



# Shabbat Table Talk Page

## Overview

- **Parashah: Shoftim (שופטים, "Judges")**
- **Chapters: Deut. 16:18-21:9**



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֲסוֹק בְּדַבְּרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

## Synopsis

Parashat Shoftim begins with Moses commanding the people of Israel to appoint judges (i.e., *shoftim*) and officers in all the cities allotted to the tribes, so that justice would be enforced throughout the promised land. These judges were to be above reproach, neither showing partiality nor accepting bribes on behalf of the wealthy: “Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may live and possess the land the Lord your God is giving you.” In practical terms this meant that every town in Israel was to have its own law court with a police force to enforce the decision of the appointed judges.

Idol worshippers were to be punished by stoning, but any conviction must be established on the testimony of two or more witnesses (not merely one). The courts were invested with the authority to interpret and decide all matters of Torah law, but if a local court found a case too difficult to decide, it was to be referred to a higher authority (i.e., the court of the priests at the Sanctuary) whose decision was considered final.

Moses foresaw that a time would come when the people would desire a king to rule over them, as did other nations. When this occurred, the king was to be an Israelite chosen by the LORD. The king was forbidden to amass many horses, maintain a harem, or accumulate great wealth. He was to write his own personal copy of the Torah, as supervised by the priests, so that he would be God-fearing and Torah observant during his entire reign. In this connection, Moses foretold of the coming Messiah as the true and rightful King of Israel.

Various other laws were to be enforced. The people were to set aside tithes for the sustenance of the priests and Levites who were given special responsibilities as God’s ministers. No form of divination or sorcery was to be used to determine God’s will, and all false prophets and occult practitioners were to be executed. Three Cities of Refuge were to be established for those accused of manslaughter to make their defense in a court. Laws regarding property boundaries and the role of witnesses in legal proceedings were given. In addition, various rules of war were stated, including offering terms of peace to an enemy before a battle began and the prohibition against wanton destruction of something of value when cities were besieged. The portion concludes with a procedure to be followed when someone discovered a murder victim in a field, but the identity of the victim was unknown. In such a case, responsibility for the murder rested with the city nearest to the scene of the crime. In an atonement ceremony, the leaders of the city were required to slaughter a young heifer, wash their hands in the priest’s presence, and pray for forgiveness.



## Parashah Questions

1. What does the word *shoftim* (שֹׁפְטִים) mean (Deut. 16:18)? <sup>1</sup>
2. What does the word *shoterim* (שׁוֹטְרִים) mean (Deut. 16:18)? <sup>2</sup>
3. Who first suggested the idea of a judicial system to Moses? <sup>3</sup>
4. Why did God want to appoint judges and officers throughout all the cities of the land? (Deut. 16:18)? <sup>4</sup>
5. Who was responsible for appointing judges (Deut. 16:18)? <sup>5</sup>
6. How were judges to judge the people (Deut. 16:18)? <sup>6</sup>
7. What three characteristics must a judge possess (Deut. 16:19)? <sup>7</sup>
8. Why are bribes considered a grave offence in matters of justice (Deut. 16:19)? <sup>8</sup>
9. Why is the word “justice” repeated in Deut. 16:20 (*tzedek, tzedek tirdof*)? <sup>9</sup>



