



שפטים *Shoftim*—Judges

[Deuteronomy 16.18—21.9](#) / [Isaiah 51.12—52.12](#) / [Acts 10—12](#)

שפט *Shafat* The root word for Judge consists of three consonants, each of which has an ancient meaning, since Hebrew is the only language which is both pictures (like Chinese) and letters (like English). **ש** *sheen* teeth/figuratively destroy, **פ** *peh* mouth, and **ט** *tet* serpent. So the judge's job is to “destroy the serpent's mouth.” A similar word, both in spelling and occupation, is **שטר** *shoteyr* officer. With only one letter difference, **ר** *resh* (**ראש** *rosh*) head, the officer's job is to destroy the serpent's head. Remembering the role of the serpent in deceiving Adam and Eve, it's appropriate that in

[Deuteronomy 16.18](#) God should provide for both **שפטים** and **שטרים** to take stations in the gates of the city, **לך** *lechah* for yourself (2nd person singular)—we each need authority to protect us—often from ourselves. Courts and police are often next to each other in prominent locations, such as here in St. Louis in 1902. **שפטים** and **שוטרים** *shotriym* officers are not to accept bribes, which Samuel's sons did, leading to the monarchy, [1 Samuel 8.1-5](#).



אלול *Elul* This Shabbat usually falls after the first of Elul, the last month in the secular calendar. The start of a new month is called **ראש חודש** *Rosh Chodesh* Head of the Month. The new month traditionally starts at the first sighting of the new moon. Today “new moon” means “no moon,” but in Bible times it meant the first visible sliver of the new moon. There would be men in the hills around Jerusalem watching and when they saw it, they would first notify the high priest, who would make the official pronouncement, then signal others via a hilltop-torch system, so that word would spread all the way to the Jews in Babylon. Each month starts off with the blowing of the **שופר** *shofar* ram's horn as a reminder to be alert and start fresh. But in Elul, the **שופר** is blown every day because the start of the next month is **ראש השנה** *Rosh Hashanah* Head of the Year (New Year)/Feast of Trumpets, and also the harvest festival, when the **שופר** will be blown 100 times.

Elul 1 is the day **משה** *Mosheh* Moses goes up Mt. Sinai again after the sin of the Golden Calf. He stays for 40 days and returns on **יום כפור** *Yom Kippur* Day of Atonement.

Pursue [Deuteronomy 16.20](#) is usually translated to follow what is just. This is a passive rendering of a word with much more emphasis: רָדַף *radaf* to pursue/put to flight/chase/dog/attend closely upon/persecute/harass/aim to secure/run after. When Abraham learns in [Genesis 14.14](#) that his brother has been taken captive, he doesn't follow Lot's captors, he רָדַף them. A hungry lion won't simply follow a zebra, it will רָדַף! Which does God want us to do—follow or רָדַף after righteousness and justice?



Is there a reward in store for us if we רָדַף righteousness and justice? King David, a man after God's own heart, writes in Psalm 23.6 that goodness and mercy shall רָדַף him all the days of his life. Imagine being pursued by those!



Judaism tells a story of a wealthy rabbi who visits a yeshiva (rabbinical school) to find a suitable man to marry his beautiful daughter. He tests the eager students with a very difficult תּוֹרָה *Torah* Law/Instruction question which none can answer. As the rabbi is leaving town, he hears someone running to catch up. It's one of the yeshiva students who gasps, "I know no one won your daughter's hand, but I still want to know the answer to the question!" The rabbi responds, "You're the one I want to marry my daughter." Our job is to רָדַף righteousness and justice. And perhaps goodness and mercy will רָדַף us.

Song of Solomon 6.3 The first half of [this verse](#) in Hebrew is four words and the first letter of each of these words spells אֵלּוּל. So this verse and the month of אֵלּוּל have been linked in tradition. In [Song of Solomon 5.3](#), the woman is in bed when the Shepherd knocks and calls for her to come out, but she responds that she is too inconvenienced, so He leaves. This is a picture of the Church asleep and not wanting to be awakened when יְשׁוּעָה knocks at the door. When she realizes He has left, she repents and goes to look for Him.

