

## LET'S PRAY TOGETHER

*We pray every week for the Jewish Friendship Ministry and their partner. I suggest our friends to pray from February 14 through 20, for Paula Sanders, who is with her husband the leader of Jewish Adventist Friendship ministry in North Carolina (USA). As we know our ministry is not easy, especially in this time of pandemic, when travels are not allowed, that is why our leaders need more than ever before our prayers.*

## NEWS

## PURIM CELEBRATION

Last week we looked at the historical background of *Purim*, reviewing the story of how G-d provided salvation for the Jewish people even though His name is not mentioned in the book of Esther.

Today we would like to focus on the Jewish celebration—how do they celebrate this feast which is not from the Torah but was instituted by the Rabbis? And then we would like to explore ways to celebrate this feast on-line with our Jewish friends because of the difficulties of meeting in-person during this pandemic.

*Purim* is the most joyous feast of the year. Interestingly, the Jewish people have compared this feast with the most holy feast of the year, *Kippur*. This is because the full name of this feast is *Yom Hakipurim*, and we recognize the sound “*Purim*” and “*Ki*” which means “as” or “like”—“the day like *Purim*.” In what way can *Purim* and *Kippur* be compared? *Purim* and *Kippur* are both about the saving of the Jewish people. At *Purim*, Jews were saved from physical annihilation or genocide. On *Yom Kippur*, Jews are spiritually saved by an all-powerful, loving G-d. Salvation may be physical or spiritual, but both are the result of a caring G-d.

**How Jews Celebrate Purim**

Since this feast is not described in the Torah, the Rabbis take great latitude to organize a celebration. This fact also gives us great freedom in the organization of this celebration. The main goal is to remind everyone of the story of *Purim*. That is why the central part of this celebration is the reading the *Megillah* (the scroll of Esther)—the purist would read from a real scroll (which can be purchased at any Jewish religious store or from a synagogue). It is traditionally read in Hebrew, but any vernacular language can be used.

The scroll or *Megillah* is read twice, once on the eve of *Purim* (in 2021 this will be the evening of Thursday, February 25), and again the next day (Friday, February 26).

Another important custom is giving gifts of money to at least two poor people. The reason is that on this feast everyone should rejoice in *Hashem* for His deliverance, and be able to afford a great festive meal. Some poor people might use their poverty as a reason for not celebrating and rejoicing; thus, sending monetary gifts helps everyone, even the poorest, to celebrate along with other Jews of the Jewish community.

On *Purim*, Jews emphasize the importance of friendship and community. That is why they send

additional gifts comprised of two kinds of food to at least one person. Here also, this is to motivate everyone to celebrate the feast.

The feast is celebrated with a festive *Purim* meal. Having a festive meal is one of the four *mitsvoth* of *Purim*. So gather your family and invite a guest or two. Traditionally, this meal begins *Purim* eve (Thursday, February 25, 2021) before sundown and lasts well into the evening.

The table should be festive with a nice tablecloth and candles, *Challah* bread, and a holiday meal during which Jewish songs about *Purim* are sung, words of Torah are read, and there is a joyous *Purim* spirit. It is important to be creative in planning this meal so that it is unforgettable for the children.

Prayers: Traditional *Purim* prayers describe the *Purim* story and thank G-d for the “miracles and salvation of our ancestors.”

In the morning service on the day of *Purim*, there is a special Torah reading (Exodus 17:8-16) describing the battle Joshua waged against Amalek—Haman’s ancestral nation.

**Ideas for Celebrating Purim**

Being in a Pandemic situation might cause many people to hesitate to attend a congregation in person for this celebration. That is why it is important to think about how we can translate each of these ideas into a virtual event online.

• *Celebrate Purim With Traditional Jewish Recipes*

- Sephardic or Ashkenazic Cookies

- A cooking segment that teaches how to make *Hamantaschen* (Ear of Aman) cookies, showing how to fold them.

- Scroll cookies (a kind of tube).

- Rosemary Garlic *Challah* Bread.

- Delicious *Purim* cocktails without alcohol.