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- <sup>1</sup> *Shoftim* means “judges” or “magistrates,” the plural form of *shofet*. Generally, judges were esteemed Levites (or Torah sages) who were entrusted to discern and interpret God’s law and settle disputes for the people.
  - <sup>2</sup> *Shoterim* originally referred to “overseers” or “officers” in Egypt (Exod. 5:6,10; 14-19). During the years in the desert, the word was applied to the seventy elders of Israel who shared the weight of governance with Moses (Num 11:16, Deut 1:15). Later, they became associated with military, religious, and civil officers who enforced the law.
  - <sup>3</sup> Moses’ father in law, Jethro (Exod. 18:14-26).
  - <sup>4</sup> The welfare of the theocratic state required that God’s law was upheld and transgressors were punished. The sages believed that the fortunes of Israel depended upon the behavior of its judges. They interpret the opening verse of the book of Ruth, “... in the days when judges ruled (*shofot ha-shoftim*) there was a famine in the land” (Ruth 1:1) to mean that the judges were *themselves* judged, and this is why the famine was decreed upon the land. “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3).
  - <sup>5</sup> The people themselves selected qualified men to serve as judges based on their godly character and their abilities as Torah sages. Later this became a function of “semikhah” or ordination from judicial ruling bodies. The commandment to appoint judges and offices *titten lekha*, “for you” (Deut. 16:18) implies that no judges or officers were to be regarded as “above the law” but rather were to function as agents of God to deliver the oppressed from the oppressor.
  - <sup>6</sup> *Mishpat tzedek*. They were to judge with “righteous judgment,” that is, according to the principles of *tzedakah* (righteousness). They were to model themselves after the “men of valor” Moses chose to be the elders of Israel. The term *mishpat tzedek* implies that a verdict will benefit both parties involved: the wronged party will be given restitution, while the guilty party will be given an opportunity to repent.
  - <sup>7</sup> They must not be unfair; they must not show partiality, and they must not take bribes. This implies, of course, that they revered God and loved the truth.
  - <sup>8</sup> A bribe is an attempt to persuade someone to judge in one’s favor, and this will pervert the cause of the righteous. The sin of accepting a bribe will actually damage the judge’s vision!
  - <sup>9</sup> The repetition of the word signifies that one must pursue justice using just means, certainly not through deceptive or underhand methods (e.g., entrapment). We must pursue righteousness righteously and never use a form of evil for a supposed good (e.g., torture to obtain information in war, etc.)



10. What was the goal of the law for the people? Why a legal code? <sup>10</sup>
11. Why did God prohibit trees from being planted near the altar (Deut. 16:21)? <sup>11</sup>
12. Were “sacred pillars” always forbidden to the Jewish people? (Deut. 16:22)? <sup>12</sup>
13. Why is the law against offering a blemished sacrifice mentioned in connection with the appointment of judges (Deut. 17:1)? <sup>13</sup>
14. What was the penalty for engaging in personal idolatry (Deut. 17:2-7)? <sup>14</sup>
15. Is astrology a form of idolatry (Deut. 17:3)? <sup>15</sup>
16. Why was the testimony of a single witness insufficient to establish the truth about a legal matter (Deut. 17:6)? <sup>16</sup>
17. Why did the responsibility of beginning an execution fall to the accusing witnesses (Deut. 17:7)? <sup>17</sup>
18. What was the penalty for *edim zommemim* (false witnesses)? <sup>18</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Speaking of the Torah, “her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Prov. 3:17). The goal of the law is the administration of justice, which is a state of peace. Without the law, there would be anarchy and destruction. Life would be “short, nasty, and brutish.” The law functions as a *restraint* upon the evil inclinations of depraved human beings (see Paul’s statements in 1 Tim. 1:9-11; Rom. 5:20, and Gal. 3:19).

<sup>11</sup> First, trees were planted in and around pagan temples, and God wanted no association to be made with these customs. Second, trees were planted simply to make pagan shrines more attractive, and the juxtaposition of this commandment with the qualities required of judges (of the previous verse) is taken as a warning to not appoint judges based on their external characteristics (such as good looks, status, etc.).

<sup>12</sup> No. Before the Torah was given to Israel, Jacob erected a *matzevah* (pillar) at Bet-El after his dream (Gen. 28:18), and later Moses set up twelve pillars for the twelve tribes at Sinai (Exod. 24:4). The practice was forbidden after the sin of the Golden Calf. Note that the sages associate a “sacred pillar” with a sinful judge – something God hates.

<sup>13</sup> A blemished sacrifice is thought to represent a defective judge, which is an abomination before the LORD. Even if an animal with a defect is worth a great deal of money, it is forbidden to be sacrificed, whereas an animal that is inexpensive but defect-free is acceptable for the altar. Likewise, a wealthy judge who is unqualified is not acceptable.

<sup>14</sup> A person proven guilty of engaging in personal idolatry (based on the testimony of two (or more) witnesses) was to be publicly stoned to death. The accusing witnesses were required to be the ones who began the execution of the offender. Note that some of the sages say that the person should be stoned at the place where the idolatry was committed (“out to your gates”) to demonstrate how the idol would not save him from execution.

<sup>15</sup> Yes. God “never commanded” the sun, moon, or constellations to function other than to mark times and seasons for the acceptable worship of Him.

