



Serious warning against religious fusion (syncretism)

Parashat shof'tim (48) – Judges

Torah: *Debarim* 16:18 to 21:9

Haftarah: *Yeshayahu* 51:12 to 53:12

Apostolic Writings: *Ma'asei* 3: 13-26

Mosheh reminds the children of *Yisra'el* of the protocol for settling differences. He established a system whereby judges and officials, representing all twelve tribes, could pronounce just judgement and not bring the Word of *YAH* into disrepute. At *YAH*'s command, *Mosheh* is to appoint שֹׁפְטִים (*shof'-Tim*), judges, and שְׁטָרִים (*sho-t'Rim*), officials, for all the villages. These men are to judge the nation fairly, they must be blameless and not accept bribes. The judges must judge strictly in civil, domestic and spiritual disputes. The officials will be equipped with executive duties and act as a police force in all the cities as well as the country as a whole.

We often see *YAH*'s vengeance compared to a cup of which the contents leads to drunkenness. The reason for this is that it has a similar effect. It causes the person to lose direction, stagger and fall. All misery is represented in the image of a cup that is drunk and causes the body to fall flat on the ground, face first. Not only is this position humiliating, but an attitude that prepares the person to beg *YAH* for forgiveness, as well as a position for worship and gratitude. The musical poet, *Asaph*, puts it beautifully:

Mizmor 75 ⁸For a cup is in the hand of יְהוָה, And the wine shall foam; It is filled with a mixture, And He pours it out. All the wrong of the earth drink, Draining it to the dregs.

This brings us back to one of the most important parts of the middle of this week's *sidrah*, and the reason we are beginning the study with a detour. In his intimate walk with *YAH*, *Mosheh* was allowed to experience many mysteries. One of these was the king the nation would later demand. He was also given a preview of the coming Anointed One, something we will dwell on and spend more time on in a moment.

Meanwhile, there is a thorny issue, something that christianity as a whole despises and perhaps never even thinks about:

Debarim 16 ²¹“Do not plant for yourself any tree as an *Asherah* near the slaughter-place of יְהוָה your *Elohim* that you make for yourself.

Drive through any town anywhere in the world and some of the most striking buildings are the sun god temples that adorn almost every corner, if not an entire square. In one particular town in the Northern Cape, and possibly in many other towns or cities as well, no less than five of them are built almost directly next to each other in the main street! While the gathering of Christians is not condemned here, it is the design of the building that is abhorrent – see accompanying illustration. With few exceptions, every church building has a tall tower, equipped with at least one bell, with which the entire area is disturbed early in the morning on day one and sometimes late afternoon as well. This tower is nothing other than an *ashērah*, a “tree of worship”. It is notable that the tabernacle on earth, a copy of what is in heaven, did not have a tower. It was a simple building, as we learned in fine detail earlier. The outside was important, but it was what was inside that would really matter.



With the establishment of Christianity in the fourth century, the church fathers also decided to erect more imposing buildings. These had to be visible from afar and the easiest way was to erect a tower. One particular town in northern England has a cathedral that is visible from more than 50 kilometers and was the highest building in the world until the 14th century! The tower would serve for one or more bells to encourage churchgoers to attend, as well as to scare others into submission. However, we can see that tower as a needle, thrust into YAH's eye, not out of ignorance but as a deliberate denial of YAH's rules. Instead of many church buildings, each town during *Yeshua's* lifetime and earlier, had only one place of meeting and no tower.

Each town also had its own *beit din*, court of law, and police force. In smaller towns, at least three judges would have to act as the *beit din*, while there was a requirement of at least 23 judges in larger towns. Many years later, a group of 70 *shof'tim* and an elected *nassi* (leader) would form the סִנְהֶדְרִין (*sân-hê-Dreen*), supreme court. Ironically, this word is actually borrowed from the Greek σὺνέδριον (*sunhedrion*)¹. In his book, “The Great Sanhedrin,” Sidney B. Hoenig explains that the words *Bais (beit) Din Hagadol* was originally used, which translates as “great court of justice” and which leads us back to our own word, “supreme court”.

