



Welcome to this week's Parasha (Torah Portion), which is named **Shoftim** (Judges).

Shabbat Shalom Hans,

This is the portion of Scripture that will be read this week during the Shabbat (Saturday) morning services in synagogues around the world. Please read along with us; we know you will be blessed!

SHOFTIM (Judges)

Deuteronomy 16:18–21:9; Isaiah 51:12–52:12; Mark 14:53–64

“Appoint judges [**shoftim**] and officials [**shotrim**] for each of your tribes in every town the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall judge [**shafat**] the people fairly [**tzedek mishpat / righteous judgment**].” (*Deuteronomy 16:18*)



A Jewish youth wearing tefillin (phylacteries) reads from the Torah scroll, keeping his place with a yad (Torah pointer).

Last week, in Parasha Re'eh, God set a blessing and a curse before the Israelites.

The blessing was a result of obeying God's commandments and the curse a result of forsaking them.

In this week's Torah portion, Moses instructed the nation of Israel in the appointing of **judges** (called **shoftim** in Hebrew) and **law enforcement officers** (called **shotrim**) to administer justice. These judges and officers would not only teach but also interpret the laws of the Torah.

What is the difference between a judge and an officer? **A judge refers to one qualified to deliver judgments according to the laws of the Torah. The officer then enforces these legal judgments, even by force if necessary.**

The Hebrew prophet Isaiah promised that there would come a day when judges would be restored as in the days of old: "I shall restore your judges [shoftim] as at first, and your counselors [yaats] as at the beginning." (*Isaiah 1:26*)

Although Isaiah mentions the judges, the officers do not appear in this prophecy, but rather "counselors."



A Jewish boy reads the Jewish prayer book at the Western (Wailing) Wall.

Hans, This Shabbat Bless the Jewish People, [click here](#)

Why will counselors replace the role of officers?

In the days of redemption, when the Messiah returns to rule and reign in righteousness, there will be no need for “enforcers” of the Torah.

In the Messianic era, all will have such a deep desire to follow and obey the Lord that only counselors will be needed to explain and clarify (not to enforce) the decisions of the judges.

Even today (before that great day of the Lord that is to come) those who are truly in Messiah do not need external coercion to keep God’s commandments and judgments.

For when we have been given a new heart and a new spirit, there arises within us a desire to keep God’s laws and commandments, not in a spirit of legalism, but out of a heart of love:

“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” (*Ezekiel 36:27*)

For those who believe in Yeshua (Jesus) but do not observe His commandments in the Torah, the question we need to ask is, “Why not?”

Either the person is not truly following Yeshua and filled with His Holy Spirit, or they have received and accepted a teaching of false grace which erroneously emphasizes freedom from guilt over freedom from sin.

Certainly, Yeshua did not pay the ultimate price to set us free from bondage to sin so that we can continue sinning without guilt.

"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness." (*1 John 3:4*)



An open Torah scroll

Pursuing Justice for All

“Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the innocent.” (*Deuteronomy 16:19*)

This Parasha warns that judges (or magistrates) are not to show any kind of partiality or favoritism. They are forbidden from accepting a bribe. It is written that God shows no favoritism but accepts anyone from any nation who fears Him and does what is right (*Acts 10:34*).

Justice has always been a fundamental value in Judaism; therefore, it was to be administered without corruption. Difficult cases could be referred to a higher court, which was called the Sanhedrin in Second Temple times.

"Tzedek, tzedek tirdof — Justice, justice you shall pursue." (*Deuteronomy 16:20*)

A thorough investigation of crimes was required, and in order to deliver punishment upon a criminal, a minimum of two credible witnesses were required.

As we shall see, this is why the trial of Yeshua HaMashiach (Jesus the Messiah) was completely unjust and contrary to Jewish law — and yet it was God’s will that He suffer and die on the execution stake.



A Jewish young woman buries her face in a siddur (Jewish prayer book) as she prays at the Western (Wailing) Wall.

Who Killed Yeshua?

The question is often asked, “Who killed Yeshua?”

Usually, the blame is placed upon the Jews, with accusations of “Christ Killer” fueling the fires of anti-Semitism over the centuries. But is this accusation true?

To answer that, we only need to look at the record of Yeshua’s trial.

Yeshua did not receive a trial by jury. In Jewish law, the judge would hear and evaluate an accusation from two impartial witnesses. **If two or three witnesses would agree, the judge would issue a conviction; but in Yeshua’s case, the witnesses against Him presented false testimony.**

“The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for testimony against Yeshua to put Him to death, but they could find none. For many were giving false testimony against Him, but the testimonies did not agree.” (*Mark 14:55–56*)

Because the testimony of the witnesses did not agree, the judges could not convict him.

Thus, the Sanhedrin had no other choice but to ask Yeshua directly if He claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God — a charge to which He confessed, thereby positioning Himself as being guilty of blasphemy, which carried the death penalty.

“Again the high priest questioned Him, ‘Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’

“‘I am,’ said Yeshua, ‘and all of you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.’

“Then the high priest tore his robes and said, ‘Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What is your decision?’

“And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.” (*Mark 14:61–64*)



The False Witnesses, by James Tissot (*Brooklyn Museum*)

This interrogation essentially reveals that neither the Jewish Sanhedrin nor the Roman authorities could have killed Yeshua without His cooperation.

Even some of the Roman soldiers came to believe that Yeshua truly was the Son of God.

“When the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Yeshua, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they were terrified and said, ‘This man really was God’s Son!’”
(*Matthew 27:54*)

So to answer the question of who killed Yeshua, we only need to **look at His trial to see that He willingly gave the authorities the “confession” they needed to condemn Him to death.**

Yeshua, however, said that He lay down His life of His own accord — to save us from our sins as the promised Messiah.

He said by His own words, “The reason My Father loves Me is that I lay down My life — only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from My Father.” (*John 10:17–18*)



The Crucifixion, Seen From the Execution Stake,
by James Tissot

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Keeping the Nation Holy

“You are to be holy to Me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be My own.” (*Leviticus 20:26*)

One purpose God chose a people for Himself was so He could show the world what holiness looks like. Parasha Shoftim, therefore, forbids the following:

Idolatry

In the 17th chapter of Deuteronomy, God prohibits idolatry. Anyone found guilty of this crime would be stoned to death according to the laws of the Torah, upon the testimony of two or three witnesses.

“On the testimony of two or three witnesses a person is to be put to death, but no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.” (*Deuteronomy 17:6*)

Why were such harsh penalties in place for worshiping false gods?

Although in our day, there exists a great emphasis on human rights and free choice, God's law is concerned with preserving purity and Godliness.

By purging evil from the nation, holiness was protected.

“The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting that person to death, and then the hands of all the people. You must purge the evil from among you.” (*Deuteronomy 17:7*)



“They shall show thee the sentence of judgment.”—*Psalm 96:10*

“Go to the Levitical priests and to the judge who is in

office at that time. Inquire of them and they will give you the verdict." (Deuteronomy 17:9)

The Occult

All forms of occult practices also carried the death penalty.

These included many spiritual practices that are commonplace today and for the most part widely accepted: sorcery, divination, fortune telling, astrology, wizardry, and listening to psychics, mediums or those who act as a channel for spirits of the dead.

God acknowledges that pagans participate in the occult, but **these practices are part of what leads to the downfall of nations and they are forbidden for any of God's people.**

Receiving guidance from one's astrological chart, reading palms or tea leaves, attending séances, or even using Ouiji boards are not permitted for people of God; nevertheless, many today (either in ignorance or defiance of the law) read books about wizards and dabble in the occult.

This is a dangerous spiritual path.

"The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so." (Deuteronomy 18:14)



Two Jewish men and a boy walk together in Israel.

False Prophets

Lying and deception is another form of evil that taints holiness.

Israel is warned to beware of false prophets. Only those whose words come true are to be trusted as true prophets of God.

"If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed." (Deuteronomy 18:22)

Killing and Murder

Cities were set aside as refuge for someone who killed another unintentionally.

"Now this is the case of the manslayer who may flee there and live: when he kills his friend unintentionally, not hating him previously." (*Deuteronomy 19:4*)

However, anyone who intentionally murdered someone had no right to seek refuge in these cities; he would be removed by force to be handed over to the avenger of blood to die at his hand.

The deliberate shedding of innocent blood (murder) carried the death penalty.

"Show no pity. You must purge from Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood, so that it may go well with you." (*Deuteronomy 19:13*)



A Jewish man recites prayers.

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Choosing a Holy King of Israel

"When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, 'Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us.'" (*Deuteronomy 17:14*)

In this Parasha, Moses foresees that the people will one day want a king to rule over them and not a series of judges, so he gives them guidelines on how to protect their holy calling under such a system.

The king was to be an Israelite who had not accumulated many wives or a great deal of gold and silver.

He also had to know and use the teachings of the Torah as a guide.

The king was required to write out two **Sifrei Torah** (books of the Torah) and to keep them with him at all times in order that he remain humble (*Deuteronomy 17:14–20*).



A bronze statue of King David

Yeshua was acknowledged as the King of the Jews, as was written on the sign posted over His head at His execution (*Matthew 27:11, 37*).

He fulfilled all the requirements of kinship. He was an Israelite, a man of humility who lived a simple life and taught the Torah. He was the personification of holiness.

According to a Messianic prophecy, the Messiah will rule and reign as King upon the throne of His forefather David with perfect justice and righteousness forever and ever.

“For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on His shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

"The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever." (*Isaiah 9:6-7*)

Although He will physically reign over the Earth from Jerusalem when He returns, His kingdom is established now in the hearts of those who are Believers. **Those of us who follow Him understand that He has given us a clear vision of holiness**, bringing the observance of Torah to its fullness.

Because He makes the fullness of the law known, each of us should be living in righteousness.

"If you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (*John 13:17*)



"And when ye come nigh unto battle, the priest shall speak to the people."—*Deut. xx. 2.*

When You Come Near to Battle, by David Paul Frederick Hardy

Trusting in God for Victory

In this Parasha, God gives the people laws for waging war and maintaining purity in the camp.

Moses tells the people to not be afraid of the inhabitants of the Promised Land while in battle; Adonai will be with them.

Before battle, the Cohanim (Priests) were to encourage the troops to trust in God.

“When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army. He shall say: ‘Hear, Israel: Today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not panic or be terrified by them. For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.’” (*Deuteronomy 20:2-4*)

We also need to encourage the young men and women of the Israel Defense Forces not to fear Palestinian terrorists or vast Islamic armies.

For just as in ancient times, these courageous Israeli soldiers do not enter into battle alone but with God on their side to give them the victory against their enemies.

We can also rest assured that no matter what battle we may face, God is with us and will cause us to walk in triumph in Messiah Yeshua.

“But thanks be to God, who in Messiah always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere.” (2 Corinthians 2:14)



Time is short. You can make a difference in these last days by helping us bring the Good News of Yeshua to the Holy Land.

"Hear the word of the LORD, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: 'He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over His flock like a shepherd.'" (Jeremiah 31:10)

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