<sup>16</sup> To warn us against judging a person based on circumstantial evidence. The testimony of (at least) two witnesses was required, both of whom were required to independently testify and to be separately cross-examined, for a conviction to be made.

<sup>17</sup> To remind them that while it is easy to accuse someone, their involvement in the case would not end with their mere testimony. Knowing that they would be required to “first cast a stone” should make them extremely careful with their testimony and their accusations.

<sup>18</sup> They are to be punished by receiving the very sentence that their victim was to receive (see also Deut. 19:16-19). Note that a conspiracy to perjure must be proven for each false witness before this sentence can be given.



19. What is a bet din? <sup>19</sup>
20. If a case proved too difficult for a local court, what was required (Deut. 17:8)? <sup>20</sup>
21. What does the word “sanhedrin” (סֵנְהֶדְרִין) mean? <sup>21</sup>
22. What was the Sanhedrin Ketanah? <sup>22</sup>
23. What was the Sanhedrin Gedolah (Great Sanhedrin)? <sup>23</sup>
24. Is a court with just one judge valid? <sup>24</sup>
25. When were courts required to be in session? <sup>25</sup>
26. Why is appointing an unqualified judge tantamount to erecting an idol? <sup>26</sup>
27. What is semikhah? <sup>27</sup>



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- <sup>19</sup> A bet din is a religious court (“house of judgment”) that consisted of three judges selected by a greater sanhedrin (three were required to resolve a stalemate between two verdicts). Every town with a population of less than 120 required a bet din, however, if the town did not have qualified judges, a court is forbidden there and cases must be immediately escalated. The general requirements for members of a Bet Din are given in Deut. 1:13 and Exod. 18:21.
- <sup>20</sup> The case was to be escalated to a higher court located at the Sanctuary (i.e., the Sanhedrin).
- <sup>21</sup> The word sanhedrin means “sitting together” and refers to any assembly of judges.
- <sup>22</sup> This refers to an assembly of 23 judges appointed in every city having 120 men (or more) in the land of Israel. This assembly became known as the Sanhedrin *Ketanah* (small sanhedrin) in relation to the Sanhedrin *Gedolah* (great sanhedrin) that convened at the Tabernacle/Temple. 23 judges were required based on the definition of a “community” (edah) as consisting of 10 people (Num. 14:27). In cases determining the status of someone who fled to a city of refuge, one “edah” was required to argue for guilt, while another was required to argue for acquittal, which makes 20 judges. However, in capital cases, a majority of two is required (a majority of one is insufficient), so that required 22 judges. Finally, to avoid the possibility of a stalemate, an extra judge was needed, to yield a total of 23 judges for a valid Sanhedrin Ketanah. In addition, two scribes were required to independently record the court’s proceedings. Only men of wisdom and understanding were chosen to be members of the sanhedrin ketanah.
- <sup>23</sup> The Sanhedrin Gedolah was comprised of 71 judges (corresponding to the 70 elders who helped Moses judge the people) who convened at the Tabernacle (Temple) to decide the most important or difficult cases (Num. 11:16). This was the “Supreme Court” of Israel. The head of the Sanhedrin Gedolah was the Nasi, or “president,” who served the role of Moses. Of the 70 judges, the most qualified was chosen to serve as the Nasi’s assistant, called Av Bet Din (“father of the court”). The 69 other judges (three sets of 23) were seated in order of age, the older judges sitting closer to the center of the chamber where the Nasi presided. Seats were arranged in the shape of an arc so that everyone could see one another as cases were discussed. Most of the Great Sanhedrin were composed of priests and Levites who served at the Sanctuary and were given priority over other Israelites (see Deut. 17:9), though after the Macabees, the Pharisees assumed more control of the high court.
- <sup>24</sup> Technically yes, since Lev. 19:15 states that you are to “judge your neighbor fairly,” though in general a court with just one judge was considered untrustworthy.
- <sup>25</sup> After morning prayer (sunrise) until early afternoon. Cases were never to be heard at night, based on Deut. 21:5 which states priests were “judge lawsuits and plague spots” which required the light of day for examination (Lev. 13:14). Court sessions were never held during the Sabbath or on holidays.
- <sup>26</sup> Based on the juxtaposition of the commandment not to set up an idolatrous post with the qualifications for appointing judges (Deut. 16:21-22), the sages said that appointing an unqualified judge was like erecting an idol.
- <sup>27</sup> “Ordination,” originally symbolized by the laying on of hands, but later granted through an official designation by a judicial court – approved by the Great Sanhedrin - that someone was authorized to function as a judge of Israel.



