

Numbers 35:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But if he thrust him of hatred, or hurl at him by laying of wait,
that he die;

Analysis

But if he thrust him of hatred (בְּשִׁנָּה, b'sinah)—the heart's condition determines the act's nature. Hatred (sinah, from the root 'to hate, be hostile') transforms an action into murder. The legal test isn't merely 'Did death result?' but 'What motivated the blow?'

Or hurl at him by laying of wait (בְּצִדְיָה, bitsediyah)—premeditated ambush. The manslayer who waited in hiding forfeited any claim to accidental homicide. This phrase captures first-degree murder: malice aforethought combined with deliberate planning. No refuge protects the one who plots death.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern law codes (Hammurabi, Assyrian laws) also distinguished between intentional and accidental killing, but Israel's law uniquely probed the heart's motive (sinah, hatred) rather than merely external circumstances, reflecting Yahweh's omniscience (1 Samuel 16:7).

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the law's emphasis on hatred (sinah) demonstrate that God judges internal motive, not merely external action?
2. What does 'laying of wait' reveal about the wickedness of premeditated sin versus sins of sudden passion?

Interlinear Text

עַל יְהוָה יְהִי שְׁנָא אָתָּה אַתָּה יְהִי כִּי

H518

him of hatred

But if he thrust

H176

or hurl

H5921

H8135

H1920

H7993

בְּצִדְקָה

לִמְתָּה:

at him by laying of wait that he die

H6660

H4191

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 21:14 (Parallel theme): But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.

Deuteronomy 19:11 (Parallel theme): But if any man hate his neighbour, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities:

Genesis 4:8 (Parallel theme): And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

2 Samuel 20:10 (Parallel theme): But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand: so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again; and he died. So Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri.

2 Samuel 3:27 (Parallel theme): And when Abner was returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly, and smote him there under the fifth rib, that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother.

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