

Deuteronomy 19:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.

Analysis

Witness requirement repeated: 'One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.' This reiterates Deuteronomy 17:6, extending from capital cases to all judicial matters. One witness is insufficient regardless of offense severity. The phrase 'shall the matter be established' (יבָּרֵא יָקֻם, yaqum davar) requires solid evidentiary foundation. This protects against false accusation and personal vendettas. Justice requires corroboration. The principle became foundational to biblical and Western jurisprudence. Paul applies it to church discipline (1 Timothy 5:19: 'against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses').

Historical Context

This law protected innocent from malicious prosecution. Naboth's case (1 Kings 21) shows corruption: Jezebel procured false witnesses to frame him. Despite legal form (multiple witnesses), substance was violated (lying testimony). Jesus's trial violated this—inconsistent witnesses, no proper testimony (Mark 14:56-59). The principle: procedural protections serve justice; corrupt procedures serve injustice. Modern legal systems similarly require corroboration, especially in serious cases.

Church discipline processes should follow this pattern—private confrontation, two or three witnesses, then church-wide (Matthew 18:15-17).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does requiring multiple witnesses balance protecting innocent while ensuring justice for victims?
2. What safeguards prevent witnesses from coordinating false testimony (the Naboth problem)?
3. How should churches implement the 'two or three witnesses' principle when handling serious accusations?

Interlinear Text

לֹא יִקְרַב עַד יְמֵי אֶחָד בְּאֶשְׁתָּוֹת לְכָל עַוְנָה
H3808 be established H6965 H5707 H259 H376 H3605 H5771

לְכָל עַל יְחִטָּאת כַּפֵּט אֶת כְּלָל כְּלָל
H3605 or for any sin H2403 H3605 H2399 H834 H2398 H5921

עַל אֶת שְׁלַשָּׁה יְמֵי עַד יְמֵי שְׁלַשָּׁה
H176 H5921 H6310 H7969 H5707

בְּרִית יְמֵי יְבָרֵךְ
be established shall the matter
H6965 H1697

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 17:6 (Witness): At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.

Numbers 35:30 (Witness): Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die.

Hebrews 10:28 (Witness): He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

Matthew 18:16 (Witness): But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

2 Corinthians 13:1 (Witness): This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.

John 8:17 (Witness): It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true.

1 Timothy 5:19 (Witness): Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

1 Kings 21:13 (Witness): And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died.

1 Kings 21:10 (Witness): And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.