

Deuteronomy 21:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it shall be, that the city which is next unto the slain man, even the elders of that city shall take an heifer, which hath not been wrought with, and which hath not drawn in the yoke;

Analysis

And it shall be, that the city which is next unto the slain man, even the elders of that city shall take an heifer, which hath not been wrought with, and which hath not drawn in the yoke. The nearest city must provide the heifer for the cleansing ritual. This cost creates incentive for communities to maintain safety and pursue justice - negligence has tangible consequences.

The specific requirement of a heifer which hath not been wrought with indicates an unused animal, suitable for sacred purpose. Like sacrificial animals, the heifer for this ritual must be unblemished and unused for common work.

That it has not drawn in the yoke emphasizes its separation from ordinary labor. What serves sacred purpose must be set apart from common use, even though this particular ritual differs from temple sacrifices.

The young heifer represents valuable economic resource. This ritual requires real cost, not mere token gesture - the community bears tangible consequence for failing to prevent or solve the murder.

Historical Context

Heifers (young female cattle) had significant economic value as potential breeding stock. Requiring an unused heifer ensured the ritual involved genuine sacrifice,

not disposing of useless animals.

The similarity to sacrificial requirements (unblemished, unused) despite this not being a temple offering demonstrates that sacred rituals outside the sacrificial system still required appropriate reverence.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What does requiring valuable unused animal teach about the cost of addressing evil?
2. How does economic consequence create incentive for communities to maintain safety and justice?
3. Why must even non-sacrificial sacred rituals use set-apart, unblemished animals?
4. What does genuine cost versus token gesture reveal about appropriate response to serious evil?
5. How does this principle apply to contemporary community responsibility for addressing crime and injustice?

Interlinear Text

וְיִהְיֶה	בַּעַיר	בְּקָרְבָּה	אֵלֶּה	הַמְלָלֶת
H1961	And it shall be that the city	H7138	H413	unto the slain man
	H5892			H2491
וְלֹא	זִקְנִים	בַּעַיר	וְאֶת	עֲגָלָת
shall take	even the elders	And it shall be that the city	H1931	H5697
H3947	H2205	H5892		
לֹא	אֲשֶׁר	עָבֵד	לֹא	אֲשֶׁר
an heifer	H834	H5647	H0	H834
H1241	H3808	which hath not been wrought with		H3808
מִשְׁׁבֵךְ	בָּעֵל:			
and which hath not drawn	in the yoke	H5923		
H4900				

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 19:2 (Parallel theme): This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke:

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