

Utter Destruction from among God's People

In this weeks reading from **Parsahat Shoftim** (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9*), Moshe writes on the establishment of offices of administration, judges, and officers and the necessity for justice saying כ צדק צדק תרדף למען תחיה וירשת את-הארץ אשר- *Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you.* (NASB) To judge with justice is to judge righteously (משפט-צדק) here justice is the act of righteousness (16:18-17:20). Moshe continues by describing the portion to be given to the children of Levi (18:1-8), he speaks about the nations and what they do is forbidden and detestable (18:9-14), and the cities of refuge are mentioned (19:1-22). In addition to this, we are not to move our neighbor's landmark and to not bear false testimony (19:14-21). We are told what to do when going out to battle (20:1-20), and how to make atonement for a crime (21:1-9). In the midst of these instructions, Moshe declares that God will rise up another prophet, one whom the Lord God will place His Word in His mouth, one who stands as an intermediary on behalf of the people because of their fear of the fiery voice of the Almighty was more than they could endure (18:15-16). Based on this text, and the promise of a prophet like Moshe, there developed some measure of Messianic overtones based on these verses within the first century regarding the Messiah and who He will be (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:15-22*).

ספר דברים פרק יח Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:15-19

טו נביא מקרבך מאחיהי כמני יקים לה יהיה אלהיה אליו תשמעו: טז ככל אשר-שאלת מעם יהיה אלהיה בחרב ביום הקהל לאמר לא אסף לשמע את-קול יהיה אלהי ואת-האש הגדלה הזאת לא-אראה עוד ולא אמות: יז ויאמר יהיה אלי היטיבו אשר דברו: יח נביא אקים להם מקרב אחיהם כמוה ונתתי דברי בפיו ודבר אליהם את כל-אשר אצונו: יט והיה האיש אשר לא-ישמע אל-דברי אשר ידבר בשמי אנכי אדרש מעמו:

18:15 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. 18:16 'This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.' 18:17 'The Lord said to me, 'They have spoken well. 18:18 'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 18:19 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. (NASB)

The Torah portion this week emphasizes the importance of living with justice, in truth, and in peace with one another in order to possess the land God is giving the children of Israel. In the midst of these Scriptures, we are told the importance of the "Word" of God and the one through whom the word is brought to us. In addition to this, the rabbis have a considerable amount to say concerning justice, truth, and peace and its im-

portance according to *Midrash Rabbah Devarim, Parashah 5, Part 1* (מדרש רבה דברים):
(פרשה ה סימן א

Midrash Rabbah Devarim, Parashat 5, Part 1

1. JUDGES AND OFFICERS WILL YOU MAKE THEE IN ALL YOUR GATES, WHICH THE LORD YOUR GOD GIVES YOU, TRIBE BY TRIBE; AND THEY WILL JUDGE THE PEOPLE WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS JUDGMENT (Devarim / Deuteronomy 16:18).
Halachah: Is it permissible for a man's near relative to act as judge in his suit? The Sages have taught thus, the following are regarded as near relatives, a man's father and his brother, and both his paternal and maternal uncles, etc. Why so? Just as a relative is disqualified from giving evidence, so too is he disqualified from acting as judge. And what reason have you for saying so? R. Simeon son of Yohai said, It is written, And the priests that sons of Levi will come near, for them the Lord your God has chosen to minister unto Him, and to bless in the name of the Lord; and according to their word will every controversy and every stroke be (Devarim / Deuteronomy 21:5). Come and see. Scripture has compared controversies with strokes, and strokes with controversies, in order to tell you that just as strokes can only be adjudged by day, so too, suits can only be tried by day, and just as from controversies near relatives adjudging are excluded, so too, are they excluded from strokes. R. Simeon son of Gamliel said, Do not make mock of justice, for it is one of the three feet of the world. Why? For the Sages have taught, On three things the world rests, on Justice, on Truth, and on Peace. Know then full well that if you wrest judgment, you shake the world, for it is one of its pillars. The Rabbis say, Great is the power of Justice, for it is one of the feet of the Throne of Glory. Whence is this? For it is said, Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before You (Tehillim / Psalms 89:15) God said, Since the punishment for wresting judgment is so severe, take great heed. Whence is this? From what we have read in the context, JUDGE AND OFFICERS, etc.

The rabbis begin with a discussion on how justice can be perverted if one's relatives are in charge acting as a judge or officer. One should be careful not to pervert justice and do not make a mock of justice in this way because it is evil in God's eyes. The midrash says that justice, truth, and peace are so important that these are the three things the world rests upon. If one of these three are withheld, the world would be shaken. The strength of this statement is illustrated by justice being at the feet of the Throne of Glory, righteousness and justice are the foundation stones of God's mercy and truth.

