

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

Psalm 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

לְחַטֵּב בִּירוּר לְאַשְׁר יָבָא אֶת רֹעֵהוּ

H834 As when a man goeth H935 H854 upon his neighbour H7453 H3293 to hew H2404

לְכַרְתֵּת בְּגַרְזִין יְדֵי וְנִקְדַּחַת הַכְּעֵץ

from the helve fetcheth a stroke and his hand with the axe to cut down

H6086 H5080 H3027 H1631 H3772

לְכַעַז אֶת וְלִמְצָא אֶת בְּגַרְזִין וְנִשְׁלַח לְכַעַז

from the helve slippeth and the head from the helve and ligheth H853

H6086 H5394 H1270 H4480 H6086 H4672

הַעֲרִים אֶמְתַת רֹעֵהוּ יְמֵת הַאֲזֵל יְנֵס יְמֵת הַאֲזֵל

upon his neighbour that he die he shall flee unto one of those cities

H7453 H4191 H1931 H5127 H413 H259 H5892

וְאֶלְחָנָן וְאֶלְחָנָן

H428 and live H2425

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