



#48 Shoftim – Deuteronomy 16:18 to 21:9
Torah teaching and teaching, Staying on Course in Life
By Moshe Schwab

Names

Cohanim - priests
Kefa – Peter
Moshe – Moses
Shaul – Paul
Shavuot – Pentecost, a spring feast of God
Tamuz – the name of an ancient pagan god
Yeshua – Jesus (in Hebrew it means "Salvation")
Yĕhōvâh – God's real name forever (Exodus 3:15)

Yochanan – John

Terms

#48 – the 48th portion for 2019-2020
Haftarah – the weekly reading from the prophets
High Holy Days – Yom Teruah, Yom Kippur, & Sukkot
Parashah – (portion) one of 54 portions of the Torah
Shabbat – the 7th day of the week; we are to rest
Tanakh – Old Testament portion of Bible
Torah – 1st 5 books of the Bible

Introduction

God has good things for us. He has not left mankind alone. His ways keep our lives in order and are a blessing to us. Think about it; the God of the universe created us and we get to learn from Him. We should be so thankful for the opportunity we have.

Sometimes though, people's lives can be caught up in sin that does not please God. We may even make excuses for how we behave. When we are determined to do what is wrong, we break off our relationship with God. God gave us good commandments that we can follow and they are not difficult to keep (mitzvah means commandment). Deuteronomy 30:11 CJB says, "For this mitzvah which I am giving you today is not too hard for you, it is not beyond your reach." Yeshua even quotes this by saying His yoke is not difficult (yoke is a Jewish expression that refers to God's commandments in the Torah). Yeshua is Jewish. God will forgive us if we turn our lives around and follow Him. 1 John 1:9 NKJV says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

God gave us the choice to either follow what is right and good or do things our own way. Why is there so much pain in the world; mankind decided to do things their own way. That is not how things will end though. Those who want to follow God and turn their lives around will be raised from the dead to be with Him in a new and good future kingdom. In the meantime, God has given us His good commandments in the Old Testament portion and also the Holy Spirit in this Messianic age.

God gave us His law and the Holy Spirit to help us overcome sin. I was talking to someone on the phone this one time who seemed to have given up trying to live right. When I mentioned repentance to him I thought the Holy Spirit was telling me he was angry with me for saying that.

If anything, he should have welcomed my encouragement. I was trying to help him to have a blessed life and get right with God. A good person will encourage and kindly try to lift up and

encourage someone. I had his best interests at heart. I do not want to see anyone suffer for the consequences of their sin and most of all, I do not want anyone to end up in the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8).

I get the idea that some place a low value on life and nothing could be further from the truth about life. Life is not monotony and a frivolous merry go round of activities. We can value a relationship with our Creator God and understand how special it is to live in relationship with God. We have good reasons to value and care about life, and be excited about our relationship with God.

God did not have to care about mankind; He has lots of creation to care about. Since He is a good God, He reaches out to mankind in spite of some who are mindless, uncaring, selfish, hurtful, and destructive. In contrast, God calls those who do what is right and follow Him, His children. 1 John 3:1 NKJV says, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him."

It is no wonder that those who live in unbelief towards God do not understand. They are ignorant. 1 Corinthians 1:21 NKJV says, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." Those that do not believe live in a dark tunnel where they are oblivious to the truth. Romans 1:21 NKJV, "Their foolish hearts were darkened." Those that live in darkness must take the first step toward the light and want to know God and the truth. So instead of being "bright in their own eyes" and blind, they can come to know the truth.

Why do you think some can think this way?

Some see life as no more than mere chance.

All their values are wrapped up in materialism; they value things.

Some want what others have and will even try to take what does not belong to them.

Their values could be humanistic; they value only what people make or do.

They could be wrapped up in some type of man-made created philosophy of life.

Some do not want anyone including a good God to speak into their lives.

The Bible says there is a devil and they allow the devil to speak lies into their lives.

Enjoy the life that God has given us and hit the mark in life through His commandments and the work of the Holy Spirit. God created this world and we should enjoy life and follow our creator's commandments so we won't suffer the consequences for sin. Sin brings evil into our lives and the lives of others.

The Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39) is given to believers in Messiah in this Messianic era to help us live better and lead us and encourage us in life's situations. You can do no better than to follow God's commandments and how the Holy Spirit is leading you (The Holy Spirit will not contradict God's commandments – why would God's good commandments change; God says, "For I am the LORD, I do not change;" Malachi 3:6 NKJV.). Through God's commandments and the Holy Spirit we can hit the middle of the target in life.