The Scriptures and the rabbis appear to be directing our understanding of these concepts within the context of bringing another prophet, one who is greater than Moshe. The Scriptures tell us that if a man will not listen to God's voice, if a man does not listen

to the words in the Torah, God says *“I myself will require it of him”* (יִט וְהִיָּה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר) (לא-יִשְׁמַע אֶל-דְּבָרֵי אֲשֶׁר יִדְבֹר בְּשִׁמִּי אֲנֹכִי אֲדַרֵּשׁ מֵעַמּוֹ: יִט וְיִהְיֶה גְבָרָא דִּי לֹא יִקְבֵּל לְפִתְגָמֵי דִּי יִמְלֵל) (*My Word (Memra) will require it of him”*). It appears the Lord is saying that if you do not believe My word, then My word will require it of you, which may be a reference to payment for sins. King David said in *Tehillim / Psalms 49:8*, וַיִּקַּר פְּדִיּוֹן נַפְשׁוֹ וַחֲדָל לְעוֹלָם: 49:8 *For the redemption of his soul is costly, And he should cease trying forever. (NASB)* This suggests that there are those who seek to redeem their own souls by the work of their own hands. It could be that the wicked who boast in their riches (see *Tehillim / Psalms 48, compare both the Hebrew and Aramaic Targums*) believe it is possible to deliver themselves by their own hands. Note how the Targum states *49:8 A man will by no means redeem his brother, who was taken captive, by his riches; and he will not give to God his price of redemption.(EMC)* The rabbis who translated the Targum do not appear to be thinking on the salvation of the soul when David says *“the redemption of the soul is costly.”* It appears in the psalm that the wicked man is held captive by his own wealth and that it is impossible to redeem one from this kind of captivity. A man is unable to rescue another from his (personal) riches, or that one is not able to save from the grave, he could not by his wealth preserve him in life. The point of the psalm and the Torah portion is to show how powerless and valueless is wealth in regard to the things that are most important to a man’s welfare, life, and even his own soul before God. We seek the Lord and we believe His word and by faith we live our lives accordingly. The parable or riddle that David speaks of in *Tehillim / Psalms 48* is with regard to the wicked who follow their own folly and do not follow the wisdom of God that is found in the Scriptures, God’s Word itself.

The people interpreted these Scriptures in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 18* in the 1st century period as referring to the Lord raising up a prophet and according to the gospel of John, the people questioned whether John the Baptist was the messiah promised by Moshe. They wanted to know His identity.

John 1:19-27

1:19 This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ 1:20 And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ.’ 1:21 They asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ And he said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No.’ 1:22 Then they said to him, ‘Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?’ 1:23 He said, ‘I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.’ 1:24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 1:25 They asked him, and said to him, ‘Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?’ 1:26 John answered them saying, ‘I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. 1:27 ‘It is He who comes after me, the

thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.’ (NASB)

When the priests and Levites come they asked John whether he was the prophet that was to come as it was written of Moshe in the Torah. John responded saying “*I am not the Messiah.*” John goes to say that he is the one that prepares the way, “*makes straight the way*” as it is written in *Isaiah 40:3*. It is interesting that the priests and the Pharisees then ask John “*why do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, Eliyahu (Elijah), or the Prophet?*” The understanding of the priests and Pharisees on the Prophet whom God was going to rise up according these scriptures from *Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:15-22*, the Messiah would be the one who would perform the mikvah for the people, directing to repentance and to turn their lives in a new direction, to the way of the Lord. In the 1st century, the priests, Pharisees, and the disciples of Yeshua understood *Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:15-22* to be predicting the coming of the Messiah. In *Acts 3:22-23*, the apostle Peter states that this prophet is none other than Yeshua the Messiah.

Acts 3:19-23

3:19 ‘Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; 3:20 and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, 3:21 whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. 3:22 ‘Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. 3:23 ‘And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’ (NASB)

Peter references Moshe (Μωϋσῆς) in the Torah stating that “*the Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you.*” Peter goes on to say “*And it shall be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.*” This is consistent with the Torah in the sense that the Lord God Almighty says “*I myself will require it of him,*” meaning by own his life he will pay for his sins and die. Peter expounds upon the Torah in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:19* which says “*If the man will not listen to His voice,*” then Lord God will require it of the man (“*I myself will require it of him*”). Peter interprets this to mean that those who do not believe in Yeshua the Messiah, such a person will be “*utterly destroyed from among the people.*” (*Acts 3:23*)

Peter stood before the Sanhedrin in Acts and supported what he was saying using the text from *Devarim / Deuteronomy 18* to reinforce that one is to accept the words of the true prophet since these were the very words of God. The context indicates that Peter was not referring to an average prophet but specifically to Yeshua as “*The Prophet*” God had promised to raise up and that His message should be listened to and received. In *Acts 3:23*, Peter declares that the person who disregards the words of “*The Prophet*” that is like unto Moshe would have to give an account to God. If we are not seeking

the Lord God our Father in heaven and His Messiah Yeshua, the only thing left is “*utter destruction from among the people.*” In light of these scriptures, it is apparent that the 1st century Jewish person was looking for the prophet that God was going to raise up who was like Moshe. This week’s Torah portion, Parashat Shoftim, the Scriptures emphasize the importance of living in justice, in truth, and in peace in order to possess what God has for His people. Are you actively seeking our Father in Heaven and His Messiah Yeshua, to walk in His ways which are to live with justice, truth, and peace, and to receive what He has for you? John the Baptist said that Yeshua is that promised Prophet of God who came to fully disclose the will of our Father in Heaven. If you want that life of justice, truth, and peace, come to Him (Yeshua) and ask Him to come into your heart. In Yeshua the Messiah, we find the forgiveness and pardon from sin, peace with God and peace of conscience, and a joy that surpasses all understanding. The Lord Yeshua will then send His Holy Spirit to dwell within and the Lord will manifest himself as Savior of your life, change you from the inside out, and bring justice, truth, and peace to your life. Halleluia!

