

Deuteronomy 1:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him.

Analysis

Moses recalls his establishment of a judicial system based on Jethro's advice (Exodus 18:13-26). The appointment of 'captains over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens' created an efficient hierarchical structure for adjudicating disputes. This wasn't merely administrative convenience but theological necessity—Moses as sole judge couldn't bear the burden alone, and the people needed accessible justice. The delegation demonstrates both human limitation and God's provision of leaders to shepherd His people. It also establishes the principle that spiritual leadership requires shared responsibility, not autocratic control.

Historical Context

This judicial reform occurred early in the wilderness period, soon after Sinai, when Jethro visited Moses (Exodus 18). The system parallels ancient Near Eastern administrative structures but is unique in being grounded in covenant law rather than royal decree. The judges were to decide cases based on God's revealed standards, making this a theocratic legal system where all authority derives from divine revelation.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does Moses' willingness to share leadership responsibility model healthy spiritual authority?
2. What burdens are you trying to carry alone that God intends to be shared within the community of faith?

Interlinear Text

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|-----------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------|--------|-------|
| וְאָנֹכִי | אֶת | וְשִׁפְטֶתָּם | בְּעֵת | הַהִיא | וְאָמַר | שְׁמַע | בֵּין |
| And I charged | H853 | and judge | at that time | H1931 | saying | Hear | H996 |
| H6680 | | H8199 | H6256 | | H559 | H8085 | |
| אֶת יוֹ | וְשִׁפְטֶתָּם | צַדִּיק | בֵּין | אֶת יֵשׁ | וּבֵין | | |
| and his brother | and judge | righteously | H996 | between every man | H996 | | |
| H251 | H8199 | H6664 | | H376 | | | |
| אֶת יוֹ | וּבֵין | גֵּרָוֹ: | | | | | |
| and his brother | H996 | and the stranger | | | | | |
| H251 | | H1616 | | | | | |

Additional Cross-References

John 7:24 (Righteousness): Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

Exodus 22:21 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Leviticus 24:22 (Parallel theme): Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I am the LORD your God.