

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Deuteronomy - Chapters 17-18

Deuteronomy Chapter 17

The ancient nation of Israel was governed by God's laws, given through Moses. Chapter 17 gives instructions to the elders and judges in how to administrate justice in Israel. It also instructs future kings.

Deuteronomy 17:1 (NLT) "Never sacrifice sick or defective cattle, sheep, or goats to the Lord your God, for he detests such gifts.

A lame sacrifice dishonors God - a lame sacrifice is lame! It is a Bible principle to give God the first and the best. Jesus was first, and He was best. The Old Testament sacrifices that were *"without spot and blemish"* were a picture of Jesus Christ. We, in turn, are to give our first and our best to God in love and thankfulness to Him.

Later in their history, God scolded the Israelites for offering inferior offerings to Him on the altar.

Malachi 1:6b (NKJV) ". . .Where *is* My reverence?

Says the Lord of hosts

To you priests who despise My name.

Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'

7 "You offer defiled food on My altar. . .

8 . . .when you offer the blind as a sacrifice,

Is it not evil?

And when you offer the lame and sick,

Is it not evil?

Offer it then to your governor!

Would he be pleased with you?

Would he accept you favorably?"

Says the Lord of hosts.

Even we humans are offended when someone gives us something that is worthless or inferior, or when labor is of poor quality. How much more is the Lord God offended when we give Him something that is less than our best. Malachi continues:

Malachi 1: 10 (NLT) "How I wish one of you would shut the Temple doors so that these worthless sacrifices could not be offered! I am not pleased with you," says the Lord. . .

13 You say, 'It's too hard to serve the Lord,' and you turn up your noses at my commands," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "Think of it! Animals that are stolen and crippled and sick are being presented as offerings! Should I accept from you such offerings as these?" asks the Lord.

14 "Cursed is the cheat who promises to give a fine ram from his flock but then sacrifices a defective one to the Lord. For I am a great king," says the Lord. . .

Remember the principle - God deserves our first and our best.

Deuteronomy 17:2 (NLT) “When you begin living in the towns the Lord your God is giving you, a man or woman among you might do evil in the sight of the Lord your God and violate the covenant. **3** For instance, they might serve other gods or worship the sun, the moon, or any of the stars—the forces of heaven—which I have strictly forbidden. **4** When you hear about it, investigate the matter thoroughly. If it is true that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, **5** then the man or woman who has committed such an evil act must be taken to the gates of the town and stoned to death.

There were many capital crimes in ancient Israel, and idolatry was one of them. Idolatry would eventually be the downfall of Israel and the reason that God allowed Babylon and Assyria to take them away from their land as captives.

But why would this sin against God be punished by death? In ancient Israel, God said that idolatry affects the entire community. A part of idolatry was immoral acts and even sacrificing children on pagan altars. Idolatry affected the community in every way. Therefore, it was a capital crime in ancient Israel.

6 But never put a person to death on the testimony of only one witness. There must always be two or three witnesses. **7** The witnesses must throw the first stones, and then all the people may join in. In this way, you will purge the evil from among you.

A person was innocent until proven guilty, and the testimony of one witness was not enough to convict in Israel’s courts. Although God commanded that imperfect men help to bring about justice, He also commanded that the process be handled carefully in a company of witnesses.

It was the official witness in the court of law that was to throw the first stone. This made it public record that the witness did indeed see the crime. The stoning (which was the execution) of a person was not supposed to happen without official witnesses (more than one).

The principle of two or three witnesses continues into the church in the New Testament age. Paul told Timothy:

1 Timothy 5:19 Do not listen to an accusation against an elder unless it is confirmed by two or three witnesses.

Satan would like to sow trouble and discord in the church, and gossips can ruin a good man’s ministry and reputation. Therefore, Paul warns Timothy that he should not listen to every accusation against a church leader. There must be two or three witnesses (not gossips). We should always think the best of people. This is an important trait to cultivate. It is the job of the church people to think the best, pray for the church leaders, and be faithful to God and His church.

Deuteronomy 17:8 “Suppose a case arises in a local court that is too hard for you to decide—for instance, whether someone is guilty of murder or only of manslaughter, or a difficult lawsuit, or a case involving different kinds of assault. Take such legal cases to the place the Lord your God will choose, **9** and present them to the Levitical priests or the judge on duty at that time. They will hear the case and declare the verdict. **10** You must carry out the verdict they announce and the sentence they prescribe at the place the Lord chooses. You must do exactly what they say. **11** After they have interpreted the law and declared their verdict, the sentence they impose must be fully executed; do not modify it in any way. **12** Anyone arrogant enough to reject the verdict of the judge or of the priest who represents the Lord your God must die. In this way you will purge the evil from Israel. **13** Then everyone else will hear about it and be afraid to act so arrogantly.

