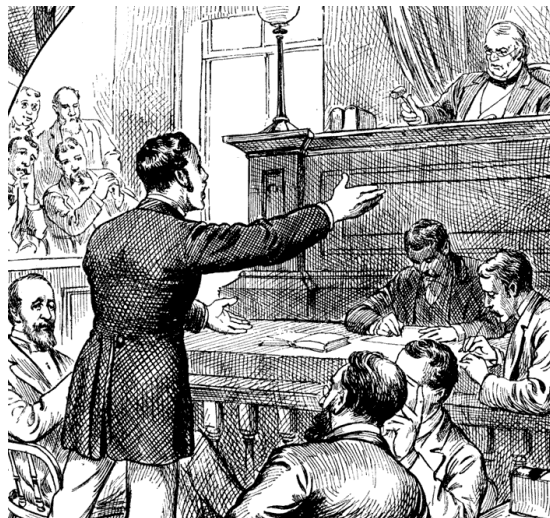




משפטים Mishpatim Judgments

[Exodus 21.1—24.18](#) / [Jeremiah 33.25-26, 34.8-22](#) / [Mark 9](#)

Adar This portion starts around the beginning of Adar, the last month of the religious year. According to tradition and history, major events of this month include the beginning of the plague of darkness on Adar 1, completion of the 2nd Temple on Adar 3 in 515 BC, Moses' birth—and death—on Adar 7, the banning of Jews from all public offices in the Roman Empire on Adar 16, 418 AD, a decree by Pope Nicholas V on Adar 24, 1451 AD, banning all Jewish/Christian interaction, and on Adar 25, 1891, U.S. President Harrison was petitioned to aid in the reestablishment of Palestine as a sovereign Jewish state. The petition was signed by Cyrus McCormick, J. P. Morgan, William McKinley, John D. Rockefeller, Russel Sage, and Cardinal Gibbons, among others. It was a spontaneous expression of American sympathy for Zionism, independent of Jewish Zionist activities. The petition was motivated by public sentiment toward the Bible and by intense indignation aroused by Russian pogroms.







Judges and Officers In the previous תורה

[Torah](#) Law/Instruction portion, יתרו [Yitro](#)

Jethro, משה [Mosheh](#) Moses appoints judges to settle matters among the people. So this portion deals with various subjects the judges face. In

[Exodus 21.1](#), God tells משה, “These are the משפטים [mishpatiyim](#) judgments/ordinances you are to set before them.” Abraham pleads for Sodom in [Genesis 18.25](#), arguing that the שפט [shaphat](#) Judge of the earth (God) should judge fairly. שפט is the root word of משפטים.

Hidden Meanings in the Hebrew Picture Language

21		SHEEN ש	W w to consume, to destroy	TEETH s, sh
17		PEY פ	ן פ to speak, a word, to open	MOUTH p
9		TET ט	⊗ ⊗ to surround	SNAKE, SURROUND t
20		REYSH ר	ר 9 a person, the head, the highest	HEAD (OF A MAN) r


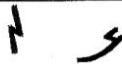

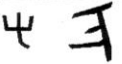
Hidden Meanings, cont'd [Deuteronomy 16.18](#) says **שפטים ושטרים** *shoftiyim v'shoteriyim* judges and officers are to sit in all the gates of cities to settle matters. The root of **שטרים** is **שטר** *shatar* officer/scribe. In [Genesis 3.15](#), God tells the serpent that the seed of woman will attack his head, the first hint of the Gospel redemption, the promise that one day Messiah will crush Satan. Hebrew is the only language which is both pictures like Chinese and letters like English. A study of the Hebrew picture language for **שפט** and **שטר** shows the hidden meanings of the letters and how they apply to the promise in Genesis.

שפט judge is **ש** *sheen* teeth/symbolically destroy, **פ** *pey* mouth, and **ט** *tet* snake.

