

פרשת  
שופטים  
*Parashat Shoftim*

*Devarim / Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9, Isaiah 51:12-52:12,  
Matthew 26:47-27:10*

**To Look for the One Whom Moshe Spoke About**

This week's Torah Portion discusses how Moshe commands to appoint judges and officers in Israel's towns (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 16:18-21*), the administration of justice on the violation of a command (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 17:1-20*), what portion belongs to the Levites (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:1-7*), how consulting spirits are forbidden (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:9-22*), the cities of refuge (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 19:1-13*), not to move landmarks (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 19:14-21*), the Laws for warfare (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 20:1-20*), and the atonement for a crime (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 21:1-9*). In this week's reading we find Moshe writing the following according to *Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:15-18*, טו נְבִיא מִקִּרְבְּךָ, מֵאַחֵיךָ כְּמִנִּי יָקִים לְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶלְיוֹ תִשְׁמָעוּן: טז כָּל אֲשֶׁר-שָׁאֲלָתָּ מֵעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּחָרֵב בְּיוֹם הַקֶּהֱל לֵאמֹר לֹא אֶסֶף לִשְׁמָע אֶת-קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי וְאֶת-הָאֵשׁ הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת לֹא-אֶרְאֶה עוֹד וְלֹא אֲמוֹת: יז וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי הִיטִיבוּ אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי: יח נְבִיא אֲקִים לָהֶם מִקִּרְבֵּם אֲחֵיהֶם כְּמוֹךָ וְנִתְּתִי לָהֶם: יח *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 as-*

sembly, 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. (NASB)

The context of these words are in regard to not imitate the abominations of the nations, כִּי אַתָּה בָּא אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ, לֹא-תִלְמַד לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּתוֹעֵבֹת הַגּוֹיִם הָהֵם 18:9 'When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. (NASB) Here the words לֹא-תִלְמַד

are translated as "not imitate" in the NASB but the Hebrew text states "not to learn" their abominations. The promise to raise up a prophet like Moshe is connected to this phrase וְנִתְּמִי דְבָרִי בְּפִיו וְדִבַּר אֱלֹהִים אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶנּוּ that this one whom God raises up will teach the people God's Torah. Throughout time there are many messiahs whom God has raised up to lead His people. The first of which was Joshua who led the people into the Promised Land. In addition to this, the phrase

וְנִבִּיא מִקִּרְבְּךָ מֵאַחֶיךָ כָּמוֹנִי (Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:15) "a prophet from your midst from your brothers like me" is a reference that excludes prophets from other nations, that is the descendants of Esau and Ishmael. Notice how consequently this excludes Muhamad as a prophet of God! Now we note that the Edomites, the descendants of Esau are also known as אַחִיךָ, "your brethren," (see Bamidbar / Numbers 20:14) and therefore there could have been a misunderstanding.

The word כָּמוֹנִי, excludes all prophets except those of Jewish birth. The Rabbis discuss how there are a total of four distinctions which have been reserved exclusively for the Jewish people, (i) the gift of prophecy, (ii) the Torah, (iii) Eretz Yisrael, and (iv) the resurrection of the dead in connection to these verses. (Rabbeinu Bahya on Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:15 Part 1) Interesting correlation to the life and ministry of Yeshua right? Note how this reveals to us how these truths come from Israel, through whom God had revealed Himself, and are consistent with what Yeshua said that "salvation is from the Jews." (John 4:22) We also note how the rabbinic literature provides a warning concerning this prophet that God raises up. We are to not believe a prophet based upon the miracles they perform alone. (see

*Sanhedrin 90, Maimonides Hilchot Yessodey Hatorah 9,1*) The reason is in regard to what we read here, וְנִתְּתִי דְבָרִי בְּפִיו וְדָבַר אֲלֵיהֶם אֵת כָּל-אִשָּׁר אֶצְנֹנּוּ that this one whom God raises up will teach the people God's Torah. If the prophet does not adhere to the Torah, he is not to be listened to. This is a major quantifying characteristic of the One whom God was promising to raise up for His people. The reason this is so important is this prophet would lead the people and they were to follow him and walk in His footsteps, etc. The authentic nature of the prophet's ministry is that of teaching the Torah to God's people and instructing in the way of God. This is why while reading the Apostolic Writings, it is very important to understand that Yeshua was teaching Torah, and to look for these things. The reason this is important is if Yeshua was not teaching the Torah he would not be the One sent by God. A few examples of Yeshua teaching Torah are found in his answer/response on what it is that God expects of us. He responds with the Shema (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:4-7*) and with loving our neighbor (*Vayikra / Leviticus 19:18-19*). This one instance from the NT reveals to us that Yeshua was teaching Torah. He also directed us to be humble, and self-sacrificing, merciful, and full of grace towards others when he taught on the Torah command to love others, he said "A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (*John 13:34*). Yeshua's words were not spoken in a vacuum; this commandment hinges upon the command from the book of Vayikra / Leviticus! This again draws us back to this week's Torah portion of the prophet whom God raises, and of our being commanded to listen to Him. Yeshua showed us the way to the greatest extent, that one should have this mentality of laying one's life down for another!

