

Mishpatim **Judgments True Spirituality Means Getting Practical**
Torah: Exodus 21:1-24:18
Haftarah: Jeremiah 34:8-22;33:25,26
Brit Chadashah: Matthew 17:1-11

Elements from this Torah portion are reflected in both the prophetic and the New Testament portions. I will leave them to your personal study. Regular Bible Study is both our responsibility and our privilege. So many problems and so much heart ache would be avoided if believers made the Scriptures the rock they build their lives on. How is your rock doing?

This portion is an extended application of the Ten Stipulations to multiple life situations facing Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. When you apply a Law to various situations, it is called jurisprudence and this process of applying the Word in every situation of our lives is a vital feature of our spirituality in our fast paced, rapidly changing world. This portion does not cover every scenario which Israel was going to face, but it gives examples of how to apply the Ten Stipulations, so that the application of G-d's Word becomes a life strategy for the Children of Israel. It should also be a life strategy for us, so that we do not wander away from the Word or allow traces of paganism and carnal behaviour to defile our lives.

The first section of our portion deals with the just treatment of Hebrew bond servants. They were only to be in bondage for six years and in the seventh year they were to go free. If they did not want to go free, they were given a kind of earring and became permanent members of the household. Most of the time, servitude came about as a result of the inability to pay debts, because, even in the Promised Land, sometimes, some of the people, would get into financial trouble and need help. We can still serve YHVH when we are having problems.

A strange form of servitude was the sale of a daughter as a kind of marriage contract without a dowry. If she did not please the person who bought her contract, she could not be sold to strangers and was set free. If there was more than one wife in the household, the rights of the new wife and the other wives could not be diminished. Polygamy does not reflect the perfect will of G-d, but it is not strictly forbidden and was carefully regulated. If a polygamous person came to faith in New testament times, they were excluded from leadership, so that the practice would disappear in subsequent generations.

The discussion moves on to murder and a distinction is made between premeditated murder and accidental homicide. If the death was on purpose and premeditated, the murder suffered capital punishment, though how this punishment was carried out is not stipulated. The punishment for accidental homicide had to be decided before the judges who were to live in special communities throughout the land.

This discussion is followed by three more offences where capital punishment was applied. The Jews were told never to beat their parents. They were also forbidden to kidnap someone and sell them into slavery. Those who tried to bring down a curse on their parents were also to be put to death.

Next comes disputes where physical violence occurs. When the violence is non lethal, the guilty person had to pay a fine, probably to the injured person. If the combatants injure a pregnant woman and cause her to go into labour, without causing injury to the mother or the baby, they had to pay a fine to the husband. Any injury inflicted on the baby was also be inflicted on those who caused the harm. If the baby died, it was considered a capital offence and they payed for it with their lives. Babies are people from the moment of conception.

In our society, it may be legal to murder babies in their mother's womb, but it is never right and we should always speak out against this horrible crime. In Israel, YHWH wants His people to understand that the punishment should fit the crime. In the case of a bond servant, the loss of an eye or of a tooth meant that the injured person was given their freedom. This section aims to limit injury and to prevent violence from escalating into an endless blood feud (vendetta). Settling disputes is a necessary function of practical spirituality.

When it came to injuring livestock, the penalty was payed to repair the damage and not to increase it. Restitution for crop damage is also discussed along with the theft of something left with another person for safety. If the case involved fraud, then the guilty one had to pay double what was stolen.

Israel was a polygamous society and while rape was a capital offence, if a man seduces a virgin woman he has to marry her. If her father refuses the match, the offender had to pay the equivalent of a dowry for a virgin wife.

This section is followed by the mention of three more capital offences. The practice of magic was a capital offence, as was having sex with an animal (bestiality). Any acts of idolatry were also punishable by death.

The next section deals with how we should treat people and begins with a reminder to be kind to those who are less fortunate. No curse is to be made towards G-d or towards the prince of the people.

