

Parasha Mishpatim

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



The Torah Portion at a Glance

Following the revelation at Sinai, YHWH legislates a series of laws for the people of Israel. These include the laws of the indentured servant; the penalties for murder, kidnapping, assault, and theft; civil laws pertaining to redress of damages, the granting of loans, and the responsibilities of the "Four Guardians"; and the rules governing the conduct of justice by courts of law.

Also included are laws warning against mistreatment of foreigners; the observance of the seasonal festivals, and the agricultural gifts that are to be brought to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem; the prohibition against cooking a baby goat in its mother's milk; and the mitzvah of prayer. Altogether, the Parashah of Mishpatim contains fifty-three mitzvot/commandments -- 23 imperative commandments and 30 prohibitions.

YHWH promises to bring the people of Israel to the Holy Land, and warns them against assuming the pagan ways of its current inhabitants. The people of Israel proclaim, "We will do and we will hear all that YHWH commands us." Leaving Aaron and Hur in charge in the Israelite camp, Moses ascends Mount Sinai and remains there for forty days and forty nights to receive the Torah from YHWH.

(adapted from chabad.org)

The Messiah in the Torah Portion

John 1:14 states that the "word became flesh and dwelt among us." This means that the Messiah was the living, breathing, eating, hurting, sleeping, actual, Word of YHWH in human form. This "Word" was not the New Testament made flesh but the walking and talking embodiment of the Torah. Y'shua never broke the commandments of Torah nor spoke against them. His life was a powerful example of righteous living. Every day that Y'shua lived he constantly stayed in the Spirit and crucified His flesh. He didn't wait for His death to be obedient!

Y'shua never told a single lie or stretched the truth just a little. He always showed proper respect to others and acted in love every second of every minute of His life. He attended all festivals, perfectly kept the Shabbat without working, and gave the proper tithes and offerings as proclaimed in the Torah. Y'shua never looked upon a woman with lust, nor did he ever mention the names of the false gods. He treated everyone fairly, gave

to others, and always helped the needy. Y'shua said, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you," John.13:15

When we read in the Torah of the various laws that YHWH gave mankind we are actually reading about the personality and the character of the "Word made flesh" Y'shua. The Messiah is found in every commandment and in every verse of the Torah. This presents another reason why the Torah is applicable today – the more of the Torah we keep, the more we can be like our Master Y'shua. "To this you were called, because Messiah suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps," 1 Peter 2:21.

Applying the Portion to Life Today

Why did YHWH give mankind hundreds of rules to obey and follow?

The answer of course is simple – He did it because He loves us! Loving parents build boundaries for the behavior of their kids. Love motivates moms and dads to say "no" when something is not safe or of benefit. Love stops kids from getting their way all of the time. Love yells "no!" when a toddler tries to drink Drano or pull the dog's tale. The everlasting love of a mother or father is powerful enough to spank even though it really hurts the parents much more than it hurts the child. Simply put, love sets rules.

Unfortunately, most people don't equate the concepts of "love" and "rules." Do you think a child feels love when they are not allowed to play in the road? Do you feel loved when you are in a hurry and want to break the speeding limit? Parents' decisions and driving rules seemingly stop fulfillment and satisfaction. Yet both are motivated by protection, by love. Rules, laws, judgments, or commandments are given to prevent the danger and bless the obedient. Loving laws aren't given to restrict. The Western mind seems to think that laws punish, while the Torah teaches that rules protect. Such is the case with the everlasting love of YHWH and the giving of His Torah. Out of His great love YHWH has given man instructions on living. To remember this idea, the Sages of Yisrael have composed a prayer called "Ahavat Olam."

"Ahavat Olam" is a short blessing that is usually sung in the morning and at night right before the "Shema" is recited. "Ahavat Olam" is the Hebrew phrase for "everlasting love," from which YHWH gave us His Torah. Ahavat Olam shows YHWH's love for Yisrael while the Shema shows our love for YHWH.

