

# Deuteronomy 21 Commentary

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Moses on Mt Nebo (Deuteronomy 34:1+)  
Listen to Mt Nebo as you Ponder How Moses' May Have Felt

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deut

Source: Ryrie Study Bible

## Deuteronomy

| Dt 1:1-4:43                  | Dt 4:44-26:19                             | Dt 27:1-34:12                                |                                 |
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| Take Heed<br>Don't forget                                     | Ten<br>Commands                             | Related<br>Commands                 |                                 |                                 | Two Choices Affecting<br>the Future          |                                           | Moses' Parting<br>Words                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Dt 1:1-4:43<br>Looking Back                                   | Dt 4:44-11:32<br>Exposition of<br>Decalogue | Dt 12:1-16:17<br>Ceremonial<br>Laws | Dt 16:18-20:20<br>Civil<br>Laws | Dt 21:1-26:19<br>Social<br>Laws | Dt 27:1-28:68<br>Ratification of<br>Covenant | Dt 29:1-<br>30:20<br>Terms of<br>Covenant | Dt 31:1-34:12<br>Moses' Song,<br>Blessing, Death |
| <b>Plains of Moab</b>                                         |                                             |                                     |                                 |                                 |                                              |                                           |                                                  |
| <b>ca. 2 Months</b><br><b>Moses: Author</b><br>(Except Dt 34) |                                             |                                     |                                 |                                 |                                              |                                           |                                                  |

**Deuteronomy 21:1 "If a slain person is found lying in the open country in the land which the LORD your God gives you to possess, and it is not known who has struck him,**

- Ps 5:6 9:12 Pr 28:17 Isa 26:21 Ac 28:4
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Outline

- **Murder Mystery in Israel Dt 21:1-9**
- **Female Prisoners of War Dt 21:10-14**
- **Firstborn Inheritance Rights Dt 21:15-17**
- **The Rebellious Son Dt 21:18-21**
- **Miscellaneous Dt 21:22-22:12**

#### Related Passage:

Numbers 35:33-34+ 'So you shall not **pollute** (see [chaneph](#) below) **the land** in which you are; for **blood pollutes the land** and no **expiation** ([kaphar](#)) can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. 34 'You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD am dwelling in the midst of the sons of Israel.'

### UNSOLVED MURDER IN THE PROMISED LAND

**Coates** - Moses expanded his exposition of the sixth commandment, "You shall not murder," by covering a number of issues meant to maintain order. These verses discuss a specific case law regarding an unsolved murder.

**ESVSB** - These laws are given to keep the Promised Land free from desecration.

**McIntosh** - Although the victim of a crime may be unknown to the community, he is neither unknown nor forgotten before God. The community must declare its disapproval and its separation from such crimes. ([Holman Old Testament Commentary](#))

Here is the problem - Murder pollutes, desecrates or defiles YHWH's land and must be dealt with in an appropriate manner. Recall from Dt 19:12-13 that if the avenger of blood kills the murderer of his relative, the "theological effect" is to **purge the innocent blood from Israel** and then it would **go well** with them. Therefore, if there is a murder which is not avenged as in the present case, some kind of cleansing was still necessary to purge (Heb - baar - burning used figuratively to describe the consuming of the polluting effect) the land lest it be defiled.

**If a slain person is found lying in the open country in the land which the LORD your God gives you to possess, and it is not known who has struck him** - Presumably, death from natural causes had been ruled out and it was evident that the deceased had been murdered. There was no "CSI Israel" to solve the crime, but God desired the community to take responsibility because a murder had been committed in the land that God regarded as holy. Note how seriously the Lord takes bloodshed and violence (cf. Ge 4:10; 9:5, 6; Nu 35:33, 34).

**NET NOTE** - tn Heb "slain [one]." The term לָלַחַם (khalal) suggests something other than a natural death (cf. Num 19:16; 23:24; Jer

[IVP Bible Background Commentary](#) - . innocent blood procedures and concepts. See the comments on Numbers 19 dealing with the significance of the purification ritual and the use of the red heifer. These comments also deal with the importance of expiation for the shedding of "innocent blood." In Hittite law if a body was found out in the open country, the person's heir was entitled to some property from the town nearest the place where the body was found, up to three leagues' distance. This legislation is more concerned with the rights of the heir than with the issue of innocent bloodshed.

**What is the problem?** See the "Related Passage" above - Nu 35:33–34+ shows that even the blood of an 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.

**Polluted** (02610) [chaneph](#) means to be defiled, to be profane, to pollute, to corrupt, to be godless. "This word most often appears in association with the defilement of the land, suggesting a tainting not by active commission but by passive contact with those committing sin." (Baker) Chaneph denotes the pollution of the land through the shedding of blood (Nu. 35:33); through divorce (Jer. 3:1); and through breaking God's covenant (Isa. 24:5). The earth was "defiled" by the sins of Judah in the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa 24:5) and false prophets and priests were "profane" in Judah near the time of their exile to Babylon (Jer. 23:11). The land was considered "polluted" when adultery and wanton immorality were practiced. (Jer 3:1) The land "polluted" (Ps 106:38; Jer. 3:1, 9) as a result of sacrifice to idols and gross immorality. Baker adds that "Two notable exceptions to this linkage with the land further intensify the notion that the primary meaning is one of passive contamination. In Jeremiah, the Lord declared that the prophets and the priests were corrupted, seemingly by their association with the people's sin (Jer. 23:11)." (CWSD) Breaking of marriage vows to marry another precludes a return to the first mate; in the same way a favored people who drifted back and forth between devotion to idols and the Lord, pollutes the land (Jeremiah 3:1). The Hiphil stem describes the pollution of land. The murderer who had shed innocent blood was regarded as polluting the land (Numbers 35:33).

**Expiation** (forgive, appease) (See "mercy seat") (03722) [kappar](#) means to make atonement, to make reconciliation (to reconcile), to purge, to make propitiation (to propitiate), to pacify, to cancel. There are two main ideas regarding the meaning of **kappar** - (1) Kappar means to cover over sin (2) A number of resources however favor the idea that kappar means to wipe away. **Richards** notes that "It is often said that the idea expressed (in kappar) is one found in a possibly related Arabic root that means "to cover or conceal." **Atonement** would then denote a *covering* that *conceals* a person's sin and makes it possible for him to approach God. Although this relationship is possible, the language link is not at all certain. What is certain is the role that atonement played in the religion of Israel—a role given to atonement by God to carry a vital message about our faith." **Vine** writes that "Most uses of **kappar** involve the theological meaning of "covering over," often with the blood of a sacrifice, in order to atone for some sin. It is not clear whether this means that the "covering over" hides the sin from God's sight or implies that the sin is **wiped away** in this process."

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**Doug McIntosh - Granny Dumping** - In all the wars in which Americans have participated, about 1.1 million of our citizens have been killed. Since the *Roe v. Wade* ruling in 1973, more than twenty-eight times that number have been exterminated through abortion. According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute (the research arm of Planned Parenthood), over 95 percent of the abortions in America take place for reasons of convenience—not because of incest, rape, or the threatened health of the mother.

In recent years, a matching phenomenon for the end of life (albeit in smaller numbers) has appeared on the American scene. Harshly dubbed "Granny-dumping," it describes the practice of abandoning elderly people in places where they are most likely to receive the notice of community authorities. Often these elderly victims are left at the doors of hospitals or clinics by their relatives, who leave the hospital staff to extend care to the person left behind. The standard approach is to leave the victim with no identification so he cannot be traced to his kin and thus will become a ward of the state.

Several years ago, an eighty-two-year-old man was left by his daughter at an Idaho racetrack. When his story made the newspapers, there was a brief outcry because of what was thought to be an unusual practice. However, one past president of the American College of Emergency Physicians estimates that about two hundred thousand elderly people are abandoned at hospitals annually. Americans are exhibiting an increasing disregard for life at its end as well as its beginning. ([Holman Old Testament Commentary](#))

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**Deuteronomy 21:2** then your elders and your judges shall go out and measure the distance to the cities which are around the slain one.

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- De 16:18,19 Ro 13:3,4
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## DETERMINE WHO HAD JURISDICTION

**Then** - Marks progression in the narrative.

**Your elders and your judges shall go out and measure the distance to the cities which are around the slain one-** Not the cities of refuge, but the cities in general and specifically the ones that are near where the murdered body was found.

**Guzik** writes that "These elders were responsible to make the sacrifice to atone for and cleanse the murder-polluted land."

**Utley** - elders and judges" There are local appointed leaders who sat in the gates of the city and tried the cases of the community. Only if they had a problem did they take the cases to a higher authority (i.e., Levitical priests, cf. v. 5). They measured the distance from the found body to the cities around. The nearest town had to perform certain rituals (cf. vv. 3–8). This demonstrates their sense of guilt by proximity. The closest city was responsible for the blood-guiltiness, which could affect YHWH's blessings on the whole region (cf. Dt 19:13 = "You shall not pity him, but you shall purge the blood of the innocent from Israel, that it may go well with you.").

**Deuteronomy 21:3** "It shall be that the city which is nearest to the slain man, that is, the elders of that city, shall take a heifer of the herd, which has not been worked and which has not pulled in a yoke;

- Nu 19:2 Jer 31:18 Mt 11:28-30 Php 2:8
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### Related Passage:

Numbers 19:2+ "This is the statute of the law which the LORD has commanded, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel that they bring you an unblemished red heifer in which is no defect and on which a yoke has never been placed.

## NEAREST CITY "RESPONSIBLE" FOR THE MURDER

**It shall be that the city which is nearest to the slain man, that is, the elders of that city, shall take a heifer of the herd, which has not been worked and which has not pulled in a yoke** - The death of the **heifer** may amount to either a substitute execution or a curse on the murderer.

As described below "a red heifer was needed to help accomplish the purification from sin."

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### [What is the significance of a red heifer in the Bible? Is a red heifer a sign of the end times?](#)

To meet the requirements of the Old Testament law, a red heifer was needed to help accomplish the purification from sin—specifically, the *ashes* of a red heifer were needed. The red heifer was a reddish-brown cow, probably at least two years old. It was to be "without defect or blemish" and to have never borne a yoke. The sacrifice of the red heifer was unique in the law in that it used a female animal, it was sacrificed away from the entrance to the tabernacle, and it was the only sacrifice in which the color of the animal was specified.

The slaughtering of a red heifer is described in Numbers 19:1–10. Eleazar the priest was to oversee the ritual outside the camp of the Israelites. After the animal was killed, [Eleazar](#) was to sprinkle some of its blood toward the front of the tabernacle seven times (verse 4). Then he left camp again and oversaw the burning of the carcass of the red heifer (verse 5). As the red heifer burned, the priest was commanded to add "some cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet wool" to the fire (verse 6).

The ashes of the red heifer were collected and stored "in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp." The ashes were used "in the water of cleansing; it is for purification from sin" (Numbers 19:9). The law goes on to detail when and how the ashes of the red heifer were used in purifying those who came into contact with a dead body: "Whoever touches a human corpse will be unclean for seven days. They must purify themselves with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then they will be clean" (verses 11–12). The purification process involved the ashes of the red heifer in this way: "Put some ashes from the burned purification offering into a

jar and pour fresh water over them. Then a man who is ceremonially clean is to take some hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle . . . anyone who has touched a human bone or a grave or anyone who has been killed or anyone who has died a natural death” (verses 17–18).

The imagery of the red heifer is yet another foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Christ for believers’ sin. The Lord Jesus was “without blemish,” just as the red heifer was to be. As the heifer was sacrificed “outside the camp” (Numbers 19:3), Jesus was crucified outside of Jerusalem (Hebrews 13:11–12). And just as the ashes of the red heifer cleansed people from the contamination of death, so the sacrifice of Christ saves us from the penalty and corruption of death.

The red heifer ritual was established in the Mosaic Law; in the interval since that time, Judaism has added many standards to what was originally a straightforward, rather simple set of instructions. Talmudic tradition speaks of the type of rope the red heifer was to be bound with, the direction it was to face when being slaughtered, the words spoken by the priest, the wearing of sandals during the ritual, etc. The rabbinical rules listed many things that would disqualify a red heifer from being sacrificed: if she had been ridden or leaned on, if she had a garment placed over her, if a bird had rested on her, and if she had two black or white hairs, among many other conditions.

According to rabbinical tradition, there have been nine red heifers sacrificed since Moses’ time. Since the destruction of the [second temple](#), no red heifers have been slaughtered. The rabbi [Maimonides](#) (1135—1204) taught that the tenth red heifer would be sacrificed by the Messiah Himself. Those who anticipate the construction of a third temple are eager to find a red heifer that meets all the conditions, because the red heifer ashes will be necessary to purify the new temple. Many consider that the appearance of a red heifer will herald the construction of the temple and the return of Christ. According to the Temple Institute, a group advocating the construction of a third temple, a flawless red heifer was born in August 2018 in Israel.

According to the [futurist](#) timeline of eschatology, there will indeed be a third temple of God in Jerusalem. Jesus prophesied a desecration of the [temple](#) during the tribulation (Matthew 24:15; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:4); for that to occur, there obviously will have to be a temple in Jerusalem to desecrate. Assuming that those who dedicate the end-times temple follow Jewish law, they will need the ashes of a red heifer, mixed with water, for the ceremonial cleansing. If a blemish-free red heifer has truly been born, it could be seen as one more piece falling into place leading up to the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. [GotQuestions.org](#)

**Deuteronomy 21:4 and the elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with running water, which has not been plowed or sown, and shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley.**

- **shall break the heifer's neck** 1Pe 2:21-24 3:18
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **SUBSTITUTE IS KILLED ATONEMENT ACCOMPLISHED**

**and the elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with running water, which has not been plowed or sown, and shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley** - Apparently the valley did not have to be adjacent to the crime scene because running water was necessary for the following ritual. Breaking the heifer's neck symbolized that the crime deserved capital punishment. Breaking the heifer's neck would certainly be a reminder that murder deserved punishment and that punishment was death. As discussed below it seems that the heifer's life served in effect as an atonement for the sin of murder.

**MacArthur** has an interesting note on why a **valley** - They would go to a valley (idol altars were always on high places, so this avoided association with idolatry).

**NET NOTE** - a **valley with running water, which has not been plowed or sown** - The combination “a wadi with flowing water” is necessary because a wadi (נַחַל, *nakhal*) was ordinarily a dry stream or riverbed. For this ritual, however, a perennial stream must be chosen so that there would be fresh, rushing water. The **unworked heifer**, **fresh stream**, and **uncultivated valley** speak of ritual purity—of freedom from human contamination.

