

## **Deuteronomy 16**

### **Leadership (V)**

Deuteronomy 16:18-18:22

In these studies, I will not be working through the details in the text, but I will seek to draw out the underlying principles on which the instructions were given. We need to know the instructions given by Moses to the agricultural and farming communities three and a half thousand years ago and then to rework the principles to our present age. Of course, there will be differences in the application and I will try to put forward those that are clear and uncontested.

### **V Commandment**

Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. (5:16)

### **Introduction**

The few chapters (16:18-18:22) in this next section deal with the leadership in Israel, the governing bodies of the land. It might be a long bow to draw to link it to the fifth commandment. It seems that Moses did not feel the need to spell out the details of working through this commandment. Instead, he turned his direction from governing the family to governing the community. The principle remained the same. The honour due to our parents who brought us up should be the same honour we give to those who lead us and govern us. I acknowledge that this may be difficult for some of us to accept. However, Moses is giving his discourse in the context of the covenant relationship with God on the one hand and with one another on the other. This covenant relationship undergirds the book of Deuteronomy and indeed the whole of the Bible because our God is a covenant God.

Honouring our parents is not a methodology but is dependant on the relational. It is a matter of the heart. This is the transition from honouring God the creator to honouring our parents as pro-creator. The fifth commandment to honour our father and mother also reflects the God-Israel relationship. 'Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son (Ex. 4:22). The relationship of God to His people is that of Father. Jesus addressed God as His Father. The earthly relationship of father (parent) and children is a reflection of the heavenly relationship. To honour our parents, we must firstly honour God when we worship Him and observe the Sabbath. How this relationship is expressed is also dependent on the culture one finds oneself in. Different cultures express that in different ways.

### **Leadership in Israel**

The way the land was to be governed would be by the following:

- 16:18-20 judges and officers
- 16:21-17:7 forbidden worship and right judgement
- 17:8-13 court
- 17:14-20 kings
- 18:1-8 priests
- 18:9-22 prophets

Our parents are pro-creators and therefore merit the honour due to them. The leaders of the land were appointed to uphold the justice of God and therefore merit honour from the people they led. There is no political-religious divide in ancient Israel. Their form of government is what we call theocracy, God is their King and authority. All authorities on earth 'were created through him and for him'.

<sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. (Col. 1:16)

### **Judges and officers (16:18-17:7)**

<sup>18</sup> "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. <sup>19</sup> You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. <sup>20</sup> Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you. (18-20)

When the people had settled in the land, they needed to establish channels of justice. The simple reason for this is sin is still endemic in the people. Perversion of justice remained and this needed to be identified and punished. This is the task of the judges and their subordinate officers. They were also cautioned to be upright and justice - 'justice, and only justice, you shall follow' (20). They were to preserve the observance of the laws of God for the community.

This jurisdiction did not only apply to civil cases, but is also extended to the religious realm. Bear in mind, the laws are not categorised into civil and religious, but to the whole of life, life under the governance of God, a theocracy. The jurisdiction of the judges also oversees the nature of Israel's worship. Any altar of the local deity needed to be destroyed and the perpetrators judged and punished.

<sup>21</sup> "You shall not plant any tree as an Asherah beside the altar of the LORD your God that you shall make. <sup>22</sup> And you shall not set up a pillar, which the LORD your God hates. (16:21-22)

The purpose of this is to 'purge evil from Israel' (7). There is an authority set up for the governing of the people. They were to act righteously. There is also an obligation by the people to obey. We need to see this in a covenantal relationship similar to that of God and His people. It is not mere legality as we understand these things today. It is the grace of God to His people in enabling them to keep to the prescribed ways.

We need to see that the jurisdiction of the land is part of the worship of Yahweh. Today our separation of state and church is not the way Moses saw it. We have also separated the religious and social aid. That is not so in Israel and we shall see that again in a later study.

### **The court (17:8-13)**

<sup>8</sup> "... any case within your towns that is too difficult for you, then you shall arise and go up to the place that the LORD your God will choose. <sup>9</sup> And you shall come to the Levitical priests and to the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall consult them, and they shall declare to you the decision. (8-9)

This is the concept of the 'high court' as we have today. Cases that are too difficult can be taken to a wider panel in the central sanctuary.

**Kings (17:14-20)**

The appointment of a king in Israel has the Mosaic sanction. It has been said that the appointment of a king in the days of Samuel was against God's purpose. Not so. What was wrong then was the appointment of a man not of God's choosing. Thereafter, David was a man of God's choosing.

<sup>14</sup> "When you come to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, 'I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,' <sup>15</sup> you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose. (17:14-15)

This appointment of a king comes with a warning not to put his trust in the things (power) of this world.

<sup>16</sup> Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never return that way again.' (17:16)

Against this warning is that the king must keep close to the way of the Lord. He must read the law of the Lord is all the days of his life.

<sup>18</sup> "And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. <sup>19</sup> And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, <sup>20</sup> that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel. (17:18-20)

This sets the authority of the Lord above that of the king in Israel.

**Priests (18:1-8)**

Having enunciated the arrangement for the governing of the land, Moses then continued to spell out the way the religious life of Israel was to be maintained. The first of these is the priesthood from the tribe of Levi. Next comes the prophets. They have different functions in regulating the life of worship in Israel. Notice here that what we term 'secular' and 'religious' are bundled together as one and the same thing. What we need to see in these chapters is that the whole of life is our worship as Paul puts in in Romans 12:1.

<sup>12</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1-2)

The details of the duties of the priest are not mentioned here. They have been given in Leviticus. What is detailed here is the support of the priesthood.

<sup>2</sup> They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; the LORD is their inheritance, as he promised them. (18:2)

The rest of Israel were to bring their produce and tithes to the temple for the support of the priests. Note that what was given were not the left overs that the people do not want. They were to provide for the priests the best cut (shoulder, cheeks and stomach) from their animals (18:3), and the first fruits (18:4) of their harvest. Now whether we consider the stomach (18:3) as the best cut is another matter. The implication of this for us today is obvious. Those who are set apart in the service of God need the support from the rest of the community in which they serve. What

undergirds this arrangement is the covenant relationship we have. Just as we honour our parents we also need to honour those whom the Lord has placed before us in the conduct of our worship.

### **Prophets (18:9-22)**

<sup>9</sup>“When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. (18:9)

Here comes another prohibition against following the practices of those already on the land. The abolition of the practices of the land was the duties of the judges and their officers, as well the prophets. The former had a judicial function, seeking out the perpetrators and punishing them. The latter were to speak the truth of the words of God. We can see that both bodies subserved a negative and positive function. Both arms needed to be applied to maintain the truth of the worship of God in Israel.

<sup>15</sup>“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen - ... <sup>18</sup>I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. (18:15, 18)

This would be a very dry study if we merely see this as setting up a bureaucracy for the administration of the land. However, it would be very different if we see this as the covenant relationship within Israel. The Lord had brought them out of Egypt into the promised land. They were one people redeemed by the Lord and therefore they were to express themselves in obedience to God and mutual respect for one another, which is the essence of the covenant relationship, and especially to those whom the Lord has appointed to administer and to guide the nation.