



Parasha Shoftim

August 30, 2025

Torah: Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9

Haftarah: Isaiah 51:12-52:12

Ketuvim Shlichim: John 1:19-34

Shabbat shalom Mishpacha. Our *parasha* today is *Shoftim*, meaning “judges.” It opens with the words: *18 Judges and officers you are to appoint within all your gates that Adonai your God is giving you, according to your tribes; and they are to judge the people with righteous judgment.* (Deuteronomy 16:18 TLV). שֹׁפְטִים וְשׁוֹטְרִים, *Shoftim v'shotrim t'ten l'cha*, literally, Judges and officers you shall appoint to you, with you being the people of Israel. All Scripture is from the Tree of Life Version of the Bible. *Shoftim*, Judges, as a noun, is straightforward in its meaning and refers to an official who can interpret the law to make a ruling or decide on an outcome. The judges were Levites (Numbers 3-4, and 1 Chronicles 23-26). Judges are necessary in any society, as ADONAI first pointed this out. But if there was a case too difficult, it was to be taken to the place designated by ADONAI where it would be judged by the judge in charge at that time, who was a *kohen* (Deuteronomy 17:8-9). *Shotrim*, on the other hand, is usually translated as “officers” and refers to someone responsible for carrying out the rulings made by the judges, but is more literally understood as police. The *Shotrim*, who were also Levites, were responsible for enforcing the decisions of the *Shoftim*, carrying them out with force if necessary. This is something we don't usually think about: that there were officers needed to ensure the rulings of the judges of the Nation of Israel were carried out. In reality, they were what we typically think of as police officers. We have a possible example of this when Yeshua was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. Luke tells of captains coming with the chief elders to arrest Him. They were called *Stratēgous* (strat-ay-gos'), meaning chief magistrates, captains, or officers, most likely Levites serving in the Temple. Having religious police is a foreign concept to us today in our congregational life under the New Covenant. But at that time, Israel was ruled directly by ADONAI, and it will be that way again when Yeshua returns to earth as king.

Under the First Covenant, ADONAI was a covenant-making king, referred to as a suzerain. He, the suzerain, was the greater, dominant power in the covenant, and Israel was the vassal, the lesser, subordinate party. As suzerain, ADONAI pledged to be Israel's protector and provider, requiring Israel to demonstrate unwavering loyalty, obedience to His laws, and worship Him alone as their king and lord. Other than being a theocracy, a nation ruled by ADONAI, ancient Israel functioned as a nation much like our modern countries do.

ADONAI cares about just judgment; judgment free of bias or bribes. Parasha *Shoftim* continues: צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדּוֹף, *Tsedek tsedek tirdof*, meaning “justice, justice, you must pursue” (Deuteronomy 16:20a). There is a deeper meaning here expressed through Hebraic doubling. An example we often use is “*shalom, shalom*,” meaning “perfect peace.” Isaiah wrote these words to reveal this truth: *3 You keep in perfect peace (שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם) one whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You* (Isaiah 26:3). The Hebrew reads *shalom, shalom*, but it is translated as “perfect peace” in English. In Hebrew, doubling, saying it twice, adds emphasis to it. In Deuteronomy 16:20, we can translate *tsedek, tsedek tirdof* as “pursue perfect

justice,” or pursue complete justice. That’s what ADONAI has commanded Israel to do: be unbiased and fair, ensure perfect justice in all matters of justice.

An example of the pursuit of justice is found a few verses later in this *parasha*. In chapter 17, procedures are provided for the judgment of anyone discovered worshipping other gods: 4 *“It is told to you and you have heard about it, and you investigate thoroughly and indeed it is true and the thing certain—this abomination has been done in Israel. 5 Then you are to bring out to your gates that man or woman who has done this evil thing, and stone that man or woman with stones to death.”* (Deuteronomy 17:4-5). Those who may have a lesser understanding of our great king sometimes say He is a cruel G-d. But you and I would say that He is a just G-d who is love, but also cannot tolerate flagrant sin. Israel agreed as a nation to worship only Him, and those who worshipped other gods understood the penalty.

