

Deuteronomy 25:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked.

Analysis

If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment—the Hebrew *riv* (רִיב, controversy/dispute) requires formal adjudication. **That the judges may judge them** (*shaphat*, שָׁפַט)—the verb for rendering judicial decisions based on Torah. **Then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked**—the terms *hitsdiq* (הִצְדִּיק, declare righteous) and *hirshi'u* (הִרְשִׁיעוּ, declare wicked) use causative forms, meaning judges actively pronounce legal status.

This establishes judicial principles echoed throughout Scripture: impartial judgment (Deuteronomy 1:17), evidence-based verdicts (Deuteronomy 19:15), and clear distinction between innocent and guilty. These earthly judges foreshadow God's perfect judgment where every person is justly assessed (Romans 2:5-11, Revelation 20:11-15).

Historical Context

Israel's judicial system operated at multiple levels: elders at city gates for local disputes (Ruth 4:1-2), appointed judges for regional cases (Deuteronomy 16:18), and difficult cases appealed to the central sanctuary (Deuteronomy 17:8-13). This verse establishes foundational principle that justice requires active discernment, not passive neutrality.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does God's requirement for judges to actively distinguish righteous from wicked challenge modern relativism that refuses moral judgments?
2. What does this verse teach about God's own character as the ultimate Judge who perfectly justifies the righteous (Romans 3:26)?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	יְהִי הַ	רִיב	בֵּין	אָנָּשׁ יָם	וְנָגֵשׁ וְ	אֵל
H3588	H1961	If there be a controversy	H996	between men	and they come	H413
		H7379		H582	H5066	
הַמִּשְׁפָּט	וְשֹׁפֵט וְ	וְהִצִּדּוּ יְקוֹ	אֶת			
unto judgment	that the judges may judge	them then they shall justify	H853			
H4941	H8199	H6663				
הַצִּדִּיק	וְהִרְשָׁ יְעוֹ	אֶת	הַרְשָׁעִי:			
the righteous	and condemn	H853	the wicked			
H6662	H7561		H7563			

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 17:15 (Righteousness): He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.