Bill Bullock², a lawyer in Texas, but first and foremost a wonderful *Torah* believer and teacher, wrote the following:

The words which Moshe will speak in this second speech are usually described in English as “commandments” and “ordinances” and “laws”. But those terms do not describe them accurately at all.

Alas, the translation of the Holy One's declaration at Sinai into English and other Western language as ‘commandments’, ‘ordinances’ and ‘laws’ lies at the root of the most critical errors into which both Christianity and Judaism have wandered.

By and large organized Christianity has erred in rejecting *Torah's* “commandments, ordinances, and laws” as “unspiritual” – indeed considered to border on being demonic.

Most of Christianity has thus over the centuries devolved into a King-less, Constitution-less, Kingdom-less, Love-less, Law-less blob of prudish, angry religious people who try to process glorious spiritual mysteries through the filter of fleshly, carnal minds, who spread hate-filled opinions instead of truth, who expose people to dull, repetitive sermons instead of flowing in vibrant words of life, who pass off

¹ <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Sanhedrin>

² Bill Bullock teaches and writes under the name “The Rabbi's Son”.

cute marquee one-liners as revelation, and who promote models of church growth and bean-counting instead of any real, substantive message that could lead to freedom, destiny, and purpose.

Organized Christianity today thus has virtually nothing of value to offer either the world or its own adherents, and both groups are rejecting it in droves.

Many modern forms of organized Judaism on the other hand have committed the exact opposite error, focusing almost all their attention on the letter of Torah's instructions, drawing all the wrong lessons from the Holocaust and therefore instilling in upcoming generations the paranoia that everyone who is not Jewish is anti-Semitic, dangerous, and inferior.

Indeed since the Holocaust the mantra of organized Judaism seems to have unofficially changed from Sh'ma Yisrael! to 'Never Again'! As a result mind-numbing sets of extra-Biblical rules designed to keep people away have been promoted in the guise of 'building a fence around the Torah'.

There is indeed now a fence around the Torah in many forms of Judaism – and that fence is so high, is laced with so much razor wire, and is strewn with so many IEDs that the beauty of Torah – if not of the Holy One Himself -- has become hidden behind the carnage.

Father Avraham would weep. Moshe would be appalled. David would hang his harp in the willows. Sh'lomo would scratch his head in bewilderment. Eliyahu would rend his mantle in twain and start thrashing.

Fragments of the Messianic Judaism are alas falling into the same traps as organized Christianity and Judaism. Labels such as 'Sacred Namers', 'Two-Housers', 'Lunar Sabbatarians', and 'Sabbatical Year Followers' have become modern 'Shibboleths'.

Swords are drawn and waving, ready to strike off the ear, cut out the tongue, or lop off the head, of anyone and everyone who fails to adopt the specific phraseology the ears of those bearing one's chosen label itch to hear.

Brethren, these things should not be so. What in Heaven's Name are we doing? How can we continue to misrepresent the Holy One's character so horribly?

The Sinaitic covenant is not "law" - at least in any sense that term is used today. Nor are the mitzvot, mishpatim, and chukim "commandments" or "ordinances".

They are Divine Energy.

They are a sweet fountain of life, health and peace.

They are substantive words of Divine empowerment and activation.

They are loving instructions, given in the context of an abiding covenant relationship, prophetically and creatively reshaping the soul and spirit of the recipient, transforming her from a redeemed slave into the Betrothed Bride-to-be of the Holy One.

(End of quote.)

With this information we currently see that today's judges are no longer subject to YAH's rules and laws. The "ten words", the commands of YAH, have been removed from the courts of especially Western society; they will only be restored during the Messianic era. During that time, it will be the desire of every person to follow and obey *Torah*. The *shot'rim* will no longer be needed to enforce or apply decisions of the *shof'tim*, but only to explain them. The words of Bill Bullock above are incredibly true, because only a handful of people respect and follow the commands and rules of YAH in love, as *Yeshua* taught us:

Yohanan 14 ¹⁵ "If you love Me, you shall guard My commands.

The choice of words we read here is significant. We should guard, which means to uphold and teach others, the commandments, not put a fence around them. We are given a new heart and spirit; a desire arises in us to obey YAH's commands, not only to follow them legally, but in love:

Yehezqel 36 ²⁷ and put My Spirit within you. And I shall cause you to walk in My laws and guard My right-rulings and shall do them.

On every level, *Torah* requires that we stand pure and blameless before YAH at all times. Some people believe that many rules have lapsed due to the lack of a temple and that many sacrifices do not need to be made. However, the opposite is true, for we cannot appear before YAH as corrupt and conflicting people. *Yeshua* came to completely erase the sins of our past; He did not die on a torture stake so that we could continue to disobey all of YAH's commands.

During our study of *Balaq* (cf. *B'midbar* 22:1 to 25:17) a few weeks ago, we learned how the early church fathers tried to remove *Yeshua* from the ten words given by YAH at *Sinai*, also known as the "good news". When impure and pagan customs from *Babel* are mixed with the truth of *Torah*, set-apartness, we learn what religious blending is, also known as syncretism. In several places in Scripture we are warned against this:

- 🏺 *Yeshayahu 1* ¹⁰ Hear the word of יהוה, you rulers of *Sedom*; give ear to the *Torah* of our *Elohim*, you people of *Amorah*!
- 🏺 *Yeshayahu 1* ¹⁴ "My being hates your New moons and your appointed times, they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.
- 🏺 *Hosh'a 2* ¹¹ "And I shall cause all her rejoicing, her festivals, her New moons, and her Sabbaths, even all her appointed times, to cease,
- 🏺 *Yehezqel 8* ¹⁴ And He brought me to the door of the north gate of the House of יהוה, and I saw women sitting there, weeping for *Tammuz*.
- 🏺 *Yehezqel 8* ¹⁵ Then He said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? You are to see still greater abominations than these."

The name of the pagan idol, *Tammuz*, appears only once in Scripture, to show us that YAH finds it reprehensible (v. 14 as per the citing above). From about the seventeenth century, the custom was introduced by the RCC³ during which Christians walked the *Via Dolorosa*⁴ and other streets in *Yerushalayim* with a cross on "good Friday", while mourning and supposedly showing repentance. This 'pilgrimage' is also known as the "Stations of the cross", but is nothing other than the weeping of *Tammuz* as quoted in the verses above – a human institution during which idolatry is practiced and therefore a total reprehensible act before YAH.

Processions and rituals are typical of what we consider *yetzer harah*, the evil disposition of man; this is the type of man who 'serves' YAH out of a sense of duty, rather than out of love and free choice. This causes a tameness of spirit and cannot bring any joy to man, much less our Creator-*Elohim*. The spiritual man, in contrast, will serve YAH in fullness and with devotion through *yetzer hatov*, the good disposition. It is in this

³ Roman Catholic Church, also known as the mother of harlots or harlot church.

⁴ The last road out of *Yerushalayim* that *Yeshua* walked on his way to *Gulgotha*.

way that man always reaches for more intimacy with YAH, a greater spiritual fulfillment through which we can please YAH in all that we do.

Unfortunately, this *yetzer harah* already stems from many generations before *Yeshua*, where the people of *Yisra'el*, also known as the *Y'hudim*, only fell further into idolatry. They wanted to do what other nations do, they wanted to be ruled by an earthly king and thereby rejected YAH as their King. Later, the *Y'hudim* carried this rule even further, especially when they were no longer ruled by their earthly king, but also by foreign nations in their own land. Having a non-*Y'hudi* as leader was an anomaly and that is why we also see the question to *Yeshua*:

Mattithyahu 22 ¹⁷ "Then say to us, what do You think? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

Yeshua knew, however, that this was a loaded question, because of their hatred for Him and also for the ruling nation, which was appointed by Rome. This 'law' was established by the leaders of the *Y'hudim* and the Romans; therefore, no matter which side He chose, there would be trouble. If He were to make it illegal, the Herodians would accuse Him of enmity against Caesar; if He considered it legal, the Pharisees in particular would accuse Him of treason, since He presented Himself as a *Y'hudi*, and it would be against *Torah* to be ruled by another nation. However, His answer amazed them and they simply walked away:

Mattithyahu 22 ^{21b} And He said to them, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to *Elohim* what is *Elohim's*."

