do? How do you make this right? How do you keep on track for the blessings of God if you find a murdered dead body?

God gives seven specific guidelines to follow in solving this kind of case. These guidelines are still good guidelines to use in any homicide case. But these guidelines do show that those in the Promised Land would be interested in obeying the word of God, regardless of outcome:

Guideline #1 - Contact legal authorities. 21:2a

The legal authorities would be the elders of the city and the judges. So if a person found this dead body, they would need to contact the legal authorities.

Guideline #2 - Legal authorities need to begin by looking at closest location. 21:2b-3a

The place to begin to look is in places closest to the body. If the body were out in a field, the distance was to be measured to the closest city and the investigation was to be started there. This is still what the police do. When a dead body is discovered, they start with the closest relatives to see what they know.

Guideline #3 - The Elders of that city are to conduct a specific ceremony. **21:3b-4**

The Elders of the city closest to the dead body were to select a heifer that had never been broken and they were to lead the heifer to a valley with running water and break the neck of the heifer.

The unbroken heifer represents something that had not been contaminated by humans and the place where this was to be done was a place that would be uncultivated by humans, therefore making this the ideal sacrifice and ideal place of sacrifice.

Now the mode of death was not a shedding of blood mode of death. So this was not a blood sacrifice, but a broken neck sacrifice. Now the reason for this is probably because a blood sacrifice had to be offered on an altar at a place of God's choosing. Since this murder occurred out in some field, then a sacrifice was to occur near the place where it occurred because it was in God's sacred land.

It would be interesting to see what would happen if a true minister of God were brought to the place where a dead body was found to pray that God would intervene and allow the perpetrator to be caught. Instead of contacting some psychic, this would be a much wiser approach because it would show God they were interested in justice.

Guideline #4 - God-appointed leaders were to participate in the ceremony. **21:5**

The priests and sons of Levi of that city, who had been chosen by God, were to come and bless the name of the Lord and were to analyze every dispute and assault case that had occurred in that city.

Contextually, there obviously was a murderer in the city and these leaders were to examine known cases of argument and assault to determine how things had been settled.

Guideline #5 - All of the near city elders were to wash their hands over the heifer. **21:6**

This was to illustrate that they were clean and innocent of the death. This would also indicate that they were innocent of knowing who the murderer actually was.

Guideline #6 - All of the elders are to acknowledge that they did not kill the man nor see who did. **21:7**

There was to be an honest account given by the leaders. They were to publicly acknowledge that they had no idea who had done this. There was to be no cover-up.

Guideline #7 - All of the elders are to ask God to forgive the people and do not make this place guilty of shedding innocent blood. **21:8**

No matter what God ever does to the land of Israel and to Jerusalem, it will be completely justified and right. The people of that city murdered Jesus Christ. They shed innocent blood and they killed the Son of God.

Verse 9 says if the leaders follow this formula and these guidelines, God will remove the guilt from their midst. We may assume that this could mean God would also permit the homicidal felon to surface so he could be punished.

SITUATION #2 – What to do when one sees a woman he wants to marry. **21:10-14**

Now Moses moves from murder to marriage. When Israel was in the Promised Land, they would fight battles and there would be times when after they had taken a city there were women and children who were captured. As we saw last time, the women and the children and animals would become legitimate spoil for the people of God (Deut. 20:14).

Now if an Israelite man saw a beautiful woman who had been captured, God made a provision whereby he could marry her, providing that she was not from some Canaanite nation (Deut. 7:3; Ex. 34:16).

Now if a man were to want to marry one of the captive non-Canaanite women, there were specific guidelines he was to follow. This woman was not to be treated like some piece of property. She was not to be raped or made to feel like some slave. She was to be honored as a wife and she was to go through a legal process:

Guideline #1 - She is to be taken to her future husband's home. **21:12a**

She was not to be kept in some secret motel or apartment somewhere. She was to be brought into the home.

Guideline #2 - She is to shave her head. **21:12b**

Now this initially seems odd, but the fact is she is cutting off all ties to her previous life. She is getting a new fresh start. People can have a fresh beginning, but they need to get rid of the old things.