אֵנִי לְדוּדַי וְדוּדֵי לִי

I am my beloved's,
and my beloved is mine:

he feedeth among the lilies.

Song 6:3

ELUL אֵלּוּל

אֵלּוּל is a time of repentance before the Fall Feasts, when the שׁוֹפָר is blown every day to remind us, “Wake Up!” The Church around the world needs to wake up, repent, bear fruit, and prepare for the blowing of the heavenly שׁוֹפָר, [1 Thessalonians 4.16-18](#).





Bearing Fruit According to tradition, ישוע goes into the wilderness after his baptism on Elul 1 to be tempted by Satan and to fast for 40 days (the same 40 days that משה goes up the Mountain to receive the 2nd Law). When His time of testing is over, ישוע is proved faithful. So Elul, a busy month of bringing in the Fall harvest before the mandatory stop-work order of ראש השנה, is a time to examine our hearts in preparation for יום כפור. Judgment Day is not necessarily to be feared. If our hearts are clean before ישוע, Judgment Day can be cause for joy, when the wheat is gathered up into the barn and the weeds are gathered up to be burned, [Matthew 13.24-30](#). Elul is a time to examine whether or not we are bearing fruit, which is what brings God glory, [John 15.1-8](#). By bearing fruit, we tell God that He is worth our time and energy! God instructs ישראל to put שפטים in the city gates. Are we willing to have the שפטים examine our heart-business? A company CPA can cook the books. But on יום כפור we're going to have an objective fact-finding.

Judge ישוע As God commands to place שפטים in the city gates, so Judge ישוע guards the New Jerusalem:

- [Isaiah 11.1-6](#) ישוע (Branch of Jesse) will judge with righteousness
- [Micah 4.2-3](#) God teaches תורה from Jerusalem, judges nations
- [Matthew 25.31-46](#) ישוע names Himself the Judge
- [John 1.49](#) ישוע is declared [Rabbi](#), Son of God, King of ישראל
- [Acts 10.42](#) ישוע is ordained the Judge of the living and the dead
- [2 Corinthians 5.10](#) We will all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ
- [2 Timothy 4.1,8](#) Judge ישוע awards crowns of righteousness

Setting a King over You [Deuteronomy 17.14-20](#) gives guidelines for kings:

- A brother, no strangers allowed
- May not amass horses
- May not encourage a return to Egypt
- May not amass wives, or his heart will turn away (as Solomon's does)
- May not amass wealth
- Must write a copy of תורה and keep it and read it his whole life so that he fears God, keeps the תורה, and doesn't lift up his heart, so that he rules long and with justice. Many in the Church think ישוע abolished or destroyed תורה. Not so ([Matthew 5.17](#))!

A King Who Doesn't Listen Solomon violates much of the **תורה** applying to kings, [Ecclesiastes 2.4-9](#). Another law is [Deuteronomy 18.10-12](#)., that no one should make his son or daughter pass through the fire. That's a euphemism for child sacrifice, a way to worship **כמוש** *Chemosh*, god of the Moabites, [Numbers 21.29](#), and **מלך** *Molech*, god of the Ammonites. Both these gods are worshipped by burning children alive in their arms. [Leviticus 18.21](#) specifically prohibits offering a child to **מלך**. [1 Kings 11.7](#) records that King Solomon built high places for both **כמוש** and **מלך**, probably to appease wives from those nations. It's likely then that Solomon sacrificed his own children by these wives in this way! 400 years later, King Josiah in [2 Kings 23.10](#) defiles the high place of **מלך** in **תפת** *Topheth* Place of Fire of the Valley of **הנם** *Hinnom* Lamentation.



