

Deuteronomy 19:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And this is the case of the slayer, which shall flee thither, that he may live: Whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past;

Analysis

And this is the case of the slayer, which shall flee thither, that he may live: Whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past.

The distinction between intentional murder and accidental killing demonstrates God's concern for justice based on intent and motive, not merely outcome. Divine law recognizes difference between malice and misfortune.

The phrase killeth his neighbour ignorantly indicates unintentional homicide - death resulting from accident rather than deliberate action. God's justice system accounts for circumstances and intent, not merely external consequences.

The qualification whom he hated not in time past establishes that no prior animosity existed. If previous hostility could be shown, the killing might indicate premeditation or willful negligence rather than pure accident. Context and relationship history matter in determining culpability.

This nuanced approach to justice reflects God's perfect knowledge of hearts and motives. He judges not only actions but intentions, requiring human justice systems to similarly seek truth about circumstances rather than simply punishing outcomes.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern law codes often treated all killing as requiring blood vengeance regardless of intent. Israel's distinction between intentional and accidental homicide represented advanced legal thinking recognizing moral culpability differences.

The avenger of blood (family member obligated to pursue justice for slain relative) could legally kill the fugitive if caught outside refuge - thus the urgency in fleeing to safety.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What does distinction between intentional and accidental killing teach about God's justice?
2. How does accounting for intent and motive reflect God's perfect knowledge of hearts?
3. Why is context and relationship history relevant in determining culpability?
4. What does this nuanced justice approach teach about pursuing truth rather than merely punishing outcomes?
5. How should modern justice systems reflect these principles of distinguishing intent and circumstance?

Interlinear Text

וְזֶה	דִּבַּר	הַרֹצֵחַ	אֲשֶׁר	יָנֹס	שָׁמָּה	
H2088	And this is the case	of the slayer	H834	which shall flee	H8033	
	H1697	H7523		H5127		
וְהָיָה	אֲשֶׁר	יָכֹחַ	אֶת	רֵיעֵהוּ	בְּבִלְיָא	
thither that he may live	H834	Whoso killeth	H853	his neighbour	ignorantly	
H2425		H5221		H7453	H1097	
עַתָּה	וְהָיָה	לֹא	שֶׁנִּי אֵל	לֹא	מִתְמַל לְשָׁלֶשֶׁם:	
H1847	H1931	H3808	whom he hated	H0	not in time	past
		H8130		H8543	H8032	

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 4:42 (Parallel theme): That the slayer might flee thither, which should kill his neighbour unawares, and hated him not in times past; and that fleeing unto one of these cities he might live: