

Mishpatim **Judgments** **Shabbat Shekalim**
Torah: Exodus 21:1-24:18 (Exodus 30:11-16)
Haftarah: 2 Kings 11:17-12:17
Brit Chadashah: Matthew 17:1-11
Reading: Jack p. 171,173 & Ps. 72 Jewish Hero: Isaac. Carrier: Laureen

After the people have received the Ten Commandments and have agreed to abide by this unique set of stipulations, what follows is the first set of situational jurisprudence where the people are instructed in how to apply the Ten Words to every area of their lives. Even in the the four chapters which follow, it would be impossible to cover every possible eventuality which the people would encounter as they strove to become authentically Torah observant.

It is a set of examples for us to study as well. to see how thoroughly we are called to apply the Torah into every area of our lives. Our personal and congregational situation is radically different from that which our people faced, as they learned to distance themselves from any of the bad habits they may have picked up in Egypt. None the less, we face an equally daunting task because, once we come to faith, it is our primary duty to distance ourselves from all and any bad habits we picked up while we dwelt in the darkness of this fading world.

Increasingly, Egypt was to become a distant memory, but the community had to be totally reinvented, if they were going to make the full transition out of darkness and become the chosen people who are called to be dwelling in the light of His presence. Whatever we encounter and wherever we roam, we also need to see every detail of our lives as an opportunity to trust in our Messiah and to respond to everything from the perspective of faithful obedience.

When I taught the Torah at a Bible College, one of the exercises I suggested to the students was to go through these four chapters and identify which commandments were being applied to each situation which was mentioned. Many of the situations may seem strange to us in our modern world, but each was given both so that the people would become Torah observant, and that we would learn to order our lives, so that we would become entirely Torah observant in our particular situation.

Some of the stipulations may appear random, but every major detail of their individual and corporate lives was touched upon so that no trances of paganism were allowed to linger where they were no longer welcome. Paganism needs to receive the same treatment from us, because it is no longer welcome in our hearts and lives either. We should not be different just because we believe differently, we should be different because we live differently and relate to the happenstances of life from a radically different perspective. How radical is your perspective and how successful have you been in rooting out any residual paganism which you brought with you when you came to faith in our beloved Messiah?

Sprinkled throughout this portion are various capital crimes, because the L-rd wanted the people to take His Word so seriously that it not only impacted their lives, it became their life. These offenses fall into three broad categories: Idolatry (and immorality), abuse and various acts which are now construed by the Torah to be forms of murder.

Senior abuse, either by striking or by cursing is now forbidden on pain of death. Cursing does

not refer to the use of bad language, it refers to actually pronouncing a curse that would ask for the victim to be wounded or even killed. There were five kinds of people who were not to be abused: elders, widows, orphans, strangers and slaves. It was a radical idea at this time for a slave to be considered a human being with actual rights. When the United States started importing black people as slaves, this understanding of their humanity was lost and was only resolved through a bloody civil war. There are still some elements in our neighbour to the south who still do not recognize persons of colour as fully human, with all the rights which all of us should possess.

Idolatry should never be tolerated in any form by believers and neither should any manifestation of fornication. In a very real sense, idolatry is spiritual fornication and fornication is physical idolatry.

In dealing with abuse, a major case in point was dealt with wounding (or killing) a pregnant woman. Most of our Old Testaments are based on the Masoretic Hebrew script which tends to downplay elements of an understanding of who the Messiah is. It also downplays an understanding of what constitutes an accident be it wounding or causing death.

When two quarreling men hurt a pregnant woman, there are two people who could lose their lives in such an encounter. First of all, the woman could die from her wounds. Secondly her preborn child could also die from wounds received through the altercation. If the woman miscarried and the child was born alive the husband of the woman could impose a fine on the perpetrator. If the child died, the perpetrator was considered murderer and had to pay with his life.

In our darkening world, children will never be safe in their mother's womb until our society recognizes that abortion at any stage and in any form is murder. Life begins at conception and ending it prematurely, inside or outside of the womb, is murder. This is what the Scriptures teach and we had better take up the cause of the helpless babies who are being slaughtered before they have a chance to leave their mother's womb.

