

# MISHPATIM { מִשְׁפָּטִים } (Judgments)

Exodus 21:1 – 24:18, Jeremiah 34:8-22, 33:25-26, Matthew 17:1-11

## A Messianic Jewish Commentary

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“And these are the judgments (mishpatim מִשְׁפָּטִים) which you shall set before them.” (Exodus 21:1)

In last week’s parashah, the children of Israel had been led out of four hundred years of injustice – of institutionalized slavery in Egypt –to receive the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. This week’s portion of the Torah, ‘*Mishpatim*’ (from the Hebrew word ‘*mishpat*’ meaning ‘judgment’) begins by describing a whole system of civil legislation such as: the rights of persons, slaves and servants, laws concerning murder, personal injuries, offenses against property, and moral offences. By these civil laws, Israel was instructed to conduct communal life with justice and righteousness.

Mishpatim opens with the conjunction “*and*” which links these mundane and minute civil laws to the greater laws of the Ten Commandments that preceded them.



Moses Receives the Tablets of the Law (1868 painting by [João Zeferino da Costa](#))

On the surface, these lesser ancient laws may seem irrelevant to our modern society, but if we dig deeper, we can find rich and meaningful treasure in the Word of God. We may not like rules and regulations, but they are for our good; for if not for some sort of agreed upon standards, then confusion, chaos and anarchy would reign.

My youngest son, Avi, said something interesting to me one morning. He woke up talking about a self – defense class he was taking in Israel. He said, “*Mom, to defend yourself you don’t kick or punch; you just try to cause confusion to the enemy.*” Likewise, the enemy of our souls may not directly attack, but rather may attempt to cause confusion and chaos in our lives through our lack of obedience to God’s ‘*mishpatim*’ (laws and judgments).

Lawlessness is sin. The end time anti-Messiah is called the ‘man of lawlessness.’<sup>1</sup> God is a God of peace and order. One of His names is Yehovah Shalom<sup>2</sup>. His first act of creation was to

<sup>1</sup> 2 Thess. 2:3

<sup>2</sup> Judges 6:24, Romans 16:20

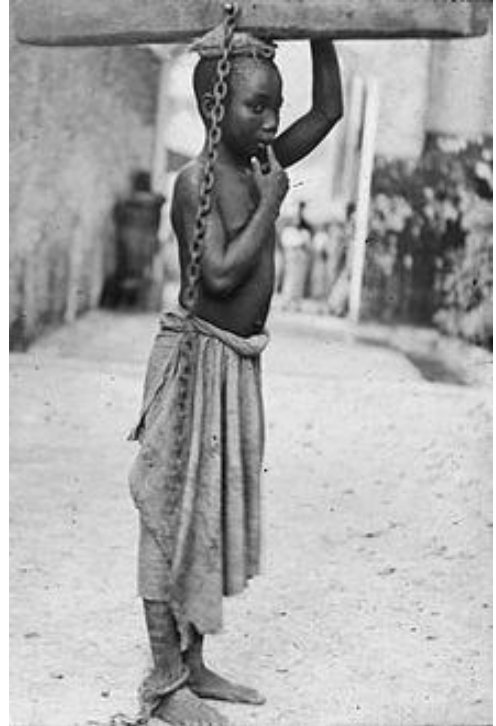
make order (seder) out of tohu v'vohu (chaos)<sup>3</sup>. Laws are absolutely necessary to live a righteous and peaceful life.

### Avadim Hayinu – Once we Were Slaves.....

The presentation of Jewish civil law began with the laws of slavery. Why begin with the laws of slavery? It is because slavery had, at this point, been Israel's primary national experience, etched into their very psyche and consciousness; therefore God desired to address this very personal issue with the Israelites.

Each year, at Passover, Jewish people celebrate our ancestors' freedom from bondage in Egypt by singing, '*Avadim Hayinu*', ('Once we were slaves, but now we are free'). Even though the Israelites had been set free from slavery in Egypt, they employed slaves (or servants) themselves.

Slavery was a widely accepted and even popular practice in ancient times. A person could become a slave through poverty, debt, crime, or through being sold by another person such as a father selling his daughter into slavery. God gave legislation to place slavery into its proper perspective.



Photograph of a slave boy in Zanzibar. 'An Arab master's punishment for a slight offence.' c. 1890.

A Hebrew slave was to be treated as a person - not an object; a human being - not a *'thing'*. According to God's law, in the seventh year as well as the year of Jubilee<sup>4</sup>, all slaves were to be set free, regardless of whether or not they had completed their term of service. The 'six years', according to the rabbis, represent the 6000 years that we will work to serve the Lord. The seventh year of freedom represents the Messianic age – the thousand years when we will rule and reign with Messiah on the Throne of His father David from Jerusalem.