Together, **שפט** means to destroy the mouth of the serpent. A judge is supposed to listen to testimony and sort out the lies from the truth to give a righteous judgment.

שטר officer is **ש**, **ט**, and **ר** *resh* head. **שטר** means to destroy the serpent's head. Often a judge will hand over a convicted person to an officer, who will then execute some type of consequence on the guilty to punish the behavior. Or a **שטר** may be in a position of executing punishment immediately without going to a judge. The word for officer in modern Hebrew is **שוטר** *shoteyr*, similar in sound to our English shooter.

Deuteronomy 16 continues in [verse 19](#) to warn that the **שפט** and **שטר** shall not **נטה** *natah* stretch out/turn/pervert/bend judgments, respect persons, or take bribes. A study of the Hebrew picture language for **נטה** is also revealing:

14		NOON נ	 activity, life	FISH (DARTING THROUGH THE WATER) n
5		HEY ה	 'the', to reveal	BEHOLD h

נ *noon* fish/symbolically activity/life, **ט** *tet* serpent, and **ה** *hey* behold/reveal. So **נטה** means the life of the serpent revealed, which is what happens when justice is perverted.

The jobs of **שפט** and **שטר** are challenging, because it is a constant fight against the power of the serpent. One goes after the serpent's mouth, the other after his head. It's a noble job when done with integrity as commanded by Deuteronomy 16.19, and it's a necessary job so that people can live without fear. It's best done according to God's Word, not man's.



מצוה *Mitzvah* Commandment In [Exodus 24.12](#), God tells **משה** to come up the Mount to receive tablets of stone, a **תורה**, and a **מצוה**, so that Moses can teach them. Jews recognize this responsibility in a boy at 13 in the **מצוה בר** *Bar Mitzvah* Son of the Commandment and in a girl at 12 in the **מצוה בת** *Bat Mitzvah* Daughter of the Commandment. Many in the Church, on the other hand, take a dim view of any commands except the Nine (very few count the 4th anymore, keeping Shabbat) and a few others, becoming ourselves the cut-and-paste editors of God's Word that we're normally so quick to criticize. Commandments can be categorized in the following chart, with this portion's emphasis highlighted:

Four Types of Commandments				
English	Hebrew Singular		Hebrew Plural	
Commandment	Mitzvah	מצוה	Mitzvot	מצות
Judgment (Ordinance)	Mishpat	משפט	Mishpatim	משפטים
Statute	Chuqah Chuq	חקה חק	Chuqot Chuqim	חקות חקים
Law Instruction	Torah	תורה	Torot	תרות

מצות *Mitzvot* (root **צוה** *tsavah* command) **ישוע *Yeshua*** Jesus/salvation says in [Matthew 5.16](#) to let your light shine so that men see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

משפטים *Mishpatim* (root **שפט**) One example of a **משפט** we've already looked at is [Deuteronomy 16.18-19](#), for **שפטים** and **שטרים** to exercise righteous judgment, and not **נטה** judgment, respect persons, or take bribes. A strict reading could imply it's OK for other professions to take bribes. But imagine if your child is in an emergency room with a broken arm and a wealthy man with a minor complaint gives the doctor \$1,000 so that he can be treated first. As we mature, we understand that these regulations apply in more circumstances. We learn how to avoid receiving personal advantage from any number of situations in order to be fair.

