

## INTRODUCTION

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There was no precise term for "court of law" in the Old Testament, at least in the sense of a specific building in which judicial proceedings were conducted. The reason for this was that cases at law were normally heard out in the open, generally in the open square near a city gate. There seems to be only one exception to this (1 Kgs 7:7) which states that Solomon "built the throne hall, the Hall of Justice, where he was to judge," which would be the nearest equivalent to a law court in the sense of a building. It would be natural for Solomon to erect an imposing structure of this sort for the hearing of appeals from the lower courts or for the handling of cases of major importance since his royal neighbors in Egypt and Mesopotamia maintained special courthouses or audience halls for that purpose. Apart from this reference, court proceedings were normally held in the forum or market square which faced the principal gate of the city.

The first definite reference to this in the OT is found in Gn 19:1 and states that "Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city" when he noticed the two angelic visitors whom he invited to his home. Gn 19:9 quotes the night time rioters as complaining that an outsider like Lot "wants to play the judge." Later allusions to the city gate as the place for public tribunals are Dt 16:18; 21:19; and 25:7.

In the earliest stage of the exodus from Egypt Moses had the responsibility of holding court sessions in the Israelite camp, along with all of his executive and military duties. At the advice of his father-in-law Jethro, Moses delegated to an ascending series of petty and appellate judges to hear all original cases (Ex 18:13-26). Only the more difficult problems for which there was no clear precedent were to be referred to Moses as the court of final appeal. (See also Dt 16:18-20; 17:8-13). Note also the set up of "cities of refuge" (Nm 35; Dt 19).

During the period of the judges it was apparently Deborah who figured prominently as a jurist, holding court sessions under her palm tree

(Jdg 4:5). The other national leaders who bore the title "judge" evidently included court hearings with their other responsibilities as executives and military commanders. This function was taken over by the king after the monarchy was instituted. David maintained an appellate court for his entire kingdom (2 Sm 15:2), and Solomon as well (1 Kgs 3:9). 1 Chr 23:4 states that David appointed 6000 of the Levites as officers and judges to serve in the lower courts. By the time of Jehoshaphat (873-848 BC) it became necessary to enlarge even the central tribunal at Jerusalem into a larger complex consisting of priests, Levites, and heads of clans.

By New Testament times there had intervened several centuries of Greek influence and example, and it became more usual to hold court hearings inside of a building constructed as a courthouse (Jn 18:12-15, 33) although in Greek cities some criminal cases could be tried in the open (Ac 16:37-39).

## GOD'S WORD ON LAWSUITS: 1 CORINTHIANS 6

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1. **Read 1:6:** At first glance it may seem as if 1 Corinthians 6 has no connection to the previous chapter, which has to do with a case of incest in the church at Corinth. However, there is a connection. What's the connection between this chapter and the preceding one? Compare Proverbs 25:8-10.
2. The Greek word for ungodly is literally translated \_\_\_\_\_.
3. So, what makes Paul's question so pointed (and ironic)?
4. **Read 6:2:** "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" When? How? What does this mean? (Check Mt 19:28)

## FOR DISCUSSION:

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5. **Read 6:4:** In the original it is not clear what the suitable punctuation for the end of this verse should be.

What is Paul's tone of voice if this sentence ends with an exclamation mark?

What if it ends with a question mark?

6. **Read 6:5:** "I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?" Paul needles them here. Why?

7. **Read 6:6-8** What's wrong with believers going to court against one another?

What does Paul mean, "If you do this, you have been completely defeated"?

What attitude and spirit does God's Word foster among Christians? (Check v:7)

- Mt 5:39-40 -
- Galatians 6:1-10 -
- Proverbs 25:21-23 -
- 1 Peter 4:8 -

8. Under what circumstances may a Christian appeal to public courts? (Ac 16:37; 25:9-11)

1. A friend of yours has minor surgery. An error by the doctor leads to complications which require three more surgeries. Your friend really believes that the doctor made an "honest" mistake but is being urged by her children to sue. What advice will you offer?

2. Agree or Disagree: A Christian should never sue another Christian.