

Deuteronomy 17:19

And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

Read the context: Deuteronomy 17:14-20

To understand this paragraph in Deuteronomy, we have to give it some historical context. Israel's history before they were conquered by the Assyrians and Babylonians and carried off into exile can be divided into four main sections or administrations. The first administration was under the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham was the beginning of the Jewish nation, though he was only one man called out by God to go to the land God would show him. He had only one son of promise, through whom God had promised He would bring forth a new nation that would bless all the nations of the world. This son of promise, Isaac, had but two sons, and to only one of them was given this promise and blessing of God. It seems like a slow start for the building of an entire nation. A call and promise was given to one man, who had one heir through whom the promise would be fulfilled, who passed it on to one son – one, one, one: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.

It was through Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel, that the nation really began to blossom. Jacob had twelve sons who each had two or more sons of their own. As a result of a famine and the amazing behind-the-scenes hand of God working all things together for good, even evil intentions, the whole clan ended up in Egypt and remained there for four hundred years. During those years, each of the twelve sons became a patriarch of his own family or tribe. These are years that we know very little about except that as a family they went from being highly revered and honored in Egypt to being feared and despised. This change of heart on the part of the Egyptians came about because of sheer numbers. By the end of that four hundred years, the Israelites went from being a family of seventy in number to being a distinct people group—a nation of over a million people—and a force to be reckoned with. The Israelites were conscripted to hard labor and oppressed as slaves in the land that had once protected and cared for them. Under this harsh treatment, the people, who remembered their calling and the Promise, began to cry out to God for deliverance.

God raised up a man to lead them who, in turn, passed the national leadership on to one other man. Under the administration of Moses and Joshua, the people of Israel were brought out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Under their administration, three branches of government emerged, from which model the United States formed its Constitution and the three governing

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bodies that rule its nation. Moses and then Joshua were the designated leaders, chosen by God, to execute His leadership and commands. They comprised the “Executive Branch.”

Beside them, God ordained high priests to preside over the religious laws of the nation, the duties and responsibilities that would keep the people connected with God in a nationally unique way. The high priests were from the family tribe of Levi, one of Jacob’s twelve sons, and that role was inherited, passed on from father to son. The rest of the Levites were to be dispersed among the other tribes to act as under-shepherds or local priests, teaching the Israelites the Law of God. They were analogous to the “Legislative Branch.”

Shortly after the Exodus from Egypt, Moses found himself overwhelmed with the responsibilities that came with leading so many people. There were constant disputes to settle and questions to answer about the finer points of the Law God had recently given to them. He was having to sit as judge over the people from morning till night. His father-in-law, who saw that Moses was wearing himself out in his attempt to meet all these needs alone and that there were too many needs for one man to attend to, advised that Moses choose reliable, upright men from each tribe to judge the easier cases and send only the difficult cases to Moses. So the seventy-man Sanhedrin was established, which is the counterpart of the “Judicial Branch.”

After Joshua died and the people were settled in their new homeland, there was a vacancy of national leadership and “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:25). The people drifted away from God and began to worship the gods of the nations around them. Consequently, God allowed other nations to oppress them in order to bring them to repentance and turn the people back to Himself. Due to the hardship of the oppression, the Israelites cried out to God for deliverance. In His mercy, God answered their prayers by raising up judges to rescue them from the foreign oppression. This cycle of falling back into sin and idol worship, being overrun by an oppressive neighboring nation, crying out to God, the raising up of a judge-deliverer, and then a time of peace repeated itself seven times over. This was the administration of the Judges.

Finally, the people demanded a king like the nations around them.

Write what you learn about God from this lesson.

Add to your fear of the Lord list what you have learned from this verse study.