

Numbers 35:33

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it 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.

Analysis

God declares: '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.' This establishes capital punishment's theological basis - murder pollutes the land where God dwells, requiring purification through justice. The Hebrew 'chaneph' (defile/pollute) indicates moral corruption spreading from unpunished murder. This reflects Genesis 9:6: 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.' Murder assaults God's image, demanding ultimate penalty. The principle points to Christ whose blood cleanses all defilement (1 John 1:7, Heb 9:14).

Historical Context

This verse concludes laws about cities of refuge (v.9-34), which protected accidental killers from vengeful 'avengers of blood' while ensuring murderers faced justice. The cities of refuge balanced mercy (for manslaughter) with justice (for murder). The requirement that the land be cleansed demonstrated that God, dwelling among Israel, couldn't tolerate blood-guilt. Deuteronomy 21:1-9 provided ritual for unsolved murders. After the exile and without the temple system, Jewish law developed complex regulations about capital punishment, eventually making it nearly impossible to execute. The principle remains that image-bearers' lives are sacred, and murder demands ultimate penalty.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does understanding humans as God's image-bearers affect your view of the sanctity of human life?
2. In what ways does Christ's blood cleanse the 'land' - your life and conscience - from the pollution of sin's guilt?

Interlinear Text

וְלֹא H3808	וְיִחַן יָרֵךְ H2610	אֶת H853	וְלֹא רֵץ H776	אֲשֶׁר H834	אֲתֶם H859	כִּי H0	י H3588
	So ye shall not pollute		and the land				
מִדַּם H1818	וְהָוָא H1931	וְיִחַן יָרֵךְ H2610	אֶת H853	וְלֹא רֵץ H776	וְלֹא רֵץ H776		לֹא H3808
of the blood		So ye shall not pollute		and the land	and the land		
יִכָּפֵר H3722	מִדַּם H1818	אֲשֶׁר H834	שֶׁפָּכוֹ H8210	כִּי H0	י H3588	אֵם H518	
cannot be cleansed	of the blood		of him that shed				
מִדַּם H1818	שֶׁפָּכוֹ H8210						
of the blood	of him that shed						

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 106:38 (Blood): And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood.

Isaiah 26:21 (Blood): For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.

Genesis 9:6 (Blood): Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.

Leviticus 18:25 (Parallel theme): And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.

2 Kings 23:26 (Parallel theme): Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal.

2 Kings 24:4 (Blood): And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the LORD would not pardon.

Micah 4:11 (Parallel theme): Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion.