

# Deuteronomy 21:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And all the elders of that city, that are next unto the slain man, shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley:

## Analysis

**And all the elders of that city, that are next unto the slain man, shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley.** Hand washing symbolically declares innocence - I am clean from this blood. This public gesture demonstrates the community's protest that they did not commit or negligently permit this murder.

That all the elders participate emphasizes corporate declaration. This is not individual protestation but community-wide assertion of innocence. Leadership represents the entire city in declaring they fulfilled their responsibility for justice and safety.

Washing over the heifer connects the declaration to the ritual sacrifice. The slain heifer's blood addresses the victim's blood, and the hand washing declares that this blood does not rest on the community's hands.

Pilate later mimicked this gesture when declaring innocence of Jesus' blood, though his guilt was real. True innocence requires actual faithfulness, not mere ritual protestation.

## Historical Context

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Ritual hand washing as declaration of innocence appears throughout ancient Near Eastern cultures. The gesture communicated publicly that the participant bore no guilt for the matter at hand.

Psalm 26:6 uses similar imagery - I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O LORD - connecting cleanliness with worship access.

## Related Passages

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**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

## Study Questions

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1. What does public hand washing communicate about declaring innocence?
2. How does corporate participation emphasize community-wide responsibility?
3. What is the connection between the slain heifer and the elders' innocence declaration?
4. Why is actual faithfulness required beyond mere ritual protestation?
5. How does Pilate's misuse of this gesture demonstrate the danger of empty religious formalism?

## Interlinear Text

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הִסְלַל אֶל בְּקָרְבֵּם בְּהָאֶת עַיר יְקַנֵּי יְכַל ל  
H3605 And all the elders H2205 of that city H1931 that are next H413 unto the slain  
H2491

בְּעַרְוֹף הַעֲגֵל הַמֵּת אֶת יָדֵיכֶם עַל יְדֵיכֶם  
man shall wash H853 their hands H5921 over the heifer H5697 that is beheaded  
H3027 H6202

בְּמִלְחָמָה  
in the valley  
H5158

## Additional Cross-References

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**Psalms 26:6** (Parallel theme): I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O LORD:

**Psalms 73:13** (Parallel theme): Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.

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