

# Mishpatim

## משפטים

### “Rulings”

Exodus 21:1 – 24:18

## Torah Together



This *Torah* portion seems to contain a hodge-podge of miscellaneous commands. However, by examining them in some detail, one can gain significant insight into God’s character and into the attitude we should have in our life in order to please Him.

### 1. Hebrew Servants - 21:1-11

a) Although the concept of slavery seems cruel to us, God set strict guidelines on how slaves were to be treated. What was the maximum period of servitude (unless overridden by the slave)? How did slavery effect the family of the slave?

***The maximum period of servitude was six years. If a man came with a wife, she left with him. If his owner buys a wife for him, the wife (and children) remain the owner’s property (for six years maximum). The family could be reunited after the wife’s six-year period was over.***

b) What were some of the reasons a person might become a slave? Why might someone want to remain a slave for life? (Such a person is called a “bondservant.”) Can you compare this to anything today?

***Two main reasons were 1) to escape extreme poverty, and 2) a thief who is sold by the court to earn the money for restitution. If a slave had a good life, a good “job”, and his family was also in the household, he may choose to remain in servitude. Today, this is like working to pay off personal debt.***

c) Because of the status of women in this culture, young female slaves were to be treated differently. What was the effect of this treatment? Based on these laws, what attitude do you think God expected the Hebrews to have toward their slaves?

***The law preserves the dignity of the woman by assuring that she is not released without any way to support herself. If a woman is purchased for a man’s son (a common practice) she is treated as a daughter-in-law. If she was purchased as a wife for the owner, her status is to be maintained. God made sure that women were cared for and He expected slaves to be treated with fairness, dignity, and compassion.***

“These are the laws you are to set before them.”

Exodus 21:1

### Hebrew Slaves

In ancient times, a person typically did not have a job in which an employer paid a specific wage. Instead, long- term employment usually took the form of servitude in which a person would serve his “master” for a period of time in return for food, lodging, and perhaps some additional belongings.

### What is a Bondservant?

If after some period of time, a servant decided that serving his master was good and that he would like to continue in the “job” indefinitely, he would choose to become a **bondservant**. In essence, he chose to serve his master for life for the reason of love. This is the term used by many New Testament writers to describe their relationship to *Yeshua*.

### Women’s Rights

By today’s standards, women were treated poorly in most ancient cultures. However, God’s laws made sure that women were treated with dignity and respect.

### **Murder or Manslaughter**

Even today, the legal difference between murder and manslaughter is **intent**. If a person planned to take the life of another with “malice aforethought,” then that is considered murder for which the Biblical punishment is death. (See **Genesis 9:6**)

### **An Eye for an Eye, a Tooth for a Tooth**

Notice that the focus for punishment associated with harming another was on **restitution**. The idea was to **restore** what was wrongly taken from another, if possible. With this in mind, it seems obvious that the infamous “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” rule was intended to be a guide for judges when determining the appropriate restitution in a specific case. In other words, make sure that the value of the restitution demanded of the guilty was essentially equal to the loss suffered by the victim.

### **Personal Responsibility**

While it was recognized that “accidents happen,” a person still had the responsibility not to create unsafe situations in which another person might be injured. The idea of “personal responsibility” is of significant importance even today.

## **2. Personal Injuries - 21:12-36**

a) According to verses 12-14, what is the key factor that determines whether a person receives the death penalty for killing another? Does this seem unnecessarily harsh to you? Why might a person guilty of an unintentional killing need to flee?

***The key factor is intention, “malice aforethought.” God considers murder a very serious crime against Himself, (see Genesis 9:6) and prescribes death as the appropriate penalty. A person guilty of manslaughter may need to flee to avoid the revenge of the victim’s family. (Cities of Refuge are explained more fully in Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 19.)***

b) Why do you think the sins described in verses 15-17 carry the death penalty?

***All three of these sins involve attacks against parents and violate the fifth commandment. God evidently considers the honoring and respecting of parents to be very important. (Note: “Cursing” here involves more than merely swearing; it implies an aggressive spiritual attack on one’s parents.)***

c) Verses 18-21 deal with what today would be called “assault and battery.” What is the main focus of the punishment? Why was it different in the case of a slave?

***The focus is restitution, paying for the damages caused. If a man injures his own slave, it is like damaging his own property: no sin, but not very smart. If the slave dies, however, the owner is guilty of murder.***

d) Verses 22-25 describe a situation in which men are fighting and a bystander is accidentally injured. How do you think the famous “eye for eye, tooth for tooth, ...” punishment was to be implemented? Do you think this law is fair?

***Again, the focus is restitution. The “eye for eye, ...” is meant to guide the judges in assigning the restitution to be paid. Note that slaves are also to be given restitution. It’s difficult to imagine anything more fair than this.***

e) The end of this chapter deals with injuries caused by domestic animals. What responsibility is placed on the animal owner? Does this seem reasonable?

***The law recognizes that accidents happen. However, if a person knowingly allows a dangerous situation to exist and an accident happens, then he bears some guilt for his negligence. (How is this handled in civil law today?)***

### 3. Protection of Property - 22:1-15

a) In the situation described in verses 2-3, why should it matter whether the thief was caught “after sunrise”? What does this imply about God’s view of personal property?

