**Worshiping Other Gods**

“I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.” This is the oath of office recited by each incoming president according to Article II of the Constitution. George Washington added the words “so help me God” as well as all presidents since with the exception of Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt and John Quincy Adams were the only presidents who did not place their hand on the Bible during the ceremony. Perhaps the most recognizable use of God’s name is on our currency. On the back side of our currency is the inscription “Annuit Coeptis” which means “He favors our undertakings”. Also inscribed is “In God We Trust”. The first amendment of the Constitution states that Congress shall make no law establishing a religion but it also guarantees freedom of religion. Although the Constitution has no references to God, the Declaration of Independence has several and there are references to God inscribed on many federal buildings. It is clear that our founders strongly believed that our nation should honor God. The United States functions as a representative republic which was seen as an experiment in the late 1700’s. Most countries operated as monarchies or dictatorships. Another form of government sometimes seen in history, though rarely today, is a theocracy where the government is controlled by a religious leader. In our study of Deuteronomy chapter 17, we see the beginnings of a government as the Israelites prepared to enter Canaan.

The chapter begins with Moses repeating instructions that any animals sacrificed to God had to be without blemish. He then told the people that anyone found to be worshipping idols had to be put to death, but only on the testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses. The hands of those witnesses had to be the first to cast a stone (see John 8:7).

Next Moses referred to law courts which were probably administered by the individual tribes. Difficult cases were to be presented to the Levites and judge in office at that time and at a place to be established by God which would have been the tabernacle. Their word was to be final and anyone who defied them was to be put to death.

The chapter ends with instructions from Moses on selecting a king. The king had to be an Israelite and he could not use the office of the king to enrich himself (see 1st Kings chapter 10). Most importantly, the king had to write for himself of a scroll a copy of the law and read it each day of his life.

Verse 9 directed lower courts to go to the Levites and the judge, indicating shared power much like Moses and Aaron. In our study of Joshua, we will find that Eleazer as high priest was not mentioned nearly as much as Aaron during Joshua’s time as leader of Israel. Later judges took the role of leader (see Judges 2:16) and there were times when a judge also served as chief priest. The form of government that God intended for Israel was a theocracy led by priests and judges. It was not God’s intention for them to have a king (see 1st Sam. 8:6-7) since a king might deviate from God’s law or usurp the authority of the chief priest. The 4 books of Kings and Chronicles record the actions of kings, some of whom were true to God and some who were not. The roles and king and priest could not be merged because no man could fill both roles. Only Jesus has the ability to act as king an priest. Isaiah 9:6 says that the government will be on His shoulders. When Jesus returns to rule, we will once again have a theocracy but it will be ruled according to God’s will.