The portion mentions tithes and the three pilgrimage festivals and at the end of presentation of the laws, four of Israel's leaders ascend close to the presence of G-d along with the seventy elders. As part of the dedication, twelve young men prepare sacrifices to both dedicate the words and the people they were given to. Blood is sprinkled on the people. Moses goes into the presence and he and the 70 elders celebrate a ritual meal with G-d. The people are close enough to see YHVH's feet, but are not close enough to see His face.

This is stage one in the preparations which are being made so that G-d could take up His dwelling place in the midst of the camp. It is only when everything in our lives is a response to His Word that our Messiah can effectively and fully dwell in our midst. After the ceremony, the leaders return to the camp (in their absence, Hur is left in charge) and Moses remains on the mountain for a further 40 days and forty nights. It is during this time that he receives the pattern for the ark and the tabernacle, along with the special rituals which have to be performed. This is so that the presence would be able to dwell in their midst without being defiled or without becoming lethal for those who did not maintain an adequate ritual distance between themselves and the holy G-d who was going to take up residence in their midst.

Sermon: Closure, Transition and Legacy

Passage: "Song of Degrees. I will lift up my eyes to the mountains. . . where will my help come from? My help comes from YHVH who has made the heavens and the earth. He will not allow your foot to stumble; the one who watches over you does not grow sleepy. Behold the One who guards Israel does not slumber nor sleep. YHVH is the One who guards, YHVH is the shadow of your right hand. During the day, the sun shall not strike you, neither will the moon at night. YHVH will preserve you from all evil, He will protect your soul. The L-rd will guard your departure and your arrival from this stay forward, forever."

Now that every thing is set in motion for our move, I want to talk to you about getting the most out of our transition, because despite all the potential effort it is going to settle it is going to take to settle into a new location, it is a very exciting moment in the life of our community. I want to defy all the odds and lose no one as we move to our new location.

We have had a good time here at St. Timothy's and we will be taking with us some very good memories. Our new location, Jasper Place Baptist Church is an amazing facility which is about twice the size of St. Timothy's. We are not leaving our current location on bad terms and we want to make sure that we establish an amazing rapport with our new landlords. Besides the Baptists, there are two other groups which meet in the building, one group of Rwandans and another group of Romanians.

Once we are settled, we will organize a Torah parade around the block and make some time to get to know all the groups who meet in the building. The actual location any congregation meets at is not so important as the kind of meetings we hold when we gather to worship our resurrected Messiah.

I have selected Psalm 121 to begin our discussion of closure, transition and legacy because we know that unless the L-rd builds a house, those who labour, labour in vain. And unless the L-rd guards a city, those who watch, watch in vain. We want to walk in the light of G-d's Word and have His blessing watch over us every step we take on our journey through this life to our Father's home in glory. We explored nearly leafly fifty locations and met some incredible people. Throughout the process, I was surprised to learn that most congregations in our fair city have renters, so there is an entire community of invisible congregations which is both blessed and cherished by the same L-rd who looks after their landlords.

It is never easy to say good bye to a place you have enjoyed and I am glad we are leaving with a whole series of good memories. We know this building well enough to wander around it in the dark without bumping into things. We know how they like things to get done and we know how we like to get things done as well. We not only shared a common faith, but also a common set of values about the importance of community and courtesy. We both liked things to be done decently and in order. We will take this same commitment with us when we move to Jasper Place Baptist Church.

It is going to take time for us to get used to our new location, but the dynamic nature of our community will not be diminished because we are moving in among friends who also want to do their best to serve the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It may take us a while to work all the bugs out of our settling in, but we know we will be undertaking all of this with the full blessing of our Messiah. He still has many good things in store for us during our move. We will be leaving a legacy of friendship and blessing behind us when we leave St. Timothy's,

along with the assurance that we have always done our best to be good tenants for our Anglican brothers and sisters. No building is perfect and I am excited that JPBC has an even bigger lower hall and an even bigger kitchen. We are a little behind in our preparations for Passover, but we will keep you posted, especially if you are willing to pitch in and help. We will have the same excellent caterer and our Seder will once again be the best and most exciting celebration of Passover in our fair city. It is not too early to think about people you would like to invite to this the most important calendar event of our festival year.

