

## Deuteronomy 19:1-21 How the Sixth Commandment Would Apply in the Land of Canaan

Introduction: The sixth commandment says, “Thou shalt not kill.” In our text Moses explains how this commandment would affect them in certain ways in Canaan’s land.

### I. Instructions about cities of refuge, v. 1-13.

- A. Once the children have conquered Canaan and live in it, they were to designate three cities as cities of refuge, v. 1-2.
  - 1. These three cities were to be within Canaan west of the Jordan.
  - 2. Moses had already designed three cities east of the Jordan river to be cities of refuge for those who live east of the Jordan.
- B. The land west of the Jordan was to be divided into three districts with each district having a city of refuge in the central part of it, v. 3.
- C. The roadways leading to each city of refuge were to be maintained in good condition, v. 3.
- D. The purpose of these cities was that in the event a person had killed someone, he could flee to the city of refuge and be safe there until he could have a trial and his guilt or innocence be determined, v. 3.
- E. If a man accidentally killed someone, without such a city to flee to, he might be killed by some angry relative of the victim, v. 4-6.
- F. Three such cities should be designated as soon as possible and in the event their territory should ever expand then three additional cities should be designate as cities of refuge, v. 7-9.
- G. The purpose of these cities was not to provide protection for a deliberate murderer, but to protect the innocent until his innocence could be determined in a court of law, v. 10.
- H. If a man was suspected of murder he should flee to a city of refuge, should be returned to the city where the killing took place and his innocence or guilt should be determined in a court of law, v. 11-12. (If he is found guilty by the court, he is to be put to death, v 12-13).
- I. God does not condone murder; the sixth commandment forbids it. (But neither does God condone the killing of a man who has accidentally caused the death of another.)

### II. Instructions concerning the removal of a landmark, v.14.

- A. Land tracts were marked by stones which would mark the boundary of the track of land.
- B. Through Moses God forbid that the landmarks should be moved, v. 14.
- C. The secret moving of landmarks was done for the purpose of stealing property which rightly belonged to someone else.
  - 1. It would seem that this would be discussed under an explanation of the commandment which forbids stealing.
  - 2. But the land was also the means by which one sustained life.
  - 3. Therefore, God viewed the stealing of one’s land as being almost equivalent to taking his life.
  - 4. Therefore, God chose to have Moses to forbid the moving of the landmarks under a discussion of the 6th commandment which forbids murder.

### III. Instructions concerning witnesses in a court case, v. 15-19.

- A. One witness was not to be considered sufficient to determine the guilt of a man, v. 15.
  - 1. A minimum of two witnesses were required and three was even better proof, v. 15.

2. In the event that only one witness was available, the person was to be presumed to be innocent and treated as innocent.
- B. In the event that the judges in a court case could not determine if the witnesses were testifying truthfully, then the matter was to be carried to a higher court in which priests along with other judges (elders) heard and decided the case, v. 16-17.
  1. They would diligently investigate to seek to determine the truthfulness and accuracy of the witnesses, v. 18.
  2. If they determined that a witness had deliberately lied, then they were to punish him with the same punishment that he had sought for the accused, v. 19. (An effort to put a man to death by means of false accusation before the courts was to be treated as though he had sought to murder the man with his own hands.)
- C. Punishment of the guilty was to serve as a deterrent to crime in the land, v 20.
  1. It would, by no means, prevent all crime from being committed.
  2. But the danger of a severe penalty would serve as a deterrent and prevent many crimes that would otherwise be committed.
- D. Those who would serve on the court were never allow pity on the guilty to lessen the penalty for the guilty, v. 21.
  1. They were to show all diligence in seeking to learn the truth and render a decision
  2. But they were not to allow their pity for the guilty party to cause them to lessen the penalty. (Only in that way could their decisions be a deterrent to further crime.)

#### IV. Some observations.

- A. The court systems of any nation would do well to study these laws and pattern after these principles.
- B. Every individual should learn from these principles.
  1. For one thing, we should not make hasty judgment about another person.
  2. We should not make a judgment based upon one witness. (Might be dishonest or might be honest but mistaken.)
  3. We should never be guilty of telling a lie on someone else.
  4. We should never be a gossip. (We could cause someone to falsely judge another person to be guilty when they are innocent.)