In ancient Israel there were “higher courts” or “courts of appeal,” just as there are in many modern nations. After a matter was taken to the “higher court,” the decision of the judge must stand. The judge represented the Lord and he was supposed to be well versed in the laws of Israel. He was supposed to take into account the testimony of several witnesses. After this, his decision was final. Notice that “contempt of court,” or anyone who rejected the verdict of the judge also committed a capital crime in ancient Israel.

Guidelines for a King

Deuteronomy 17:14 “You are about to enter the land the Lord your God is giving you. When you take it over and settle there, you may think, ‘We should select a king to rule over us like the other nations around us.’ **15** If this happens, be sure to select as king the man the Lord your God chooses. You must appoint a fellow Israelite; he may not be a foreigner.

Israel was a *theocracy* which means “rule by God.” God was their king. In the future (over 300 years in the future) the people of Israel would demand a human king to rule over them. God knew this would happen, and He gave rules and warnings for the future kings of Israel.

Bible scholars debate whether it was God’s will for Israel to eventually have a king. When we read the history of the kings, we see mostly negative examples - kings that caused the downfall of Israel. When Jesus returns in the last days, He will be God and King over all the earth. The only King that will reign righteously is the Lord Jesus Christ. The history of the kings of Israel teaches us that man is not able to rule - we need God’s rule over us.

God’s first command regarding a king is that Israel should select a king that God chooses - not one of their own choosing. Secondly, he must be an Israelite - not a foreigner.

16 “The king must not build up a large stable of horses for himself or send his people to Egypt to buy horses, for the Lord has told you, ‘You must never return to Egypt.’ **17** The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the Lord. And he must not accumulate large amounts of wealth in silver and gold for himself.

God gave specific charges to the future kings of Israel.

A king must not build up a large quantity of horses, which means he must not put his trust in his military might. God would help him win every battle. Further, the horses must not be purchased from Egypt. Egypt was the land of bondage for the descendants of Jacob, and God delivered them in a miraculous manner. They were to have no dealings with Egypt (a picture of sin and worldliness).

A king must not have many wives. The standard for marriage has been one wife for one lifetime. God tolerated polygamy in the Old Testament, yet one wife was God’s pattern and standard. Notice the reason God gave for not having multiple wives - *because they will turn his heart away from the Lord.*

A king must not accumulate large amounts of wealth for himself. His focus was not to be on the things that he possessed. His focus was to be on serving the people he governed - and pleasing the God of Israel.

These three areas - political or military power, personal pleasure, and the accumulation of riches - are potential pitfalls for leaders in every generation. Those in positions of leadership must be on guard that these areas do not become a snare. A leader should live to serve. His power, pleasure, and wealth should all be within reason. We can look to the story of Joseph (Genesis 37 through 50) for an example of a godly leader. Joseph did have power, pleasure, and wealth, but he was devoted to his God and to service, and these three things were governed in his life while he governed the people.

As we read Deuteronomy 17:16-17, we can't help but think of King Solomon.

1 Kings 4:2 (NLT) Solomon had 4,000 stalls for his chariot horses, and he had 12,000 horses.

1 Kings 10:28 Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Cilicia. . . **29** At that time chariots from Egypt could be purchased for 600 pieces of silver, and horses for 150 pieces of silver.

1 Kings 11:1 Now King Solomon loved many foreign women. Besides Pharaoh's daughter, he married women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and from among the Hittites. **2** The Lord had clearly instructed the people of Israel, "You must not marry them, because they will turn your hearts to their gods." Yet Solomon insisted on loving them anyway. **3** He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. And in fact, they did turn his heart away from the Lord.

4 In Solomon's old age, they turned his heart to worship other gods instead of being completely faithful to the Lord his God, as his father, David, had been. **5** Solomon worshiped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. **6** In this way, Solomon did what was evil in the Lord's sight; he refused to follow the Lord completely, as his father, David, had done.

1 Kings 10:14 Each year Solomon received about 25 tons of gold (KJV: 666 talents of gold). **15** This did not include the additional revenue he received from merchants and traders, all the kings of Arabia, and the governors of the land. . .

18 . . .the king made a huge throne, decorated with ivory and overlaid with fine gold. **19** The throne had six steps and a rounded back. There were armrests on both sides of the seat, and the figure of a lion stood on each side of the throne. **20** There were also twelve other lions, one standing on each end of the six steps. No other throne in all the world could be compared with it!

21 All of King Solomon's drinking cups were solid gold, as were all the utensils. . . They were not made of silver, for silver was considered worthless in Solomon's day!. . .

