

Justice and Judges Established

Key Verse: *“That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”*
—Deuteronomy
16:20

Selected Scriptures:
Deuteronomy
16:18-20; 17:8-13

SYSTEMS ESTABLISHED IN Israel for justice and judgment were intended to guide the people in their proper worship of Jehovah. Shortly after their exodus from Egypt, Moses alone judged between the disputes of the people. (Exod. 18:13-16) However, this arrangement soon began to overwhelm Moses. At the suggestion of his father-in-law Jethro, Moses appointed able leaders to judge the people alongside him.—vss. 17-26

Another element of Israel’s judicial arrangements was the appointment of judges and officials from all the tribes to execute righteous judgment, thus providing a judiciary throughout the population. (Deut. 16:18-20) Moses further instructed that the Levitical priests were to collaborate with the judges in more difficult cases to aid them in judgment. These matters were to be heard and decided at “that place which the LORD shall choose.” This arrangement continued the practice of having smaller cases decided at a local level and the harder matters settled by a higher, centralized authority.—Deut. 17:8-13

The Selected Scriptures of our lesson do not give the

specific qualifications of the judges and officials to be selected, the method of their appointment, or the details of their job description. They do, however, give attention to the principles they were to embody. First, the appointment of judges and officials was the task of the whole community. They were to choose men who possessed righteous characters as would be approved by God. This principle stresses the community's responsibility to be actively involved in the maintenance and pursuit of righteous judgment.

Judges and officials were also to judge fairly. They were prohibited from distorting justice, showing partiality, and accepting bribes. (Deut. 16:18,19) These practices were clearly condemned by Jehovah. The community was to appoint those who were wise, as noted in God's instructions to Moses recorded in Deuteronomy 1:13-15. The work of these judges and officials was to be for the benefit of the whole community. Their appointment was not to be a matter of status or power, but for the specific task of judging people fairly, in order that righteous decisions would prevail among the entire nation.

Today's Key Verse reflects the blessed result of following righteous judgment and rejecting unrighteous practices. All would be benefitted—the judges and officials, the people in general, and the entire nation—if God's instructions would be followed. We see a general principle in this lesson, that the blessing of the Lord ensues where righteousness prevails. The paraphrased *Living Bible* captures the essence of our Key Verse: "Justice must prevail. That is the only way you will be successful in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."

Learning the meaning of justice, and practicing it in our lives, should be one of the prime objectives of our walk in the Christian way. Making these things part of our character will help prepare us for our future kingdom work: "Don't you know that Christians will one day judge the world?"—I Cor. 6:2, *J. B. Phillips New Testament* ■