

SHOFTIM { שֹׁפְטִים } (Judges)

**Deuteronomy 16:18 – 21:9, Isaiah 51:12 – 52:12,
John 1:19-27**

A Messianic Jewish Commentary

By Hannah Nesher www.voiceforisrael.net

“Judges (Shoftim) and officers (shotrim) shall you make in all your gates, ...and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment...” (Deuteronomy 16:18)

This week’s Torah reading, called ‘Shoftim’ (Judges), discusses the issue of justice according to a Biblical perspective. God commanded Moses to instruct the people of Israel in appointing judges and law enforcement officers (shotrim in Hebrew - police officers).



“They shall show you the sentence of judgment.”—Deut. 16:18

“They shall show you the sentence of judgment.” ([Deut. 17:9](#)) (illustration circa 1890–1910 by Paul Hardy)

What was the difference between a judge and an officer? A judge referred to one qualified to make legal decisions according to the laws of the Torah. The officer would then enforce these judgments, even by force if necessary.

Restoring the Judges

The ancient Hebrew prophet Isaiah promised that there would come a day when judges would be restored as in the days of old: **“I shall restore your judges as at first, and your counselors as at the beginning.”** ([Isaiah 1:26](#)).

We may note that although Isaiah mentions the judges, the officers do not appear in this prophecy; but rather ‘*counselors*’. Why do counselors replace the role of officers? This is because in the days of redemption, when the Messiah returns to rule and reign in righteousness there will be no need for ‘enforcers’ of the Torah.

In the Messianic era, all will have such a deep desire to follow and obey the Lord that only counselors will be needed to explain and clarify (not to enforce) the decisions of the judges. Even today (before that great day of the Lord that is to come) those who are truly in the Messiah do not need external coercion to keep God’s commandments and judgments.

For when we have been given a new heart and a new spirit, there arises within us a desire to keep God's laws and commandments, not in a spirit of legalism; but out of a heart of love. **"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances."** (Ezekiel 36:27)

For those who believe in Yeshua but do not observe His commandments in the Torah, the question we need to ask is, *"Why not?"* Either the person is not truly filled with His Spirit; or they have received and accepted a false teaching which erroneously states that the Torah is no longer relevant for 'New Covenant believers'.

Today's judges no longer govern according to God's laws. The Ten Commandments have been removed from many courtrooms of our modern, Western society; but one day righteous judges will be restored to the land.

Pursuing Justice

"You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous." (Deuteronomy 16:19)

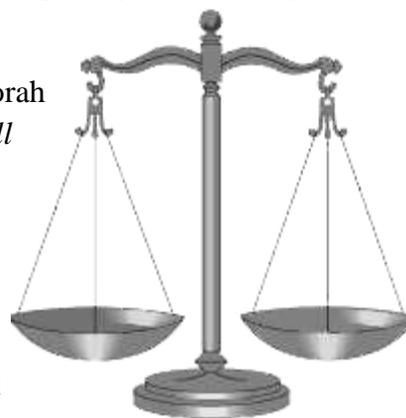
Justice has always been a fundamental value in Judaism; therefore it was to be administered without any kind of corruption. Judges (or magistrates) were warned not to show any kind of partiality or favoritism and were forbidden from accepting a bribe.

It is written that God, the highest judge, shows no favoritism but **"accepts anyone from any nation who fears Him and does what is right."** (Acts 10:34)

So crucial is the concept of justice to the nation of Israel that the Torah actually repeats this word twice for emphasis, ***"Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may live and possess the land the Lord your God is giving you."*** (Deuteronomy 16:20)

The Hebrew word for justice is **tzedek**, צדק which is the root of **tzadik**, צדיק (righteous), and also **tzedakah** – צדקה (charity).

Justice is the foundation of the humane legislation of the Torah and the demand upon Israel for righteousness, integrity, and charity.



"Justice, justice shall you pursue."

In Hebrew, justice is synonymous with holiness. God is a God of Justice. The name of one of the Kings of Israel, Yehoshafat, means 'God is judge'. The prophet Isaiah declared, **"The Holy God is sanctified by justice."** (Isaiah 5:16)

Where there is no justice, there is no appreciation of the right of every human being to be treated with fairness, respect, and kindness. Those who oppress, mistreat, or take advantage of others, especially orphans, widows and strangers, make themselves the enemies of God and man.