**Jack Deere** - This ritual demonstrated how extremely valuable God considers life. For even though no murderer was found, the land and the people both incurred the guilt of shedding innocent blood. The animal sacrifice, accompanied by the petition of the elders, made atonement, that is, turned the wrath of God away from the people. ([Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

**Doug McIntosh** - The animal was to be killed in a rite of atonement for the community. Two proposals are commonly forwarded for the rationale behind this ritual. One suggests that the rite substituted the death of the heifer for the death of the murderer. By killing

the animal, the community displayed their recognition of the need to cleanse the land of such offenders. The other option is to regard the rite as symbolic of the cleansing of community guilt. Just as the blood of the animal was washed away by the flowing stream, the bloodguilt of the community was cleansed by the rite. In favor of the second suggestion is the location prescribed and the ritual of hand-washing by the elders (cp. v. 6). In this respect the rite of atonement resembles other prescribed rituals for the elimination of guilt (cp. the released bird in Lev. 14:1-7 and the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement in Lev. 16:20-22). Although the ritual for communal atonement contained aspects of worship, it was not properly a sacrifice. It was not offered at the central sanctuary (cp. Deut. 12:5-7), or on an altar of any kind, but in a valley adjacent to the responsible community. No reference is made to the pouring out of the blood in a ritualized way. ([Holman Old Testament Commentary](#))

**ESVSB** - This animal is not burned, as in the usual sacrifices. However, its death is a sacrifice to atone for sin committed by an unknown person.

**Utley** - The valley, too, had to be unpolluted by human activity or in a natural state. The water symbolized carrying the guilt away (similar to the goat of Leviticus 16). **“shall break the heifer’s neck”** Later rabbis said “chopped head off with an ax” because breaking the neck was a difficult task (cf. Exod. 13:13; 34:20). However, blood does not seem to be involved in the ritual, but the concept of substitution. The innocent heifer ceremonially takes the place of the unknown murderer. The purpose was to rid the land of innocent bloodguiltiness (cf. Nu 35:33–34).

**Coates** - This was not a sacrificial act because the blood was not to be poured out on the ground or manipulated in any way. Breaking the neck of the heifer symbolized that a capital crime had occurred and the guilty one, even though unknown at that time, was worthy of death. The priests, the Lord’s representatives in this matter, were to be summoned to the valley where they would wash their hands (with the running water nearby as a symbol of purity; v. 4) over the dead heifer

**TSK** - As the word {nachal} signifies both a torrent, and the valley or glen through which it flows, {nachal aithan} may be rendered a rapid torrent. Many torrents in Judea are dry during a great part of the year; when not only their banks but their beds may be ploughed, and yield a crop. Hence there is no impropriety in specifying that such a place should be one that “is neither cared nor sown;” while the circumstance that the elders were to wash their hands over the heifer, whose head had been struck off into the stream, confirms this interpretation. The spot of ground where this sacrifice was made must be uncultivated, because it was considered as a sacrifice for the atonement of murder, and, consequently, would pollute the land.

**Deuteronomy 21:5** **“Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near, for the LORD your God has chosen them to serve Him and to bless in the name of the LORD; and every dispute and every assault shall be settled by them.”**

- them: De 10:8 Dt 18:5 Nu 6:22-27 1Ch 23:13
- by their word: De 17:8-12 Mal 2:7
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Then** - Marks progression of this narrative.

**The priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near, for the LORD your God has chosen them to serve Him and to bless in the name of the LORD** - The final judicial authority rested with the priests.

**Utley** - “to bless in the name of the LORD” Blessing was one of the functions of priests/Levites (cf. 10:8; 1 Chr. 23:13). One example of a priestly blessing is recorded in Num. 6:22–26. This blessing is related to Israel’s covenant keeping (cf. Num. 6:27; Deut. 28:3–6). YHWH’s personal presence (i.e., name) was honored or rejected by each Israelite’s obedience or willful disobedience to YHWH’s revelation (i.e., covenant). Israel’s blessing, both individual (cf. Ex. 19:5–6) and corporate, was determined not by arbitrary or capricious choice, but by personal faith in YHWH, demonstrated by covenant obedience (lifestyle). YHWH wanted to bless (cf. Exod. 20:24; 2 Chr. 30:27).

**and every dispute and every assault shall be settled by them** - The priests were a go between and would in effect settle the matter in accord with God’s will.

**Utley** - “every dispute and every assault shall be settled by them” The VERB is the common one, “to be” (BDB 224, KB 243, Qal IMPERFECT). The translation “be settled” comes from the previous NOUN phrase, “by their word” There are two types of legal problems mentioned: (1) “dispute” (i.e., lawsuit)—BDB 936, cf. 1:12; 19:17; 21:5; 25:1; Exod. 23:2, 3, 6 (2) “assault”—BDB 619, cf. 17:8. Here it refers to physical attack, but the term can mean disease, cf. 24:8 (many times in Leviticus).

Moses has described this earlier...

Deuteronomy 17:8-12 “If any case is too difficult for you to decide, between one kind of homicide or another, between one kind of lawsuit or another, and between one kind of assault or another, being cases of dispute in your courts, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses. 9 “So you shall come **to the Levitical priest** or the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall inquire of them and they will declare to you the verdict in the case. 10 “You shall do according to the terms of the verdict which they declare to you from that place which the LORD chooses; and you shall be careful to observe according to all that they teach you. 11 “According to the terms of the law which they teach you, and according to the verdict which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or the left. 12 “The man who acts presumptuously by not listening to the priest who stands there to serve the LORD your God, nor to the judge, that man shall die; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel.

**Deuteronomy 21:6 "All the elders of that city which is nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley;**

- **wash their hands:** Job 9:30 Ps 19:12 26:6 51:2,7,14 73:13 Jer 2:22 Mt 27:24,25 Heb 9:10
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### WASHING HANDS OF ANY GUILT

**All the elders of that city which is nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley** - To wash their hands was to symbolize they were being washed from guilt. (Pilate did this in Matt. 27:24-25, but he was still guilty!)

**Guzik** - This washing of the hands, done in the presence of the sons of Levi, who by their word every controversy and every assault shall be settled, was a powerful proclamation by the elders: “We have done all we could to settle this case, but cannot. We are clean from all guilt in the matter of this slain man.” Of course, this ceremony of washing the hands over the sacrificed animal meant nothing if the elders had in fact not done what they could to avenge the murder; apart from that, this washing of the hands was just as much an empty gesture as Pilate’s washing of his hands at the trial of Jesus (Matthew 27:24).

**Uteley** - “**wash their hands over the heifer**” This symbolizes cleansing (cf. Ps. 26:6; 73:13) from guilt by the proximity of the dead body. The elders represent the whole community as they corporately wash the guilt away from the village and area.

**NET NOTE** on **valley** - Heb “wadi,” a seasonal watercourse through a valley.

**Deuteronomy 21:7 and they shall answer and say, 'Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it.**

- Nu 5:19-28 2Sa 16:8 Job 21:21-23,31-34 Ps 7:3,4
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### WE ARE NOT GUILTY

**and they shall answer and say, 'Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it** - They are saying they were not guilty and had no information on who was guilty of the murder.

**NET NOTE** - **nor did our eyes** - Heb “our eyes.” This is a figure of speech known as synecdoche in which the part (the eyes) is put for the whole (the entire person). **SEE IT** - Heb “seen”; the implied object (the crime committed) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

**Uteley** - “Our hands have not shed this blood nor did our eyes see it” The rabbis relate this to help for the stranger, poor, orphan, or widow. Since the villagers did not see the stranger’s need for help they were absolved from meeting that need. This may have been a way to stop the victim’s family (i.e., blood avenger) from killing an innocent member of the nearest village in retaliation.



Deuteronomy 21:8 '**Forgive** Your people Israel whom You have redeemed, O LORD, and do not place the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of Your people Israel.' And the bloodguiltiness shall be forgiven them.

- **do not place** Nu 35:33 2Sa 3:28 2Ki 24:4 Ps 19:12 Jer 26:15 Eze 23:3,24,25 Jon 1:14 Mt 23:35 1Th 2:15,16
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages (other translations of Dt 21:8)

ESV Deuteronomy 21:8 **Accept atonement**, O LORD, for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, and do not set the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of your people Israel, so that their blood guilt be atoned for.'

NIV Deuteronomy 21:8 **Accept this atonement** for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, O LORD, and do not hold your people guilty of the blood of an innocent man." And the bloodshed will be atoned for.

YLT Deuteronomy 21:8 **receive atonement** for Thy people Israel, whom Thou hast ransomed, O Jehovah, and suffer not innocent blood in the midst of Thy people Israel; and the blood hath been pardoned to them,

NKJ Deuteronomy 21:8 '**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.

## SEEKING GOD'S FORGIVENESS

**Forgive** (Heb "Atone for") **our people Israel whom You have redeemed** ([padah](#); Lxx - [lutroo](#)), **O LORD, and do not place the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of Your people Israel.** - **Forgive** is [kapor](#) the same word used in Nu 35:33 (see [above](#) translated **expiation**). Notice they don't say forgive us but **Your people**, so all of Israel was in effect held responsible for this unsolved murder. The Lxx translates **forgive** (*kapor*) with [hileos](#) (*hildos genou* = **be** merciful) which means to favorably disposed to another with implication of overcoming obstacles that are unfavorable to a relationship - gracious, merciful. (BDAG). Note how the prayer is based on the Lord's glory - specifically they remind God that they were His **people** and that He had **redeemed** them. The implication is that based on these truths He would be willing to forgive them based on His character and what He had accomplished for them.

**Redeemed** = [padah](#) - used 6x in Deut - **Redeemed** from the house of slavery (Dt 7:8), **redeemed** through your greatness (Dt 9:26), **redeemed** from the house of slavery (Dt 13:5), the LORD your God **redeemed** you (Dt 15:15), the LORD your God **redeemed** you from there (you were a slave in Egypt). (Dt 24:18).

The reason they would seek forgiveness is based on Numbers 35:33+ = "So you shall not **pollute the land** in which you are; for **blood pollutes the land** and no **expiation** ([kapor](#) - ESV, NIV = **ATONEMENT**) **can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it**, except by the blood of him who shed it." In this case it is not known who shed the blood of the dead person.

[NIDOTTE](#) According to Deut 21:8, in the ritual for an unsolved homicide the elders of the closest city were instructed to break the neck of a heifer and implore the Lord: "accept this atonement (lit., atone, pi. vb.) for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, O LORD ..." (NIV; NASB has "forgive your people Israel"). In this case it was the Lord who needed to make (or accept, NIV) the atonement for the city.

**Kapor** (see also [kapor](#)) - The vb. occurs 102x in the OT (q. 1x in Gen 6:14; pi. 92x; pu. 7x; hitp. once in 1 Sam 3:14; nitp. 1x in Deut 21:8), the majority of them in the priestly ritual sections of Exod-Num (ca. 73x) and other ritual passages strewn throughout the rest of the OT (e.g., 1 Chron 6:49 [34]; 2 Chron 29:24; Neh 10:33 [34]; Ezek 43:20, 26; 45:15, 17, 20). The primary focus in this article is naturally atonement in the priestly ritual system, but a survey of other usages and an analysis of some of the most suggestive nonpriestly passages is also found here. The Eng. word itself is interesting. "To atone," or in nominal form "atonement," is a combination of "at" plus Middle English "one(ment)," meaning to be or make at one. The dictionaries tend to define it as a word for reconciliation or reparation to bring about reconciliation. On one level this is, in fact, a good definition of the basic effect that to atone, make atonement (the vb. [כָּפַר](#)) had in the relationship between God and human beings within the Israelite cultic sacrificial system (see the extensive discussion below). **2. The nom. form [כֶּפֶר](#), bribe, ransom**, occurs 13x in the HB (cf. the single instance of [כָּפַר](#), pitch, tar (#4109), in Gen 6:14 along with the only occurrence of the q. vb. [כָּפַר](#), cover, paint, smear pitch (#4106), on Noah's ark; see kupru, pitch, bitumen, used in the Gilgamesh Epic Tablet 11 flood account for sealing the boat, CAD K 554). It means bribe money (1 Sam 12:3; Prov 6:35; Amos 5:12) or ransom money (Exod 21:30; 30:12; Num



35:31, 32; Job 33:24; 36:18; Ps 49:7 [8]; Prov 13:8; 21:18; Isa 43:3). The relationship between this term and the foundational meaning of the vb. כָּפַר, atone, will be discussed below (OT 8–18). **The abstract term כִּפּוּרִים, atonement,** occurs 8× (Exod 29:36; 30:10, 16; Lev 23:27, 28 [the only anarthrous use]; 25:9; Num 5:8; 29:11), and כִּפְתָר, place of atonement, mercy seat, or cover (over the ark) (referring to the plate with the two gold cherubim placed on top of the ark of the testimony, Exod 25:17–22) occurs 26× (Exod 25:17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 26:34; 30:6; 31:7; 35:12; 37:6, 7, 8, 9; 39:35; 40:20; Lev 16:2 [2×], 13, 14 [2×], 15; Num 7:89; 1 Chron 28:11). It is clear from the contexts in which these two terms occur that they are closely related to the vb. כָּפַר, atone, and can therefore contribute to our understanding of the foundational meaning of atonement, and vice versa ([NIDOTTE](#))

[Uitley](#) on **forgive** - This is the Hebrew VERB “cover” ( Piel IMPERATIVE). It is used twice in this verse (the second use is a Nithpael PERFECT). This term, so common in Leviticus and Numbers, is used only three times in Deuteronomy (21:8 [twice]; 32:43). Its basic meaning is “to ritually cover by means of a sacrifice.” “redeemed” This VERB (BDB 804, KB 911, Qal IMPERFECT, but JUSSIVE in meaning) is parallel to “forgive” (i.e., cover). **do not place** The VERB (BDB 678, KB 733, Qal IMPERFECT, but in a JUSSIVE sense) is a prayer for ritual absolution from the consequences of an unsolved murder. .

