



**“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ and upon finding a single pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.
Mathew 13:45**

**Parsha: Shof'tim (Judges) Deuteronomy 16:18–21:9
18th August 2018/ 7th Elul 5778**

Traditional	Amended
Deut. 16:8-17:13	Duet. 16:18-17:13
Deut. 17:14-17:20	Deut. 17:14- 17:20
Deut. 18:1-18:5	Deut. 18:1-18:8
Deut. 18:6-18:13	Deut. 18:9-18:22
Deut. 18:14-19:13	Deut. 19:1-19:21
Deut. 19:14-20:9	Deut. 20:1-20:20
Deut. 20:10-21:9	Deut. 21:1-21:9

Shabbat Shalom Talmadim, and welcome to this week’s Parsha Pearl 48

Key Points

The appointment of judges (Shoftim)

The appointment of King

The appointment of Prophets

Laws of war

Laws regarding the right of refuge in the cities of refuge

In this study, I intend to look a little closer into the establishment of the judicial and priestly system that will overrule the ancient and traditional form of Israelite tribal traditions of law. The crucial timeline of this is the second temple period following the return of the exiles from Babylon around 585BC. Pagan worship and syncretism of cultic worship prevailed throughout the exilic period. It was time to create a centralized framework around the Mosaic laws which meant that interpretation of the law could be more precise. No longer would laws be interpreted tribally but would come jointly from a civil and priestly counsel. Over time, the interpretation of the law would change as the generations changed. Furthermore, the relationship with YHVH and His people would change over time, and many struggles would ensue. The nature of the Israelite culture would contend with established legal practices and observances. This will bring the judgment of YHVH upon them many times. As we read the laws within the Torah, we must understand they were written to uphold the holiness of generations and not just the one. The law progressed from an ancient oral form to a written one and then to a greater interpretative oral one where understanding and exposition of it was practised. In this study, I want to emphasize that the law of God still stands for us today and for us to obey it and benefit from it we must abolish all other forms of worship. Throughout the generations, YHVH will bring forth other prophets and eminent teachers to help us in understanding the law and how we are to live

in and as the culture of YHVH, a people called by His name. Regarding the rest of the keynotes, I encourage you to spend time in them during your study throughout the week.

Let us begin

Chapter 16:18 **“You are to appoint judges and officers for all your gates [in the cities] ADONAI your God is giving you, tribe by tribe; and they are to judge the people with righteous judgment. ¹⁹ You are not to distort justice or show favouritism, and you are not to accept a bribe, for a gift blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of even the upright. ²⁰ Justice, only justice, you must pursue; so that you will live and inherit the land ADONAI your God is giving you.**

²¹ “You are not to plant any sort of tree as a sacred pole beside the altar of ADONAI your God that you will make for yourselves. ²² Likewise, do not set up a standing-stone; ADONAI your God hates such things.

In this week’s study, we will see that YHVH is establishing a system of judgment among the people who will be authorized by an appointed group of men. The civil justice system is one that will run in parallel to the religious. Both systems will be brought into relationship with one another and to oversee this, the Sanhedrin will eventually be formed. One system the political will represent the King and the religious by the Prophet. Overall, neither will have sole power. It would become a new model based on the Torah that will bring balance to both ruling authorities.

Practically, jurisdiction will be dispensed from the temple by the Levitical priests and at the gates by the elders.

This passage in Ruth shows us a clear example of deliberation:

Ruth 4:1-12 Boaz Marries Ruth

Meanwhile, Boaz went up to the town gate and sat down there just as the guardian-redeemer[a] he had mentioned came along. Boaz said, “Come over here, my friend, and sit down.” So he went over and sat down.

² Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, “Sit here,” and they did so. ³ Then he said to the guardian-redeemer, “Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelek. ⁴ I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you[b] will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line.” “I will redeem it,” he said.

⁵ Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the[c] dead man’s widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.”

⁶ At this, the guardian-redeemer said, “Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.”

⁷ (Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.)

⁸ So the guardian-redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it yourself.” And he removed his sandal.

⁹ Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, “Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰ I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of

the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!"

¹¹ Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem.