ADONAI is a just king, but also a loving Father. He doesn’t take pleasure in carrying out justice against His children, whom He created. Now that we are no longer under the Covenant made at Sinai and, under the *B’rit Chadasha*, the New Covenant, things are different. We cannot be stoned to death for worshipping other gods, as ADONAI formerly commanded for Israel. That is because, under the New Covenant, there is no such penalty. The penalty for stoning remains in the *Torah*, but is now inactive because there is no Temple and no *kohanim* to carry it out. And that applies to more than two-thirds of the *mitzvot*. They are currently inactive. Now under the New Covenant, everyone who trusts in Yeshua with a sincere and lasting commitment is promised life, eternal life. ADONAI knows those who claim to have accepted Yeshua but whose hearts remain uncircumcised and unrepentant. While they claim to be His covenant members, ADONAI knows their hearts and that they are not genuine covenant members. Yeshua testified to John on the Island of Patmos: 8 *“But for the cowardly and faithless and detestable and murderers and sexually immoral and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars—their lot is in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”* (Revelation 21:8). All of these individuals are outside the New Covenant. The punishment for the continued worship of other gods, turning away from or not recognizing ADONAI, is death, but now it is not by stoning—it is their eventual separation from their Creator, and an eternity of aloneness, apart from their family and friends who will spend eternity in G-d’s presence.

Even before the time of the Book of Deuteronomy, almost 3,500 years ago, ADONAI had formulated a plan to supersede the covenant He made with Israel at Mount Sinai. Moses prophesied about a coming prophet; one he said would be like him. 15 *“Adonai your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your midst—from your brothers. To him you must listen. 16 This is just what you asked of Adonai your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly when saying, ‘I cannot continue to hear the voice of Adonai my God or see this great fire any more, or I will die.’ 17 “Adonai said to me, ‘They have done well in what they have spoken. 18 I will raise up a prophet like you for them from among their brothers. I will put My words in his mouth, and he will speak to them all that I command him. 19 Now whoever does not listen to My words that this prophet speaks in My Name, I Myself will call him to account.”* (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). We who have trusted in Him know that “the Prophet Like Moses” is Yeshua. His coming is foreshadowed in these verses, but ADONAI also reveals in them that sending Him was at least partially due to Israel’s request at Mount Sinai to remove the fearfulness of hearing His voice and seeing the fire. ADONAI said, *“This is just what you asked of Adonai your God in Horeb.”* While they got what they asked for, Yeshua, their Messiah, many have not accepted Him.

But we also recognize that ADONAI made every one of these plans before the earth was formed. *Sha'ul wrote: 1 For this reason I, Paul, am a prisoner of Messiah Yeshua for the sake of you Gentiles. 2 Surely you have heard about the plan of God's grace given to me for you— 3 that the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote before briefly. 4 When you read this, you can understand my insight into the mystery of Messiah— 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, as it has now been revealed by the Ruach to His holy emissaries and prophets.* (Ephesians 3:1-5). The mystery of the Messiah is that Jew and Gentile are one in the Messiah, that He died for both groups. However, the specific reference to ADONAI's plan is found in Revelation 13:8. Yeshua revealed this to John: *8 All who dwell on the earth shall worship him—everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the Book of Life of the Lamb who was slain.* (Revelation 13:8). This refers to the time of the end, and “him” in this verse is the Beast whom the Dragon, *HaSatan*, empowered. I believe he is also the False Prophet, possibly a human representative of Islam in the very last days. This verse indicates that a time will come when everyone on earth who has not trusted in Yeshua will worship the Beast's false teaching. It will be about a false god named Allah. This verse also gives us two truths regarding Yeshua, depending upon which way you look at it and which Bible version you read. The TLV emphasizes that our names were written in the Book of Life before the foundation of the earth, whereas other versions highlight that ADONAI planned to send His Son Yeshua to die for us before the foundation of the earth. Both are true. ADONAI planned to send His Son to reconcile us to Him from the very beginning. He made plans to send His Son, Yeshua, to Israel even before the earth was formed. He said that Israel asked for it at Mount Sinai (Deuteronomy 18:16). He also had another very good reason which He revealed through the Prophet Jeremiah: *30 “Behold, days are coming” —it is a declaration of Adonai— “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— 31 not like the covenant I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they broke My covenant, though I was a husband to them.” it is a declaration of Adonai.* (Jeremiah 31:30-31). Because Israel broke ADONAI's covenant that He made with them at Mount Sinai, He cut a New Covenant with Israel, but not with the blood of animals as before, but now with the blood of His own Son.

Yeshua is the “prophet like Moses,” sometimes called “the second Moses,” or “a greater Moses,” and there are several similarities in their lives. Both faced threats as infants, Moses from Pharaoh and Yeshua from Herod. Moses led Israel in a physical deliverance, while Yeshua brought their spiritual deliverance. Both Moses and Yeshua taught *Torah*. Both taught on a mountain, Moses on Mount Sinai and Yeshua on a small mountain on the shores of the Sea of Galilee (The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6, and 7). Both Moses and Yeshua performed miraculous signs (Moses; signs before Pharaoh). But Yeshua, as the Son of G-d, far surpasses Moses and achieves a much greater fulfillment of his efforts as a deliverer of Israel.