**Doug McIntosh** explains that "Although not a sacrifice in the strictest sense, the ritual would have the effect of a sacrifice since the bloodshed would be atoned for." **The strangeness of this rite should not blind our eyes to the values that lie behind it. God was concerned for even one unknown and unclaimed life in Israel. Any wrongful death produced a moral stain on the whole nation.** The guilt of innocent blood was not to be dismissed but **purged** by prescribed ritual. ([Holman Old Testament Commentary](#))

**And the bloodguiltiness shall be forgiven ([kaphar](#)) them - Bloodguiltiness** is the state of being guilty of bloodshed or murder. God says after performing this ritual, the people are forgiven ([kaphar](#)). The Lxx translates **kaphar** with the verb [hilaskomai](#) in the NT use in Heb 2:17+ refers to the act of our Lord offering Himself on the Cross to satisfy the righteous demands of God's justice so that His government might be maintained, and that mercy might be shown on the basis of justice satisfied. The words “reconciliation” and “propitiation” are to be understood in this light. (See related word study on [hilasterion](#))

**Bloodguiltiness** - Exod. 22:2; Exod. 22:3; Lev. 17:4; Lev. 20:9; Lev. 20:11; Lev. 20:12; Lev. 20:13; Lev. 20:16; Lev. 20:27; Deut. 19:10; Deut. 21:8; Deut. 22:8; Ps. 51:14; Hos. 12:14

**Philip Logan - Bloodguilt** made a person ritually unclean (Num. 35:33–34) and was incurred by killing a person who did not deserve to die (Deut. 19:10; Jer. 26:15; Jon. 1:14). Killing in self-defense and execution of criminals are exempted from bloodguilt (Exod. 22:2; Lev. 20:9). Bloodguilt was incurred (1) by intentional killing (Judg. 9:24; 1 Sam. 25:26, 33; 2 Kings 9:26; Jer. 26:15); (2) by unintentional killing (See Num. 35:22–28 where one who accidentally kills another may be killed by the avenger of blood implying that the accidental murderer had bloodguilt. See Avenger.); (3) by being an indirect cause of death (Gen. 42:22; Deut. 19:10b; 22:8; Josh. 2:19); (4) a person was under bloodguilt if those for whom he was responsible committed murder (1 Kings 2:5, 31–33); and (5) the killing of a sacrifice at an unauthorized altar imputed bloodguilt (Lev. 17:4). The avenger of blood could take action in the first two instances but not in the latter three. When the murderer was known in instance (1) above, the community shared the guilt of the murderer until the guilty party had paid the penalty of death. No other penalty or sacrifice could substitute for the death of the guilty party, nor was there any need for sacrifice once the murderer had been killed (Num. 35:33; Deut. 21:8–9). The one who unintentionally killed another [(2) above] might flee to a city of refuge and be safe. If, however, the accidental killer left the boundaries of the city of refuge, the avenger of blood could kill in revenge without incurring bloodguilt (Num. 35:31–32; Deut. 19:13). The community was held to be bloodguilty if it failed to provide asylum for the accidental killer (Deut. 19:10). In cases where the blood of an innocent victim was not avenged, the blood of the innocent cried out to God (Gen. 4:10; Isa. 26:21; Ezek. 24:7–9; cp. Job 16:18), and God became the avenger for that person (Gen. 9:5; 2 Sam. 4:11; 2 Kings 9:7; Ps. 9:12; Hos. 1:4). Even the descendants of the bloodguilty person might suffer the consequences of God's judgment (2 Sam. 3:28–29; 21:1; 1 Kings 21:29). Manasseh's bloodguilt and Judah's failure to do anything about it was the cause of Judah's downfall over 50 years after Manasseh's reign (2 Kings 24:4). Judas incurred bloodguilt by betraying Jesus (“innocent blood,” Matt. 27:4). Those who called for the crucifixion accepted the burden of bloodguilt for themselves and their children (Matt. 27:25). Pilate accepted no responsibility for the

shedding of innocent blood (Matt. 27:24). ([Holman Bible Dictionary](#))

**HCSB** - Innocent blood **defiled the land** so that **the land** figuratively became hostile toward the guilty person and resisted his attempts to make use of it. When Cain killed Abel, Abel's blood cried out to the Lord from the ground. It would thereafter withhold its yield from Cain (Gen 4:10-12). **The soil of Israel would likewise become polluted by the blood of innocent victims** (Num 35:33-34; Dt 19:13).

**Guzik** - 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.

#### Related Resources:

- [What was the Old Testament way of salvation? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- Baker's Evangelical Dictionary [Day of Atonement Atoning Sacrifice](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Atonement, Day of Atonement](#)
- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Atonement, Day of Atonement](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Day of Atonement Atonement](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Day of Atonement Atonement, Day of Atonement](#)

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### Utley's Special Topic - SPECIAL TOPIC: RANSOM/REDEEM

#### I. OLD TESTAMENT

A. There are primarily two Hebrew legal terms which convey this concept:

1. Ga'al, which basically means "to free" by means of a price paid. A form of the term go'el adds to the concept a personal intermediary, usually a family member (i.e., kinsman redeemer). This cultural aspect of the right to buy back objects, animals, land (cf. Lev. 25, 27), or relatives (cf. Ruth 4:15; Isa. 29:22) is transferred theologically to YHWH's deliverance of Israel from Egypt (cf. Exod. 6:6; 15:13; Ps. 74:2; 77:15; Jer. 31:11). He becomes "the redeemer" (cf. Job 19:25; Ps. 19:14; 78:35; Prov. 23:1; Isa. 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 63:16; Jer. 50:34).

2. Padah, which basically means "to deliver" or "to rescue"

- a. the redemption of the first born, Exod. 13:13, 14 and Num. 18:15–17
- b. Physical redemption is contrasted with spiritual redemption, Ps. 49:7, 8, 15
- c. YHWH will redeem Israel from sin and rebellion, Ps. 130:7–8

B. The theological concept involves three related items:

1. There is a need, a bondage, a forfeiting, an imprisonment.
  - a. physical
  - b. social
  - c. spiritual (cf. Ps. 130:8)
2. A price must be paid for freedom, release, and restoration:
  - a. of the nation, Israel (cf. Deut. 7:8)
  - b. of the individual (cf. Job 19:25–27; 33:28)
3. Someone must act as intermediary and benefactor. In ga'al this one is usually a family member or near kin (i.e., go'el).
4. YHWH often describes Himself in familial terms:
  - a. father
  - b. husband
  - c. near kin

Redemption was secured through YHWH's personal agency; a price was paid, and redemption was achieved!

#### II. NEW TESTAMENT

A. There are several terms used to convey the theological concept:

1. Agorazō (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 2 Pet. 2:1; Rev. 5:9; 14:3, 4). This is a commercial term which reflects a price paid for something. We are blood-bought people who do not control our own lives. We belong to Christ.

2. Exagorazō (cf. Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5). This is also a commercial term. It reflects Jesus' substitutionary death on our behalf. Jesus bore the "curse" of a performance-based law (i.e., Mosaic Law), which sinful humans could not accomplish. He bore the curse (cf. Deut. 21:23) for us all! In Jesus, God's justice and love merge into full forgiveness, acceptance, and access!

3. Luō, "to set free"

a. Lutron, "a price paid" (cf. Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). These are powerful words from Jesus' own mouth concerning the purpose of His coming, to be the Savior of the world by paying a sin-debt He did not owe (cf. John 1:29).

b. Lutroō, "to release"

- (1) to redeem Israel, Luke 24:21
- (2) to give Himself to redeem and purify a people, Titus 2:14
- (3) to be a sinless substitute, 1 Pet. 1:18–19
- c. Lutrōsis, “redemption, deliverance, or liberation”
  - (1) Zacharias’ prophecy about Jesus, Luke 1:68
  - (2) Anna’s praise to God for Jesus, Luke 2:38
  - (3) Jesus’ better, once offered sacrifice, Heb. 9:12
- 4. Apolytrōsis
  - a. redemption at the Second Coming (cf. Acts 3:19–21)
    - (1) Luke 21:28
    - (2) Romans 8:23
    - (3) Ephesians 1:14; 4:30
    - (4) Hebrews 9:15
  - b. redemption in Christ’s death
    - (1) Romans 3:24
    - (2) 1 Corinthians 1:30
    - (3) Ephesians 1:7
    - (4) Colossians 1:14
- 5. Antitypon (cf. 1 Tim. 2:6). This is a crucial text (as is Titus 2:14), which links release to Jesus’ substitutionary death on the cross. He is the one and only acceptable sacrifice; the one who dies for “all” (cf. John 1:29; 3:16–17; 4:42; 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:10; Titus 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:14).
- B. The theological concept in the NT implies:
  - a. mankind is enslaved to sin (cf. John 8:34; Rom. 3:10–18; 6:23).
  - b. mankind’s bondage to sin has been revealed by the OT Mosaic Law (cf. Gal. 3) and Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt. 5–7). Human performance has become a death sentence (cf. Col. 2:14).
  - c. Jesus, the sinless lamb of God, has come and died in our place (cf. John 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:21). We have been purchased from sin so that we might serve God (cf. Rom. 6).
  - d. By implication both YHWH and Jesus are “near kin” who act on our behalf. This continues the familial metaphors (i.e., father, husband, son, brother, near kin).
  - e. Redemption was not a price paid to Satan (i.e., medieval theology), but the reconciliation of God’s word and God’s justice with God’s love and full provision in Christ. At the cross peace was restored, human rebellion was forgiven, the image of God in mankind is now fully functional again in intimate fellowship!
  - f. There is still a future aspect of redemption (cf. Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30), which involves our resurrection bodies and physical intimacy with the Triune God.

**Deuteronomy 21:9 "So you shall remove the guilt of innocent blood from your midst, when you do what is right in the eyes of the LORD.**

- **So you shall remove:** De 19:11-13
- **when:** De 13:18 2Ki 10:30,31
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### **Related Passage:**

Deuteronomy 19:11-13 “But if there is a man who hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and rises up against him and strikes him so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities, 12 then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. 13 “You shall not pity him, but you shall purge the blood of the innocent from Israel, that it may go well with you.

**So** - Therefore. Term of conclusion. Concluding the matter of the "mysterious murder."

**You shall remove the guilt of innocent blood from your midst, when you do what is right in the eyes of the LORD** The **innocent blood** of course is the person who has died. Doing **what is right** is carrying out the procedure described in Dt 21:1-8.

**Coates** - This ritual signifies the need for Israel to deal with all bloodguilt matters, even in cases where the perpetrator was not known. The land was to remain undefiled, and this ritual was the prescribed means of removing bloodguilt in unsolved murder cases.

**Utley** - The ritual (cf. vv. 1–8) was seen as “purging” (Piel IMPERFECT) the effects of corporate sin (i.e., unsolved murders) from the whole community (similar to the rituals of “the Day of Atonement” in Leviticus 16). Sin, even unintentional corporate sin, affects the blessing of YHWH and even brings collective wrath (i.e., curses, cf. Deuteronomy 27–29).

**Deuteronomy 21:10** "When you go out to battle against your enemies, and the LORD your God delivers them into your hands and you take them away captive,

- De 20:10-16
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Outline

- Murder Mystery in Israel Dt 21:1-9
- Female Prisoners of War Dt 21:10-14
- Firstborn Inheritance Rights Dt 21:15-17
- The Rebellious Son Dt 21:18-21
- Miscellaneous Dt 21:22-22:12

### "PEOPLE PLUNDER" FROM BATTLE

**Utley** - Dt 21:10–14 These verses address how to appropriately deal with women (i.e., not Canaanites, but others, cf. Dt 20:10–15) captured in war, even they had rights in YHWH's land. This care for the poor and powerless is unique in the ancient world's law codes.

**When you go out to battle against your enemies, and the LORD your God delivers them into your hands and you take them away captive - Into your hands** signify into your power and authority and control. In context he is speaking about war **outside** the promised land because Canaanite women were to be killed. Obviously this section deals with non-Israelite women who were not Canaanites.

**Deuteronomy 21:11** and see among the captives a beautiful woman, and have a desire for her and would take her as a wife for yourself,

- **desire:** Ge 6:2 12:14,15 29:18-20 34:3,8 Jdg 14:2,3 Pr 6:25 31:10,30
- Nu 31:18
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### SEE, DESIRE TAKE

**and see among the captives a beautiful** (literally "beautiful form) **woman, and have a desire for her and would take her as a wife for yourself** - Watch the flesh work - SEE...BEAUTIFUL > DESIRE > TAKE. In this context God does not condemn it because the women were not under the ban (devoted to Yahweh). Joshua 7:21 has a similar progression - SEE BEAUTIFUL > COVETED > TOOK > CONCEALED. We see this same sequence in Genesis 3:6 "When the woman SAW that the tree was good for food, and that it was a DELIGHT to the eyes, and that the tree was DESIRABLE to make one wise, she TOOK from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate." LESSON - LOOK OUT WHAT YOU LOOK AT!!! **Desire** (**ḥāšaq/chashaq**;) in Lxx is translated with [enthumeomai](#) which means to reflect on, which speaks of an inner reflection, a processing of information by thinking about it carefully, in this case the "*information*" his eyes see in the beautiful (form of) woman!

Note that even here God is protecting the women because the Israelite male could not simply grab her and use her for sexual favors as his fallen flesh likely would have desire (just being honest!) He has to "man up" and marry her!

**Deere** adds that "Israelites were not to rape, plunder, or otherwise mistreat captives as other armies of the ancient Near East did." ([Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

The verb **take** does not indicate a sexual union in this context, but simply a taking the woman into his house, because the actual "consummation" of their marriage is described later.

