Bits of Torah Truths | Parashat Shoftim

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Shoftim v'Shotrim (Judges and Officers)

In weeks reading, from Parashat Shoftim (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9*), Moshe tells the people they are to appoint judges, officers, from the men who are righteous who will give righteous judgement (*16:18*). It is written that they are not to distort justice, not to be partial, and not to take a bribe, these things pervert the words of the righteous (*16:19*). The scriptures also say that if there is a man or woman who does evil in the eyes of the Lord by transgressing the covenant to serve other gods that these people are to be stoned to death outside of the cities (*17:2-5*). Evidence is to be established by the witness of two or three people on these things (*17:6*). The Scriptures say *17:12 'The man who acts presumptuously by not listening to the priest who stands there to serve the Lord your God, nor to the judge, that man shall die; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel. 17:13 'Then all the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act presumptuously again. (NASB)* There are no details given on what it means to *"act presumptuously"* but it may be related to the passing of judgement that is given to the person who has transgressed the covenant of God by serving and bowing down to other gods. The Scriptures continue describing how a king is to behave himself, he is to make a copy by his own hand and study the words of the Torah and to fear the Lord his God by carefully observing all of these things (*17:14-20*). We are told that when the people enter the Promised Land we are not to imitate the detestable things of those nations, using divination, practice witchcraft, interpret omens, a sorcerer, not to cast spells, or consult a medium or spiritists who calls upon the dead. Whoever does these things the Lord God will set His face against them; these are detestable to the Lord (*18:9-12*). Innocent blood is not to be shed in the land and cities of refuge are spoken of in *19:1-13*. The people are to be honest with each other and not move the boundary marker of his ancestors (*19:14*). Moshe says that when you go out to battle and see an army that is greater than you, do not be afraid because the Lord is with you (*20:1*).

שדוקה יבתכ / The Holy Scriptures

ספר דברים פרק טז

יח שֹׁפְטִים וְשֹׁטְרִים תִּתֶּן-לְךָ בְּכָל-שְׁעָרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לְךָ
לִשְׁבָטֶיךָ וְשָׁפְטוּ אֶת-הָעָם מִשְׁפַּט-צֶדֶק: יט לֹא-תַטֶּה מִשְׁפָּט לֹא תַכִּיר
פָּנִים וְלֹא-תִקַּח שֹׁחַד כִּי הַשֹּׁחַד יְעַוֵּר עֵינֵי חֲכָמִים וִיסַלֵּף דִּבְרֵי צַדִּיקִם: כ
צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדֹּף לְמַעַן תִּחְיֶה וְיָרַשְׁתָּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ:

Devarim / Deuteronomy 16:18-19

16:18 'You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the Lord your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment.
16:19 'You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. (NASB)

In this week's reading, Moshe says that you are to appoint judges and officers in all your towns which the Lord your God is giving you and that you are to not distort justice, not to take a bribe, and not be blind to pervert the words of the righteous. The Hebrew text says שֹׁפְטִים וְשֹׁטְרִים *"Judges and officers."* It is interesting however, while studying the Torah, Elohim אֱלֹהִים, the word most often used as a reference to God and to the false gods of the pagan nations, may also be used to refer to human rulers or judges. For example:

> ***Shemot / Exodus** 22:8 'If the thief is not caught, then the owner of the house shall appear before the* **judges**, *to determine whether he laid his hands on his neighbor's property. 22:9 'For every breach of trust, whether it is for ox, for donkey, for sheep, for clothing, or for any lost thing about which one says, 'This is it,' the case of both parties shall come before the judges; he whom the* **judges** *condemn shall pay double to his neighbor. (NASB)* ז אִם-לֹא יִמָּצֵא הַגַּנָּב וְנִקְרַב בַּעַל-הַבַּיִת אֶל-**הָאֱלֹהִים** אִם-לֹא שָׁלַח יָדוֹ
> בִּמְלֶאכֶת רֵעֵהוּ: ח עַל-כָּל-דְּבַר-פֶּשַׁע עַל-שׁוֹר עַל-חֲמוֹר עַל-שֶׂה עַל-שַׂלְמָה עַל-כָּל-אֲבֵדָה אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר כִּי-הוּא זֶה עַד הָאֱלֹהִים יָבֹא דְּבַר-שְׁנֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר יַרְשִׁיעֻן
> **אֱלֹהִים** יְשַׁלֵּם שְׁנַיִם לְרֵעֵהוּ:

Both the *Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon* and *Brown Driver and Briggs Lexicon* list *"angels"* and *"judges"* as possible alternative meanings for Elohim with plural verbs and adjectives. The Greek New Testament quotes *Tehillim / Psalm 8:4-6* in *Hebrews 2:6-8*, where the author of Hebrews uses "ἀγγέλους" (aggelous) while quoting *Tehillim / Psalms 8:5* providing us with a very early understanding of the word Elohim and *"angels"* or *"judges."* The LXX also translates Elohim as "ἀγγέλους" angels. In the Torah, the word Elohim (אֱלֹהִים) is used as a reference for God, false gods, men and angels. It is never used in the biblical text to refer to creatures (man or angels) as God in the way that YHVH is the Lord God of Israel. Yeshua's spoke on this topic in *John 10:34* to portray those who he was speaking with as rulers of certain positions in the world, similar to the use of Elohim in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 22:8-9*. The Lord God is a ruler and judge over the people and according to the Torah the Lord installed human rulers to do the same according to *Devarim / Deuteronomy 19:17-18*. Yeshua, in *John 10:34*, is making a reference to the corrupt judges and leaders who were abusing their authority and he is using it with irony. In *John 10* Yeshua is saying that God appointed these men to be rulers, but they are unable to recognize his rulership which is supreme over them as the Messiah (*Prophet, Priest, and King*). Yeshua said that the people were called gods to whom the word of God came and that Scripture cannot be broken. That the behavior of those who are the sons of God are those who go about doing the work of their Father in Heaven (*John 10:32-38*). Note the context of appointing judges and not perverting justice and righteousness in this weeks portion. When thinking on these things and who we are in Yeshua to whom the Word of God has come to make His dwelling place in our hearts. Do we too quickly pass judgment in our hearts against others, and are we perverting justice and righteousness before God? Do you pass judgment upon a brother or sister and do the vary thing that they have done, regardless of whether it is in the past or the present? Is passing judgment in our hearts as weighty and equal to doing so in life?

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