

Numbers 19:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.

Analysis

And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days—This extends the contamination principle beyond tent-deaths to various death-contact scenarios. "Slain with a sword" (chalal cherev, חַלָּל חֶרֶב) refers to violent death in battle. The progression—whole body, partial remains ("bone"), or burial place ("grave")—shows death's contaminating power persists even in fragments and marked locations.

Death defiles regardless of how it occurred or how much of the corpse remains. Even touching a single human bone or standing over a grave transmitted uncleanness. This comprehensive scope demonstrates death's totalizing corruption—no part of death is clean or acceptable. The "seven days" requirement applies universally, treating all death-contact equally seriously. This anticipates that Christ's atonement addresses all sin and death's effects comprehensively—no partial cleansing suffices, only complete purification through His blood.

Historical Context

The "open fields" (sadeh, שָׂדֶה) reference relates to Israel's military context—soldiers would inevitably contact slain enemies. This provision ensured warriors could be purified after battle before rejoining the camp. Graves in ancient Israel were typically caves or rock-cut tombs, often marked with stones. Later Jewish

tradition developed the practice of whitewashing tombs to warn travelers against accidental defilement (Matthew 23:27). The bone contamination provision remained significant—even ancient remains defiled, which complicated land use in areas of previous habitation.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does death's defiling power extending to bones and graves illustrate sin's lasting effects?
2. What does the equal treatment of all forms of death-contact teach about sin's universal seriousness?
3. In what ways does this comprehensive defilement point to humanity's need for equally comprehensive cleansing through Christ?

Interlinear Text

אֲשֶׁר	וְכָל	עַל	בְּפִנֵּי	בְּשָׂלֵךְ הַ
H3605	H834	H5060	H5921	H6440
And whosoever	toucheth		in the open	fields
				H7704
בְּמִתְּבָנָל	אֵלֶּה	בְּמִתְּבָנָה	אוֹ	בְּעֵד אָם
one that is slain	with a sword	H176	or a dead body	H176
H2491	H2719	H4191		H6106
			or a bone	H120
בְּקָבֵר	אֵלֶּה	יִטְמֶן	שְׁבַע	יְמִימִים:
or a grave	shall be unclean	H2930	seven	days
H6913		H7651	H3117	

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 23:27 (Parallel theme): Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whitened sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

Numbers 31:19 (Parallel theme): And do ye abide without the camp seven days: whosoever hath killed any person, and whosoever hath touched any slain, purify both yourselves and your captives on the third day, and on the seventh day.

Luke 11:44 (Parallel theme): Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them.

Numbers 19:11 (Parallel theme): He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days.

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