

Deuteronomy 16:18 – 17:1-20 Moses Gives Instructions About Government

Introduction: The first commandment did not directly give regulations to Israel about the government of the nation. There were, however, two principles upon which the government was to exist: (1) God is the supreme ruler of the universe. Whatever human government Israel would have must recognize God as supreme ruler of Israel. (2) God gave parents rule over their children, these set the pattern for national rule. The rulers should govern with the best interest of the nation as their goal. The citizens should recognize the God-given authority of the rulers and obey their rule.

Our text speaks of several aspects of the Israelite government.

I. Judges to be appointed to assist in ruling, verses 18-22.

- A. Moses used the head of each tribe plus the princes to assist him in his rulership over Israel. (He also appointed judges to rule on the lower level.)
- B. After Moses and Joshua God would raise up judges for the top place of leadership and they would be assisted by the heads of the tribes, the princes, and by judges who would assist them by serving in the lower position of authority.
 1. As the present men who served in such offices would die or become unable to serve men would be selected to serve in their place.
 2. Moses will now set forth some of the rules regarding these men.
- C. A judge was not to show favoritism toward family or friend, but was to deal fairly with all, verse 19a. (He was to take no bribes, verse 19b.)
- D. Just as God promised long life to children who obey their parents, even so He promised Israel that good government would mean that the nation would dwell long in the land, verse 20. (The implication is that bad government could allow corruption and sin which would cause the nation to be driven from their land.)
- E. One of the main things which the governmental leaders were to do was to keep idolatry out of the land, verses 21-22.

II. How the officials and the priest were to work together. 17:1-13.

- A. The people were not to be allowed to offer sacrificial animals to the Lord if the animals had some blemish, verse 1.
 1. The priests, of course, would be responsible for checking the animal and rejecting it.
 2. The judges and other officials were to enforce the ruling which the priest made.
- B. If some man or woman was guilty of idol worship, the judges were to investigate, to officiate in a trial, and to punish the guilty by stoning, verses 2-7.
 1. Only those cases which could be proven by two or three witnesses were to be found guilty.
 2. If there was only one witness the person charged was to be given the benefit of the doubt. (This was to help the execution of an innocent party on trumped-up charges.)
 3. The purpose of executing the guilty was to help prevent the idolatry from spreading. (Execution is a deterrent to crime, verse 7.)
- C. If the judges were unable to make a decision concerning any court case which should come before them, they were to refer the matter to either the Levitical priest or to the high ruling judge of the land, verses 8-13.
 1. The Levitical priests were to serve somewhat as a Supreme Court.
 2. The judges were to accept the decision of the priest and to see that their decision was carried out.
- D. The priest were to make their decisions based on the laws of God, verse 11,
- E. There is the mention that the ruling judge of the land may hear such hard cases. (Presumable

he would be given the case only if the priests were unable to reach a decision.)

F. The person who would not obey the decision which the ruling officials reached was to be put to death, verses 12-17.

III. Instructions concerning kings, verse 14-20.

A. Israel had no king at that time, but God could foresee the time when they would and He gave instructions concerning kings. (It was not that God desired for them to have a king, but that the people would want one, verse 14.)

B. The people would be allowed to make their own selection of the king, but they were always to seek to select the man that God wanted to be their king. (Churches ought to identify with that; that is the way pastors should be selected, verse 15a.)

1. They were never to select a man who is a foreigner to be their king, verse 15b.

2. He must not be a man who seeks to have many horses, verse 16.

a. He was not forbidden to have horses, but many horses.

b. The land of Israel was not as suited for horses as was Goshen in Egypt.

c. A king with many horses might seek to lead the people back to Egypt and there were those who wanted to go.

3. Neither was he to seek to have many wives, verse 17.

(Solomon failed to follow this teaching concerning both horses and wives.)

C. Whoever the king might be he was to get a personal copy of the laws of God which Moses will leave and constantly study them that he might know the will of God, verses 18-19.

1. He was to do the will of God for his own life.

2. He was to lead the nation in doing the will of God.

D. The king was not to become lifted up in pride, verse 20a.

(Pride would lead to his own downfall and to the downfall of the nation.)

E. The king was not to turn aside from the will of God, verse 20b.

Conclusion:

1. We can see the importance of trying to have good leaders in our own government from the lowest office to the highest.
2. We can see the importance of praying and voting in the elections that we may get qualified men.
3. The court system of a land is no better than the men who serve as judges.
4. The legislative system is no better than the men who vote and make the laws.
5. Our government officials should study the word of God and seek to live by it's teachings and to govern by its teachings.
6. The citizens of the land should be law abiding citizens. (It will not only help to keep you out of jail, but it will help to keep you out of rouble with God.)