What is the end result of justice? It is peace (shalom) and security: **“The work of justice is peace; and the effect is quietness and confidence forever.”** (Isaiah 32:17)

It is so important that our government leaders and officials and all those in positions of authority, even in a family, are righteous and just.

“When the righteous (tzadikim) are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan.” (Proverbs 29:2)

In the 17th chapter of Deuteronomy, God prohibited Canaanite idolatry. Anyone found guilty of worshipping other gods would be stoned to death according to the laws of the Torah. However, in order for justice to be served, all crimes were to be investigated thoroughly; and the death penalty could only be executed upon the testimony of two or three witnesses.

“On the testimony of two or three witnesses a person is to be put to death, but no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.” (Deuteronomy 17:6)

In fact, it was to be the hands of the witnesses themselves that would throw the first stones at the one accused of the crime. Then the rest of the people of Israel would stone the criminal to death.

“The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting that person to death, and then the hands of all the people. You must purge the evil from among you.” (Deuteronomy 17:7)

“Why did God institute such harsh judgments?” one may ask. Although in our day, there exists an emphasis on human rights and free choice; in the days of ancient Israel, the primary purpose of the law was to keep the nation pure and holy.

The purpose of these severe punishments was to purge the evil from among the community:

“You must purge the evil from among you... You must purge the evil from Israel.”
(Deuteronomy 17:7, 12)

The Sanhedrin and the Judgment of Yeshua

If a judge felt unqualified to decide on a difficult case, it could be referred to a higher court which, in Second Temple times, was called the Sanhedrin. We see this Jewish court system at work in the trial and execution of Yeshua Hamashiach (the Messiah). Although it was unjust and contrary to Jewish law; yet it was God’s will for His Son to suffer and die on the cross.

The question is often asked, “*Who killed Jesus?*” Often the blame is placed upon the Jews; and the label of ‘Christ Killer’ has fueled the fires of anti-Semitism over the centuries; but is this accusation really true?

Instead of a Jewish trial by jury, the judge in these ancient times would hear and evaluate accusation from two impartial witnesses. If two or three witnesses would agree, the judge would issue a conviction; but in Yeshua’s case, the Sanhedrin attempted to convict Yeshua on the basis of false testimony. Even so, the testimony of the witnesses did not agree therefore they could not convict him.

“The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but they could find none. For many were giving false testimony against Him, but the testimonies did not agree.” (Mark 14:55 – 56)

Thus, the Sanhedrin had no other choice but to ask Yeshua directly if He claimed to be the son of God – a charge to which He confessed, thereby convicting Himself of blasphemy which carried the death penalty.

Again the high priest questioned Him, “Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?”

“I am,” said Jesus, “and all of you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.”

Then the high priest tore his robes and said, “Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What is your decision?”

And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.” (Mark 14:61-64)

This shows us that neither the Jewish Sanhedrin, nor the Roman authorities could have crucified Yeshua without His cooperation. Even the Roman soldiers came to believe that Yeshua truly was the Son of God.

“When the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they were terrified and said, “This man really was God’s Son!” (Matthew 27:54).

So to answer the question of who crucified Yeshua we may look to his trial to see that he willingly gave the authorities the ‘confession’ they needed to condemn him to death. Yeshua, by His own words, said that he lay down His life of His own accord – to save us from our sins as the promised Messiah.

He said, “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.” (John 10:17-18)

In contrast to the disrespect towards authority tolerated in our modern, Western society, the showing of contempt towards a judge or law enforcement officer in ancient times constituted a crime which also carried the death penalty. Contempt for authority was simply not tolerated!

Choosing a King of Israel

In his farewell message to the nation of Israel, Moses prophesied that Israel would ask for a King to rule over them in the Promised Land:

"When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you and inherit it and live in it, and you say, '**Let us appoint over me a king like all the nation around me,**' [then] you will appoint over yourself a king **whom the Lord your God shall choose**. From among your brothers are you to appoint over yourself a king, you may not appoint over yourself a foreigner who is not your brother." (Deuteronomy 17:14-15)

As Moses predicted, after close to four centuries in the Land without strong central leadership, Israel demanded a King. Both God and Samuel the Prophet were not pleased with their request, seeing it as a rejection of the reign of God over Israel.

The Lord said, "Listen to the voice of the people according to all that they say to you for they have not rejected you but **they have rejected Me from reigning over them.**" (1 Samuel 8:7)

The problem was not that Israel wanted a king; for Moses had prophesied that they would have a king over them in the Land. It was the manner in which they asked:

"And they the people said [to Samuel] "... Now set up for us a king to judge us like all the nations ..." (1 Samuel, 8:6)

God never intended for us to be ruled by a king '*like all the nations*'. The King of Israel was to be a model of justice and righteousness – an **example** for the rest of the nations to follow.