- Online cooking segments that walk through the preparation of a full festive meal.

• *Create a Coloring book with characters from the book of Esther* (Esther, Mordechai, Achashverush, Haman, a gate keeper, a regular Jew, Esther praying, etc...).

• *Hosting a Purim baking party*

• *Tell the story of Esther* according to the Bible, enriched by many Jewish traditional ideas about Esther and Mordechai. Wear an appropriate costume and use interesting props. This could involve several “actors,” each telling a segment of the story.

• Since we are wearing masks to protect us from Covid-19, why not *teach how to decorate and paint our masks with Purim symbols*.

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## SHABBAT SHALOM

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## PARASHA FOR THIS WEEK

### Mishpatim

# משפטים

## PARASHA OVERVIEW:

### Exodus 21:1 - 24:18

Israel receives a series of laws concerning social justice.

Topics include:

- Proper treatment of Jewish servants;
  - A husband's obligations to his wife;
  - Penalties for hitting people and for cursing parents, judges and leaders;
  - Financial responsibilities for damaging people or their property, either by oneself or by one's animate or inanimate property, or by pitfalls that one created;
  - Payments for theft;
  - Not returning an object that one accepted responsibility to guard;
  - The right to self-defense of a person being robbed.
- Other topics include:
- Prohibitions against seduction;
  - Witchcraft,
  - Bestiality and sacrifices to idols.
  - The Torah warns us to treat the convert, widow and orphan with dignity, and to avoid lying.
  - Usury is forbidden and the rights over collateral are limited.

- Payment of obligations to the Temple should not be delayed, and the Jewish People must be holy, even concerning food.

- The Torah teaches the proper conduct for judges in court proceedings.

- The commandments of Shabbat and the Sabbatical year are outlined.

- Three times a year — Pesach, Shavuot and Succot — we are to come to the Temple.

- The Torah concludes this listing of laws with a law of kashrut — not to mix milk and meat.

G-d promises that He will lead the Jewish People to the Land of Israel, helping them conquer its inhabitants, and tells them that by fulfilling His commandments they will bring blessings to their nation.

The people promise to do and listen to everything that G-d says. Moshe writes the Book of the Covenant, and reads it to the people.

Moshe ascends the mountain to remain there for 40 days in order to receive the two Tablets of the Covenant.

## PREPARING FOR NISAN AND PESACH

For the Jewish people, the first month of the year is very important. According to scholars, the cycle of the Parashoth two thousand years ago did not start after *Succoth* (Feast of Tabernacles) as is done today, but with the month of *Nisan*. Thus, to prepare the Jewish people for the coming feast of Passover and the month of *Nisan*, the last *Shabbat* before *Adar* was designated to begin a cycle of four *Shabbatot* which are called *Shabbat Terumah*, *Shabbat Zachor*, *Shabbat Parah*, and *Shabbat HaChodesh*.

To mark the beginning of these special *Shabbatot*, the Jewish people bring out two Torah scrolls from the holy ark (*aron kodesh* or *heichal*), then read the regular Parashah for the week (*Parashat Mishpatim*) from the first Torah scroll, and immediately read a short portion of *Parashat Shekalim* (Exodus 30:15-16) from the second Torah scroll. *Parashat Shekalim* contains the text where *Hashem* asks each male of *Bnei Yisrael*, 20 years of age and older, to contribute to the expense of the Sanctuary (later the Temple) with a half-*shekel*.

Another modification of the liturgy during these four *Shabbatot* is that the second text (usually the Haftarah—the reading from the prophets) is not in connection with the regular Parashah for the week but is a *Maftir* or second text read from the second Torah scroll.