**“When you acquire a Jewish bondsman, for six years he shall work and in the seventh year he shall go free...”** (Exodus 21:2)

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:1-2

<sup>4</sup> Leviticus 25:10

A slave, however, who loved his master so much that he didn't want to go free would be brought before God and unto the doorpost (mezuzah)<sup>5</sup>, where his master would pierce his ear with an awl; and the slave would be bound to serve his master forever.<sup>6</sup>

This place where the slave was dedicated to his master for life is an important location. It was on the doorpost (mezuzah) - the very place that the Israelites marked with the blood of the Passover Lamb. This blood was a sign to the angel of death that when he would see the blood he would 'pass over' that dwelling and not enter in to destroy them.

So too, when we believe in our heart that Yeshua is this Lamb of God, and therefore confess with our mouth our love and devotion to our Master; our ears are 'pierced' at the blood-stained mezuzah to serve Him forever – not out of obligation or duty, but from a heart of love and gratitude.

“... having been set free from sin, we have become slaves of righteousness.” (Romans 6:18)

Slavery, as permitted by the Torah, was quite different from the cruel Greek and Roman systems. The Hebrew language does not differentiate between a slave and a servant. The word used is 'eved' עבד (plural – *avadim* עבדים).

This is not a shameful term; it just means a worker. 'La'avod' is 'to work'. Even in the Garden of Eden, God put Adam there to 'work' (*l'avdah*) לעבדה and to 'keep' (l'shamrah) it.<sup>7</sup>

It is this same root word used when God said, "Let My people go - that they may 'serve' ויעבדוני Me in the wilderness."<sup>8</sup>

### The Hebraic Concept of Servanthood

Have you ever thought, or even uttered these words, perhaps in serving a demanding family or difficult boss, "*I'm not your slave!*"? No one really likes to feel like a slave of another, forced into involuntary servitude - like some kind of Cinderella, scrubbing the dirty floors of her wicked stepmother and stepsisters.

Perhaps we all feel like this at times...and yet Yeshua made a remarkable claim - that whoever desires to be great should be a servant; and whoever wants to be first, should be a slave.<sup>9</sup> Yeshua



<sup>5</sup> See article about Mezuzah, [www.voiceforisrael.net/articles](http://www.voiceforisrael.net/articles)

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 21:6

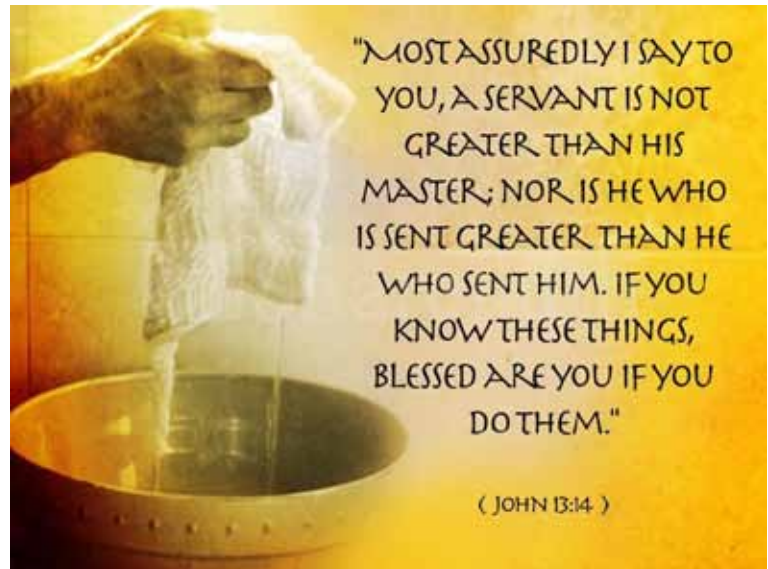
<sup>7</sup> Genesis 2:15

<sup>8</sup> Exodus 7:16

never asked us to do anything that He did not do first, **“for the son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.”**<sup>10</sup>

Before the Feast of Passover, Yeshua rose from supper, laid aside his garments, girded himself with a towel, and washed his disciples’ dirty feet. With this, He gave us an example of servanthood, **“For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you.”** (John 13:15)

How was Yeshua, son of God, El Gibor (Mighty God), able to so easily humble himself as a servant? I believe the key is in the prior verse, **“Yeshua, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and....”** (John 13:3)



(Note: Scripture in graphic is John 13:16-17)

Yeshua knew what God had given Him; He knew where He had come from and He knew where He was going to finish— at the right hand of His Father in Heaven. This knowledge of His possession, His identity, and His purpose gave him such a security that *he could walk in humility without being humiliated*. When we also receive this knowledge of our inheritance, identity, and purpose in Messiah, deep into our spirit; then we will also possess the security to serve the Lord in humble, unnoticed and even unappreciated tasks with gladness of heart rather than resentment.