23 So King Solomon became richer and wiser than any other king on earth. **24** People from every nation came to consult him and to hear the wisdom God had given him. **25** Year after year everyone who visited brought him gifts of silver and gold, clothing, weapons, spices, horses, and mules.

King Solomon broke God's commands to kings on a grand scale. However, we must remember that God *chose* to give Solomon great riches and fame because he did not ask for these things, but rather he asked for wisdom to lead the people of Israel. So in the area of riches, God chose to make Solomon rich.

1 Kings 3:7 "Now, O Lord my God, you have made me king instead of my father, David, but I am like a little child who doesn't know his way around. . . **9** Give me an understanding heart so that I can

govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong. For who by himself is able to govern this great people of yours?"

10 The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for wisdom. **11** So God replied, "Because you have asked for wisdom in governing my people with justice and have not asked for a long life or wealth or the death of your enemies— **12** I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have! **13** And I will also give you what you did not ask for—riches and fame! No other king in all the world will be compared to you for the rest of your life!

Now, back to God's instructions for future kings in Deuteronomy 17:

Deuteronomy 17:18 "When he sits on the throne as king, he must copy for himself this body of instruction on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. **19** He must always keep that copy with him and read it daily as long as he lives. That way he will learn to fear the Lord his God by obeying all the terms of these instructions and decrees. **20** This regular reading will prevent him from becoming proud and acting as if he is above his fellow citizens. It will also prevent him from turning away from these commands in the smallest way. And it will ensure that he and his descendants will reign for many generations in Israel.

The above passage lets us know that a king was not above his people. He was to copy and read the Word of God (under the direction of the Levites). Daily Bible reading is a must for every child of God. The Word of God was to be the king's constant companion. This regular Bible reading and study insured three things: (1) it kept the king from becoming proud, (2) it kept him from breaking God's commandments, and (3) it ensured that he and his descendants would rule for many generations to come.

Regarding the Bible, a saying is, "The Bible will keep you from sin. Sin will keep you from the Bible."

Deuteronomy Chapter 18

Gifts for the Priests and Levites

Deuteronomy 18:1 (NLT) "Remember that the Levitical priests—that is, the whole of the tribe of Levi—will receive no allotment of land among the other tribes in Israel. Instead, the priests and Levites will eat from the special gifts given to the Lord, for that is their share. **2** They will have no land of their own among the Israelites. The Lord himself is their special possession, just as he promised them.

Moses reminds the people that the Levites are God's appointed ministers who have no inheritance in the land of Israel. Instead, the people of Israel were to bless the priests and Levites with a portion of the tithes and the sacrificial offerings that were brought to the Tabernacle (later the Temple).

3 "These are the parts the priests may claim as their share from the cattle, sheep, and goats that the people bring as offerings: the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach. **4** You must also give to the priests the first share of the grain, the new wine, the olive oil, and the wool at shearing time. **5** For the Lord your God chose the tribe of Levi out of all your tribes to minister in the Lord's name forever.

The priests and Levites received certain parts of the animal offerings as well as a certain portion of the fruits of the harvest, oil, and wine (the first fruits).

Deuteronomy 18:6 "Suppose a Levite chooses to move from his town in Israel, wherever he is living, to the place the Lord chooses for worship. **7** He may minister there in the name of the Lord his God, just like all his fellow Levites who are serving the Lord there. **8** He may eat his share of the sacrifices and offerings, even if he also receives support from his family.

It is the duty of God's people to support the ministry. God reminded His people over and over, *"don't forget to take care of the Levites."*

A Call to Holy Living

9 "When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, be very careful not to imitate the detestable customs of the nations living there. **10** For example, never sacrifice your son or daughter as a burnt offering. And do not let your people practice fortune-telling, or use sorcery, or interpret omens, or engage in witchcraft, **11** or cast spells, or function as mediums or psychics, or call forth the spirits of the dead.

People are curious concerning the occult. Unfortunately, this curiosity can lead to a knowledge of things that should be left alone. The idol worship of the Canaanites involved the occult practice of offering children to pagan gods. In reality, occult practices are nothing more than the worship of demons.

Eight terms or phrases are given above. The above verses warn against:

Fortune-telling - predicting the future through occult means

Sorcery - those who use drugs or potions to cast spells or gain spiritual knowledge, or enter into altered states of consciousness

Interpreting omens - to tell the future or cast spells using tarot cards, crystal balls, tea leaves, Ouija boards, reading palms, etc. A *soothsayer* is one who attempts to predict the future from the sun, moon, and stars. It is said that 32 million Americans believe in astrology. Over 10,000 "soothsayers" work full time in the astrology business. Most newspapers carry a "horoscope" column. Astrology is "entry level" occultism. People start dabbling with horoscopes and the like, and then continue on into more deception and darkness.

