

Deuteronomy 19:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live:

Analysis

As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live. This specific example illustrates accidental killing - a common workplace accident where the axe head flies off, striking and killing a co-worker. The detailed scenario clarifies what constitutes unintentional homicide.

The example emphasizes completely unintentional nature - both men were doing normal work, no malice existed, and the death resulted from tool failure rather than negligence or carelessness. This represents pure accident without culpability for the outcome.

The promise he shall flee...and live guarantees refuge protection. Though the man caused death, lack of intent and malice means he deserves protection from revenge, not punishment. The refuge city preserves innocent life while allowing grief and justice processes to work properly.

This case law demonstrates God's mercy - even though death occurred and the

victim's family suffers, executing the accidental killer would compound tragedy without serving justice.

Historical Context

Ancient tools frequently failed - axe heads could slip from handles during use. Without safety equipment or modern manufacturing standards, such accidents occurred more commonly than in contemporary contexts.

The specificity of this example helped judges and communities determine whether particular deaths qualified for refuge protection or required prosecution for murder.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What does this specific example teach about God's concern for justice based on actual circumstances?
2. How does protecting accidental killers demonstrate mercy without compromising justice?
3. Why would executing someone for genuine accident compound tragedy rather than serve justice?
4. What role do specific case examples play in helping apply general legal principles?
5. How should grief for victims be balanced with mercy toward those who cause accidental death?

Interlinear Text

וְאִשָּׁר

H834

יֵבֶ א

As when a man goeth

H935

אֶת

H854

רֵעֵ הוּ

upon his neighbour

H7453

בִּיעֵר

into the wood

H3293

לִחְטֹב

to hew

H2404

הֵעַץ

from the helve

H6086

וְנָדָם ה

fetcheth a stroke

H5080

וְדוֹ

and his hand

H3027

בַּגִּרְזֹן

with the axe

H1631

לִכְרֹת

to cut down

H3772

הֵעַץ

from the helve

H6086

וְנָשַׁל

slippeth

H5394

הַבִּרְזֵל

and the head

H1270

מִן

H4480

הֵעַץ

from the helve

H6086

וְיָמַץ א

and lighteth

H4672

אֶת

H853

רֵעֵ הוּ

upon his neighbour

H7453

וְיָמָת

that he die

H4191

ה וְא

H1931

יָנֹס

he shall flee

H5127

אֶל

H413

אֶחָד

unto one

H259

הָעָרִים

of those cities

H5892

וְהָיָה

H428

וְחָיָה

and live

H2425