

Exodus 21:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.

Analysis

He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.

Lex talionis (law of retaliation) begins—'smiteth a man so he die' (מַכֵּה אִישׁ וּמָת, makkeh ish vamet) means fatal striking. The doubled verb 'shall surely die' (מוֹת וְיָמָת, mot yumat) emphasizes certainty. This implements the sixth commandment—murder requires capital punishment. Why death for death? Genesis 9:6: 'whoever sheds human blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His image.' Murder assaults God's image; only death atones. The law protects life's sanctity by making murder capital. Distinction between murder (vv. 12-14) and manslaughter (vv. 13) shows justice requires intent consideration.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern law codes (Hammurabi, Hittite) included capital punishment for murder but varied in application. Israel's law, grounded in imago Dei, universally applied capital punishment for intentional homicide.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. Why does murder require death penalty—what does this teach about human life's value?
2. How does Genesis 9:6 (image of God) ground capital punishment for murder?

Interlinear Text

הַמִּכֵּה	אִישׁ	יוֹמֵת:	יוֹמֵת:	יוֹמֵת:
He that smiteth	a man	put to death	put to death	put to death
H5221	H376	H4191	H4191	H4191

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 9:6 (Parallel theme): Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.

Matthew 26:52 (Parallel theme): Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

Leviticus 24:17 (Parallel theme): And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death.

Exodus 20:13 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not kill.

2 Samuel 12:13 (Parallel theme): And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.