

2-22-25 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene - *Mishphatim* [judgments]  
Torah Portion: Exodus 21:1 – 24:18  
Haftarah: Jeremiah 34:8-22, 33:25-26  
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Matthew 18:15-20

# **Biblical Dispute Resolution 1 – Origins of Biblical Justice**

**Central question: Where did G-d's justice system begin, and how did it develop?**

Today we are in parasha *Mishphatim*, which means “judgments.” It takes its name from the fifth word of the passage in English, and the second word in the original Hebrew.

Ex 21:1-4

21 "Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them. 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. 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. 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.

21:1 ואלה המשפטים אשר תשים לפניהם: Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them.  
428 9999 4941 834 7760 6440

2 כי תקנה עבד עברי שש שנים יעבד If thou buy an servant, Hebrew six years he shall serve:  
3588 7069 5650 5680 8337 8141 5647

ובשבעת יצא לחפשי חנם: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.  
7637 3318 2670 2600

3 אם בגפו יבא בגפו יצא אם If by himself, he came in by himself, he shall go out if  
518 1610 935 1610 3318 518

בעל אשה הוא ויצאה אשתו עמו: he were married, then shall go out his wife with him.  
1167 802 1931 3318 802 5973

4 אם אדניו יתן לו אשה וילדה לו If his master have given him a wife, and she have born a wife, him  
518 113 5414 3807a 802 3205 3807a

בנים או בנות האשה וילדיה תהיה sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be  
1121 176 1323 802 3206 1961

לאדניו והוא יצא בגפו: her master's, and he shall go out by himself.  
113 1931 3318 1610

It is in this passage that G-d continues to elaborate upon His standards for the conduct for His people, beyond the giving of His “Constitution” which is established in the “Ten Commandments.”

If you ask those in the normative church how many commandments there are in Scripture, most of them will tell you there are only ten commandments. And they will cite to you the time that Moses encountered G-d on Mt. Sinai, found in last week's parasha.

Furthermore, although they consider those ten commandments to be binding upon Christians, they will quickly testify that no one has ever perfectly kept even these ten. Hence, the need for Yeshua as Savior.

If you ask an observant Jew how many commandments there are, he will tell you there are 613. This is a more accurate number than that acknowledged by the normative church. And he will tell you that he likewise does not know anyone who has been able to keep all these commands (even the reduced number which apply specifically to him) faithfully.

He will tell you that he relies upon two things for his security:

1. That he recites the various sacrifices as part of his morning prayers, since he is unable to offer them due to the Temple being destroyed.
2. That his heartfelt and strict observance of Yom Kippur suffices to make him right with G-d for another year. Or, at least he *hopes* that is the case.

What he lacks is the assurance that Yeshua's sacrifice has provided.

What the normative Christian has is that *assurance* of forgiveness through the sacrifice of Yeshua, even though he generally lacks an understanding of the dept of G-d's commandments, and a working knowledge of how G-d intends to carry out His holy pattern of justice, and dispute resolution, for those who claim allegiance to Him.

What the normative orthodox Jew has is access, at least in some major metropolitan areas, to a Biblical court which is constituted to apply G-d's laws to important disputes.

It seems that neither group has the full picture. But each group has for generations always had available to it the greater body of information. All they needed to do was to receive it. The Satan-inspired rift between the synagogue and church has resulted in a refusal of each side to learn from the other. It is time for that rift to be healed.

In this series, I intend to provide assistance to the body of faith regarding an understanding and proper application of G-d's system of justice, and His ways of dispute resolution.

My prayer is that this will awaken those who hear or read this message to an important truth that can – and should – result in a proper resolution of

disputes between members of the body of faith, thus thwarting Satan's attempts to divide and weaken that body.

We will begin with a short history of the development of Biblical justice, which by its essence involves the proper resolution of disputes between the people of G-d.

## **Beginning**

G-d has always existed, and so that which is right and that which is wrong have likewise always existed. And people have, from the time of the fall, known to a greater or lesser degree what is right and what is wrong.<sup>1</sup> Every human being has, at his deepest core, that understanding. It may be imperfect, and incomplete, but it is there.

A careful reading of the early chapters of Genesis demonstrates that the concepts of right and wrong – what is righteous and what is evil – were written on the hearts of all people clearly, and in sufficiently high contrast so that G-d's judgment would be righteous when applied to the lives and choices of mankind.

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<sup>1</sup> Gen 2:16-3:13

It is idiomatic that if people do not have an understanding of at least some of the standards of right and wrong hard-wired into their hearts, then G-d would be an unjust judge in condemning them and punishing them. At no point will anyone who is rightfully condemned by G-d be able to plead innocence of the law which was violated.

