

**Maintaining Righteousness in Israel  
(Deuteronomy 16:18-17:13)  
Veritas Class  
September 8, 2013**

**A. Introduction: The Context of 16:18-17:13**

**1. Common Scholarly Approach to 16:18-18:22**

**a. The Function: Israel's *Politeia***

**Israel's Administrative Constitution—Focus on Civil and Religious Offices**

**b. The Structure of 16:17-18:22**

**A Instructions concerning Communal Judges (16:18-17:7)**

**B Instructions concerning Levitical Priests (17:8-13)**

**C Instructions concerning the King of Israel (17:14-20)**

**B' Instructions concerning Levitical priests (18:1-8)**

**A' Instructions concerning Prophets**

**c. The Agenda of 16:17-18:22: Centralization of Power**

**Problems with this Interpretation**

- (1) None of the segments focuses on administrative structures.**
- (2) None of the segments calls for centralization of political power.**
- (3) None of the segments is addressed to the administrators.**
- (4) None of the segments provides guidance for administrators.**
- (5) Every segment is concerned with the righteousness of the people.**

**2. An Alternative Approach**

**a. The Agenda: Righteousness only righteousness.**

**b. The Structure of 16:17-18:22**

**(1) The People as Guardians of Righteousness in Israel (16:18-17:13)**

**(2) The King as Paragon of Righteousness (17:14-20)**

**(3) The Levitical Priests as a Specific Challenge to Righteousness (18:1-8)**

**(4) The Prophets as a Provision for an Ongoing Voice of Righteousness (18:9-22)**

**B. A. Laying the Foundations for Righteousness: 16:18-17:13**

**1. The Style this Passage: Apparent Lack of Structure. What ties it together?**

- a. The Second Person of Direct Address
- b. A Fundamental Concern for Righteousness

- (1) The root **קָדַשׁ** appears four times in 18-19.
- (2) Expressions for culpable behavior keep the focus on righteousness.
- (3) Explicit reference to the Torah in 17:11 provides the basis of judgment.
- (4) 16:21-17:1 and 17:2-7 offer specific examples of righteousness.

But what is “righteousness”?

- (1) The Dimensions of Righteousness

God is righteous: (32:4)

The laws of God are righteous: (4:8)

God’s people are to be righteous: (16:20)

- (2) The Key Phrase: “Righteousness, righteousness you shall pursue.”

- (3) Righteousness in Deuteronomy

6:5

9:5, 7 (cf. 9:27, wicked [רָשָׁע]; 9:16, 27, sinful [חַטָּאת])

16:18

25:13-16

24:13

- (4) Two Aramaic Texts

## 2. The Structure of 16:18-20

- a. A Call for Communal Commitment to Righteousness (16:18-20)
- b. Three Examples of Righteousness Violated (16:21-17:1)
- c. Prescriptions for Righteousness Violated (17:2-13)

## C. Exposition of 16:18-17:13

### 1. A Call for Communal Commitment to Righteousness (16:18-20)

- a. Note the parallel structure between 18a and 20:
- b. Compare with 1:15

**(1) Both contexts involve the appointment of *šōtērîm*, civil servants with scribal skills.**

**(2) Both contexts involve formal installation**

**What would be the qualifications of the officials?**

**Cf. 1:13**

**(a) They are senior representatives of important families;**

**(b) They are wealthy but generous;**

**(c) They possess oratorical skills;**

**(d) They exhibit exemplary moral and ethical character.**

**(3) Both contexts involve tribally based appointments.**

**(4) Both contexts have as their goal “righteous judgment.”**

## **2. Moses Three Main concerns**

**a. The people shall not pervert justice.**

**b. The people shall be impartial.**

**c. The people shall not let themselves be corrupted by bribery.**

**(1) Bribery corrupts one’s perception of reality.**

**(2) Bribery works against “righteousness.”**

**What does it mean to “subvert the cause of the righteous”?**

***NLT* has it right:**

**For bribes blind the eyes of the wise  
and corrupt the decisions of the godly.**

## **3. Conclusion: V. 20**