The leadership of Israel had reached a low level in the early 1st century. The High Priest, not being a descendant of Aaron, purchased his office from the Romans, and many other priests also exploited their priesthood for personal gain. Many Pharisees sought glory and profit for themselves, turning away from teaching the truth of the *Torah*. Zechariah's son, *Yochanan*, saw this and chose to live in the desert rather than take up his role as a priest at the Temple like his father. He preached *teshuvah*, repentance, turning away from one's sins, and had been doing this for some time, probably for six months to a year, when

Yeshua came to him for immersion. John began his preaching in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, and it probably lasted for up to two years before Herod arrested him.

As John was preaching and immersing in the Jordan River, Scripture reveals his thoughts about some of the people coming to him: *7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his immersion, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"* (Matthew 3:7). The coming wrath was ADONAI's judgment and punishment for the unrepentant, and John preached a message of repentance, immersing those who repented as a sign of turning away from their sins. Those coming to Yochanan HaMatvil, John the Immerser, were familiar with Moses' prophecy and observed something in his actions that made them wonder if the Messiah had arrived. *19 This is John's testimony, when the Judean leaders sent kohanim and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He openly admitted and did not deny; he admitted, "I am not the Messiah." 21 "What then? Are you Elijah?" they asked him. "I am not," said John. "Are you the Prophet?" "No," he answered.* (John 1:20-21). The Prophet they referred to is the "Prophet like Moses" of Deuteronomy 18. Later, in the Galilee, crowds of people who were following Yeshua acknowledged Him as "the Prophet." After He fed the five thousand, we read this: *14 When the people saw the sign that Yeshua performed, they began to say, "This is most certainly the Prophet who is to come into the world!"* (John 6:14).

We know "the Prophet." He is our Messiah whom we have trusted. But how well do we know Him? Do we understand what He asks of us and know Him well enough to follow His instructions? Knowing Him well enough means understanding the commands He has given us. Deuteronomy 18:18-19 says: *18 I will raise up a prophet like you for them from among their brothers. I will put My words in his mouth, and he will speak to them all that I command him. 19 Now whoever does not listen to My words that this prophet speaks in My Name, I Myself will call him to account.* (Deuteronomy 18:18-19). This tells us that Yeshua's Words are the Father's Words, and if we don't listen to Yeshua's Words, we are held accountable to ADONAI. But we don't need *shotrim*, the police, to enforce it. Because we share a loving relationship with Yeshua and the Father, we desire to be obedient. We don't have to be forced to obey. But we must understand what the Scriptures instruct us to do. Sha'ul taught his disciple Timothy: *15 Make every effort to present yourself before God as tried and true, as an unashamed worker cutting a straight path with the word of truth.* (2Timothy 2:15). These words are beneficial for us today. We need to study to understand ADONAI's Word and then follow through with what it instructs us to do.

Sometime after the events of *Shavuot* and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the Temple, *Shimon Kefa* and *Yochanan* went up to the Temple for the ninth-hour prayer. This traditional prayer time, at 3 PM, was also when the evening sacrifice was offered. This reminds us that Yeshua, who died as a sacrifice for us around the ninth hour on the previous Passover day, died at the time of the evening sacrifice. A beggar was sitting by the Temple gate, a man lame from birth. He had no income other than begging, and someone would carry him to the Temple each day so he could beg for *tzedakah* from the people entering the Temple. We are told that this occurred at the gate called Beautiful. There is no consensus about which gate this was, but it was possibly the double gate, one of "the Huldah Gates," at the southern end of the Temple Mount, where most worshippers would have entered. It is said that they entered through the double gates and exited through the triple gates, also known as the Huldah gates. These gates had been named for the Prophetess Huldah, whose tomb was near the southern end of the Temple. The double gate has long been destroyed, but although the triple gate has been sealed since the Middle Ages, these three are still visible

at the top of the “monumental staircase.” Our *Beit Shalom* tour group has had the privilege of sitting on these steps several times. With our backs to the gates, we faced the ritual immersion complex, a system of forty *mikvaot*—immersion pools where worshippers could achieve ritual purity before entering the Temple—and also the place where three thousand people had been immersed on the Day of *Shavuot*, just a few weeks earlier. *4 But Peter, along with John, looked straight at him and said, “Look at us!” 5 So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. 6 But Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give to you—in the name of Yeshua ha-Mashiach ha-Natzrati, get up and walk!” 7 Then grabbing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately the man’s feet and ankles were made strong. 8 Jumping up, he stood and began walking; and he went with them into the Temple, walking and leaping and praising God!* (Acts 3:4-8). Instead of receiving *tzedakah*, which would feed him for a day or two, he was given a gift from Yeshua, one that would enable him to support himself without begging. And he was overjoyed, walking and leaping onto the Temple platform with them while praising G-d. The people saw this miracle and realized that he was the one who sat at the gate begging.

