

## Parashat Shoftim – A System of Justice & Leadership

### ***His Justice & His Leaders***

This week's *Parasha* is *Shoftim*: "Judges". In this *Parasha* we are introduced to *Adonai*'s system of justice and leadership. The "officers for doing good" are judges, Levites, kings, prophets and the military. In this *Torah* portion *Adonai* establishes many principles that are fundamental to governing His people. A good example of this is Deut 17:6: "At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses..." Not surprisingly, this principle is repeated by *Yeshua*: "If he doesn't listen, take one or two others with you so that every accusation can be supported by the testimony of two or three witnesses." Matt. 18:16. We find it repeated again in the *B'rit Chadasha* by *Rabbi Shaul*: "This is the third time I am coming to you. Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses" 2 Cor. 13:1; and "Never listen to any accusation against a leader unless it is supported by two or three witnesses" 1 Tim. 5:19. How much trouble could we avoid if we followed the Two or Three Witness principle! Scripture is crystal clear: "One witness alone will not be sufficient to convict a person of any offense or sin of any kind; the matter will be established only if there are two or three witnesses testifying against him" Deut 19:15.

Husbands and fathers are sitting in a place of authority in their homes. In fact, they are compared in Scripture to kings. This is especially true when dealing with matters of their role as protectors and when considering the awesome responsibility invested in husbands and fathers. In this *Parasha* we see a great example of that responsibility: "18When he has come to occupy the throne of his kingdom, he is to write a copy of this Torah for himself in a scroll, from the one the *cohanim* and *L'vi'im* use. 19It is to remain with him, and he is to read in it every day, as long as he lives; so that he will learn to fear ADONAI his God and keep all the words of this Torah and these laws and obey them; 20so that he will not think he is better than his kinsmen; and so that he will not turn aside either to the right or to the left from ADONAI's mitzvot. In this way he will prolong his own reign and that of his children in *Isra'el*" Deut 17:18-20. Do you have a copy of *Adonai*'s Torah that is to be with you to "read therein all the days of your life: that you may learn to fear the LORD your God, to keep all the words of this Torah and these mitzvot, to do them?"

I was also reminded in this weekly portion of our responsibility toward *Adonai*'s ministers (His Levites & *Cohanim*). The *Parasha* states: "4You will also give him the firstfruits of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the first of the fleece of your sheep. 5For ADONAI your God has chosen him from all your tribes to stand and serve in the name of ADONAI, him and his sons forever." Deut 18:4-5.

Then there are also restrictions imposed on military service: "6Is there a man here who has planted a vineyard, but hasn't yet made use of its fruit? He should go back home; otherwise he may die fighting, and another man will use it. 7Is there a man here who is engaged to a woman, but hasn't married her yet? He should go back home; otherwise he may die fighting, and another man will marry her." Deut 20:6-7. In next week's *Parasha* we will read Deut 24:5: "5If a man has recently married his wife, he is not to be subject to military service; he is to be free of external obligations and left at home for one year to make his new wife happy." How many marriages do you know that adhered to this Torah principle? Did yours?

The *Parasha* concludes with this beautiful prayer: "8ADONAI, forgive your people *Isra'el*, whom you redeemed; do not allow innocent blood to be shed among your people *Isra'el*.' And they will be

*forgiven this bloodshed. <sup>9</sup>Thus you will banish the shedding of innocent blood from among you, by doing what ADONAI sees as right.” (Deut 21:8-9)*

### **Messianic Judaism in Kol Simcha – Fleshing Out a Balance Between Christianity & Judaism**

Since the theme of this week’s *Parasha* is leadership, I would like to take this opportunity to share matters concerning our KS leadership. The two primary issues of relevance in any congregation are: (1) the message and (2) the messenger (or leader).

What *flavor* of Messianic Judaism are we all about? I agree with Rabbi David Chernoff’s position stated in the 2001 IAMCS Rabbi’s Conference. Let me quote him more fully:

*“In the beginning the movement was not drawn to halacha, they were drawn to being Jewish. We must establish some kind of Jewish lifestyle that incorporates our religion heritage, not just our cultural and social heritage as Jews. The problem is that sometimes we can go too far into it. We can go too far into wanting to be accepted by our own Jewish people. We need to be sensitive and positive about the religious traditions of our Jewish people, we need them, they are a part of us, they are part of the foundation of any true Messianic Jewish lifestyle. On the other hand, I (David Chernoff) have been concerned by the extent some have gone into halacha, into the religious traditions, into Talmudic interpretation of things and into granting authority to Oral Torah and to the ancient sages. What should our relationship be to these things as Messianic Jews? I (David Chernoff) am a second generation messianic Jew and was not brought up in a traditional Jewish home. I do not want my three children to have a traditional Jewish upbringing—I want them to have a Messianic Jewish upbringing. I believe my position with respect to these things is a centrist position. Our theology needs to be moderated by pragmatism and the Holy Spirit. On the one hand I have no sympathy with replacement theology, anti-Jewish bias and anti-Semitism, on the other hand I find that traditional Judaism does not offer me everything I need either. The rabbis missed the Messiah, opposed the Messiah, created traditions that are against Scripture, persecuted the early Yehudim Meshichim and persecute us today as well. I believe that many (most) of them have generally lost their way spiritually.”*

What can also be said about the leadership’s philosophy in KS? I am a person of balance and a person of integrity. I do not want to be misunderstood! I strive to live by the things that I preach and to attempt to stay in a centrist position with respect to these issues. We are truly developing a congregation not based on everyone else’s rules. We have endeavored to be *Na’ase V’Nishma* people, respecting one another’s rights (even the right to disagree). I am personally motivated by the character quality of being considerate. Mariilyn is the most considerate person I know. Consideration is an application of the golden rule, and it was evident in *Yeshua*’s life, His *talmidim* and in *Rabbi Sha’ul*’s ministry. My favorite verse in the Psalms is Ps 26:11: *“But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity: redeem me, and be merciful unto me.”* I do not know everything, and I do not claim to do so, I do not claim to be “the anointed” nor do I fail to recognize that I am flesh and thus, subject to the Romans 7 struggle. I have readily admitted before you some of my failures and struggles. Yet, I sense from you at times, a reluctance to give me space in order to lead you. Scripture states that without trust it is impossible to please *Adonai* (Hebrews 11:6), and without trust it is impossible to lead G-d’s people. You have to ask yourself the question: is it possible that G-d is speaking to me via this imperfect leader? Let me join *Rabbi Sha’ul* and say: *“And I will show you a still more excellent way.”* (1 Cor. 12:31)