

Deuteronomy 16:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment.

Analysis

Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates—This verse transitions from worship (vv. 1-17) to justice (16:18-18:22), linking liturgy with law. The Hebrew shofetim veshotrim (שֻׁפְטִים וְשׁׁוֹתְרִים, 'judges and officers') distinguishes judicial officials (who decide cases) from executive officers (who enforce decisions). 'In all thy gates' (בְּכָל-שְׁעָרֶיךָ) means every town—justice must be locally accessible, not centralized bureaucracy.

Throughout thy tribes (לְשָׁבָטֶיךָ)—each of Israel's twelve tribes must establish justice systems, preventing judicial monopolies. The democratic note 'thou shalt make thee' (titten-lecha, תִּתְּנַהֲךָ) suggests community participation in selecting judges.

And they shall judge the people with just judgment—The emphatic phrase mishpat-tzedek (מִשְׁפָט-צֶדֶק, 'righteous judgment') means justice according to God's law, not human opinion. The word tzedek (righteousness) appears throughout this section (vv. 19-20), emphasizing that justice reflects God's character. Paul later echoes this principle: magistrates are 'ministers of God' for good (Romans 13:4).

Historical Context

Moses established this justice system after Jethro's counsel (Exodus 18:13-26), creating tiered courts to handle disputes. This command assumes Israel's settled

life in Canaan with stable towns ('gates' = city courts, where elders judged). The system decentralized justice, preventing tyranny through local accountability. Ancient Near Eastern law codes (Hammurabi, etc.) were royal edicts; Israel's law was covenant revelation, with judges applying divine standards rather than kingly decrees. This distinction made Israel's justice system theocratic, not autocratic.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does local, accessible justice ('in all thy gates') reflect God's concern that righteousness be practically available to all?
2. What does the link between worship (vv. 1-17) and justice (vv. 18ff) teach about the inseparability of liturgy and ethics?

Interlinear Text

אָשָׁר שָׁעַר יְהֹוָה בְּכָל לְבָנָת | וּשְׁפָט יְמִינָת |
Judges and officers giveth H8199 H7860 H5414 H0 H3605 thee in all thy gates H8179 H834

וּשְׁפָט | לְשָׁבֵט יְהֹוָה לְבָנָת | אֱלֹהִים יְהֹוָה ה
which the LORD thy God giveth H3068 H430 H5414 H0 H7626 thee throughout thy tribes H8199

צְדָקָה מִשְׁפָט מִשְׁפָט הַשְׁפָט אֶת אֶת
the people judgment with just H853 H5971 H4941 H6664

Additional Cross-References

1 Chronicles 23:4 (Judgment): Of which, twenty and four thousand were to set forward the work of the house of the LORD; and six thousand were officers and judges:

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org