

פרשה שפטים / Parashat Shoftim

Shabbat Elul 2, 5769, August 22, 2009

32:1-32:52 MATSATI.COM / Rightly Dividing The Word of G-d

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What should a ministry exalt?

השבועות הזה קוראים / This Week's Reading

תורה: Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9

הפטרה: Isaiah 51:12-52:12

הברית: John 1:19-27, Acts 3:22-23

החדשה

- 10 One of the great advantages of reexamining the Torah text each year is being able to look at things from a different angle. This week's parsha, Parashat Shoftim, I would like to look at a slightly different angle by highlighting an aspect of ministry that may be applied from the text. The fascinating aspects of this portion are found in the section of verses from *Devarim / Deuteronomy* chapter
- 15 *18*. I feel this chapter can provide us with insights on ministry and our focus as ministers of G-d which parallels the focus of the children of Yisrael to not walk in the ways of the nations. To begin, we need to understand that the life and ministry of Yeshua, including his death and resurrection, was received by His disciples as the definitive fulfillment for the messianic promises found in the
- 20 Tanach. The proximity of the messianic prophecy (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:18*) to the prohibition against consulting diviners suggests a contrast is being made between diviners whom one is forbidden to consult, and prophets, to whom there is an obligation to listen. It stands to reason then that there is an obligation to listen to G-d's prophets as long as the prohibition not to consult diviners stands
- 25 for all future generations.

דברים 18:9-15

9 הָאֲבוֹתַי: כִּי אֶתָּה בָּא אֶל־הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ לֹא־תִלְמַד לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּתוֹעֵבֹת
הַגּוֹיִם הָהֵם: לֹא־יִמְצֵא בְּךָ מֵעֵבִיר בְּגוֹיֹבְתוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר קָסַם
10 קַסָּמִים מְעִיגִין וּמְנַחֵשׁ וּמְכַשֵּׁף: וְחֹבֵר חֶבֶר וְשֹׂאֵל אוֹב
11 וְיֹדְעֵנִי וְדָרַשׁ אֶל־הַמֵּתִים: כִּי־תוֹעֵבֹת יְהוָה כָּל־עֲשֵׂהָ
12 אֱלֹהִים וּבְגִלְלַת הַתּוֹעֵבֹת הָאֵלֹהִים יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מוֹרִישׁ
13 ׀ אֹתָם מִפְּנֵיךָ: הַיָּמִים תִּהְיֶה עִם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: כִּי
14 הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר אֶתָּה יוֹרֵשׁ אוֹתָם אֶל־מַעֲנִיִּים וְאֶל־
15 קַסָּמִים יִשְׁמְעוּ וְאֶתָּה לֹא כֵן נֹתֵן לָךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: נָבִיא
מִקִּרְבְּךָ מֵאַחֶיךָ כַּמֶּנִּי יָקִים לָךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵלָיו
16 תִּשְׁמָעוּן: כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־שָׁאֵלַת מֵעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּחֲרֹב

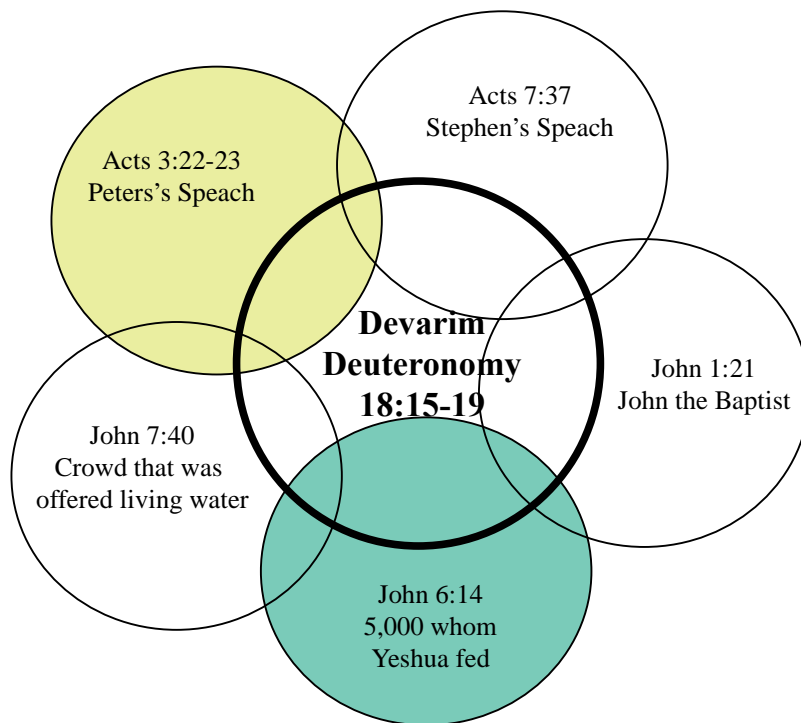
Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:9-15

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. (NASB)

30 This contrast, between following the ways of the nations (consulting
diviners, sorcerers, etc) over against the ways of G-d (consulting a prophet of G-
d), I hope will stimulate your thinking. The prophet operated by communicating
the revelation of G-d no matter the content of the message, foretelling of future
events and/or the telling of G-d's decision over the moral actions or religious
35 abuses of the people. The way of the nations, consulting diviners, sorcerers, etc
was done outside of a communication with G-d. The purpose of this
commandment was to leave the man made ways of knowing the future by
drawing near to the Lord and waiting upon Him in pursuit of the truth. The pre-
eminence in ministry from these verses is to not follow in the ways of the nations
40 but to seek the Lord, and listen to G-d's prophet. The purpose was to teach
morality and heart-felt worship of the Lord whereby the most important point was
to draw the people back to the Lord in truth and righteous living.