28. What were some of the responsibilities of the Great Sanhedrin? <sup>28</sup>
29. Why did God originally command a Great Sanhedrin (Deut. 17:10-11)? <sup>29</sup>
30. What is a “zaken mamre” (Deut. 17:12-13)? <sup>30</sup>
31. When did the Great Sanhedrin lose its authority to inflict capital punishment? <sup>31</sup>
32. Why was Yeshua’s “trial” before the Sanhedrin illegal? <sup>32</sup>
33. When was the Great Sanhedrin abolished? <sup>33</sup>
34. After the Great Sanhedrin was abolished, how was Jewish law determined when a dispute arose among the sages? <sup>34</sup>
35. Was Israel commanded to set a king over them (Deut. 17:14-15)? <sup>35</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> They were responsible for appointing the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) and for the establishment of the lesser courts of 23 members. Later they were responsible for validating the appointment of a king of Israel. In criminal matters they decided cases of a city given over to idolatry, the status of false prophets, “rebellious elders” (zaken mamre), the guilt or innocence of unfaithful spouses (sotah), and proceedings in connection with the discovery of a corpse. No non-mandatory wars could be waged without their authorization. In religious matters they settled disputes of ritual and decided the time of the festivals through the official proclamation of the “new moon.”

<sup>29</sup> To settle matters of case law and to avoid the anarchy of “multiple Torahs,” God permitted the high court to be the final word regarding a particular judgment.

<sup>30</sup> During the Second Temple period, the Great Sanhedrin was regarded as the final authority on Jewish law and any scholar who went against its decisions was put to death as a *zaken mamre* (“rebellious elder”). Note that the zaken mamre did not incur the death penalty unless he had been previously ordained by the Great Sanhedrin. His death was to be publicly executed and was intended to function as a warning not to rebel against the supreme court.

<sup>31</sup> Around 30 AD the Imperial Roman government exercised legal hegemony over the region of Palestine and all capital cases were required to be submitted to the Roman proconsul for adjudication.

<sup>32</sup> (1) He was arrested illegally; (2) He was examined by Annas in a secret night proceeding; (3) the indictment against Him was false; (4) the Sanhedrin court illegally held its trial before sunrise; (5) the Sanhedrin illegally convened to try a capital offense on a day before an annual Sabbath; and (6) the trial concluded in one day; (7) He was charged on the basis of invalid testimony (false witnesses); (8) He was convicted of blasphemy based on his own testimony, though this was legally insufficient; (9) He was not allowed to defend his statement that He was the Messiah, the Son of God; (10) the High Priest tore his clothes to prejudice his peers, though the Torah forbids this (Lev. 10:6); and (11) the initial charge of blasphemy was illegitimately switched to that of sedition against Rome.

<sup>33</sup> After the Temple was destroyed in AD 70, so was the Great Sanhedrin. A Sanhedrin in Yavneh took over many of its functions, under the authority of Rabban Gamliel. The rabbis in the Sanhedrin served as judges and attracted students who came to learn their oral traditions and Pharisaical scriptural interpretations. From Yavneh, the Sanhedrin moved to different cities in the Galilee, eventually ending up in Tiberias. Various smaller Sanhedrins existed in the Diaspora until the abolishment of the rabbinic patriarchate around 425 A.D.

<sup>34</sup> First, disputes were catalogued in the oral traditions (Talmud). Later, a general principle was developed that in cases involving Biblical ordinances, the ruling of the stricter disputant was to be accepted, but in matters regarding Rabbinical law, the more lenient ruling was to be accepted....

<sup>35</sup> Yes, as Moses is speaking *prophetically* in this matter, as the LORD certainly did not want Israel to copy the pagan customs of the nations. The sages identify three commandments for life in the land: 1) the appointment of a king; 2) the destruction of Amalek (1 Sam. 15:1-3, and 3), and the building of the Temple (2 Sam. 7:1).



