

Deuteronomy
Week 6
Divine Authority
Chapters 16:18-21

I. Chapter 16:18-20 – Administering Justice

The LORD establishes various laws that the Israelites must follow while in the Promise Land. This section directs the appointment of judges to administer these laws. Here we see three characteristics for a model judge:

1. Do not pervert justice (i.e. follow justice and justice alone as in verse 20)
2. Do not show partiality
3. Do not accept a bribe

II. Chapter 16:21-17:7: Forbidden Forms of Worship

The point is that we must worship God and God alone...and in exactly way He has ordained. We do worship other gods (such as at an Asterah pole or a sacred stone). We offer only our best animals as sacrifice to Him. Indeed, in Israel, the requirements for correct worship are so high that the penalty for violation is death.

What do you think about verse 7?

III. Chapter 17:8-13: Legal Decision

We saw that judges were to be set up at the end of Chapter 16. Now we see where judges and Priests are called to determine violations of the law. Comment: By its very nature, the law cannot be comprehensive. As such, judgment is required when determining how to apply it.

Why is a person to be purged if they disobey a judge?

IV. Chapter 17:14-20: Limitations of Royal Power

The original King in Israel was to be the LORD, but in 1 Samuel 8, we see the people rejecting Him for the King, wanting a human king like the rest of the nations. Of course, the LORD knew this and set up guideline for kings.

Which guidelines did Solomon break?

V. Chapter 18:1-8: Privileges of Priests and Levites

As you read through this section, think about those who returned from the Diaspora. Many Priests returned, but Levites were very scarce. Any idea why?

VI. Chapter 18:9-14: Additional Prohibitions

Why are child sacrifice, divination, and magic prohibited?

VII. Chapter 18:15-22: A Prophet like Moses

The ultimate fulfillment of the first part of this passage is Jesus. How did the people at Horeb (i.e. Mt. Sinai, probably immediately after the verbal giving of the Ten Commandments) ask for such a prophet?

The latter part raises again the standard for a prophet as in Chapter 13, and the punishment if such a “prophet” falls short.

VIII. Chapter 19:1-13: Cities of Refuge

The cities of refuge east of the Jordan were mentioned in Deut. 4:40-43. Other passages on them being created and their purpose are:

Exodus 21:12-14

Numbers 35:6-34

Joshua 21-22

Why were the cities of refuge important? For their “legal” purpose, would such a scheme work today?

IX. Chapter 19:14-21: Foreshadowing of Naboth

Two points are made in this section. One is the rights of property and second is the use of witness. The nature of the theft of Naboth’s orchard by Ahab is a little different than the theft indicated in verse 14, the misuse of witnesses was part of Jezebel’s method for taking the land.

X. Chapter 20: Rules of War

Verse 1: When Israel goes to war, why should its warriors not be afraid?

Discussion Point: Is war right or wrong?

Per Merrill, “War in the Old Testament was always viewed as a necessary evil in the defense of God’s people from those who would seek their harm but also as an offensive measure in advancing their territorial interests.” He goes on to point out in the OT war was always a holy war if motivated by God.

The Bible is unclear in general as to whether war is right or wrong, and if right, in what situations. Do you think that God chooses a side in wars today? If so, how do you know?

Verse 2: Right worship goes before right war.

Verses 3-9: How can so many people be allowed to leave the battle if Israelite army is going to win victories?

Verses 10-18: This section points out leniency to be offered to enemies, apparently outside the Promise Land. Verse 15 points out that these rules apply to cities that are far away. Canaanites (including all the sub-varieties listed in verse 17) were under herem and were to be exterminated.

Verses 19-20: Why would God tell the Israelites not to cut down the fruit trees?

XI. Chapter 21:1-9: Odd Law Concerning an Unknown Murder?

Do you see any value in this law (beyond following God’s directions)?

XII. Chapter 21:10-14: Female Captives

Deut 7:3

3 Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons,

NIV

This passage does not negate Deu 7:3 which deals only with inter-marriage with a still existing culture. In this case, the women are removed far from their homes and their culture. Their continuance would not have met that their culture would continue in Israel permeating it and defiling it as marrying women in the land would do.

Note the following concessions to the woman:

1. She is not to be raped or harmed.
2. She is to become a full wife.
3. She is given a month for mourning before becoming a wife.
4. She must give up everything that she has to become a wife.
5. She has rights if the man tires of her.

XIII. Chapter 21:15-17: Right of the First Born

While the Bible does not support polygamy anywhere, and denies it as Jesus makes clear in Mark 10:8-9, it does regulate it.

XIV. Chapter 21:18-21: Punishment for the Rebellious Child

Do you think that this law is fair? If so, why? If not, why?

XV. Chapter 21:22-23: Curse of Hanging on a Tree

How is verse 23 used in the NT? Gal. 3:13 quotes this verse.

Also note that verse 22 points out that the hanging on a tree is not the apparent cause of death. It appears to be an additional punishment. Of course, for Jesus, it was the cause of death, but it was also still a curse per this verse.