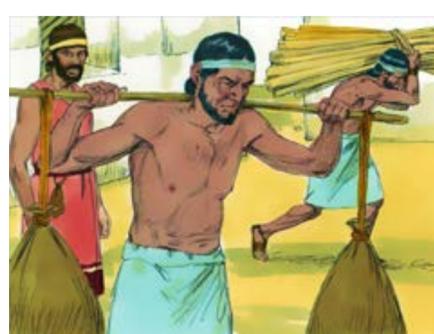
## SOCIETAL LAWS

*Parashat Mishpatim* lists additional laws (Judgments) that were given after the giving of the Ten Commandments. These *mitsvot* give practical details about how *Hashem* wants His people to relate to one another, and how to deal with transgressions. These laws called *Mishpatim* (Judgments) are the societal laws that instruct *Yisrael* how to live life in the Promised Land. Most of these laws describe in detail what it means to "Love your neighbor as yourself" — they give practical instruction about the second table of the Ten Commandments, which are all about our relationships with our neighbors.

## CONTEXT OF THE MITSVOTH

Some of *mitsvot* given three thousand and five hundred years ago can surprise or shock modern people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, let's remember that the people of *Yisrael* were just coming out of slavery, and had a lot to learn before understanding the meaning of true freedom.

*Hashem* wanted to establish and build up a Jewish society on the basis of humane justice. The Torah places one such law at the beginning of its societal legislation (the Judgments of Exodus 21, 22, and 23). As we read this law, we see there is hardly any other law as eminently suited for social justice as this Sabbatical law from Exodus 21:2-4—"If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve for six years, and in the seventh he is to go free, without payment. If he comes in by himself, he is to go out by himself. If he was married, then his wife will go out with him. If his master gave him a wife, and she bears him sons



or daughters, the wife and her children will be her master's, and he will go free by himself."

For the Jewish people these *mishpatim* are the civil and criminal code of the Jewish nation. The purpose of these laws is to set forth the principles and ordinances of humane justice that are to regulate human relationships within the framework of the judicial law.

The first section of this code deals with personal rights. The laws of Exodus 21 are a very strong argument for Jews about the existence and validity of the "Oral Law." For the Jewish people, the primary source of Jewish law is not the written Word, the "Book" or Bible, but the living teachings of the oral tradition; the Bible serves only as an aid to memory and a resource when doubts arise. The Bible itself establishes the fact that the entirety of the Torah had already been transmitted to the people and impressed upon them and lived by them for forty years before Moshe *Rabbeinu* (just before his death) completed writing the Torah, and gave the scroll to the priests for safe-keeping (Deuteronomy. 31:24-26).

The Bible is full of stories, and the beginning of the Tanach gives us stories: the story of creation, of the flood, of the Tower of Babel, of Avraham, Yitschak and Yaakov. Before recording laws and theology, the Bible gives us individual case studies, and from these case studies we draw lessons and instructions for our everyday life. These case studies have been interpreted throughout the history of *Yisrael*, and all these interpretations have resulted in the Oral Laws.

That is why, for the Jewish people, the relationship between the written Torah and the Oral Torah is like that between brief written notes taken on a lecture and the lecture itself.

We find an example of this in Exodus chapter 21, verse 2, when it says, "If you buy a Hebrew slave" (Exodus 21:2)—the Oral Torah teaches us that the case dealt with here is that described in Exodus 22:2: "A thief ... is to make full restitution. If he has nothing, then he must be sold for his theft" (22:1-2). The Oral Torah adds: "Such a sale is imposed only on male thieves." Thus, the wording here (22:2) is not general and all-inclusive—it does not say simply, "he shall be sold" but adds the qualifying words, "for his theft," and it does not say simply "for the theft" but "his theft, which indicates that females found guilty of theft are excluded from this provision" (*Sotah* 23b).

Let's remember that Avraham also had a certain knowledge of these laws: "Avraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments (*mitsvotay*), My statutes (*chukotay*), and My laws (*torotay*)" (Genesis 26:5 NKJV). Avraham had no written documents, and Moshe *Rabbeinu* would not be born until some

"If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years, but in the seventh year, he is to be set free without liability." (Exodus 21:2)

three centuries later. This means that a number of Oral Laws existed long before Moshe *Rabbeinu*, and these Oral Laws were transmitted by Avraham to Yitschak and Yaakov (who was 15 when Avraham died), by Yitschak to Yaakov, by Yaakov to his 13 children, who then transmitted these "commandments, statutes and laws" to their children and descendants. When the children of *Yisrael* left Egypt they had in their collective memories these laws received generation after generation.