Witchcraft - anything that makes contact with the demonic or dark spiritual world. Witchcraft has had a resurgence in our day. It has been described as witchcraft for the good, or to better the earth, or to become one with the earth. No matter how you package it, witchcraft is still the worship of demons. No good ever comes of it. Satan is at the core of all occult practices and false religions. We must worship Jesus only. Witchcraft is becoming more and more open in our society (like many other abominable sins). It is in the colleges and universities. Young people have a natural desire to look into it because in many cases, the churches have failed to teach holiness and godliness - and many churches have downplayed the reliability of God's Word. Where the church fails, Satan will gladly step in.

Cast spells - refers to those who use charms or cast spells for good luck or for evil upon others. Instead, we are to bless people in the name of the Lord and pray for them.

Mediums - these are people who stand in the gap between a person and the world of the occult. Psychics, palm readers, crystal ball readers are mediums. Most are fakes who just want your money. Many are full of demons and are dangerous.

Call forth the spirits of the dead - people who conduct seances are practicing *necromancy*, which is the conjuring up or the contacting of the dead. This became very popular in the Roaring Twenties when there was much rebellion both in society and spiritually. In the last days of King Saul of Israel, the king sought out a medium in order to speak to the late prophet, Samuel. He got more than he bargained for (1 Samuel 28).

Isaiah 8:19 (NLT) Someone may say to you, "Let's ask the mediums and those who consult the spirits of the dead. With their whisperings and mutterings, they will tell us what to do." But shouldn't people ask God for guidance? Should the living seek guidance from the dead?

20 Look to God's instructions and teachings! People who contradict his word are completely in the dark.

Deuteronomy 18:12 Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord [KJV: is an abomination to the LORD]. It is because the other nations have done these detestable things that the Lord your God will drive them out ahead of you. **13** But you must be blameless before the Lord your God. **14** The nations you are about to displace consult sorcerers and fortune-tellers, but the Lord your God forbids you to do such things."

The Lord let ancient Israel know that occult practices had no place in their nation. The Canaanites were going to be removed from the land because of their involvement in idolatry, gross sexual sins, and occultism.

The New Testament Christian goes to two sources for information - God's Word and the Spirit of God. His pastor helps to mediate both of these in his life. To go to a pagan or demonic source is totally forbidden and beyond reason. There is no need to go there. It is useless to go there because it is a place of deception. It is a great sin to go there. God has revealed through His Word and by His Spirit all that we need to know. If it is not there, then we don't need to know it.

American culture is becoming progressively more tolerant of the occult and less tolerant of biblical spirituality. However, we should not be afraid of demons or occultism. The power of God lies within every person who is filled with the Holy Spirit. His family is protected by the power of God.

Romans 8:38 And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. **39** No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

True and False Prophets

Deuteronomy 18:15 (NLT) Moses continued, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. **16** For this is what you yourselves requested of the Lord your God when you were assembled at Mount Sinai. You said, 'Don't let us hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore or see this blazing fire, for we will die.'

Moses said that a prophet was coming in the future who would be like him (Moses). He would come from Israel, and they should listen to him. They didn't want to listen to the booming voice of the Lord that spoke from Mount Sinai (it frightened them).

Deuteronomy 18:17 "Then the Lord said to me, 'What they have said is right. **18** I will raise up a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I command him. **19** I will personally deal with anyone who will not listen to the messages the prophet proclaims on my behalf.

Instead of a booming voice from Mount Sinai, this prophet will speak the words of God. Of course, Moses is prophetically speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Peter refers to this Scripture in Deuteronomy when he is addressing the Jewish people after the healing of the lame man:

Acts 3:19 (NLT) Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. **20** Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah. **21** For he must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his holy prophets. **22** Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people. Listen carefully to everything he tells you.' **23** Then Moses said, 'Anyone who will not listen to that Prophet will be completely cut off from God's people.'

Deuteronomy 18:20 But any prophet who falsely claims to speak in my name or who speaks in the name of another god must die.'

21 "But you may wonder, 'How will we know whether or not a prophecy is from the Lord?' **22** If the prophet speaks in the Lord's name but his prediction does not happen or come true, you will know that the Lord did not give that message. That prophet has spoken without my authority and need not be feared.

The Lord Jesus Christ is a true prophet because everything he promised came true (or will yet come true). Scripture says:

John 2:13 It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. **14** In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. **15** Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. . . **16** Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!" . . .

18 But the Jewish leaders demanded, "What are you doing? If God gave you authority to do this, show us a miraculous sign to prove it."

19 "All right," Jesus replied. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

20 "What!" they exclaimed. "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can rebuild it in three days?" **21** But when Jesus said "this temple," he meant his own body. **22** After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this, and they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said.