

# Deuteronomy 17:18-20

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*After listing the things that the Israelite king was to avoid, Moses then described what he was supposed to do—study the law of the LORD and observe all the covenantal laws in order to learn to fear the LORD his God and to serve Him alone*

Whereas the previous section provided negative instructions for the Israelite king (vv. 16-17), this section focuses on positive instructions. The essence of this section is that the king must maintain a proper perspective concerning his rule, and follow God's laws and God's ways. This perspective was grounded on complete obedience and loyalty to the Suzerain (Ruler) God, the greater King. Like the previous section, this section anticipates Israel's successful conquest of the Promised Land.

When God set up Israel, He set it up to be self-governing under His law. The essence of God's law is "God gets to make the rules" and "What God mainly wants is for His people to love and serve one another." In order to effect His law, He authorized the people to appoint judges, which created a consent of the governed. And the people were to have sovereignty over their own families and possessions. The king was to understand and honor these principles.

Having discussed what the king should not do during his reign, Moses turned his attention to what the king needs to do when *it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom* (v. 18). Shortly after taking the throne, the king was to *write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll*. The covenant treaty was placed in the LORD's dwelling place ([Deuteronomy 31:26](#)), and the king was required to create a copy of it for himself. By writing himself a copy, the king will understand the law more thoroughly.

The phrase *this law* probably refers to most (if not all) of the book of Deuteronomy ([Deuteronomy 1:5](#); [4:44](#); [27:3](#) etc.). It was this that the king was to *write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical Priests*. By writing in the *presence of the Levitical Priests*, perhaps the king could receive instruction on the meaning, and have the tenants seep deep into his soul.

The *Levitical priests*, who descended from the tribe of Levi, were serving as priests in the central sanctuary, the place chosen by God for His people to worship and to fellowship with Him. One of their responsibilities included carrying the ark of the covenant when the Israelites travelled, and moving the ark for other purposes ([Deuteronomy 10:9](#); [31:9](#)). They were also the ones who would offer sacrifices to God, either for themselves or on behalf of the people ([2 Chron. 29:11](#)).

Once the king had written a copy of the law for himself, he was to *read it all the days of his life*. Not only was he to write his own copy, he was to read it continuously. The purpose of reading God's law constantly throughout *all the days of his life* was so that the king might *learn to fear the LORD his God*. To *fear the LORD* is to care more what God thinks than what other people think. To have a greater concern of God's judgement than of the judgment of man.

The king would *fear the LORD by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes*. The king needed to keep in mind that he was not the final authority on what the law was. He would have to humble himself and obey the laws and statutes given by the true sovereign—the suzerain LORD. The practical effect of this would be to honor God's ways, and lead the people to love one another, serve one another, and honor the possessions and families of all other Israelites. It would also be to see that justice was served equitably, and without partiality.

The term “statutes” (Heb. “*ḥuqqîm*”) refers to something prescribed, like an ordinance. As such, it could be translated as “prescriptions,” or “decrees.” It is used here as a synonym of the term *law* to emphasize obedience to the precepts of the Suzerain God. Such an obedience to God's law was to have several results.

One of the results of obeying God's precepts was maintaining a proper perspective on his role as king. To be the king under the supervision of the suzerain LORD required humility. Humility is seeing reality as it is. The reality is that the LORD God was the greatest sovereign over all, and the suzerain ruler of the covenant with Israel. God's teaching would cause the king to live a humble life and ensure *that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen* (v. 20). The truth is that all people have equal value under God, even though their roles might differ. Even though this man was a king, he was to know that his role was to serve, rather than be served. Following God's precepts would prevent arrogance and would cause the king to humbly rule

the people of Israel under God's authority. This would lead the king to seek the welfare of the people, and seek God's ways.

Another great result of reading and studying the law regularly was that the king would know what the straight path of the law was, *that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or to the left*. The statement *not to turn aside to the right or to the left* means that the Israelite king needed to strictly follow the straight path of the law with no deviation. In other words, the king of Israel would never fail to do exactly what God commanded him.

A third result of obeying God's commandment was *that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel*. In other words, faithfulness to the law of the LORD included the promise of a long dynasty. The royal line would last a long time if the king and his descendants followed the instructions of the Suzerain (Ruler) God.

#### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>18</sup> Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. <sup>19</sup> 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, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, <sup>20</sup> that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.**