These laws are fundamentally different from any legal system of that time. In the law of Exodus 21:2-6 it even speaks about the servant who loves his master and wants to stay with him: "But if the servant plainly states, 'I love my master, my wife and my children, and I will not go out free...'" (Exodus 21:5).

Precautions were taken to protect the servant's status within this family, in order not to crush his self-respect. Despite the degradation he has brought upon himself, the servant should feel that he is treated and respected as a brother, capable of earning and giving love! It is remarkable to read how the Torah imposes on the master to ensure that the servant's family remains intact, and that the servant's family does not suffer distress because of his offense and its consequences in depriving him of his freedom. Upon those who have benefited from his labors during his term of service, the Torah imposes responsibility for the servant's ability to provide for his dependents.

These laws of releasing the servants on the seventh year were not always honored by *Yisrael*. Rabbi Hirsch reminds us: "In the final days of the Jewish State, the prophet Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) was given the task of publicly proclaiming that disregard of the principle inherent in the *Mitsvah* of releasing slaves in the seventh year would be the ultimate cause of the fall of the State (Jeremiah 34:12)." This is one of the topics of the Haftarah from Jeremiah 33-34 that is presented as part of this chapter.

According to the Sages of *Yisrael*, the law of setting servants free on the seventh year was the first duty that Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon gave to the people of *Yisrael* as the basic condition for their redemption. In other words, before *Yisrael* could experience and appreciate their own redemption, they needed to

"If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, bring it back to him" (Exodus 23:4)

appreciate giving freedom and redemption to others. This law was very important because slavery was very common in the surrounding nations, but *Yisrael* was to live according to higher standards than did other groups of people.

## LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

As we continue to read the Torah, we find examples of protective laws for the people who were living so long ago: "If one uncovers a pit or digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls in, the owner of the pit must pay compensation" (Exodus 21:33-34). In this Parashah, *Mishpatim*, the Torah tells us the laws pertaining to damages caused by one's animals and damages caused by someone digging a hole in the ground. In some instances, we are legally obligated to pay for damages and in other instances we are free from having to pay.

Rabbi Packouz says the proper way to view these laws of damages is from the perspective of the *Sefer HaChinuch*, that the foundation of the laws pertaining to damages is the *mitsvah* of loving our fellow human beings. When we care about others, we will be careful not to do anything that will cause them damage or suffering. When kind and compassionate people study these laws, they do not think in terms of how much money they will have to pay, but in terms of what they can do to avoid causing others any loss or pain. Studying these sections of the Torah in the proper way will increase our sensitivity to the possibilities of harming others. Again we quote Rabbi Akiva: "What you don't want done to you, don't do unto others!" ([aish.com](http://aish.com)).

The concept of compensation was important in the Torah—that is why it is written: "If a man steals an ox or a sheep and kills it or sells it, he is to pay five oxen for one ox or four sheep for one sheep" (Exodus 21:37). Then Rabbi Zelig Pliskin asked the question: Why is the fine for stealing a sheep less than the fine for stealing an ox? Rashi, the great 13<sup>th</sup> century commentator, cites the sages of the Talmud who said the reason the thief pays less for a sheep is that he has to carry it on his shoulders to run away faster when stealing it. Running with a sheep on one's shoulders in public is embarrassing, and this embarrassment is a partial punishment in itself ([aish.com](http://aish.com)).

Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm comments that if in committing thievery a man experiences a slight embarrassment and this lightens the punishment, then all the more is the reward intensified if one suffers embarrassment or humiliation while doing a good deed: the action is elevated and the reward will be very great! ([aish.com](http://aish.com)).



## APOSTOLIC WRITINGS

## ACTS 23:5-11

There are at least four verses of *Mishpatim* which are quoted in the Apostolic Writings. One of them is a *Mitsvah* mentioned in Exodus 22 where it is written, "You shall ... nor curse a ruler of your people" (Ex. 22:28). This is even more important today than in the past, because today we have a natural tendency to distrust our leaders, not only leaders of the country or the city where we live, but also the leaders of God's people.

The quotation of this text in the Apostolic Writings is interesting, because it is Rabbi Shaul who pronounced it. Looking at the context, we discover that Rabbi Shaul was arrested in the Temple of Jerusalem and then presented before the Sanhedrin with a false accusation: "Men of Yisrael, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place" (Acts 21:28 NIV).

This accusation was not true. Rabbi Shaul was respectful of the Temple, the Torah, the people of Yisrael and the leadership. That is why, when he was confused with someone else, an Egyptian terrorist (Acts 21:38), he had to justify himself and said: "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia" (Acts 21:39 NIV). He clearly identified himself, publicly, with the Jewish people—he was proud to be a Jew and affirmed it clearly. But who was Rabbi Shaul? He himself was a member of the Sanhedrin around the year 34, and perhaps his election to the Sanhedrin was a reward for his active participation to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7): "After the death of Stephen, Saul was elected a member of the Sanhedrin council in consideration of the part he had acted on that occasion" (White 1911, 102). As we review the role Shaul played in this revolting murder, we learn from Acts 6 that Stephen was one of the first seven deacons of the early believing *kehilah* that formed around faith in Yeshua *HaMashiach*. Stephen was a Jew—not from the holy land, but a Jew from the diaspora. He was chosen to oversee the fair distribution of food and other resources among the Hebrew and Greek believers.

Thus, as is customary among Jews, every Shabbat they attended a synagogue that fit their tradition. Even today, a Sephardic Jew on Shabbat attends a Sephardic synagogue, and an Ashkenazic Jew attends an Ashkenazic synagogue. The worship customs and even the pronunciation of Hebrew are not the same for a Sephardic Jew as for an Ashkenazic Jew. Thus, the synagogue Stephen attended was "the synagogue of the Freedmen—both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, as well as some from Cilicia and Asia" (Acts 6:9). As he attended his chosen synagogue and shared his testimony about Yeshua, some of the members of the synagogue were not happy: "Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen ... rose up and disputed with Stephen" (Acts 6:9-10 RSV). A public discussion arose between Stephen and the members of this synagogue. We recall

that when Shaul made his defense before the Sanhedrin, he said, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia" (Acts 21:39 NIV). He was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, and the synagogue Stephen attended was for "those from Cilicia and Asia" (Acts 6:9 RSV). This means Stephen and Shaul were attending the same synagogue. As a doctor in Torah law, and almost a member of the Sanhedrin, Shaul was a respected rabbi, full of diplomas; but Stephen was a simple man with no degree. How could this man, a nobody with no authority, presume to teach others on the topic of Torah and *Mashiach*? When Shaul heard Stephen boldly state that Yeshua is the long-awaited *Mashiach*, he was furious. He had many discussions and arguments with Stephen, trying to prove that Yeshua of Natzeret was **not** the *Mashiach*. Shaul then reported this heresy to the Sanhedrin, the *Beth-Din* of Yisrael and Stephen was arrested. The Sanhedrin heard Stephen and his defense as recorded in Acts 7, and then he was condemned to death. The instigator of the condemnation and execution of Stephen was Shaul of Tarsus. That is why the text specifies that Shaul approved Stephen's death: "And Saul approved of his execution" (Acts 8:1 ESV).

A few weeks or months later, Shaul was still enraged against the followers of Yeshua: "But Saul... went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1-2 RSV). On the way to Damascus, Shaul had an encounter that completely changed his life: "Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Yeshua, whom you are persecuting'" (Acts 9:3-5 ESV). This appearance, or vision, drove him to repentance and resulted in Shaul becoming a believer in Yeshua as the *Mashiach*. From that day forward, he was a follower of Yeshua and came to be known as a *Shaliach* (Apostle) to the Gentiles. Some Jewish leaders were so astonished and infuriated that they thirsted for his death. That is why he was accused of apostasy: "This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place" (Acts 21:28 NIV). When he was arraigned before the Sanhedrin, Shaul did not know that the man before him was the High priest, and in his defense quoted from memory one of the *mitsvoth* found in *Parashat Mishpatim*: "for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" (Acts 23:5 NIV; Exodus 22:27). This ability to quote Torah demonstrates that Shaul knew the Torah very well; in addition, this text demonstrates that Shaul was Torah observant, keeping the *Mitsvoth* of the Torah.

