

Deuteronomy 21:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer unto a rough valley, which is neither eared nor sown, and shall strike off the heifer's neck there in the valley:

Analysis

And the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer unto a rough valley, which is neither eared nor sown, and shall strike off the heifer's neck there in the valley. The ritual occurs in unproductive land - rough valley that is neither eared nor sown. This desolate location represents the waste and barrenness that violence produces.

Striking off the heifer's neck kills the animal but not through standard sacrificial method. This is not temple offering but ceremonial cleansing addressing blood guilt. The distinction maintains proper categories while still requiring blood to address bloodshed.

The uncultivated valley that will never be farmed preserves the site from common use, marking it as place where innocent blood was addressed. The land bears witness to the ritual cleansing performed there.

This unusual ritual - not quite sacrifice, not common slaughter - demonstrates that extraordinary evils require extraordinary responses that fit the unique circumstances while honoring God's holiness.

Historical Context

The rough, uncultivated valley remained permanently unusable for agriculture after this ritual, creating lasting memorial of the unsolved murder and community's innocence declaration.

This differed from standard sacrifices offered at the altar, reflecting its unique purpose as legal-ceremonial cleansing rather than worship offering.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does the desolate, unproductive location symbolize about violence's effects?
2. Why is this ritual distinct from temple sacrifices while still requiring blood?
3. How does permanent preservation of the site serve as memorial and witness?
4. What does the unusual nature of this ritual teach about responding appropriately to extraordinary circumstances?
5. Why must blood address bloodshed even when the guilty party cannot be identified?

Interlinear Text

וְהוֹרֵד דּוֹ זִקְנֵי הָעִיר הָהִיא אֶת הַעֵגֶל הַ אֵל
shall bring down **And the elders** **of that city** H1931 H853 **the heifer** H413
H3381 H2205 H5892 H5697

בְּנֵחַל: אֵיטָהּ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יַעֲבֹד בּוֹ
there in the valley **unto a rough** H834 H3808 **which is neither eared** H0
H5158 H386 H5647

וְלֹא יִזְרַע וְעָרְפוּ אֶת הַעֵגֶל הַ בְּנֵחַל:
H3808 **nor sown** **and shall strike off** H8033 H853 **the heifer** **there in the valley**
H2232 H6202 H5697 H5158

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