***A thief caught at night may be a murderer and the owner is entitled to self-defense. However, it is assumed that in daylight, a person can tell if another is intent on physical harm. Personal property is not worth a human life.***

b) In general, what is the punishment for stealing? Do you think this is a good deterrent?

***As punishment, thieves must make restitution to their victims of between two and five times the amount stolen. This is more productive than a prison sentence.***

### 4. Social Responsibility - 22:16-31

a) What was the penalty for seducing a virgin? Who made the decision about whether a marriage was to take place or not? Given the culture of that time, does this seem fair?

***A seducer must pay for and marry the girl. If the girl’s father was against the marriage, then he could demand only the payment. Culturally, this seems fair. The law provides for the welfare of the girl through her father.***

b) Verses 16-20 seem to be a mismatched set of laws. What might tie them together?

***God draws a parallel between sexual activity in the human realm and idolatry in the spiritual realm. Also, various forms of paganism involved sexual activity.***

c) Verses 21-27 concern the treatment of others less fortunate than you. What attitude are we to have toward these people? How is this made clear in this passage?

***We are not to take advantage of the poor, the widow or the orphan. It seems that God is quite serious about treating those less fortunate with compassion.***

d) What other “social responsibilities” do we have described in verses 28-31?

***We are not to withhold our tithes; not to curse “the ruler of our people”.***

### 5. Laws of Justice and Mercy - 23:1-9

a) When involved in legal disputes, how should we conduct ourselves? What do these verses reveal about God’s sense of justice?

***We should show no favoritism whatsoever and seek only pure justice. Furthermore, we should not “follow the crowd.” God considers justice to be of paramount importance.***

#### Property Rights

God has quite a lot to say about property. It is clearly God’s plan that a person may own property and that others must respect the rights of the owner. However, property ownership is not more important than another person’s right to life. Also, property ownership comes with a responsibility to help those less fortunate.

#### God on Compassion

Notice that in **Exodus 22:21-27**, God is quite strong in His instructions for how we are to interact with foreigners, widows, orphans and others who might need some help. It seems very clear that we are **required** to act with compassion toward those who are less fortunate than us.

#### God’s View of Justice

It has been said that God is a perfect balance of Love and Justice. His perfect Justice demands payment for sin but in His perfect Love, He provides us with a substitute for that payment. Do you think God expects us to conduct our lives in way that supports this view of His nature? **Micah 6:8** may provide the answer.

### Importance of Seven

In the Bible, the number seven signifies **completion** and **spiritual perfection**. God reinforces the importance of seven in His plan for mankind with His command that we celebrate the weekly Sabbath as well as a "Sabbath Year" every seventh year. This would require faith on the part of the Israelites as they would be dependent on God to provide for them during this "year of rest." More on this subject is found in **Leviticus 25**.

### Scripture Link:

There are seven annual festivals ordained by God in **Leviticus 23**. These are arranged such that the first three occur within a one week period in early spring, the fourth occurs in early summer, and the last three festivals occur during a three week period around harvest time (September-October).

### Boiling a Kid in its Mother's Milk

Many Bible scholars believe that boiling a young goat in its mother's milk was a pagan fertility ritual that was conducted in Canaanite culture at this time. This is often cited as the basis for the Jewish dietary laws that forbid the eating of meat and dairy foods together.

b) According to verses 4-5, what is your responsibility for the property and welfare of others, even those who hate you?

***You are to return the property of even your enemies and you are to assist them if they are in need.***

### 6. Sabbath Laws - 23:10-13

a) Do you think giving the land a year's rest every seven years is a good idea? How do you think the farmers would survive during this seventh year?

***Agriculture experts have concluded that resting the land every few years helps productivity. (The U.S. government even has programs for this.) Even though the land was not planted in the seventh year, the farmers could reap whatever crops came up naturally. Furthermore, they could store up for the seventh year.***

b) When the Israelites got to the land, how well do you think they observed this law? (See **2 Chronicles 36:21**)

***Evidently they didn't observe this for at least 490 years, as this was the reason for the 70-year Babylonian captivity (7 x 70 = 490 years).***

### 7. The Three Annual Festivals - 23:14-19

a) What are the three festivals that are to be celebrated each year? (We'll learn more details in later chapters.) Can you see any types and shadows in these?

***1) the Feast of Unleavened Bread (with Passover), 2) the Feast of Shavaot (Firstfruits, Weeks, Pentecost), and 3) Feast of Ingathering (Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles). Yeshua fulfilled the Passover feasts, the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) came on Pentecost. Many others are possible.***

b) Have you any idea why God would prohibit the cooking of a young goat in its mother's milk?

***This was probably a pagan practice. Many see this as the foundation for the Kosher prohibition of serving dairy and meat together.***

### 8. God's Angel to Prepare the Way - 23:20-33

a) In verses 20-22, God describes the "messenger" He is sending to his people. What were the people to do with him? Why? What name did he carry?

