

Parashat Shoftim / פרשת שופטים

Shabbat Elul 4, 5767, August 18, 2007
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This Weeks Reading List:

Torah: Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9

Haftarah: Isaiah 51:12-52:12

B'rit HaChadashah: John 1:19-27 Acts 3:22-23

As you know life has its ups and downs. I don't know about you, but I can have one good day and feel on top of the world and then turn right around and have six really bad days the rest of the week. This could be from interpersonal relationships, my job, or something going wrong at home. Have you ever wondered what you are doing is correct, or what you believe is the truth? I think we all have been to that point while we move forward in life taking both the good with the bad things that happen to us. The concept of leadership can help to bring these things into perspective for example, is God really in control when I have six days of heart ache and pain? Interestingly enough leadership and our lives fit well with this week's Parashat Shoftim. While reading Parashat Shoftim four questions come to my mind (i) is God in control, (ii) am I hanging with and following the right people, (iii) how do I find what is spiritually true, and (iv) how can I please God. Hopefully we can answer these questions as we study this week's parsha.

This week in Parashat Shoftim we find four models of national leadership. Remember that this week's parsha forms part of the chukim and mishpatim section (Devarim Perek 12-26) which began in Parashat Re'ey discussing the mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael (children of Israel) must observe as they enter into the Promised Land.

Model of National Leadership

- A Navi (נביא, prophet) – religious guidance and national direction
- A Shofet (שופט, judge) – a judicial system
- A Kohen (כוהן, priest) – religious leadership and civil servants
- A Melech (מלך, king) – political leadership

As God is working in the lives of Bnei Yisrael to become a holy nation, we can see how God also desires to work in our lives to make us holy. For what other reason would Hashem have given us his Torah if it were not to make us an Am Kedosh (holy people). As messianic believers we believe Yeshua is Yisrael's Messiah and our promised savior. Placing our faith in Him, (i) that he had given his life in substitute for ours and (ii) that his blood was shed for our sins (Lev17:11, Col1:14); God gives us his Ruach Hakodesh (Holy Spirit) as a helper. As a result we receive a new heart along with a new capacity to love and forgive others from the hurtful things that have been done in the past, as well as a new ability to serve Him. Once the Ruach Hakodesh comes to dwell within us, God begins a "work in progress" in our lives.

The process of becoming an Am Kedosh takes preparation and time to develop. It does not occur all at once. The model of national leadership gives us an example to work from, the Melech (king) of Yisrael. God warns the Melech to be careful of pride and of acquiring worldly possessions (horses, silver, gold, etc).

Deuteronomy 17:14-20

17:14 "When you have entered the land ADONAI your God is giving you, have taken possession of it and are living there, you may say, 'I want to have a king over me, like all the other nations around me.' 17:15 In that event, you must appoint as king the one whom ADONAI your God will choose. He must be one of your kinsmen, this king you appoint over you - you are forbidden to appoint a foreigner over you who is not your kinsman. 17:16 However, he is not to acquire many horses for himself or have the people return to Egypt to obtain more horses, inasmuch as ADONAI told you never to go back that way again. 17:17 Likewise, he is not to acquire many wives for himself, so that his heart will not turn away; and he is not to acquire excessive quantities of silver and gold. 17:18 "When he has come to occupy the throne of his kingdom, he is to write a copy of this Torah for himself in a scroll, from the one the cohanim and L'vi'im use. 17:19 It is to remain with him, and he is to read in it every day, as long as he lives; so that he will learn to fear ADONAI his God and keep all the words of this Torah and these laws and obey them; 17:20 so that he will not think he is better than his kinsmen; and so that he will not turn aside either to the right or to the left from the mitzvah. In this way he will prolong his own reign and that of his children in Isra'el.

Notice in Deut. 17:18-19, the Melech or leader is to write for himself a copy of the Torah. This will help to ensure that (i) the leader does not grow too proud of his stature and (ii) he should use his power to lead Yisrael towards becoming an Am kadosh (holy people). By studying the Torah (God's word) on a daily basis it will keep the Melech's mind within the right perspective to lead his people. In the Tanach, we see a holy nation (Yisrael) begins with its leader, if the Melech of Yisrael is holy, the nation subsequently is holy. I feel this demonstrates that our leaders or those whom we look up too, can have a great impact upon our lives spiritually.

I believe the Torah challenges us to be not only different from the nations, but also sets up a standard for us so we can sanctify God's Holy Name. Therefore, we need to be very conscious of our lives and how we relate to others, we should particularly watch out for six things:

Things to watch out for

- (i) Self conceit (1 Timothy 3:6)
- (ii) Discontentment (Genesis Perek 3-4)
- (iii) Self-deception (Hebrews 3:13; James 1:22-25)
- (iv) Envy (Cain and Abel, Genesis Perek 4, 1 John 3:12)
- (v) Willfulness; meaning our will versus God's will in our lives
- (vi) Arrogance (Luke 22:31-34), and (vii) rebellion (James 3:13-16; 1 Peter 5:5-9; James 4:6-7).

The reason I listed these six things is because in my own life, I find it is very easy to overlook these things. The Ruach Hakodesh constantly makes me mindful of my character, behavior, thought life, etc because these things can effect whether I sanctify God's name or not in my life. For example, discontentment and envy are negative attitudes and we should be careful not to be a victim of negative attitudes. This list is incomplete of course, but serves as an example, if we overlook even the simplest negative attitude it will keep us from fulfilling our created purpose which is to glorify God's name.

Just as God is warning us in his Torah on the inherent danger in political power found in a strong central government which the Melech of Yisrael has under his control (i.e. wealth, power and arrogance). Here in Parashat Shoftim God is telling us that it is possible to thwart these things by studying His Holy Word. This undoubtedly is a challenge to us as well; it is absolutely important that we study God's word. Studying God's word helps to transform us mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Doing so gives us a perspective on life especially when those difficult times come. In the Torah, we see how God is always in control, even when bad times come and though we have to live through both the good and the bad; the Lord is with us every step of the way.

At the beginning of this commentary, I posed four questions: (i) is God in control, (ii) am I hanging with and following the right people, (iii) how do I find what is spiritually true, and (iv) how can I please God. Studying the Torah and all of the Holy Scriptures God has shown us that He is absolutely in control, even when bad things happen to us. Making the study of God's Word a daily process can bring assurance of the love God has for us. We know that God's Word and His Messiah is completely trustworthy and true.

Furthermore, this week's parsha shows us the influences others have upon our lives, especially leaders in our community and those who we call friends which we look up to. Just as the Melech of Yisrael had a direct influence upon the spiritual position of Bnei Yisrael likewise our friends have an influence upon us. The challenge is to become a positive influence upon our friends and family and in the process sanctify God's Holy Name.

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Help us to find what it is you want us to do, our created purpose so we can play our part as a member of the Holy Community you have put together. Help us to sanctify your Holy Name in our lives, not only to bless others, but also to be a blessing unto you Lord. Thank you for providing a way for us to live our lives according to your will by the power of your Spirit which you have given us.

In Yeshua's name we pray.

Amen.

Be blessed in Yeshua the Messiah!

הללויה לאדוננו מורנו ורבינו ישוע מלך המשיח לעולם ועד:

Hallelujah for our Lord, our Teacher, our Rabbi,
“Yeshua” King Messiah for ever and ever