## STORIES AND TRADITIONS

from such massive wealth to the most appropriate recipients!

## SUPPORTING THE PARTY

In Communist Russia a Jew named Berel, was summoned to the local Communist district office. "We heard rumors that your devotion to the Communist party is wavering." "That's not true. I declare my complete and unquestionable loyalty to the party!" said Berel.

"We'd like to ask you a few questions to be certain of your dedication," declared the officer. "Suppose somebody died and you were be-

Rabbi Shaul observed the people present in the trial room and recognized immediately that one of the groups included his own people: "But recognizing that one group was Sadducees and the other Pharisees, ..." (Acts 23:6). The Pharisees were those with whom he had studied when he earned his PhD or doctorate degree in Torah law. Knowing the positions and beliefs of these two groups, he played on the internal divisions he knew existed between them: "Paul began crying out in the Sanhedrin, 'Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees! I am on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead!'" (Acts 23:6). The Pharisees were faithful to the Tanach—they had a good understanding of eschatology and knew that at the ultimate end, the dead will resurrect. However the Sadducees, who did not fully accept the prophets but were influenced by the Greek philosophers, believed in the immortality of the soul. Since everyone wanted to defend his own beliefs, pandemonium broke out: "When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection or angel or spirit, but the Pharisees affirm them all" (Acts 23:7-8). Thus, the Pharisees understood that Rabbi Shaul had not been arrested for a good reason: "Then there was a great uproar. Some of the Torah scholars of the Pharisees' party stood up and protested sharply, 'We find nothing wrong with this man! What if a spirit or angel has spoken to him?'" (Acts 23:9). What an affirmation! The Pharisees were ready to recognize that maybe his story was true: "What if a spirit or angel has spoken to him?" Yisrael had not recognized any prophet for 350 years, and suddenly here was a man attesting that he received a vision while he was *en route* to Damascus: "What if he is a true prophet? We would be very wrong if we refused this divine manifestation." The situation was about to turn into a riot, and the Roman soldiers knew they needed to move quickly to protect Shaul: "As a big dispute was developing, the commander was afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them. So, he ordered the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them and to bring him into headquarters" (Acts 23:10). Shaul knew that he had done nothing wrong—he knew his vision was true and authentic.

In the night, Shaul received divine confirmation of obedience to the Lord: "The following night the Lord stood beside Paul and said, 'Take courage! For just as you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome!'" (Acts 23:11). Then Shaul understood the purpose of this trial: God had a greater plan for him, not only testifying before the Jewish leaders, but testifying before the emperor, Caesar. He must find a way to go to Rome—that was now the purpose of the rest of his life. Are we courageous as witnesses for the *Mashiach*? Have we discovered God's purpose for our life?

queathed 10,000 rubles, what would you do?" "I would give 5,000 to the party and keep the other half for myself."

"Very good! Now what if you had two houses?" "I would give one to the party and keep the other!" "Excellent. Now, suppose you had two pairs of pants?" Berel hesitated for a long while and finally stammered out: "I don't think this question is fair. I do happen to have two pairs of pants!"

So, too, the believer engulfed and immersed in Torah must nevertheless be hungry to ascend to new levels in Torah learning and observance.