### Serving with a Song in our Hearts

Hebrew is such an amazing language, containing such richness in its hidden meanings. One day the Holy Spirit revealed something awesome about service. The Hebrew verb ‘to serve’ is **l’sharet. לשרת**. It contains another Hebrew word, ‘**shar’, שר**’ which means ‘**sing**’. Therefore, when we serve God and one another, it is to be done with a song in our heart – with joy and gladness – not dragging ourselves through our days with a long face so all can see how much we are suffering under our ‘heavy yoke of slavery’.

**“Speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.”** (Ephesians 5:19)

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 20:26-27

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 20:28

## Free At Last

We like to think of ourselves as free agents. Who among us likes to feel controlled and manipulated by others? Some seem to have a greater need for their expression of personal freedom than others. We can see this in our children: some are perfectly content to obey, happy to please, while others balk at the slightest suggestion that they must do something they don't *'feel like'* doing. This is when parents who are disciples of Yeshua may remind their children that the Messiah probably didn't *'feel like'* going to the cross to be crucified for our sins either!

*"Don't you dare try to tell me what to do!"* seems to be attitude that some wear as a mantle. Taken to the extreme, this manifests as rebellion; but in truth we all have a healthy need to feel that we have the right to make at least some of our own choices and decisions.

God has given each of us a free will; and yet Scripture tells us that we are all still slaves – either to sin that leads to death or righteousness that leads to life.<sup>11</sup> Or as Bob Dylan sang, *"Ya gotta serve somebody..."*<sup>12</sup>

Yeshua warned us that we cannot serve two masters; either we serve the Lord our God, or we serve the Kingdom of Darkness.<sup>13</sup> Elijah on Mt. Carmel, challenged the people of Israel on this exact point. **"How long will you waver between two opinions? If YHVH יהוה is God, then follow (serve) Him but if Baal is God, follow him."** (1 Kings 18:20-21)

We must make up our minds. No more sitting on the fence; no more wavering between two opinions. Whom do we serve?

I still remember clearly sitting in a church at the beginning of my walk of faith and hearing the pastor preach on this exact Scripture. At the time, I was still heavily into New Age and only beginning to understand the dangers and deceptions involved; but when the pastor thundered out this question, *"How long will you waver between two opinions?"* (At least it came across to me as 'thunder') I felt deeply convicted in my heart about following New Age gods, spirits and practices.

I went home and gathered up all my New Age books and paraphernalia and prepared to take them to a second hand bookstore to sell. *"Why not at least get some money out of this?"* I foolishly thought; but when I walked through the doorway to the store, I hit my head so hard on the doorjamb that I almost blacked out. *"Ok, Ok, I get the message!"* I turned around and dumped the whole defiled load into the trash where it belonged. Then I felt a great peace come over me.

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<sup>11</sup> Romans 6:16-18

<sup>12</sup> Bob Dylan, Gotta Serve Somebody

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 6:24



God wants our steadfast loyalty and devotion. **“Fear the Lord and serve (t’avod) תַעֲבֹד Him....do not go after other gods...for the Lord your God is a jealous God.”** (Joshua 24:14, Deuteronomy 6:15)

This fatal flaw proved to be King Solomon’s downfall – his foreign wives turned his heart away from the one true God towards their foreign gods. Although he began as the wisest man on earth, he ended his life a disillusioned old man who considered all of life meaningless vanity.

Such is the emptiness that grips our soul when we turn to idols rather than the living God. Solomon penned these few words which sum up his advice, **“Fear Adonai and keep His commandments...”** (Ecclesiastes 12:13) As with most of us, he should have practiced what he preached.

A description of the Proverbs 31 woman is that the heart of her husband safely trusts in her. Can our heavenly husband (our *Ishi*) our faithful Bridegroom, safely trust in us? We are so much more than mere slaves or servants to the Lord; we are His dear friends. Yeshua said,

**“No longer do I call you servants (Avadim), for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends (y’didim), for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.”** (John 15:15)

### Secret Service Agents for Adonai

The question remains - how specifically, do we serve the Lord? Many people are seeking direction to know God’s will. We want to be used by the Lord in a greater way. We stretch out our hands out to Him and plead, *’Hineini (Here am I), Adonai, send me!’*

Each of us is a secret service agent for the Lord – sent out every day to accomplish His purposes. We may not have a plan, but God has a plan for our life and that plan is good. If nothing else, we can get up each day, put a smile on our face, and just go about doing as much good as we can, to whomever we can, wherever and whenever we see a need.