¹² Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

In the book of 'Lamentations' the writer, considered to be Jeremiah laments over the destruction of Jerusalem in 586BC by the Babylonians. The decisions concerning the dispensing of the law have gone. He says;

Lamentations 5:12-15

***Princes have been hung up by their hands;
elders are shown no respect.***

***¹³ Young men toil at the millstones;
boys stagger under loads of wood.***

***¹⁴ The elders are gone from the city gate;
the young men have stopped their music.***

***¹⁵ Joy is gone from our hearts;
our dancing has turned to mourning.***

The Talmud Sanhedrin gives us insight into how the judges would be set up:

A court of three judges decides monetary matters. Capital crimes by a tribunal of twenty-three judges... From where is this derived? For it is written (Numbers 35:24–25): "The community shall judge ... and the community shall save"—we need a community of judges arguing to convict the accused, and a community of judges arguing to exonerate him. Thus, we have twenty. A conviction requires a majority of two, and a court of law cannot have an even number of judges; thus, we need twenty-three judges (22 so that there should be a majority of 2 over the 10 "saving" judges, and another judge so that the court should not be even-numbered).

Furthermore, the Talmud goes on to state a fundamental dynamic of peace emerges when the truth of the law is upheld. It also considered that a Judge who judges in absolute truth becomes a partner with God.

If we look closely at this new system of law, we see that a centralized law-making judiciary may have overridden the traditional clan systems. However, there was a hierarchy among the elders. Elders were not men of age but distinction and wisdom. The system was made up elders for the city, the country and the people and there were also elders associated with the King. In 1 Kings 20:7, for example, we see how Ahab had to consult the elders of the land before declaring war. In 2 Samuel 3:17 **Abner conferred with the elders of Israel and said, "For some time you have wanted to make David your king.**

In 2 Samuel 5:3 (CJB) ³ **So all the leaders of Isra'el came to the king in Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them in Hebron in the presence of Adonai. Then they anointed David king over Isra'el.**

In Jeremiah 17 we see how the priests and false prophets declared the penalty of death over Jeremiah following his prophecy concerning the judgment of the Lord against those who had profaned. This is the accusation: Jeremiah 26 Amplified Bible (AMP)

Cities of Judah Warned

In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the Lord, saying, ² "Thus says the Lord, 'Stand in the court of the Lord's house

[Jeremiah], and speak to all [the people of] the cities of Judah who have come to worship in the Lord's house all the words that I have commanded you to speak to them. Do not omit a word! ³ It may be that they will listen and everyone will turn from his wickedness, so that I may relent *and* reverse [My decision concerning] the disaster which I am planning to do to them because of their malevolent deeds.'

..7The priests and the [false] prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the Lord. ⁸ Now when Jeremiah finished proclaiming everything that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the [false] prophets and all the people seized him, saying, "You must die!

Following the ruling of the priests, we read how the princes – the court officials come to the defense of the Jeremiah.

¹⁰ When the princes (court officials) of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the Lord and sat in the entrance of the New Gate of the house of the Lord. ¹¹ Then the priests and the [false] prophets said to the princes and to all the people, "This man is deserving of death, for he has prophesied against this city as you have heard with your own ears."

We see also that Moses took counsel from Jethro to establish a judicial council to help him judge the people.

Exodus 18:13-24 Now the next day Moses sat to judge [the disputes] the people [had with one another], and the people stood around Moses from dawn to dusk. ¹⁴ When Moses' father-in-law saw everything that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why are you sitting alone [as a judge] with all the people standing around you from dawn to dusk?" ¹⁵ Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to ask [about the will] of God. ¹⁶ When they have a dispute they come to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and I make known the statutes of God and His laws."

Jethro Counsels Moses

¹⁷ Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you are doing is not good. ¹⁸ You will certainly wear out both yourself and these people who are with you, because the task is too heavy for you [to bear]; you cannot do it alone. ¹⁹ Now listen to [b]me; [c]I will advise you, and may God be with you [to confirm my advice]. You shall represent the people before God. You shall bring their disputes and causes to Him. ²⁰ You shall teach them the decrees and laws. You shall show them the way they are to live and the work they are to do. ²¹ Furthermore, you shall select from all the people competent men who [reverently] fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; you shall place these over the people as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. ²² They shall judge the people at all times; have them bring every major dispute to you, but let them judge every minor dispute themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. ²³ If you will do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure [the responsibility], and all these people will also go [back] to their tents in peace."