In a very short time following creation, Satan influenced mankind by a two-pronged attack. He simultaneously urged us to question G-d's pronouncements, and also to gain forbidden knowledge so we might "be like G-d."<sup>2</sup> We made some tragic choices, and gained far greater knowledge of the depth and breadth of G-d's standards and our multiplied failures to abide by them.

Our increased understanding of good and evil was not the only consequence, for we also were now responsible to live-out the standard, and we were standing convicted of our sins before Holy Judge. We were no longer innocent. We knew what to do, but lacked the power to do it, and so to us that failure was sin.<sup>3</sup>

So, with this first defiance of G-d by mankind, the abstract concept of justice was immediately transformed into a harsh reality of sin and death, for our G-d is a G-d of justice.

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<sup>2</sup> Gen 3:1-6

<sup>3</sup> John 9:40-41

How G-d handled disputes between people, and how He handled people's rebellion against Him, are each quite evident in the opening pages of human history.

In the garden Adam blamed his failures on Eve, and Eve blamed her failures on the Serpent. At that point, G-d's justice was satisfied by the substitutionary sacrifice of an animal rather than the death of these two people. G-d Himself provided the sacrifice, and His love prevailed over His judgment. From that time forward, Adam and Eve wore on their bodies the evidence of that restorative justice.<sup>4</sup>

Later, Cain the murderer faced G-d's examination regarding his actions. The passage tells us that the blood of Abel had cried out to G-d from the ground. G-d Himself came down and confirmed for Himself that Abel was murdered. Thus, there were two witnesses to this murder.<sup>5</sup>

Once found guilty, Cain faced G-d's judgment. And the mercy of G-d is evident even then because Cain did not die immediately, but bore upon his body the mark of his punishment.

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<sup>4</sup> Gen 3:21

<sup>5</sup> Gen 4:9-13

In the days of Noah, the entire people of the earth, save one family, faced extinction by G-d's death penalty because they had departed so dramatically from G-d's ways, which were written – at least in partial revelation – upon their hearts. G-d assembled the evidence against them, declared that they had filled the earth with violence, and then He Himself carried out the punishment.<sup>6</sup>

Even that mass-extinction event failed to operate long as a deterrent. For even when it was recounted as a still-fresh tale of woe, all the people of the earth assembled together to break ground on a construction project which would raise a high tower “reaching to the heavens” in open defiance of G-d's clear instruction to scatter abroad and populate the earth.

G-d again established the facts condemning them, judged their actions as defiance of His instruction, and the punishment He meted out was confused languages.

Again, G-d's mercy was evident, as these defiant ones lived. Then left with no other choice, they scattered, and G-d's will was once again accomplished.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Gen 6:5 – 7:24

<sup>7</sup> Gen 11:1-9

When the sin of Sodom had ascended as a stench before the L-rd, He came Himself to determine the facts, together with two witnesses. And after seeing for Himself what was happening, He destroyed the city.<sup>8</sup> But His mercy again is evident, as He gave righteous Lot the opportunity to flee.

We see in this passage another important lesson as well, and it is illustrated in the actions of Lot's wife.<sup>9</sup> Once G-d, in His mercy, grants you a way of escape from His justice, don't reject that way of escape, or you will perish with the wicked.

For the first few chapters of human history, G-d was the sole arbiter who carried-out the judicial process. He heard from witnesses, He came to the scene of the offense, personally determined the true facts, and He determined whether the actions constituted sin. The divine judicial process culminated either in approval or punishment.

Although He carried out the process perfectly, the evidence before mankind of the righteousness of G-d's justice was insufficient of itself to deter the hearts of men from evil.

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<sup>8</sup> Gen 18:1 -19:26

<sup>9</sup> The English translation often misses the Hebrew idiom's clear intent. Lot's wife didn't merely look back over her shoulder, she actually turned back and returned in the direction of Sodom, in a rejection of G-d's plan of redemption.

Knowing what is right and wrong didn't cause us to do only right. G-d, in His mercy, never removes our ability to choose. And the consequences of our choices rest squarely upon our own shoulders.<sup>10</sup>

As one generation gave way to the next, the heart-written instructions of G-d regarding what is right and what is wrong began to fade. Parents failed to teach their children G-d's ways.

Rebellion against G-d's ways again increased. Each person turned aside to his own way. Hearts grew hardened as they rejected the authority of G-d to establish right and wrong, or to punish evil.

Each of the people groups which sprung from the scattering event at Babel saw the value of order among their group. Each established civil laws determining which actions were laudable, and which punishable under tribal law.

Each tribal group, separated from G-d's instructions, determined that they alone – using their own intellect - would be the arbiter of right and wrong. Once an action was determined as “wrong”, they alone would determine what punishment would be meted out. And the most powerful among them often became the sole accuser, judge, and executioner.