Torah Study

Shoftim means, "judges." This portion occurs in the Jewish month of Elul, just before the High Holy Days, the Fall feasts of God. It is a good time to think about doing better in life and following God and keeping God's commandments. The Jews have a prayer book for this time of year. It would be good to do something in preparation for Yom Kippur (the day of forgiveness of sins – the Day of Atonement). According to the Jewish writings, Moshe came down the mountain with the second set of tablets on Yom Kippur. He went up the mountain several times, but only two times to bring down tablets of God's commands with him. The first time, some in Israel were committing idolatry and he threw the tablets down. The second time, the people were not sinning.

People can be stubborn, but in this case they repented. Many people get accustomed to the way they live. Those that say they follow the Torah often follow extra misapplied laws and do not follow the Torah the way they should. Christians do the same thing. They are accustomed to following the pagan practices passed down by the Roman Empire. Those that follow the extra misapplied man-made laws and those who follow the pagan practices do not want to change.

Yeshua said in Matthew 5:20 NKJV, "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." What did the Pharisees do in Yeshua's time? They kept these extra misapplied laws religiously. What are we supposed to do? Deuteronomy 10:12-13 NKJV says, "What does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good."

The Torah portion begins with Moshe (Moses) telling Israel they were to appoint judges in their cities who would not distort justice or take bribes. Bribes subvert justice. Our elected officials should look out for the best interests of our countries. If they are not following what the Bible says, they are not looking out for our best interests. Also, some politicians are looking to get votes just to stay in office instead of considering the outcome of bribing the people who are voting for them. They are to be held accountable to the people. Their bad decisions can subvert justice. Are we holding these people accountable for their ungodly decisions or are we supporting ungodly people?

They were not to plant a sacred tree or set up a stone (to pray to). What about putting up an evergreen tree in our homes? Evergreen trees were considered sacred because the pagan god Tamuz died by an evergreen tree. So, setting up an evergreen tree in homes has its roots in pagan practice. What about Christmas, December 25th? Rome celebrated the birth of the Sun god (natalis solis invicti) on December 25th. Not only are the evergreens pagan, but the day chosen by Rome to celebrate Yeshua's birth is pagan. We are not to do the things pagans do.

If you want to find out a more acceptable date for the birth of Yeshua, see my article, [Rosh Hashanah and the Birth of Yeshua](#). He was born on a Jewish holiday and not December 25th. If you want to celebrate His birth, celebrate it on a better day. To see my article, go to this page and scroll down to the article: <https://www.teshuvahsa.org/observing-the-feasts>.

Idol worshippers were to be stoned, but there had to be two or three witnesses. Think about it;

do you still want to put up a pagan symbol in your home on a pagan day? God takes things associated with pagan practice very seriously.

Difficult cases were to be decided by the Cohanim (priests). This compares to our higher courts in the United States. First the appointed judges made the decisions and if it was a more difficult decision, they were to defer to the Cohanim.

If Israel wanted a king, God must choose him; he cannot be a foreigner; he cannot have many wives and excessive riches. He is to write a copy of the Torah, keep a copy of the Torah, and read it every day. He is not to think himself better than others. Leaders should not accumulate excessive wealth due to their position. Those in important positions should know the Torah well and read it every day. The portion goes on to say they were to support the Cohanim. They were not to learn the religious practices of the Canaanites. So, we should stop keeping pagan practices.

It says in Deuteronomy 18:10-11 NKJV that no one was to be a, "Diviner, a soothsayer, an enchanter, a sorcerer, a spell-caster, a consulter of ghosts or spirits, or a necromancer." A person that does these things is using false signs associated with devil spirits. The devil only wants to keep us from the true God and is called the destroyer in the Bible (Isaiah 14:12). Anything associated with spiritualism and the occult is wrong.

God will raise up a prophet like Moshe. They were to listen to him and whoever does not will have to give an account for himself. We can see many similarities between Moshe and Yeshua (Jesus). Here are a few; there are many more than these.

Similarities Between Moshe and Yeshua

- Yeshua and Moshe came to save Israel.
- They both had to flee for their safety.
- Both spoke to God and God spoke to them.
- They were both teachers.
- Moshe set Israel free from pagan Egypt and Yeshua set believers free from sin.
- They both honored God's name; Exodus 3:15; John 17:6
- They both served God.
- Moshe led God's people and Yeshua leads us as our "Shepherd." John 10:11
- Moshe offered his life for the people and Yeshua gave his life for our sins.
- Israel received the Torah from Moshe and from Yeshua (Yeshua is God).
- Moshe's face shined from the presence of God and Yeshua shined as the presence of God when He was transfigured.
- Moshe lifted up the serpent for the healing of the people and Yeshua was lifted up and gave Himself for our healing.
- Both were appointed by God as saviors.
- Moshe gave the people manna and Yeshua created food for thousands.
- Moshe gave the Torah on Shavuot (Pentecost) and Yeshua gave the Holy Spirit on Shavuot.

