

## Covenant Responsibilities for Community Life – *Deuteronomy 21:1-23*

**Introduction** – In this extended exposition of the sixth commandment, covenant responsibility for life and death, in the context of community life, is pressed out into complex and even tragic situations. Life with people is messy and God's law is our sane anchor by which we learn how to live. We also have in this chapter a gory and glorious example of how the law is given to lead us to Christ.

**Responsible for Murder** (vv1-9) – The elders of a city closest to the location of a murder assume responsibility for that murder even though they do not know who committed the crime. They are not acknowledging guilt, but responsibility, by following God's law. And in doing so, the Lord provides atonement from the guilt of the murder. Note this: they are innocent of the blood (v7) by taking responsibility for it (v8).

Some say the OT laws are barbaric, but we learn quite the opposite here. God requires that we consider the dignity of every human life and that in covenant communities (family, church, cities) leaders need to represent their people and take responsibility for all that goes on. In stark contrast, our cities are full of innocent blood on their hands (chiefly through the abortion industry) and yet refuse to call it anything but "personal choice." We are the barbaric ones. At least we recycle...

**Responsible for a Woman** (vv10-14) – If you are at all familiar of the history of human warfare you understand this is a mind-boggling contrast of treating women in times of war. God is concerned about the treatment of the poorest and most vulnerable in such a situation. If a man desired to take one of the captives of a distant, foreign, conquered city, he must give her time to mourn and (most likely) ceremonially remove herself from her city and its gods. This also avoided marriages that in any way forged treaties. A man had to take responsibility and not simply see an opportunity to take advantage of an unprotected woman. If he did not delight in her, she was to be set free and had the rights of a free woman, lest it simply be a cover-up of nothing less than rape and pillage.

**Responsible for a Son** (vv15-17) – All human government is under the law and so, in the family, the father's rights are not autonomous. In times of war, polygamy probably increased with the loss of men in the community (and a serious study of polygamy shows that it never was considered God's intention, that it always brought family troubles, and always dies out in communities wherever the gospel goes). There were legitimate reasons for disinheriting a son, but the firstborn being the son of a less favored wife was not one of them. The father/husband must take responsibility under God's laws for how he manages his household and this includes inheritance laws. The inheritance of the first born was a double portion.

**Responsible for a Rebel** (vv18-21) – The law here concerns a completely hardened and worthless son. These sons have responsibilities for themselves in the covenant community, the parents must be responsible for them, and the community must also take action and responsibility. There comes a time when sins within the family become far more than family issues. This both instructs and requires the parents (both) to turn over such a rebellious son to the men of the city in extreme situations. We can extrapolate, from this example, situations when children should be brought before civil or ecclesiastical authority by the parents. This is a feature of the Old Testament that we tend to be embarrassed by; we must notice that Jesus was not embarrassed in the slightest (Mark 7:10). Jesus did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it in all its glory. He embodied the law, which brings us to the last two verses.

**Cursed is the Man** (vv22-23) – If a man was executed (for public or grievous sin against God and the community) and then his body hung publicly (as a form of warning), this sign of God's curse and wrath must not remain beyond the day, lest you defile the land.

**Being Made a Curse for Us** (Gal 3:10-13) – Jesus said He would be lifted up (John 3:14-15, 12:32), and Paul would have us know nothing except Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:23-25, 2:2) and no man can see this in his carnal reasoning. Paul appeals to this passage as a glorious statement of the gospel.

**Guilt and Responsibility** (2 Cor 5:20-21) – This is the gospel. The Perfect, Sinless One was hung on a tree and became a curse for us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Jesus was not guilty of any sin, but as covenant Head He took full responsibility and bore our sin for us.

**All Sins, Any Sins** – The law shows us how convoluted and complicated our sins become, as well as our carnal tendency to try and justify our sins. We want justice, we cry. But hell is pure justice. Saving sinners is a problem for justice, and that problem is only solved when the Law becomes flesh and dies on a cross for us. Look again at this chapter: Christ died for murderers, for lustful men, for rapists and all fornicators, for foolish fathers and rebellious, wicked sons. Christ died for sinners.