36. What qualifications were required of a king of Israel (Deut. 17:15-20)?<sup>36</sup>
37. What special duty was given to the king regarding the Torah (Deut. 17:18-19)?<sup>37</sup>
38. What quality of heart must mark a true king of Israel (Deut. 17:20)?<sup>38</sup>
39. If God commanded a king for Israel, why was He angry when the people asked for a king during the days of Samuel the prophet (1 Sam. 8:7)?<sup>39</sup>
40. Who first prophesied that Israel would have a king (Gen. 49:10)?<sup>40</sup>
41. Why did King Solomon's heart go astray?<sup>41</sup>
42. Ultimately, who is Israel's king (Isa. 33:22)?<sup>42</sup>
43. How were the Levites to make their living in Israel (Deut. 18:1-5)?<sup>43</sup>
44. Did all the Levites serve at the Sanctuary in Israel (Deut. 18:6-8)?<sup>44</sup>



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- <sup>36</sup> The king must be a man chosen by God (1 Sam. 16:7), of Jewish ancestry (not a foreigner or a convert), and confirmed (anointed) by a true prophet. He must not seek to strengthen his throne through alliances with pagan nations (such as Egypt) nor rely on instruments of warfare (horses, chariots, etc.). He must not have many wives (“lest his heart go astray”) nor seek to amass great wealth. He shall be a Torah scholar who is careful to observe the will of God and to walk in genuine humility before the people to whom he shall serve (he must personally write a copy of the Torah in front of the priests). He will have the heart of a shepherd for his people, being just and fair and full of mercy.
- <sup>37</sup> During his reign, the king was to write for himself a letter-perfect copy of the Torah (*mishneh ha-Torah*) under the direct supervision of the Levitical priests (מִלְפְּנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם). The scroll was to always be with him and the king was to read and study it every day of his life. The sages say that when King David wrote, “I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Psalm 16:8), he was referring to the scroll of Torah which he kept tied to his arm.
- <sup>38</sup> A king without reverence before the LORD and true humility is a usurper who will ultimately suffer *karet* judgment from heaven: “Those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be cursed” (1 Sam. 2:30)
- <sup>39</sup> Though the people were permitted to have a king, as the time of the judges attests: “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6), Israel's sin was in demanding a king to “judge them,” which was an affront to the office of Samuel, who had been Israel's judge. God, however, told Samuel that the people (at that time) were really rejecting Him, attempting to distance themselves from the LORD.
- <sup>40</sup> Jacob prophesied that from the line of Judah would come the Messiah, the true regent of Israel. King Saul therefore understood that his reign was temporary, until a descendant of Judah would assume the throne.
- <sup>41</sup> Because he had taken so many wives and concubines and sought aggrandizement through amassing wealth. The sages say that Solomon's reign was a parable of sorts, to teach that it is dangerous to explain the reasons for divine prohibitions. Solomon regarded himself as wiser than others and therefore not subject to the same failings as less intelligent men, though his later end proved him wrong in his assumption.
- <sup>42</sup> Isaiah 33:22 – “For the LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver; the LORD is our king; he will save us.” Yeshua is the true Judge, Lawgiver, and King of the Jewish people (and indeed, the whole world).
- <sup>43</sup> They were supported by the tithes of the people. Each received dues, even if he had a personal inheritance (18:8).
- <sup>44</sup> No, they resided in “Levitical cities” spread throughout the nation and served as Torah scholars and judges. Both the priests and Levites served the Sanctuary on a rotating basis, though on festivals, they all served together. King David later established 24 “watches” (*mishmarim*) or “weekly divisions” of service at the Temple (2 Chron. 8:14). Each *mishmar* was itself divided into six groups called *batei avot* (“head of families”) so that a different family would serve on each day of the week (on Shabbat, all the *mishmarim* would serve together).



