

Deuteronomy 17 - Justice Must Be Administered; Principles Governing Kings

II. Second sermon: What Israel must do for God (Deut 4:41—26:19)

(3) Exposition of the Decalogue (Deut 12:1—25:19)

(E) Laws arising from the fifth Commandment (Deut 16:18—18:22)

(a) Judges and other officials (16:18—17:13)

(ii) What judges must address (16:21—17:3)

(b) Improper sacrifice (17:1)

(c) Apostasy (17:2-3)

(iii) Guidelines for execution (17:4-7)

(iv) Supreme Court (17:8-10)

(v) Penalty for not carrying out Supreme Court's verdict (17:11-13)

(b) King's (17:14-20)

Deuteronomy 17

(b) Improper sacrifice (17:1)

1 "You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep which has a blemish or any defect, for that is a detestable thing to the LORD your God.

1 "You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep which has a blemish or any defect, for that is a detestable thing to the LORD your God.

1 You are not to sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep that has a defect or any flaw in it, because that is detestable to the LORD your God."

1 Thou shalt not sacrifice unto the LORD thy God any bullock, or sheep, wherein is blemish, or any evil favouredness: for that is an abomination unto the LORD thy God.

(c) Apostasy (17:2-3)

2 "If there is found in your midst, in any of your towns which the LORD your God is giving you, a man or a woman who does what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, by violating His covenant,

2 "If there is found in your midst, in any of your towns, which the LORD your God is giving you, a man or a woman who does what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, by transgressing His covenant,

2 "You may discover that a man or woman living in one of your cities that the LORD your God is about to give you has done evil in the eyes of the LORD your God by transgressing

his covenant.

2 If there be found among you, within any of thy gates which the LORD thy God giveth thee, man or woman, that hath wrought wickedness in the sight of the LORD thy God, in transgressing his covenant,

- To take a defective sacrifice to the Lord (Deut 17:1; Cf. 15:21) was to bring something into the sanctuary that was foreign to the worship of God, just as Asherah poles and sacred stones were foreign to genuine worship. Such a sacrifice was detestable to the Lord.

— To offer less than the best to God was to “despise” His name (Mal 1:6-8)

— Offering a less-than-perfect sacrifice was, in effect, failing to acknowledge Him as the ultimate Provider of all that is best in life

— Also it was a failure to acknowledge the vast gulf that exists between the perfectly holy God and sinful people

- The priests were normally responsible to maintain pure worship at the sanctuary (i.e., no fertility symbols or defective sacrifices), but the ultimate responsibility rested with the judges. If the priests failed, it was necessary for the judges to intervene.

3 and *that person* has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun, the moon, or any of the heavenly lights, which I have commanded not to do,

3 and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the heavenly host, which I have not commanded,

3 He may be following and serving other gods by bowing down to them—that is, to the sun, the moon, or to any of the heavenly host (something I did not command).

3 And hath gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded;

(iii) Guidelines for execution (17:4-7)

4 and if it is reported to you and you have heard *about it*, then you shall investigate thoroughly. And if it is true and the report is trustworthy that this detestable thing has been done in Israel,

4 and if it is told you and you have heard of it, then you shall inquire thoroughly. Behold, if it is true and the thing certain that this detestable thing has been done in Israel,

4 When it is reported to you or you hear of it, then investigate it thoroughly. When the truth has been established that this detestable thing has been done in Israel,

4 And it be told thee, and thou hast heard of it, and enquired diligently, and, behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel:

- The judges were also to see that false worshipers were executed

— One who worshiped other gods deserved capital punishment because his act threatened the nation’s very existence

- Astral worship was also forbidden (Cf. 4:19) for it honored inanimate creation rather than the living Creator
- The execution could take place only after it had been proved by a thorough investigation

10 Questions for Astrologers

- (1) What is the likelihood that 1/12th of the world's population is having the same kind of day today?
- (2) Why is the moment of birth, not conception, crucial for astrology? Is that why identical twins always have the same personality?!
- (3) If the mother's womb can keep out astrological influences until birth, can we do the same with a slab of steak?
- (4) If astrologers are as good as they claim, why aren't they richer? (e.g.: stock market, etc. How many foresaw Black Monday, October 1987? — None.)
- (5) Are all horoscopes done before the discovery of the three outer most planets incorrect? (Uranus, 1781; Neptune, 1846; Pluto, 1930.)
- (6) Shouldn't we condemn astrology as a form of bigotry? (i.e., refusing to hire a Leo or date a Virgo, etc.)
- (7) Why do different schools of astrology disagree so strongly with each other? No convergence of consensus.
 - Precession of the Earth's axis
 - How many planets and celestial objects to be included
 - Allocation of personality traits, etc.
- (8) If the astrological influence is carried by any known force, why do the planets dominate? [The obstetrician who delivers the child turns out to have about six times the gravitational pull of Mars and about 2,000 billion times its tidal force (less mass, but a lot closer!).]
- (9) If astrological influence is carried by an unknown force, why is it independent of distance? The importance of Mars in a horoscope is identical whether the planet is on the same side of the sun as the Earth or seven times farther away on the other side, etc.
- (10) If astrological influences don't depend on distance, why is there no astrology of stars, galaxies, and quasars? Doesn't the omission of Rigel, the Crab pulsar, and M31 render a horoscope incomplete?

