

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 (יִפְּאֵל מִמְּכָה, 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** (דִּין לַדִּין, din ladin—competing legal claims), **between stroke and stroke** (נֶגַע לַנֶּגַע, 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

כִּי	יִפְּלֵא	מִמֶּנּוּ	דָּבָר	לְמִשְׁפָּט	ט	בֵּין
H3588	too hard	H4480	If there arise a matter	for thee in judgment		H996
	H6381		H1697	H4941		
וְלִדְם	וְלִדְם	בֵּין	וְלִדְם	וְלִדְם	וְיִבֶּן	לִנְגֹּעַ
and blood	and blood	H996	and plea	and plea	H996	and between stroke
H1818	H1818		H1779	H1779		H5061
וְלִנְגֹּעַ		דָּבָר	רִיב	בְּשַׁעַר	יְיָ	
and between stroke		If there arise a matter	of controversy	within thy gates		
H5061		H1697	H7379	H8179		
וְקָמָה	וְעָלָה	אֶל	הַמָּקוֹם	אֲשֶׁר	יִבְחָר	
then shalt thou arise	and get thee up	H413	into the place	H834	shall choose	
H6965	H5927		H4725		H977	
וְהִוא	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	יְיָ				
which the LORD	thy God	H0				
H3068	H430					

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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