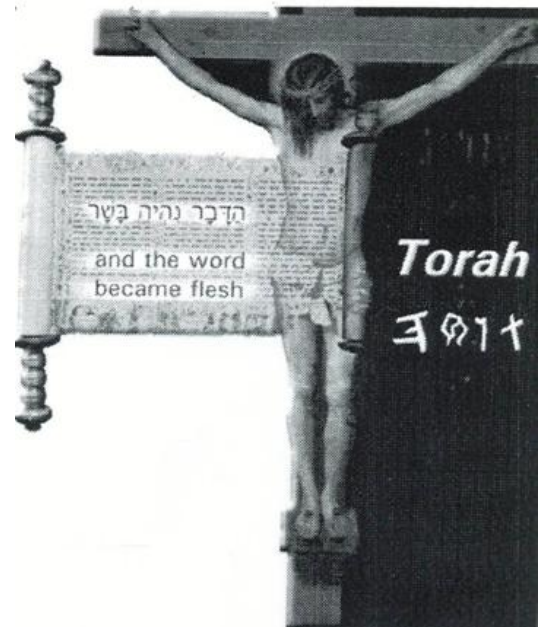
חקות *Chuqot* (root **חק** *choq* statute) These are commandments that often don't make sense, such as [Numbers 19.1-12](#), which describes how the ashes of the red heifer are used to purify someone who has touched a dead body. Why would that work? And the clean person who handles the ashes of the red heifer himself becomes unclean!

תורה *Torah* The five books of Moses/Genesis through Deuteronomy/sometimes also the whole Tenach (Old Testament).





A Light to the Nations Deuteronomy 4.5-8 names three of the מצוות: “5 Behold, I have taught you ומשפטים וחקים *chuqim v' mishpatim* statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the Land wither ye go to possess it. 6 Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear כל-החקים *kal ha' chuqim* all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. 7 For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? 8 And what nation is there so great, that hath ומשפטים וחקים so righteous as all this תורה, which I set before you this day?”

These written commandments, statutes, judgments, and תורה, the Written Word, are a light to the nations, just like ישוע, the Living Word.

Laws reveal the character of their maker. The laws making prostitution legal in Nevada say a lot about that state. The laws of Islam, which assign a woman half the value of a man, say a lot about that religion. The commandments of God’s Word and God’s Word in flesh tell us a lot about God’s character: justice, mercy, and faithfulness. “All Scripture (including תורה!) is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works,” [2 Timothy 3.16-17](#).



In the Hebrew picture language, תורה contains two letters we haven’t looked at yet in this portion, ת *tav* sign means covenant, written like a cross in Moses’ time, and ו *vav* nail means and. With ר *resh* person and ה *hey* reveal, תורה means covenant/cross—nail Person revealed: ישוע. There’s not a big split between “Old” and “New” Testaments. תורה and ישוע are light to the nations; so are we if we live both.

22	 TAV ת	 to seal, to covenant	SIGN t
6	 VAV ו	 'and', to add, to secure	NAIL, PEG v

Slavery The first of the **משפטים** is [Exodus 21.2-6](#), concerning making a Hebrew brother a slave, and the command to release him after six years of service. [Deuteronomy 15.12-15](#) expands on this, saying that after six years, the slave is to be sent away richly bestowed with material blessings. So slavery toward a Hebrew brother is not like we think of slavery today. In fact, Jewish tradition says that if there were only one pillow in the house, the slave got it, and “he who has gained a servant has gained a master.” The tradition explains that a slave who chooses to be a slave for life gets his ear pierced on the doorpost, because that is where the mezuzah, the container with a tiny scroll and Torah quote, is affixed. The slave is being reminded in this way that he is choosing to be a slave to man rather than to God, a poor choice. The rules for a brother slave are different from a foreigner slave, some of which are addressed in [Leviticus 25](#) in relation to the Year of Jubilee.

We like to think that we no longer practice slavery in civilized countries today. But how many people actually own their home and land free and clear and live a debt-free lifestyle? More common is the person who works every day to pay a large chunk of his or her salary to banks, mostly for interest charges on debt. We are more like the person who chooses to be a slave for life than we like to think.



Eye for an Eye [Exodus 21.24-27](#) is an often-criticized passage, as if requiring an eye for the loss of an eye is extreme. But another way of looking at this is measure for measure. For example, it's not appropriate to take someone's life for the loss of an eye. The concept of measure for measure applies in other areas. If someone steals my dog, I shouldn't burn down his house. Still, Jewish tradition says that this ordinance is the basis for monetary damages, not the actual removal of an eye or tooth—what good is it for two people not to have eyes?—and supposedly was never practiced any other way.