**Coakley** gives some background - Moses legislated a number of family related laws, the first dealing with regulations regarding captive women. Earlier the law stated (Dt 20:14) that women and children from captured cities were to be spared. The possibility arose, as described here, that one of the soldiers might find one of the captive woman attractive enough for marriage. Caution was in order here because intermarriage was expressly forbidden with women from the Canaanite nations (7:3) and should not have been even possible if all the inhabitants, including the women, were put to death as the Lord had instructed. The background for this situation (although not explicitly stated) is that some of the captive women might wish to associate themselves with the God of Israel (like Rahab), and now the possibility of an Israelite marrying one of these women was an option. ([Moody Bible Commentary](#))

**Beautiful** (03303) יָפֶה **yapheh**: Delighting the sense or exciting intellectual or emotional admiration. An adjective meaning lovely, beautiful. It is used in many settings to describe the beauty of various things and persons: of women (Gen. 12:11, 14; 2 Sa 13:1; Esth. 2:7) **Swanson** - 1. **beautiful**, fair, lovely, handsome, i.e., pertaining to an appearance that is considered attractive in relation to its person, class or kind (1Sa 17:42; 1Sa 25:3); 2. **proper**, i.e., pertaining to what corresponds to an expectation (Ecc 5:17) ([Dictionary of Semantic Domains - Hebrew](#)) Used 38v - Gen. 12:11; Gen. 12:14; Gen. 29:17; Gen. 39:6; Gen. 41:2; Gen. 41:4; Gen. 41:18; Deut. 21:11; 1 Sam. 16:12; 1 Sam. 17:42; 1 Sam. 25:3; 2 Sam. 13:1; 2 Sam. 14:25; 2 Sam. 14:27; 1 Ki. 1:3; 1 Ki. 1:4; Est. 2:7; Job 42:15; Ps. 48:2; Prov. 11:22; Eccl. 3:11; Eccl. 5:18; Cant. 1:8; Cant. 1:15; Cant. 1:16; Cant. 2:10; Cant. 2:13; Cant. 4:1; Cant. 4:7; Cant. 5:9; Cant. 6:1; Cant. 6:4; Cant. 6:10; Jer. 11:16; Ezek. 31:3; Ezek. 31:9; Ezek. 33:32; Amos 8:13

**Form** (08389) תָּאֵר **toar**: A masculine noun meaning form, appearance, beauty. It refers to the contours and outward form of something, e.g., the body of a woman or a man (Gen. 29:17; 39:6; Deut. 21:11; 1 Sam. 16:18); of an animal's body, it means healthy, strong-looking (Gen. 41:18, 19). It is used in a stereotypical way, the form of the son of a king, a royal-looking person, a person with dignity (Judg. 8:18). It also refers to the shape of trees, plants, etc. (Jer. 11:16). Especially noteworthy is the use of **to'ar** twice in the fourth Suffering Servant Song (Isa 52:13–53:12). The Servant's form was horribly marred and disfigured (52:14), repulsive to look at (53:2). As H. C. Leupold (Exposition of Isaiah, II, p. 224) puts it: "Little wonder that many of the fathers of the church of days of old claim that the account reads as though Isaiah had sat at the foot of the cross" (see Mk 14:65; 15:15–20). **Swanson** - **tō'ar**: 1. appearance, form, shape, what one looks like, i.e., that which distinguishes the way an object looks, usually implying a positive, attractive appearance (Jdg 8:18; 1Sa 16:18; 28:14; Isa 52:14; 53:2; La 4:8+); 2. unit: יָפֶה תָּאֵר (yā-pē(h) tō'ār) beautiful, handsome, formally, fair of form, i.e., of a desirable appearance relative to the kind or class of the object (Ge 29:17; 39:6; 41:18; Dt 21:11; 1Sa 25:3; Est 2:7; Jer 11:16+); 3. unit: רָע תָּאֵר (rā' tō'ār) ugly, unattractive, formally, bad of form, i.e., of an undesirable appearance relative to the kind or class of the object (Ge 41:19+); 4. unit: טוֹב תָּאֵר (tōb tō'ār) beautiful, handsome, formally, good of form, i.e., of a desirable appearance relative to the kind or class of the object (1Ki 1:6+)([Dictionary of Semantic Domains - Hebrew](#))

Toar - 15v - Gen. 29:17; Gen. 39:6; Gen. 41:18; Gen. 41:19; Deut. 21:11; Jdg. 8:18; 1 Sam. 16:18; 1 Sam. 25:3; 1 Sam. 28:14; 1 Ki. 1:6; Est. 2:7; Isa. 52:14; Isa. 53:2; Jer. 11:16; Lam. 4:8

**Have desire** - 02836. חָשַׁק **hāšaq/chashaq**: A verb meaning to be attached to, to love, to delight in, to bind. The root idea of this verb is "to be devoted" to a person or thing. In the OT, it is always used figuratively for emotional attachment, for love which is already bound to its object. Laws in Deuteronomy described the procedure for taking a slave woman to whom one has become attached as a wife (Deut. 21:11). Chāshaq could simply refer to physical attraction, as in the case of (NON-JEW) Shechem's soul longing after **Dinah**, who was an Israelite (Gen. 34:8). God's binding love for Israel is described as unmerited love (Deut. 7:7). Hezekiah describes the figurative way in which God's love for his soul delivered him by casting all his sins behind His back (Isa. 38:17). The verb comes to mean "to kiss" in Middle Hebrew, while an Arabic cognate means "to love passionately." **Swanson** - desire, love, set one's affection, formally, be attached to, i.e., have a strong feeling for an object, as a figurative extension of the joining or fastening of two objects together ([Dictionary of Semantic Domains - Hebrew](#)) **TWOT** - **hāšaq** emphasizes that which attaches to something or someone; in the case of emotions (to which the biblical usage is limited) it is that love which is already bound to its object. It should be distinguished from 'āhab "love," 'āwā "desire, wish," hāmad "desire, take pleasure in." Also, contrast hāšaq, II "to join, furnish with fillets or rings." Our root occurs twelve times. This root may denote the strong desire of a man toward a beautiful woman (Gen 34:8) who could, however, be put away if she did not live up to expectations (Deut 21:11–14). A deep inward attachment (in a positive sense) is descriptive of God's love of Israel (Deut 10:15). He was bound to them of his own volition (love) and not because of anything good or desirable in them (Deut 7:7). It is to God's attachment (love) that Hezekiah attributes his deliverance (Isa 38:17). This is the love that will not let go. If a man has such an attachment

toward God he will be delivered (Ps 91:14).

**ḥāšaq/chashaq** - 8v - have a desire(1), kept(1), longs(1), loved(1), pleased\*(2), set his affection(1), set his love(1). Gen. 34:8; Deut. 7:7; Deut. 10:15; Deut. 21:11; 1 Ki. 9:19; 2 Chr. 8:6; Ps. 91:14; Isa. 38:17

**Take** (Lxx in Dt 21:11 = [lambano](#) - take in an active sense as to grasp or seize)- **3947. נָזַל lāqah**: A verb meaning to take, to get. Its exact meaning must be discerned from its context. It is used of grasping or seizing a person or an animal (Gen. 12:5; Ex. 17:5; Ezek. 8:3; Hos. 14:2[3]). The ark was captured (1 Sam. 4:11; 17, 19). It has the sense of keeping what one has (Gen. 14:21). It may mean in context to receive or acquire, to buy (2 Kgs. 5:20; Prov. 31:16). It is used of a bird carrying or loading its young onto its wings (Deut. 32:11). It is used figuratively of obeying, "taking on" commands, instructions (Pr 10:8). It is used of taking a wife (Gen. 25:1). With nāqām as its object, it means to take vengeance (Isa. 47:3). One's ear can "receive," hearken to God's Word (Jer. 9:20[19]). It is used of one's heart sweeping away, carrying away oneself (Job 15:12). In its passive usage, it means to be brought in (Gen. 12:15; Esth. 2:8, 16). It takes on the nuance of flashing, bolting here and there like fire or lightning (Ex. 9:24; Ezek. 1:4).

**Deuteronomy 21:12 then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails.**

- **and she shall:** 1Co 11:6 Eph 4:22
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE: HAIR AND NAILS "UNDONE!"**

**then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails-** The purpose of these acts is not clear

**Coakley** - The most likely reason is that these acts demonstrate that she needed to remove anything pertaining to her former life and embrace life within the Israelite community. This would also remind her husband that he is no longer to treat her as an alien but as a wife. ([Moody Bible Commentary](#))

**NET NOTE** - This requirement for the woman to shave her head may symbolize the putting away of the old life and customs in preparation for being numbered among the people of the LORD. The same is true for the two following requirements.

**Utley** has an interesting comment (not sure I agree with every point) - "**she shall shave her head and trim her nails**" This was a (1) concluding (cf. Num. 6:9, 18–19); (2) cleansing (cf. Lev. 13:33; 14:8–9); or (3) mourning (cf. 14:1; Lev. 21:5; Jer. 41:5; Ezek. 44:20) ritual. Here it symbolized a new day, a new life, a new family. It is interesting that her conversion to YHWH is assumed, but not stated. The husband's faith was the family's faith!

**Wiersbe** - Shaving the head was part of the rituals for cleansed lepers (Lev. 14:8–9) and the dedication of Nazirites who had fulfilled their vows (Num. 6:18). While shaving the head would be a humbling experience for the woman (see Deut. 21:14), it could also be the sign of a new beginning, as it was for the leper and the Nazirite. She was renouncing her former religion, the worship of idols, and accepting Jehovah as her God. From a practical point of view, perhaps her appearance would encourage her to stay home and get better acquainted with her Jewish husband-to-be. During this waiting period, she was expected to express her sorrow over leaving her family and her native city. In short, the experiences of this month of waiting, painful as they might be, were designed to help the woman make the transition from the old life into the new. ([Be Equipped](#))

**TSK** This was in token of renouncing her religion, and becoming a proselyte to that of the Jews. This is still a custom in the East: when a Christian turns Mohammedan, his head is shaved, and he is carried through the city, crying, {la eelah eela allah wemochammed resoolu 'Ilahee,} "There is no God but the God, and Mohammed is the prophet of God."

**TSK - her nails:** or, suffer to grow, Heb. make, or dress, {Weasethah eth tzipparneyyha,} "and she shall make her nails;" i.e., probably neither paring nor letting them grow, but dressing or beautifying them as the Eastern women still do by tinging them with the leaves of an odoriferous plant called {alhenna,} which Hasselquist (p. 246) informs us, "grows in India and in upper and lower Egypt, flowering from May to August. The leaves are pulverized and made into a paste with water: they bind this paste on the nails of their hands and feet, and keep it on all night. This gives them a deep yellow, which is greatly admired by Eastern nations. The colour lasts for three or four weeks before there is occasion to renew it. The custom is so ancient in Egypt, that I have seen the nails of mummies dyed in this manner."



**Deuteronomy 21:13** "She shall also remove the clothes of her captivity and shall remain in your house, and mourn her father and mother a full month; and after that you may go in to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife.

- Ps 45:10,11 Lu 14:26,27
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## REMOVING PAGAN CLOTHES AND MOURNING

**She shall also remove the clothes of her captivity and shall remain** (Heb - "sit") **in your house, and mourn her father and mother a full month** - NRSV "discard her captive's garb." So the marriage could not take place immediately, but there was time for both parties to adjust. Presumably her father and mother would be dead after the city was captured, so she would need time to grieve those losses. The fact that is not said to mourn over loss of husband or children suggests she was unmarried.

**Deere** makes an excellent point that "The full month allowed the captive woman a proper amount of time for mourning, and it also gave the prospective husband opportunity to reflect on his initial decision to take her as his wife. For with a shaved head she would be less attractive." ([Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

**And after that you may go in to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife- Go in to her** is a euphemism for sexual relations and in this context represents consummation of the marriage. Note the apparent absence of an actual marriage ceremony (cf. Gen. 24:67).

**Deuteronomy 21:14** "It shall be, if you are not pleased with her, then you shall let her go wherever she wishes; but you shall certainly not sell her for money, you shall not mistreat her, because you have humbled her.

- Ex 21:7-11
- **because:** De 22:19,24,29 Ge 34:2 Jdg 19:24
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### Related Passages:

Deuteronomy 22:19; and they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give it to the girl's father, because he publicly defamed a virgin of Israel. And she shall remain his wife; he cannot **divorce (let her go)** her all his days.

Deuteronomy 22:29 then the man who lay with her shall give to the girl's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall become his wife because he has violated her; he cannot **divorce (let her go)** her all his days.

## DIVORCE ALLOWED BUT SHE HAS RIGHTS

**It shall be, if you are not pleased with her, then you shall let her go**(translated "divorce" in Dt 22:19, 29) **wherever she wishes** - **NET** = "If you are not pleased with her, then you must let her go where she pleases" **Let her go** means divorce her (see more on divorce in Dt 24:1-4+ where same verb is used three more times - Dt 24:1, 3, 4). What might not please her? For one thing the Israelite serves Yahweh and she may not find that acceptable.

She is given full freedom in Israel. Even though she was a foreigner, she had certain rights.

**NET NOTE** - **let her go** - Heb "send her off." The Hebrew term שִׁלְחָהּ (shillakhtah) is a somewhat euphemistic way of referring to divorce, the matter clearly in view here (cf. Deut 22:19, 29; 24:1, 3; Jer 3:1; Mal 2:16). This passage does not have the matter of divorce as its principal objective, so it should not be understood as endorsing divorce generally. It merely makes the point that if grounds for divorce exist (see Deut 24:1-4), and then divorce ensues, the husband could in no way gain profit from it.

**but you shall certainly not sell her for money** - **NET** = "You cannot in any case sell her." She is not like an ox or sheep to be bought or sold. She is a creature in God's image, and God protects her from this humiliation.

**you shall not mistreat her, because you have humbled her** - **NET** = "you must not take advantage of her, since you have already humiliated her" Note how God protects her dignity and honor. **Mistreat** means to treat as a slave. The man had **humbled her** by

bringing her into his house, removing her clothes, and then letting **her go**, that is divorcing her!

**Coakley** points out that "While some of these regulations may affront modern sensibilities, these regulations were a far cry from the common way war captives were treated throughout other ancient Near Eastern nations of the time." ([Moody Bible Commentary](#))

**NET NOTE** - **You have humiliated her**. Since divorce was considered rejection, the wife subjected to it would "lose face" in addition to the already humiliating event of having become a wife by force (Dt 21:11–13). Furthermore, the Hebrew verb translated "humiliated" here (עָנָה, 'anah), commonly used to speak of rape (cf. Gen 34:2; 2 Sam 13:12, 14, 22, 32; Jdg 19:24), likely has sexual overtones as well. The woman may not be enslaved or abused after the divorce because it would be double humiliation (see also E. H. Merrill, Deuteronomy [NAC], 291).

**Mistreat** - [06014](#). עָמַר 'amar: A verb meaning to treat as a slave, to bind. It means to treat a person harshly, without humane consideration, without compassion (Deut. 21:14); or to be brutal physically to a person (Deut. 24:7). It refers to a person who binds and ties up sheaves of grain (Ps. 129:7). Some translators find a different word, therefore, in Ps 129:7. In Dt 21:14 the thought may be "must not enslave her" (cf. ASV, NAB, NIV, NRSV, NLT) for the Hebrew says "[must not] be tyrannical over."

**Humbled** ([06031](#)) 'anah means to be afflicted, be bowed down, be humbled, be meek. 'Anah frequently expresses the idea God sends affliction to discipline (Dt 8:2-3, see context Dt 8:5, 1Ki 11:39; Ps 90:15 Luke 3:5). It often speaks of harsh and painful treatment (Isa 53:4, Ge16:6). 'Anah is most frequently translated in LXX by [tapeinoo](#) (as it is here in Dt 21:15). God commanded them to "afflict themselves" ("deny yourselves" Lev 16:31NIV), which is the same word used to describe the pain that the Egyptians inflicted on the Hebrews (Ex 1:11,12) and the suffering Joseph felt in prison (Ps 105:18)!

**Deuteronomy 21:15** "If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him sons, if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved,

- Ge 29:18,20,30,31,33 1Sa 1:4,5
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## Outline

- Murder Mystery in Israel Dt 21:1-9
- Female Prisoners of War Dt 21:10-14
- Firstborn Inheritance Rights Dt 21:15-17
- The Rebellious Son Dt 21:18-21
- Miscellaneous Dt 21:22-22:12

## DIVIDED AFFECTION RIGHT OF THE FIRSTBORN

**If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him sons, if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved** - The firstborn son's rights were independent of whether this son's mother was now unloved.

