

# Deuteronomy 19:11-13

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-19/deuteronomy-1911-13/>

*Moses then addressed the issue of someone guilty of premeditated killing (murder) fleeing to one of the cities of refuge. The murderer must be brought before the elders and then executed so that he might be removed from the Israelite community.*

After making provisions for unintentional killing (vv. 1-10), Moses now turned his attention to a case in which *there is a man who hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and rises up against him and strikes him so that he dies* (v. 11). Moses used four action verbs to describe the act of intentional killing. He tells us that the murderer first *hates his neighbor*, then *lies in wait for him*, then *rises up against him*, and *strikes him so that he dies*. This shows the thought process of the murderer.

To *hate* (Heb. “šānē”) someone is to despise, detest, and reject the person. To *lie in wait* (Heb. “ārab”) for someone is to plot an ambush against him and to attack him by surprise. The murderer would catch his neighbor off guard, rise up or revolt against him, and strike (wound) him mortally. So, contrary to the previous case where an Israelite might kill his friend accidentally as they cut wood together in the forest (v. 4-7), the premeditated killing here involved hatred and lying in wait. That is, someone willfully committed an act of murder because he hated his neighbor.

And if the murderer chose to flee *to one of the cities of refuge* to live, then he should be pursued and overtaken. Not just anyone could do this. Moses told them that *the elders of his city shall send and take him from there*. The *elders* were the local leaders of a community and were held in high esteem. They were well-respected and often served as authorities in their towns ([Deuteronomy 1:13](#)). The avenger or family relative of the slain victim was not to go to the city of refuge and fetch the murderer, but the *elders*. Thus, the *elders* of one city were to come to agreement with the elders in the city of refuge to ensure that the one taking refuge was, indeed, a murderer, and not a manslayer.

Once the murderer was caught, he was to be delivered *into the hand of the avenger of blood*, a close relative who was responsible to punish the guilty in a way that would fit the crime (v. 6). In this case, the person responsible to

avenge the blood of his relative was allowed to strike the murderer so *that he might die* (Numbers 35:19-21). The *avenger* was not to do this on his own, but rather to first work through the proper authorities.

However, when the authorities delivered the murderer to him, the *avenger of blood* was commanded *not to pity* the murderer or to show mercy or compassion to him. He was to execute the murderer to *purge the blood of the innocent from Israel*. The verb *purge* (Heb. “bā’ar”) literally means “to burn.” It connotes the idea of burning something to remove it completely from a certain place, like a laser burning away a cancerous tumor. In this context, the murderer was to be executed and removed from the Israelite community to purge the land of violence. One who murders is not allowed to continue to live in the land. This would also have a deterrent effect, as the execution of the murderer would demonstrate that anyone thinking of murder is clearly shown that their life would be required of them should they take the life of another. The *avenger of blood* was not allowed to delegate the “dirty work” to someone else. He had to take responsibility to see that justice was done. Thus hate and violence would be purged, and discouraged.

#### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>11</sup> But if there is a man who hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and rises up against him and strikes him so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities, <sup>12</sup> then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. <sup>13</sup> You shall not pity him, but you shall purge the blood of the innocent from Israel, that it may go well with you.**