

Deuteronomy 17:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the LORD thy God shall choose;

Analysis

A matter too hard for thee in judgment (יִפְלָא מִמְקָה, yippalei mimkha)—'too difficult/extraordinary for you'—acknowledges limits of local judicial competence. Three categories: **between blood and blood** (capital vs. non-capital homicide? Different types of bloodguilt?), **between plea and plea** (דין לדין, din ladin—competing legal claims), **between stroke and stroke** (נֶגֶע לֶגֶע, nega lanega—distinguishing types of assault or injury).

Matters of controversy within thy gates—cases local judges can't resolve require appeal. **Get thee up into the place which the LORD thy God shall choose**—the central sanctuary (Jerusalem post-Davidic). Centralized appeals court ensures legal consistency and theological orthodoxy.

Historical Context

Ancient Israel had tiered judicial system: elders at city gates (local cases), then central sanctuary for difficult appeals. Jehoshaphat institutionalized this (2 Chronicles 19:8-11). This prefigured later rabbinic courts (Beth Din) and ultimately secular appellate systems. Moses established this precedent via Jethro's advice (Exodus 18:13-26). The principle: difficult cases require specialized expertise.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. When have you encountered situations 'too hard' for your wisdom, requiring appeal to higher authority or expertise?
2. How does this passage validate both local decision-making and the need for centralized theological/judicial authority?

Interlinear Text

בַּיִן לִמְשָׁפֵט ט מִתְנַבֵּן דְּבָרָכֶם כִּי
H3588 H4480 H1697 H4941 H996
too hard **If there arise a matter** **for thee in judgment**

לִדְמָעָם לִדְמָעָם לִדְמָעָם לִדְמָעָם
H1818 H1818 H996 H1779 H1779 H996 H5061
and blood **and blood** **and plea** **and plea** **and between stroke**

בְּשֵׁעָר יְכָנּוּן רִיב תְּדָבֵר לִדְמָעָם
H5061 H1697 H7379 H8179
and between stroke **If there arise a matter** **of controversy** **within thy gates**

רָאשׁ רְאֵשׁ רְאֵשׁ רְאֵשׁ רְאֵשׁ רְאֵשׁ
H834 H977 H4725 H413 H5927 H6965
shall choose **into the place** **from** **and get thee up** **then shalt thou arise**

בָּנָה אֱלֹהִים יְהָיָה ה
H430 H0 H3068
thy God **which the LORD**

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 12:5 (References God): But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come:

Haggai 2:11 (References Lord): Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying,

Deuteronomy 1:17 (Judgment): Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it.

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