

Deuteronomy 19:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But if any man hate his neighbour, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities:

Analysis

But if any man hate his neighbour, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally וְכִי־יָהִי אִישׁ שָׁנָא לְרָעָהוּ וְאָכַב לֹא וְקָם עַלְיוֹ וְהַכְהָהוּ—this describes premeditated murder, not accidental killing. Soneh (hate) establishes malicious intent. Arav (lie in wait, ambush) shows planning. Nefesh (soul, life) emphasizes he killed a living person.

And fleeth into one of these cities—the murderer's flight to a refuge city doesn't grant immunity. Cities of refuge protect the innocent, not the guilty. Verses 12-13 command the elders to extradite the murderer: 'The elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die.' This prevents cities of refuge from becoming criminal havens. God's mercy toward the innocent doesn't compromise justice toward the guilty. Both must operate together to reflect God's character.

Historical Context

This provision prevents abuse of the refuge city system. Without it, murderers could escape justice by claiming accident. The elders' investigation (verse 12) determined intent—was it hatred and premeditation, or genuinely accidental? Ancient legal systems struggled to distinguish murder from manslaughter; Israel's system required careful inquiry into motive and circumstance. The balance

between accessible mercy (refuge cities) and enforceable justice (extradition of murderers) created a sophisticated legal framework uncommon in the ancient world.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does God's provision of both mercy and justice reflect His complete character?
2. What safeguards prevent mercy from becoming license for evil, and justice from becoming merciless vengeance?

Interlinear Text

לוּ	וְאֶבֶן	לְרַעַת	הָוֹ	שְׁנַיְתָּא	אִישׁ	וְהַיָּה	הַיָּה	וְאִיָּהִי	וְאִיָּהִי
H0	H693	H7453	H8130	H376	H3588	H1961	But if any man	hate	his neighbour
וְאֶלְעָזֶר	וְאֶלְעָזֶר	וְאֶלְעָזֶר	וְאֶלְעָזֶר	וְאֶלְעָזֶר	וְאֶלְעָזֶר	וְאֶלְעָזֶר	וְאֶלְעָזֶר	וְאֶלְעָזֶר	וְאֶלְעָזֶר
for him and rise up	H6965	H5921	against him and smite	H5221	him mortally	H5315	that he die	H4191	
בְּאַלְמָנָה	בְּעָרָם	בְּעָרָם	בְּעָרָם	בְּעָרָם	בְּעָרָם	בְּעָרָם	בְּעָרָם	בְּעָרָם	בְּעָרָם
and fleeth	H5127	H413	into one	H259	cities	H5892	of these	H411	

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 27:24 (Parallel theme): Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbour secretly. And all the people shall say, Amen.