5 then you are to bring out to your gates that man or woman who has done this evil deed, *that is*, the man or the woman, and you shall stone them to death.

5 then you shall bring out that man or that woman who has done this evil deed to your gates, *that is*, the man or the woman, and you shall stone them to death.

5 summon the man or the woman who did this evil thing to your city gates. Then stone the man or the woman to death.

5 Then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman, which have committed that wicked thing, unto thy gates, even that man or that woman, and shalt stone them with stones, till they die.

6 On the testimony of two witnesses or three witnesses, the condemned shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of *only* one witness.

6 On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.

6 Based on the testimony of two or three witnesses, they must surely die. But they are not to die based on the testimony of one person.

6 At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.

- To insure against a capricious execution, two or three independent witnesses were required

- One witness was inadequate (Cf. 19:15) because if he lied no one would be able to prove or disprove it

7 The hands of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall eliminate the evil from your midst.

7 The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

7 Let the witnesses be the first to begin executing them, then the rest of the people shall follow. By doing this you will purge evil from among you."

7 The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you.

- The witnesses were to be the first in the execution. So if their testimony was later proved false, they in effect would have committed murder and would be liable to execution.

- The whole community (all the people) would then join in the execution, thereby demonstrating their rejection of other gods (17:3) and their commitment to the Lord

- Such idolatry was an evil to be purged from the people (Cf. v12)

- NT churches have a similar responsibility to keep themselves pure

— A Christian offender should be "cut off" from his local church's fellowship if a thorough investigation proves his sin and he is unwilling to repent of it

— If he is a genuine believer, he will not lose eternal life but he will suffer loss on earth and receive less reward in heaven (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 3:10-15; 1 Tim 5:19)

(iv) Supreme Court (17:8-10)

8 "If a case is too difficult for you to decide, between one kind of homicide or another, between one kind of lawsuit or another, and between one kind of assault or another, *that are* cases of dispute in your courts, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses.

8 "If any case is too difficult for you to decide, between one kind of homicide or another, between one kind of lawsuit or another, and between one kind of assault or another, being cases of dispute in your courts, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses.

8 "If a case is too difficult for you to decide with respect to bloodshed, civil claims, assault and battery, or other matters of dispute within your courts, bring it to the place that the LORD your God will choose.

8 If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the LORD thy God shall choose;

- Moses made a provision for future judges in the Promised Land similar to that provided for judges in the time of the wilderness wanderings (1:17)

- If a judge felt a case was too difficult for him to decide, he could take it to a central tribunal (consisting of priests and the officiating chief judge) to be established at the future site of the central sanctuary (the place the Lord would choose)

9 So you shall come to the Levitical priests or the judge who is *in office* in those days, and you shall inquire *of them* and they will declare to you the verdict.

9 So you shall come to the Levitical priest or the judge who is *in office* in those days, and you shall inquire *of them* and they will declare to you the verdict in the case.

9 Present the case to the Levitical priest or the judge at that time. When you have inquired and they have announced the verdict,

9 And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment:

10 Then you shall act in accordance with the terms of the verdict which they declare to you from that place which the LORD chooses; and you shall be careful to act in accordance with everything that they instruct you *to do*.

10 You shall do according to the terms of the verdict which they declare to you from that place which the LORD chooses; and you shall be careful to observe according to all that they teach you.

10 carry out the verdict that was declared to you at the place that the LORD will choose. Carefully observe all of their instructions to you

10 And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the LORD shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee:

- The decisions of the tribunal would be final

— Any rebellion against the tribunal was considered "contempt of court" and was a capital offense

— This made the rule of justice paramount in the land and helped prevent anarchy

(v) Penalty for not carrying out Supreme Court's verdict (17:11-13)

11 In accordance with the terms of the law about which they instruct you, and in accordance with the verdict which they tell you, you shall act; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or the left.

11 According to the terms of the law which they teach you, and according to the verdict which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or the left.

11 in accordance with what the Law says, and in accordance with the verdict that will be handed to you. You must not deviate from the verdict that they declare to you either to the right or to the left.

11 According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left.

12 But the person who acts insolently by not listening to the priest who stands there to serve the LORD your God, nor to the judge, that person shall die; so you shall eliminate the evil from Israel.

12 The man who acts presumptuously by not listening to the priest who stands there to serve the LORD your God, nor to the judge, that man shall die; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel.

12 If a man presumptuously disregards the priest who is serving the LORD your God there or the judge, that person must die so you will purge evil from Israel.

