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Moses and the Torah

21:1 to 23:19



As the name of this parashah (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy**, **to see link click Af - Parashah**) indicates, this reading from the **Torah** contains *the mishpatim*, or **the rulings**. Like an Ancient Near Eastern legal code, the rulings of **God** come tumbling forth in some of the most densely packed and comprehensive legislation of the whole Torah. Several of the rulings speak of being brought before **Elohim**, thus it would seem that legal matters are to be settled directly by **God**. Yet, the context of these trials indicates that a human court of judges is meant. Which is correct? Perhaps both are correct. **In Jewish thought there is no disconnecting between civil, moral, and ceremonial mitzvot, for they are all God's Torah.** An **Israelite** judicial court was a religious court. The legal issues they debated and decided were issues of the **Torah** legal system. As a result, to appear before a **Torah** court of law was to appear before **YHVH**, for the **Torah** court is the dispenser of **God's rulings**.

Because **Torah** is both **rulings** and **revelation**, it functions in a dual capacity. On the one hand, it is a blueprint for living (see **Dj - The Ten Commandments**) which guides our conduct. On the other hand, it is the expression of **Ha'Shem** in human terms. **We must learn to recognize that Torah is more than merely 613 commandments; it is actually the revealed character of YHVH dressed up as mitzvot. Torah is His spoken Word written down and His self-disclosure to the world.** When one realizes this, one must also realize the enormous gravity of declaring it irrelevant to their lives today. Even the smallest **commandment** of

the **Torah** is saturated with godliness. To declare any **commandment** as being irrelevant or obsolete is to deny the eternal and unchanging nature of **God**.

Sadly, far too many people today are put off by these **commandments**. The sudden jolting return to the culture of the Ancient Near East is more than they are prepared to handle. When **the Torah** begins to speak in a matter-of-fact manner about the institution of slavery, about selling one's daughter, about repaying measure for measure, we quickly become queasy. The temptation is to comfort ourselves with the notion that all of these unpleasant **commandments** have been done away with and replaced by kinder, gentler, and nobler virtues. The problem with such thinking is that it is heretical. To suppose that **God's** eternal **Torah** can simply be dismissed is an affront to the Holiness and Unchangingness of **YHVH**.

Every commandment of **the Torah** is spoken by the mouth of **God**. Each mitzvah is therefore Holy and Eternal. Whether or not a particular commandment seems to apply in our day is irrelevant. Human society may change, but **the LORD** does not change. **He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8)**. Every **commandment** is a distillation of **His** essence, a pure revelation of **His** person. The study of **the commandments** is the study of **God**. As soon as we begin to discard commandments, we have begun editing **ADONAI**. We have immediately begun the process of reshaping **the Holy One** into an image that we have deemed more appropriate. So you see, when we try to change **the Torah** or do away with a **commandment**, it is actually **God** we are trying to change or do away with.

When **the Torah** was completed there would be 613 **commandments**, including the Ten Commandments. These **teachings** were divided into two groups, positive and negative. The positive ones start with words like: **do** or **you shall**; while the negative ones started with words like: **do not** or **you shall not**. There were 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments, one for each day of the year. There are a lot of **mitzvot** packed into this parashah. Of the 613 commandments, over 50 of them come directly from this portion. Yet there are far more than 50 commandments here. Some of them are repeated in later portions, while other fall under the general categories of broader **mitzvot**.

When we get to the B'rit Chadashah and we read about **the traditions of the Elders (Matthew 15:2)** or **the traditions of my fathers (Galatians 1:14)**, those had nothing to do with the **Torah**. They were man made rules after the Babylonian captivity and were called **the Oral Law** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law**). **The rabbis taught that Moses brought**

them down with him in written from Mount Sinai, but in reality **God** had nothing to do with **them**. By the time of **Christ**, **the Pharisees and Sadducees not only treated them as being equal to Torah, but they actually held them in higher esteem. They said, "He who follows Torah does a good thing. But he who follows the Oral Law, does an even better thing."** Therefore, *all* of the conflict **Jesus** had with the religious rulers in Jerusalem was over the Oral Law. But **Messiah** had nothing to do with the thousands and thousands of oral laws, that is why **He** called them **the traditions of men (Mark 7:8)**. So although **the Torah** was misinterpreted and corrupted by pharisaic Judaism, it continues to be **a tree of life to those who take hold of its principles. Happy are those** who view it as a blue print for living because **its ways are pleasant and all its paths lead to peace (Proverbs 3:17-18)**.