

Numbers 35:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait,

Analysis

But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity—the pivotal 'but' (v'im, 'and if') transitions from murder (vv.16-21) to manslaughter. **Suddenly** (בפתע, b'feta) means 'unexpectedly, in an instant'—no premeditation, no prior hostility. **Without enmity** (בלא איבת, b'lo eivah) explicitly contrasts verse 21's 'in enmity.'

Or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait—contrasts verse 20's ambush (bitsediyah). This verse legally defines accidental homicide: unintentional, unplanned, arising from circumstances rather than malice. For such cases, the cities of refuge offered asylum—grace for the guilty-but-not-culpable.

Historical Context

Accidental deaths were common in ancient agrarian societies: axes flying off handles (Deuteronomy 19:5), construction accidents, animal-related incidents. Without the refuge city provision, blood feuds would spiral endlessly, destabilizing tribal society. The cities balanced justice (vv.16-21) with mercy (vv.22-28).

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How do the cities of refuge demonstrate that God's justice system distinguishes between moral guilt and tragic accident?
2. What does the sudden/without-enmity distinction teach about the difference between sinning willfully versus being overtaken in a fault (Galatians 6:1)?

Interlinear Text

עַל יְהוָה הַשְׁלִיכָה יְהִי אֵת מֵעַל אָמֵן

H518 him suddenly H6621 H3808 H342 H1920 H176 H7993 H5921 or have cast

כַּל אֲבָל כַּל אֲבָל כַּל אֲבָל

H3605 upon him any thing H3627 H3808 H6660

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 21:13 (Parallel theme): And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.

Numbers 35:11 (Parallel theme): Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares.