

Deuteronomy 19:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then 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.

Analysis

Then 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.

The Hebrew goel ha-dam (גּוֹל הַדָּם, "avenger of blood") refers to the kinsman-redeemer who had both the right and duty to exact justice for a murdered relative. Unlike the manslayer who accidentally killed (vv. 4-5), the intentional murderer finds no asylum in the cities of refuge. The ziqnei (זִקְנִים, "elders") of his own city must extradite him—showing that civic authority supersedes tribal loyalty when deliberate murder is proven.

This law establishes that sanctuary applies only to the innocent, not to those who manipulate legal protections. The phrase **that he may die** (וְנִמְתֵּן, va-met) is emphatic—death is both required and certain for deliberate homicide. This protects the integrity of the asylum system itself; if murderers could claim sanctuary, the cities of refuge would become havens for the guilty rather than protection for the innocent, undermining justice entirely.

Historical Context

The cities of refuge (Deuteronomy 19:1-13) addressed a critical legal problem in ancient tribal societies: blood revenge could spiral into endless cycles of violence. The goel system balanced family honor with controlled justice. This passage (c.

1406 BC, on the plains of Moab) refined earlier instructions from Numbers 35, establishing procedures for extradition when intentional murder was proven. The elders served as the investigative and judicial authority, determining whether the killing was accidental or premeditated before deciding on extradition.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does the distinction between accidental and intentional killing reflect God's justice being both merciful and exacting?
2. In what ways might Christians today abuse "grace" as a refuge while persisting in deliberate sin (cf. Romans 6:1)?

Interlinear Text

מַשֵּׁךְ אֶת־וְיַלְקֹחַ וְעִיר־וְיַקְבֵּחַ וְיִתְּחַנֵּן:

shall send **Then the elders** **of his city** **and fetch** H853 H8033

H7971

H2205

H5892

H3947

גַּאֲלֵה יְדֵי־תְּבִנָּה אֶת־וְיִתְּחַנֵּן:

him thence and deliver **him into the hand** **of the avenger** **of blood**

H5414

H853

H3027

H1350

H1818

וְיִמְתַּה:

that he may die

H4191