This is what Yeshua did – he went about doing good - loving people, bringing healing, salvation and deliverance to those in need. He allowed his daily agenda to be interrupted by the desperation of people in need of help, sustenance, or even just encouragement. Will we do the same? **“Trust in Adonai and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.”** (Psalm 37:3)

I am sometimes dismayed to see followers of Yeshua who claim to know God, act super-spiritual, go to every prayer meeting, conference, and seminar that comes around, and yet balk at doing a fellow believer even a simple favor.

I know that God will continue the good work He has started in me and in each one of us. We are all a work in progress; but God will be faithful to show us how to serve Him in a greater way right where we live, just by loving Him and loving the people around us more deeply.

Love is expressed not only with words but also in very practical ways – even materially – as is said, *'talk is cheap'*. **“But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.” (1 John 3:17-18)**

I was so blessed one day to witness a precious couple come over to my daughter's home when she was sick. They brought food, worked in the garden, and engaged in some powerful spiritual warfare for Courtney and her family. Another faithful servant of the Lord came to look after the three young children and help take care of the household so that Courtney could get a needed break. Often we bring meals to members of our kehilla (congregation) who are going through challenging circumstances and need a helping hand. These are some of the ways we can serve the Lord by loving one another.

Sometimes we can get so entangled in the things of this life and the cares of making a living in this world that we get distracted and forget our primary focus. We are so busy driving to and fro, running errands, cooking and feeding our family – the to-do lists seem endless! And then there's the house that need cleaning and the dog that needs to go to the vet, and hundreds of e-mails that have to be answered, and the washing machine that won't work and the yard full of weeds that is going to be a hiding place for snakes if we don't cut it soon...you get the picture, right?

We can get so caught up in all of this that we forget we are here first and foremost to serve the Lord. Each day that I drove from our moshav (village) to the town of Mevasseret Tzion or Ein Kerem, I passed a traffic circle called 'Kikar Sataf' where *'the Bagella man'* as I called him had set up his bread stand. Actually his name is Amjad. He used to sit there every day from 6:30 A.M. until the afternoon, selling his delicious freshly baked breads called 'bagellas'; and over time we became acquainted. He even received a Hebrew tract explaining the gospel.



Amjad the Bagel Man

One day, I began to think, “*What if Amjad had actually been hired as a secret Mossad agent to intercept terrorists and that selling bagelles was just his ‘cover’? And what if Amjad got so caught up in the details and challenges of selling bagelles - picking them up early each morning, making sure he had enough, transporting them back and forth, selling enough to cover his costs each day and even hoping to make a profit – that he forgot his primary mission?*”

This can happen to us as well. Even in the midst of the mundane aspects of life, we are still here on this earth to serve the Lord – to pray for people, to help them when we can, and to do good.

## Haftarat Mishpatim

The corresponding haftarah (prophetic portion) for this week also deals with the issue of slavery within the nation of Israel:

“The word came to Jeremiah from the LORD after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to proclaim freedom for the slaves. Everyone was to free their Hebrew slaves, both male and female; no one was to hold a fellow Hebrew in bondage.

So all the officials and people who entered into this covenant agreed that they would free their male and female slaves and no longer hold them in bondage. They agreed, and set them free. But afterward they changed their minds and took back the slaves they had freed and enslaved them again.” (Jeremiah 34:8-11)

In 589 B.C.E., the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem and the Israelites who had slaves agreed to release them according to the rules written in the Torah, in hopes of ‘*appeasing God*’ and convincing Him to be merciful.

When the Babylonians retreated one year later, the slave owners (now feeling safe and secure) set about to forcibly re-enslave those they had previously set free. The prophet Jeremiah was incensed by this betrayal of the covenant and prophecies the complete destruction of Jerusalem, which took place in 586 B.C.E.

Having been released from bondage in Egypt, the Israelites were meant to be especially sensitive to the needs of a slave. All Hebrew slaves were only to serve for six years and then to be released in the seventh year. (Jeremiah 34:13-14)

These first laws of Moses were intended to create within Judaism a profound respect for every human being. It is told that a 13<sup>th</sup> century Jewish sage, Hillel, was challenged to sum up the entire Torah while standing on one leg. Hillel responded with, “*ve’ahavta l’reacha kamocho*” (and you shall love your neighbor as yourself).

Yeshua, as a Jew well versed in the Rabbinic Judaism of his day, responded to a similar challenge in like manner. One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating.



Noticing that Yeshua had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one,” answered Yeshua, “is this:

**‘Hear, O Israel (Sh’ma Yisrael): The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”**  
(Mark 12:28-31)

Yeshua has made it clear that our primary service in this lifetime is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength – and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves; because, if we want to sum up all of the Torah in one word it would be this – love (ahava).



