

8-15-26 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene- *Shoftim* (“judgments”)
Torah Portion: Deut 16:18-21:9
Haftarah: Isa 51:12 – 52:12
Suggested Acheron K’tuvim: John 12:44-50

A Prophet Like Moses

Central question: Can you prove Messiah is this prophet?

Today we are in parasha *Shoftim*. It means “Judges.” It takes its name from the sixth word in the English, and the first word of the original Hebrew.

Deut 16:18-20

18 "You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the Lord your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. 19 You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. 20 Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

That is not an illegitimate translation, but it ignores the many nuances of the word translated as “justice.” I want to focus on the phrase commonly translated as: “justice and only justice...”

20
קִדְשׁ קִדְשׁ
just That which is altogether
6664 6664

You see, it is the same Hebrew word both times. More words are being used by the translator into English as he tries to make this Hebrew phrase make the clearest meaning (at least in his own mind and consistent with his own theology).

The Hebrew root word *tzedek* has a number of primary meanings. One is “righteousness” and another is “justice.” It is used in a number of Hebrew words with related concepts, and the context often helps us with the proper way to interpret this term in use.

This concurrence of at least two meanings, combined in this parasha by back-to-back repetition to construct a sentence regarding proper ways of conducting our lives shows us precisely how deeply connected the concepts of righteousness and justice are in the mind of G-d. And it also shows how emphatically this concept is to be transmitted to the people.

When a Hebrew speaker uses the same word twice, he more than doubles the impact of that word. In Hebrew linguistics, back-to-back use of a word amplifies the meaning to the highest possible effect. There is no equivalent tool in English. In the written word, we can italicize or bold the word to show emphasis, or some will put the word in all-caps. In spoken English, we would need to maybe raise our voices as we spoke that word.

So, when Moses said *tzedek tzedek tirdoph*, he was giving the phrase the highest level of written emphasis that is possible.

I might suggest a slightly different translation into the English that will convey a bit more the emphasis found in the Hebrew. We know that the topic is justice, so that will set the theme.

“The highest form of justice is what you shall seek.” Or,

“The highest combination of righteousness and justice is what you are to seek.” Or,

“Ultimate righteous in justice is what you will seek.”

You see my point. The more common English translations seem to me to be a bit too shallow.

We are instructed as a people to take government and justice very seriously. In this parasha, before anyone can assume the duties of King of Israel, he must write the entire Torah scroll with his own hand, under the supervision of a priest.

Deut 17:18-20

18 "Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. 19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, 20 that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left; in order that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.

With these two themes found in our parasha for today, I want you to consider how that might be applied in our land today. Imagine our President being required to write a Torah scroll by hand before taking the oath of office. Imagine he reads from it every day of his administration.

Now imagine our judges apply the law of G-d to resolve the disputes of our people, and beyond that, are known for the highest and most excellent acts of righteousness and justice of all the people.

What you have just imagined seems to be impossible with the state of our nation today. I would agree with that assessment. But there will be such a government established on the Earth one day. It will be the government of Messiah.

And with that, I wish to now turn to one of the most overlooked messianic prophecies found in Tanach.

Deut 18:15-20

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. 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, lest I die.' 17 "And the Lord said to me, 'They have spoken well. 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.

19 'And 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.

Midrash Tanhuma, Toldot 14:1

A song of ascents. I will lift up mine eyes to the mountains (Ps. 121:1). Scripture alludes here to the verse Who art thou, O great mountain before. Zerubbabel? Thou shalt become a plain (Zech. 4:7). This verse refers to the Messiah, the descendant of David. Why was he called a great mountain? Because he will be greater than the patriarchs, as is said: Behold, My servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high (Isa. 52:13). He shall be exalted above Abraham; lifted up above Isaac; and shall be very high above Jacob. He shall be exalted above Abraham, concerning whom it is said: I have lifted up my hand unto the Lord (Gen. 14:22); lifted up above Moses, of whom it is said: That thou shouldst say unto me: Carry them in thy bosom (Num. 11:12); and shall be very high like the ministering angels, concerning whom it is said: As for their wings, they were high (Ezek. 1:18). Hence Scripture says: Who art thou, O great mountain?

Rabbi Levi ben Gershon, also known as Ralbag, wrote regarding the Messiah.¹

A prophet from the midst of you.- In fact the Messiah is such a Prophet as it is stated in the Midrash [Tanhuma] on the verse “Behold my Servant shall prosper” [Is. 52:13]... Moses by the miracles which he wrought brought a single nation to worship Elohim, but the Messiah will draw all peoples to the worship of Elohim.

Maimonides reputedly wrote a letter to a Yemenite community, denounces a man claiming to be the Messiah saying:

The Messiah will be a very great Prophet, greater than all the Prophets with the exception of Moses our teacher...His status will be higher than that of the Prophets and more honorable, Moses alone excepted. The Creator, blessed be He, will single him out with features wherewith He had not singled out Moses; for it is said with references to him, “And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither decide after the hearing of his ears.” (Isaiah 11:3)

¹ Ralbag on Duet. 18:18

The Dead Sea Scroll document 4Q175 also speaks of three types of Messias – each setting out the characteristics of Yeshua. This community reads Deut. 18:18-19 to mean that the Prophet “like Moses” was understood clearly as referring to the Messiah.