## HAFTARAH

## JEREMIAH 33: 25 - 34:22

The foremost feature of the prophecy of Jeremiah chapter 33 is that it is given in the context of a new covenant which *Hashem* wants to contract with His people, and particularly with the remnant who will survive the destruction of Jerusalem and deportation to Babylon: "I will restore Judah from exile and Yisrael from exile, and will rebuild them, as in former times. I will also cleanse them from all their iniquity in which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their wrongs in which they have sinned against Me and in which they have rebelled against Me" (Jeremiah 33:7-8). The ultimate purpose of *Hashem* is to bring the Messiah among His people in order to save them and to fulfill all the promises He made to them: "Behold, days are coming—it is a declaration of *HASHEM*—'when I will fulfill the good word I spoke concerning the house of Yisrael and concerning the house of Judah. In those days and at that time, I will cause a Branch of Righteousness to spring up for David, and He will execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days will Judah be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this is the Name by which He will be called: *HASHEM* our Righteousness'" (Jeremiah 33:14-16). In contracting this new covenant, *Hashem* intends to help His people understand the Torah and apply it more fully in their life: "Behold, days are coming—it is a declaration of *HASHEM*—'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Yisrael and with the house of Judah.' ... It is a declaration of *HASHEM*—I will put My Torah within them. Yes, I will write it on their heart. I will be their God and they will be My people" (Jeremiah 31:30, 32b).

To make sure it is clear that *Hashem* is speaking about the people of Yisrael and not another people, in the last part of the chapter the promise made to Yisrael is repeated in the strongest way possible: "Thus says *HASHEM*: 'If I have not made My covenant of day and night firm, and the fixed patterns ordering the heavens and earth, only then would I reject the offspring of Yaakov, and of My servant David so that I would not take from his offspring rulers over the offspring of Avraham, Yitschak, and Yaakov. For I will restore them from their exile, and have compassion on them'" (Jeremiah 33:25-26). The promises *Hashem* has made with

Yisrael (Yaakov) and David are so strong that *Hashem* uses the order of the universe to assure them of the permanence of His covenant. We find a similar text in Jeremiah 31: "Thus says *HASHEM*, who gives the sun as a light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars as a light by night, who stirs up the sea so its waves roar, *HASHEM-Tzva'ot* is His Name: 'Only if this fixed order departs from before Me'—it is a declaration of *HASHEM*—'then also might Yisrael's offspring cease from being a nation before Me—for all time'" (Jeremiah 31:34-35). *Hashem* is a faithful God even though Jerusalem is going to be destroyed. Some might consider that the destruction of Jerusalem means that *Hashem* has given up on His people and will begin something new with someone else, and even more so because He has just announced a "new covenant;" but let's remember that this "new covenant" is made with the house of Yisrael: "Behold, days are coming—it is a declaration of *HASHEM*—'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Yisrael and with the house of Judah'" (Jeremiah 31:30). This "new covenant" is not made with a foreign people but with the very people of *Hashem*.

In the Apostolic Writings, we also read an interpretation or explanation of this "new covenant." When Yeshua shared his last *Seder* meal with his *talmidim*, he spoke of this New Covenant, and all his *talmidim*, even all the women who were around him, were Jews. After the ascension of Yeshua, they were all, about 120 people, meeting in the upper room in Jerusalem, and these were all Jews. However, the great difference between this covenant and the covenant made at Mount Sinai, is that this covenant is now open to Gentiles upon their conversion. And *Hashem* chose a Pharisee, Rabbi Shaul of Tarsus, to become the Apostle to the Gentiles. Thanks to Rabbi Shaul, the church opened up her arms to welcome Gentile converts, but that does not mean that Yisrael was rejected—Yisrael was still part of *Hashem's* plan. In his letter to the *kehilah* in Rome, Rabbi Shaul asked this question: "*Hashem* has not rejected His people, has He?" (Romans 11:1). His answer is clear: "*Hashem* has not rejected His people whom He knew beforehand" (Romans 11:2).

"If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, bring it back to him."  
(Exodus 23:4)



That the obligations of the Decalogue might be more fully understood and enforced, additional precepts were given, illustrating and applying the principles of the Ten Commandments. These laws were called judgments, both because they were framed in infinite wisdom and equity and because the magistrates were to give judgment according to them. (PP, 310)

## THE WINNING TICKET

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (the founder of the ethical revolution known as the Mussar Movement) once heard that his wife had bought a lottery ticket. Rather than sharing her dream of winning the jackpot, the Rabbi quickly called two witnesses and declared before them that in the event that she bought the winning ticket, he was forfeiting in advance his portion of the winnings. He explained that he felt ill-suited to handle the obligation of distributing the correct amounts