45. When Israel entered the land, were they forbidden to learn about the abhorrent customs of the seven Canaanite nations (Deut. 18:9)? <sup>45</sup>
46. What horrifying practice was associated with “Molech” worship (Deut. 18:10)? <sup>46</sup>
47. What connection is there between Gehenna and Molech? <sup>47</sup>
48. What is *kesem* (כֶּסֶם), or “divination” (Deut. 18:10)? <sup>48</sup>
49. What is a “soothsayer” (Deut. 18:10)? <sup>49</sup>
50. What is an “enchanter” (Deut. 18:10)? <sup>50</sup>
51. What is *keshef* (כֶּשֶׁף), or “sorcery” (Deut. 18:10)? <sup>51</sup>
52. What is a “charmer” (Deut. 18:11)? <sup>52</sup>
53. What is a “medium,” a “wizard,” and a “necromancer” (Deut. 18:11)? <sup>53</sup>
54. How does God describe all these occultic practices (Deut. 18:12)? <sup>54</sup>




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<sup>45</sup> They were permitted to learn about them in the sense of being able to judge that they were contrary to the law of God, though they were forbidden to imitate or practice any of these practices.

<sup>46</sup> Molech (“king”) was an ancient Phoenician god whose idol was heated with fire so that a child could be burned to death as a sacrificial offering in its outstretched arms. To drown out the screams of the children, drums were beaten loudly as the idolaters loudly chanted.

<sup>47</sup> Jewish tradition states that there was a temple to Molech once located south of Jerusalem, situated in a place called Gei Hinnom, the “valley [of the son] of Hinnom” (so named because of the cries [*nohem*] of the murdered children). The fires of the valley of Hinnom are identified as a picture of the fires of hell because of this horrible association (Jer. 7:31). Later this valley was converted to a garbage dump where filth, refuse, and dead animals were burned. It was during the Second Temple period that “Gehenna” (γέεννα) became identified with a place of torment (i.e., hell).

<sup>48</sup> Divination is an attempt to gain insight into a question or situation by way of an occultic rituals, such as gazing at an object until a person enters a trance-like state and pretends to foretell the future.

<sup>49</sup> The Hebrew word for a “fortune teller” comes from the verb to make cloudy (עָנַן) – i.e., to obscure the truth for deceptive ends or purposes. This term includes those who seek for signs or “omens.”

<sup>50</sup> The Hebrew word for an “enchanter” is *nachash* (נָחַשׁ), the same word used to describe the serpent in the garden. It is therefore associated with witchcraft and the casting of “spells” or uttering chants to influence the spirit world.

<sup>51</sup> The word refers to the practice of “wizards” or magicians who are steeped in the occult. The pharaoh of the exodus had those who practiced this variety of the occult among his advisers (Exod. 7:11). The prophet Malachi saw the end of these sorcerers to be terrible judgment (Mal. 3:5).

<sup>52</sup> A “charmer” (חֲבֵר חֲבֵר, “binder of binders”) refers to one who can charm snakes, scorpions, etc., into obeying one’s commands. Snake-handlers are therefore considered members of the occult.

<sup>53</sup> A medium is one who “asks questions of a spirit” (שָׁאַל אוֹב) by means of a skin bottle (ov) used in occult rituals. A wizard (וִיזָנִי) is someone possessed by a “familiar spirit,” and a necromancer is one who seeks to communicate with the dead (1 Sam. 28:6-7).

<sup>54</sup> They are called *to’evot* (תּוֹעֵבוֹת), “abominations,” something detested and utterly rejected by the LORD. These practices defiled the land and caused the seven Canaanite nations to be driven out.



55. Instead of relying on the occult, how were the people to hear the voice of God and discern the way to walk (Deut. 18:13-15)? <sup>55</sup>
56. What was unusual about Moses as a prophet of the LORD (Num. 12:6-8)? <sup>56</sup>
57. How is Yeshua the prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15)? <sup>57</sup>
58. What was the test of a false prophet, and what was to be his fate (Deut. 18:20-22)? <sup>58</sup>
59. What protection did someone who *accidentally* killed another have under the Jewish legal system? <sup>59</sup>
60. How many “cities of refuge” were given to the Levites, and where were they located? <sup>60</sup>
61. If the Sanhedrin in a city of refuge determined that a man murdered his brother in malice, what was to be done (Deut. 19:12-13)? <sup>61</sup>
62. What was to be done to a “corrupt witness” in a trial (Deut. 19:16-19)? <sup>62</sup>
63. Is it ever permissible to be fearful in battle against God’s enemies (Deut. 20:1)? <sup>63</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The people were to be “wholehearted” before the LORD and trust only in the Hebrew prophets chosen by God to reveal his will. The voice of the prophets were to be ascribed the same status as that given to Moses, though of course the prophet must demonstrate that he (or she) is indeed a true prophet of the LORD.