²⁴ So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything that he had said.

In the above passage from Exodus 18 we learn that Moses placed men in counsels of different authority. In Exodus 18, the attributes of the chosen men are: fear of God and to be trustworthy and honest. In Numbers 11, we witness a conversation between God and Moses and see that the 70 elders are chosen through divine inspiration.

Numb 11:16-17 Accordingly, the Lord said to Moses, "Gather for Me [g]seventy men from among the elders of Israel whom you know to be the elders of the people and their officers; bring them to the Tent of Meeting (tabernacle) and let them stand there with you. ¹⁷ Then I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take away some of the

Spirit who is upon you, and will put Him upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you will not have to bear it all alone.

In Deuteronomy 1, wisdom, understanding, and knowledge will be the criteria that make a man fit to judge. In this layer of criteria, we see that wisdom is placed at the top of the ladder of values.

See this passage in Prov. 8:11-17

**“For wisdom is better than rubies;
And all desirable things cannot compare with her.**

¹² **“I, [godly] wisdom, reside with prudence [good judgment, moral courage and astute common sense], And I find knowledge and discretion.**

¹³ **“The [reverent] fear *and* worshipful awe of the Lord *includes* the hatred of evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way, And the perverted mouth, I hate.**

¹⁴ **“Counsel is mine and sound wisdom;
I am understanding, power *and* strength are mine.**

¹⁵ **“By me kings reign
And rulers decide *and* decree justice.**

¹⁶ **“By me princes rule, and nobles,
All who judge *and* govern rightly.**

¹⁷ **“I love those who love me;
And those who seek me early *and* diligently will find me.**

There would soon be established a system of law that would override the congregational laws. The time had come to look at Israel now as one community and not as separate tribes with their peculiar laws.

Can you imagine an event so profound that the law of society suddenly gives way to one overriding counsel of law? I don't think that is hard to imagine at all do you? The unification of nations which involve their economies, currencies, and religions will occur soon. Over the last few decades, we as a nation through a confederacy of nations have been forced to take on laws that have been set by a single non-elected parliament. We have seen that that in itself is corrupt because the nations with its absence of YHVH's law at their heart of government have never had real and contented peace. Hundreds of thousands of laws have been instituted concerning every aspect of life. Most of those laws we will never have heard of. We have heard since the great Brexit debate how the institutional laws governing our relationship with the rest of Europe have forced us to consider more closely that relationship and the cost of breaking it. How many of us at the beginning of that union knew the complexities? And now today, we see that even our leaders are perplexed by it all. An ancient society was, thousands of years ago, able to put the laws of YHVH into practice because they wanted to live under the blessing and righteousness of YHVH. Living that way and obeying YHVH's rule of law brought them peace and prosperity. Even the land itself was blessed. We know this to be true because the scriptures are full of YHVH's judgment against an unruly and wicked people.

In the background of all the written law, there is, of course, the Oral law. We look to the rule of law to be understood by those who use it to provide sound a right counsel over us. The dispensers of the law were themselves to be of a humble disposition. Even the King had to speak to his people with gentleness and humility. His life was not one given to excess. He was to have his own hand-written Torah which he was to read every day. The Torah would be his guide.

Ch17:18-20 **“When he has come to occupy the throne of his kingdom, he is to write a copy of this Torah for himself in a scroll, from the one the cohanim and L'vi'im use. ¹⁹ It is to**

remain with him, and he is to read in it every day, as long as he lives; so that he will learn to fear Adonai his God and keep all the words of this Torah and these laws and obey them;²⁰ so that he will not think he is better than his kinsmen; and so that he will not turn aside either to the right or to the left from the mitzvah. In this way he will prolong his own reign and that of his children in Isra'el.

