

# DEUTERONOMY

## Chapter 17

**“You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep in which is a blemish, any defect whatever, for that is an abomination to the LORD your God. 2 “If there is found among you, within any of your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, in transgressing his covenant, 3 and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden, 4 and it is told you and you hear of it, then you shall inquire diligently, and if it is true and certain that such an abomination has been done in Israel, 5 then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has done this evil thing, and you shall stone that man or woman to death with stones. 6 On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. 7 The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.**

**17:4** *inquire diligently.* The people had an obligation to confirm whether rumors about transgression of the covenant were based in fact. In this way, even the rumor of idolatry would be suppressed. (TLSB)

**17:5** The people were not to tolerate idolatry in the land. The punishment was severe regardless of the offender’s gender. (TLSB)

**17:6** *two or three witnesses.* A further specification of the law set forth in Nu 35:30. See 19:15; cf. Mt 18:16; 2Co 13:1; 1Ti 5:19; Heb 10:28. (CSB)

This was to safeguard against false accusations made out of desire for revenge or personal gain. (TLSB)

**17:7** *You must purge the evil from your midst.* The accuser was also responsible for the execution of justice. There could be no anonymous denunciations. (TLSB)

**16:21–17:7** God forbids all forms of false worship even as He provides for instruction in the truth. We did not choose God, but He chose us (Jn 15:16). We can be rightly confident that He will keep us in true faith and lead us through death to eternal life. • Thank You, Lord Jesus, for choosing me to be Your disciple. Keep me in true faith so I may do those things that are pleasing to You. Amen. (TLSB)

*Legal Decisions by Priests and Judges*

**8 “If any case arises requiring decision between one kind of homicide and another, one kind of legal right and another, or one kind of assault and another, 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. 9 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. 10 Then you shall do according to what they declare to you from that place that the LORD will choose. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they direct you. 11 According to the instructions that they give you, and according to the decision which they pronounce to you, you shall do. You shall not turn aside from the verdict that they declare to you, either to the right hand or to the left. 12 The man who acts presumptuously by not obeying the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall purge the evil from Israel. 13 And all the people shall hear and fear and not act presumptuously again.**

**17:8–13** Outlines the course of action when legal issues could not be decided locally (cf 16:18–20). Levitical priests had a prominent role in judging crimes. The decision of the Levitical priests, in conjunction with that of the presiding judge, was to be final. Chemnitz: “[This] is not speaking of the doctrine which has been commanded or of the dogmas of the faith or religious controversies, but of ceremonial and civil matters” (*LTh* 2:709). (TLSB)

**17:10** Chemnitz: “They were bound to the law of the Lord, and if they judged contrary to this, their decision was null and void” (*LTh* 2:710). (TLSB)

**17:12** Chemnitz: “The duties of the priests were, first, to teach concerning the Law and to answer questions about it; to judge and settle controversies; Lev. 14:35; Deut. 17:9; Mal. 2:7 Mal. 2:7; second, they were to pray, Lev. 4:20; Num. 15:25; third, to make sacrifices and offerings, Lev. 24:4; and fourth, to cleanse, Leviticus 14” (*LTh* 2:345). (TLSB)

**17:8–13** Difficult legal cases require special consideration, and the people are to respect the decisions. When the Law of God convicts us, we must not seek to escape judgment by trying to gain other people’s approval for our sinful actions. God gives His judgment through the Law to drive us to repentance (Rm 3:20) so that we may receive salvation from sin in our Lord Jesus. • Lord, let me hear Your word of judgment so that I may place my hope not in the opinion of sinful human beings, but in Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen. (TLSB)

#### *Laws Concerning Israel's Kings*

**14 “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,’ 15 you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. 16 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 And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. 18 “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. 19 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, 20 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.**

**17:14** *a king ... like all the nations around us.* Moses, Joshua and a succession of judges were chosen directly by the Lord to govern Israel on his behalf. As Gideon later said, “The LORD will rule over you.” Moses here, however, anticipates a time when the people would ask for a king (see 1Sa 8:4–9) contrary to the Lord’s ideal for them. (CSB)

**17:15** God gives a concession (not a command) that His people may have a king, but the process for choosing a king would be the Lord’s prerogative (cf 1Sm 9:1–10:27). (TLSB)

*One from among your brothers.* The king must be an Israelite. (TLSB)

**17:16** The king’s power was limited. He was forbidden from having many horses because that would mean the unnecessary buildup of military forces. (TLSB)

**17:17** *many wives.* The king was forbidden from having many wives. Monogamy was God's original plan for human beings, and polygamy often leads to further evils (cf 2Sm 11–12). A harem would also invite the possibility of idolatry with the introduction of foreign, idol-worshipping wives into the court of Israel (cf 1Ki 11). (TLSB)

*excessive silver and gold.* The king was forbidden from imposing burdensome taxes and forced labor on the people (cf 1Ki 12). (TLSB)

**17:18** *write for himself ... a copy of this law.* As a sign of submission to the Lord as his King, and as a guide for his rule in obedience to his heavenly Suzerain. This was required procedure for vassal kings under the suzerainty treaties among the Hittites and others before and during this period. (CSB)

The king must be literate and well instructed in God's Word. The king was personally accountable to God and the people on the basis of the teaching handed on by Moses. (TLSB)

*approved by the Levitical priests.* Unlike the kings of foreign nations, the kings of Israel would not be lawmakers but lawkeepers. The Levitical priests would ensure that the king would not introduce his own laws but would submit to God's Law. Chemnitz: "The duty of the ruler is to see that the people 'live in honesty,' that is, they are to establish and defend external order and not tolerate anything in conflict with it. The ruler must establish discipline ... let him rule according to the Decalog" (*LTh* 2:400–401). (TLSB)

**17:20** *not be lifted up above your brothers.* The king was not above God's law, any more than were the humblest of his subjects. (CSB)

Unlike Pharaoh or the other kings of the surrounding nations, the kings of Israel could not consider themselves descended from the gods, with special powers to make absolute laws. Instead, God called His kings to uphold His Law. (TLSB)

Prideful, considering himself above the Law. (TLSB)

**17:14–20** God gives His concession, allowing His people to have a king, but only on certain conditions. Note well the focus on God's Word in this description of a good and godly king. God's Word will similarly bless, equip, and strengthen you for faithful service. • Lord, Your instruction shows me the way of life and love; keep my heart always open to Your teaching. Amen. (TLSB)