

Deuteronomy 16-19: About Leadership and God's Covenant People

Thesis: For people living in covenant with God, civil law and justice require commitment to God and reliance upon him, from all members of the community, but above all from those in leadership positions.

Understanding these chapters in the book

- Israel would be “separated” in the Promised Land: cities and tribal regions could foster local deviations. It’s not hard to see the relationship between our own dichotomy of “Christian life on Sunday” and that of the rest of the week.
- Good leadership is required for the best implementation of God’s covenant. This section thus deals with prophets, priests, and kings.
- Deuteronomy insists on the centrality of worship in every part of the life of God’s people

About Judges (Deut. 16:18- 17:13)

“judges” = leaders of local councils? Local “chiefs”?

Case study: “Worship” (16:20-21) a hypothetical example of the application of the law, but one that gets at the heart of the covenant relationship ((Merrill) 259.

17:2-7: Communal aspects of the application of the law?

About Kings (Deut. 17:14-20)

- It may be that this passage [merely] assumes a king will eventually be put into place in Israel [chk for proscriptions of this]. As a statement, it is “promonarchic,” intended to provide safeguards kingship from the excesses that would destroy it. Kingship had been mentioned as early as Gen. 17 and 35. Monarchy was the prevalent mode of government in the late Bronze Age for the ANE
- Kingship is dealt with second here because sound judicial administration is at the heart of Israel’s covenant theocracy, monarchy as a particular form of political authority is not (Wright) 207
- In Deuteronomy, the judge stands closer to divine functions and is a more true successor to Moses than a king... the way of the king in Deuteronomy is not a reflection of the deity but a model of the true Israelite. This section, therefore, is permissive rather than prescriptive legislation” (Wright 208).

List of “checks” to ensure the best kingly practices?

About Priests (Deut. 18:1-8)

The priests were not to own land like the priests from surrounding cultures and relations, who had the potential to become an economically dominant, exploitive elite. At the same time, they were not to be impoverished, but enjoy adequate provision provided by an obedient people (Wright 215)

About Prophets (Deut. 18:9-22)

This passage is of particular interest as being the only one in the Torah that establishes prophecy as an institution of Yahweh in Israel. (Thompson) 234.

Four Principles of prophecy?

Two principles of false prophets?

Ensuring Justice

Cities of refuge (Deut. 19:1-13)

Civil conduct (Deut. 19:14-21)

Sources

Merrill, Eugene. Deuteronomy. The New American Commentary. Ed. Ray Clendenen. Vol. 4. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994.

Thompson, J. A. Deuteronomy. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Vol. 5. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974.

Wright, Christopher. Deuteronomy. New International Biblical Commentary. Ed. Robert and Robert Johnston Hubbard. Vol. 4. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996.