His duty to read and observe Torah was also his guarantee of a long and successful reign. That same approach is admonished upon all believers because we are a priestly and kingly nation.

Galatians 5:23 **gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.**

2 Timothy 2:25 **Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.**

Ephesians 4:1-2

with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

Maybe you can pursue some further study on these attributes.

Now back to the Oral law. It must not be confused with the traditions and rituals that were adopted over time. The purpose of the Oral law was to interpret the law. For example, we need to decide what murder is and what manslaughter is. We need to see what the law says for example how to punish a man who murders one person and another who has murdered several. Does he get the same sentence? Will a man find mercy in a city of sanctuary if he kills someone accidentally? will the man who murders wilfully find the same? We will see this clearly outlined in the final chapter of this parsha regarding the places of refuge. On a side note: we need to understand here that those places of refuge mentioned are purely for the safety of a person who has killed someone accidentally. A murderer would have no place in these places of sanctuary. If he seeks sanctuary,, he will be handed over to the authorities. The oral law is to be righteously interpreted. On the occasion when local and civil law found it difficult to conclude the matter, it would be taken to the temple priests. A joint decision would have to be made in the event of neither authority agreeing.

Deut 17:8-13 "If a case comes before you at your city gate which is too difficult for you to judge, concerning bloodshed, civil suit, personal injury or any other controversial issue; you are to get up, go to the place which Adonai your God will choose, ⁹ and appear before the cohanim, who are L'vi'im, and the judge in office at the time. Seek their opinion, and they will render a verdict for you. ¹⁰ You will then act according to what they have told you there in that place which Adonai will choose; you are to take care to act according to all their instructions. ¹¹ In accordance with the Torah they teach you, you are to carry out the judgment they render, not turning aside to the right or the left from the verdict they declare to you. ¹² Anyone presumptuous enough not to pay attention to the cohen appointed there to serve Adonai your God or to the judge — that person must die. Thus you will exterminate such wickedness from Isra'el — ¹³ all the people will hear about it and be afraid to continue acting presumptuously.

Clearly, the Torah recognised that problems would arise in the interpretation of the law and that solutions would not come simply by observing the text. Those that studied the law in the first temple period were called tofsei Torah (those learned in Torah). The role of the patriarch to pass down these laws was gradually surpassed by formal education. The young

learned from their elders and teachers, and the oral law became a framework for the Mosaic written law.

It is said that when Ezra the scribe read the Torah to the people at the institution of the second temple in 445BC that the Levites stood at his side and interpreted the significance of the text. Ezra was considered to be the first sage of the Torah. **Ezra 7:7-10 And there went up also to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king, some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants. ⁸ And Ezra[a] came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. ⁹ For on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the good hand of his God was on him. ¹⁰ For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.**

He is also considered to be the precursor of a time known in Jewish history of the era of the Knesset Gadolah (the Great Assembly).

During the time of the reading of the Torah by Ezra we read in Nehemiah 8:1-6 **all the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel.**

² So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand.

³ He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

⁴ Ezra the teacher of the Law stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam.

⁵ Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. ⁶ Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

Nehemiah 9: the people repent before the LORD and as a result of this we witness what is called the 'Great Covenant' possibly the world's first constitution. V38 **"In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it."**

The study of the Mosaic and Oral laws prove that no generation will truly understand it all so in this sense it will take many lifetimes to understand and appropriate it in the culture of humanity. However, if we listen to those who understood it through wisdom and the spirit of YHVH we can learn much. Their testimony of it is not just historical it is pertinent for us today. However, we see now in the culture of the church that tolerance and liberalism in the church has misinterpreted it to make it relevant to a generation in order to attract a very different following. If the Law has changed then YHVH has changed and Yeshua died for no reason.

In one of our readings today we will look at 1 Corinthians 5.

**1 Corinthians 5:1-13 Amplified Bible (AMP)
Immorality Rebuked**

It is actually reported [everywhere] that there is sexual immorality among you, a kind of immorality that is condemned even among the [unbelieving] Gentiles: that someone [a]has [an intimate relationship with] his father's wife. ² And you are proud and arrogant! You should have mourned in shame so that the man who has done this [disgraceful] thing would be removed from your fellowship!

