

Deuteronomy 19:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

That innocent blood be not shed in thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and so blood be upon thee.

Analysis

That innocent blood be not shed in thy land (וְלֹא יִשָּׁפַךְ דַּם נָקִי בְּקֶרֶב אֶרְצְךָ, velo yishafech dam naki bekerev artzecha)—dam naki (innocent blood) refers both to murder victims and to manslayers wrongly killed by vengeance. Shafach (shed, poured out) emphasizes the gravity of bloodshed, which defiles the land.

Which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and so blood be upon thee—corporate guilt for innocent blood pollutes the entire community. Numbers 35:33 states, 'Blood defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.' The cities of refuge prevent two kinds of blood-guilt:

1. unpunished murder,
2. killing the innocent manslayer.

God's justice system protects both victim's rights and accused's rights, maintaining the land's sanctity. This principle underlies Jesus's warning about Jerusalem's blood-guilt (Matthew 23:35) and the crowd's terrible cry, 'His blood be on us, and on our children' (Matthew 27:25).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cultures recognized that innocent blood cried out for vengeance and polluted the land (Genesis 4:10). Israel's system was unique in providing institutional protection for the accidental killer while still maintaining justice for murder. The land theology—that Canaan was God's gift requiring holiness—meant bloodshed had spiritual consequences beyond individual guilt. This explains passages like Deuteronomy 21:1-9, where an unsolved murder requires communal atonement ritual. The principle that land is defiled by violence and injustice appears throughout Scripture.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the concept of corporate responsibility for injustice challenge modern individualism?
2. In what ways does Christ's shed blood cleanse the guilt that innocent blood brings upon humanity?

Interlinear Text

אֶשֶׁר	אֶרֶץ	בְּקֶרֶב	נָקִי	דָּמִים:	יִשְׁפֹּךְ	וְלֹא
H834	thy land	in	That innocent	and so blood	be not shed	H3808
	H776	H7130	H5355	H1818	H8210	
וְהָיָה	נַחֲלָה	לְךָ	נָתַן	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	יְהוָה	וְהָיָה
H1961	thee for an inheritance	H0	giveth	thy God	which the LORD	
	H5159		H5414	H430	H3068	
				דָּמִים:	עַל	יְךָ
				and so blood	H5921	
				H1818		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 59:7 (Blood): Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths.

Proverbs 6:17 (Blood): A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,