

שׁוֹפְטִים

SHOFTIM/JUDGES

Devarim/Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9

This week our Parasha gives us the necessary arrangement of **leadership** and **government** through which the **Torah-following nation of Israel** can successfully **thrive** in the Promised Land. It covers the **four** main types of human authorities: **judges, kings, priests, and prophets**. First mentioned are **judges** and **officers**:

*Devarim 16:18 " You shall appoint **judges** (shoftim-שׁוֹפְטִים) and **officers** in all your gates, which יהוה (Yahwey) your Elohim gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall **judge** (shaphat-שָׁפַט) the people with **righteous** (tzadek-צֶדֶק) **judgment** (mishpat-מִשְׁפָּט).*

Both the **judges** and the **officers** are to be **appointed by the people**. It is the **judges** who pass **judgment** and the **officers** that are responsible for **seeing that the verdict is accepted and implemented according to the judge's instructions**. The **judgments** that the **judges make** are **subject to the Torah**. The **officers** are like **police** whose duty is to carry out **judgments**.

Individually, we sometimes find **ourselves playing both judge and officer** in our own **relationships**. If someone does or says something that we feel is against us, we are prone to **instantly make a judgment** (mishpat-מִשְׁפָּט) against them and take action. Instead, we should slow down and consider "**righteous judgment**" (Devarim 16:18 – tzadek mishpat - צֶדֶק מִשְׁפָּט). **Yeshua** had something to say about this when speaking to an unfriendly crowd:

*John 7:24 "Do not **judge** (shaphat-שָׁפַט) according to **appearance**, but **judge** (shaphat-שָׁפַט) with **righteous judgment** (tzadek mishpat - צֶדֶק מִשְׁפָּט)."*

Yeshua also pointed out the **significance** of **righteous judgment**, as the way we **judge** others will turn out to be the way that we ourselves are **judged**:

*Matthew 7:2 "For with what **judgment** (mishpat-מִשְׁפָּט) you **judge** (shaphat-שָׁפַט), you will be **judged** (shaphat-שָׁפַט); and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.*

Why is the way we **judge** (shaphat-שָׁפַט) so important? Because **righteous judgment** (tzadek mishpat - צֶדֶק מִשְׁפָּט) is according to the **Law (Torah)** and we know that **hasatan** is the **lawless (Torahless)** one! When he convinces us that the **Torah is done away with**, then we are prone to making "**unrighteous**" **judgments**.

*2 Thessalonians 2:8 And then the **lawless one** will be revealed, whom Adonai will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.*

*1 John 3:4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and **sin is lawlessness**.*

Today when we think of **unrighteous judgment**, we think of our **secular court system**. How often have the **guilty, rich and famous gone free**? Still we must face the fact that **righteous judgment** is

being perverted in our churches today when **pastors teach that we are no longer under the Law**, the Torah that specifically teaches **justice**. The **righteous judgments** that the Torah teaches is a **standard** that is **not man-made**. It is **יהוה's standard!**

Psalm 89:14 Righteousness (tzadek-צַדִּיק) and judgment (mishpat-מִשְׁפָּט) are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face.

Devarim 17:11 "According to the terms of the Torah in which they instruct you, according to the judgment (מִשְׁפָּט) which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you.

Where **godliness** exists there will be **righteous judgment**. The **two** go hand in hand and are **inseparable**. I find most English translations of **Devarim 16:20** rather interesting. This happens to be the NAS version:

Devarim 16:20 "Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which יהוה your Elohim is giving you.

“**Justice, and only justice**” is a repetition of the same Hebrew word - צַדִּיק צַדִּיק. You may have noticed that it is also the word used for “**righteous**” in **Devarim 16:18**. In fact **tzadek (צַדִּיק)** more commonly is translated “**righteous**”, not “**justice**”. Young’s Literal Translation translates more accurately:

Devarim 16:20 Righteousness -- righteousness thou dost pursue, so that thou livest, and hast possessed the land which יהוה thy Elohim is giving to thee.

Why is this important? **Righteousness (tzadek-צַדִּיק)** is the very **foundation** for **יהוה's justice system**. As this verse indicates, **righteousness** is necessary for **LIFE** and for going in to possess the **LAND** which **יהוה** is giving to us. Again **Yeshua** had something to say about this:

Matthew 6:33 "But seek first the kingdom of Yah and His righteousness (tzadek-צַדִּיק), and all these things shall be added to you.

The first place that we find the word for **righteousness, tzadek (צַדִּיק)**, is in Bereshith (Genesis):

Bereshith 14:18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of El Most High.