We tend to dismiss child sacrifice as something that no longer happens today, but in fact it does and the motivations are similar. As followers of **כמוש** and **מלך** sacrifice their children in a horrible way, believing they will prosper in other ways, so parents today abort their unborn children, often to avoid the expense or trouble of raising a child. In fact one method, the saline abortion, burns the skin of the unborn child. In India, the going rate for a midwife to kill a newborn girl is equivalent to a few dollars. There's a proverb in India, "He who raises a daughter is watering another man's field." And parents in China have long been killing born or unborn girls for a similar reason. Then there are the Muslim parents who strap bombs to their children to kill the "infidel," assuring the bombers that they will arrive immediately after death in a paradise filled with eternal pleasures. And in many cases the parents receive a sizable check for their "holy" sacrifice. So it seems that some in America, Asia, and the Middle East have inherited the spirit of child sacrifice. In contrast stand believers in **תורה** and **ישוע**, who see both boys and girls as gifts from God to be treasured, not thrown away.

[1 Kings 11.2](#) declares that in violating **תורה**, Solomon makes it a point to **דבק** *davak* cling to/stick/stay close/cleave/follow closely/overtake/catch/pursue closely these foreign women and their gods. Adam says in [Genesis 2.24](#) that a man should leave his father and mother and **דבק** his wife, and God says in [Deuteronomy 13.4](#) to keep His commandments and **דבק** Him. Solomon does not **רדף** righteousness and justice and God. Instead he **דבק** foreign women and gods and breaking **תורה**.

Be Perfect! [Deuteronomy 18.13](#) says to be תמיים *tamiym* complete/whole/entire/sound. The KJV says to be perfect with יהוה your God. ישוע repeats this in [Matthew 5.48](#).

A Prophet Like Me משה says in [Deuteronomy 18.15-19](#), that God will raise up a Prophet *from among their brothers* and ישראל must listen. Peter agrees in [Acts 3.22-33](#), and Stephen in [Acts 7.37](#). Many fail to see ישוע as Jewish. Consider this from <http://www.rabbiyeshua.com/>:

... The center of Christianity is Jesus, and Jesus is a Jew. He was born of a Jewish mother, into a Jewish family. Like all Jewish sons, he was circumcised on the eighth day. In keeping with Jewish tradition, he was given his Hebrew name on the same day he was circumcised. He was named Yeshua, "Salvation," because he will "save his people." His people are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: the Jewish people. He was raised as a Jew within an Orthodox Jewish community. Nazareth, his hometown, was a thoroughly Jewish village pioneered by descendants of King David. In keeping with ancient Jewish tradition, he had his hair cut when he was three years old. He kept the festivals and the Sabbath. He ate only kosher. He ate matzo on Passover; he fasted on the Day of Atonement. He dressed as a Jew. He did not wear a mixture of wool and linen. He wore fringes on the corners of his garments. He wore phylacteries. He had a Jewish education. He learned Hebrew. He learned the Hebrew blessings. At the age of five, he began to learn the Torah. He went to Synagogue every Sabbath. He became known as a Jewish Teacher. He taught the Torah of the Jews. He taught from the Holy Books of the Jews. He taught about the God of the Jews. His disciples were all Jews. They called him "Rabbi."...The anti-Jewish Jesus is not the Biblical Yeshua. He is a creation of the anti-Semitic and anti-Torah climate of the developing gentile church.



The gospels clearly portray Yeshua as a faithful and deeply committed Jew operating within the context of First Century Judaism. Although his interpretation of the תורה was often at odds with that of his contemporaries, he never abrogated the Law of God. He repeatedly demonstrated his affection for his people. He compared himself to a shepherd and Israel to his sheepfold. Yeshua is a Jew. The Yeshua of the gospels is not a one-size-fits-all mystic. To remove him from his Jewish context is to misunderstand him. He lived as Jew, he taught as a Jew, he prayed as a Jew and he died as a Jew. His blood was Jewish blood. The sign above his cross said, "Yeshua of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

When Nathanael meets ישוע in [John 1.49](#), he calls Him Rabbi, Son of God, and King of Israel. Many Christians today would agree with "Son of God," but not "King of Israel," if they think ישראל has been passed over, and almost certainly not "Rabbi." ישוע has become a Gentile in the eyes of both the Church and the Jews!

