

Slaves to Righteousness

This weeks reading is from Parashat Mishpatim (*Shemot / Exodus 21:1-24:18*), is titled “*Mishpatim*” meaning ordinances (הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים). The Hebrew text states what one is to do if they have a Hebrew slave (21:2), if a man is forced to sell his daughter because of debt, what is he to do (21:7-9), if a man has a wife he is not allowed to reduce her food, clothing, or conjugal rights (21:10-11). Stipulations on murder are made, whether premeditated or accidental (21:12-16). Rulings are made on whether two men are fighting and one is injured, how one’s loss of work is to be compensated. When two men are fighting and strike a woman and she miscarriages, the offending person is to pay compensation for the loss (21:22), and any other injury, the ruling is to be fair and described as eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth (21:23-22:2). The Scriptures go on to discuss things regarding a man’s property, cattle, and fields (22:3-14). Sorcerers and Witches are not permitted to live (22:18), bestiality is forbidden (22:19), and one is not to sacrifice to any other gods (22:20). Be good to the stranger (22:21), and do not oppress the widow or orphan (22:24). No interest is to be charged on loans made to a brother (22:25). The law of the first born is given (22:29-30). The seventh year rest for harvesting (23:10-11) and the seventh day rest from working (23:12). The command to celebrate three yearly festivals is given, (i) the Feast of Unleavened Bread (23:14), (ii) the Feast of Harvest of First Fruits (23:16), and (iii) the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year (23:16).

Studying these verses, there appears to be a very significant aspect of these ordinances that apply to our lives today. Can you guess what that is in *Shemot / Exodus 21:1-6*?

ספר שמות פרק כא

א ואֵלֶּה הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר תִּשִׂים לְפִי־
גֵיְהִם: ב כִּי תִקְנֶה עֶבֶד עִבְרִי שֵׁשׁ
שָׁנִים יַעֲבֹד וּבְשִׁבְעַת יֵצֵא לְחֻפְשִׁי
חֲנָם: ג אִם־בָּגַפוּ יְבֵא בָּגֹפוֹ יֵצֵא אִם־
בְּעַל אִשָּׁה הוּא וַיִּצָּאָהּ אִשְׁתּוֹ עִמּוֹ: ד
אִם־אֲדָנָיו יִתֶּן־לוֹ אִשָּׁה וַיִּלְדֶּיהָ תִהְיֶה
בָּנִים אוֹ בָנוֹת הָאִשָּׁה וַיִּלְדֶּיהָ תִהְיֶה
לְאֲדֹנֶיהָ וְהוּא יֵצֵא בָּגֹפוֹ: ה וְאִם־
אָמַר יְאֹמֵר הֶעֱבַד אֶהְבֵּתִי אֶת־אֲדֹנָי
אֶת־אִשְׁתִּי וְאֶת־בָּנָי לֹא אֵצֵא חֻפְשִׁי:
ו וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֲדָנָיו אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים וְהִגִּישׁוּ
אֶל־הַדָּלֶת אוֹ אֶל־הַמְּזוּזָה וַרְצַע אֲדָנָיו
אֶת־אָזְנוֹ בַּמַּרְצֵעַ וְעָבְדוֹ לְעֹלָם:

Shemot / Exodus 21:1-6

21:1 ‘Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them: 21:2 ‘If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment. 21:3 ‘If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. 21:4 ‘If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall belong to her master, and he shall go out alone. 21:5 ‘But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,’ 21:6 then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently. (NASB)

Studying these verse, God is not establishing, validating, or instituting slavery. These laws that He’s giving are merely regulating the practice, which was already a part of

the culture and their world. A person could end up a slave as a result of poverty, debt, or maybe even as a result of a crime. What is interesting though, while studying the Hebrew text, the Scriptures say in *Shemot / Exodus 21:3*, אִם-בָּגַפוּ יָבֵא בְגֵפוֹ יֵצֵא אִם-בְּעַל אִשָּׁה, 21:3 *If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. (NASB)* The English translation states “if he comes alone” using the Hebrew word בָּגַפוּ. Generally, the Hebrew word לבד meaning “alone, by himself, unaccompanied” or the word יחיד “single, individual, alone” are used to describe one who is alone, however, Moshe writes בָּגַפוּ from the root word גוף meaning “body.” The idea is that the man who becomes a slave, comes with nothing but himself (his body). The Scriptures say that if he has a wife, she will go out with him when he is set free. If he finds a wife in his masters household she is to remain when he goes free. And if the servant decides to dedicate his life to his master, they are to go before God and to the door or door post using an awe to put a ring in his ear to indicate that he has dedicated his life to his master as a “bond-servant” for the remainder of his life. Note also how the Hebrew text is written וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֶדְנֵי אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֶל-הַדְּלֶת אוּ 21:6 *then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently. (NASB)* Moshe writes saying וְהִגִּישׁוּ “and he brought him near” unto God, and he brought him near to “the door” (הַדְּלֶת) or to “the mezuzah” (הַמְּזוּזָה, door post). This is interesting because of the mezuzah that is hung on the door post also contains a small Torah scroll. The master would force an awe on the servants ear fixing a hole in the ear against the mezuzah, against the Torah, and blood is shed. This typifies making a covenant before God. Can you see the parallels here to Pesach (Passover), the mezuzah (door post), the Torah, drawing near to the Lord, becoming a part of a righteous family and dedicating ones life to the master? What did the Apostles teach regarding these Scriptures from Parashat Mishpatim in the Apostolic Writings? The Apostle Paul wrote the following, *Romans 6:16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? 6:17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 6:18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. (NASB)* Is it surprising that we read many of the authors of the New Testament said something similar? *Romans 1:1 “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus...,” Philippians 1:1 “Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus...,” Colossians 1:7 “...Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant,” Colossians 4:7 “...Tychicus, {our} beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord,” James 1:1 “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,” 2 Peter 1:1 “Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ...,” and Jude 1:1 “Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ...”* They all proclaimed themselves to be “bond-servants,” willingly committing to serve their Master for life. According to *Romans 6:16-18*, we are always slaves to something, why not be slaves to righteousness and bond-servants of Christ?