Robert Indiana's 1977 *Love* sculpture spelling *ahava*

Love is the fulfillment of the Torah: **“For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”** (Galatians 5:14)

Yeshua did not come to abolish the Torah but to fulfill it.<sup>14</sup> He came to show us what the Torah was all about and it is this: Yeshua said, **“This one commandment I give unto you – that you love one another.”** (John 13:34)

We can be trying so hard to keep all the rules – all the ‘*mishpatim*’ – to the letter and still miss the spirit of the Torah. Yeshua had this scathing remark to say to the Pharisees of his day,

**“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”** (Matthew 23:23)

The apostle Paul went as far as to say that even if we have mountain-moving faith and give all we have to the poor; yet if we have not love we are nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2).

## Tough Love

These series of laws, also called ‘*The Covenant Code*’ by some biblical scholars, specify penalties for various violent crimes such as murder, kidnapping, and assault. Pre-meditated murder, kidnapping and striking or even cursing a parent all carried the death penalty.

**“He that smites his father or his mother shall be surely put to death...And he that curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.”** (Exodus 21:15,17)

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew 5:17

Today, it is not uncommon to see a child hitting his or her parent in a fit of temper at the grocery store or in a public place. I witnessed this shameful display at the Jewish school my children used to attend in Canada. What did the mother do as her child repeatedly beat on her? Nothing.

Since the practice of biblical chastisement (or spanking) has fallen out of favor (and is, in some places, actually illegal) it has become more and more difficult to restrain the sinful behaviors of children. We must be constantly thinking up creative ideas for alternative discipline methods such as timeouts, withdrawal of privileges, etc. I don't know about you, but sometimes I just don't feel smart enough to keep this up!

One of my children was a seriously strong-willed child from birth. By the age of two, this ankle biter tried to control our entire existence to revolve around her selfish demands. At this time, we toured several places in the U.S. and Canada on a speaking tour, taking this sweet little girl along with us.

At one point, we stayed with a Messianic family in Florida for almost a week. This family had about ten children at that time; and yet the mother sat in a rocking chair with her guitar, singing praise songs - the picture of poise and peace. The contrast was striking!

With only two children, I'm sure I was the picture of a woman with seriously frazzled nerves. When time came for meals, the children all sat quietly like cute little olive shoots around the table and the mother sat as the older daughters served the meal they had also prepared. Astonished, I wondered, 'How *does she do it*'?

I soon discovered the answer to my question when, after observing my willful daughter for a couple of days, this calm, relaxed mother sat me down and handed me what looked like a blue rubber ruler. "*Use this.*" she said, and proceeded to show me the biblical instructions on chastisement and proper use of the rod of correction. This was probably the best gift anyone had ever given me. I wouldn't say that our family life became perfect after this (mostly due to my own inconsistency in discipline and my personal faults) but at least we experienced some improvement.

When they become teenagers, it becomes more difficult if they have not been properly trained as young children. They need to be taught to respect and honor parents and authorities and not to curse them, for the consequences may be far more serious than they imagine. Youth may no longer be put to death for cursing a mother or father; but such a serious sin may bring spiritual death to a child unless they repent and find forgiveness through the blood of Yeshua.

We all want our children to be happy so we may tend to indulge them, but we don't do them any favors by ignoring disrespectful behaviors or attitudes. Abuse is not love; but failure to discipline our children correctly and promptly is also not real love. True love must sometimes be tough.

## Mercy (*chessed*) Triumphs over Judgment (*mishpat*)

Mishpatim (judgments) were outlined regarding how to make reparation for assault and injuries caused by animals; as well as damage to crops or livestock. Laws prohibited seduction of virgins, the practice of sorcery, bestiality, and idolatry as well as mistreating the disadvantaged of society.

Infractions of these laws often carried the severest of penalties – death by stoning – since God intended to keep peace and order within the camp. If a widow or fatherless child was to cry out to God because of someone’s ill treatment of them, God would pour out His fierce wrath upon their oppressor and kill them so that their wives would be widows and their children fatherless.

Remembering their painful experiences in Egypt, Israel was to remember that foreigners were to be treated with kindness and respect. **“You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”** (Exodus 21:21)

Yeshua taught us not only justice, however, but also mercy. In this judicial system under the Old Covenant, it was about just retribution for offenses: **“an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, ....”** (Exodus 21:24). This law was not meant to be harsh; but rather to limit vengeance and to ensure that the punishment fit the crime.

Under the New Covenant, God still demands justice and retribution; but the full penalty for all of our sins was laid upon His Son, Yeshua Hamashiach (the Messiah). He taught us not to return evil for evil but to love our enemies:

**“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on the right check, turn the other to him also...love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. That you may be sons of your Father in heaven...’** (Matthew 5:38 & 39, 44)

Sometimes children, when confronted with wrong behavior will say, *“Well, they did that to me so I did it back to them!”* In the natural, the last thing we usually want to do when someone wrongs us is to love them, pray for them and be good to them. We need to ask God for His supernatural grace and love to forgive people and show them mercy. Thus we overcome evil with good.