When Israel asked for a king like all the other nations, it suggests that they wanted a powerful, strong leader who would make all the decisions and take the burden of responsibility from their shoulders.

Some of us want to do this as well. We grow weary of carrying the burden of making all the decisions and being responsible for everything on our own. We long for some 'knight in shining armor' to come along and sweep us off our feet, saying, "*Don't worry about anything from now on. I'm in charge and I will take care of everything.*"

Sometimes it just seems so much easier to have someone else decide for us; that way we don't have to take responsibility for the consequences if we make a mistake. We can say, "*It was their fault and not mine.*" We may be tempted to give up our freedom for the security of knowing we are taken care of and all decisions are being made for us.

But this is childish, '*fairy tale thinking*' that can get us into trouble if we don't allow God to choose the 'king' (authority) over us, and instead choose on the basis of fleshly characteristics as the people did with Saul.

He was tall, strong and handsome on the outside; but unfortunately, he did not have the strength of character to match his outward appearance.¹ King Saul was not God's chosen king, but a concession to the incessant demands of Israel to have a king – "*like all the other nations.*"

¹ See Study on King Saul and King David – Kingdom of flesh and spirit – on the website: www.voiceforisrael.net

When God tore the Kingdom away from Saul due to his disobedience, He set His chosen King on the throne – David – a man after God’s own heart - a warrior, a lover, one who ruled Israel with righteousness and justice.

David was God’s anointed one - a type of the Messiah. The word ‘Messiah’ in Hebrew is *‘mashiach’* which means ‘anointed one’. David was not a perfect man, but a God-fearing one who was not too proud to humble himself and repent when he had strayed from God and His righteous path.

This, I believe, is the essential quality to righteous authority – not perfection – but a willingness to listen to godly rebuke, to repent, and turn back to God. A leader must possess a unique combination of strength and humility – strong enough that he doesn’t let people walk all over him, but humble enough to be compassionate.



Statue of David by [Nicolas Cordier](#), in the basilica of [Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome](#)

The ideal Jewish king is unique amongst the nations in that he has real power and tremendous responsibility, but also he is not a tyrant or dictator. Instead, He is a **servant-leader**, a scholar, pious, righteous and God-fearing. He is someone who encourages the Jewish people to fulfill their mission to be a light to the nations.

Yeshua - An Example of Servant - Leadership

The authorities over us should ideally also encourage us to be all God created us to be, even if this means they must give of themselves sacrificially. It is beautiful how Yeshua modeled this kind of servant-leader and taught this to His disciples: “But Yeshua called them to him and said,

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:25-28)

Even the Hebrew language shows us that God intends for those in positions of authority to be an example to others to emulate. The Hebrew word for government is **memshalah** **ממשלה** from the root **mashal** **משל** – to govern. This word, *mashal*, also carries the connotation of ‘example’. The proverbs are called in Hebrew ‘*mishlim*’ **משלים**, which means examples or parables.

Yeshua is our example of the perfect servant-leader. When he washed his disciple's feet, he showed us a beautiful example of how we should serve others.

He said, **“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example (mashal) that you should do as I have done for you.”** (John 13:14-15)



Yeshua was acknowledged as the King of the Jews, as was written on the sign posted over His head at His crucifixion (Matthew 27:11,37). He was an Israelite, a man of humility who lived a humble life and taught the Torah. According to an Old Testament Messianic prophecy, the Messiah will rule and reign as King upon the throne of His father David with perfect justice and righteousness forever.

The prophet Isaiah prophesied about the Messiah, that “a child would be born, a Son given, and the government would be upon His shoulders...of the increase of his government and peace (shalom) there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment (mishpat) and justice (tzedakah).” (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Yeshua is this **eternal King of Israel** who will rule and reign on the throne of His father David in **righteous judgment and justice**.

The king of Israel was not to gather to himself many wives or much silver and gold, but was to write out two copies of the book of the law (Torah), to read it; to fear the Lord and keep His laws and statutes.

