

The title for this week's Scripture portion comes from the first verse of this Scripture portion.

***V'ele ha-mishpatim asher tasim lifneihem:***

***Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them:***

Exodus 21:1

In last week's Scripture portion, we read how the Almighty King of the Universe, blessed is He, spoke to us the "Ten Words" from Mount Sinai. We heard His voice. We heard the thundering, we saw the cloud descend. We saw fire on the mountain. The air was electric - and it was an experience that none had ever experienced before. Our traditions tell us that the Voice of the Almighty was visible as He spoke the "Ten Words" [Ten Commandments]. That tradition also says that the Voice split into seventy branches - representing the seventy languages of all the nations - and that the fire entered the Camp like sparks... and rested over our heads.

The events of last week's portion were a rehearsal. They were played out 1,500 years later in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem at the Feast of Shavuot [Pentecost] around the year 30 CE. The *talmidim* [disciples] of our risen Master Yeshua were meeting in the *Bayit* [House] of Israel, the Holy Temple. When suddenly, the air was electric, and there was a sound like the rush of wind, and fire rested on the *talmidim's* heads. All present heard the servants of the Living G-d speaking His Words - in the languages of the nations.

The events of Acts 2 were not only rehearsed in last week's portion from Exodus - the events on that feast of Shavuot after Yeshua's resurrection took place on the very anniversary of Exodus 20. You see, our G-d wants His people to rehearse truth. The patterns of redemption are seen again and again.

This week's parasha contains more of G-d's commands to us, His people. It is ironic that so many who want to nullify the commands (or at least some of them) - and yet say they follow a Messiah who said that He did ***not*** come to nullify them. Men have struggled for 1,900 years to find a ***theological way to nullify at least some of the commands*** of the Almighty. They have played the games of Replacement Theology, and Dispensationalism. They have divided up G-d's commands into categories in which some are "fulfilled" (read "abolished") - and others are still in effect (so, didn't "Jesus" fulfill the command against lying? Is it OK to lie now?). There is a single reason why all these machinations. Only a single reason. ***To distance themselves from the Jewish people.*** This is the historical reality and it is the reality today whether people recognize it or not. Sadly, even Jewish people themselves engage in it.

Read any theological treatise on the commandments of G-d, and you will read of the "moral, ritual, and civil" law. How these are divided up and categorized is a man-made invention. Invariably, if you are honest you will soon discover one thing about the "fulfilled" (read "abolished") commandments (what they call "ritual"): ***they are seen by some as "Jewish."*** Even in Jewish-friendly quarters the Feasts of Leviticus 23 are called the "Feasts of Israel" or the "Jewish Feasts." What does Leviticus 23 call them?

*Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: "The **feasts of HaShem**, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, **these are My feasts.**"*

Leviticus 23:2

Of course, the first "feast" [*moed* = appointment] mentioned as a "Feast of HaShem" is the weekly Sabbath. It is one of the first things that the Gentiles in the early church wanted to distance themselves from. Why? Because it was "Jewish" in the eyes of Rome, and remains such to this day. So, is the Sabbath "Jewish?" No. It is HaShem's. So why do so many Christians claim that the seventh day is the "Jewish Sabbath" and that the first day is the "Christian Sabbath?" Beloved, it is not on the authority of Scripture - it is a historical reality that the Sabbath was abandoned because many Gentiles did not want to be seen as "Jews" - even though they claimed to follow Messiah, who just happens to be Jewish. This is a conveniently forgotten truth.

The way the Sabbath was eliminated for many was by designating it "ritual" law - and hence it was "fulfilled" (read "abolished"). Did they never read "Do not add... nor take away from it" (Deuteronomy 4:2)? They soothe their consciences by preaching how Yeshua "broke the Sabbath" - all without an inclination of how repugnant such a statement is in the hearing of our Master Yeshua.

So the "Ten Words" [Ten Commandments] became the Nine Commandments with the striking of the Fourth Commandment (*Remember and Keep the Sabbath*) from the Ten.

But that was not enough. They eliminated *Pesach* [Passover] and the Feast of Unleavened Bread [Passover]. They did it about the same time as replacing the Sabbath with "Sunday." They had no Scriptural authority (since Scripture calls *moadim* [appointments] of Leviticus 23 *chukot olam* [eternal statutes]). Why eliminate these? Again, to some they seemed "Jewish." You know you have heard the lie, "Sunday is for Christians, Saturday for Jews. Easter for Christians, Passover for Jews."

Beloved, if you go down the list of what is considered by some Christians to be "ritual" law, or what is "fulfilled" (read "abolished") you will have to agree - it seems like the "Jewish stuff." How sad that Gentiles who claim to be the people of G-d, who according to Ephesians chapter two have been grafted into the Commonwealth of Israel; still want to distance themselves from, "that Jewish stuff." How wrong.