<sup>56</sup> To ordinary prophets, God sometimes makes himself known by visions or dreams, but Moses spoke to God “face to face,” as a man speaks to his friend - without the use of metaphors or analogies that must be interpreted (e.g., the ladder of Jacob, the Chariot of Ezekiel, etc.).

<sup>57</sup> Like Moses, Yeshua was a Jew, a Leader, a Prophet, a Lawgiver, a Savior, a Teacher, a Priest, an Anointed One, a Mediator between God and man – who spoke to God “face to face” and revealed the words of God -- and like Moses, He offered himself to die for the sins of the people.

<sup>58</sup> A prophet who claims to speak on behalf of the LORD something that God did not command him to speak shall be put to death. The test of the prophet is this: if the prophet predicts something in God’s Name and the prediction does not come to pass, then the message was not spoken by God.

<sup>59</sup> He was given the opportunity to flee to a “city of refuge” and make his case before a Sanhedrin ketanah composed of members Levite judges. If he was cleared of a charge of murder, he was allowed to dwell there under the protection of law until the time of the death of the High Priest, when he could return home without fear of retribution from the avenger of blood (i.e., next of kin who sought vengeance for the death). If he was guilty of murder, he was executed.

<sup>60</sup> Six, with three located east of the Jordan and three located *equidistantly* within the land of Canaan (Deut. 19:3-7). Later, however, additional cities of refuge would be added after the land was settled and enlarged (Deut. 19:10-11).

<sup>61</sup> The elders were to deliver him to the blood avenger (go’el dam) to be put to death before his eyes.

<sup>62</sup> If a witness accuses someone of wrongdoing and it is determined that his testimony is based on malice, he is to be punished by receiving the very sentence that his victim was to receive: “life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.” This was meant to be a deterrent against those who would perjure themselves in court.

<sup>63</sup> No. You must display courage (faith), put your trust in God and his purposes, and overcome any fear of defeat. One who is afraid is regarded as one who has forgotten God. See the Haftarah: Isaiah 51:12-13. Put on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:11-13), the “armor of light” (Rom. 13:12), and fight the good fight of faith, “by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left...” (2 Cor 6:7). Share in suffering as a good soldier of the Messiah, Yeshua (2 Tim. 2:3).



64. What was the priest required to do before Israel engaged in battle (Deut. 20:2-4)?<sup>64</sup>
65. What promise did God give the armies of Israel (Deut. 20:4)?<sup>65</sup>
66. When was a soldier exempt from engaging in battle (Deut. 20:5-8)?<sup>66</sup>
67. How was Israel to fight nations in battle *other than* the seven Canaanite nations that had infiltrated the promised land (Deut. 20:10-18)?<sup>67</sup>
68. When Israel besieged a city, what was required (Deut. 20:19-20)?<sup>68</sup>
69. What happens if someone discovers a murder victim in a field, but the identity of the victim is unknown (Deut. 21:1-9)?<sup>69</sup>
70. When does the Heavenly Court judge quickly?<sup>70</sup>
71. What commandment helps you sleep better?<sup>71</sup>
72. How are we to always judge others (Lev. 19:15)?<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Before the start of any war, the Levites were to commission a “war priest” to address the soldiers before the battle began. The war priest was to be anointed with the same oil used to anoint the High Priest. The priest would recite the Shema (“Hear, O Israel..”) and encourage the troops to put away any fear of the enemy.

<sup>65</sup> The LORD would go with them, fight for them, and give them the victory.

<sup>66</sup> In two cases: 1) when he was otherwise obligated to perform some unfulfilled mitzvah (e.g., redeeming firstfruits of a crop), and/or 2) if he was in fear of divine retribution for sins he had committed. Note that the exemptions applied only in cases of “optional” (i.e., political) wars, not for wars that were commanded by the LORD (e.g., wars against Amalek and the other Canaanite nations for control of the land, wars of defense for the entire nation, etc.).

<sup>67</sup> They were to first offer them terms of peaceful surrender (with the option of voluntary self-exile), and if these terms were accepted, the nation either was free to leave the territory or to become politically subservient to Israel. Only if the terms of peace were rejected was Israel required to annihilate the entire population of the besieged cities. In the case of the seven Canaanite nations, however, no terms of peace were to be offered, and Israel was to entirely destroy all traces of their culture, cities, and property.