“He shall write for himself two copies of this Torah...It shall be with him, and he shall read from it all the days of his life, so that he will learn to fear the lord, his God, to keep all the words of the Torah...so that his heart does not become haughty over his brethren...”
(Deuteronomy 17: 16-20)

Interestingly, when a British monarch is crowned, he is presented with a Bible along with these words:

“We present you with this Book, the most valuable thing the world affords. Here is wisdom; this is the royal law; these are the living oracles of God.”



Re-Discovery of the Torah

During the reign of King Manasseh over Israel, somehow the book of the law (The Torah) became lost and forgotten. This king did not live by the Torah, nor did He lead Israel according to the principles and words it contained; rather, King Manasseh was a wicked King who led Israel into idolatry.

His son, King Josiah came to power at the tender age of eight years old, but he wanted to follow God's ways: **“He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and followed completely the ways of his father David”** (2 Kings 22:2)

While repairing the temple, Hilkiah, the high priest, made an incredible discovery – he found the Torah – the book of the Law - that the King of Israel was supposed to keep with him at all times.

“ Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD.” (2 Kings 22:8)

When they read the scroll to King Josiah, he was so grieved to realize that they had neglected to live by God's Word that he tore his robes. **“When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes.”** (2 Kings 22:11)

King Josiah knew that God's judgment was about to fall upon Israel for not obeying the words of His Torah and not living according to it; but because the king humbled himself, tore his robes and wept in repentance, God promised not to execute His judgment during Josiah's reign.



Sefer Torah at old Glockengasse Synagoge, Cologne

“He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD—to follow the LORD and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.” (2 Kings 23:2-3)

The Torah has been neglected and lost by many of God's people over the centuries. There are some followers of Yeshua (Christians) who consider the 'Torah' an outdated book strictly for the Jews who are still 'under the law'. Is this true??

Seeking for Ancient Paths

In the book of Hosea, the prophet foretold that the Northern ten tribes of Israel would be ‘lost’ among the nations, assimilated to the point of losing their Israelite identity and even ‘considering the Torah a *‘strange thing’*’.

God said, **“I have written for him (Ephraim) the great things of My Torah, but they were considered a ‘strange thing.’”** (Hosea 8:12)

However, just as Hilkiah re-discovered the Holy Torah amid the ruins of the Temple, so are many in the Body of Messiah re-discovering the Book of the Law (Torah).

The Spirit of God is leading many to ‘seek for the ancient paths’: **“Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and find rest for yourselves.”** (Jeremiah 6:16)

More than 2500 years after Hilkiah’s amazing discovery, Messianic Believers, both Jews and Gentiles, are making this same re-discovery for their own spiritual lives – finding grace and truth through the ancient words of the Torah. ²

Praying for Leadership

People in positions of leadership and authority may have more privileges but they also carry greater responsibility. Teachers of the Torah will be judged even more harshly than others. (James 3:1)

The New Testament also gives biblical guidelines for choosing leadership of a community: “Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.” (1 Timothy 3:2)

The mistakes of people in positions of power can have huge consequences, as we have seen with Pharaoh in Egypt. All the Egyptians, even innocent men, women and children suffered because of the hardness and stubbornness of Pharaoh’s heart. The same is happening today to the people of Gaza because of the evil choices and decision of their leadership (Hamas) to wage war and engage in terrorism against Israel (the children of Jacob). By doing so, they bring disaster not only upon themselves but also upon the innocent people under their authority.

We need to pray for our government leaders and those in authority over us, for wisdom, justice and righteousness, that we may lead quiet, peaceable lives. **“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”** (1 Timothy 2:1-2) (NKJV)

² For an excellent resource see Torah Rediscovered, by Ariel and D’vorah Berkowitz

The greater a person's position, the more they need to keep a higher standard. As with Moses hitting the rock — even the smallest mistakes of great Jewish leaders are severely punished.

Lev Shome'ah – A Listening Heart

Knowing this, King David's son, Solomon (Shlomo), fervently prayed to God for the wisdom to 'judge rightly' and to discern right from wrong in judging Israel as their next king. (1 Kings 3:9). In the Hebrew, what Shlomo asked from God is a **'lev shome'ah'** – literally **'a heart that hears'**.

In order to make right judgments about situations and people in our life, we also need to have a *'listening heart'* – a heart that hears from God. So often, we judge a situation prematurely or wrongly due to our limited perspective, only to find out later that something we labeled 'bad' actually turned out to be a great blessing. Or the opposite – something we judge to be a great blessing can turn out to have hidden sorrows attached.

We can rest in the understanding that God knows everything and we don't have to have it all figured out. Some things we will never understand this side of heaven.