³ For I, though absent [from you] in body but present in spirit, have already passed judgment on him who has committed this [act], as if I were present. ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I am with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to [b]hand over this man to Satan for the destruction of his body, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

⁶ Your boasting [over the supposed spirituality of your church] is not good [indeed, it is vulgar and inappropriate]. [c]Do you not know that [just] a little leaven ferments the whole batch [of dough, just as a little sin corrupts a person or an entire church]? ⁷ [d]Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new batch, just as you are, still unleavened. For Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore, let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with leaven of vice and malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and [untainted] truth.

⁹ I wrote you in my [previous] letter not to associate with [sexually] immoral people—

¹⁰ not meaning the immoral people of this world, or the greedy ones and swindlers, or idolaters, for then you would have to get out of the world and human society altogether!

¹¹ But actually, I have written to you not to associate with any so-called [Christian] brother if he is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater [devoted to anything that takes the place of God], or is a reviler [who insults or slanders or otherwise verbally abuses others], or is a drunkard or a swindler—you must not so much as [e]eat with such a person. ¹² For what business is it of mine to judge outsiders (non-believers)? Do you not judge those who are within the church [to protect the church as the situation requires]? ¹³ God alone sits in judgment on those who are outside [the faith]. Remove the wicked one from among you [expel him from your church].

This is indeed a very challenging passage. We are acutely aware of the ongoing disgraceful sexual misconduct among the clergy. Historical offences are piling up and the full extent may never really be known. It has been highlighted many times over the years in the news recently by the decades of abuse that took place in two of the countries prestigious religious schools. Instead of bringing right counsel to the matter and dispelling the offenders they are moved on to other establishments or parishes. Friends, we know that this nothing new. We see that even Paul attends to the matter in the church of Corinth. Sexual sin is an abhorrence to the Lord and in the ladder of those abhorrence's it remains on the top rung of the ladder.

1 Corinthians 6:9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who submit to or perform homosexual acts.

Galatians 5:19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery;

1 Timothy 1:10 for the sexually immoral, for homosexuals, for slave traders and liars and perjurers, and for anyone else who is averse to sound teaching.

The book of Revelations counts in the final judgement sexual immorality among the practices of Idolatry. It somehow links us to this small passage in ch16.

21 “You are not to plant any sort of tree as a sacred pole beside the altar of Adonai your God that you will make for yourselves. 22 Likewise, do not set up a standing-stone; Adonai your God hates such things.

Before we leave this study let us quickly look at what this is referring to.

The sacred poles are the Asherah poles. They were used in the Canaanite religion to worship the goddess Asherah. Her relationship to the practices among the early Israelites seems ambiguous. She is associated with Baal and El and is predominantly seen as the goddess of living trees and possibly the Queen of the heavens, though this was also used as a title for other eastern deities. It therefore seems that the poles referred to as Asherah poles were in fact living trees. Now let us look at this passage in **Deuteronomy 20:19 Amplified Bible (AMP)**

“When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to capture it, you shall not destroy its [fruit-bearing] trees by swinging an axe against them; for you may eat from them, and you shall not cut them down. For is the tree of the field a man, that it should be besieged (destroyed) by you?

In this passage the command of the LORD is of a practical nature. Non-fruit bearing trees should be used for building. Why would you cut the tree down that feeds you? However, we must realise that the Israelites were still prone to falling into the ancient practices. On a side note: the first fruit from the trees were also offered as a thanksgiving sacrifice to the Lord.

Now let's go back to V16

16 Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes. 17 But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the LORD your God has commanded you, 18 so that they will not teach you to act in accordance with all the detestable practices which they have done [in worship and service] for their gods, and in this way cause you to sin against the LORD your God.

The reference here is to the worshipping practices of pagans. Asherah is linked to a number of eastern religions and may be confused with another eastern goddess 'Astarte' a fertility Goddess. However, our focus is that YHVH declares that the sacred poles must not be planted which clarifies the notion that the poles were living non-fruit bearing trees.