The portion continues. They were not to listen to false prophets. Those who killed another accidentally could flee to a city of refuge so their case could be heard; they do not deserve the death penalty. A person who does not kill someone accidentally is to be put to death. They were to keep honest boundaries and a false witness was to be punished.

They were not to be afraid of enemy forces because God would fight for them. Under certain conditions a man was to not serve in the army. They could take spoil from their enemies and they were to completely destroy their enemies; they were not to destroy food bearing trees. The leaders of the nearest town were to do a ritual over an unsolved murder and ask for forgiveness so that innocent blood would not be shed.

The Haftarah is Isaiah 51:12 to 52:12; the Messianic portion should go to Isaiah 53:12. The Haftarah portion asks the question why are they afraid of man. God says awake for He is your God, be strong, the uncircumcised and unclean will not enter any more. Shake the dust off your feet (leave unbelief behind) and loosen your chains (be set free). Israel will be redeemed again and **they will know His name** and that He speaks, "Here I am." He is announcing salvation (**Yeshua** just happens to be the Hebrew word for salvation). God will bare His arm and all the earth will see salvation (**Yeshua**). They literally saw Yeshua (which means salvation), didn't they.

Modern Jews who do not believe in Yeshua stopped reading Isaiah 53. The Messianic portion should continue to Isaiah 53:12. It goes on to say that God's servant will succeed and be honored. [In Isaiah 53 it says:](#)

People will be appalled at **Him**;

He will be disfigured.

Who will believe; the arm of the Lord has been revealed?

People despised **Him** and did not value **Him**.

He bore our pains and we thought **He** was being punished.

He was stricken and wounded for our sins;

by **His** bruises we are healed.

We are like sheep that have gone astray yet God laid our guilt on **Him**.

He was like a lamb being slaughtered, silent.

He was arrested, sentenced, and died for the sins of our people.

God will accomplish His desire through **Him** and make many righteous.

This is obviously talking about a male person, so this is about Yeshua the Messiah giving Himself for our sin and not Israel as some say. Unbelieving Jews are not trying to make many live right (be righteous). Yeshua (Jesus) though has reached the entire world. **He** is truly the Messiah.

In this Haftarah portion we clearly see Yeshua. **He is the one that came and said, "I am" ("here I am");** **He** is the one bringing good news; **He** is our God and King; and **He** is the one that brought the earth salvation – He is Yeshua (He is salvation).

The Messiah was to be the descendant of David and is God (Yĕhōvâh according to Jeremiah 23:5-6). Yeshua prays to be glorified with the glory He had before He came to earth. He did not become God; He came as God to help us. Yeshua says in John 17:5 NKJV, "And now, O Father,

glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."

Yeshua makes a number of "I am" statements in the New Testament portion. In Isaiah 52:6, 7, 10 CJB, it says, "**Here I am!**" ... "**your God is King!**" ... "**All the ends of the earth will see**" **Yeshua (salvation). Could it be any plainer!**

Yeshua said (NKJV):

"I am the bread of life" (John 6:35,48,51).

"I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

"I am the door of the sheep"(John 10:7,9).

"I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11,14).

"I am the resurrection, and the life" (John 11:25).

"I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

"I am the true vine" (John 15:1,5).

In Deuteronomy 18:18-19 NKJV, Moshe said that those who don't listen to the prophet like him would have to give an account; "I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him."

Staying on Course in Life (A practical teaching to accompany the Torah portion)

Allow God's word to speak into your life and keep you clean

The judges were not to distort justice; we need to stay on course in life too. In previous portions, we talked about using the scriptures to help us in areas of our life. We want to be a "clean" people who do not live in sin. For example, we are to have faith. Deuteronomy 9:23 NKJV says, "You rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God, and you did not believe Him nor obey His voice." We see that having faith in God means we are to keep God's commandments.

There are similar words for faith in English with different "shades" of meaning. Believing means we have faith and trust. When we do not trust in God, we do not obey God and vice versa. I sometimes replace the word faith or believe with the word "trust" in my mind in order to make it a more active idea. Webster's online says that believing is similar to accepting, understanding, and concluding. It is dissimilar to suspecting, doubting, and disputing. Therefore, when we are not accepting God's commandments, we are actually disputing with God!