The verses we are looking at for this week are from *Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:9-22*.

### ספר דברים פרק יח

ט כִּי אַתָּה בָּא אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ  
 לֹא-תִלְמַד לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּתוֹעֵבֹת הַגּוֹיִם הָהֵם: י לֹא-יִמָּצֵא בָּךְ  
 מַעֲבִיר בְּנוֹ-וּבִתּוֹ בָּאֵשׁ קֶסֶם קְסָמִים מְעוֹנֵן וּמְנַחֵשׁ וּמְכַשֵּׁף:  
 יא וְחָבֵר חָבֵר וְשֹׂאֵל אוֹב וְיִדְעֵנִי וְדָרַשׁ אֶל-הַמֵּתִים: יב

כי-תועבת יהנה כל-עשה אלה ובגלל התועבת האלה יהנה  
אלהיה מוריש אותם מפניה: יג תמים תהיה עם יהנה  
אלהיה: [חמישי] יד כי | הגוים האלה אשר אתה יורש  
אותם אל-מענגים ואל-קסמים ישמעו ואתה לא כן נתן  
לה יהנה אלהיה: טו נביא מקרבה מאחיה כמני יקים לה  
יהנה אלהיה אליו תשמעו: טז ככל אשר-שאלת מעם  
יהנה אלהיה בחרב ביום הקהל לאמר לא אסף לשמע  
את-קול יהנה אלהי ואת-האש הגדלה הזאת לא-אראה  
עוד ולא אמות: יז ויאמר יהנה אלי היטיבו אשר דברו:  
יח נביא אקים להם מקרב אחיהם כמוה ונתתי דברי  
בפיו ודבר אליהם את כל-אשר אצננו: יט והיה האיש  
אשר לא-ישמע אל-דברי אשר ידבר בשמי אנכי אדרש  
מעמו: כ אף הנביא אשר יזיד לדבר דבר בשמי את אשר  
לא-צויתיו לדבר ואשר ידבר בשם אלהים אחרים ומת  
הנביא ההוא: כא וכי תאמר בלבבך איכה גדע את-הדבר  
אשר לא-דברו יהנה: כב אשר ידבר הנביא בשם יהנה  
ולא-יהיה הדבר ולא יבא הוא הדבר אשר לא-דברו יהנה  
בנדון דברו הנביא לא תגור ממנו:

**Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:9-22**

18:9 'When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. 18:10 'There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, 18:11 or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. 18:12 'For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord; and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you. 18:13 'You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. 18:14 'For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the

*Lord your God has not allowed you to do so. 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. 18:20 'But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' 18:21 'You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?' 18:22 'When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. (NASB)*

Moshe prophesied of the future Messiah according to *Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:15*, טו נְבִיא מִקִּרְבְּךָ מֵאַחֶיךָ כְּמֹנִי יָקִים לְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲלָיו 18:15 תִּשְׁמָעוּן: *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. (NASB)* This verse is the only place in all of the Torah where Moses explicitly identifies himself as a prophet of the Lord. In addition, this is also the only passage where Moses identifies the coming of the Messiah stating that he would be a נְבִיא כְּמֹנִי "Prophet like me." (see *Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:15 and John 6:14*) We also established according to *Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:18* (, וְנִתְּתִי דְבָרִי בְּפִיו וְדָבַר ,) (אֲלֵיהֶם אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶנּוּ) that the Messiah would teach Torah. This is what yeshua did according to *Matthew 5:17-19* saying, "Do not