**Deere** - Monogamy was always the divine ideal for marriage in the Old Testament (Ge 2:20–24). Polygamy, though practiced by some, never appears in a positive light in the Old Testament; the Bible never describes a truly happy polygamous marriage. One reason was that one of the wives would always be loved more than the other (s). The husband was forbidden in this case to follow his feelings and disregard the Law. His firstborn son must be given the double share of the father's inheritance even though he was the son of his father's unloved wife ([Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

**Utley** - This paragraph recognizes the cultural practice of polygamy. The first example in the OT is Lamech (Gen. 4:23). The most famous early polygamist was Jacob in Genesis 29. Polygamy was practiced among wealthy or powerful people, not usually the common people (although vv. 10–14 could refer to bigamy). "unloved" is literally "hated" (vv. 15 [twice], 16, 17). But it is functioning here as a Hebrew idiom of comparison—**loved** versus **unloved** (cf. Gen. 29:30–31; Mal. 1:2–3; Rom. 9:13 [quotes Mal. 1:2–3]; Luke 14:26).

**Believer's Study Study** - The passage does not necessarily speak of polygamy. The two wives could have been successive rather

than concurrent. There is certainly no permission given here for polygamy. The law is concerned with fairness toward one's children. ([Criswell, W A. Believer's Study Bible](#))

**NET NOTE** - Heb "one whom he loves and one whom he hates." For the idea of שָׂנֵא (sane', "hate") meaning to be rejected or loved less (cf. NRSV "disliked"), see Gen 29:31, 33; Mal 1:2–3. Cf. A. Konkel, NIDOTTE 3:1256–60.

#### Related Resource:

- [Why did God allow polygamy / bigamy in the Bible? | GotQuestions.org](#)

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#### Hard Sayings of the Bible - Ge 29:25–28 Is Polygamy Approved by God?

Is this episode a case of polygamy? Or did the special circumstances excuse Jacob, Laban or both? If it is polygamy, what is the case for or against polygamy?

Polygamy was never lawful for any of the persons in the Bible. There never existed an express biblical permission for such a deviation from the ordinance of God made at the institution of marriage in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:21–24).

There are at least four passages that conceivably could be construed as giving temporary permission from God to override the general law of marriage found in Genesis 2:24. They are Exodus 21:7–11, Leviticus 18:18, Deuteronomy 21:15–17 and 2 Samuel 12:7–8. But each one falls far short of proving that anything like divine permission was being granted in these passages.

Scripture does not always pause to state the obvious. In many cases there is no need for the reader to imagine what God thinks of such states of affairs, for the misfortune and strife that come into the domestic lives of these polygamists cannot be read as a sign of divine approval.

It is true that Jacob was deceived by Laban on Jacob's wedding night, but that did not justify Jacob in agreeing to Laban's crafty plan to get him to stay around for another seven years to ensure continued prosperity. Two wrongs in this case did not make a right.

**Deuteronomy 21:16** then it shall be in the day he wills what he has to his sons, he cannot make the son of the loved the firstborn before the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn.

- 1Ch 5:2 26:10 2Ch 11:19-22 21:3 Ro 8:29 Php 4:8 Heb 12:16,17
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### FIRSTBORN TO BE FIRST SHOW NO PARTIALITY

**Then** - Marks progression in the narrative.

**It shall be in the day he wills what he has to his sons, he cannot make the son of the loved the firstborn before the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn** - The **firstborn** could not be switched because of greater affection for the second wife.

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**Doug McIntosh - Firstborn** Israelites were warned not to tamper with reality when it came to writing their wills: "It shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn" (Deut. 21:16 NKJV). *Firstborn*, as this verse makes clear, is a term that refers to legal status as well as chronological precedence. The firstborn of the family received a double portion of his father's estate and was regarded as senior among surviving sons. Cults often teach that applying the term *firstborn* to Jesus proves that he was a created being and thus is not God. Nothing could be more misguided. Jesus' *firstborn* status relates him to us, not to creation: "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29). As the senior member of God's human family, Jesus is deserving not simply of respect, but of worship: "When He again brings the firstborn into the world, [God] says: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him'" (Heb. 1:6 NKJV). ([Holman Old Testament Commentary](#))

**Deuteronomy 21:17** "But he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; to him belongs the right of the firstborn.

- **by giving:** Ge 25:5,6,32,34 1Ch 5:1,2
- **the beginning:** Ge 49:3 Ps 105:36
- the right: Ge 25:31-34
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## DOUBLE PORTION TO FIRSTBORN

**But he shall acknowledge the firstborn** (see [note](#); Lxx = [prototokos](#)), **the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength** (aka "his procreative power"); **to him belongs the right of the firstborn-**  
**NET** - "Rather, he must acknowledge the son of the less loved wife as firstborn and give him the double portion of all he has, for that son is the beginning of his father's procreative power— to him should go the right of the firstborn."

**Guzik- double portion** - 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.

**NET NOTE - double portion** - Heb "measure of two." The Hebrew expression פִּי שְׁנַיִם (piy shénayim) suggests a two-thirds split; that is, the elder gets two parts and the younger one part. Cf. 2 Kgs 2:9; Zech 13:8. The practice is implicit in Isaac's blessing of Jacob (Gen 25:31–34) and Jacob's blessing of Ephraim (Gen 48:8–22).

**NET NOTE on beginning of his strength** - Heb "his generative power" (וְעוֹלָם, 'on; cf. HALOT 22 s.v.). Cf. NAB "the first fruits of his manhood"; NRSV "the first issue of his virility."

**Utley - double portion** The Hebrew idiom (BDB 804, "mouth" and BDB 1040, "double") is also used of Elisha's desire related to Elijah in 2 Kgs. 2:9. This is the only place in the OT that this double portion is specifically mentioned. If there were two sons, the older would receive two-thirds and the younger one-third; if three sons, then 50%, 25%, 25%, etc.

It is interesting that the historicity of these laws is demonstrated by the archaeological finds of other ancient law codes:

1. Jacob in Genesis 49 gives all his twelve sons equal inheritance. This is reflected in the Code of Hammurabi
2. Here the mention of a double share for the firstborn is paralleled in the Nuzi and Mari tablets.
3. The differences recorded in Scripture reflect the differences in their contemporary culture (see The Old Testament Documents by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., p. 86).

This is an interesting passage for clearly Ishmael was born before Isaac but by a different wife (Hagar). Also Jacob was actually not the firstborn but with some conniving was treated as if he were the firstborn over Esau. **McIntosh** comments "This legislation (IN DEUT 21) does not deny the special circumstances surrounding the experience of Jacob and Esau ([What was the story of Jacob and Esau?](#)) or [Isaac](#) and [Ishmael](#) where God specifically set aside the normal prerogatives of the firstborn. Apart from some such intervention, however, the rights of the firstborn were not to be transferred." ([Holman Old Testament Commentary](#))

**Firstborn** (Lxx in Dt 21:17 = [prototokos](#))(01060) **bekor** means an offspring who came first in the order of birth (animals [Ge](#) 4:4) or persons ([Ge](#) 25:13). Swanson adds that **bekor** means "firstborn, usually, the first male offspring, the oldest son, with the associative meaning of prominence in the clan and privileges pertaining to clan and inheritance ([Ge](#) 43:33; [Ne](#) 10:37)." The firstborn of clean animals were sacrificed to the Lord ([Dt](#) 12:6, 17), but the firstborn males of unclean animals could be redeemed ([Nu](#) 18:15)

**Currid** - Yahweh calls Israel his 'first-born son'. He uses the language of a family relationship. The status of the first-born in antiquity was one of great privilege. In the laws of Israel, the first-born had the right of headship of the family after the father died, and the right of receiving a double portion of inheritance ([Deut](#) 21:17). It was a position of prominence and pre-eminence.

The [Septuagint](#) (Lxx) translates **bekor** with Greek word [prototokos](#) (from **protos** = first, foremost, in place order or time; rank dignity + **titko** = beget, to bear, bring forth) can mean **first-born chronologically** ([Lk](#) 2:7), but refers primarily to position, rank, priority of position and emphasizes quality or kind, not time with the idea of "preeminence". So in [Colossians 1:15+](#) Paul writes that Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the **firstborn** of all creation." In this passage the emphasis is on the priority of Jesus' **rank** as over and above creation. In both Greek and Jewish culture, the **first-born** was the son who had the right of inheritance. He was **not** necessarily the first one born chronologically.

**Vine** writes **bekor** "represents the "firstborn" individual in a family ([Gen](#). 25:13); the word can also represent the "firstborn" of a nation, collectively ([Num](#). 3:46). The plural form of the word appears occasionally ([Neh](#). 10:36); in this passage, the word is applied to animals. In other passages, the singular

form of bekôr signifies a single "firstborn" animal (Lev. 27:26; kjv, "firstling") or collectively the "firstborn" of a herd (Exod. 11:5). The "oldest" or "firstborn" son (Exod. 6:14) had special privileges within the family. He received the special family blessing, which meant spiritual and social leadership and a double portion of the father's possessions, or twice what all the other sons received (Deut. 21:17). He could lose his blessing through misdeeds (Gen. 35:22) or by selling it (Gen. 25:29-34). God claimed all Israel and all their possessions as His own. As a token of this claim, Israel was to give Him all its "firstborn" (Exod. 13:1-16). The animals were to be sacrificed, redeemed, or killed, while the male children were redeemed either by being replaced with Levites or by the payment of a redemption price (Num. 3:40ff.). Israel was God's "firstborn"; in an idiom meaning a deadly disease (Job 18:13); the "first-born of the poor" is the poorest class of people (Isa. 14:30). [Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words](#). online)

**Right (04941) mishpat/mispat** from **shaphat** = to judge, govern) is a masculine noun used over 400x in the OT and has general meanings including a judgment, a legal decision, a legal case, a claim, proper, rectitude. **Vine** writes that **mishpat/mispat** "has two main senses; the first deals with the act of sitting as a judge, hearing a case, and rendering a proper verdict. Eccl. 12:14 is one such occurrence. Mishpat can also refer to the "rights" belonging to someone (Ex 23:6). This second sense carries several nuances: the sphere in which things are in proper relationship to one's claims (Ge 18:19—first occurrence); a judicial verdict (Dt. 17:9); the statement of the case for the accused (Nu 27:5); and an established ordinance (Exod. 21:1). ([Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words](#))

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### Why is the birthright so emphasized in the Bible?

The birthright is emphasized in the Bible because it honored the rights or privileges of the family's firstborn son. After the father died, or in the father's absence, the firstborn son assumed the father's authority and responsibilities. However, the Bible also shows that the father could rescind the birthright and pass it on to a younger son. A good example of this is the case of Jacob and his twelve sons. Reuben was the eldest, but the birthright was given to Joseph's sons. Even then, Jacob blessed the younger son, Ephraim, above the elder, Manasseh (Genesis 37:19-22; Genesis 49:1-4; Genesis 49:22-26).

In addition to assuming the leadership role in the family, the recipient of the birthright inherited twice that received by the other sons. In cases where a husband might have more than one wife, the birthright always went to the firstborn son of the father and could not be awarded to the son of a favorite wife without proper justification (Deuteronomy 21:15-17) or if the firstborn son's mother was a concubine or a slave (Genesis 21:9-13; Judges 11:1-2).

The birthright of a king's firstborn son included his succession to the throne (2 Chronicles 21:1-3). King Rehoboam of Judah violated this tradition by passing the birthright to Abijah, his favorite son. However, to avoid trouble with the older sons, the king paid them off (2 Chronicles 11:18-23).

As New Testament Christians, we have an inherited "birthright" status through Jesus Christ as the firstborn Son of God (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15; Revelation 1:5). As God's only begotten Son, Jesus received the kingdom from His Father and is Lord of all (Acts 2:36; Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 19:16). Christ promises to share with us His kingdom and inheritance (Romans 4:13; Galatians 3:29; Ephesians 1:18; Hebrews 11:16).

Christians are warned not to imitate Esau who, on impulse, gave away his birthright for a bowl of stew (Hebrews 12:16-17; Genesis 25:19-34). Because of his foolishness, Esau lost his birthright and the blessings of his father (Genesis 27). The lesson for us is to respect what is holy. We should never throw away what is important, godly, or honorable for the sake of temporary pleasure.

Our focus is to remain on Jesus, the appointed heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2; Psalm 2:7-8; Matthew 28:18). And we, through His grace and our faith in Him, are counted as joint heirs (Romans 8:17; Galatians 3:29; Titus 3:7). [GotQuestions.org](#)

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### Why is the firstborn so important in the Bible?

In biblical times, the firstborn was given certain unique rights, responsibilities, and privileges. A married couple's firstborn male child was given priority and preeminence in the family, and the best of the inheritance. The nation of Israel is identified as God's "firstborn" in the Bible (Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9); in other words, Israel held a special place of privilege and blessing among the nations.

People in ancient cultures attached great value to the eldest son, assigning him distinct benefits and obligations. The firstborn male was important because he was believed to represent the prime of human strength and vitality (Genesis 49:3; Psalm 78:51) as the "opener of the womb" (Exodus 13:2, 12, 15; Numbers 18:15; Luke 2:23). As a result, the firstborn son became the primary heir of the



family. The firstborn's birthright involved a **double portion** of the household estate and the leadership of the family if his father became incapacitated or was absent for some reason (Deuteronomy 21:17). After his father's death, the eldest son usually cared for his mother until her death and provided for his unmarried sisters.

In the Old Testament, firstborn humans—and animals—were considered sacred to God (Genesis 4:4; Exodus 13:1–2; Leviticus 27:26; Numbers 3:11–13; Deuteronomy 15:19–23). After God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt, He commanded the people to consecrate every firstborn male human and firstborn animal to Him (Exodus 22:29–30). The dedication was in memory of God's great deliverance and a sign to their children that God had brought them out of Egypt (Exodus 13:11–16).

At the beginning of Israel's years in the [wilderness](#), **God took all the males in the tribe of Levi into service in place of the firstborn males from the other tribes, entrusting the Levites with the work of His tabernacle** (Numbers 3). The number of Levite males did not equal the full number of firstborns among the other tribes, so, to make up the difference, some of the firstborn from other tribes were redeemed with a financial offering to the priests (Numbers 13:46–48). After the Israelites settled in Canaan, the firstborn sons of all Israelites were to be redeemed as a sign they belonged to God (Exodus 34:19; Numbers 18:14–16). Among the clean animals, the firstborn male was to be sacrificed to God eight days after birth (Exodus 13:11–16; 22:29–30). The firstborn males of unclean animals were either redeemed through a financial payment to the temple, replaced on the altar of sacrifice by a clean animal, or killed (Exodus 34:20; Numbers 18:14–16). These symbolic acts represented the Passover. In the final plague against Egypt, God “passed over” the firstborn males of Israel, who were in their homes with the blood of a lamb as a sign on their doors as God had commanded. The firstborn Egyptian males, including the livestock, were struck down (Exodus 11–12:30).

