

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
2. An Alternative Approach

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

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

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 [רשע]; 9:16, 27, sinful [חוטאת])

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.”

c. Moses’ Three Main concerns

- (1) The people shall not pervert justice.
- (2) The people shall be impartial.
- (3) The people shall not let themselves be corrupted by bribery.
 - (a) Bribery corrupts one’s perception of reality.
 - (b) 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.

d. Conclusion: V. 20

2. Three Examples of Righteousness Violated

- a. A Warning against Syncretism (16:21)
- b. A Warning against Substitution (16:22; cf. 7:5; 12:3)
- c. A Warning against Compromised Sacrifices (17:1)

3. The Prescription for Righteousness Violated (17:2-13)

The Two Panels of 17:2-13

	Deuteronomy 17:2-7	Deuteronomy 17:8-13
Condition	<i>"If any is found</i> among you, within any of your towns that YHWH your God is giving you, a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of YHWH your and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon God, in transgressing his covenant, ³ and has gone or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden, ⁴ and it is told you and you hear of it,	⁸ <i>"If any case arises</i> 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,
Prescription	then you shall inquire diligently , and if it is true and certain that such an abomination has been done in, 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.	then you shall arise and go up to the place that YHWH 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 inquire [of 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 YHWH 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 YHWH your God, or the judge, that man shall die.
Result	So you shall purge the evil from your midst.	So you shall purge the evil from Israel.
Conclusion	And all the people shall hear and fear and not act presumptuously again.	

Panel A: How to Deal with Idolaters (vv. 2-7)

Panel B: How to Deal with Insoluble Cases (vv. 8-13)