***The people were to "pay attention to him", "listen to what he says", and "do not rebel against him." He speaks for God: "listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say." (verse 22) (See John 17:6-12). He carried the name of God (verse 21).***

b) Who do you think this messenger was?

***If the messenger was the pre-incarnate Yeshua, it would fit the scripture well.***

c) How were the Israelites to treat the people who currently occupied the land that God was giving them? What was God's reason for this? Do you think this applies today?

***The Israelites were to "not bow down before their gods and to demolish them and break their sacred stones" (verse 24) and "not to make a covenant with them" and "not let them live in your land" (verses 32-33). Verse 33 says that "they will cause you to sin because the worship of their gods will be a snare."***

d) Why didn't God drive out the Israelite's enemies in a single year? ***God would drive the current inhabitants out little by little to give the Israelites time to increase in numbers sufficient to possess the land (verses 29-30).***

e) List how many times God says, "I will . ." in verses 23-33. Is this significant?

***At least 10 times God says, "I will." Very specific promises.***

## **9. The Covenant Confirmed - 24:1-18**

a) After Moses had told the people all that God had said, what was their response? What did Moses do after this? (verse 4)

***In verse 3, the people said, "Everything God has said, we will do." Moses then wrote everything down which became the "Book of the Covenant", Torah.***

b) Describe the worship service that Moses conducted "early the next morning"? What did Moses do with the blood? What covenant was being sealed? Compare with **Mark 14:24**. Does **Hebrews 9:15-22** give you any insight into this ceremony?

***Moses built an altar and set up 12 pillars for the 12 tribes. They sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings. Moses sprinkled half the blood on the altar and the other half on the people, after they had agreed to keep God's covenant. This is known as the "Mosaic Covenant." It is similar to the blood covenant Yeshua established in Mark 14:24. Hebrews 9:15-22 refers to this event also.***

c) Who all went up on the mountain to worship God? Compare what the men saw on the mountain with the descriptions given in **Revelation 4:2-6 & 21:18-21**. Given that no one can see the face of God and live (**Exodus 33:20**), how do you explain what the men saw?

***Verse 9 says, "Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and 70 elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel." It could be that these people only saw God's feet standing on the pavement of sapphire, the rest of Him hidden in cloud. The description is similar to other visions of God and heaven.***

d) Who went on up to the top of the mountain? Who was left in charge? Assuming that Moses alone stayed on the mountaintop for 40 days and 40 nights, what do you suppose the other person did?

***Moses and Joshua went on to the top (verse 13). Moses left Aaron and Hur in charge. It would appear that Joshua waited part way up the mountain while Moses met personally with God.***

### **Scripture Links:**

The Hebrew term for "messenger" is often translated "angel," which would certainly make sense in this case.

However, this "angel" is unique in that "my Name [YHWH] is in him." (vs 21) Many believe that this "messenger" is a pre-incarnation of *Yeshua*. See **Isaiah 63:8-9**, **Malachi 3:1**, and **Joshua 5:13-15** for examples of similar occurrences.

### **Amazing Pavement Exodus 24:9-11**

describes what "Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel" saw on Mt Sinai. Although the text clearly says that they "saw the God of Israel," their description indicates that they only saw the blue pavement. Doesn't this imply that they were essentially looking at the ground? Perhaps all they saw of God were his feet and the ground on which He was standing!

### **Joshua, Moses' Aide**

This is our first encounter with Joshua who will become more important as we continue with our *Torah* study. Notice in this passage that Joshua accompanies Moses up Mt. Sinai but that Moses met with God alone. What do you suppose Joshua did during this 40 day period?

### **Moses, the Lawgiver**

Many people believe that the laws set forth in the *Torah* are the foundation upon which our current legal system is built. The founding fathers of the United States certainly believed so. The Supreme Court Building in Washington, DC, has an ornately sculpted frieze which depicts Moses in the center, dispensing the Laws of the *Torah*.



## **Digging deeper . . . .**

1. Although these laws were written some 3,500 years ago for a culture and time much different than ours, by looking at the intent of these laws, one can see that God has very specific ideas about how man is to interact, both with God and his fellow man. Make a list of the laws in this *Torah* portion that are relevant to our culture today, whether enforced or not. Are you surprised that something as old as the *Torah* can have so much relevance for today?

**Such a list might include:**

- 1. Manslaughter versus murder judgment**
- 2. Personal responsibility for careless actions**
- 3. Right to self-defense in one's home**
- 4. Assault and battery judgments**
- 5. Seducing a virgin (shotgun wedding?)**

**Many others are possible.**

2. Carefully read **Matthew 5:17 - 6:4**. After your study of God's law over the last two weeks, does this passage take on any additional significance? What new insights have you gained?

***Yeshua's discourse on the law makes very clear the connection between the moral law and the civil law. He encourages one to understand the intent or "spirit" of the law as well as its letter. He also makes it clear that the law is not to be forgotten or forsaken - it will remain central to God's plan for mankind even after "heaven and earth shall pass away."***

For further study, see

**Haftarah** : Jeremiah 34:8-22; 33:25-26

**Brit Hadashah** : Matthew 5:38-42; 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23; Acts 23:1-11;  
Hebrews 9:15-22; 10:28-39