**The firstborn could sell his rights, as [Esau](#) did to Jacob** (Genesis 25:29–34). In doing this, “Esau despised his birthright” (Genesis 25:34). The author of Hebrews warned his readers, “See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done” (Hebrews 12:16–17). In taking his position as firstborn lightly, Esau sinned against God and his family.

The rights of the firstborn could also be lost, as was the case for [Reuben](#), Jacob's firstborn son (Genesis 49:3–4). Reuben slept with Bilhah, his father's concubine (Genesis 25:22), an act that demonstrated the utmost disrespect for his father and his family. Jacob denied Reuben the blessing of the firstborn because of that sin (Genesis 49:4). In fact, Jacob withheld the blessing of the firstborn from the next two oldest sons, too, due to their violence against the Shechemites (Genesis 49:5–7; cf. Genesis 34).

**The importance of the firstborn reaches its apex in Scripture in the person of Jesus Christ.** All prior implications of the firstborn's role in the Bible serve to illuminate Christ's preeminence over all creation and in the family of God.

**The New Testament describes Christ as the “[firstborn](#)” several times.** In an earthly sense, Jesus is Mary's firstborn son (Luke 2:7), and He was dedicated according to the law (Luke 2:22–24). Spiritually, Jesus is the “firstborn among many brothers and sisters” in the body of Christ (Romans 8:29). In Colossians 1:15, the apostle Paul writes, “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” This use of the title *firstborn* for Christ echoes the wording of Psalm 89:27–29, where God says of King David, “And I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure.”

In the book of Hebrews, Christ is “heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2) and God's “firstborn into the world” (Hebrews 1:6). Just as the firstborn son is head over his earthly family after his father, Jesus Christ is head of the body of Christ—the church—after God the Father (Ephesians 1:20–23; Colossians 1:18; Hebrews 2:10–12). Just as the firstborn son receives the greatest inheritance from his father, Jesus Christ receives the world as His inheritance. God says to His Son, “Only ask, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, the whole earth as your possession” (Psalm 2:8).

As a point of clarification, the term *firstborn* in relation to Jesus does not suggest that He is a created being. The Son of God has existed for all eternity along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is fully God (John 1:1–3). He took on human flesh so that He could become our Savior serve as the Mediator between humankind and God (1 Timothy 2:5). When Scripture refers to Christ as the “firstborn,” the message is that Christ's supremacy, sovereignty, and priority extend over all things and all other beings.

In paying for our sin, Jesus Christ suffered death, but He also became “the firstborn from the dead” (Revelation 1:5); that is, He conquered death and is the first person to ever be “born” to eternal life after dying. By God's grace, through faith in Jesus, we, too, can receive eternal life (Ephesians 2:1–10; John 3:16–18). Through His death and resurrection, Jesus is the “firstfruits” who guarantees the future resurrection and eternal life of many other sons and daughters of God (1 Corinthians 15:20–23). As He Himself said, “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19). [GotQuestions.org](#)



they chastise him, he will not even listen to them,

- **have a stubborn:** Pr 28:24 Pr 30:11,17 Isa 1:2
- **obey :** De 27:16 Ex 20:12 21:15,17 Lev 19:3 21:9 Pr 15:5 20:20 Eze 22:7
- **when they:** De 8:5 2Sa 7:14 Pr 13:24 19:18 22:15 23:13,14 29:17 Heb 12:9-11
- **will not:** Isa 1:5 Jer 5:3 31:18 Eze 24:13 Am 4:11,12
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## Outline

- Murder Mystery in Israel Dt 21:1-9
- Female Prisoners of War Dt 21:10-14
- Firstborn Inheritance Rights Dt 21:15-17
- The Rebellious Son Dt 21:18-21
- Miscellaneous Dt 21:22-22:12

## Related Passages:

Proverbs 30:11; 17 There is a kind of man who curses his father And does not bless his mother. 17 The eye that mocks a father And scorns a mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it.

## STUBBORN SON

If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will (Lxx = ouch = absolutely) **not even listen** ([shama](#); Lxx = [hupakouo](#) - lit "listen under" used in Eph 6:1+) **to them** - This description suggests the son is recalcitrant to discipline and instruction and the implication is that this is a chronic problem. **Stubborn** ([sarar](#); Lxx = [apeithes](#) one who will not be persuaded to obey some authority - Titus 1:16+) means he is obstinate and unwilling to change (sounds like some of my children!) The word **rebellious** means openly defiant of authority, in this case the authority God has placed over the son (and so to be disobedient to the parents is in a sense demonstrating disobedience and rebellion against God Himself). Interesting Israel is repeatedly described as rebellious. (Dt 9:24+) Clearly in this context (and in most OT uses) the verb **listen** ([shama](#)) implies heeding (responding to, taking action upon) what is heard, something this son did not do, even after they chastised or instructed him!

This is a violation of the fifth commandment, "**Honor** (a command) your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you." (Dt 5:16+) but was such a striking violation that it was to be punished by death.

**Stubborn** (rebellious) ([05637](#)) [sarar](#) means to be stubborn or to be obstinate, 16/17x as Qal participle and 4x in parallel with *mārāh* which means rebellious. A similar verb in Arabic means "to be angry" and in Akkadian "to be deceitful." **Patterson** - The root is clearly displayed in the case of the wayward and rebellious son who is publicly denounced and executed (Deut. 21:18ff., see under *sābā'*). Most often it portrays Israel's total rebellion against God (Isaiah 1:23; Jeremiah 6:28). Indeed, the "stubborn and rebellious son" may be one who is not merely disobedient to parents, but who has rebelled likewise against their God. In that case, the verses teach that even the parent should condemn the apostate son. Cf. for a similar thought Deut. 13:6-11. It is a rebellious generation (Psalm 78:8) or heifer (Hosea 4:16) which walks in its own way (Isaiah 65:2). It has a stubborn shoulder (Neh. 9:29), a deaf ear (Zech. 7:11), and a stubborn and rebellious heart (Jeremiah 5:23). (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament)

**Rebellious** ([04784](#)) [marah](#) means to be contentious, rebellious, and openly defiant to an authority by not obeying commands. Most of the uses of *marah* refer to rebellion by Israel or Judah against Jehovah (exceptions = Dt 21:18, 20, Job 17:2, Job 23:2, Pr 17:11). There is repeated focus on Israel's rebellion in the wilderness after being set free from slavery in Egypt (Nu 20:10, 24; 27:14; Deut 1:26, 43; 9:7, 23), summed up by the statement "You have been rebellious against the LORD from the day I knew you." (Deut 9:24) *Marah* is used with similar descriptive words - stubborn (Dt 21:18, 20, Jer 5:23, Ps 78:8), to grieve (Isa 63:10, Ps 78:40), to refuse (Isa 1:20, Neh 9:17), to transgress (Lam 3:42), to sin (Ps 78:17), to test (Ps 78:56), to rebel (*marad* in Neh 9:26), to reject or profane (Ezek 20:13).

**Chastise** (discipline, instruct) (03256)(**yasar**) means to [chasten](#), [chastise](#), [admonish](#), discipline. Literally to chasten with blows or figuratively with words (instruct, correct, punish, reform, reprove). To punish, chasten or instruct in order to gain control or enforce obedience. The theological basis for discipline of Israel is grounded in the covenant relationship which Yahweh establishes with His people. It is a good thing to be disciplined by the Lord for as the psalmist says "Blessed is the man whom You **chasten**, O LORD, And whom You teach out of Your law." (Ps 94:12) Notice there that the discipline is not in a vacuum but is coupled with teaching, a good pattern! (cp similar pattern in Isa 28:26). God chastens individuals, Israel and the nations.

The **Septuagint** translates **yasar** here with [paideuo](#) from **país** = child) refers primarily to the training or discipline of children to bring them to maturity by teaching, instructing, educating or nurturing and also by utilizing correction and punishment if necessary (which it usually is for children) as a part of the training process.

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#### QUESTION - [Deuteronomy 21:18–21 Does the Bible really say that parents should have their rebellious children stoned?](#)

**ANSWER** - This is one of those "Yes, but..." questions that require serious explaining. Leviticus 20:9 says, "If there is anyone who curses his father or his mother, he shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother, his bloodguiltiness is upon him."

First, a note on the last part of the verse. "His bloodguiltiness is upon him" basically means that he brought this punishment on himself. He knew what he was supposed to do, and he didn't do it. Also, it is important to remember that the Mosaic Law was for God's covenant people, Israel, living in a theocracy. The Old Testament Law is not in force today (Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:23–25; Ephesians 2:15).

Deuteronomy 21:18–21 expands on the law:

*If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his home town. And they shall say to the elders of his city, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard." Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear of it and fear.*

The context of a passage is crucial to understanding what it means. Taking these two verses by themselves, one could come away with a negative attitude toward God and His Word. In the Leviticus passage, this law is part of a section dealing with egregious sins, sins that would tear a nation and family apart. The trespass in question was not a casual, slip-of-the-tongue curse, but a deep-seated rebellion, an ongoing attitude of hatred that had to be dealt with severely. In other words, the punishment was not for minor infractions but for determined defiance.

There are several things to keep in mind about this particular sin and about the law:

*The sin was ongoing and continuous.* Deuteronomy 21:18 indicates that the punishment was only meted out after a persistent refusal to heed both father and mother and after all discipline had failed. The parents have tried to deal with their son in a loving, firm way, but nothing worked.

*It was deep-seated sin.* Verse 20 specifies that the son is stubborn in his rebellion. Not only is he recalcitrant, "he is a glutton and a drunkard." This is not a case of a child who misses curfew or plays ball in the house. This was a true menace, a child who is causing trouble in society and grieving his parents, possibly to the point of endangering them physically and financially.

*The punishment was not an impulsive act of anger or vengeance.* Verse 19 says that the city elders had to oversee the case and determine the guilt of the child. It is only after the elders pronounced a sentence of death that the execution could take place. The law did not allow an angry parent to arbitrarily stone a child. A modern equivalent of this is when a parent sees news footage of his child committing a crime and subsequently turns the child in to the police. If parents know their child is acting in a way that endangers society, they are responsible to obey the civil authorities and report the crime.

*The punishment was designed to preserve the nation.* As verse 21 explains, the reason for this law was to purge evil from society and act as a deterrent to further rebellion. Israel was a nation chosen by God to be holy (Exodus 20:6). God gave the Israelites three [types of laws](#): judicial, moral, and ceremonial. This is a judicial law. A child who was actively and deliberately rejecting the laws of the land needed to be punished judicially.

Which brings us to the last and most important factor:

*Rebellion against one's parents is direct rebellion against God.* The 5th Command is to honor one's father and mother (Exodus

20:12). Parents are a God-ordained authority. Disobedience to parents is disobedience to God (Ephesians 6:1-3). Throughout the Bible, there are only a handful of things we are told to fear: God (Proverbs 1:7) and parents (Leviticus 19:3) are among them.

The law requiring rebellious children to be stoned to death was meant for extreme cases to protect God's people. It would have been heartbreaking for parents to bear the responsibility of initiating such severe measures. However, the Bible never records this law being enforced. - GOTQUESTIONS.ORG

**Deuteronomy 21:19** then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his home town.

- bring: De 21:2 16:18 25:7 Zec 13:3
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## ELDERS JUDGE STUBBORN SON

**then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his home town**- The parents could seize the stubborn son but could not stone him. That judgment was left to the elders.

**Deere** - The son was to be taken to the elders at the gate (i.e., the place where the Law was administered; cf. Dt 22:15; Josh. 20:4; Job 29:7). ([Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

**Keil** - The elders are not regarded here as judges in the strict sense of the word, but as magistrates, who had to uphold the parental authority, and administer the local police. The gate of the town was the forum, where the public affairs of the place were discussed (cf. Deut 22:15; 25:7); ([Deuteronomy 21](#))

**Seize** ([08610](#)) (**taphas** means to lay of of, capture, arrest, grasp, catch. **Taphas** basically “seize, take hold of,” sometimes preparatory to further action. It is therefore often used of capturing people (2 Kgs 14:13) or towns (Josh 8:8), or of grasping weapons (Amos 2:15) to use them or musical instruments (Gen 4:21) to play them. It also thus has the figurative sense of “being expert/skilled in” the law (Jer 2:8) or warfare (Num 31:27). In fact, the figurative uses of the verb are in many respects the most interesting. In Ps. 10:2, the wicked are said to be caught in their own schemes, while in Ezk 14:5 the Lord expresses his intention to seize or terrorize the hearts of his idol-worshipping people. Prov 30:9 warns against seizing or profaning the name of God and is an excellent example of how OT wisdom literature presupposes the Mosaic legislation (Ex 20:7; Lev 19:12; Deut 5:11). It means to get possession of, to catch in its active usages: to grab hold of something, e.g., a garment (Gen. 39:12); to catch and hold a lizard (Prov. 30:28); to capture or to seize a person (1 Sam. 23:26). It has the sense figuratively of holding on to someone or something for support, e. g., Egypt (Ezek. 29:7). In a general sense, it may describe living in or occupying a hill, an area, or a location (Jer. 49:16). It takes on the sense of holding or wielding a tool or a weapon in a skillful way (Ezek. 21:11[16]; Amos 2:15). By extension, it takes on a figurative sense of handling the Law skillfully or planning strategy in warfare (Num. 31:27; Jer. 34:3). In a passive sense, it means to be seized (Jer. 38:23; 50:24).