Guideline #3 - She is to trim her nails. **21:12c**

These things were symbolic illustrating that she was going to have a new life.

Guideline #4 - She was to take off captivity clothes and dressed in new clothes. **21:13a**

God did not want this woman wearing her old worldly clothes. She was to put on new clothes.

Guideline #5 - She was to be able to mourn for her mother and father for one month. **21:13b**

God permitted this woman to honor her father and mother and mourn for them. But she could not continue on in a depressed state. She could mourn for one month. Who wants to be married to a woman who is totally depressing to be around all the time?

Guideline #6 - She was to be intimate with her new husband after the month. **21:13c**

She was not to be raped. She was to be cared for and treated with respect of being a wife. Sexuality is an important part of marriage and after this initial month, she was to be intimate with her husband.

Guideline #7 - If she was not pleasing to her husband he was to let her go. **21:14**

Sometimes when one would marry someone from a different culture, it didn't work out right. She was not to be sold or mistreated in any way. He was to let her go wherever she wanted to go. God did not want people mistreated and He did not want people living a miserable life for the rest of their lives.

There are people who are very rigid when it comes to the subject of divorce. But there needs to be a healthy balance. Sometimes it happens and the Bible admits it and allows for it - Lev. 22:13; Numbers 30:9; Deuteronomy 21:14; 24:1-4.

The Bible also presents the fact that Divorce is not the ideal and it is not something that is loved by God - Lev. 21:7, 14; Deut. 22:19, 29; Mal. 2:16/Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-9; I Cor. 7:10-16. Often times people will say God hates divorce, which He does.

But He also hates haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run swiftly to evil, a false witness who utters lies and one who sows discord among the brethren (Prov. 6:16-19). In fact, He calls these things an abomination to Him and He never says that about Divorce.

Sometimes divorce happens and God's people should not fall apart when it does. There are things that can be done even in a case of divorce that will guarantee the blessings of God.

SITUATION #3 – What to do when you have two wives who each have sons. **21:15-17**

The fact is there were those who did have more than one wife back in this culture. There was a man like Uriah the Hittite, who had one wife, Bathsheba, and then there was a man like Solomon, who had 700 wives and 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3).

Now if there were two wives and one of the wives was loved more than another and each wife had a son, then the sons were not to be penalized when it came time for the father to distribute his property.

If the oldest son was born to the wife who was loved the least, then he still was entitled to the firstborn allocation of a double blessing. God did not want him shortchanging his son just because things didn't go well with the mother.

So he was entitled to the firstborn blessings.

SITUATION #4 – What to do with a stubborn and rebellious son. **21:18-21**

There are stubborn and rebellious children who are a nightmare. They are not to be coddled. The father and mother raises them and points them in the right ways of God, but they will not obey them. They try and discipline the child and it does no good. So God said when you have a child like that, here are the guidelines:

Guideline #1 - Grab the child and bring him out to the elders of the city of his hometown. **21:19**

Guideline #2 - The parents are to present their case about the child to the elders. **21:20**

They are to point out that the son is stubborn and rebellious and that he is a glutton and a drunk.

Guideline #3 - All the men of his city are to stone him to death. **21:21**

There will be two results:

(Result #1) - The evil will be removed from the midst of the people. **21:21a**

(Result #2) - The report of what happens to a rebellious child will impact all Israel. **21:21b**

Other children growing up will hear of it and not want to do it.

Punishment is a preventative.

SITUATION #5 – What to do with someone who commits a sin worthy of death. **21:22-23**

If a person commits a crime, like murder, which is worthy of the death penalty, he is to be executed, but not to be treated like garbage.

If he is hung, he is not to be hung out all night. He is to be buried before dark because anything that is hung on a tree is under God's curse.

We know that this has direct ramifications to Galatians 3:13 and Jesus Christ because Paul quoted this very verse in regard to what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross. He became a curse for us.

God is very much interested in how we live real life.