*think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to destroy but to fulfill them. For truly I say to you until heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.* Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (17 Μὴ νομίσητε ὅτι ἤλθον καταλῦσαι τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας· οὐκ ἤλθον καταλῦσαι ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι· 18 ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν, ἕως ἄν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ, ἰῶτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου, ἕως ἄν πάντα γένηται. 19 ὃς ἐὰν οὖν λύσῃ μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων καὶ διδάξῃ οὕτως τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἐλάχιστος κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν· ὃς δ’ ἂν ποιήσῃ καὶ διδάξῃ, οὗτος μέγας κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν. SBL) According to the Greek text, the word καταλῦσαι (destroy) is placed in opposition to πληρῶσαι (fulfill). These things speak to us of the permanency of the verdict of sin, which is death, and to the substitutionary death which makes atonement. This was the purpose of the Messiah coming as those who trust in Him for life will find it! (see 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13, Romans 8:3-4, Hebrews 7:18 and 10:1-31) The NT text speaks to us how Yeshua taught us to obey the peshat (simple/plain) meaning of the Torah, whereas the Pharisees for example would disregard the weightier matters of the Torah. (Matthew 23:23) The apostles also taught that the followers of the Messiah must also consider the sanctity of the commands of God in order to appreciate what Yeshua redeemed us from, which is the curse due to sin. (see James 2:10 and Galatians 3:3)

When we think on the topic of Torah observance, there are a number of things that come to the minds of many people, and it depends upon what religious background one comes from. Some think legalism. This is based upon the idea that one obeys the commands in order to earn his or her salvation. This is not why the Torah was given, as the Torah was given to be lived out and not for justifying one’s self before God, the commands are a stipulation of the covenant agreement with God. On the other hand, in normative Judaism today, rabbinic Judaism, orthodox Judaism, has in a large part denied the “*jots and tittles*” of the Torah by redefining what the Torah means. The end result is the

denial of the importance and necessity of blood atonement by claiming that prayer and deeds of loving kindness take the place of sacrifices. So Judaism today denies the peshat (simple / plain) meaning of the covenant through the mechanism of man-made reinterpretations of the Torah through Talmudic Judaism. Following the destruction of the second temple in Jerusalem, the rabbis reformulated Judaism at Yavneh (this is a historical fact). When we consider the commands, 40% of the commands in the Torah are related to the priesthood and sacrifice. Therefore the conclusion, which is obvious, is that Judaism ignores the plain meaning of the Torah for the sake of the traditions of men, it could then be said it is these who actually deny the Torah! This is actually a difficult thing to recognize because this tradition is so rooted into one's life. The same biases are also found in the NT text by those who believe the NT. Let's consider what the NT text states from the following selected verses:

***Romans 7:12***

*7:12 So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. (NASB)*

***Hebrews 7:6-19***

*7:6 But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. 7:7 But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. 7:8 In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. 7:9 And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, 7:10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him. 7:11 Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? 7:12 For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. 7:13 For the one concerning whom*

*these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. 7:14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. 7:15 And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, 7:16 who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. 7:17 For it is attested of Him 'You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.' 7:18 For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness 7:19 (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. (NASB)*

When we consider these verses, obviously Paul had a positive opinion of the Torah and its purpose in life, to walk in its ways and to recognize that we all are in need of the mercy of God. In *Hebrews 7* the author of Hebrews is making an argument for the priesthood of Yeshua taking the example from Melchizedek saying that he was not of the genealogy of Abraham and yet Abraham gave him tithes indicating that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham. He then draws in the idea of Levi also being in the loins of Abraham and thus paying tithes, too. (7:10) Note the idea of “*perfection*” (7:11) in the Torah is a very rabbinic concept, *tikkun olam*. The phrase *tikkun olam* appears in the Mishnah saying, *mip’nei tikkun ha-olam*, “*for the sake of repairing the world*,” and in this context has the meaning of not just personal perfection in the sense of walking in God’s ways, but also amending the law in order to keep society well-functioning. *Tikkun* can mean improvement, establishment, repair, prepare, and more. This appears to be the way the author of Hebrews is using this argument of perfection, not just through the priesthood, but as the basis of the people who received the Torah as well. Here the author of Hebrews goes on asking the question, “*what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?*” Referring to Yeshua, he is speaking



