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Purge Innocent Blood

21: 1-9

Purge innocent blood DIG: In what different ways did the offering of the red heifer speak of the death of Yeshua Messiah and the grace of God? Why the instructions in verses 3-9 (see Deuteronomy 19:6)? What were the elders and priests acknowledging in verse 7? How is God described in the very next verse? What did the death of the heifer signify? Why the prayer? For what might you have expected them to pray? What would be the ultimate result of Isra'el failing to purge the Land of murderers?

REFLECT: In what sense, if any, are you partly responsible for the shedding of innocent blood in today's society? Do you think the money spent on cold case files could better be spent elsewhere? What rituals does our society reenact today in the murders of innocent victims? How have you become desensitized to the shedding of innocent blood today? How much does the death of one innocent person mean to you? What would anarchy look like for you or your loved ones if it came about? What can you do to prevent that? Who this week has heard Good News from your lips, and seen in your life, that "God reigns"?

The nation was called to purge the Land from the shedding of innocent blood, which would in turn, fill the Land with the Sh'khinah glory of God.

Deuteronomy 19:1 to 26:15 (to see link click [DI](#) - The Social and Family Mitzvot) deals with individual mitzvot, and to today's readers they might appear irrelevant at first, but the very principles behind these commandments were the ones that have brought dignity to mankind. We need to examine these mitzvot in depth to discover the spirit in which they were given, so that we can still live in obedience to **God's Word** today. For example, in **Numbers 18, the Israelites** were to bring **their tithes** to the Tabernacle because **the priests** and **Levites** had **no inheritance**. But today we have no Temple and no priesthood; however, we bring our tithes to our place of worship. That is the spirit of the mitzvah.

Chapter 19 dealt with the procedures where the killer (intentional or accidental) is known

to the community. But if the killer is not known, it was not enough just to “leave the case open.” **Bloodshed** defiled **the Land**, and brought **guilt** on **the** entire **nation** of **Isra’el**, thus exposing them to **Ha’Shem’s** anger. So, this mitzvah provides a ritual to deal with that **guilt** and to exonerate **the nation**.⁴⁴⁵

*Dear Holy Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that **You** are all seeing. There is nothing that can be hidden from **You**. **Behold, you sin against Adonai! Be assured! Your sin will find you out! (Numbers 32:23B and C). You see it all. He will bring to light the things hidden in darkness and also make clear the motives of the hearts (First Corinthians 4:5b). In Yeshua’s holy name and power of His resurrection. Amen***

The ritual (21:1-4): Suppose a slain person is found fallen in a field, on the Land ADONAI your God is giving you to possess - who struck him is unknown. The body is presumably found by accident, perhaps by a farmer or a passer-by. Since the person responsible for the crime would be unknown, a specific legal process would be followed. **Then your elders and judges must come out and measure the distance to the cities that are around the slain one (21:1-2). The elders and judges** referred to here are the representatives of the central legal authority, rather than the local authority as in the next verse. **The city nearest to the slain one** would be responsible to follow the legal process.



The elders of that city are to take from the herd a one-year-old heifer who had produced no offspring, and that has not been used for work or pulled a yoke. Then the elders of that city are to bring the heifer outside the city, down a valley with a running stream, and a field that had not been plowed or sown. There they would break the heifer’s neck in the running stream to atone the murdered person (21:3-4). This was not a sacrifice in the normal sense, for the text does not say that **blood** would be **shed**. **The heifer** was simply to be killed by breaking **its** neck.⁴⁴⁶ The ritual was a symbolic reenactment of the murder in an uninhabitable place, which, by first transferring **the guilt** away from **the city** by “washing away” **the guilt** by **the running stream**,

symbolically removed its threat from the community and **the nation**.⁴⁴⁷

The entire ritual speaks of the grace of **God**, for **the works** of mankind could never earn **ADONAI's** forgiveness. **The heifer** had never been **worked**, the ground of the valley had **never been plowed or sown**, and **the elders, judges, and priests** had done nothing special to earn **God's** forgiveness for **His people**. The sacrifice wasn't even done in the Sanctuary or offered on the bronze altar. **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves - it is the gift of God. It is not based on deeds, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)**. The offering of **the innocent heifer** pointed to the offering of **the innocent Son of God**, whose death brought cleansing, forgiveness, and the cancelation of **God's** judgment.⁴⁴⁸

The priests (21:5): At this point **the priests** entered the picture because **they** were the best fitted to make **atonement** for **the shedding of innocent blood**. In a criminal (capital) case, where there was a person charged with an offense, **the priests** would have been involved in the passing of judgment. In matters of **bloodshed, the city** responsible for the legal process would call the **Levitical cohanim** and they would render **the sentence of judgment (17:8-9)**. Even though **the guilty** party was not known at that time, **their** presence would be required. Then **the cohanim, the sons of Levi, would come forward - for ADONAI your God has chosen them to serve Him and pronounce blessings in His Name, and by their mouth every dispute and assault is to be settled (21:5)**.