This week's parasha reminds me of this for a reason: a lot of the commands in this week's portion are commands that some categorize as "moral or civil" law - and hence not "fulfilled" (read "not abolished"). My question to all those who have divided up the Word of G-d is this, **Who Gave You The Right?** The One you claim as Your Master **never did**. You see, it is in large part  *mishpatim* [judgments] that Yeshua speaks of in what is called His "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew chapters 5-7. Let's look at some of that.

Yeshua said,

**Do not** think that I came to destroy [kataluo] the Torah or the Prophets. I did **not** **come to destroy** but to fulfill [pleroo]. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and

*earth pass away, one yod or one tittle will by no means pass from the Torah till all is fulfilled [ginomai].*

*Whoever therefore **breaks** [luo] one of the least of these commandments, and **teaches men so**, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever **does and teaches them**, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

Matthew 5:17-18

The English ought to be enough for people, but quite honestly, the language used in these verses has become so perverted by theologians it is amazing. Since when does the English word "fulfilled" mean "abolished" or "nullified"? Let's look at the Greek words.

*kataluo* [throw down, break up] is translated into English as "abolish" or "destroy." Yeshua said He did not come to *kataluo* the Torah and the Prophets. "Torah and the Prophets" is a way to refer to the Scripture of Yeshua's day - what some theologians disparagingly call the "Old Testament." Instead, Yeshua said He came to *pleroo* [fill to the top] the TaNaKh [Torah, Prophets, and Writings].

These two words (*kataluo* and *pleroo*) are conveying a pattern of speech that was often used in the First Century when men spoke of Scripture. The Sages and early Rabbis spoke of making Scripture "fall down" or "stand up." If a teacher gave a bad interpretation of a Scripture passage, it was said of him that he made the Torah "fall down." If an interpretation was good, it was said of him that he made the Torah "stand up." This is what Yeshua is speaking of here. Yeshua is telling His disciples that He had come to correctly interpret Scripture - **to make it stand up**.

An interesting trick the translators do to correlate Yeshua's use of *pleroo*, ("not come to destroy but to fulfill [*pleroo*]") is that they use the same English word "fulfilled" later in verse 18 ("*till all is fulfilled*") - and yet this is a completely different Greek word. Here the word "fulfilled" is *ginomai* which means "to arise, or to be." The last I checked, the heavens and the earth have not passed away - and Yeshua did not abolish a thing, except to put death and sin on notice that their time was short.

What Yeshua does in Matthew 5-7 in explaining the *mishpatim* [judgments] is to correlate the crimes with the heart's intention. Of course, the Greek philosophy lovers of the early church took this and ran with it. "*All that matters is the heart*," and "*faith is unseen*," where things they taught and so many believed.

Yeshua was not saying that ***all that matters*** is the heart or the motives of man - instead He taught us that ***a man's motives will be evident in what he does***. Breaking G-d's commandments called *mishpatim* [judgments] will be evident in how we treat others. G-d's *mishpatim* are summed up best in the command, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). ***Breaking G-d's mishpatim will reveal whether we truly love G-d as well*** (Deuteronomy 6:5). Our actions reveal our hearts.

As you study this week's Scripture portion, contemplate what *mishpatim* are, and how they relate to G-d's command to love your neighbor. After you read this week's portion, read Yeshua's words in Matthew chapters 5-7.

Beloved, as you read these *mishpatim*, you will be able to see why so many theologians want to put them into the category of "moral and civil" law - these are **good** words. Beloved, **all** the words of HaShem are **good**. They are **all** righteous, and they are **all** valid, both now... and **forever**. We live under their jurisdiction, because we live under the jurisdiction of the One Who lovingly gave them to us!

*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our G-d **stands forever**.*

Isaiah 40:8

### **Haftarat Mishpatim - "Judgments" (Jeremiah 34:8-22; 33:25-26)**

This week's Torah portion is found in Exodus 21:1-24:18. This portion includes *mishpatim* [judgments] which could be characterized as "fair treatment of fellow Israelites." Among those *mishpatim*, are instructions regarding slaves and servants. It is regarding these instructions that our haftarah portion from the Prophets is drawn. The first part of our haftarah deals with what is about to happen because Israel disobeyed the instructions in Exodus 21.

The setting for the haftarah portion from Jeremiah is this: Six hundred years before the birth of Messiah, the prophet Jeremiah was sent to tell Israel that because of her persistent disobedience, she was about to be sent into exile in Babylon. In fact, the exile in Babylon was to be seventy years - one year for each of the missed *sh'mittah* years since they had entered the Land. The *sh'mittah* is the seventh year of the seven year cycle. It is a year that the farm land was to lay fallow, and the year that all Israelite slaves were to be set free. The first reference to the *sh'mittah* is found in Exodus 21, from this week's Torah portion.

*Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them: If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing.*

Exodus 21:1-2

*"And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity," says HaShem; "and I will make it a perpetual desolation."*

Jeremiah 25:11-12

*And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of HaShem by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.*

2Chronicles 36:20-21

For seventy *sh'mittahs* [seven year cycles, or 490 years], Israel had not obeyed Exodus 21:1-2. It was time to let the land lay fallow, and to set the Israelite slaves free (in reality they all became slaves). It was for Israel's disobedience of these commands that she was sent into the seventy

year captivity in Babylon. And it is from that seventy year captivity that we are given the future prophecies regarding Daniel's "seventy sevens" from Daniel chapter 9.

*In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans - in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of HaShem through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.*

Daniel 9:1-2

*Seventy sevens are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.*

Daniel 9:24

Like all Scripture, when you think you've read far enough, keep reading. Beloved, there are many who have a profound misunderstanding of these and other instructions of the Torah. *Mishpatim* are the standards of righteousness of HaShem. It is the way He expects His people to live. If they refuse to obey Him, then they will suffer... **but they remain His people**. Therein is the focus of the second portion of this week's haftarah. Yes, Israel went into captivity in Babylon. But Israel **remained** HaShem's chosen.

*This is the word that came to Jeremiah from HaShem, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were at Jerusalem to proclaim liberty to them: that every man should set free his male and female slave—a Hebrew man or woman - that no one should keep a Jewish brother in bondage. Now when all the princes and all the people, who had entered into the covenant, heard that everyone should set free his male and female slaves, that no one should keep them in bondage anymore, they obeyed and let them go. But afterward they changed their minds and made the male and female slaves return, whom they had set free, and brought them into subjection as male and female slaves. Therefore the word of HaShem came to Jeremiah from HaShem, saying, "Thus says HaShem, the G-d of Israel: 'I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, saying, "At the end of seven years let every man set free his Hebrew brother, who has been sold to him; and when he has served you six years, you shall let him go free from you." But your fathers did not obey Me nor incline their ear. Then you recently turned and did what was right in My sight - every man proclaiming liberty to his neighbor; and you made a covenant before Me in the house which is called by My name. Then you turned around and profaned My name, and every one of you brought back his male and female slaves, whom he had set at liberty, at their pleasure, and brought them back into subjection, to be your male and female slaves.' "Therefore thus says HaShem: 'You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and every one to his neighbor. Behold, I proclaim liberty to you,' says HaShem 'to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine! And I will deliver you to trouble among all the kingdoms of the earth.'"*

Jeremiah 34:8-17

That was not the end. After Israel returned from Babylon, they were in the Land until the Second Century CE. Then after their failed rebellions against Rome, Israel was dispersed to the Diaspora [scattered among the nations]. But Israel **remains** HaShem's chosen. This is the connection to the prophecies of Daniel 9 and following. It is sad that some theologians must create metaphors to deal with Scriptures like the last part of this week's haftarah.

*Thus says HaShem: "If My covenant is not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, then I will cast away the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, so that I will not take any of his descendants to be rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will cause their captives to return, and will have mercy on them."*

Jeremiah 33:25-26

The dispersion in the Diaspora is for a time. We would be on very dangerous ground to assume that HaShem now has a "new people" - no, Israel is still His **only** people.

The **only** hope for Gentiles is to be **grafted into Israel**. Messiah's work is the only thing that can do that.

*Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh - who are called Uncircumcision [i.e. not Israel] by what is called the Circumcision [i.e. Israel] made in the flesh by hands that at that time you were without Messiah, being **aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise**, having no hope and without G-d in the world. But now in Messiah Yeshua you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah... Now, therefore, you are **no longer strangers and foreigners**, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of G-d.*

Ephesians 2:11-13; 19

Remember, you are attached to the root, if you follow Messiah Yeshua. His promises to remain faithful regardless are still valid.

#### **Prayer Focus for Mishpatim - "Prayer for the State of Israel"**

*Our Father in Heaven, Protector and Redeemer of Israel, bless the State of Israel, the first flowering of our redemption. Shield her beneath the wings of Your kindness, and spread over her Your canopy of peace. Send Your light and truth to her leaders, officers and counselors, and direct them with Your good counsel. Strengthen the defenders of our Holy Land; grant them salvation; crown them with victory. Establish peace in the land and everlasting joy for its inhabitants.*

*Remember our brothers, the whole House of Israel, in all the lands of their dispersion. Speedily bring them to Zion, Your city, to Jerusalem, Your dwelling place, as it is written in the Torah of Moses, Your servant: Even if your outcasts are at the ends of the world, from there HaShem, your G-d will gather you, from there He will fetch you. And HaShem, your G-d will bring you to the land which*

*your fathers occupied, and you shall occupy it; and He will make you more prosperous and more numerous than your fathers.*

*Unite our hearts to love and revere Your Name and to observe all the precepts of Your Torah. Speedily send us Your righteous Messiah of the House of David to redeem those who long for Your salvation.*

*Reflect Your glorious majesty upon all the inhabitants of the Earth and let everyone who breathes declare: HaShem, G-d of Israel, is King and His dominion rules over all. Amen. Selah.*

-- ArtScroll translation