Although the nation had not yet demanded a human king, it would happen many years later and therefore YAH was already setting rules in place. In addition to the prohibition of many horses and women, another requirement that a future and every successive king would have to fulfill was the writing of a *Torah* scroll to have with him day and night. This would keep the king humble at all times and make him aware that he, like his fellow citizens, was also a servant of *Torah*. This copy would be made from the existing *Torah* scroll that *Mosheh* had placed in the custody of the priests.

However, there are differences of opinion regarding this verse, as one particular translation⁵ contains the words "two *Torah* scrolls":

Debarim 17 ¹⁸ And it will be, when he sits upon his royal throne, that he shall write for himself two copies of this *Torah* on a scroll from [that *Torah* which is] before the Levitic *kohanim*.

Further examination of this translation brings us, once again, to the point where we see Judaism exalting themselves, by adding to the Word of YAH. The verse quoted above was changed to suit their way of thinking, or they misunderstood the original text, which reads:

Debarim 17 ¹⁸ וְהָיָה כְּשִׁבְתּוֹ עַל כִּסֵּא מַמְלָכְתּוֹ וְלָתֵב לוֹ אֶת מִשְׁנֵה הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת עַל סֵפֶר מִלְּפָנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם:

This literally translates as: And it came to pass, when he sat down upon the throne of his kingdom, that he wrote for him **the second part of this law** in a book before the priests the *Lěwites*. [emphasis added]

Our emphasis shows that the passage in *Debarim 5*, the second rendition of the *Torah*, was to be written in a book that was to be a personal belonging of the king. He was to write this in the presence of the priests, but they also wrote a copy which he had to store away safely. We therefore disregard the verse that claims two copies had to be written by the king himself.

According to the *Talmud* (*Sanhedrin 21b*), the king was to keep one copy with him to read every day, while the other copy was to be kept in the treasury. This would remind the king that *Torah* was as important as

⁵ https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/9981/jewish/Chapter-17.htm

any of the treasures within it. This is derived from the obligation to share with his fellow citizens that each one would have a personal copy. It can also be inferred that he was to keep one with him at all times, but that there would always be a copy at the throne, even when the king was not there:

Debarim 17¹⁹ “And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, so that he learns to fear יהוה his *Elohim* and guard all the Words of this Torah and these laws, to do them,

Regardless of one or two copies, there are also differences as to what exactly the copy would entail – whether it would be the entire set of five books of *Mosheh* or just a section from the book of *Debarim*. Since Scripture does not provide direct clarity on this, we must rely on the research and insight of the sages. *Malbim*, like *Rambam* before him, teaches us that all the laws in *Debarim* had already been given to *Mosheh* at *Sinai* while he was on the mountain with *YAH*. However, there was no reason to apply or learn everything at that point, because most of the rules would only become valid in the new land. The older generation, who would die out, would not need to learn them, and the younger generation would now have to get them fresh to remember and put into practise. However, there is ample evidence in *Debarim* that the expression ‘*Torah*’ is self-referential. The full phrase “*sefer hatorah*” (book of the *Torah*) does not appear anywhere else in the Pentateuch except in *Debarim*⁶. From this we infer indisputably that only the rules contained in *Debarim*, without redundant information, would be the information that the king had to write. Also keep in mind that the first king would not be appointed until many years later, a period of more than 300 years. Despite the copies they made, very few kings adhered to the rules. However, we cleared up the mystery of the two copies in the previous chapter and consider the matter settled.

