

Numbers 35:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing him not, and cast it upon him, that he die, and was not his enemy, neither sought his harm:

Analysis

Or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing him not (בְּלֹא רָאֹת, b'lo re'ot)—'without seeing,' denoting complete lack of intention. The stone may have been deadly ('wherewith a man may die'), but the thrower didn't see the victim. Intent, not just outcome, determines guilt.

And was not his enemy, neither sought his harm (וְלֹא אִיּוֹב לוֹ וְלֹא מְבָקֵשׁ רָעָתוֹ) (lo'v, v'lā ay'ob lo v'lā mevakesh ra'ato)—a threefold test of innocence:

1. didn't see him
2. wasn't his enemy
3. didn't seek his harm.

This exhaustive exoneration protects the truly accidental killer from vengeful misinterpretation. The refuge city awaits those who meet these criteria.

Historical Context

This verse addresses scenarios like quarrying accidents, construction mishaps, or agricultural incidents where falling objects caused death. In tightly-packed ancient villages, such tragedies occurred despite caution. The law's nuance prevented innocent blood from being avenged as murder.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 – Characteristics of love

Romans 2:1 – Judging others

Revelation 20:12 – Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does the threefold test (unseen, not an enemy, didn't seek harm) demonstrate God's exhaustive fairness in evaluating accidents?
2. What principle of jurisprudence does 'seeing him not' establish about the necessity of intent in criminal culpability?

Interlinear Text

וְכֹל	אֲלֵי	בְּכָל	אַל	בְּהָ	אַל	בְּהָ
H176	H3605	Or with any stone	H834	it upon him that he die	H0	him not

רָא וְתַ	עַל יְ	לִפְנֵי תַ	וְיִמְתַ	וְהַיְאֵת	אֵל אֲ
seeing	and cast	H5921	it upon him that he die	H1931	him not
H7200	H5307		H4191		H3808

רְעֵתָנוּ מִבְּקֵשׁ אָנוּ בְּ לֹא יְלֹא הָיָה וְאָנוּ בְּ

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