Our desire should not be to keep score and get revenge, but to love one another and to forgive offenses. The rabbis have said that the greatest hero is one who turns an enemy into a friend. This can only be done by deeds of loving kindness.

**“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the LORD will reward you.”** (Proverbs 25:21-22)

## Pilgrimage Festivals

The three pilgrimage festivals are mentioned in this parashah as a time when all adult Jewish males were to appear before the Lord: Passover, Shavuot (Weeks) and Sukkot (Tabernacles). “Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.” (EXODUS 23:17)

### SHABBAT SHEKALIM

This week begins the first of four parashot leading up to the festival of Passover. Because one of these special Sabbaths, called Shabbat Shekalim (“Sabbath of [shekels](#)” שבת שקלים) often occurs on the same Sabbath as Parashah Mishpatim (in 2015, 2017, 2018, 2020, 2023, and 2026), a special selection of Scriptures (called a maftir) regarding the half-shekel tax is also read from the book of Exodus chapter 30:verses 11-16.



Carthaginian shekel, c. 310–290 BC

What does ‘shekalim’ mean? Shekalim is the plural form of the Hebrew word ‘*shekel*’, which was the currency of ancient Israel as well as that used today in the modern state of Israel.



At this time, every Jewish adult male (twenty years and older) was required to give half a Biblical shekel towards the maintenance of the Temple in Jerusalem. This would be similar to the tithes or dues that we give our local congregation towards its upkeep and operating costs. It is important to financially support our house of worship.

“Everyone who is entered in the records, from the age of twenty years up, shall give Adonai’s offering. The rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than half a shekel when giving the Lord’s offering as expiation [or atonement] for your persons. You shall take the expiation money from the Israelites and assign it to the service of the Tent of Meeting; it shall serve the Israelites as a reminder before Adonai, as expiation for your persons.” (Exodus 30:14-16)

The half shekel tax needed to be paid before the Hebrew month of Nissan in which Passover occurs; therefore the call for the tax began to be issued to the people at the start of the previous month, Adar, giving people time to prepare their payment.

Why was this tax required to be paid before Nissan? It is because roads and pathways needed to be repaired before the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover. Many of the ritual baths also needed maintenance and repair before the customary pre-Passover purification ceremonies that took place as ritual water immersions in what was called a ‘mikvah’.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> [http://thejewishchronicle.net/view/full\\_story/21647591/article-What-Shabbat-Shekalim-means-?instance=news\\_special\\_coverage\\_right\\_column](http://thejewishchronicle.net/view/full_story/21647591/article-What-Shabbat-Shekalim-means-?instance=news_special_coverage_right_column)

If the mikvah was not properly maintained, then it would not be kosher and could not be used for ritual purposes. The maintenance of our churches and congregations require faithful funding. On Shabbat shekalim, then, let us renew our commitment to be faithful in our support of our church or congregation where we worship and fellowship with other Believers and with Adonai.

## The Blood of Sprinkling

Moses ratified the Old Covenant by sprinkling the blood on the two contractual parties: half on the people and half on the altar that represented God. . .

“Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.” And Moses took the blood, sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, “This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words.” (Exodus 24:7-8)



Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people (1984 illustration by Jim Padgett, courtesy of Distant Shores Media/Sweet Publishing)

All the covenants were sealed in blood; and when Yeshua shed His blood on the cross, He entered the most Holy Place, not with the blood of bulls and goats but with His own precious blood.<sup>16</sup>

Even the New Covenant was sealed with blood – that of the Messiah, Yeshua. At the Passover meal with His disciples, Yeshua held up the cup of redemption and said, "**This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood...**" (Luke 22:20)

When Yeshua died, the veil separating the people from the Most Holy Place was torn from top to bottom. This could have been an expression of our Heavenly Father’s grief over the death of His Son, as when a grieving Jewish person tears their garments. But the result is that we can now come boldly to the Throne of God to find help and grace in time of need. Are we taking advantage of this privilege?

The book of Hebrews tells us that the blood of sprinkling of Yeshua, mediator of the New Covenant, speak better things than that of Abel. “...**to Yeshua the Mediator of the new**

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<sup>16</sup> Heb. 9:18-22



**covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.”**

(Hebrews 12:24)

What does this verse mean? Abel’s blood cried out to God from the ground for vengeance; but Yeshua’s blood cries out to God for mercy, saying “Father forgive them....”

Truly, mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:13)

## Laws of the Sabbath

The last ordinance (mishpat) I want to touch on is that of resting on the seventh day. The law of the Sabbaths is given in this week’s parashah – not only a Sabbath rest for people every seventh day, but also a Sabbath rest for the land every seven years. This is called a Shemitah year.

