

Judges 17:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Analysis

In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes. This verse provides the theological diagnosis for all corruption in chapters 17-21. The phrase "no king in Israel" appears four times in Judges (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), functioning as historical observation and theological indictment. Israel's true King was Yahweh (Exodus 15:18), yet they rejected His kingship by disregarding His law. The absence of human monarchy didn't cause chaos—rejection of divine authority did.

The phrase "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" describes moral relativism and autonomous self-determination—the essence of sin since Eden. When Adam and Eve ate forbidden fruit, they asserted their right to define good and evil independent of God's revealed will (Genesis 3:5-6). Proverbs 21:2 warns: "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts." From a Reformed perspective, this verse encapsulates the doctrine of total depravity and the necessity of external moral authority. The Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 149) states we need Scripture to define right and wrong, not human intuition or cultural consensus.

Historical Context

The period of Judges (approximately 1375-1050 BC) was characterized by tribal confederation without centralized human government. After Joshua's death, Israel had no permanent national leader except Yahweh as their divine King. Judges were

temporary, regional deliverers raised up during crises. This theocratic system worked only when Israel maintained covenant faithfulness, but required corporate obedience Israel proved unable to sustain.

The repeated cycle in Judges—apostasy, oppression, repentance, deliverance—demonstrates Israel's inability to maintain faithfulness without external accountability. The book's structure shows progressive moral decline. The phrase "no king in Israel" is ironic because Israel's lack of centralized authority wasn't the problem—their rejection of God's authority was. When they later demanded a king "like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5), Samuel warned that human monarchy would bring oppression. The subsequent history showed political solutions cannot solve spiritual problems.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does contemporary culture's embrace of moral relativism reflect Israel's "every man did right in his own eyes" mentality?
2. What specific areas tempt us to rely on personal intuition rather than God's revealed Word?
3. How does this verse demonstrate that external religious structure cannot produce righteousness apart from heart transformation?

Interlinear Text

בָּמָּ יוֹם	הָיָה מָ	אֵין מֶלֶךְ	בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל לֹ	אֵין יוֹשֵׁ	
In those days	H1992	H369	there was no king	in Israel	but every man
H3117			H4428	H3478	H376
הַיֵּשׁ ר	בְּעֵינָיו יוֹ	יַעֲשֶׂה:			
that which was right	in his own eyes	did			
H3477	H5869	H6213			

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 12:8 (Parallel theme): Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes.

Proverbs 14:12 (Parallel theme): There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

Proverbs 12:15 (Parallel theme): The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.

Judges 21:25 (Kingdom): In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Judges 18:1 (Kingdom): In those days there was no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel.

Judges 19:1 (Kingdom): And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Beth-lehem-judah.

Proverbs 16:2 (Parallel theme): All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits.

Psalms 12:4 (Parallel theme): Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?

Ecclesiastes 11:9 (Parallel theme): Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart,

and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.

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