This prayer has been passed down from generation to generation as a remembrance of Elohim's ahava (love.) True love leads to actions and YHWH's love for Yisrael led Him to give the words found in the first five books of the Bible. This blessing is an expression of gratitude to YHWH for His gift of Torah. YHWH loves us and the fact that He has given us the Torah proves this. Just read the prayer for yourself and perhaps you can understand this better:

"You have loved the family of Yisrael with an ever-lasting love. Torah and Mitzvot, laws and precepts have You given us. Therefore, O Elohim, when we lie down and when we rise up, we will meditate on Your laws and rejoice in Your Torah and Mitzvot for ever. Day and night we will reflect on them, for they are our life and the length of our days. Then Your love shall never depart from our hearts! Blessed are You, YHWH, who love the people Yisrael."

Ahavat olam beit yisraeil amcha ahavta, Torah umitzvot chukim umishpatim otanu limad'ta. Al kein Adonai Eloheinu b'shochbeinu uv'kumeinu nasi-ach b-chukecha, v' nis mach b'divrei torat'cha uv'mitzvotcha le-olam va-ed. Ki heim cha-yeinu v-orach yameinu uva-heim nehgeh yomam valaila. V-ahavatcha al tasir mimenu le-olamim, Baruch ata YHWH, oheiv amo yisraeil.

Ahavat Olam is the everlasting, eternal love of YHWH expressed in his “torah and mitzvot, laws and precepts.” You might notice in this Hebrew prayer the term “umishpatim.” This is the same word used to title this week’s Torah portion. “Mishpatim” or “judgments” in English is the subject of Shemot/Exodus 21:1-24:18. This Parasha highlights the civil rules being given to the bnai (children) of Yisrael. These laws are called “mishpatim.” According to Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance and Dictionary this Hebrew term means, “law, rules, justice, including a particular right, or privilege, determination, discretion, disposing, form, to be judged, judgment, manner, measure, order, ordinance.” Mishpatim is from the base Hebrew word "shaphat", which means, "to establish, set on, reduce, bring, ordain, to contend and defend." Through the mishpatim, YHWH’s love is trying to stop us from playing in a busy road.

Isn’t it wonderful that YHWH through divine love gave His people mishpatim or rules on how to get along with each other? These rules remain as reminders on how Yisrael should live. Many issues are discussed in this portion, from how to handle the restitution of an incident to how Eretz Yisrael experiences the Sabbath rest. Each section of these chapters has valuable information for the believer. Time could be taken to study every single verse and every single word of this Parasha. For that matter you could even break the words down and examine and research the Hebrew letters that make up the words. We could do all of this. But, please, let’s not rationalize, spiritualize, or analyze this Torah portion. Let’s just receive these instructions as what they are – LOVING MISHPATIM from YHWH. Then we should seek to obey them.

Portion Points to Ponder

These questions are compiled from the author’s own interest and various books and websites.

1. The Hebrew name for this portion is “Mishpatim.” What does this mean?
2. Read Jeremiah 34:8-22, 33:25-26. How does this relate to the story of Exodus this week?
3. Consider the words found in Matthew 17:1-11. What did you learn from studying this passage?
4. How does this Torah portion speak of the Messiah Y’shua?
5. Describe two ways that you can apply this week’s Torah portion to your life.
6. Why do you think the specific day-by-day rules for life in Exodus begin with a discussion about slavery, right after the Ten Commandments?
7. Why do you think YHWH presented us with commandments in the first place?
8. Where was Moses' specific location at the time these rules were handed down?
9. What kind of rules are these? Are they rules related to justice, like the U.S. Constitution or are they rules related to ethical behavior or both?
10. The Torah states: "If a person steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay five oxen for an ox and four sheep for the sheep" (Exodus 21:37). Why is the fine for stealing a sheep less than the fine for stealing an ox? What lesson can we learn from this for our lives?