God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts so much higher than ours. (Isaiah 55:9)

Despite all the wisdom God gave to Solomon, his downfall was that he didn't listen to the Word of the Torah that God had written about a king of Israel being forbidden to have too many wives. In the end, King Solomon's many foreign wives turned his heart away from the Lord to serve their foreign gods.

Occult Practices vs Prophetic Revelation

“When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not imitate the detestable customs of those nations.”
(Deuteronomy 18:9)

We live in a world today that is steeped in occult practices; but God calls them 'detestable' and those who do them are also 'detestable to the Lord.

“No one among you is to make his son or daughter pass through the fire, practice divination, tell fortunes, interpret omens, practice sorcery, cast spells, consult a medium or a familiar spirit, or inquire of the dead. Everyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD,” (Deuteronomy 18:10)



Storefront [psychic](#) fortune-teller in [Boston](#)

In the days of ancient Israel, all forms of occult practices also carried the death penalty. These included many spiritual practices that are commonplace today and for the most part widely accepted: sorcery, divination, fortune telling, astrology, wizardry, and listening to psychics, mediums or those who act as a channel for spirits of the dead.

God acknowledges that pagans participate in the occult but these practices are forbidden for any of God's people. Receiving guidance from one's astrological chart, reading palms or tea leaves, attending séances or even using Ouiji boards are all not permitted for people of God; and yet many today (either in ignorance or defiance of the law) read books about wizards and dabble in the occult. Although some consider these harmless, according to God's Word this is a dangerous spiritual path.



The [astrological signs](#)

“Though these nations you are about to drive out listen to fortune-tellers and diviners, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do this.” (Deuteronomy 18:14)

Israel was then warned to beware of false prophets. Only those whose words came true are to be trusted as true prophets of God. There is a difference between running to psychics and diviners and listening to real prophets of God.

Cities of Refuge

In the 19th chapter of Deuteronomy, rules were given regarding unintentional killing. Three ‘Cities of Refuge’ were to be set up for the purpose of giving refuge to anyone who accidentally killed someone. They could flee to one of these cities of refuge to find shelter and safety.

“This is the rule concerning anyone who kills a person and flees there for safety— anyone who kills a neighbor unintentionally, without malice aforethought.” (Deuteronomy 19:4)



The City of Refuge (illustration from the 1897 *Bible Pictures and What They Teach Us* by Charles Foster)

Anyone who intentionally murdered someone, however, had no right to seek refuge in these cities; and would be removed by force to be handed over to the avenger of blood to die at his hands.

The deliberate shedding of innocent blood also carried the death penalty – again for the purpose of purging the evil from Israel.

“Show no pity. You must purge from Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood, so that it may go well with you.” (Deuteronomy 19:13)

Included in the deliberate shedding of innocent blood would be modern-day terrorism; as well as the sin of abortion. The innocent blood of so many unborn children are being shed every day by women in cooperation with abortionists. May God forgive them for they know not what they do.

We may not have all murdered someone; but we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Thankfully we have a ‘city of refuge’ to where we can run and find refuge in Messiah.

“The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe.” (Proverbs 18:10)

Victorious in Battle

Israel was also prepared for entering into battle with the inhabitants of the Promised Land. The Cohanim (Priests) would encourage the Israelite troops to trust in God. We also need to encourage the young men and women of the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) not to fear Palestinian terrorists or vast Islamic armies or even the brutal ISIS hordes.

For just as in ancient times, these courageous Israeli soldiers do not enter into battle alone; but with God on their side to give them the victory against their enemies.

“When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army. He shall say: “Hear, Israel: Today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not panic or be terrified by them. For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.” (Deuteronomy 20:2-4)



IDF soldier put on tefillin and prays.

We can also rest assured that no matter what battle we may face; God is with us and will cause us to walk in triumph in Messiah Yeshua.

“But thanks be to God, who in Messiah always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.” (2 Corinthians 2:14)

Right Judgment

To summarize - the entire theme of this parashah is judgment. The question we may ask is, “How do we judge rightly especially in situations that are not specifically addressed in God’s word?”

In the beginning, in the perfect Garden of Eden, humankind was never designed to carry the burden of judgment. God was the only judge: **“But God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another.”** (Psalm 75:7)

Adam and Eve did not look down at themselves and say, “*Oh dear, we are naked; that is terrible! Shameful!*” Not until they disobeyed God and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil did they receive this burden of judgment.