Peter and John walked over to the area called Solomon’s Portico, the place where they had been when the *Ruach Kodesh* fell on *Shavuot*. The people who had seen the man being healed ran to where they were. Kefa’s response to them was: *12 ... “Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this? Why do you stare at us—as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? 13 The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Servant Yeshua—the One you handed over and disowned before Pilate, though he had decided to release Him.”* (Acts 3:13b-14). And he had more to say, telling them that during Passover, they had executed Yeshua and asked for a murderer to be released instead of Him. He said to them that “they killed the ‘author of life,’” the Creator whom ADONAI raised from the dead, and that it was through faith in Yeshua’s name that this man was healed. Peter said he knew that both they and the leaders had done this in ignorance, but ADONAI had foretold through the prophets that the Anointed One had to suffer. Then he said: *19 Repent, therefore, and return—so your sins might be blotted out, 20 so times of relief might come from the presence of Adonai and He might send Yeshua, the Messiah appointed for you.* (Acts 3:19-20). Then Kefa spoke to them about Moses’ prophecy: *22 Moses said, ‘Adonai your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your brothers. Hear and obey Him in all that He shall say to you. 23 And it shall be that every soul that will not listen to that Prophet shall be completely cut off from the people.* (Acts 3:22-23). Under the covenant made at Sinai, verse 28 meant banishment from Israel. Under the *B’rit Chadasha*, this refers to eternity and life after death, indicating that those who trust in Yeshua will not be cut off but will have eternal life.

This very same truth was recognized by Phillip, whom Yeshua had met three years earlier in the Galilee. After meeting Yeshua, Phillip said to Nathanael: *45 ... “We’ve found the One that Moses wrote about in the Torah, and also the prophets, wrote about—Yeshua of Natzeret, the son of Joseph!”* (John 1:45). Stephen also told his accusers before they stoned him to death: *37 “This is the Moses who said to Bnei-Yisrael, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers. 38 This is the one who was in the community in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living words to pass on to us.”* (Acts 7:37-38). The testimonies of Yeshua’s disciples regarding “the Prophet Like Moses” demonstrate the consistency of ADONAI’s Word. This is about Yeshua, who, as Stephen said, was with ADONAI at Mount Sinai, but was also the Living Word in the beginning, as John said. *In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God,*

and the Word was God. (John 1:1). There was no question that the people of Israel in the 1st century had heard, and many understood, that Yeshua was the prophet about whom Moses was speaking. Yeshua's brother Ya'acov reported to Sha'ul that there were tens of thousands of Yeshua's Jewish followers who zealously followed the *Torah* (Acts 21:20).

Moses prophesied: 15 “*Adonai your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your midst—from your brothers. To him you must listen.*” (Deuteronomy 18:15). He said: אֵלָיו תִּשְׁמָעוּן, *elav tishma'un*, literally, “Him you shall hear.” Rabbinic eschatology interprets Moses' words as referring to the “final redeemer,” the Messiah, the גּוֹ'עַל *go'el*, the “Kinsman Redeemer,” Son of David, who will be a redeemer to all of Israel. Moses' word *tishma'un* means “to listen to and to obey the Messiah.” We listened to Him and we obey Him.

We just began the month of *Elul*. What better time is there to *tishma'un*, to hearken to Yeshua. During these 29 days before the 1st day of *Tishrei* and then the 10 days after that before *Yom Kippur*, the Jews of the world examine their hearts and prepare to renew their covenant with ADONAI. We pray that many Jews who are repenting and seeking the truth will recognize their kinsman, Yeshua, and trust in Him as their Messiah and Savior. And many Gentiles. And we who know Yeshua should also be in repentance during *Elul*, but not only during *Elul*. It should be part of our daily routine. Yeshua's disciple John wrote: 1 *My children, I am writing these things to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Intercessor with the Father—the righteous Messiah Yeshua. 2 He is the atonement for our sins, and not only for our sins but also for the whole world.* (1 John 2:1-2). Even faithful followers of Yeshua sin, and our repentance should be a daily occurrence for each of us. This season, we join in spirit with our Jewish brothers and sisters around the world as they prepare for the High Holy Days. As Yeshua's followers in covenant with Him, we receive His forgiveness whenever we sincerely repent. Still, it's essential that we acknowledge this time of year as a season of repentance. During *Elul*, the *shofar* is sounded daily in traditional synagogues, and its piercing sound serves to remind the hearers to surrender their will to ADONAI's will. During *Elul*, may we each renew our commitment to following Yeshua. As we hear the *shofar* blow each *Shabbat* this month, let it remind us of our vow to serve Yeshua and seek Him daily. *Shabbat shalom!*