Which part of understanding faith applies to you. What helps you to understand this better? Perhaps you've been doubting that God made the 7th day holy.¹ Should we keep the Shabbat the Bible tells us to keep? Rome changed the day of worship and not God. "On March 7, 321, however, Roman Emperor Constantine I issued a civil decree making Sunday a day of rest from labor, stating: All judges and city people and the craftsmen shall rest upon the venerable day of

¹"Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." Genesis 2:3 NKJV To sanctify means to set it apart.

the sun."² It was changed by a man to honor the sun god. Are we going to trust God or what some man did? The Bible says, "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you;" Deuteronomy 4:2 NKJV. So, changing Shabbat to Sunday was wrong.

That is how we can use the scriptures to help us do what is right. Deuteronomy 4:2 helps us to understand that Sunday is the wrong day because it was changed by man. Have you ever gone to the doctor on the wrong day, I have. They tell you to come back on the right day. What about worshipping God?

Anger can be a issue in life. We are made in the image of God; God has given us the blessing of having His characteristics. If someone wrongs us, we need to forgive after we make up and not carry grudges. Deuteronomy 13:17-18 NKJV says, "That the LORD may turn from the fierceness of His anger and show you mercy, have compassion on you and multiply you, just as He swore to your fathers, because you have listened to the voice of the LORD your God, to keep all His commandments." God forgives us after we repent and do what is right; He even blesses us; so we also need to forgive others and not keep a record of offenses.

This also could teach us that God expects us to trust Him; so whatever sin we are being tempted with, we need to devote our attention to correct our behavior. We do not want the fierce anger of God; that is for sure. Revelation 3:5 NKJV says, "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life." I want to be an over-comer. What resonated with you more? The fierce anger of God might be enough; you surely do not want to be blotted out from the book of life and lose your eternal life!

Set your life in order; do not let your aim be set off course

We need to set our lives in order and stay on course. We do not want to live a life of sin, and we want eternal life with an all good and powerful God. Getting off course can be a painful experience. This one time after driving for several hours, I took the wrong exit onto the wrong freeway and it took me a half an hour to get back on track. We do not want the added pain of circumstances or wrong habits to keep us from living out the purposes that God's wants for us.

God told Israel to go into Canaan and when they did not go, they ended up wandering in the desert for 40 years! They got there. Stay the course so you do not end up wandering. Proverbs 14:12 NKJV says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death. A lot of the time, getting off the path doesn't effect us a lot, but just that one time can really mess us up. Why take the chance with your life. My one missionary friend tells the story of hearing this loud crash while looking for a jungle town. They found a panther in a pit the next path over. They were probably glad they were on the right path or they could have ended up in a pit with a panther.

Be productive; do not let complacency set in and sidetrack you from engaging spiritually.

Do we ever wonder if what we are doing is making a difference. Do not let yourself think for one minute that what you do does not matter. All the good we do matters. Shaul said in Galatians 5:22-23 NKJV, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law." Engage with how

²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabbath_in_Christianity

the Holy Spirit wants to work in us. There is nothing wrong with that. Make doing what is right your aim everyday.

Shaul says, "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind;" Philippians 3:14-15 NKJV. Engaging spiritually is a worthwhile thing to do. We can try to be good at academics, sports, or work, but there is nothing better to do than being productive spiritually. We honor great achievement, but don't forget to honor the greatest achievement of all; living right, engaging with the things of God, and living for the purposes of God. When Abraham was 99 years old, God still expected him to live right. Genesis 17:1 NKJV says, "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.'" Just like Abraham, we also need to stay engaged spiritually; even at 109.

Keep going; push yourself spiritually

Years ago I used to participate in sports. Sometimes I would play baseball all day long; the days seemed to go by so fast even though I exerted myself all day. I used to enjoy running. I remember this one time I went to run with my friends; I ran about three miles to see them, ran another 12 miles with them, and then ran home. I managed to win some races because of my dedication. Shaul told us to be dedicated believers.

He said in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NKJV, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

When you are in training, you are thinking about what you need to do to succeed. I remember hearing about this one basketball player while he was in college, practicing for 6 hours a day; plus he had to go to classes and study. We can be dedicated to all sorts of things, but do not forget to be dedicated to God. Shaul says that he fights to bring his body into subjection. Stay in the fight; push yourself.

This Torah portion begins by talking about appointing judges. Judges were not to subvert justice. We also should do what is right and therefore make this world a better place to live. Stay in faith and keep God's commandments. Accept what God teaches us and trust in Him. Find ways that help you to keep God's commandments. Do not live in sin. Set your course spiritually. What we do matters. Do not get sidetracked. Stay engaged and fight spiritually so you will receive the prize of eternal life.