**Swanson** - **1. (qal) take hold of, seize, capture, arrest**, i.e., take another entity or object into custody, often as a military victory (Dt 20:19); (nif) seized, caught, be captured (Jer 34:3; 38:23; 48:41; 50:24, 46; 51:32, 41; Eze 21:28[EB 23], 29[EB 24]+); **2. (qal pass.) covered**, i.e., pertaining to placing one object over another, as the feature of an object (Hab 2:19+); **3. (nif) caught in the act.**, i.e., pertaining to something being clearly known by first hand experience of the speaker or a witness (Nu 5:13+); **4. (qal) control**, i.e., be under the considerable influence of another so as to do only what the controller wants, as a figurative extension of being caught in a trap or by the hand (Eze 14:5); (nif) controlled (Ps 10:2+); **5. (qal) seize, take hold of, i.e., grasp and hold an object** (Ge 39:12); (nif) be caught (Eze 12:13; 17:20; 19:4, 8+), note: some of the contexts may refer to being seized in custody as a prisoner; (piel) catch, seize with the hand (Pr 30:28+); **6. (qal) play an instrument**, formally, grasp, i.e., execute a melody from a musical instrument, as an extension of grasping an object in the hand (Ge 4:21); **7. (qal) deal with, formally, grasp**, i.e., behave or conduct oneself with respect to certain means, as a figurative extension of grasping an object with familiarity and some understanding (Jer 2:8); **8. (qal) reap**, i.e., cut off and gather the harvest, as an extension of grasping and controlling an object in the hand (Jer 50:16); **9. (qal) dishonor, profane**, i.e., cause one to have low status, and so become a contemptible object of loathing, as a figurative extension of having a low status after being captured in a battle

or some such event (Pr 30:9); **10. unit:** (qal) מִלְחָמָה (mīlḥāmā(h)) soldier, formally, engaged in battle, i.e., one who is a military fighter (Nu 31:27); **11. unit:** יָשָׁר (yāšār) archer, bowman, formally, handler of the bow, i.e., a soldier who shoots arrows with a bow (Am 2:15+); **12. unit:** (qal) שָׁבַב (šāḇāḇ) rape, formally, grasp and lie with, i.e., to attack and force a partner to have sexual intercourse (Dt 22:28+) ([Dictionary of Semantic Domains - Hebrew](#))

**Taphas** - 59v - arrested(2), capture(2), captured(8), caught(5), grasp(1), grasps(1), handle(4), handled(1), hold(1), lay hold(1), lays hold(1), occupy(1), overlaid(1), play(1), profane(1), seize(5), seized(13), seizes(1), surely be captured(1), take(3), taken over(1), took(3), took hold(3), wielding(1), wields(1). Gen. 4:21; Gen. 39:12; Num. 5:13; Deut. 9:17; Deut. 20:19; Deut. 21:19; Deut. 22:28; Jos. 8:8; Jos. 8:23; 1 Sam. 15:8; 1 Sam. 23:26; 1 Ki. 11:30; 1 Ki. 13:4; 1 Ki. 18:40; 1 Ki. 20:18; 2 Ki. 7:12; 2 Ki. 10:14; 2 Ki. 14:7; 2 Ki. 14:13; 2 Ki. 16:9; 2 Ki. 18:13; 2 Ki. 25:6; 2 Chr. 25:23; Ps. 10:2; Ps. 71:11; Prov. 30:9; Prov. 30:28; Isa. 3:6; Isa. 36:1; Jer. 2:8; Jer. 26:8; Jer. 34:3; Jer. 37:13; Jer. 37:14; Jer. 38:23; Jer. 40:10; Jer. 46:9; Jer. 48:41; Jer. 49:16; Jer. 50:16; Jer. 50:24; Jer. 50:46; Jer. 51:32; Jer. 51:41; Jer. 52:9; Ezek. 12:13; Ezek. 14:5; Ezek. 17:20; Ezek. 19:4; Ezek. 19:8; Ezek. 21:11; Ezek. 21:23; Ezek. 21:24; Ezek. 27:29; Ezek. 29:7; Ezek. 30:21; Ezek. 38:4; Amos 2:15; Hab. 2:19

**Gateway** (08179)(shaar) Basically, this word represents a structure closing and enclosing a large opening through a wall, or a barrier through which people and things pass to an enclosed area. The "gate" of a city often was a fortified structure deeper than the wall. This is especially true of strong, well-fortified cities, as in the case of the first biblical appearance of the word: "And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom..." (Gen. 19:1). Within major cities there were usually strongly fortified citadels with "gates" (Neh. 2:8). Certain "gates" were only the thickness of a curtain: "And for the gate of the court [of the tabernacle] shall be a hanging of twenty cubits ..." (Exod. 27:16). Later, the temple had large openings between its various courts: "Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord" (Jer. 7:2).

Exod. 32:26 speaks of an opening ("gate") in the barrier surrounding Israel's temporary camp at the foot of Sinai. Such camps often were enclosed with barriers of earth and/or rock. Ancient fortified cities had to find a source of water for periods of siege, and sometimes dams were built. Nah. 2:6 apparently refers to such a dam when it says: "The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved" (i.e., swept away). Both the underworld (Job 38:17) and heaven, the domain of God (Gen. 28:17), are pictured as cities with "gates."

The "gates" of ancient cities sometimes enclosed city squares or were immediately in front of squares (2 Chron. 32:6). The entry way (2 Chron. 23:15) could be secured with heavy doors that were attached to firmly embedded pillars and reinforced by bars (Judg. 16:3; cf. Psa. 147:13; Neh. 3:3). Palaces could be citadels with strongly fortified "gates" large enough to have rooms over them. During siege, such rooms housed warriors. It was such a room into which David climbed and wept over the death of his son Absalom (2 Sam. 18:33). "Gates" had rooms to house guards (Ezek. 40:7). The rooms bordering the "gates" could also be used to store siege supplies (Neh. 12:25).

The "gates" were the place where local courts convened: "And if the man like not to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband's brother refuseth ..." (Deut. 25:7). The sentence sometimes was executed at the city "gates": "And I will fan them with a fan in the gates of the land; I will bereave them of children, I will destroy my people ..." (Jer. 15:7). In this passage, all of the land of Israel is envisioned as a city at whose "gates" God gathers the offenders for trial, judgment, sentence, and punishment. The phrase, "within the gates," means "within the area enclosed." Thus the sojourner who is "in your gates" is the foreigner who permanently lives in one of Israel's towns (Exod. 20:10). In passages such as Deut. 12:15, this phrase means "wherever you live": "Notwithstanding thou mayest kill and eat flesh in all thy gates...." ([Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words](#))

**Shaar in Deut** - Deut. 6:9; Deut. 11:20; Deut. 12:12; Deut. 12:15; Deut. 12:17; Deut. 12:18; Deut. 12:21; Deut. 14:21; Deut. 14:27; Deut. 14:28; Deut. 14:29; Deut. 15:7; Deut. 15:22; Deut. 16:5; Deut. 16:11; Deut. 16:14; Deut. 16:18; Deut. 17:2; Deut. 17:5; Deut. 17:8; Deut. 18:6; Deut. 21:19; Deut. 22:15; Deut. 22:24; Deut. 23:16; Deut. 24:14; Deut. 25:7; Deut. 26:12; Deut. 28:52; Deut. 28:55; Deut. 28:57; Deut. 31:12;

us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.'

- **not:** Pr 29:17
- **glutton:** Pr 19:26 20:1 23:19-21,29-35
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## PARENTS ACCUSATIONS AGAINST THEIR SON

**They shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey**(does not listen to our voice) **us, he is a glutton and a drunkard** - Note that he is not just a transient issue but is multifaceted - stubborn, rebellious, disobedient, glutton, drunkard. This is not a son that just "talked back to his parents."

**Deere** - The son was ultimately rebelling against the Lord's authority and therefore attacking the foundations of the covenant community. ([Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

**Stubborn** (05637) ([sarar](#)) means to be stubborn or to be obstinate, 16/17x as Qal participle and 4x in parallel with mārāh which means rebellious. A similar verb in Arabic means "to be angry" and in Akkadian "to be deceitful." סָרַר sārār: A verb meaning to be stubborn, to be rebellious. Israel was said to be stubborn for forming an alliance with Egypt against God's ordained plan (Isa. 30:1); performing improper sacrifices, eating unclean things, and worshiping ancestors (Isa. 65:2). They were even compared to a stubborn heifer (Hos. 4:16). They stubbornly turned their backs (lit., shoulders) on God and His words (Neh. 9:29; Zech. 7:11). The son who rebelled against his parents could be severely disciplined and was eventually stoned (Deut. 21:18, 21). The term is also used of an immoral woman (Prov. 7:11).

**Rebellious** (04784) ([marah](#)) מָרָה mārāh: A verb meaning to be rebellious. In one instance, this word spoke of a son's rebellion against his parents (Deut. 21:18, 20). In all other instances, this word was used of rebellion against God, which provoked Him to action. This word is usually used as an indictment against a nation's rebellion, whether Israel's (Deut. 9:23, 24; Ps. 78:8; Jer. 5:23); Samaria's (Hos. 13:16[14:1]); or David's enemies (Ps. 5:10[11]). In a few instances, it is used to indict specific people, as Moses (Num. 20:24; 27:14), or a man of God who disobeyed (1 Kgs. 13:21, 26).

**Glutton** - 2151. זָלַל zālāl: I. A verb meaning to be vile, frivolous, gluttonous, worthless; to despise. It describes an especially serious corruption of character in a worthless, gluttonous son (Deut. 21:20), closely akin to one who drinks too much (Prov. 23:20, 21). A good son avoids company with this vile, gluttonous person (Prov. 28:7). It is the opposite of what is useful, valuable, and precious (Jer. 15:19). It means to hold up to disdain, to despise (Lam. 1:8).

**Drunkard** 5433. סָבָא sābā': A verb meaning to imbibe, to carouse, to get drunk. It means to drink heavily, to drink hard: a drunkard (Deut. 21:20; Prov. 23:20, 21; Ezek. 23:42; Nah. 1:10); those who engage in drinking too much (Isa. 56:12).

**Deuteronomy 21:21** "Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel will hear of it and fear.

- **all the men:** De 13:10-11 Dt 17:5 Lev 24:16
- **so:** De 13:5,11 19:19,20 22:21,24
- **all Israel:** De 13:11
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### Related Passages:

Deuteronomy 13:10 "So you shall stone him to death because he has sought to seduce you from the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. "Then **all Israel will hear and be afraid**, and will never again do such a wicked thing among you.

Deuteronomy 17:13 "Then all the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act presumptuously again.



## STONING A STUBBORN SON

**Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death - NET** - "Then all the men of his city must stone him to death. In this way you will purge out wickedness from among you, and all Israel will hear about it and be afraid." Note that it does not say that the parents stoned him but one cannot exclude the father since the text says **all the men**.

**Remove** is the verb **ba'ar** (translated **purge** in some of the other passages).is repeatedly used in this section - Dt. 17:7; Dt. 17:12; Dt. 19:13; Dt. 19:19; Dt. 21:9; Dt. 21:21 **NET NOTE** adds "The Hebrew term בַּעַרְתָּה (bā'artah), here and elsewhere in such contexts (cf. Deut 13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:9), suggests God's anger which consumes like fire (thus בָּעַר, ba'ar, "to burn").

**And all Israel will hear of it and fear** - Stoning is clearly seen as a deterrent to sin in Israel. What effect might stoning for capital punishment have on crime in America? Just wondering! Fear of this punishment may have been enough to prevent sons extreme rebellion, for there is no record in the Bible or in extra-biblical literature of it ever having been carried out.

**Morris** agrees that "Records indicate no rebellious son was ever put to death under this law. Every father elected to spare his own son, no matter how sinful the son might have been. Only Christ, the perfectly obedient Son (John 8:29;17:4) was not spared (Romans 8:32).

**Guzik** - This law was clearly intended to protect the social order of ancient Israel. No society can endure when the young are allowed to make war against the old. Perhaps just the presence of this law was deterrent enough; we never have a Scriptural example of a son being stoned to death because he was a stubborn and rebellious son.. "Yet the Jews say this law was never put into practice, and therefore it might be made for terror and prevention, and to render the authority of parents more sacred and powerful." (Poole).i. "Stoning was the punishment appointed for blasphemers and idolaters; which if it seem severe, it is to be considered that parents are in God's stead, and intrusted in good measure with his authority over their children; and that families are the matter and foundation of the church and commonwealth, and they who are naughty members and rebellious children in them, do commonly prove the bane and plague of these, and therefore no wonder if they are nipped in the bud." (Poole). "If such a law were in force now, and duly executed, how many deaths of disobedient and profligate children would there be in all corners of the land!" (Clarke)

**So you shall remove** (purge - **baar**) **the evil from your midst** - **Remove ba'ar** literally means to burn, but most uses in Deuteronomy describe the state or action of destroying an entity into non-existence as a figurative extension of fire consuming an object. Thus it often means to kill. The first 3 uses in Deuteronomy describes Mt Sinai = "the mountain **burned** with fire to the very heart of the heavens." (Dt 5:23, 9:15).**What will be removed or purged?** False prophet (Dt 13:5), false worshiper (Dt 17:7), one who show contempt for a judge (Dt 17:12), murderer (Dt 19:13), false witness (Dt 19:19), people's bloodguiltiness for an unsolved murder (Dt 21:6), a stubborn, rebellious son (Dt 21:21), girl who lied when she married and was not actually a virgin (Dt 22:21), kidnapper (Dt 24:7).

**Evil** (07451) רָע **ra'**, רָעָה **rā'āh**: An adjective meaning bad, evil. The basic meaning of this word displays ten or more various shades of the meaning of evil according to its contextual usage. It means bad in a moral and ethical sense and is used to describe, along with good, the entire spectrum of good and evil; hence, it depicts evil in an absolute, negative sense, as when it describes the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9; 3:5, 22).

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### Hard Sayings of the Bible = Dt 21:18–21 Stone a Stubborn and Rebellious Son?

At first glance this law seems pitiless in its demands both of a society with incorrigibly delinquent children and of the emotionally torn parents of such ruffians. But a second glance would question if our pity is well placed. Shall we pity the criminal or the community? Does Scripture side with the offender or the offended? The issue is not abstract or antiquated. It haunts modern society as well as the Christian community.

The case represented here particularizes the fifth of the Ten Commandments. The sanctity of the family is at the heart of this command to honor one's parents. Accordingly, God's plan for the family in its origin, function and perpetuity was not to be measured by humanistic or societal conventions but by the counsel of God.

Children were to honor their parents as God's earthly representatives. To rebel against these representatives was equal to rebelling against God. In practice, obedience to parents (a command strictly qualified by "in the Lord") could then be transferred as obedience to God, for the parents taught the children the law of God. Parents were to impress the commandments of God on their children's hearts while sitting together at home, walking along the road or getting up (Deut 6:6–7).

What happened when a serious case of juvenile delinquency appeared in the community? Should the family strike out in wrath to rid



themselves of this embarrassment?

Deuteronomy 21:19–21 limits the power of the family. Parents were restricted to chastening and disciplining their children. They were never given power to kill or to abort life. Only under Roman law, as R. J. Rushdoony points out, was the parent the source and lord of life. In Scripture God is the source and Lord over life.

Thus, when anyone in the extended family rebelled and refused to obey his or her parents (son does not restrict this law to sons, for it also included daughters and, by extension, all relatives), the rest of the family was to align themselves with God's law and not with the recalcitrant family member.

In fact, the family order was so sacred to the fabric of society and the plan of God that the accusing family members were not considered the complaining witnesses as in other cases. Ordinarily witnesses were required to participate in the execution by throwing the first stones (Deut 17:7). In this case, however, "all the men of his town" were required to participate, for the complaint was a complaint by the community against one of its members.

What disrupted one family in the community attacked the whole community. Moreover, if the parents had refused to bring the guilty and incorrigible individual to the elders, they would have been guilty of condoning and, in a sense, participating in the defiant son's crimes.