Melchizedek – King of Righteousness (צַדִּיק -tzadek)

We know that **Yeshua** is the **King of Righteousness** and it is **HIS kingdom** that we should be **pursuing** (Matthew 6:33). In the very basic sense of the word, “**righteousness**” means “**not deviating from the standard**”...which of course we know to be **Torah**. Following are a few more verses to help us in defining **righteousness (צַדִּיק -tzadek)**:

Psalm 119:142 Your righteousness (צדק -tzadek) is an **everlasting righteousness**, And Your Torah is truth.

The next verses speak to what the world will be like when יהוה's **righteous judgments** prevail on the earth:

Isaiah 26:9 With my soul I have desired You in the night, Yes, by my spirit within me I will seek You early; For **when Your judgments** (mishpat-משפטים) are in the earth, the **inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness** (צדק -tzadek).¹⁰ Let grace be shown to the wicked, yet he will not learn **righteousness** (צדק -tzadek); In the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of יהוה.

Everlasting righteousness (צדק -tzadek) is spoken of at the end of **Daniel's 70 weeks**:

Daniel 9:24 " Seventy weeks 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** (צדק -tzadek), To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy.

We have been offered **righteousness** as a **result of our relationship with Yeshua, the King of Righteousness**:

Romans 10:4 For **Messiah is the goal of the Torah for righteousness** (צדק -tzadek) to everyone who believes.

Those **righteous** ones who continue to **seek after righteousness** may find themselves in a **favored position** in the end times:

Zephaniah 2:3 Seek יהוה, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His judgment (mishpat-משפטים). **Seek righteousness** (צדק -tzadek), seek humility. **It may be that you will be hidden in the day of יהוה's anger.**

We have a picture of **final judgment** being accomplished by **righteousness** (צדק -tzadek):

Revelation 19:11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in **righteousness** (צדק -tzadek) He **judges** (shaphat-שפט) and makes war.

Next to be addressed is the position of the **King**:

Devarim 17:14 " When you come to the land which יהוה your Elohim is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,'¹⁵ "you shall surely set a king over you whom יהוה your Elohim chooses; one **from among your brethren** you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over

you, who is not your brother.¹⁶ "But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for יהוה has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again.'¹⁷ "Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.¹⁸ " Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this Torah in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites.¹⁹ "And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear יהוה his Elohim and be careful to observe all the words of this Torah and these statutes,²⁰ "that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

These words are very unique in that they foresee the day when **the Israelites would ask for a king** in order to **"be like all the nations that are around"**. Indeed, they did this in the days of **Samuel**:

1 Samuel 8:5 and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."

Ouch! Do you see what the Israelites are asking for? They want to be **judged** (shaphat-שָׁפַט) just **like all the other nations**. The whole **purpose of Yah choosing Israel** was for them to be a **model nation** that was **holy**, and **DIFFERENT than the other nations**. Their **distinctiveness** was intended to make them to be a **light to the gentiles** and an example to the world of the **benefits of living a Torah-based life**. We read in Devarim, however, that יהוה **allows for them to have a king** as long as this leader **guards against the pride of his position**.

These are the **parameters** that יהוה established for choosing a **king**:

- He must be an **Israelite** whom יהוה **chooses**. The **prophet Samuel** anointed the first two kings in Israel.
- He must **not own too many horses** which is an association with **trusting in the world's ways**:
 - *Isaiah 31:1 Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, And rely on horses, Who trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, But who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek יהוה!...³ Now the Egyptians are men, and not Elohim; And their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When יהוה stretches out His hand, both he who helps will fall, And he who is helped will fall down; They all will perish together.*
 - **King Solomon** fell short of this commandment:
 - *1 Kings 10:28 Also Solomon had horses imported from Egypt....*
 - *2 Chronicles 9:25 Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king at Jerusalem.*
 - **King Josiah** did away with **horses** that were stationed **right by the temple!**