Annual tithes of crops and livestock were required of the people. A lamb or a calf was to be left with its mother for eight days, so as not to cause injury to the animals' udder. The people were not to scavenge dead meat. By application, any meat they ate, they had to kill it for themselves or have it killed by a qualified person. Any straying livestock had to be returned to their owner.

Moving on, malicious gossip is forbidden, along with giving in to crowd pressure to commit wrong. The rights of the poor were not to be violated and any judgment should be made without favouring them. It was also forbidden to use a false judgment in a capital case. The stranger who lived among them was not to be oppressed and bribes are again forbidden.

The beginning of the next chapter deals with the three annual harvest pilgrimage festivals. One reason for the people bringing their tithes to the tabernacle three times of year, may have been to make sure the priests did not run out of food. They did not work the ground, so a portion of the tithes was also their sole source of revenue.

As they move into the Canaan, G-d would conquer the land for them and they are forbidden to adopt any pagan practices.

If they walked with the L-rd they would not have trouble with either miscarriages or sterility. Also, the land would be conquered gradually so that parts of it did not turn back into wilderness. As they grew in strength, they would conquer the parts of the land they had not yet occupied. The eventual boundaries of the land are given and they approximate both the boundaries of the Garden of Eden and the limits of Solomon's empire.

Moses wrote down these applications and when they were read to the people, everyone agreed to abide by them. Once this agreement was given, Moses, Aaron and the elders of the people climbed up the mountain and had a ritual meal with G-d. They only saw His feet, but they were not struck dead by this limited presence of YHVH.

The portion ends as twelve stones are erected and sacrifices are made by the young men. Half of the blood was to be sprinkled on the stones and the other half over the people. That would have taken a lot of blood and a lot of people doing the sprinkling. The leaders go back down the mountain and are in charge of the people during Moses' absence.

Moses stays on the mountain for six days and on the seventh day, a cloud descends and shines with light, but no thunder or trumpet sounds this time. It is mentioned that the Ten Stipulations were engraved by the finger of G-d, but we are not told whether the cloud remained during the long period of time Moses was on the mountain. When it says that he spent forty days and nights, this was a way of saying he was gone for a long time. Moses passed on to the people all that he received from YHVH and in the next section, he is told how to build the ark and how to clothe the priests.

Sermon: **There is Neither Male nor Female, We are all one in Yeshua**

The last portion of the fifth chapter of Ephesians deals with our need to be submitted to one another. It also deals with the need of wives to be submitted to their husbands and the husbands need to cherish their spouses as Messiah cherishes the church.

Now, the submission of a wife to her husband is a controversial topic, especially in our politically correct, feminist world. This submission is falsely understood as some kind of gender slavery which places men as superior to women and forces them to occupy a permanently inferior position. In Paul's day, Greek and Roman women did not owe any special allegiance to their husbands and in most cases, they were running the show.

If we go right back to the beginning, we see that the Bible says that both men and women were created in the image of G-d and that male domination over women was not the intention of G-d. Because of the fall, a woman's pain in child birth was increased and her desire for her husband would exceed his desire for her. Mankind would also have to earn their living by the sweat of their brow, instead of having their food provided for them in the Garden they were soon to be excluded from.

Besides Ephesians five, there are at least three more places where the role of wives in the community is discussed. In both the Old and New Testament, women occupied positions of leadership within the community. They were called to the same level of faith and obedience as their husbands, even though it was only the male priests who performed the sacrificial rituals. This could have been because menstrual blood was considered impure, but most of the effort in raising the children was carried out by these special people. Moms are awesome!

In most places, where the role of women is being discussed, it is referring to the role of a wife towards her husband. In I Corinthians we encounter the requirement for married ladies to wear a head covering as a sign of submission to their husbands. At this time, if a woman did not want any more children, she had her husband acquire a concubine, who would occupy a lower position in the household than the actual wife and was not allowed to wear the veil.