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” (Genesis 3:6-7)

It is interesting that the Hebrew word for naked, **ערום** (arum), can also mean ‘cunning, twisted or devious’. It is the same word used in the Scripture to describe the serpent: **“And the serpent was more cunning **ערום** (arum) than any beast of the field that the Lord had made.”** (Genesis 3:1)

It is possible, given this Hebrew play on words, that Adam and Chava (Eve) realized, to their horror, much more than their own simple nakedness. Their eyes were also opened to see that they had been infected with a sinful nature that came from the serpent. Eve wanted to be more like God, to have supernatural wisdom, therefore she ate from the tree that gave her knowledge of good and evil, which was meant to be restricted to God’s domain. Now we continue to suffer the fruit of Eve’s choice.



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We look down at our bodies and judge them as ugly, imperfect, or shameful. We look at the actions of others and judge them as wrong, bad, or evil; but being judgmental and critical of ourselves and others was never in God’s perfect plan for us.

Who are we to judge our neighbor? **“There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbor?”** (James 4:12)

Judge Not

Yeshua said, “**Judge not...**” (Matthew 7:1) Does this mean that we are never to make any kind of judgment about anything or anyone? Of course this would not only be impossible, but foolish. Yeshua was merely warning us that instead of casting judgment on all those around us, we should first examine ourselves. He said,

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.” (Matthew 7:2-5)

Yeshua was not telling us to never make any kind of judgment; He only warned us against the hypocritical self-righteous judging of others. So often, we judge others for the very same thing we ourselves are doing. We tell our children to obey us as their parents but then they may see us not obeying the authority over us; or we tell them to have a good attitude and then they hear us whining and complaining.

There is a righteous kind of judgment that we are expected to exercise carefully. “**Do not judge according to appearance but judge with righteous judgment.**” (John 7:24)

Of course we need to make wise and discerning ‘righteous judgments’. If we are seeking for a marriage partner, we cannot say, “*I’m just not going to judge this person.*” Of course this is ridiculous; we are expected to use common sense. How do we judge a person rightly? The Bible says “**You shall know them by their fruits.**” (Matthew 7:16)

However, Yeshua warned us that just as we give out judgment towards others, so will we be judged ourselves. If we judge others harshly, expecting absolute perfection, being impossible to please, this will return back upon our own heads. However if we judge righteously but balanced with mercy, then we will also receive mercy and grace in our time of need.

So often we seem to want mercy (a little slack...) for ourselves when we are at fault or mess up, but call forth God’s wrathful judgment against those who have wronged us. ☺ Yeshua taught us to be merciful: “**Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy.**” (Matthew 5:7)

When confronted with the woman caught in the act of adultery, Yeshua showed her mercy. He did not condemn her, but warned her not to continue in her sin. It seems to me with this issue of judgment, that what we need is balance. After my car accident here in Israel, my balance seemed to go askew. When I went to my exercise class, the other ladies stood on one leg with ease but I toppled right over. I need to improve my balance.



Maybe this is a message for some of us – we may be leaning too much to one side or the other and need to come back into more balance between justice and mercy. Some of us may be too hard-line, too judgmental, too demanding of others that they live up to some kind of impossible standard we can't even meet. Or we may lean towards being so 'greasy gracie' that we let anyone walk all over us, and we tend to get into all kinds of foolish situations because of our failure to exercise right judgment.

According to Rabbinic Jewish thought, the human body itself is likened to a city with seven gates that open to the outer world and can be closed off as well. These include our two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and one mouth. Each of these seven 'portals' is to have an internal 'judge' which discerns what is permissible to allow inside and what to keep out.

Through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit (whose judgment is right, just, and true) we may exercise discernment between good and evil. We will know when to be open to outside influences and when to be closed, in order that we may be holy vessels for the Lord.

In the end, God is the only perfectly righteous and just God over all the earth. Only He can achieve that perfect balance between justice and mercy. God is perfectly just and perfectly merciful, but we know that in Yeshua, “ **mercy triumphs over judgment.**” (James 2:13)

None of us are perfect; all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and deserve judgment, even death. Therefore we who believe in Yeshua Hamashiach (The Messiah) can be eternally thankful that we have escaped God's wrath and judgment through Yeshua's sacrificial death on the cross. Halleluyah!

“Surely there is a reward for the righteous; Surely He is God who judges (*SHOFTIM) in the earth.” (Psalm 58:11)

About the Author:

Hannah Neshar 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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