Did the town actually kill one of its own members just for being rebellious? Such behavior came under the curse of God himself, so serious was the charge of parental abuse by children or their defiant refusal to listen to them (Deut 27:16).

However, for each crime demanding capital punishment (except premeditated murder) there was a substitution or ransom that could be offered (Num 35:31). Thus, while the penalty marked the seriousness of the crime, the offer of a ransom would mitigate some of the severity in the actual sentencing. Scripture suggests no proper ransom or substitute in this case, but it likely was similar to contemporary sentences that require community service for a specified time.

Could pity play any part in the sentencing of these crimes? Not if that pity were directed toward the violator rather than the violated or the word of God. Pity could distract people from serving God and honoring his word. There was to be no pity, for example, for the idolatrous worshipers of Canaan (Deut 7:16), the subverter of the faith (Deut 13:6–9) or the coldblooded murderer (Deut 19:11–13). Instead, our affection ought to be toward the living God and what he has spoken. Any love, loyalty or pity which preempts that love is itself a lawless and faithless love.

#### **Deuteronomy 21:22 "If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree,**

- Jos 8:29 10:26 De 19:6 22:26 1Sa 26:16 Mt 26:66 Ac 23:29 25:11,25 26:31
- **worthy of death:** 2Sa 4:12
- **hang:** 2Sa 21:6,9 Lu 23:33 Joh 19:31-38
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### **Outline**

- Murder Mystery in Israel Dt 21:1-9
- Female Prisoners of War Dt 21:10-14
- Firstborn Inheritance Rights Dt 21:15-17
- The Rebellious Son Dt 21:18-21
- Miscellaneous Dt 21:22-22:12

### **HANGING A DEAD BODY ON A TREE**

Chapter 21 begins with an unsolved murder and ends with capital punishment and a man put to death.

**If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree-** Note the progression - he is put to death. Then his dead body is hung on a tree. This was not hanging like in a gallows but his corpse exposed for all to see and just like the stoning of the stubborn son this would be sending a message not to commit this same crime. The Hebrews understand this of hanging a man up after he was stoned to death; which was done for some heinous malefactors. We have the examples of [Rechab and Baanah](#), who, for murdering [Ish-bosheth](#), were slain by David's commandment, their hand and feet cut

off, and then hanged up.

So in Nu 25:4, we read, "And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all the heads (chief men) of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel." Among the Romans, in after ages, they hanged, or rather fastened to the tree ALIVE; and such was the cruel death of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (See [What is the history of crucifixion? What was crucifixion like?](#))

**McIntosh** - Even such an offender is not to be treated in death as human garbage. The body of such a man might in certain cases be hung on a tree as a display of justice and to serve as a deterrent to lawlessness (cp. Nu 25:4; Josh. 8:29; Josh 10:26-27; 2 Sa 21:5-9). Stoning, not hanging, was the means of execution in Israel. ([Holman Old Testament Commentary](#))

**Guzik** - 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. Hang him on a tree does not have the idea of being executed by strangulation; but of having the corpse mounted on a tree or other prominent place, to expose the executed one to disgrace and the elements.

**Deuteronomy 21:23** his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.

- **he who is hanged is accursed of God** De 7:26 Nu 25:4 Jos 7:12 2Sa 21:6 Ro 9:3 Ga 3:13 1Co 16:22 2Co 5:21
- **land:** Lev 18:25 Nu 35:33,34
- [Deuteronomy 21 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Galatians 3:13-14+ Christ 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**"—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Acts 5:30+ "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.

Acts 10:39+ We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross.

Acts 13:29+ "When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.

Deuteronomy 27:26 '**Cursed** is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

### HANGING A CORPSE ON A TREE WAS LIMITED TO A DAY

**his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance** - NET = "his body must not remain all night on the tree; instead you must make certain you bury him that same day, for the one who is left exposed on a tree is cursed by God. You must not defile your land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance." **Hanged** not like with a rope but as a corpse placed on a tree - NCV "anyone whose body is displayed on a tree."

**McIntosh** - By proper burial of even such a person, Israel would not **desecrate the land** God was giving them **as an inheritance**. ([Holman Old Testament Commentary](#))

**Deere** - The criminal was under God's curse not because his body was hung on a tree but because he had broken God's Law by committing a crime worthy of death ([Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

**Guzik** on **bury the same day** - 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.

**Clarke** adds that ""It is worthy of remark that in the infliction of punishment prescribed by the Mosaic law, we ever find that Mercy

walks hand in hand with Judgment."

**Morris** - The reason why a person executed by hanging on a tree is specially cursed is not explained. It probably is because of its prophetic implications, anticipating the future death of Christ when He would bear "**our sins in His own body on the tree**" (1 Peter 2:24). Ever since Adam's sin brought God's curse of death on the earth (Genesis 3:17-19+), the whole creation had been awaiting the time when Christ would be "made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Galatians 3:13+). The primeval curse was occasioned because Adam ate the delectable fruit of the tree of temptation; therefore, the second Adam must Himself become the bitter fruit on the tree of salvation. As Christ must be buried before sundown to avoid profaning the sabbath (John 19:31), so every criminal executed by hanging or by crucifixion (which practice had not yet been introduced in Moses' day) must likewise be buried before sundown in order not to delay a receipt of the accursed victim by the cursed ground. That Christ was actually "hanged on a tree" is confirmed three times in the New Testament (Acts 5:30; Acts 10:39; Acts 13:29).

**NET NOTE** on **accursed of God** - The idea behind the phrase cursed by God seems to be not that the person was impaled because he was cursed but that to leave him exposed there was to invite the curse of God upon the whole land. Why this would be so is not clear, though the rabbinic idea that even a criminal is created in the image of God may give some clue (thus J. H. Tigay, Deuteronomy [JPSTC], 198). Paul cites this text (see Gal 3:13) to make the point that Christ, suspended from a cross, thereby took upon himself the curse associated with such a display of divine wrath and judgment (T. George, Galatians [NAC], 238–39)

**Guzik** - **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.

**TSK** on **he who is hanged is accursed of God**- That is, it is the highest degree of reproach that can attach to a man, and proclaims him under the curse of God as much as any external punishment can. They that see him thus hanging between heaven and earth, will conclude him abandoned of both, and unworthy of either. Bp. Patrick observes, that this passage is applied to the death of Christ; not only because he bore our sins and was exposed to shame, as these malefactors were that were accursed of God, but because he was in the evening taken down from the cursed tree and buried, (and that by the particular care of the Jews, with an eye to this law, Joh 19:31,) in token, that now the guilt being removed, the law was satisfied, as it was when the malefactors had hanged till sun-set: it demanded no more. Then he, and those that are his, ceased to be a curse. And as the land of Israel was pure and clean when the body was buried, so the church is washed and cleansed by the complete satisfaction which Christ thus made.

**Inheritance** (possession, heritage) (05159) **nachalah** from **nāḥal** = signifies giving or receiving property which is part of a permanent possession and as a result of succession) means Inheritance, heritage, possession. A possession is any piece of property that passes by law to an heir on the death of the owner. It also speaks of God's promises to His people, such as the promise of the land to national (redeemed **remnant**) Israel. In Dt 4:20 we read "But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today." **Nachalah** in Deut - Deut. 3:28; Deut. 4:20; Deut. 4:21; Deut. 4:38; Deut. 9:26; Deut. 9:29; Deut. 10:9; Deut. 12:9; Deut. 12:12; Deut. 14:27; Deut. 14:29; Deut. 15:4; Deut. 18:1; Deut. 18:2; Deut. 19:10; Deut. 19:14; Deut. 20:16; Deut. 21:23; Deut. 24:4; Deut. 25:19; Deut. 26:1; Deut. 29:8; Deut. 32:9;

**Defile** (make unclean) (02930) **tame** means to become unclean or make unclean. To become ceremonially unclean. To defile oneself (Hos 5:3; 6:10, Ezek 20:30). A wife defiles herself by adultery (Nu 5:13, Jer 2:23 = speaks of Israel as God's wife who had defiled herself by her spiritual adultery with idols, Ezek 23:13 = refers to Judah and in context to the 10 Northern tribes - both had defiled themselves). To defile (violate) a girl (Ge 34:5), a woman (Ezek 18:6) The **Septuagint (Lxx)** translates **tame** with the verb **miaino**, means literally to dye with another color. As used in the NT figuratively **miaino** describes a mind and conscience that is morally contaminated, corrupted, tainted, tinged and polluted (Titus 1:15-note = "**defiled** and unbelieving"). In a ceremonial or cultic sense **miaino** means to defile, profane, desecrate, make unclean or to become unacceptable. To **defile** something is to sully (damage the purity or integrity of), mar (impair the appearance of; disfigure) or spoil it. Jude uses **miaino** in a physical and a moral sense of the one's flesh defiled by licentiousness and so to corrupt morally. (Jude 1:8-note)

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### [Why is there a curse associated with hanging on a tree?](#)

Deuteronomy 21:22–23 teaches that there was a divine curse placed on a hanged person: “And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance” (ESV).

For most capital offenses covered by Jewish Law, stoning was the form of punishment. On some occasions the dead body would be hung in public as a deterrent to further crime. This law made it illegal to do so overnight (Leviticus 18:24–27; Numbers 35:3–34).

The apostle Paul referred to this law in relationship to Jesus and His death on the cross. In Galatians 3:13 we read, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (ESV). Jesus was cursed for us, hanging on the cross as a substitute for our sins. The law in the Mosaic economy was a foreshadowing of the redemption of man.

Another interesting detail is that the cross of Christ was sometimes referred to in Jewish contexts as a “tree.” Acts 5:30 states, “The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree” (ESV). Acts 10:39 says, “They put him to death by hanging him on a tree” (ESV). See also Acts 13:29.

The concept of cursing and blessing in association with a tree is found in the larger narrative of Scripture. In Genesis 3 Eve and then Adam eat fruit from a tree from which they were forbidden to eat. In Revelation 22:14 the eternal state includes those who eat from the tree of life. A tree was involved in the entry of sin into humanity (through the tree in the Garden), the answer to sin for humanity (through the cross), and the ultimate removal of sin in eternity (through the tree of life).

Under the Mosaic Law, those who were hanged on a tree were cursed. The law made it illegal to leave the body hanging overnight. This law applied to Jesus, who was executed on a tree, although He had done no wrong. Jesus’ dead body was removed from the cross on the same day of His death and was buried. Jesus took the curse of sin upon Himself to redeem us from sin. [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

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### [What is the curse of the law?](#)

As opposed to the blessing, which is grace, the Law is a curse upon all mankind, none of whom can possibly fulfill its requirements. While the Law itself is perfect and holy, those who try to justify themselves before its holy Author bring not His blessing, but His curse upon themselves. The Bible itself tells us what the curse of the Law is: “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’ Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘the righteous will live by faith.’ The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who does these things will live by them.’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘**Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree**’” (Galatians 3:10–13).

What we must understand from this passage is that **the curse is not the Law. The curse is the penalty levied for not keeping the Law.** The “Book of the Law” refers to the covenant laws that God made with His people during the time of Moses. The Law can point out where we fail and fall short of God’s will, but it cannot pronounce us righteous; that was not its purpose.

In Galatians 3 the apostle Paul is telling us that everyone who does not keep the Law perfectly is cursed by it (Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10). The reason is that no one can obey the Law perfectly. In fact, there were over 600 laws the Jews had to keep to be right in the eyes of God. The breaking of even one commandment put a person under condemnation. Trying to achieve salvation through obedience to the Law is futile. For example, we all regularly break the first and greatest commandment by failing to love God first with all our hearts, minds and strength (Matthew 22:37–38). As a result, everyone has broken the commandments, and everyone is cursed.

The Law demands perfection—an impossibility because we’re all sinful (Romans 3:10, 23). As a result, all who try to live by the Old Law were under a divine curse. But the good news is that Jesus Christ “redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice on the cross when He bore God’s curse. Paul explains how in his letter to the Romans: “God presented [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the One who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:25–26). The curse of the Law fell on Christ on our behalf so that the righteousness of God could fall on us, though we did not deserve it (2 Corinthians 5:21). [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

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## G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible -

He that is hanged is accursed of God. Deut. 21:23

The reference was to a man who for sin had been put to death, and whose body had been impaled on a tree or a stake, and thus exposed as a warning to other evil-doers. The command was that such exposure was not to outlast the day. By night the body must be buried, and so the whole fact of his sin, now expiated (atoned for by his own death) as to human society, put completely away. This parenthetical statement—for such it is—gives the reason for the burial. **The man was not accursed of God because he was hanged on a tree. He was hanged on the tree because he was accursed of God. The hanging was the outward sign of the curse upon him, the curse of death for sin. When that curse was accomplished and witnessed, the sign was to cease ; then let the man be buried, and that burial be the sign that the curse was sufficient.** The understanding of this helps us when the mind travels on in solemn thought to the One Who hung upon the Tree on Calvary. He was there because He was "made sin," and so accursed of God. Such blunt statement gives the soul a shock; but it is the very shock we need, if we are ever to come to anything like a true apprehension of the way of our saving. In His case this law was fulfilled. He did not remain on the Tree through the night. The curse on sin was borne, and witnessed; the sin was expiated (atoned for) before God, because the One Who suffered its penalty was sinless. His burial was the sign that sin was put away. His resurrection was the beginning of a new life for Himself, as Redeemer; and for us, as redeemed.

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**F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily** - Deuteronomy 21:23 He that is hanged is accursed of God. (R.V.)

This law on the Jewish statute-book hastened the awful tragedy of Calvary. No body must be left to rot on the cross on which it had been impaled. The corpse of the malefactor must be taken down at nightfall. But how little did the Pharisees and Scribes realize that the remainder of this verse had so pertinent a reference, and was having so remarkable a fulfillment. The Apostle quotes this verse as giving the inner rationale or meaning of the death of the blessed Lord (Galatians 3:13). "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." On Jesus fell the reduplicated curses, that were deserved by the race, and by each.

The curse of the broken law. — "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the Book of the Law." None had kept, all had broken that law. None was righteous, no, not one. Man's lot was cast under Mount Ebal. The race was guilty and silent before the bar of infinite justice. But Jesus, by virtue of his relationship with the entire human family, was able to stand before God charged with that sin, bearing that curse, and put them away for ever. There is no barrier, therefore, now to the outflow of God's free grace.

The curse due to individual transgression. — The whole race had broken away from God, and was under the curse; so that each of us shared in the solemn accountability to God, for the whole and for our part. But He became sin for us; cursed, that we might be blessed; cast out, that we might be for ever welcomed; naked, that we might be clothed; hungry, that we might feed on his flesh; poor, that we might be enriched; dying, that we might live beyond the range of the curse for evermore.