It may seem strange to us, but when a family came to faith, the concubine was not sent away and remained part of the family. When the family came to service, the married woman would wear a head covering as a sign of her marriage. The concubine was denied this privilege and her hair remained uncovered. The wife was usually older than the concubine and may have been intimidated by the younger woman's hair. No head covering could ever compare with the beauty of a woman's hair, so the married woman would slide off her head covering to show that she and her hair were just as beautiful as the concubine and her hair.

In ancient Greece, a married woman who removed her veil was seeking for a sexual partner other than her husband. It brought shame to her husband. This is a tricky portion of the Bible to grasp and historical context helps us to understand what Paul was saying. He is talking about married woman coming to service without a veil and he is talking about men who would sometimes grow their hair long and wear a veil. An unveiled married woman, brought shame to her husband. A veiled, long haired man was pretending to be a woman. In our world they are called transvestites and this perverted practice was not uncommon in the first century.

Paul says that an unveiled married woman who prayed or prophesied dishonoured her husband. Immoral married women had their heads shaved, so they would be obliged to wear a head covering. Apparently polygamous couples were only excluded from leadership in the community and not from ministry, such as praying and prophesying in the service.

This passage has been used by some to say that all women should wear a veil or a hat when they come to church or synagogue. It has also been used to say that long hair on a man was unnatural and that men should not cover their heads during a service. If we understand the original context, it removes quite a bit of the confusion.

When it says that married women should wear a veil because of the angels, it is saying she should not try and overthrow the authority of her husband, as some angels rebelled against the authority of G-d. Men are told to cherish their wives as our Messiah cherishes His community, so the submission of a woman was to the leadership role of the husband in the marriage and not to a complete submission to his every whim or desire.

In today's language, we could say that the husband was the captain of the team, and as such, had the final say when it came to decisions that affected the couple. But he is never allowed to violate the will of his wife and get her to do things against her will. He was to cherish his wife and not become an abusive tyrant who told his wife what to do in every situation.

The passage can become quite confusing if you do not understand the historical customs. A good example of this potential confusion is when it first says that a woman should cover her head with a veil. Later in the same passage, it says that a woman's hair was given to her as a veil. If her hair is a natural veil, does that mean she need not wear a veil? You must be careful not to switch conversations. Men should not have long hair in order to disguise themselves as women. Long hair, veiled or unveiled, brings glory to a woman, not to a man.

The Bible also says that a woman should not wear men's clothing and men should certainly not wear women's clothing. But since both men and women wore robes at this time, we need to understand that there was a difference between the robes which each gender wore. It is not saying that women should not wear slacks or that men should not wear robes or kilts. When verses are taken out of context and are removed from their historical context, a lot of unfortunate misunderstandings can occur.

Right after talking about how women should wear veils in service and how men should not have long hair or wear veils, Paul goes on to say that if anyone wants to contest this ruling, then we do not have this habit, either here or in any of the other congregations. So Paul is not saying and unsaying things in the same breath. He is saying, rather, that if someone wants to challenge this ruling, this is the only ruling because the same principles apply throughout the body of Messiah.

It gets worse. In chapter 14 of I Corinthians, it says that a woman should be silent during the service, so many groups deny women the right to speak during the services. If they are not to speak, how are they to prophesy? How are they to pray? What is being said is that when a wife did not understand something, and wanted to ask her husband, she should ask at home and not disrupt the service by shouting out her question to her husband.

Paul says that the Word has not just come to the Corinthians and if anyone claimed to be a prophet, he should acknowledge that this is a commandment from G-d. He then says, if they want to ignore what he has just said, let them ignore it. Is he actually giving people permission to ignore a commandment which comes from G-d? Earlier, he appeared to be saying that if you disagree, then what he has just said, is something which the churches do not have.

So, he appears to be teaching people that if they disagree with something, it is something which the churches do not practice or enforce. Also he appears to be saying that people can ignore the commandments of G-d when they want to. This is not what he is saying.