12 And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel.

13 Then all the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act insolently again.

13 Then all the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act presumptuously again.

13 Then all the people who hear will be afraid and will not act presumptuously again."

13 And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously.

- There apparently were no prisons in ancient Israel

(b) King's (17:14-20)

After Moses and Joshua died, the people were to be governed by judges and priests. However, this system did not provide Israel with any semblance of a strong central government. It could only work if the leaders (the judges and the priests) and the people were committed to following the Lord. The Book of Judges records the sad failure of the people and the leaders in this system. Moses anticipated that failure by including this law in reference to the future king. One may ask why God allowed the priests and judges to fail. Or why did not God institute the monarchy immediately? The answer, at least partly, is that He was preparing the nation to appreciate the gift of the monarchy.

14 "When you enter the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and you take possession of it and live in it, and you say, 'I will appoint a king over me like all the nations who are around me,'

14 "When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,'

14 "When you have come to the land that the LORD your God is about to give you, and you have taken possession of it, and have settled in it, then you will say, 'I will appoint a king over me like all the nations around me.'

14 When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me;

15 you shall in fact appoint a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses. *One* from among your countrymen you shall appoint as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves, *anyone* who is not your countryman.

15 you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, *one* from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman.

15 You will certainly set a king over you, whom the LORD your God will choose from among your relatives, but you must not place a foreign king over you who is not from your relatives.

15 Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother.

- After Israel could no longer tolerate her unique position of being without a king, she would ask for and receive a king

- In essence, what God is saying to Israel is that, if you want to fulfill your obligations under the Mosaic Covenant, you must submit to the authority of a King that God chooses

— Ultimately, this King is Jesus Christ

— This is why the NT starts with a genealogy...it anchors Jesus Christ back to both David and Abraham

- The king was to have two qualifications:

(1) He had to be chosen by the Lord

— Later history made it clear that prophets, speaking on God's behalf, would declare His choice (e.g., Samuel's support for Saul (1 Sam 9-12) and then for David (1 Sam

16); Nathan's support of Solomon (1 Kings 1))

— The people could be sure that God would place no one on the throne whom He had not gifted to be king

— Therefore if a king failed, the reason for his failure would not lie in his lack of ability but in his moral life

(2) The king must be an Israelite

— An Israelite raised from childhood in the traditions and Scripture of Israel would be a far better choice than a foreigner to protect the purity of Israel's religion (Herod was an Edomite appointed by Rome)

16 In any case, he is not to acquire many horses for himself, nor shall he make the people return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.'

16 Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.'

16 Only he must not amass horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt to obtain more horses. For the LORD said you must never return that way again.

16 But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.

17 And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, so that his heart does not turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.

17 He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.

17 Also, he must not accumulate wives for himself (otherwise, his affection will become diverted), nor accumulate for himself excessive quantities of silver and gold.

17 Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.

- Three things about the behavior of the king were singled out:

(1) The prohibition against acquiring great numbers of horses

- On human terms the king's army would be significantly weaker than an enemy's army with many chariots and cavalry. Yet this was precisely the point: to depend not on military strength but on the Lord alone. God had already demonstrated His ability to crush a large superior chariot army (Ex 14-15). Acquiring horses would mean the people would be going to Egypt, where many were available.

Returning to the nation's former land of slavery was unthinkable.

(2) The prohibition against taking many wives was given because many kings married foreign women to form political alliances. If the king followed the Lord he would not need political alliances. Also foreign wives would cause his heart to be led astray to worship their idols.

(3) The prohibition against large amounts of silver and gold was intended to keep the king from developing a sense of independence and a lust for material wealth (Cf. Prov 30:8-9).

All three prohibitions, then, were designed to reduce the king to the status of a servant totally dependent on his Master, the Lord. The tragedy of ignoring these commands is seen in Solomon, who broke all three prohibitions (1 Kings 10:14-15,23,26-28; 11:1-6).

Here is something unique in the Mosaic Law that you don't find in any other ancient near eastern document: Israel's king was under the law. In all other ANE cultures, the king was always outside the law because their kings were deity. In Israel, the kings were under the same law that the people were under.

18 "Now it shall come about, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this Law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests.

18 "Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests.

18 When he occupies his royal throne, he must make a copy of this Law for himself from a scroll used by the Levitical priests.

18 And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites:

19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, so that he will learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully following all the words of this Law and these statutes,

19 It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes,

19 It is to remain with him the rest of his life so he may learn to fear the LORD his God and observe all the words of this Law and these statutes, in order to fulfill them.

19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them:

- The education of a king consisted of his copying, reading, and following carefully the Law and these decrees, that is, the entire Book of Deuteronomy (not just this small section of v14-20)

— This would insure a right spirit within the king (i.e., humility and obedience) and a long dynastic succession

20 so that his heart will not be haughty toward his countrymen, and that he will not turn away from the commandment to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may live long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.

20 that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.

20 He is not to exalt himself over his relatives, nor turn aside from the commandment—neither to the right nor to the left—so that he and his sons may reign long in Israel.”

20 That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel.