

Deuteronomy 19:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother;

Analysis

And the judges shall make diligent inquisition (וְדָרְשׁוּ הַשְׁפָּטִים הַיָּטִב, ve-darshu ha-shoftim heitev)—the verb darash (דָּרַשׁ) means to seek, investigate thoroughly, even to interrogate. The adverb heitev (הַיָּטִב, "well, diligently") intensifies the requirement: judges must not accept testimony at face value but actively investigate. This anticipates modern cross-examination and evidence gathering.

And, behold, if the witness be a false witness (וְהִנֵּה עֵד־שֶׁקֶר הָעֵד, ve-hinne ed-sheqer ha-ed)—the word sheqer (שֶׁקֶר) denotes not mere error but deliberate deception, fraud, lying. The phrase **hath testified falsely against his brother** (shaqer anah be'achiv) uses covenant language: ach (brother) emphasizes that perjury tears the community fabric, betraying kinship bonds. Leviticus 19:16 similarly warns against going about as a talebearer among your people.

Historical Context

Thorough judicial investigation was revolutionary in the ancient Near East, where social status often determined legal outcomes. This law required evidence-based verdicts regardless of the parties' positions. The command to investigate diligently protected both the accused from false conviction and the legal system's integrity from corruption. Later Jewish tradition developed extensive cross-examination procedures (Mishnah Sanhedrin 5:2) based on this command. The requirement

that judges actively seek truth rather than passively hear testimony established an adversarial judicial process where evidence was tested and witnesses scrutinized.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the requirement for "diligent inquisition" challenge superficial judgment based on first impressions?
2. What responsibility do Christians bear to investigate truth carefully before forming judgments about others (cf. Matthew 7:1-5)?

Interlinear Text

וְדָרַשׁ ו	הַשֹּׁפֵט יָם	הֵיטֵב	וְהִנֵּה ה	הֵעֵד
inquisition	And the judges	shall make diligent	and behold if the witness	
H1875	H8199	H3190	H2009	H5707
שֶׁ קָר	הֵעֵד	שֶׁ קָר	עָנָה	בְּאָחִיו:
be a false	and behold if the witness	be a false	and hath testified	against his brother
H8267	H5707	H8267	H6030	H251

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 17:4 (Parallel theme): And it be told thee, and thou hast heard of it, and enquired diligently, and, behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel:

Deuteronomy 13:14 (Parallel theme): Then shalt thou enquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you;