**“Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat.”** (Exodus 23:10-11)

I know we have discussed this in other parashot studies, but there is one aspect of keeping Shabbat that I want to mention here. **“Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; ...that you may be refreshed.”** (Ex. 23:12)

The Hebrew word for be refreshed is ‘*vayinafesh*’ **וַיִּנְפֹּשׂ**. This comes from the word ‘*nefesh*’ **נֶפֶשׁ** which means ‘*soul*’. This is the word used in Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd....He restores my soul (*nefesh*).” (Psalm 23:3)

It can also mean ‘breath’ or ‘to be breathed upon’. When God breathed upon Adam in the Garden of Eden, he became a living soul (*‘nefesh chaya’*).

Have you ever felt like you were just going through the motions – existing, surviving, but not really ‘*living*’?! I know I have. I love the lyrics we sang one night in the Messianic congregation in Jerusalem which translate as, “*Life is not living without You.*”

Isn’t this so true! We can be walking, breathing, shopping, working, cleaning, taking care of the kids, doing all the things we do, but we may not feel alive. Life may seem to have lost its purpose and passion. Yeshua came to give us an abundant life<sup>17</sup> - far and above and beyond mere basic existence. It takes the breath of God to breathe life into our soul so that we may really come to life – filled to overflowing with His Spirit.

We are not just physical beings; we are also emotional, mental and spiritual. It takes a harmony of all these aspects of our being to feel truly satisfied and complete. God has given us the Sabbath (Shabbat) to stop all our mundane, daily activities – so we may rest in order that not just our bodies but our ‘souls’ would also be refreshed.

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<sup>17</sup> John 10:10

It is not only we, the Jewish people who have the privilege of enjoying a day of rest; but it is also for the stranger/foreigner (ger), the servants, and even the working animals to enjoy.

God gives us Shabbat to remind us that we have a soul – a nefesh – that also needs some care and attention. One night, the congregational leader gave such a good message about devotion to God that I must share some rich nuggets with you!

### Crown of Thorns Plant

Apparently, there is a little plant, native to Israel, (originally from Madagascar) that contains the name ‘*Christos*’, because tradition holds that this plant was used to fashion the crown of thorns which Yeshua wore on his head at his crucifixion.



This curious little plant is full and flowering in the rainy season, but during the dry season or in times of drought, the flowers and fruit turn into thorns. So, too, do we become ‘*thorny*’ when we neglect our soul – when we fail to drink of the living waters of His Spirit - we become hard, bitter, judgmental, and difficult to get along with. I know...you’re probably thinking of some ‘*thorny*’ person in your life right now that you wish would read this, right? ☺

But since we are the ones here, we can let the Word speak to us. We need to spend time with God, drink of the living water, getting to know Him and developing an intimate relationship with Him, so that we may be fruitful and flowering – to our Father’s glory. We need to drink and eat on a daily basis, but on Shabbat we feast! We have a whole day to spend with God, really getting to know Him; allowing Him to refresh our soul.

In total, Parashat Mishpatim contains fifty- three mitzvot (commands) – twenty three positive commandments and thirty prohibitions; but walking with God is about so much more than ‘rule keeping’ - it is about knowing Him. We can all know God.

The prophet Jeremiah prophesied a New Covenant where ALL will know God, from the least to the greatest.<sup>18</sup> No longer do we have to be male, Levite, or Cohen, to approach God - and then only once a year on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). We can be male or female, Jew or Gentile, young or old, and through the new covenant, sealed in the blood of Yeshua, we can all have free access to God.

### KNOWING GOD

We will be fruitful in our lives to the degree and depth that we truly know God. Hebrew has two words for ‘*to know*’: l’hakir and la’da’at. L’hakir is ‘to be acquainted with’ or to know in a kind of superficial way. We can know their name, the color of their hair, how many kids they

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<sup>18</sup> Jeremiah 31:31-34

have and what they do for a living. We know things about them but do not ‘*know*’ them on an intimate basis.

The other word, **la’da’at**, however, can be used in an intimate context, such as when Adam ‘knew’ **יָדַע** (**yadah**) Eve and she conceived and bore a son. We need to come to a place where we more than ‘know’ God in the sense of ‘I’hakir’. **We need to ‘know’ יָדַע Him.** This can only come through spending time in prayer, worship and His Word. I know I am not there yet, but I’m on my way, and I know you are too.

I found out something else so interesting one night at our Messianic congregation.<sup>19</sup> King Saul was called in Hebrew **Sha’ul**, which means **to borrow** (as in borrowing a book off the library shelf with intent to return it when no longer needed). As I’m sure you know, King Saul did not rule Israel in obedience to God and ended up losing the Kingdom to David, a man after God’s own heart.

