

Torah Portion Mishpatim
Exodus 21:1 – 24:18

Mishpatim means “ordinances” and is derived from a Hebrew root word meaning “to judge”. It is taken from the first verse of the scriptures above where it states that Yahweh stated, “these are the judgments (mishpatim) which you shall set before them”. (NKJV)

In these scriptures we find the beginning of the civil and moral ordinances set before the children of Israel. We find the ordinances concerning servants, violence in various instances, animal control, responsibility for ones' property, moral and ceremonial principles, and justice ordinances. In addition we find the ordinances concerning the Sabbath, and the three annual feasts. We find that Yahweh promises to go before them in the wilderness and commands their obedience. He promises that if they obey that He will indeed bless them richly. If obedience is practiced then He promises to drive out the inhabitants of the land from before them. They are told not to make covenants with the people of the land and not to worship their gods in any shape or form.

Then comes the reading that I would like to focus on. In chapter 24, Moses goes up before the LORD alone, but something significant happened before then. In verses 3-7 we read that the people said that they would do all that Yahweh commanded. So, upon hearing the ordinances of Yahweh the people stated that they would obey and do them all. What's interesting is that the people told Moses this long before they had received any of the ordinances.

In Exodus 19:8 we find them stating that they would obey and do all that Yahweh commanded of them. This was when they had first arrived at the foot of Mt. Sinai. No ordinances had been given to them, yet they are already stating that they will obey.

In the Western mindset, which is a Greek mindset, we tend to want all the details and all the “understanding” before we agree to commit ourselves. The Greek culture, which includes Americans, are the “thinkers”. We like to demand that we understand everything before we can obey. If we don't understand why God instructed us to do something, that doesn't make sense especially, then we have a tendency to say that doesn't apply to me or surely God didn't mean for me to do that; because it doesn't make sense.

This is a foreign thought process to an obedient Jew. They don't have to understand to obey God. Their love and trust for their God dictates obedience without understanding. That is why in these scriptures they could commit to obey God long before they knew what was going to be required of by them.

There are many ordinances that any Orthodox Jew would tell you that he/she does not understand what God meant, but they will obey without believing that they have to “think” and “reason” it out first. In fact, in the Hebrew language the ordinances of Yahweh fall into 3 categories: the Mishpatim, the Chukim and Edot.

The mishpatim are ordinances that are easily understood and obvious. The edot can be translated “witnesses” or “testimonies” and they are easily understood and they speak to some specific truth about Yahweh's presence or feast days; they speak of a spiritual truth or event. However, the chukim are commandments that man can't seem to understand why God would command such a thing or make such a statement; only God understands why He wants mankind to do these things. To an obeying Jew it makes no difference, they obey them all.

So, what about us - will we say, “all that You command we will do, whether we understand or not?”
This is TRUE love and trust. Growing up I didn't always understand the decisions that my parents made regarding my choices or actions, but I trusted and loved them enough to obey and know that they had my best interests at heart.

We should be this trusting of our Heavenly Father!

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