In these two instances (I Corin. 11:16 and 14:38) he is saying if you ignore what is being taught, you do not speak for G-d and that your claim to do so is false. There are other examples where the Scriptures appear to have funny ways of saying things, but it is only when they are taken in context, that they make sense. In these instances, Paul is talking about the behaviour of husbands and wives and wishes the people to understand that certain behaviours were shameful. He outlines two of them. A married lady should wear a veil, because that was the custom, so they could be distinguished from unmarried ladies. He also says that men should not cross dress as if they were women.

In both instances, those who heard him would have been scandalized that he would speak of these two problems in such a way and we need to be careful not to let the way he says things be taken out of context. When this occurs, they no longer make any sense.

Let me give you another example. In I Timothy (2:9-15), Paul is apparently saying that ladies should not wear expensive clothing or jewellery. Taking this literally may be one of the reasons that Hutterite women and Mennonite women dress so plainly and always wear scarves on their heads in public. They sometimes look at me funny, when they notice my kipah. Their men can wear hats, but no other kind of head covering. The Scriptures do not say that women should always wear long dresses. Long dresses can be immodest.

The passage in Timothy goes on to say that women should be silent and listen to instruction in silence, and with a complete submission. Some churches will not let ladies teach men or even boys. No wonder this misunderstanding offends so many modern feminist type ladies.

In context, a wife must not teach or take authority over her husband. If he doesn't want to learn or listen, she should not do it for him or explain things to him that should be dealt with after service or at home. If women were not allowed to speak, how is it that there are so many lady missionaries and ladies in positions of leadership, both in Judaism and in Christianity? In Greek, the words for husband and wife are just man and woman.

Married woman should not bring shame to their husbands and they should also not do for their husbands what their husbands refuse to do for themselves. It is a partnership of shared responsibility and not a gender based dictatorship of men over women. When the Bible says women are the weaker or the frail vessel, it means they have a depth of emotion that most men do not have or understand. Let me give you an example in the form of a joke. Women often think more about what men are thinking, than men actually think.

Paul ends his discussion in Timothy by saying women were seduced first and are guilty of the original transgression. He also says that they can only be saved by becoming a mother, if they persevere in modesty, faith, love and holiness. Before you get totally confused, what Paul is actually saying that women can be set free from the stigma of bringing death into the world, by becoming mothers and bringing life into the world.

The Scriptures are not always easy to understand and they must always be studied in context and sometimes in their historical context. The Scriptures were not written in modern English and sometimes what they are saying can be quite confusing in English. When I see something which I do not understand when I first read it, I understand that there is an historical context which I am not always understanding and I have to look for it.

Men no longer swear oaths to each other by grabbing the testicles and we no longer refer to sexual activity as uncovering a woman's nakedness. In the same sense, a discussion of the role of husband and wife needs to be understood in its historical context. All women are not required to wear long hair and men are not forbidden from having long hair. All women are not required to wear a veil in service and it is not forbidden for them to speak during the service. Also, it is not only ladies who become mothers who are saved. Women are also not forbidden from wearing jewellery or fancy clothes. Both Sarah and Rebekah wore jewellery, but not solidly from their shoulders to their wrists. Modesty is the key.

Married women should not attempt to disguise themselves as unmarried women and should not disrupt services, either by asking their husbands questions or by teaching them when they either do not understand or do not want to learn. The stigma of bringing death into the world is removed from womankind when they become mothers and bring life into the world.

If people do not agree with instructions and with commandments, they will not be changed or set aside. What is taught stands, even if Paul has a funny way of saying so. Never let the way the Scriptures say something confuse you or distract you from what it is actually saying. Flat earthers would do well to learn this important lesson. We need to get at what the Scriptures mean, when they say things that make no sense to us at first. The Bible says what it means and means what it says, even if it takes us a while to understand what is meant.