The opening chapters of Judges speak of a time after the death of Joshua when a generation had forgotten the ways of the LORD. They began to follow the practices of pagan cultures around them. They looked to the worship of Baal and Ashtoreths.

Josh 2:10-13 **After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. ¹¹ Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. ¹² They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the Lord's anger ¹³ because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.**

Josh 3:5-7 **The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁶ They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.**

Othniel

⁷ The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord; they forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs.

Joshua 6 gives an account of how Gideon having been given the command by the LORD to destroy the Asherah poles and the altar to Baal built by his own father.

Further study into this passage reveals a complex concoction of cultic practices that range over time. It is obvious that polytheism was practiced among the earlier years of Israelites. Asherah was considered at the time to be the consort of YHVH. Another name for her was 'Elat' the feminine form of 'El'. Pagan deities of Ishtar and Ashtart however have Mesopotamian links. It seems that monotheism centred on YHVH after the second temple period.

In addition to the Asherah poles we are told about the standing stones. Standing stones were used by the Canaanites, Israelites and the Nabatean people who carved out the monuments of Petra. Gilgal, in the book of Joshua is said to be a circle of 12 standing stones. However, scholarly thought pursues the notion that there may have been many places called Gilgal.

Josh. 4:19-22 The Camp at Gilgal

¹⁹On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho. ²⁰And there at Gilgal Joshua set up the twelve stones they had taken from the Jordan.

²¹Then Joshua said to the Israelites, "In the future, when your children ask their fathers, 'What is the meaning of these stones?' ²²you are to tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.'

And again in Joshua 24:26 Amplified Bible (AMP)

And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was in [the courtyard of] the sanctuary of the Lord.

Jacob is said to have raised a standing stone to YHVH in remembrance of his encounter with Him in Genesis 28:22 Amplified Bible (AMP)

This stone which I have set up as a pillar (monument, memorial) will be God's house [a sacred place to me], and of everything that You give me I will give the tenth to You [as an offering to signify my gratitude and dependence on You]."

When we look at this passage a little closer we may conclude that the stone that Jacob set up was more than a simple pillow like stone on which to rest his head.

The word Bethel is also known as Baetyl which also mean 'House of God' Bayit El. The Baetyl or upright stone was considered to be endowed with life and from a meteoric source. The meaning of the word 'Bayit' denotes not only a house or building architecturally but a house with a function. This meaning points us to ourselves as a living breathing community of believers. In the House of YHVH we all have purpose and a function.

As I conclude the study into 'shof'tim', we will see that YHVH has centralised a judicial system with Him as the single authority over it. The appointment of Judges and priests over the understanding and interpretation of it was critical in its dispensation over the people and their king. Wise, honest and just counsel given in humble service to YHVH was the criteria. The Great Council, known as the Sanhedrin was the result of the establishment of this judicial body that incorporated both the civil and priestly rules. Yeshua would come

eventually and fulfil all the conditions of the priest, king, judge and prophet. When He raises issues of the law for us as in Mathew 5, He tells us to go beyond its context and beyond its judgement. It is ultimately not what the law dishes out as punishment but how righteous it is. Yeshua is telling us that the Pharisees and the Torah teachers are being dogmatic regarding the stipulation of the law. Neglecting the issue of righteousness, including grace, mercy and wisdom is the weightier one. The Law of YHVH and the understanding of it can only come through the spirit in which it was given. The spirit of the Law can therefore never be abolished.

We often see in the media how Christians can bring shame to the body of messiah. We hear of church goers bringing law cases against Pastors, and accusations of misconduct whether true or false which are openly on view for all to see is not becoming of a believer and goes against the law which Yeshua clearly shows us. One such case you might recall was concerning the infidelity in the marriage of two very well-known TV Media producers. That incident was broadcast in the mainstream news. What transpired was shameful. It should have been dealt with privately and then as a statement to those who supported them and to the wider body. Whenever issues arise among the brethren our conduct is to make peace before it should ever go to the court of the judges or the priests and it should never enter the public arena.