<sup>68</sup> First they were to leave an escape route so that any of the city’s inhabitants might flee. Second, the army was forbidden to destroy any thing useful unnecessarily, such as fruit trees. This principle became known in Jewish environmental ethics as *bal taschit* – “do not needlessly destroy.” It is *bal taschit*, for example, to leave a light on that serves no purpose or to neglect to repair a leaky faucet.

<sup>69</sup> In the case of an unsolved murder, a special ritual (Eglah Arufah) was to be performed that would atone for any guilt incurred through negligence that might have contributed to the death. Since bloodshed must be atoned for (based on Num. 35:33, “the land can have no expiation for blood shed upon it, except by the blood of him who shed it”), the blood of a heifer was substituted instead. First, the priests will measure the closest town to the murder scene, and then the elders of that town were required to take a heifer that had never been yoked and break its neck beside a stream of running water in a rugged area which had never been tilled or sown. The elders will then wash their hands over the heifer and declare their innocence through a scripted declaration. The priests then would offer a prayer of absolution for the murder and thereby cleanse the land of the defilement of the bloodshed.

<sup>70</sup> If the courts of this world mete out justice correctly, the Heavenly Court does not have to take action. However, if the courts themselves are unjust, then God eventually will bring judgment upon the land.

<sup>71</sup> *Bittachon* – trusting in God’s mercy and love will help you be more relaxed and to sleep better. This implies that we should never go to sleep angry, or in a shameful state where we question God’s grace for our lives.

<sup>72</sup> We are to judge others *b’tzedek*, “with righteousness.” This means granting the benefit of the doubt and using the “good eye” when attempting to interpret the actions of other people.



## Discussion Topics

1. The apostle Paul warned of false teachers who desired to be “teachers of the law,” though they were ignorant of the law’s purpose. The law is good, Paul said, if one uses it “lawfully,” by which he meant that it must be understood as a restraining influence and a deterrent for evil behavior. It was established to punish evil doers and to protect society (1 Tim. 1:9-10). In another place Paul stated that the law was “set forth” to reveal the nature of sin (Gal. 3:19; Rom. 3:20) and to function as a “ministry of condemnation” (2 Cor. 3:7) *until* the Messiah would come. It was a “schoolmaster” meant to lead us to the Messiah and His Kingdom rule (Gal. 3:23-26). In short, the law reveals our *need* for a Savior, which is the heart of the Gospel message itself. The law is powerless to change the human heart, and therefore we need the miracle of spiritual rebirth to please God. Since the power of the gospel sets us free from sin, then the law’s purpose (as a punitive code for sin) has been fulfilled. We are now given a new nature and a God-given power to walk in love and thereby we fulfill (and transcend) the law and its requirements. We are no longer slaves, but children of God. *Discuss...*
2. Paul’s view of the law sometimes seems overly simplistic since he overlooks the positive aspect of the law as an expression of God’s grace and instead regards it as a punitive device intended to reveal and condemn our sin. How would Paul understand, for example, the Shema, the central commandment of the Torah to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength, as part of the “ministry of condemnation”? Discuss what you think Paul meant by the idea of law as contrasted with the idea of grace...
3. It is the Holy Spirit that gives us life and who breathes the true and inner meaning of Torah into our hearts. “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (Gal. 5:18). That is, you are no longer to be constrained by either legalism *or* lawlessness, since “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is power” to please God. The Spirit sets us free from the seduction of *both* legalism and debauchery (Gal. 3:1-2; Eph. 5:18). When we are led by the Spirit, we rely upon God’s provision to walk in a way that pleases Him. On the other hand, when we rely on the “flesh,” we are operating under the principle of our own (in)ability to please God, which invariably leads to pride (legalism) or profligacy (anti-legalism) - and sometimes to both. Therefore we see that role of the “law” is often connected with the “flesh,” but the role of the Spirit is connected with life and power. Discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in your walk with God...

### For Next Week:

- Read Parashat **Ki Teitzei** (Deut. 21:10-25:19)
- Read the Haftarah (Isaiah 54:1-10)
- Read the New Testament (Matt. 5:27-30; 1 Cor. 5:1-5)