Since the legal system is now complete, the focus shifts to the part of the nation who would be responsible for the spiritual well-being of *Yisra’el*: the *Lēwitical* priests. These men received no inheritance, as we have learned before. Their compensation and support would be taken care of by the rest of the nation and they would receive certain portions of the offerings. These portions would apply to both cattle and sheep, but only to peace offerings or similar voluntary offerings that could be eaten:

Debarim 18³ “And this is the priest’s right from the people, from those who slaughter a slaughtering, whether it is bull or sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder, and the two cheeks, and the stomach;

To some people this may sound very strange, but *Ibn Ezra* gives an acceptable explanation:

- 🥂 As a reward for the right hand that would slaughter a sacrificial animal, the right shoulder, complete with foreleg, is given to the priest;
- 🥂 as a reward for the blessing that would be pronounced over the nation, the priest receives the cheeks, which also include the jaw and the tongue;
- 🥂 in exchange for the examinations performed on sacrificial animals to determine whether or not they would be suitable, the priest receives the stomach.

Both the cheeks and the stomach were considered a delicacy in the ANE. The stomach was apparently the fourth and last one of animals that chewed the cud. The lining of the fourth stomach was also used to curdle milk. The lining was processed into a yellowish powder which was then used to make cheese⁷.

Some sages also refer to these three gifts as being connected to the priest’s words, actions, and appetite. So along with grain, wine, and oil, the priests did not really need anything else. Everyone who served at *YAH*’s altar also received *YAH*’s share. In our modern society we must keep in mind:

- 🥂 the *Shabbat*,
- 🥂 the first fruits,
- 🥂 the firstborn and

⁶ M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (Anchor Bible, vol. 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 81.

⁷ Webster’s Third International Dictionary, p. 1922

☞ the tenth

are all a Hebrew way of affirming that everything belongs to *YAH*. This does not mean that we as humans have six days to ourselves, much less the remaining fruits and nine tenths of our income! Not at all! As humans we own nothing, but are stewards of everything (*cf. B'reisheet 1:28 et al*). The earth and gift of life belong to the Creator and Sustainer (*cf. Mizmor 24:1*).

Once again, reference is made to various pagan customs that we are not to imitate, with a clear instruction:

Debarim 18 ¹³“Be perfect before יהוה your Elohim,

Shortly after this information about the gifts to the priests and all the abominations that the nation was to avoid, we see the only direct reference in *the Torah* where *Mosheh* calls himself a prophet:

Debarim 18 ¹⁵“יהוה your Elohim shall raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brothers. Listen to Him,

Several verses in the Apostolic Scriptures make direct references to *Yeshua*, all of which prove that he came to earth as a man and that every word he spoke came directly from *YAH*. Unfortunately, this is also where christianity loses its senses, especially those who remain dependent on their misguided teachers, because they forget *YAH*. In general, they become completely ‘jesus’-obsessed and consider him a new god, with new rules, and that he should be worshipped. Although *Yeshua* had a divine nature, He was in a human body, being born as a human and dying as a human. *YAH* cannot be born or die, which proves that *Yeshua*, in His own words, merely came to announce the Kingship of *YAH*:

Luqas 4 ⁴³And He said to them, “To the other cities I also have to bring the Good News: the reign of Elohim, because for this I have been sent.” [emphasis added]

In short, we see from these characteristics how *Yeshua* was a prophet like *Mosheh*: He was a *Y'hudi* (Hebrew), Leader, Lawgiver, Teacher, Priest, the Anointed One, Mediator between *YAH* and man; just like *Mosheh*, He offered Himself to die for the sins of humanity (*cf. Sh'mot 32:32*). We added an appendix to a previous version of this study that indicates the similarities between *Yeshua* and *Mosheh*. It is available upon request.

As *Yeshua* spoke the words of *YAH*, we learn that the opposite must be avoided:

Debarim 18 ²²when the prophet speaks in the Name of יהוה and the word is not, or comes not, that is the word which יהוה has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

This is the principle we must guard against: people who profess with their mouths to walk the Way of Truth, should have their feet walking in the same direction. We must not let ourselves be impressed by uncontrolled miracles or miracles of limited duration. Compare people who claim to have a spirit of healing or to speak in tongues, but none of these gifts manifest in a positive way. In cases like these, we must not hesitate to pronounce *YAH*'s judgement on them, even if they repeatedly claim to be called by *YAH*.