- **2 Kings 23:11** *Then he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of יהוה, by the chamber of Nathan-Melech, the officer who was in the court; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire.*
- He must **not multiply wives lest his heart turn away:**
 - **1 Kings 11:3** *And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart.*
- He must **not multiply silver and gold for himself:**
 - **1 Kings 10:14** *The weight of gold that came to Solomon yearly was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold....¹⁶ And King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold; six hundred shekels of gold went into each shield.¹⁷ He also made three hundred shields of hammered gold; three minas of gold went into each shield. The king put them in the House of the Forest of Lebanon.¹⁸ Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold.¹⁹ The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne was round at the back; there were armrests on either side of the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the armrests.²⁰ Twelve lions stood there, one on each side of the six steps; nothing like this had been made for any other kingdom.²¹ All King Solomon's drinking vessels were gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Not one was silver, for this was accounted as nothing in the days of Solomon...²³ So King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom.*
- He was to **write his own copy of the Torah**
 - The king was to become a **lover of the Torah**
 - He was to **carry it with him at all times**
 - **Easy reference** in the course of his duties
 - Some commentators say an aide followed him carrying a complete, full-size Torah
 - Tradition says the king carried a **miniature size Torah** or a copy of only Devarim and the 10 Words on his arm or in something like a back-pack
 - **Writing** it would **engrain the words in his memory**
 - **Writing** it caused him to be more **personally invested**
 - **King David meditated** on the Torah
 - **Psalm 119:148** *My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your Word.*
 - In doing so the **king** would learn to **fear**
 - **Proverbs 9:10** *"The fear of יהוה is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*
 - It would **keep his heart from being lifted up**
 - **Yeshua** spoke of **humble leadership**
 - **Mark 10:42** *But Yeshua called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them."⁴³ "Yet it shall not be so among you; but **whoever desires to become great***

among you shall be your servant. ⁴⁴ "And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.

The **ideal society**, as defined by **Torah** is one in which there is no **King** other than **יהוה** himself. Obviously the **Israelites** were **not able to achieve this**. After Joshua, the book of **Judges** states again and again:

In those days Israel had no king. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.....

At a certain point, the **Israelites** discovered that a **confederation of tribes led by "judges" was not strong enough** to defend against their enemies and the competition from within. At that time, **יהוה** told **Samuel** that the people were **within their rights to ask for a king** as long as they **understood what went along with that request**. Read how that came about, beginning with the **sons of Samuel** who had been appointed as **"judges"** (shoftim-שׁוֹפְטִים) for **Israel**:

1 Samuel 8:1 Now it came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges (shoftim-שׁוֹפְטִים) over Israel... ³ But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice. ⁴ Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, ⁵ and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge (shaphat-שָׁפַט) us like all the nations." ⁶ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." So Samuel prayed to יהוה. ⁷ And יהוה said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. ⁸ "According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day -- with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods -- so they are doing to you also. ⁹ "Now therefore, heed (shema) their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them." ¹⁰ So Samuel told all the words of יהוה to the people who asked him for a king. ¹¹ And he said, "This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots. ¹² "He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. ¹³ "He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. ¹⁴ "And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. ¹⁵ "He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants. ¹⁶ "And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put them to his work. ¹⁷ "He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. ¹⁸ "And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and יהוה will not hear you in that day." ¹⁹ Nevertheless the people refused to listen (shema) to the voice of Samuel; and they said, "No, but we will have a king over us, ²⁰ that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge (shaphat-שָׁפַט) us and go out before us and fight our battles." ²¹ And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and

he repeated them in the hearing of יהוה. ²² So יהוה said to Samuel, "**Heed (shema) their voice, and make them a king.**" ...

Since then, the **Israelites** have experienced **many forms of government**. Since 1948 they have a form of **representative democracy**. The **biblical ideal**, however, is **constitutional (Torah) monarchy with the Messiah as the King**. We know that when **Yeshua** returns, He will return as our **righteous King with perfect justice** (tzadek mishpat - צְדָקַת מִשְׁפָּט)! Then we will be able to **achieve the ideal!**

Revelation 17:14 "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful."

Revelation 19:16 And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: **KING OF KINGS AND ADONAI OF ADONIM**.

Let's switch directions and consider the role of the **prophet**:

Devarim 18:15 " יהוה your Elohim will raise up for you **a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear,** ¹⁶ "according to all you desired of יהוה your Elohim in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of יהוה my Elohim, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.'¹⁷ "And יהוה said to me: 'What they have spoken is good. ¹⁸ **'I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.** ¹⁹ 'And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him. ²⁰ **'But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'** ²¹ "And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which יהוה has not spoken?' -- ²² "when a prophet speaks in the name of יהוה, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which יהוה has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

Moses would not be the **last** of the **prophets**. He would have **successors**, but in particular there would be "**a prophet like me**" that would come "**from their midst**". This prophet is the one who the **priests and the Levites were looking for** when they questioned **John the Immerser**:

John 1:19 Now this is **the testimony of John**, when the Jews sent **priests and Levites** from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹ And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

Now we return to the obvious question that was asked last week...**how does one tell the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet?** A prophet had the **ability to give voice to the Word of יהוה**. Because a prophet had **privileged access to the Word** which others could not see or hear, the possibility existed for **false prophets**. **Charismatic prophets** capable of performing **signs and wonders** could be **particularly deceiving**.

Torah tells us in **Devarim 18:22** that the **test is simple**....if what the **prophet predicts happens**, then he is a **true prophet**. **If not**, then he is a **false prophet**. Sounds simple, right? Obviously this is one of those times when we cannot put the Word of יהוה in a **box**. To see the complexity of this, we will go to the book of **Jonah**.

