

# 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

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**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* (גֹּאֵל לְדָם, "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 *ziquei* (זִקְנֵי, "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** (וַיָּמָוֶה, *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

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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

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**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

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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

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וְשִׁלְחוּ	זִקְנֵי י	עִיר ו	וְלָקְחוּ	אֶת ו	מִשָּׁם
shall send	Then the elders	of his city	and fetch	H853	H8033
H7971	H2205	H5892	H3947		
וְנָתַן ו	אֶת ו	בְּיָד	גֹּאֵל	הַדָּם	
him thence and deliver	H853	him into the hand	of the avenger	of blood	
H5414		H3027	H1350	H1818	
וּמָת:					
that he may die					
H4191					