We also see repetitions of cities of refuge, duties to the priests and *Lěwites*, and then various rules are given regarding warfare. Here is important information that we, as believers, must realise: no one is promised to come out of a war unscathed. Similar to christianity's lie about the rapture, there is no guarantee that we will escape any form of testing or trial; however, the opposite is very true here. We see a promise that not only applied to *Yisra'el* of old, but also to us today:

Debarim 20 ¹“When you go out to battle against your enemies, and shall see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them, for יהוה your Elohim, who brought you up from the land of Mitsrayim, is with you.

Whether it is a physical battle against a powerful enemy or the spiritual battle we learn about in *Eph`siyim* 6:12, our final destiny is determined by our obedience and commitment to YAH. Through our trust in Him we are capable of all things, for we are taught fivefold about the love of YAH:

Eph`siyim 3 ¹⁸in order that you might be strengthened to firmly grasp, with all the set-apart ones, what is the width and length and depth and height,

Several references confirm this statement, of which we would like to cite two of the most important here:

☞ *Yohanan* 14 ²⁶“But the Helper, the Set-apart Spirit, whom the Father shall send in My Name, He shall teach you all, and remind you of all that I said to you.

☞ *Qolasim* 1 ⁹That is also why we, from the day we heard, have not ceased praying for you, and asking that you be filled with the knowledge of His desire in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,

It is extremely important to know what we, as *Yisra`el*, will inherit. Scripture teaches us that the whole land will be our inheritance, but we also know that the whole world belongs to YAH, as we referred to earlier:

Mizmor 24 ¹The earth belongs to יהוה, And all that fills it – The world and those who dwell in it.

We, as co-heirs of *Yeshua*, will therefore receive the entire new world as a dwelling place and therefore it is also important that we will rule over it with him and once again purify it of everything that is against YAH. During their wilderness experience, YAH commanded that all pagans and idolaters must be killed. We must still banish all forms of paganism from our lives today, spiritually eradicate anything that is against *Torah*, so that we are not contaminated with the customs of pagans. We must live a set-apart lifestyle as YAH repeatedly commands:

Kěpha Aleph 1 ¹⁵instead, as the One who called you is set-apart, so you also should become set-apart in all behaviour, ¹⁶because it has been written, “Be set-apart, for I am set-apart.” [emphasis original]

We conclude with a brief overview of our study, but also important facts that we must never lose sight of. We learn from Scripture that YAH would sometimes use the most unlikely type of person to perform His work. *Dawid*, the boy with the sling, is a good example; so is *Mosheh* who had a speech impediment; then we see *Gid`on* with his small army, *Noah* who had no training in shipbuilding and so there are many others. Find out what you are equipped for and live it out to the full to the esteem of YAH!

However, we, as *talmidim*, will be content with the Servant as our salvation: *Yeshua*, who had to pay the ultimate price for us on a torture stake. How could anyone be more unattractive and unsightly than a bleeding, naked man hanging on a torture stake? Perhaps a mangled corpse, like many of the saints who had to sacrifice their lives:

Hazon 11 ¹⁸“And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead to be judged, and to give the reward to Your servants the prophets and to the set-apart ones, and to those who fear Your Name, small and great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.” [first emphasis original, second emphasis added]

May it be the will of our Heavenly Father to give us the wisdom that surpasses all understanding, so that we, as His judges and officials, will correctly interpret, correctly understand, and correctly execute His Word!

Shabbat shalom!

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Sources:

We prefer to not use the word 'God', because of personal conviction. In most cases, unless quoted from another source, it will be replaced by 'Elohim' or inflections of the same word.

All citing of Scripture is taken from The Scriptures 2009⁸, unless indicated differently.

Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible

Messianic *Torah* with Commentary – Gary Gardner Ph.D. (Kindle Edition)

Artscroll Sotne Edition *Chumash*

Yohanan Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible

The Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas L. Constable

Faithlife Study Bible

Adam Clarke's 1810/1825 commentary and critical notes on the Bible

The Word of יהוה is free, therefore this study may be distributed free of charge, provided no changes are made.

⁸ <https://isr-messianic.org/>