**David**’s name in Hebrew means **Beloved**. The women sang about the two men, “*Shaul has slain thousands but David ten thousands.*” If we truly want to do even greater and mightier exploits, we need to deepen our relationship with the Lord. We can’t treat God like someone we borrow off the shelf to use until the crisis or trouble has passed and then put the Bible back up on the shelf to gather dust.

We need to develop an intimate relationship of love with our Creator, where we can say, “Ani l’dodi v’dodi li “ (I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine).”<sup>20</sup> Relationships take time and attention and especially communication. Just like a marriage will falter and fail if meaningful, loving communication ceases, so will our relationship with God if we stop communicating with Him through prayer. All it took to bring the construction of the Tower of Babel to an abrupt halt was to hinder the people’s ability to communicate!<sup>21</sup>

The story was told of an elderly couple driving together, the husband in the driver’s seat and the wife on her side of the car. The wife, reminiscing, said to her husband, “*Remember when we were young and we used to sit so close together. You used to put your arm around me and we would drive like that with me in your embrace?*” To this the husband replied, “*Honey, I’m still sitting in the exact same place; it is you who must have moved.*”

God is the same, today yesterday and forever. If we no longer feel so close to Him, then perhaps it is we who have moved away. But God is waiting and yearning for us to draw near to Him that He can draw near back to us.

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<sup>19</sup> Thanks so much to C.M. for sharing these keen Hebraic insights

<sup>20</sup> Song of Solomon 1:16a

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 11:5-9

## Seeing God

Parashat Mishpatim concludes with Moses ascending the mountain to receive the tablets of stone upon which God will write the Ten Commandments. And the glory of the Lord rested like a thick cloud upon the mountain.

**“So Moses went into the midst of the cloud and went up into the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.”**

(Exodus 24:18)



Moses entered into the midst of the cloud. (1984 illustration by Jim Padgett, courtesy of Distant Shores Media/Sweet Publishing)

Moses and Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up the mountain and there they ‘*saw God*’.<sup>22</sup> Not all of us will have this mountain- top experience. Not all of us will see angels or have a visitation from the Lord or hear His audible voice. But Yeshua said,

**“Blessed are those who believe and have not seen.”**<sup>23</sup>

### Closing Prayer:

Adonai, thank you for Your Word, your judgments and ordinances (mishpatim) that You have given us for our good and benefit. I thank you that we can be slaves of righteousness through You and be set free from sin and death.

Thank you that through Yeshua and the New Covenant we have free access to You and to find grace and mercy in our time of need. Help us, Holy Spirit, to drink of Your living waters, that our souls may be refreshed as we rest on Shabbat.

Breathe on us, Adonai, that we may become a living soul, truly living an abundant life and not merely existing. Help us, we pray, to really come to ‘know’ (la’da’at) You and not just l’hakir You. And even if we can’t see You, we know that You exist and are a rewarder of those who diligently seek You. Draw near to us, O God, as we draw near to You. In Yeshua’s name. Amen.

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<sup>22</sup> Exodus 24:9-10

<sup>23</sup> John 20:29

I want to close with the AARONIC BENEDICTION (BLESSING) over each of you:

Y'VARECH'CHA ADONAI V'YISHM'RECHA. YA'ER ADONAI PANA V A LECHA  
VICHUNECHA. YISA ADONAI PANA V ALECHA. V'YASEM L'CHA SHALOM.

MAY THE LORD BLESS YOU AND KEEP YOU

MAY THE LORD MAKE HIS FACE SHINE UPON YOU AND BE GRACIOUS TO YOU

MAY THE LORD LIFT UP HIS COUNTENANCE UPON YOU

AND GIVE YOU PEACE

### Mishpatim Study Questions

1. What is the meaning of the Hebrew word 'mishpatim'?
2. How does the Hebraic concept of slavery differ from the rest of the world's?
3. How do you feel about being a 'slave' or servant like Yeshua?
4. Are there ways you desire to serve God that you haven't yet fulfilled?
5. What is the one thing that is to be the motivation behind all our service and is the fulfillment of all the Torah?
6. Are there areas of your life where you feel you could demonstrate more love? Discuss.
7. How do you feel about 'tough love'? Have you had any experience with this? Discuss.
8. Do you agree with the 'death penalty' as outlined in the Torah? How do you reconcile this with the command to have mercy?
9. What is the 'blood of sprinkling'? How does Yeshua's blood speak better things than that of Abel's?
10. Do you feel refreshed after Shabbat? Why or why not? Discuss how you keep Shabbat.
11. What are the two Hebrew words for 'to know' and what's the difference? How can we 'know' God in a deeper way?



## About the Author:

Hannah Neshet grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

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