

*The unfolding of your words gives light.*

## God's Kind of Leadership

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### Deuteronomy 17

Republicans and Democrats are trying to convince Americans that they share our values and would provide the kind of presidential leadership the nation needs at this time. Some appear to be testing the winds to help them decide which values they should promote in order to get elected. God has a different plan for leadership in his kingdom. His kind of leaders do not take polls to decide which moral standards to profess. God's leaders tie themselves to the changeless standards of his word.

Deuteronomy 17 prepares the nation of Israel for a central place of worship and a king. In this chapter are the human leadership standards of God himself.

God's policy for animal sacrifices is restated in the very first verse of the chapter. There was to be no blemish or defect in the ox or sheep. God's opening instructions about burnt offerings in the book of Leviticus included the words, "without defect" (Leviticus 1:10). Israel's very first sacrifice as a nation was to be, "unblemished" (Exodus 12:5). It is detestable in the eyes of the Lord when people offer him what they would not dare offering an earthly leader (Malachi 1:7-8). This verse is an important way to lead off this chapter because it establishes a precedent of excellence for life in the kingdom of God.

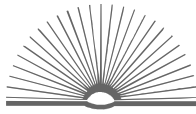
The guidelines for executing idolaters are detailed in verses two through seven. These verses are a helpful footnote to the contents of chapter 13, showing us that the death penalty was only carried out with sufficient evidence within the legal system of Israel. Key phrases in this section that rule out vigilante justice are "you shall inquire thoroughly (v. 4)," "if it is true and the things certain that this detestable thing has been done (v. 4)," "on the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses" (v. 6) and "you shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness" (v. 6).

Legal cases, capital offenses included, were to be tried through the court system, a system not unlike our own. Difficult cases were sent to a higher court where the judge (or king) would render a decisive verdict based on the word of God. Verses eight through 13 show cases being decided in "the place the Lord chooses" by a priest or a judge. Rebels were to die for two reasons: to remove the evil from the nation and to deter onlookers from committing the same crimes.

The balance of this chapter (vv. 14-20) establishes God's standards for Israel's king. Later, when the nation called for a king (1 Samuel 8:20) so they could be "like all the nations," they were rejecting the rule of God. That is what got them a Saul instead of a David the first time around. They were not, however, out of line in wanting a king. Deuteronomy 17:14 assumes that a nation needs a king. God proceeds here to tell them what that king must look like.

Here are God's leadership standards:

- The king needed to be God's choice (v. 15).
- He must not be a foreigner (v. 15). This is why Herod the Great and his descendents, being of the Edomite line, were not qualified for the title "king."
- He was not to multiply horses for himself (v. 16).
- He was not to encourage the nation to return to Egypt (v. 16).
- He was not to multiply wives for himself (v. 17). God knew that romantic relationships can turn our hearts away from him. How much more multiple romantic relationships at the same time.
- He was not to seek silver and gold for himself (v. 17).



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- He was to create his own copy of Torah with priestly witnesses (v. 18).
- He was to keep that copy of the Scriptures, read it every day and obey it (vv. 19-20). This would keep him from thinking he was better than his countrymen and would also assure a multi-generational rule of God through human kings.

Human rulers will always fail us. That does not mean, however, that God has neglected to tell us how to live under human rule—even flawed human rule. When we apply this text outside of Israel under an anointed king or appointed judge, consider the universal applications:

1. Our God deserves our very best in everything, particularly in matters of family, church and state. Offering God your leftover affection, effort, time and treasure is as out of place as offering him a diseased lamb.
2. It honors God when we work for justice. Some of us have wrongly identified defense attorneys and social justice activists as the bad guys. Some of them may be bad guys, but that should not keep the good guys from defending the weak and vulnerable ones among us.
3. When you must make a decision or judgment as a leader, it should be truth-based instead of feelings-based. Good leaders can and should be emotional, but they must never allow their emotions to overrule what God has commanded.
4. It is always best to let God promote leaders. As soon as a person says, "Then I'll never get promoted or honored," we have a pretty good idea that God isn't going to promote that one. It is a good thing to desire to be a leader, but pride and self-praise bring leaders down.
5. The business of leaders is kingdom-building, not resumé-building. Good leaders serve.
6. Leaders need to be accountable. Show me a leader who answers to no one and I will show you a leader and an organization in great danger.
7. Good leaders are humble and are held to the same standards as the people they lead. In some ways leaders need to be held to an even higher standard than the people they lead. You may think you can praise God for certain things that might cause others to stumble. Out of humble love, you may need to set some of those pleasures aside out of concern for a weaker brother.

Ultimately most human leaders fail. Even the “man after God’s own heart” did not live up to these standards completely. Human failure—including the failure of our leaders—should not discourage us from following those in authority. It should bring us to treasure and bow the knee the only king who meets the standard.

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