ישוע adds to this ordinance in [Matthew 5.38-42](#), saying to allow harm without any retaliation at all. One way this makes sense is in the context of [Matthew 18.21-35](#). In that parable, **ישוע** shows that someone who has received a huge blessing has no right to demand repayment of a small blessing. (Keep in mind when reading this parable that one talent is equal to 70 pounds of silver!) If we have received salvation and the promise of eternal life from a risen Savior, should we pursue revenge for a small matter like an eye?

Restitution There's a saying that the best way to interpret Scripture is by letting the context of Scripture interpret itself. Exodus 22.1 (Hebrew [21.37](#)) says that if a man steals an ox or a sheep and kills or steals it, he is to pay five-fold for the ox or four-fold for the sheep. Then Exodus 22.4 (Hebrew [22.3](#)) says that if the ox or sheep is found alive, the thief is to pay double. Why the difference in restitution between a dead or sold animal and a living one? The dead or sold animal can't reproduce for the owner, so the owner loses both the animal and its potential offspring. Restitution should make sense. This adds to the understanding of monetary damages awarded for the loss of an eye or a tooth.



Keeping תורה Does this concept apply today or are we “under grace” and free from the Exodus obligation to pay restitution for sin? In [Luke 19.8](#), יְשׁוּעַ has dinner with Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector, after spotting him in a tree. Zacchaeus announces that he is going to give half his wealth to the poor and he will pay back four-fold anyone he has cheated. Note that in the next verse יְשׁוּעַ doesn't say, “Don't worry about repaying, Zacchaeus, you're under grace now!” יְשׁוּעַ says, “Today salvation has come to this house.”

In [Jeremiah 7.9-12](#), God asks if we really think we can steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods, and then stand in His House and say, “It's OK.” God says to go look at Shiloh, where the ark had rested for 369 years, but now is in ruins, having been

destroyed by the Philistines when they took the ark. God says that He destroyed Shiloh because of the wickedness of יִשְׂרָאֵל *Yisra'el* Israel. After Jeremiah's prophecy, God goes on to destroy the first and later the second Temples. God is serious about His תורה! God has the same attitude today toward His Temple the Church, [1 Corinthians](#)

[3.17](#). In that verse, Paul says that ὑμεῖς *hymeis* you (plural) are the Temple of God, just as יְשׁוּעַ says in [Matthew 5.13](#) that ὑμεῖς are the salt of the earth, [Matthew 5.14](#)

ὑμεῖς are the light of the world, and [Matthew 6.48](#) ὑμεῖς (you) be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect. The Temple is all believers put together. Together we are to be salt, light, and perfect. By what standard? תורה, written first in stone, then on parchment, and now on our hearts. This is the New Covenant, [Hebrews 8.7-12](#), quoting (Hebrew version) [Jeremiah 31.30-33](#). In [Jeremiah 31.33](#), God says that it is His תורה that will be written on our hearts. God's Law hasn't changed, only its location!

Let's Be Careful with Those Widows and Orphans! In [Exodus 22.22-24](#), God says that if we afflict any widow or orphan, God will kill us with the sword so that our wives are widows and our children orphans! What does it mean to afflict them? In [verse 22](#), it is [ענה](#) *anah* afflict/oppres/humble: root word is equivalent to look down on/browbeat.

Looking closer at this passage, it actually says, “You shall not [ענה](#) any orphan or widow. [Verse 33](#) If in [ענה](#) you [ענה](#) them, they will [צעק](#) *tse'aq* cry out [צעק](#), and I will [שמע](#) *shema* hear [שמע](#) their [צעק](#) and My anger will blaze and *I will kill you...*”

This passage contains: [ענה ענה צעק צעק שמע שמע](#), doubling these words, a serious emphasis. If we look down on look down on any widow or orphan, they will cry out cry out cry out, and God will hear hear, then get angry and kill us!