The atonement (21:6-9): The **elders of that city nearest to the slain one** who accepted the responsibility for the dead person **washed their hands in the running stream, over the heifer whose neck was broken**. Then the symbolism of the various actions becomes clear. The crime deserved to be punished, as **the broken neck of the heifer** indicated; but **the hand-washing of the elders** showed that although **they** accepted the responsibility for what happened, **they** were, nevertheless, free from **the guilt** attached to the crime. **They will answer and say, "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see. Grant atonement (Hebrew: *kaphar*, meaning *to forgive, or make a covering or wipe away*) for Your people Isra'el whom You have redeemed, ADONAI" (21:6-8a)**. First, **the elders** declared that **they** were not in any way **guilty** of the crime: **Our hands did not shed this blood. Nor did they** see anything which might lead to the conviction of **the guilty** party: **Nor did our eyes see**. In speaking those words, **the elders** spoke not only for **themselves**, but also for **the city** of which **they** were representatives.

That this ritual relates to **Yeshua Messiah** and **His atoning** work on **the tree** (see the commentary on [Galatians Bk - Cursed is Everyone Who Hangs on a Tree](#)) is clear from

the elders' words, "Do not put innocent blood on Your people Isra'el." Then atonement will be granted to them for the blood (21:8b). They prayed for forgiveness, indicating that in spite of **their** innocence, the community must still shoulder the responsibility for the crime. The forgiveness was sought for **the** whole **nation**, not merely for **the city** nearest the crime.⁴⁴⁹

On that dreadful day, Pontius Pilate **washed** his hands and said: **I am innocent of this man's blood**, and **all the people** in the small courtyard **answered**, including **the religious leaders**, saying: **His blood is on us and on our children (Mattityahu 27:24-25)!** Like that innocent **heifer**, **Yeshua** died for **the nation** and even prayed from **the tree: Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34a).** **The Lord** fulfilled **God's** holy will and upheld **His** holy mitzvot, and withheld **His** judgment from **Isra'el** for about forty years (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Mt - The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple on Tisha B'Av in 70 AD**). **Yeshua** died for **the sins of the world (John 1:29; First John 4:14)**, **He** died for the Church made up of **Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14)**, and **He** died for **the nation of Isra'el**, "**His life was taken away because of the sinful things My people have done**" (**Isaiah 53:8 CEV**).⁴⁵⁰

This ritual demonstrated how extremely valuable **YHVH** considers human life. For even though no murderer was found at that time, **the Land** and **the people** both incurred **the guilt of shedding innocent blood**. The animal sacrifice, along with the prayer of **the priests**, made **atonement**, that is, turned the wrath of **Ha'Shem** away from **the people**.⁴⁵¹ **So, you will purge the guilt of innocent blood from your midst, when you do what is right in God's sight (21:9).**

It is often the case when the TaNaKh seems most culturally remote to us, that we need to pay the closest attention. What ought to be most striking to us from this mitzvah is not the oddity of **the heifer with a broken neck** in an uninhibited **wadi**, but the expected response of a whole community through its civic, judicial, and religious leaders *to a single human death!* In our society, a violent death has to be particularly gruesome or shocking to become even newsworthy, let alone a matter for public penitence. We have lost not only the concept of corporate responsibility for **blood guilt**, but we have increasingly lost any sense of the sanctity of life itself. We (or at least our emergency services) can cope with hundreds of thousands of deaths on the highway. We can tolerate millions of abortions. What need have we for ritual cleansing that would acknowledge our responsibility even where a perpetrator cannot be found? **Shedding of innocent blood** has become a fact of life, silently sanitized by statistics. Thus, the symbolic reenactment is left to the commercialized **purging** of the

movies.⁴⁵²

**Haftarah Shof'tim: Yesha'yahu (Isaiah) 51:12-52:12 (Messianic adaptation: conclude the reading at 53:12)
(see [Af](#) - Parashah)**

This Haftarah portion is the fourth of seven Haftarah of Consolation following Tisha B'Av (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Mt - The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple on Tisha B'Av in 70 AD](#)). Though **Isra'el** is in a covenant relationship with **God**, **Isaiah** is speaking to a **nation** who have not held up **their** end of the deal. **They** had turned away from trusting **ADONAI** and had not followed **Him** alone. As a result, **Ha'Shem** disciplines **them** by the hand of Assyria in the fulfillment of the covenant curses for disobedience. **Isaiah** saw past this temporary judgment, however, and gazed on **Isra'el's** future when **YHVH** fulfills all **His** promises sending the ultimate **Judge, King, Priest, and Prophet** all wrapped up on **the One** referred to in the following verses as **the Suffering Servant** (see the commentary on [Isaiah Is - Everlasting Salvation for Zion](#)). In **Him**, **Yeshua** our **Messiah, God** comforts **His people**.

Who this week has heard Good News from your lips, and seen in your life, that **God reigns**?

B'rit Chadashah suggested readings for Parashah Shof'tim: Mattityahu (Matthew) 5:38-42, 18:15-20; Acts 3:13-26, 7:35-53; First Corinthians 5:9-13; First Timothy 5:17-22; Messianic Jews (Hebrews) 10:28-31

While at **the Temple (Acts 3:13-26)**, **Peter's** healing **the crippled man** caught the attention of those around him. **His** response to their questioning was to point them to **God's** Word and **His** work in history. Do you know **His Word** well enough to point others to it? Do you comprehend what **He's** done, is doing, and is going to do in history so as to help others recognize that **YHVH** is at the center of everything? Ask **God** for growth in this area and step out in **faith**! We all need to grow in this area - so don't waste your time judging yourself in terms of what you "ought" to know and step out in **faith** because of "Who" you know.