At the beginning of our Psalm, David lifted his eyes up to hills and asked where his help was going to come from. Along with him, in this major transition, we need to acknowledge, with David, that our help comes from YHVH, the maker of the heavens and the earth. His full resources are at our disposal when we walk with Him. David faced a whole series of challenges and encountered all kinds of opposition as he tried to do his best to walk with the L-rd.

Walking with the L-rd is no guarantee that we will not encounter opposition and challenges, in fact, the Bible says that all those who want to walk with the L-rd will suffer persecution and will become favorite, frequent targets of the enemy of our souls. Instead of asking to be exempt from trials and tribulations, our prayer should be that we would see the King's guiding hand and experience His deliverance as we walk through any number of valleys of the shadow of death. Being on the L-rd's side may be a bumpy road, full of ambushes and attempts on our life, but He has promised to never leave us nor forsake us and no one can steal us away from the palm of His hand.

He is indeed full of mercy and compassion and is very slow to anger, but as His eye is on the sparrow, His eye will always be on His people and He will withhold no good thing from those who trust in Him and walk the straight and narrow path under the guidance of His Spirit and His Word. He wants us to walk peacefully and purposely through this life and never be daunted by any giants who rise up against us. He wants us to turn a deaf eye to the howling rage of the world we are just wandering through and He expects us to learn how to crucify our flesh, so that it is not allowed to drag us down from the victorious walk we are called to maintain.

We will always encounter protection and providence, even through the deepest valleys and over the highest mountains, for truly there is no life like it and it is the only life worth living in or fading, darkening world. G-d will never be caught napping and His strength will never fail or weaken. He wants us to learn the peaceful sleep of trust, knowing that He works the night shift and will never let us down. A friend of mine in Montreal once said that G-d often provides at the last minute, but He is never late.

The believer's life will often reflect the testimony of the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 11, where he outlines 28 categories of tsouris (troubles) that all sincere and victorious believers will encounter. In fact, walking with the L-rd will often be a series of dichotomies where we are perishing on the outside and the enemy, the world and the flesh ceaselessly pummel us. However on the inside we are being renewed daily because greater is He who is in us than He who is in the world. We will go from joy to joy, in peace and in love, even as the storms of life try to wreck the house of our faith and stop us from walking with the Messiah.

You see, this life can be examined on at least two levels. On the one hand we can look at it with the eyes of the world as we see people trying to get all they can and can all they get, as they sit on the lid. We can mistakenly take pleasure in riches, wisdom and power and be taught

that the real winner in this life is the one who dies with the most toys. When we measure success in material terms or even in social terms, we have misunderstood what it means to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness.

The one who truly succeeds in the L-rd is the one who seeks the L-rd and does His will, whether that involves success in many areas or whether it means a life of pain and apparent defeat. Some of these huge megachurches seem to have found a formula to attract and keep people who are impressed by a really big show and who want to see plentiful evidence that they are on the winning team. A lot of it is a cult of personality where people's ears are tickled and their eyes are dazzled in the same way as you would find under the care of any secular self help, success guru.

Many people in these big churches are indeed, truly sincere believers who want to walk with the L-rd and I want our shul to grow until we too have a substantial number and our own building. I use the term "generationally sustainable" to indicate a point in our growth where all the generations are represented and where the younger generations grow and mature and eventually take over from the older generations.

We are not trying to build a massive ministry with a huge budget that attracts people who want to be entertained spiritually. We want to learn to walk with the L-rd, so that no matter what we are going through, we are guided by Him and protected by Him and His provision. On the outside it may often appear that we are buffeted and even persecuted, but on the inside we are being renewed by our King because we are walking in His footsteps.