Note the presence of [ע](#) *ayin* eye in each of these emphasized words. It's another way of emphasizing that God is watching. Jewish tradition says that the reason these words are doubled is because the absence of a husband or parents doubles each pain a widow or orphan receives, so God listens twice as hard.



Usury [Exodus 22.25](#) commands not to charge [נשך](#) *neshekh* interest/usury on any loan to one of God's people. God loans us life, energy, talents, and amazing bodies and minds, and when we die we get free upgrades. In Judaism, loaning is considered a great charity, more charitable than a gift. I grew up hearing, “Neither a borrower nor a lender be,” but that definitely is not a traditional Jewish statement. A gift of money carries the message: “You are helpless.” A loan carries the message: “I trust you to use this money well and return it to me.”

This prohibition against lending with interest had an interesting result in Church—Jewish relations. The Church, which held civil as well as ecclesiastical power for centuries, prohibited Christians lending money for interest to other Christians. But business requires investment capital and people often need a lump of cash to make something



happen. Since pretty much everybody except Jews were considered Christians, the Church gave the “revolting” privilege of loaning money at interest to Jews. While Jews wouldn't charge themselves interest (theoretically), they did not see in this Exodus passage any prohibition against loaning money to Gentiles at interest. So while Jews were effectively shut out of most Gentile trades, they nevertheless became the essential backbone of business investment. A happy unintended consequence for Jews!

Gossip [Exodus 23.1](#) warns against spreading a false statement. It's so easy to listen to dirt and almost as easy to repeat it. We have complete control over our words—until we speak them! Then they are gone and take on a life of their own. Unlike other types of theft for which restitution can be made, stealing someone's reputation is a self-breeding action. It multiplies as it goes and the harm can never be undone.

Another kind of untruth is being falsely complementary.



Don't Follow the Masses, Follow God

The next verse, [Exodus 23.2](#), warns against following a multitude to do evil. In any type of government, people will be expected to do things with which they disagree. But in a democracy, or a democratic republic, citizens run the risk of a mob mentality, thinking they themselves are the standard of right and wrong.

[Revelation 3.14-19](#) addresses the church of Laodicea, which thinks it is rich, has goods, and is in need of nothing, but is actually wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. In fact, it's the only church of the seven in Revelation 2-3 of which the Angel has nothing good to say. Λαοδίκεια [Laodicea](#) means justice of the people. It was once a thriving city on a trade route in what is now Turkey. But since Bible times it has become a deserted place with the name "Old Castle," a home to wild animals. Justice of the people sounds like democracy. We tend to bring the same "power of the people" attitude into the Church. I remember someone arguing in a church class that just because the 2nd Word (Commandment) prohibits idolatry, that doesn't make it wrong for churches to have statues to which people pray. Too often we would rather do what's comfortable than act on God's Word. Matthew Henry, in his commentary on the Kingdom of Heaven in [Matthew 11.12](#), says,

They who will have an interest in the great salvation are carried out towards it with a strong desire, will have it upon any terms, and not think them hard, nor quit their hold without a blessing [Genesis 32.25-33](#). They who will make their calling and election sure must give diligence. The kingdom of heaven was never intended to indulge the ease of triflers, but to be the rest of them that labour. It is a blessed sight; Oh that we could see a greater number, not with an angry contention thrusting others out of the kingdom of heaven, but with a holy contention thrusting themselves into it!

As Kipling says in the first and last lines of his poem *If*, "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you...you'll be a man my son!"

Helping Your Enemy [Exodus 23.4-5](#) commands helping to return an enemy's ox or ass, or assisting him when his animal is under a burden.

Find Your Way [Exodus 23.20-28](#) tells us that God has prepared a place for us and sends His Angel to bring us there. God warns us not to rebel against this Angel, but if we listen, God will bless us in many ways. The Angel goes before us and with us.



