

While Praying:

- * We need to take the path God is giving us. We may want to forge ahead serving God the way we think we should be, but God may have other things for us to do.
- * God is the giver of life and the supplier for His purposes. He reaches out to a cold world with His goodness.
- * Set out doing what God wants you to do. Don't be moored and become ineffective.
- * God's light shines on a world that lacks substance and understanding.

Mishpatim means, "judgments." Mishpatim begins with the laws regarding a Hebrew male slave. He is to be set free after six years and his wife with him unless his wife was given him by his master. The slave may choose to remain under his master. A daughter who is sold as a slave if married to her master must be treated well and if not, she is to be set free. If married to the master's son she should be treated as a daughter. If divorced she cannot be sold to a foreigner and she can be redeemed. We should remember that slavery for Israel was not like the abusive slavery of our world. The slaves were to be treated well and set free after 6 years. A slave could choose to work for their masters indefinitely.

The person who kills someone is to be put to death unless it was an accident. If a person attacks or curses their mother or father, or is a kidnapper they are to be put to death. This cursing of their mother or father would probably be accompanied by some sort of violent action. A person who injures someone is to care for them until they are well. A person is to be punished for killing his slave. A person is to be fined for the death of an unborn child.

Appropriate Retribution must be made, as an eye for an eye relative to the damage. It was always understood that it would be some sort of remuneration for damages. A slave is to be set free for compensation for personal injury from the master. An ox that gored someone is to be killed and not eaten, but if has been known to gore the owner will be put to death too or the owner can be redeemed. Retribution should be made for a slave that is gored. A person is to make retribution for the loss of another's animal. A person that steals an animal is to make retribution even if they are recovered.

A thief caught in the act at night that is killed is not considered murder. A person is to make restitution for another person's loss that they have caused. If a dispute arises over the ownership of an animal they are to come before God and the one found not to own the animal will pay double. If something happens to an animal that is being cared for by another and it is not stolen then the owner can swear it was not his fault. If it is his fault, he should make restitution unless he had paid a usage fee. A man who seduces a virgin must pay retribution - the bride price. He may marry her unless not accepted. A sorceress, someone who has sexual relations with an animal, or someone who sacrifices to another God is to be put to death.

They are not to abuse or oppress foreigners, widows, or orphans. They were not to charge the poor interest. If they take someone's clothes as collateral, they are to restore them the same day. They are not to curse God or your leader, they were not to delay their offerings, their firstborn sons and animals belonged to God, they were not to eat dead animals, and perjury is wrong. They are not to pervert justice, they were to return what belongs to others, and to help others regardless of their feelings for you. Fraud is wrong and oppression of the innocent, oppression of the righteous, and oppression of foreigners is wrong. Even in Israel today, their neighbors in Gaza may be short of food and supplies so Israel regularly sends them help. Gaza regularly sends (shoots at) Israel rockets and Israel regularly sends them help in the form of food or supplies.

Bribery is wrong. In the seventh year, the land is to be fallow, they are to keep Shabbat, they are not to talk about other gods, and they are to keep the three feasts (of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot). They are to

follow the rules for the feasts and not bow down to other gods. If they obey God, He will protect and bless them.

Moses then reads the covenant to the people, offers a sacrifice, and sprinkles the people with blood. Moses and the elders then ascend the mountain and they all see God and they eat before Him; His feet are standing on blue sapphire. So, God appears as a man before all the elders of Israel and Moshe. Moshe then goes up the mountain to receive the tablets with the commandments from God for forty days and forty nights.

This portion begins with various rules or commandments. Rules for slaves, murder, hitting parents (cursing), reparation and restitution, accidents, self-protection, some sexual sins, not oppressing others, treatment of other believers, giving of the first born to God, dietary laws, lying and perjury, returning property, bribery is wrong, working six days only and resting on seventh, and so forth. We should note that a number of these laws are not mentioned in the New Testament portion; some say they can be implied by spurious statements in the New Testament. Without the Tanakh we do not have a complete or best understanding of how to live right.

For example, bribery which is mentioned in this portion it is not mentioned in the New Testament portion. We know that bribery subverts justice and is wrong. We need the full revelation of the Bible as instructions for life. Also, we should understand that the New Testament portion is based on the Old Testament portion of the Bible. It should be noted that “eye for an eye” in Exodus 21:24 meant that restitution was to be given and it was never understood that we are to actually put out someone’s eye as retribution.

The Haftarah for Mishpatim is Jeremiah 34:8-22; 33:25-26. We read here essentially that just as God has established day and night, He will bring back Israel to their land and show them compassion. God could have used another way to describe bringing back Israel to their land, but in using “day and night” we can say that the passage definitely alludes to the idea of something permanent; and, perhaps that final future time is drawing near.

We need to take the path God is giving us. We may want to forge ahead serving God the way we think we should be, but God may have other things for us to do. One of my favorite scriptures keeps things simple in regard to the things of God. Proverbs 3:5-10:

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;

6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil.

8 It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones.

9 Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase;

10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine."

The very first thing we need to do with our lives is to trust in God. Don't make excuses and try to do things your own ways. If we follow His commandments, a lot of life falls into place. Don't think you are smarter than the creator God. Stay away from sin and evil. It says you will be healthier and be strengthened for trusting God.