of a man who would be a priest who isn't from the tribe of Levi, and speaks of a changing of the Law such that this could take place. Note he is not saying that the Torah is done away with. He is also saying that the Torah is being changed now all we have to do is have faith in Yeshua. He is talking about Yeshua being a priest in heaven, and the Atonement he provided upon the cross was done in the sense of the ashes of the red heifer, being slaughtered outside of the tabernacle / Temple / City, not upon the altar in the Temple. This is why he goes on saying, 7:13 *For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. 7:14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.* (NASB) The argument could be made as the author of Hebrews is making, what Moshe said in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:15* טו נְבִיא : מִקִּרְבְּךָ מֵאֲחֵיךָ כְּמִנִּי יָקִים לְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אִלּוּ תִשְׁמָעוּן: 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.* (NASB) does not mean the Messiah would come from Levi but from the midst of your brethren (מִקִּרְבְּךָ מֵאֲחֵיךָ). *Hebrews 7:18* states "For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness 7:19 (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." (NASB) The statement of the setting aside of a command again is in reference to the priesthood of Yeshua as not being from Levi, and his death outside of the city making atonement for our souls. This reminds us of Pikuach nefesh, which is the principle in Jewish law on the preservation of human life which overrides a command. The setting aside of the command in this situation is consistent with both the Torah and Jewish thought! What Yeshua did upon the cross was consistent with Pikuach nefesh, the preservation of life, for all those who would believe upon him. All of what Yeshua did upon the cross is again consistent with the Jewish thought, and does not do away with the Torah. The greater hope that we have is related to his priesthood being found in heaven itself, as opposed to an earthly one. This is what the author of Hebrews continues to say according to *Hebrews 8*.

**Hebrews 8:1-6**

*8:1 Now the main point in what has been said is this we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 8:2 a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. 8:3 For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. 8:4 Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; 8:5 who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, 'See,' He says, 'that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.' 8:6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. (NASB)*

We note how *Hebrews 8:4* states explicitly that Yeshua if he was here on earth would not be a priest. When Paul taught that “*no one is justified by the law*” (ἐν νόμῳ οὐδεὶς δικαιούται), he was saying that because of our sinful nature we are unable to keep the terms of the covenant given at Sinai, and so we need the mercy of God and atonement in blood. Note that the classical interpretation on these verses is that since we fail at obeying God’s commands, we are not to even bother striving for God’s righteousness by keeping the commands. This is absolutely missing the mark and point of these verses from the book of Hebrews. The reason this is interpreted in this way is due to the belief that the covenant of Moshe was a covenant of works, and we need a covenant of faith. What is interesting is that if we read what Paul writes according to *Romans 4*, the Torah was in fact not a covenant of works, but a covenant of faith, as Paul provides the example of Abraham and circumcision to make his point about faith. Our faith leads to our expression of faith (faithfulness) as we live our lives for the glory of God. This is why we find throughout the Scriptures that statement which says “*Salvation is of the LORD,*” because due to our sins, we need an outside agency, divine intervention, mercy, and grace

to overcome this world and to receive the forgiveness of sins!

Paul's words in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:15*, טו נְבִיא מִקִּרְבְּךָ, 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. (NASB) and *Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:18* (וְנִתְּתִי דְבָרַי בְּפִיו וְדָבַר אֶלְיָהֶם אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶנּוּ) that the Messiah would teach Torah, these things says that we do not die to the Torah. What we die to is the verdict of sin which is death, that we are delivered from in regards to Torah. This is vital to understand as it is clearly possible to completely misunderstand what the book of Hebrews and Paul was teaching. Yeshua clearly taught the mitzvot in the Torah, and He moved them inwardly to be written upon the heart, to be made a part of our lives, so that we are conscious / aware of sin. Yeshua repeatedly stressed the need for the Torah to be written upon the heart, to be looking for the God of Israel working in our lives, as opposed to simply a set of external decrees written on tablets of stone. The NT text speaks of God's people need to take seriously the peshat (plain) reading of the text and to what was the intent of the message in how we are to live our lives as the people of God. Every jot and tittle needs to be taken seriously, and not reasoned away or overlooked due to tradition. These details include the Law of blood atonement that we receive in Yeshua the Messiah. If we do not understand these things, it is entirely possible to misunderstand the proper hermeneutical context of the NT. The point that Paul was making over and over again was that righteousness comes by faith, and that our faith should be demonstrated by how we live our lives. This is what Moshe wrote in *Vayikra / Leviticus 18:4* You are to practice My judgments and keep My statutes by walking in them. I am the LORD your God. 18:5 Keep My statutes and My judgments, for the man who does these things will live by them. I am the LORD. (BSB) And Paul using this according to *Romans 10:4-5* saying 10:4 For Christ is the end / aim of the law, to bring righteousness to everyone who believes. 10:5 For concerning the righteousness that is by the law, Moses writes: "The man who does these things will live by them." (BSB) The idea is righteousness comes by faith in the Messiah, and the power of God in our lives is to keep us from sin!