When my children would go to the local nursing home to play music for the residents, we would pray that God would go before us, with us, and behind us. Any ministry needs to be blessed in this way. We see the tremendous effort athletes put into winning an Olympic medal. But there are believers around the world and in your towns who through the centuries have put this intensity into God's goal of advancing the Kingdom of Heaven.

What is the place God has prepared in advance for you, what piece of the Kingdom of Heaven is yours to put in place, [Ephesians 2.10](#)? This is your purpose in life.

If your desire is to find God's will for your life and then have the integrity to do it, it won't matter what obstacles are in your way. In fact, the obstacles will only increase the amount of energy you use to get to your goal. A plane lands and everyone turns on their cell phones. A few rows back, a woman makes a call to check on her family. She finds that since she took off, her son is missing from school and hasn't been found. The woman is starting to panic and yell as she moves toward the front of the plane. Will the other passengers who are waiting to get off keep her from exiting to look for her son? No—they are just obstacles that she will go around, over, or through in order to reach her goal! When you know God's purpose for your life, you will be more motivated than an Olympic athlete. That purpose is why you are alive.

Two Covenants in Blood This portion includes [Exodus 24](#), the establishment of the first Covenant by Moses. He sprinkles the blood of the Covenant and he reads the Book of the Covenant to the people. [Hebrews 9.18-28](#) says that nearly everything is to be cleansed with blood in the first Covenant, since there is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood. Yet these things were just copies. The heavenly things themselves in the New Covenant can only be purified with the blood of **ישוע**. The first sacrifices were repeated every year, proving they weren't perfect. But the sacrifice of **ישוע** is once for all and never needs to be repeated. **ישוע** will come back, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.



Glossary, in order of appearance:

משפטים	<i>mishpatim</i>	judgments/ordinances
תורה	<i>Torah</i>	Law/Instruction
יתרו	<i>Yitro</i>	Jethro
משה	<i>Mosheh</i>	Moses
שפט	<i>shaphat</i>	judge, root of משפטים
שפטים ושטרים	<i>shoftiym v'shoteriyim</i>	judges and officers
שטר	<i>shatar</i>	officer/scribe, root of שטרים
ש	<i>sheen</i>	teeth/symbolically destroy
פ	<i>pey</i>	mouth
ט	<i>tet</i>	snake
ר	<i>resh</i>	head
שוטר	<i>shoteyr</i>	officer in modern Hebrew
נטה	<i>natah</i>	stretch out/turn/pervert/bend
נ	<i>noon</i>	fish/symbolically activity/life
ה	<i>hey</i>	behold/reveal
מצוה	<i>mitzvah</i>	commandment
בר מצוה	<i>Bar Mitzvah</i>	Son of the Commandment
בת מצוה	<i>Bat Mitzvah</i>	Daughter of the Commandment
מצות	<i>Mitzvot</i>	commandments
צוה	<i>tsavah</i>	command
ישוע	<i>Yeshua</i>	Jesus/salvation
משפט	<i>mishpat</i>	judgment/ordinance
חקות	<i>chuqot</i>	statutes
חק	<i>choq</i>	statute
חקים ומשפטים	<i>chuqim v'mishpatim</i>	statutes and judgments
כל-החקים	<i>kal ha'chuqim</i>	all these statutes
ת	<i>tav</i>	sign/covenant/cross
ו	<i>vav</i>	nail/and
ישראל	<i>Yisra'el</i>	Israel

ὕμεῖς	<i>hymeis</i>	you (plural)
ענה	<i>anah</i>	afflict/oppress/humble root: look down on/browbeat
צעק	<i>tza'aq</i>	cry out
שמע	<i>shema</i>	hear
ע	<i>ayin</i>	eye
נשך	<i>neshekh</i>	interest/usury
Λαοδικεία	<i>Laodicea</i>	justice of the people