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<sup>10</sup> Ezek 18:4

The ongoing whispers of Satan, that “you can be like G-d” (specifically, you can determine what is right and wrong), took root and grew in the fertile soil of human pride and defiance. Thus, new and separate societal notions of right and wrong, together with separate systems of justice to regulate individual societies, sprung up across the world. Those separate systems persist to this day.

Because the laws written by the intellect of mankind are not based upon Scripture, there is little uniformity across the globe. In fact, in some societies what is considered a virtue is in other societies considered a grave offense.

At their deepest core, most of the compartmentalized systems of law still recognize a few of the deeper heart-written commands of G-d. So, we are able to see in some of them what might be a basic level of commonality.

For example, few societies permit murder. However, the concept of what is and what is not “murder” has become somewhat fuzzy. Societal value-creep and the downward spiral away from G-d’s truth is a product of substituting the wisdom of men for the wisdom of G-d.

Thus, as time goes on, these worldly justice systems are becoming increasingly flawed, and their flaws become more evident by every reported judicial decision. And because their flaws spring from the soil of human pride and defiance, societal laws show an ever-increasing distance from G-d's heart-laws.

## **The Hebrew People**

The Hebrew people, beginning with Abraham, have had a far closer relationship with G-d, and held more tightly to Him. Abraham knew G-d's ways incompletely, but he followed as best he could. G-d honored that commitment. Those others from the nations who closely associated with Abraham decided to become part of his extended family, and thus G-d continued the process of gathering from all nations to be part of His people.<sup>11</sup>

Because of the example of faith that Abraham exhibited to those in his camp, which continued even past his own life, was a significant impediment against rapid decline of the Hebrew people into evil, when compared with the other nations of the earth.

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<sup>11</sup> Gen 12:4-9. The phrase often translated into English suggesting that Abraham took with him "the persons which he had acquired in Haran" is literally, "the souls he had made." It signifies that these strangers came to faith in the G-d of Abraham and decided to become part of his family and left with him from Haran.

The Hebrew people, in the age before the written Torah, were still not immune to falling away from righteous behavior. Their decline was often connected directly to the degree by which they were influenced by the pagan practices of other adjoining nations.

Fortunately, the higher commitment of trust and reliance upon G-d exemplified by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob provided the Hebrews a bit of a head-start on the next step in the establishment of G-d's justice system, which would soon be brought into play at the exodus from Egypt. Thus, these primitive Hebrews were well-poised for success when G-d took His next step.

The exodus from Egypt was a turning point not only for the redemption from slavery for the Hebrew people, but for G-d's way of dealing with His people.

The greater significance of the exodus is demonstrated by G-d's re-setting of the national calendar of the Hebrews as a part of the instructions for the first Passover. Never before, nor since, has G-d re-set His people's calendar, with detailed instructions on a festival schedule within it.

Immediately following G-d's judgment against the G-ds of Egypt, and His judgment against the people of Egypt for enslaving the Hebrew people, G-d did several new things.

He for the first time took one people group out of another, rescuing them from slavery, and possibly also from extinction. For the first time He divided the sea and allowed His people to cross on dry land, drowning their oppressors. He for the first time formed from those freed slaves a new society which would have a judicial system superior to all others on the earth. Its superiority would be evident to the entire world, as a witness of His greatness.

Such superiority was based on His standards and His wisdom, and was designed to wash away our own faulty ideas of right and wrong. This new society was immersed in G-d's eternal concepts of right and wrong, and it would be seen by all other nations on the earth as the superior system. G-d would then get the glory.

Our witness to the nations of the earth was tied inextricably to the superior standards for personal behavior, together with the superior justice system established by our G-d.

But G-d's plan was bigger than simply establishing a proper justice system for one people group. G-d's instructions were intended to benefit all people regardless of ethnicity, who would come to faith in this One G-d through the witness of those in the faith. What began with Abraham would now come into more full flower with Moses and the Hebrews.

That plan for a worldwide adoption began with the individuals from other nations who left Egypt alongside the ethnic Hebrews, that "mixed multitude".<sup>12</sup> These former-strangers were viewed by G-d as completely assimilated into a single people when they stood before the mountain.<sup>13</sup>

And so it was, as we gathered at the foot of Mt. Horeb, after three days of intense preparation and sanctification, G-d began to speak to all the people His instructions regarding how we were to properly relate to Him, and how we were to properly relate to our fellow man. And as we saw last week, He began with His Constitution for His people – the "Ten Commandments."

As part of G-d's instructions, He then delegated to His people the responsibility for His justice system, together with the process of resolution of disputes between those of the family of faith. And with that delegation event, we will continue next week.

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<sup>12</sup> Ex 12:38

<sup>13</sup> G-d referred to the entire assembled multitude as "Sons of Israel" or as "Israel" without any hint of division.