A lot of people think the only way to add strength to their lives is through their own efforts. While it is important to stay fit and to develop our minds, God's ways actually simplify life. We aren't led into unnecessary choices and even bad choices because we know what is right and focus on doing what is right.

I have had a number of experiences where my first response was to take time to think about something and express doing the right thing. In a number of instances, the other person distanced themselves from me. If they had a good heart, they should have welcomed my response. This approach perhaps saved me from getting involved with something that wasn't good.

Also, we need to find out how God wants us to use our time. After going to a conference on translating the Bible, it seemed I would never use the information I learned, but over and over again, it has helped me in the study of the scriptures. Just understanding that the translators are sometimes at odds over the translation of the scriptures or that they will not change certain scriptures so they will sell more Bibles has helped me understand that all is not perfect in the translator world. I thought, of course we want to sell Bibles; that is a good thing. But if the translation is wrong, that is not a good thing. Especially if people end up believing in false doctrine because it needed to be changed.

Don't be so quick to jump into something that God doesn't want us involved with. I remember hearing someone teach from the pulpit as though politics should be the main focus of our lives. You would have thought that the Bible was all about who to vote for. I'm not saying that voting for godly people isn't important and we should vote for godly people. Find out who supports biblical principles and vote for them.

Focusing on following God and trusting in His ways should be our primary focus in life. These scriptures in Proverbs 3 also goes on to say we are to make sure we use some of our resources for God's kingdom. That can be a sticky subject to some people, but we should desire to be generous toward the things of God. It is a demonstration of where our heart is at. God will bless our desire to use our resources for God's kingdom. I always found it strange that some people and even pastors will hold onto their money like that is all there is to life. If they valued God so much, why are they holding onto their riches so tightly and not being generous with their resources?

God is the giver of life and the supplier for His purposes. We owe everything we have to God. God will accomplish what He wills, and He allows us to take part in that. Hebrews 13:21 NKJV asks God to, "Make you complete in every good work to do His will." Of course, in Jewish thought, "good work" refers to keeping God's commandments; we are doing His will when we keep God's commandments. For example, Shaul tells us to love others by serving them in Galatians 5:13 and then quotes Leviticus 19:18.

It says in the context in Leviticus 19:17-19 NKJV, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. You shall keep My statutes." There is a lot more to the context of loving our neighbors, isn't there. Keeping God's commandments is part of loving our neighbors. Shaul (Paul) talks about loving other as ourselves in Ephesians as being tender, kind, and forgiving (Ephesians 4:32). We should understand that Shaul's reference for his commands in his letters is the Old Testament portion. That's why he quoted Leviticus 19:18 in Galatians.

God can use us to show kindness and treat others well. We can do God's will by serving others in so many ways. When the Israelites were fleeing the Egyptians, they must have worked together to accomplish that and they no doubt served each other. That wasn't supposed to stop. In this portion, God commands them not to abuse or oppress foreigners, widows, or orphans. They were not to charge the poor interest. We can show others who God is in so many ways.

God reaches out to a cold and spiritually barren world with His goodness and we are part of the solution through our lives. Yeshua said, "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant;" Matthew 23:11 NKJV. Instead of making ourselves out to be something special, we should make God out to be special by serving others. So, set out doing what God wants you to do. Shaul tells us in Romans 12 that we are to think modestly of ourselves. He says we each have different functions in the believing family, the body of Messiah. God has given some the gift of prophecy, others serving or teaching. We are to love others (like Leviticus tells us to) and don't do evil. Be kind and respect each other. We are to not be, "Lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; Romans 12:11 NKJV. We are to be servants of God.

Don't be moored and become ineffective. If you were in a ship that was moored, it would be sitting there without the ability to be of much use. Proverbs 30:19 talks about how wonderful it is to see a ship at sea. It isn't so wonderful if it is moored on some rocks. Kefa (Peter) said in 1 Peter 4:10-11 NKJV, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified."

God's light shines on a world that lacks substance and understanding. We say be good, be kind, be a blessing and the world comes back with nothing but excuses. They say believers are weak; they say we are strong and opinionated; they say we are fools for caring about others; they say we don't care. It's true isn't it. The worldly say anything to justify their behaviors and to get away with doing what they want and getting what they want. They are certifiably in need of God's light and understanding.

He is the creator and not them and God knows all. "Is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether;" Psalm 139:4 NKJV. God knows all and knows how we should live. "Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite;" Psalm 147:5 NKJV. The world needs us whether they know it or not. Serve one another and serve others so that God can be glorified.

In this portion, the people seal their covenant with God and Moshe goes up the mountain to receive the commandments. How wonderful and amazing is it to be in covenant with God and what a wonderful privilege it is to live as believers in the Messiah Yeshua. God has given each of us a path to forge ahead on, so serve God the way we should. God gives life. He gave a new life to the people of Israel and He also gives us new life through the Messiah. Follow God, do what is right, and find purpose spiritually. Don't be moored on the rocks doing nothing with our lives, but be effective. God's light shines on a world that lacks substance and understanding. The world needs you; the world needs us.