The parsha commentary for this week I would like to discuss, from the
Ketuvei Shelachim, the pre-eminence the Torah and our Lord Yeshua have in
ministry. I believe the Ketuvei Shelachim strongly suggests that a ministry that
45 does not exalt Yeshua (*Revelation 19:10*) and His Lordship (*Mark 9:39, 1
Corinthians 12:3, 1 John 4:1-3*) is not led by the Ruach HaKodesh. Like last
week, we discussed which should be exalted, the Torah or Yeshua? The Torah is
how we live our lives as a covenant people; Yeshua and His shed blood is what
keeps us in that covenant relationship with the Lord.

50 It is written that by their fruits you shall know them (*Matthew 7:15-20*)
and that no true prophecy will contradict the Word of G-d (*Isaiah 8:20*). The
source of a ministry cannot be determined merely by signs of the miraculous (see
Devarim / Deuteronomy 13:1-5) and it is interesting to note that if a person
entices people to follow after another G-d (see *Revelation 13:1-5*) or speaks of
55 another Savior, another Spirit, or another gospel he is not sent by G-d (see *2
Corinthians 11:4*). What might all of this suggest? We might begin by asking
ourselves (i) how can we discern the fruits of a ministry, (ii) how do we judge
whether a ministry is led of G-d, and (iii) how do we know if a ministry is
promoting another gospel? This may be a shocker but I believe "ministries that
60 exalt the Torah above Yeshua are teaching a different gospel!" Yes you heard me
right; ministries that exalt the torah over Yeshua are teaching a different gospel!
To understand how I come to this conclusion, I put together a Venn-diagram
which illustrates the pre-eminence of the Torah and Yeshua in the ministry of the
1st century believers. The diagram relates a few portions of the Ketuvei
65 Shelachim, the speeches of Peter and Stephen from the book of Acts and the life
of Yeshua from the book of John.



70 The diagram uses overlapping circles to show similarities between the various texts. The speeches in Acts and passage references in John make reference to *Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:15-19*. The diagram helps illustrate the sourced text (Torah) and its role in the ministry of Peter and Steven, and Yeshua's life. The overlapping circles show that there is a correlation to the referenced text that is cited in both Peter and Stephen's speeches in the book of Acts. The Pharisees asked of John the Baptist if he was "the prophet" foreseen in this passage. The five thousand whom Yeshua fed wondered the same thing as did the crowd whom Yeshua offered living water too. Evidently this passage from the Torah was widely understood to be Messianic and the people of the time were looking for its fulfillment. Note that in the speeches of both Peter and Stephen it was not the Torah that was exalted rather it was Yeshua, the death and resurrection, glory, power, and authority of our risen Lord that is emphasized. The Torah points to the Messiah as it is written in *Acts 3:22-25*.

85 ***Acts 3:22-25***
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.' 3:24 'And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. 3:25 'It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' (NASB)

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100 The Ketuvei Shelachim (*Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*) are written for the purpose of not only relating what happened in Yeshua's life but also to relate why it happened and how it should affect the reader. The life and ministry of Yeshua, His death, burial, and bodily resurrection was received by the disciples as the definitive fulfillment of the messianic promise found in the Torah. It is not the Torah that is exalted but our Savior Yeshua the Messiah! The Torah is the foundation of scripture that is used authoritatively to demonstrate Yeshua is the Messiah. Isn't it therefore only natural that the disciples would collect His sayings and teachings to preserve them and to study them as the on-going revelation of G-d in the Messiah (now known as the Ketuvei Shelachim). The disciples did not make it a point to collect the writings and sayings of the sages (Talmudic in nature) rather they chose the most important point of a ministry and that is to place Yeshua the Messiah at the center of their ministry by exalting and glorifying Him as our Lord and Savior.

110 Now, do not misunderstand, the Torah has its place in our lives to walk blameless before the Lord according to His ways as a covenant people. The point is that our self definition in the Messiah should be culminated in the love that we have for our brothers and sisters. How well do we reflect the image of Yeshua in the world? Why choose to reflect the sages who despise Yeshua? What then, as Messianic believers, should our position be towards the Torah in our ministry? We need to exalt Yeshua the Messiah, His Lordship, and how the scriptures reveal Him to be the chosen prophet, priest, and king, Lord of all creation. (*Colossians 1:15-17*). The Torah is used as a source of authority that Yeshua is the Messiah, and to be used as a teaching and instruction on living before the Lord. According to the scriptures that is the order of things, Yeshua is first and then the Torah follows. (Note that the alien first believes in the G-d of Yisrael and then is held accountable to the Torah that is the sequence: (i) faith, and then (ii) following in G-d's ways).

125 One of the most important aspects of the children of Yisrael was how to deal with the ways and practices of the nations in light of their relationship with the Lord on entering into the Promised Land. Similarly, one of the most important aspects facing us today is the relationship of the Apostolic Scriptures, Yeshua, and the Torah today. Did the apostles envision something new in the communities they were establishing by faith in Yeshua? I don't believe so, the teaching of the apostles and the life of Yeshua (the epistles and gospels respectively) bring the people of G-d (both Jew and non-Jew) back to a proper reading of the scriptures. That is the Torah as the Lord gave it, released from the shackles from the centuries of rabbinic additions and interpretations and revealing Yeshua the Messiah, our Lord and savior. Each of us has a ministry to others; whether in an official capacity (congregation) or an unofficial capacity (interpersonal). I pray your ministry will begin and uphold faith in Yeshua the Messiah.

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Be Blessed in Yeshua our Messiah!

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הללויה לאדוננו מורנו ורבינו ישוע מלך המשיח לעולם ועד:
Hallelujah for our Lord, our Teacher, our Rabbi,
“Yeshua” King Messiah forever and ever