I want us always to see things from an eternal, kingdom perspective and eventually that will mean we grow to a substantial number. This is not so that we can impress anyone, but so that we can have an expanded outreach and impact many more lives. I had hoped that this growth would occur during our time at St. Timothy's and lately we have seen this growth start to take off. Once we move to Jasper Place, it is my prayer that this growth increases so that many more people will discover the power and the joy of living a Torah observant lifestyle, both as Jews and as Gentiles.

Since we first got going as a congregation, over 18 years ago, we have seen some amazing things and have also suffered terrible losses when more people slipped out the back door than there were people coming in the front door. To date we have seen between 400 and 500 people visit our ministry and who even spend a while sojourning in our midst. You may not know this, but most religious congregations have a high turn over rate, as believers migrate between congregations looking for the best deal. Too many are never able to settle down because the same issues they struggle with and do not resolve follow them and when the newness wears off in their current location, these problems choke out any potential for change and growth and the grass starts to look greener in another congregation.

I am not being cynical and I do not judge all the people who wander through our ministry on their search for a safe, loving congregational home. What too many people do not understand is that this home is found in the midst of resolved issues and strong fellowship bonds where we learn to get along with other imperfect disciples of the king.

Our services are dynamic as well as liturgical and we want to take people on a journey into the presence of the L-rd, without all the gimmicks and tricks that spiritual entertainers use. We have an amazing worship service and our Shabbat School is teaching our children how to apply

the Word into their lives. Our Torah service makes sure our lives revolve around the Torah and our celebration of the festival cycle, keeps our eyes focused on the world to come.

We are a talented group of amazing people, but all of us have clay feet, with as many down sides as we have up sides. Some of us are harder to get along with than others, but each of us should know that we are all, each one of us, an essential part of a spiritually dynamic team that wants to shine and be salty as our world slowly slides towards the end of this age. The closer we draw to each other and discover our weaknesses as well as our strengths, the stronger we can be, if we learn to love and accept each other for who we really are and not just the polite facade we put up until people get to know us.

Some of us are sharp as a whip, some of us just keep slogging along and it is so exciting to watch our children grow, as we see what kind of people they will become. I have walked with the L-rd for some 48 years (my spiritual birthday is March 28th) and I have seen some amazing people come to faith and grow into disciples who walk according to His Word.

I have seen others eaten away by doubt, withered by temptation and choked by the care, the riches and the pleasures of this life. And it is not always easy to say which people will survive and thrive and which people will fall by the wayside and don't get me started about all the cults and who are really wolves masquerading as sheep. Life in the Messiah is not always easy, but it always filled with wonder and great joy, even in the midst of a constant battle.

One stage of our congregational life is drawing to a close. We have had a good time at St. Timothy's. It has not always been easy, but it has always been good and we will take many of the lessons we have learned with us as we settle into our new location. For the first little while, we will not have much of a comfort zone and the learning curve may be quite steep and we may want to weep and run and hide because the new wine we are drinking is not as good as the old stuff we miss! We may not feel that the new place will be as nice and safe as the old place, but let me finish with an old analogy about adjustments we all have to make in this life. You see, change is inevitable, growth is optional.

When we encounter something or someone new, our first reaction is often: "wow, this is so cool." Then as we settle in, our next reaction is "oh oh, something is not right here". Related to this, we begin to feel: "no way, this is never going to work out". As we persevere and mature, we move on to the next reaction: "maybe there is something good here". And the best and most mature reaction is: "okay, I can live with this and I am glad I took the time to really get to know it (know them)" May this be our reaction as we settle in to our new location.

A high turnover sucks, but we are looking for settlers who want to take the time to realize how amazing each one of us is and who want to bond with us as we learn to walk more closely with the L-rd and let His Word be the foundation of who we are and how we live. We are going to have closure with St. Timothy's. We are going to live through a transition as we settle into Jasper Place. And through it all, we want our legacy to be that of Torah observant disciples of the King who have tasted how good the L-rd is and are united with each other in the unbreakable bonds of our Messiah's love. Shabbat shalom and shavuah tov.