Mathew 5:20-26 “For I say to you that unless your righteousness (uprightness, moral essence) is more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not murder,’ and ‘Whoever murders shall be guilty before the court.’ ²² But I say to you that everyone who continues to be angry with his brother or harbours malice against him shall be guilty before the court; and whoever speaks [contemptuously and insultingly] to his brother, Raca (You empty-headed idiot)! shall be guilty before the supreme court (Sanhedrin); and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of the fiery hell. ²³ So if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and while there you remember that your brother has something [such as a grievance or legitimate complaint] against you, ²⁴ leave your offering there at the altar and go. First make peace with your brother, and then come and present your offering. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly [at the earliest opportunity] with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way [to court], so that your opponent does not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you are thrown into prison. ²⁶ I assure you and most solemnly say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid the last cent.

The word of warning for us and even to those ancient judges is ‘be careful of how you interpret the law and be careful how you judge others. Misinterpretation and bad judgment will affect future generations. But allowing us to misinterpret the law can also be allowed by YHVH. The dispensation of an unrighteous judgment is as sinful as the crime before God. Corruption will affect a nation and every authority in it. Scripture tells us that if we continue to sin, then YHVH will give us over to our debased mind and if a nation sins He will turn over that nation to its enemy. The final judgment over sin is the outcome of the battle that has raged since before the creation of the world. The total eradication of sin and everything that contends against the knowledge of God is the goal. At the final outcome, our Yeshua the Prince of peace, the King of kings, the Melchizedek priest, and our great judge will rule. Then we will truly witness and rest in the joy of the LORD.

In conclusion, we now understand that the Shoftim were appointed to interpret the law so that it can function as the governance for a community that would soon become a thriving nation. Interpretation of the law does not mean that it can be changed neither does every

aspect of it apply to everyone in society. Regarding the crime of adultery or idolatry, where the death penalty is the sentence, we through the blood covenant of Messiah are shown mercy. The death penalty for those who have sinned and come to repentance has been quashed by Yeshua. For us, that penalty can only be carried out once. Yeshua having taken that penalty upon Himself can only die once too. The Law of witnesses in Ch17:6 tells us that the penalty of death can only be passed on the testimony of two witnesses. John 8:17 places us at the point of witnessing the sentence of stoning being about to be carried out. Yeshua's remark to those gathered for the event is to convict them of their own sin for all of them are guilty. In reality, the Judge of Heaven stands before them and not only convicts them but saves the woman. The two witnesses in front of those ready to cast their stones is the Law and those viewing from the heavenly realms.

We must understand that although YHVH gave the law, it was open to man to understand. The observance of the law would bring peace and balance to the community made up of human beings. Righteousness and the judgment, civil or priestly cannot bring salvation. Yeshua stands before the sinner as Judge and saviour. It is only through Him that the evidence against us is thrown out of court. It happens because Yeshua brought the sentence of the crime and law upon Himself. In doing so, He balanced the scales.

To receive that gift of new life is really up to us. How we live that life is by accepting the gift of YHVH. To all that believe we have the potential to be children of God. But what of the Law? and what good is it if a man studies it all his life and never gets to know God. The written word can only show our boundaries and what happens when we go beyond them. It is only through the spirit of the word that one can know the thoughts and ways of God.

If we with a deep desire and hunger to know what righteousness is, search for it, we will be filled. Filled with what? The knowledge of God. Remind yourself today, that that is what He looks for. Yeshua has given us the ability to do just that.

Eph 1:3-10 Praised be Adonai, Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, who in the Messiah has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heaven. ⁴ In the Messiah he chose us in love before the creation of the universe to be holy and without defect in his presence. ⁵ He determined in advance that through Yeshua the Messiah we would be his sons — in keeping with his pleasure and purpose — ⁶ so that we would bring him praise commensurate with the glory of the grace he gave us through the Beloved One.

⁷ In union with him, through the shedding of his blood, we are set free — our sins are forgiven; this accords with the wealth of the grace ⁸ he has lavished on us. In all his wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us his secret plan, which by his own will he designed beforehand in connection with the Messiah ¹⁰ and will put into effect when the time is ripe — his plan to place everything in heaven and on earth under the Messiah's headship.