More insight on the Prophet Like Moses can be found in the Midrash Rabbah:²

“My beloved is like a gazelle” (Song of Songs 2:9) – Rabbi Yitzhak said: Israel said before the Holy One blessed be He: Master of the universe, You told us that You will come to us first. “My beloved is like a gazelle” – just as the gazelle appears and is then concealed, so, the initial redeemer appeared and was then concealed. Rabbi Berekhya said in the name of Rabbi Levi: Like the initial redeemer, so will be the ultimate redeemer. The initial redeemer, this is Moses; he appeared to them and was then concealed from them. How long was he concealed from them? Rabbi Tanhuma said: Three months; that is what is written: “They encountered Moses and Aaron...” (Exodus 5:20). The ultimate redeemer, too, will appear to them and will then be concealed from them. How

² Midrash Rabbah Bamidbar 11:2

long will he be concealed from them? Rabbi Tanḥuma said in the name of Rabbi Ḥama ben Rabbi Hoshaya: Forty-five days. That is what is written: “From the time of the abolishing of the daily offering and the setting up of the abomination of desolation there will be one thousand two hundred and ninety days” (Daniel 12:11), and it is written: “Happy is one who waits, and reaches one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days” (Daniel 12:12). How many are these extra days? They are the forty-five days that he will be concealed from them and will then reappear to them.

Classical Jewish theology holds that the “first redeemer” was seen in Moses,³ and the second is Messiah.⁴ Moses delivered us from the slavery of the Egyptians, but the Messiah delivers us from slavery to sin, that has great power in the spiritual realm to hold us in bondage in the spirit, even while our bodies are free.

But there is a deeper meaning as well. Moses was in the camp at Horeb, then went up onto the mountain and “disappeared.”⁵ Then Moses reappeared with greater authority and law.

³ Recall that in Egyptian, the name Moses (lit. Mses) means “He is born.” And the one born was understood by the Egyptians as being their god “with us.”

⁴ The prophecy found in Isaiah 7 regarding the virgin birth, and the name of the child being Immanuel (G-d with us) makes a connection between Moses as redeemer and Yeshua as Redeemer.

⁵ The sin of the golden calf resulted from the people losing hope of Moses’ return.

In this same pattern, and consistent with classical Jewish theology, Messiah is to be revealed, then disappear for a time causing many to despair regarding His return, but then He will return and be revealed again.

Recall the “reappearance” of Moses. There was great sin in the camp. Some repented, and some stayed in their sin. Upon Moses’ return, he separated the people and condemned those who had not repented.⁶

Let’s look once again at the prophecy of the great Prophet.

Deut 18:18-20

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. 19 'And 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.

Recall that disregarding the directions of G-d given through Moses called the violator to account – before the judge established in these parashiot.

⁶ Ex. 32:26-28

But there is clearly a change in tone. When G-d gives a word through the great Prophet, and that word is disregarded, then G-d Himself will be the Judge, and will enact the punishment. This is a much higher level of accountability.

Classical Jewish theology has interpreted this phrase to mean “death at the hands of Heaven.” And notice that the Prophet Himself needs not even speak the judgment – but the Father carries it out alongside the Prophet.

Did Yeshua fulfill this prophecy? His own words give us proof.

John 12:44-50

44 And Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me does not believe in Me, but in Him who sent Me. 45 "And he who beholds Me beholds the One who sent Me. [A level higher than Moses] 46 "I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness. 47 "And if anyone hears My sayings, and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. [the True Judge stands at His right hand] 48 "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who

judges him; [the Father] the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. [the “Word” judging is classic Jewish theology] 49 "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak. [Yeshua speaks “in My Name”] 50 "And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me." [Yeshua is not a presumptive or false prophet].

Yeshua walked among us “in the camp” and then He disappeared to spend some time with the Father, just as did Moses, and was also obscured by a cloud.

Acts 1:9-11

9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; 11 and they also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

And as Moses reappeared to the people below – some of whom had gone away from G-d and His ways – Yeshua shall also reappear with greater authority and law.

Rev 19:11-16

11 And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12 And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself. 13 And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. 15 And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. 16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

When Moses returned, he divided the camp and judged the wicked. The same will occur when Yeshua returns.

Rev 20:11-15

11 And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14 And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

In recent generations, the Jewish sages have gone through great effort to deny that this “prophet like Moses” is Messiah. I believe that is because to admit that this prophet can be Messiah, then many proofs would quickly apply, and there would be no doubt. I have shown you but a few proofs.

Yeshua’s judgment will be the ultimate justice mixed with the ultimate righteousness.

There is a stark warning to many who have not taken G-d or His ways seriously. These might appear to be holy, but inwardly are dead. They can fool us, but they cannot fool G-d.

Rev 3:1-6

He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. 3 'Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you. 4 'But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. 5 'He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. 6 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. '

And the judgment of the Word is swift, and sure.

Rev 14:9-12

9 And another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, 10 he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." 12 Here is the perseverance [the reward and vindication] of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

Stand firm in your faith in G-d and Messiah Yeshua. Follow the Commandments as He spoke them and as He lived them. Keep your garment unsoiled and white. He is our returning husband. He is L-rd.