

Parashah 48

Shof'tim

שפטים

“Judges”

Deuteronomy 16:18 – 21:9

Torah Together



This *Torah* portion contains God’s word (through Moses) on a variety of topics, encouraging the Israelites to be diligent about administering their new nation in obedience to His commands. Of particular interest is the clear prophecy of the coming Messiah in **Deuteronomy 18:14-20**.

1. Judges - 16:18-20

Where were judges to come from and how were they chosen? What was the primary responsibility of a judge? What would result from faithfully carrying out their duties?

In God’s plan for the new nation of Israel, judges had great responsibility. It was essential that they be completely committed to “justice and justice alone” for the society to function properly. Do you think this still holds true today?

2. Worshiping Other Gods - 16:21 - 17:7

a) How does God feel about setting up other items related to worship near His altar? How does He feel about the sacrifice of imperfect or defective animals?

It seems clear that God takes the worship of other gods very seriously. What insight does this give you into God’s character?

b) What was to be done if someone was suspected of worshipping other gods? What was to be done if the person is found guilty? What was required for a guilty verdict?

This is the first occurrence of a “court of appeals” or “Supreme Court” much like we have in today’s legal system. Note that the judges needed to be experts in the law (*Torah*).

It is certainly interesting that God gives instructions to the Israelites concerning the king that they would someday have. See the first “**Digging Deeper**” question at the end of this section for more discussion on this topic.

Scripture Link:
Numbers 18 discusses the duties of the priests and Levites and explains their inheritance in verse 20.

3. Law Courts - 17:8-13

What procedure was followed if a local court could not come to a verdict in a particular case? Where and to whom were such cases referred? What role do the Levites play?

4. The King - 17:14-20

a) When the Israelites decided to appoint a king over themselves, whom were they to choose? How was this king to behave?

b) After the king took his throne, what was he to do? Can you see how this might be helpful for a king? What benefits might come from this practice?

5. Offerings for Priests and Levites - 18:1-8

a) What part of the land of Israel were the Levites to receive? How were they to make their living? What was their inheritance?

b) Suppose a Levite who lived in a town far away decided to move to “the place YHWH will choose.” What could he expect? Why might this occur?

6. Detestable Practices - 18:9-13

List the detestable practices that God specifically forbids. Are any of these practiced today? Do you think God views them differently today?

7. The Prophet - 18:14-22

a) Moses explained that God would “raise up for you a prophet like me” (verse 15). From where would this prophet come? Why did God say he was sending this prophet? What were the people to do when this prophet came?

“YHWH your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.”

Deuteronomy 18:15

b) How were the people to know whether a prophet was from God? What was to be done with a prophet who spoke in the name of other gods?

8. Cities of Refuge - 19:1-14

How many cities of refuge did God command that the Israelites establish in the land of *Israel*? What was the purpose of these cities? What was the responsibility of the elders in these cities? What role did the avenger of blood play?

Scripture Link:

In **Acts 3:22-23** the Apostle Peter declares that this prophet was *Yeshua*. See “**Digging Deeper**” at the end of this lesson.

Scripture Link:

Joshua 20 names the Cities of Refuge that were established in Israel. It also explains the purpose of these cities and how they were to carry out their duties.

9. Witnesses - 19:15-21

a) How many witnesses were required before a person could be found guilty of a crime? Do you think this makes sense?

b) What process was followed in the case of a witness who lies in bringing a charge against another? Do you think this would help reduce false accusations?

c) Moses again confirms the “law of retaliation” (an eye for an eye, ...) in verse 21. Can you see how this might help “purge the evil from among you” (verse 19)?

How do you think these rules for excusing a man from serving in the army would affect the army’s performance?

10. Going to War - 20:1-20

a) When the Israelites were preparing to go to war, who first addressed the army? What did he say?

b) Who addressed the army next? What did these people say? For what reasons might a man be excused from serving? Do you think this is a good idea?

c) What process was followed when the Israelite army came upon a city near the borders of the land of *Israel*? What was to be done with the people and their goods?

d) What process was followed when the Israelite army came upon cities of the nations that God had given to them as an inheritance? Why do you think the process was so different than with other cities?

e) What was to be done with the trees that surrounded cities that were besieged?

How do you feel about the instructions that God gave the Israelites for dealing with the people they conquered in the land that was to become Israel? Does this conflict with your understanding of God as a “Loving God?”

11. Atonement for an Unsolved Murder - 21:1-9

Describe the process that was followed if a slain man was found in a field and no murderer could be identified. What was the purpose of this process? Contrast this with the case in which a murderer was identified. What does this imply to you about God’s standard of justice?

Scripture Link:
Numbers 35:33-34 show how God views murder in the land of Israel. Even though it may not seem necessary to us, God’s standard of justice must be met any time innocent blood is shed.

Digging deeper

The question of whether God desired Israel to have a King to rule over them can lead to other questions. For some insight into how God intended for Israelite society to function, see **Leviticus 25**.

1. Deuteronomy 17:14-17 speaks of a future king of Israel even before the Israelites had entered the land. Carefully read I Samuel 8-10. Do you think God desired that Israel have a king like the nations around them? What do you think God would have preferred? What insight does this give you into the character and nature of God?

2. Deuteronomy 18:14-22 speaks about a future prophet like Moses who God will raise up. Although this could certainly refer to all the future prophets of God, many take it to refer to the Messiah. Read John 1:21. Were the priests who were questioning John the Baptist looking for the Messiah? What similarities do you find between *Yeshua* and the description of the prophet given in Deuteronomy?

For further study, see

Haftarah : Isaiah 51:12 – 53:12

Brit Hadashah : Matthew 5:38-42; 18:15-20;

Acts 3:13-26; 7:35-53; I Corinthians 5:9-13;

I Timothy 5:17-22; Hebrews 10:28-31