

August 10, 2013

SHOFTIM / Judges

*Parashat Shoftim* speaks of the importance of establishing courts of justice in which true justice is administered. What is the result of true justice? The Torah tells us in verse Deuteronomy 16:20, "Justice, justice you shall pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you." One Talmudic commentary expands on this point and calls for "kosher" judges. When we hear the term "judges," we often think of Sampson, Deborah, and Gideon - judges appointed by HaShem. But the first line of our parasha reads, "You shall appoint judges." So . . . who should we appoint? In Old Testament times, the judges were sages and elders who studied Torah, who were sufficiently schooled in Torah law, and who could apply it to the lives of the average, run-of-the-mill Israelite. Two-thousand years ago, the term *judge* was understood to represent those qualified to rule in cases involving *halakhah* - in other words, the rabbis themselves were the judges.

These rabbis, the ones who were judging others, were often placed on a pedestal. They were people who were well respected. They were people who were trusted. They were someone you could look up to. Try to imagine being judged by someone who was involved in an illicit relationship, or who was caught stealing from the *tzedakah* box, or who indulged in "I'hayim" a little too often. You might wonder if a person of such questionable moral character was fit to judge your case, and rightly so. But that was back then. How can we apply the concept of "kosher" judges and true justice to our lives today?

In the Church world they would say, "If you are gonna to talk the talk, you gotta walk the walk." Any person, Jew or Gentile, demonstrates their beliefs more by what they do than by what they say. A person whose actions are abhorrent demonstrates not only a lack of moral integrity, but also a lack of faith in HaShem and the Scriptures. And because they are in serious need of *teshuvah*, they are not qualified to judge others nor hold a position of honor.

Each of us has an obligation to embody the highest values of our tradition, and to serve as ambassadors of Yeshua, not only to each other, but to everyone with whom we come into contact. In that task, we cannot always depend on other humans to act as an example. Ultimately, there is the one true Judge - Yeshuah - Who is the best example for us to emulate.

Focus: Here come The Judge

Hebrew Deut 16:18 (19)

English Deut 16:18-20

Haftarah Isaiah 53:4-6

B'rit Chadasha Matthew 3:4-11