ישוע and משה

- משה *Mosheh* “drawn” is similar משיח *Mashiyach* Messiah/anointed/one who is separated to do God’s work and speak God’s message with God’s power.
- שֶׁה *seh* lamb with the prefix מ *mem* of/from, משה figuratively: “of the lamb.”
In the times of both משה and ישוע, redemption is by the blood of the Lamb.
- Both are born during a time when ישראל is in bondage to another nation
- Both leave high positions: משה/Egypt and ישוע/heaven, [Philippians 2.5-11](#)
- Both come as shepherd/redeemers after ישראל waits generations for redemption
- Both perform signs and wonders to validate their ministries
- Both act as Law-giver and authority on תורה
- Both experience rejection
- Both intercede with God for ישראל and bring reconciliation when the covenant has been broken
- Both lead others from bondage to salvation: משה/Israel and ישוע/heaven.
- Both die before arriving at the destination to which they lead others.

ישוע Fulfills This Prophecy Besides the quotes from Acts in which Peter and Stephen say that ישוע is the Prophet of whom משה speaks, ישוע confirms it:

Deuteronomy 1.18-19	John 12.49-50 , John 15.15 , John 15.6
I will raise them up a Prophet...and will put My words in his mouth	I have not spoken of Myself, but the Father which sent Me
He shall speak unto them all that I command Him	He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak
...whosoever will not hearken unto My words which He shall speak in My name, I will require it of him	Everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you...If anyone does not remain in Me, he is...thrown into the fire

Note that the last two quotes of ישוע are from his sermon about being a fruitful branch attached to the Vine. This brings us back to this month of אלול, the last month of harvest, for each of us to ask, “Am I being fruitful?”

The New Covenant records two people waiting for this Prophet promised by משה. There were probably many others. Simeon in [Luke 2.25](#) and Anna in [Luke 2.36-38](#) are waiting for ישוע, the Consolation of ישראל and the Redemption in Jerusalem. (Note that Anna is of the tribe of Asher, one of the ten tribes “lost” seven centuries earlier, but not “lost” as far as Anna is concerned!)



Haphtarrah [Isaiah 51.17](#) and [52.1](#) begin with “Awake! Awake!” like blowing the שופר each day in this month of אלול. Verse 51.18 says that none of the sons of ישראל will guide her or take her by the hand. Does this mean spiritual “sons” of the Gospel, who forsake ישראל at the time of her tribulation? Many in the Church today have a couldn’t-care-less attitude toward ישראל, or even favor those whose stated goal is the elimination of ישראל. These Church members say that ישראל should give up the Land promised and delivered by God and let terrorist groups like Hamas control it, so that ישראל may have peace!

In [Romans 17.27](#), Paul says that since Gentiles have shared in spiritual blessings of the Jews, they owe it to the Jews to share material blessings. There are, in fact, modern-day missions in ישראל to support their poor, to buy ambulances, and to help finance settlements, such as [Christian Friends of Israel](#) and the [International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem](#), but these are often considered by the Church to be fringe groups. And the main political thrust in Europe and North America today is to establish two states in ישראל, one for the Jews and one for those who worship a god who has no son ([Koran 4.171](#)). So there is either little help for those who gave us spiritual blessings, or outright hostility. But in [51.22-23](#), God promises to take the cup of trembling out of the hand



of ישראל and give it to those nations who have said to her, “Bow down, that we may go over.” Look what happened to Nazi Germany and all the other nations over the centuries who have tried to destroy ישראל! Since America is a democratic republic, individual Americans are responsible in part for how their elected leaders treat the nation of ישראל.

Our God Reigns? Does a popular Christian song with this title have it wrong?

According to [Isaiah 52.7](#), we should say of ישראל, “Your God reigns!” Remember, the New Covenant of [Jeremiah 31.30-33](#), quoted in [Hebrews 8.7-12](#), is not with Gentiles, but with ישראל. When we join the root of ישראל we are saved, [Romans 11.11-24](#), not until then.