Jonah was a **prophet** commanded by יהוה **to warn the people of Nineveh that their wickedness was about to bring disaster on them**. A fearful Jonah attempted to flee, but failed. Most of us are familiar with the story of the sea, the storm, and the whale that swallowed Jonah. **A disobedient Jonah comes to his senses** and goes to Nineveh to **utter the words** יהוה had commanded him to speak:

***Jonah 3:4** And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"*

As the story goes, the **people of Nineveh repent, and the city is spared**. Jonah, however, is very distressed by this:

***Jonah 4:1** But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.² So he prayed to יהוה, and said, "Ah, יהוה, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful Elohim, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.³ "Therefore now, O יהוה, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"*

יהוה is **not happy** with Jonah's attitude:

***Jonah 4:4** Then יהוה said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"*

The problem... **Jonah prophesied that the city would be destroyed in 40 days**. It did not happen. The question... **does that make him a false prophet according to our definition in Devarim?** We find our answer in the book of **Jeremiah**. Jeremiah had been **prophesying disaster** for the nation of Israel. The people had **drifted from Torah** and were being warned of **destruction and exile**. It was a difficult message and the **people did NOT want to hear it**. A false prophet arose, **Hananiah**, with the **opposite message of Jeremiah**...in other words, **Hananiah said what the people wanted to hear**:

***Jeremiah 28:1** And it happened in the same year, at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year and in the fifth month, that **Hananiah** the son of Azur the prophet, who was from Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of יהוה in the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying,² "Thus speaks יהוה of hosts, the Elohim of Israel, saying: 'I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon.³ 'Within two full years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of יהוה's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon.⁴ 'And I will bring back to this place*

Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah who went to Babylon,' says יהוה, 'for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.' "

Hananiah told the people that **within two years, the crisis would be over**. Jeremiah knew that this was not so, and he also addressed the people...starting with a bit of **sarcasm**:

Jeremiah 28:5 Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and in the presence of all the people who stood in the house of יהוה,⁶ and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! יהוה do so; יהוה perform your words which you have prophesied, to bring back the vessels of יהוה's house and all who were carried away captive, from Babylon to this place."⁷ "Nevertheless hear (shema) now this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people:⁸ "The prophets who have been before me and before you of old prophesied against many countries and great kingdoms -- of war and disaster and pestilence."⁹ "As for the prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes to pass, the prophet will be known as one whom יהוה has truly sent."

Jeremiah teaches us a **distinction between good news and bad**. According to verse 9, a **prophecy of peace cannot be refuted**. A prophet who **prophesizes peace** and it **does not come true** can definitely be seen as a **false prophet** because **יהוה does not retract from a promise He has made in regards to peace or His return**.

On the flip side, a **negative prophecy that does not come true does not necessarily point to a false prophet**. Look back at Jonah 4:2...the Almighty is “**slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, One who relents from doing harm**”. Sometimes those who hear a prophet’s words, **repent** and are **forgiven** as in the example of the men of **Nineveh**. Or as in the case of **Hezekiah**, it could be that the **judgment is postponed**.

Therefore we see that a **true prophet** does not necessarily **foretell...rather he warns**. The **motive** of a **prophet** is **not to predict future catastrophe, but rather to avert it**. If the **prophecy comes true**, he has actually **failed in his warning**.

Israel’s prophets generally sounded **pessimistic**. But they were realists and were giving the **warnings of יהוה** as set forth in the **Torah** for those who are **disobedient**. They warned of the **dangers** that lie ahead for those **who persist in going their own way**. On the other hand, they were without exception, agents of **hope**. They could see that **restoration** was always the **ultimate outcome**.

The **Apostle Paul** was also a **prophet** who gave plenty of **warnings to the unrighteous** from the **Word of יהוה** concerning the **kingdom**:

1 Corinthians 6:9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of Yah? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of Yah.

Every **prophecy** must **align with Scripture** or it is **automatically disqualified (along with the prophet)**. The **prophets** of Scripture were generally **reluctant to give their messages**. They were usually **not well-liked** and often lived **isolated lives**. They were sometimes **beaten, jailed, or martyred**. The **message of the Almighty** is not one that **unrighteous people** want to **hear**. **True prophets** generally **care deeply for the people and desire for them to repent**. In a world where many declare themselves to be prophets, we need to be **discerning**. And know the **Word!** **Yeshua**, the **true Prophet** has left us a **prophecy of peace**, and **we can count on it!**

*John 14:26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."²⁷
"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

Shabbat Shalom!

Ardelle