

Mishpatim מִשְׁפָּטִים

Rulings

“Blood Covenant”

Exodus 21:1–24:18
Jeremiah 34:8–22; 33:25–26

Mishpatim, beginning with the word, “These are the regulations you must present to Israel” (Exodus 21:1, NLT), is a very different kind of Torah portion than what we have read thus far in Exodus. Up until this point, our readings have been significantly dominated by events in Ancient Israel’s history. Now, the specific Instruction of God will begin to be delivered to the Israelites. It is pretty serious, when you think about it, because the people will now be consecrated to the Lord’s service:

“So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words’” (Exodus 24:8).

Mishpatim gives the Torah student a tremendous variety of images to contemplate. For three chapters (Exodus chs. 21–23), Moses delivers an array of ordinances that allow the people of Israel to, in essence, become “civilized” among the nations of the Earth. While most of the laws that are stated regulate proper ethics and morality—even until this day—other laws seem somewhat strange. The short answer is that many of the Torah’s commandments were given in an Ancient Near Eastern economic and technological environment, that would not be the same environment of later centuries, and Israel’s Law often ran quite contrary and subversive to the codes of their neighbors.²⁶

The reason that Israel is given God’s Instruction, is because in obeying God’s commandments, Israel could be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation able to serve Him in the world:

“Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel” (Exodus 19:5–6).

From the following response, you can see how Israel did sincerely desire to be a holy nation unto the Lord. As Moses delivers the various ordinances seen in *Mishpatim*, the people answer the following response with one voice (Heb. *qol echad*, קוֹל אֶחָד):

“Moses alone, however, shall come near to the LORD, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him.’ Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘**All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!**’” (Exodus 24:2–3).

Here at the end of a very lengthy list of rulings, the Ancient Israelites conclude that they will do all that the Lord has spoken. There does not appear to be any hesitation for them to obey, and so the Lord and Israel make this covenant, and solidify it with animal sacrifices. Moses writes down what he has been given, and wakes up early the next morning

²⁶ For a further discussion, consult the article “Addressing the Frequently Avoided Issues Messianic Encounter in the Torah” by J.K. McKee, appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*.

to build an altar at the base of Mount Sinai. He builds an altar with twelve large stones that represent the twelve tribes of Israel:

“Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put *it* in basins, and the *other* half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!’ So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words’” (Exodus 24:4-8).

Moses elicits the aid of some of the Israelites, and burnt offerings and peace offerings are sacrificed to the Lord. He then takes half of the blood and sprinkles it on the altar he had just constructed (Exodus 24:5-7a). Then, Moses takes the written commandments and reads them again to the people. Once again, they respond unanimously, “All that the LORD has spoken we will faithfully do!” (Exodus 24:7b, NJPS).

In order to seal the covenant between God and Israel, Moses sprinkles the people with the blood (Exodus 24:8a). He utters this statement, “This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words” (Exodus 24:8b, NIV). This was a very critical moment for Ancient Israel as they took on the responsibility for keeping the covenant with God and obeying Him. They understood the principle that the shedding of blood was required to seal a covenant.

Is it possible that here we see a foreshadowing of the shedding of blood, which would be required in the future in order for God’s people to maintain their position as His chosen kingdom of priests? As I pondered this scene, the words “blood of the covenant” (Heb. *dam-ha’b’rit*, דַּם־הַבְּרִית) kept reminding me of the Last Supper. There on the night of His betrayal, Yeshua used the same terminology:

“And He said to them, ‘This is My blood of the covenant [Grk. *to aimā mou tēs diathēkēs*, τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης], which is poured out for many’” (Mark 14:24).

What do you think went through the minds of the Disciples, who heard these words come from the mouth of the Son of God? Is it possible that they thought back to the scene from centuries earlier when their ancestors were literally sprinkled with the blood of bulls (Exodus 24:5)? At the time of the Last Supper, the thought of Yeshua’s blood being the permanent atonement for sins was likely not fully understood. As you should recall from the Gospel accounts, this was a very intense time for the Apostles. When those words were spoken from the Lord, they did not fully know what was about to take place.

But we, who live today and who have heard the good news—and can look back at both the Book of Exodus and the record of Yeshua’s ministry—do not have the luxury of claiming “ignorance.” It has been understood ever since the crucifixion and resurrection that the shed blood of the Messiah is absolutely necessary for the final atonement of sin. The author of Hebrews reminds us of the critical need for a blood covenant:

“For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves...,²⁷ with water and scarlet wool and hyssop,

²⁷ Editor’s note: There is some doubt that “and the goats” is part of the original reading of Hebrews 9:19. The NIV notably omits this second clause, reading as, “he took the blood of calves, together with water...”

and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, ‘THIS IS THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD COMMANDED YOU’ [Exodus 24:8]. And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, *one may almost say*, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:19-22).

Today, as we contemplate and discuss some of the ordinances given in *Mishpatim*, that were intended to make Ancient Israel a holy nation, it is far more critical to ask this profound question: Has the blood of the Messiah been shed for you, to make the New Covenant valid in your life? Without this blood of the covenant and the sprinkling of the Messiah’s blood for your sin, you are without hope of permanent forgiveness and atonement. **So turn to Him and cry out for mercy!** The Apostle Paul affirms this truth:

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Messiah (by grace you have been saved)” (Ephesians 2:4-5).

Terumah תְּרוּמָה Contribution “Willing Hearts”

Exodus 25:1-27:19
1 Kings 5:26-6:13

Our Torah portion for this week, *Terumah*, begins with the command for the Ancient Israelites to contribute to the Tabernacle construction project:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution. This is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze’” (Exodus 25:1-3).

In *Terumah*, the people of Israel are finally given an opportunity to give back to God for all that He has done for them—and the outpouring of material is great (cf. Exodus 36:5). With meticulous detail, Moses is given and then records the instructions for construction of a temporary Tabernacle and its components,²⁸ which will be used to worship the Lord during the sojourn through the desert:

“Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8).

Among the lengthy list of items to be contributed are not just the materials necessary for the different pieces of Tabernacle furniture, but also the materials necessary for the garments for the high priest:

“This is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze, blue, purple and scarlet *material*, fine linen, goat *hair*, rams' skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece” (Exodus 25:3-7).

Cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London and New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), pp 668-669.

²⁸ Exodus 25:10-27:21.