What (or Who) Has God Declared Clean? Peter's vision in [Acts 10](#) has two interpretations: what it meant to Peter and what it means to the modern Church.



God tells Cornelius of Caesarea, a Roman centurion, devout and God-fearing, to send men to Joppa, modern-day Tel Aviv, to bring back Peter. As the men draw near to Peter's home, he is praying at the sixth hour (about noon, most likely praying the [Amidah](#)) and hungry, when God gives him a vision of a sheet lowered down to him. The sheet is full of all kinds of animals, clean and unclean, and Peter is told, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." Peter refuses three times and while he is wondering what the vision means, the sheet is taken away and the men arrive.

This vision has been understood by the modern Church to mean that the [clean and unclean](#) food laws of תורה no longer apply to Christians. So while it's unusual for Jews to eat pork, for example, many Christians have no issue at all with pork.

But there is no indication that Peter or the other disciples of the early Church ever changed their kosher eating habits as a result of this vision. Instead, Peter understands his vision as (verse 28), "God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean." He enters Cornelius' home, which he would not have done before the vision.

Allowing Peter to interpret his own vision is a principle of Bible study: let the text interpret itself. This is exegesis, extracting meaning from the text. The opposite is eisegesis, putting one's own ideas into the text, which the Church does with this passage.

Not only does Peter understand the interpretation of his dream that Gentiles are not to be called unclean, the rest of the Jewish Church gets it, too, [Acts 11.1-18](#). Paul and Barnabas go on missionary journeys to Jews and Gentiles in the next chapters, and then in [Acts 15.1-21](#), the Jerusalem Council allows for Gentiles to fellowship with Jews in the Church as long as they obey four laws. This doesn't mean Gentiles only ever have to obey just these four laws—that would mean adultery, blasphemy, murder, etc. are OK!

Instead, James reasons, "משנה has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath." In other words, "If the Gentiles obey these four laws for now, we can allow them to fellowship with us. Then over time they will get the rest of תורה and it will be a joy to fellowship together."



We in the Church have mixed our own ideas with תורה for long enough. ישוע didn't come to abolish תורה, [Matthew 5.17](#), but He spends much time clarifying it. Neither should we attempt to abolish תורה.

Glossary, in order of appearance:

שפטים	<i>shoftim</i>	judges
שפט	<i>shafat</i>	judge
ש	<i>sheen</i>	teeth/figuratively destroy
פ	<i>peh</i>	mouth
ט	<i>tet</i>	serpent
שטר	<i>shoteyr</i>	officer
ר	<i>resh</i>	head
ראש	<i>rosh</i>	head
שוטרים	<i>shotriym</i>	officers
אלול	<i>Elul</i>	12 th month of the secular Jewish year 6 th month of the religious year
ראש חודש	<i>rosh chodesh</i>	head of the month
שופר	<i>shofar</i>	ram's horn
ראש השנה	<i>Rosh Hashanah</i>	Head of the Year (New Year)/Feast of Trumpets
משה	<i>Mosheh</i>	Moses
רדף	<i>radaf</i>	pursue/put to flight/chase/dog/attend closely upon/ persecute/harass/aim to secure/run after
יום כפור	<i>Yom Kippur</i>	Day of Atonement
תורה	<i>Torah</i>	Law/Instruction
כמוש	<i>Chemosh</i>	god of the Moabites
מלך	<i>Molech</i>	god of the Ammonites
תפת	<i>topheth</i>	place of fire
הנם	<i>hinnom</i>	lamentation
דבק	<i>davak</i>	cling to/stick/stay close/cleave/ follow closely/overtake/catch
תמים	<i>tamiym</i>	complete/whole/entire/sound/KJV: perfect
משיח	<i>Mashiyach</i>	Messiah/anointed
שה	<i>seh</i>	lamb
מ	<i>mem</i>	of/from
משה	<i>Mosheh</i>	figuratively: of the lamb