11. Today the death penalty is under scrutiny. Do you think it's fair to take a man's life after he kills someone? Are other punishments more appropriate?
12. Why does YHWH give so many rules governing the “stranger”?
13. Exodus 23:20–21 says, “Behold, I send a Messenger before you to keep you in the way.” Who is this *Messenger* [Hebrew *Malak*] from YHWH Elohim? Read and compare this with 1 Corinthians 10:4.
14. Why does the Torah have to make such a horrible threat (“Your wives will be widows and your children will be orphans” – 22:23) in order to convince Bnei Yisrael not to oppress widows and orphans?
15. The Hebrew word for torn flesh is "terefa" or “traif.” What does that word mean to you?
16. There is the command for the Sabbath of years. Why does the land need to rest? Isn't it enough that man should rest?
17. The Torah includes the same verse twice in Exodus/Shemot – 23:19 and 34:26. Each includes the commandment of not cooking a goat in its mother’s milk. What does this commandment have in common with its context, and, assuming it is correct in context, why must it be repeated?
18. Is it a sin for a man to have relations with a virgin if he later pays the dowry bride price? What if her father refuses the price?
19. What is the penalty in this Torah portion for Idolatry?
20. Who is allowed to borrow money without being charged interest?
21. How do people curse leadership today? Is this allowed by YHWH?
22. Does the commandment to set aside the first born still apply today?
23. Explain what Exodus 23:1 means to you.
24. How have you in the past followed a crowd to do evil? Have you repented of this?
25. How does bribery blind the wise? Give an example.
26. To whom does the sabbatical year of farming apply today?
27. Explain how YHWH uses the Sabbath of the Land to feed the poor. If farmers did this and planted on different years, would there always be food for the needy?
28. Why should animals and foreigners rest on the Sabbath?
29. What type of work is prohibited on the Shabbat?
30. Does the commandment to “make no mention of other gods” apply in all conversation or just worship?
31. What three feasts are special pilgrimage journeys to Jerusalem?
32. When is the month of Aviv?
33. Why do many of the feast days line up with harvest times?
34. Does Exodus 23:19 really mean that you shouldn’t eat meat and dairy together? What about chicken and cheese? Does the stomach process meat and dairy differently? Do you think the Messiah mixed the two?
35. What is the penalty for wounding one's father or mother?
36. From where in this week's parasha can the importance of work be demonstrated?
37. Which verse forbids listening to slander?
38. What compels the two enemies to get together? Read Exodus 23:5 for this answer.
39. "A" intentionally hits "B." As a result, B is close to death. Besides any monetary payments, what happens to A?
40. An ox gores another ox. What is the maximum the owner of the damaging ox must pay, provided his animal had gored no more than twice previously?
41. A person borrows his employee's car. The car is struck by lightning. How much must he pay?
42. What blessing would Israel inherit if they listened to YHWH according to Exodus 23:25?
43. How is making a covenant with foreigners also making a covenant with their gods?

44. How many commands are given in this week's Torah portion?
45. What leaders were called to go up the mountain of YHWH?
46. What was the sacrifice of a bull symbolic of? Was this made for a sin offering?
47. In this week's Torah portion, the nation of Israel once again said, "All that YHWH has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" Did they keep their words? Why or why not?
48. Does a covenant always require blood?
49. How could the leaders "see" YHWH on the mountain when Exodus 33:20 states that "no man can see YHWH and live?"
50. Was it good to leave Aharon and Hur in charge when Moses was on the mount?
51. On what day did YHWH call to Moses to come into the cloud?
52. How long was Moshe on the mountain? Did he eat or drink during this time?
53. What do you think it would be like to see YHWH as this group of elders did? What did the elders do as they fellowshiped with YHWH? Was there a church service or fellowship with food?
54. Imagine yourself as an Israelite. What would it be like to behold the consuming fire of YHWH on the mountain top?
55. Why weren't Aaron and the elders of Israel eligible to accompany Moses up the mountain?
56. YHWH commands Moses to come up Mount Sinai and write down The Ten Commandments on stone tablets so they can be taught. Why is it important to teach the Ten Commandments? Are the Ten Commandments strictly for Jews or for all people?
57. What did you learn from this Open Bible study?

The Open Bible is a teaching series written by Daniel Rendelman of Emet Ministries. Find more teachings, audio messages, videos, and music at www.emetministries.com.

Daniel Rendelman is the found and leader of Emet Ministries and the author of the book "Finding the Truth." He, his wife, and five children live in Newberry, South Carolina. He can be reached at emetministries@gmail.com.