Today, as we close this study let us give thanks to Yeshua, and the cloud of witnesses who saw our sin chose not to cast the stones.

Psalm 103:6

**⁶ The Lord works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.**

**⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel:**

**⁸ The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.**

**⁹ He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;**

¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve

or repay us according to our iniquities.

- ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
¹³ As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.
¹⁵ The life of mortals is like grass,
they flourish like a flower of the field;
¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more.
¹⁷ But from everlasting to everlasting
the Lord's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children—
¹⁸ with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts

Shalom.



Numbers 6:22 Adonai said to Moshe, ²³ “Speak to Aharon and his sons, and tell them that this is how you are to bless the people of Isra’el: you are to say to them,

²⁴ ‘Y’varekh’kha Adonai v’yishmerekha.

[May Adonai bless you and keep you.]

²⁵ Ya’er Adonai panav eleikha vichunekka.

[May Adonai make his face shine on you and show you his favour.]

²⁶ Yissa Adonai panav eleikha v’yasem l’kha shalom

[May Adonai lift up his face toward you and give you peace.]

Until next time.

Shabbat Shalom

Grant Marshall: Co-founder Arrows of Ephrayim Ministries.

Haftarah Shof’tim: Yesha’yahu (Isaiah) 51:12–52:12

B’rit Hadashah suggested readings for Parashah Shof’tim: Mattityahu (Matthew) 5:38–42; 18:15–20; Acts 3:13–26; 7:35–53; 1 Corinthians 5:9–13; 1 Timothy 5:17–22; Messianic Jews (Hebrews) 10:28–31

Reference

Midrash: In Judaism, the *Midrash* is the genre of rabbinic literature which contains early interpretations and commentaries on the Written Torah and Oral Torah (spoken law and sermons), as well as non-legalistic rabbinic literature (*Aggadah*) and occasionally the Jewish religious laws (*halakha*), which usually form a running commentary on specific passages in the Hebrew Scripture (*Tanakh*)

Targum: **Targum Onkelos** (or **Onqelos**), is the official eastern (Babylonian) Targum (Aramaic translation) to the Torah. However, its early origins may have been western, in Israel. Its authorship is attributed to Onkelos, a famous convert to Judaism in Tannaic times (c. 35–120 CE)

Targum Jonathan: **Targum Jonathan**), otherwise referred to as **Targum Yonasan/Yonatan**, is the official eastern (Babylonian) Targum to the Nevi'im/Prophets. Its early origins, however, are western (i.e. from the Land of Israel), and the Talmudic tradition attributes its authorship to Jonathan ben Uzziel of Jerusalem in the time of King Herod

Tannaim: Tannaim were the Rabbinic sages whose views are recorded in the Mishnah, from approximately 10-220 CE. The period of the Tannaim, also referred to as the Mishnaic period, lasted about 210 years.

Talmud: The **Talmud** means "instruction, learning", "teach, study") is a central text of Rabbinic Judaism. The term "Talmud" normally refers to the collection of writings named specifically the **Babylonian Talmud** (*Talmud Bavli*), although there is also an earlier collection known as the Jerusalem Talmud (*Talmud Yerushalmi*) or Palestinian

The Talmud has two components:

1. The Mishnah (c. 200 CE), the first written compendium of Judaism's Oral Law;
2. The Gemara (c. 500 CE), an elucidation of the Mishnah and related Tannaitic writings that often ventures onto other subjects and expounds broadly on the Hebrew Bible

Jubilees: The Book of Jubilees claims to present "the history of the division of the days of the Law, of the events of the years, the year-weeks, and the jubilees of the world" as revealed to Moses (in addition to the Torah or "Instruction") by angels while he was on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights. The chronology given in Jubilees is based on multiples of seven; the jubilees are periods of 49 years, seven "year-weeks", into which all of time has been divided

Vulgate: This is the Latin Bible. Translated from the Hebrew and Aramaic by Jerome between 382 and 405 CE, this text became known as the 'versio vulgata', which means 'common translation'.