

Godly Character

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For I lift up my hand to heaven and swear,

As I live forever,

if I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand takes hold on [mish^epat],

I will take vengeance on my adversaries and will repay those who hate me.

(Deuteronomy 32:40-41 ESV)

When [mish^epat] is done ('asah),¹

it is a joy to the righteous (tzaddiq)² but terror to evildoers.

Evil men do not understand [mish^epat],

but those who seek [YHWH]³ understand it completely.

(Proverbs 21:15, 28:5 ESV)

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;

remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes;

cease to do evil, learn to do good;

seek [mish^epat], correct oppression;

bring justice (shaphat)⁴ to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

(Isaiah 1:16-17 ESV)

You shall follow my [mish^epatim] and keep my statutes and walk in them.

I am [YHWH] your God.

You shall therefore keep my statutes and my [mish^epatim];

if a person does ('asah) them, he shall live by them: I am [YHWH]."

(Leviticus 18:4-5 ESV)

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.

And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my Spirit within you,

and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to [do] ('asah) my [mish^epatim].

(Ezekiel 36:26-27 ESV)

For when your [mish^epatim] are in the earth,

the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness (tzedeq)⁵.

(Isaiah 26:9b ESV)

The Hebrew words, מִשְׁפָט - mish^epat and מִשְׁפָטִים - mish^epatim, are poorly understood; hence, their translation into English is very poor. Both words have a very complicated range of meaning. Just for the singular form, mish^epat, – **BDB** lists more than a dozen nuances of meaning; **TDOT** identifies six major categories of meanings. All the lexicons, dictionaries, and translations work under the assumption that the plural form, mish^epatim, is simply more than one of the singular; when, in fact, it actually has a completely different range of meaning.

These words are very important to understand the Nature of God.⁶ These words are also very important to understand what God requires of human beings. Fundamental to all God's dealings with human beings is that God is always perfectly fair, perfectly impartial, perfectly just. That is the most important meaning of mish^epat.

God has given we human beings a short physical life so that we have the opportunity to come to know God, to learn the Way of God, and decide whether or NOT we desire to join the God Family in Eternity.

To be part of the God Family we must learn to be like God – we must in this life strive to attain

Godly Character. An understanding of the words mish^epat and mish^epatim is vital to attaining Godly Character.

¹ See the discussion of 'asah in section [2 Terminology](#)

² See the discussion of tzaddiq in section [2 Terminology](#)

³ The tetragrammaton, יהוה, in the **ESV**, as with most English translations, is rendered LORD or GOD. These translations are ambiguous.

It is useful to consider who this Divine Being is when the name is used; hence, in this paper, YHWH, is always substituted.

⁴ See the discussion of shaphat in section [2 Terminology](#)

⁵ See the discussion of tzedeq in section [2 Terminology](#)

⁶ See the paper "First Pillar - The Nature of God" located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

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1 What is “Godly Character”?

Human life is short:

The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty;
yet their span is but toil and trouble;
they **are soon gone**, and we fly away.
(Psalm 90:10 ESV)

And Jacob said to Pharaoh,

“The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years.

Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life,
and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers
in the days of their sojourning.”

(Genesis 47:9 ESV)

Come now, you who say,

“Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town
and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”

—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring.

What is your life?

For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

(James 4:13-14 ESV)

God has given us this short life for a reason. God’s purpose for human beings is to become members of the Family of God and inhabit Eternity with God the Father and Jesus Christ. This is discussed in detail in section **2.1 The Family of God** in the paper **“Second Pillar - The Plan of God”** located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca. God gives us this short life so that we can make the decision whether or NOT we want to participate in the God Family:

See, **I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.**

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today,
that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse.

Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live ...
(Deuteronomy 30:15, 19 ESV)

We can never become perfect as human beings:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

I [YHWH] search the heart and test the mind,
to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.
(Jer 17:9-10 ESV)

... as it is written:

None is righteous, no, not one;
for **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God ...

For **I know that nothing good dwells in me**, that is, in my flesh.

For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

Wretched man that I am!

Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, I myself serve the [nomos]⁷ of God with my mind,
but with my flesh I serve the [nomos] of sin.

For when **you were slaves of sin**, you were free in regard to righteousness.

But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed?

For **the end of those things is death.**

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God,
the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

For the wages of sin is death,

but **the free gift of God is eternal life** in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 3:10, 23, 7:18, 24-25, 6:20-23 ESV)

⁷ The Greek word, νόμος – nomos, can be correctly translated as “law”; however, “law” should NEVER be used in relation to the Writings of Moses, or any part of the Old Testament. The Old Testament comprises *torah*, (see footnote 18) NOT *nomos*; hence, in this paper, the transliteration, *nomos*, is always used. For further discussions see **Excursus 8 - torah and nomos** in the paper **“True Worship of the True God”** located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca.

In this life God requires human beings to come to understand the Nature of God. The Nature of God is fully discussed in the paper “**First Pillar - The Nature of God**” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca. In this short life, God requires we human beings to strive to replace our sinning human nature with the Divine Nature. This cannot be fully accomplished while we are physical human beings, but we can demonstrate to God that we love his nature, and we desire to fully become like God, and we desire to be granted the gift of eternal life.

Human beings who demonstrate to God that in fact they do “choose life” by learning to live by the Way of God,⁸ become candidates for the gift of eternal life. While perfection is NOT attainable in this life, God requires human beings to “conquer”, to “overcome”, and develop traits of Godly Character, which God can perfect through the Resurrection of the Dead.⁹

The Christian life is a battle against Satan the Devil and the world that he has created. To become a candidate for the gift of eternal life, a person must resist all that Satan has to offer, “conquer it”. The battle is also with one’s own human nature which is inherently disposed to sin and must be “overcome”. It is this internal downward pull which must be replaced by Godly Character. The Apostle Paul is explicit about our battle with human nature:

For I do not understand my own actions.

For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the [nomos],¹⁰ that it is good.

So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.

For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

(Romans 7:15-20 ESV)

In his letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, Jesus makes promises to those who conquer:

To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life,
which is in the paradise of God.

The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.

To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna ...

The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end,
to him I will give authority over the nations ...

The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments,
and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.

The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.

The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne,
as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

(Revelation 2:7b, 11b, 17bα, 26, 3:5a, 12a, 21 ESV)

We cannot become perfect in this life, but that is what God requires of us:

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
(Matthew 5:48 ESV)

And let steadfastness have its full effect,
that you may be perfect and complete,
lacking in nothing.
(James 1:4 ESV)

In this life, once called to be a True Worshipper, and having repented, been baptized, and received the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, a person can be “perfected” by God:

But now, [YHWH], you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
(Isaiah 64:8 ESV)

⁸ See the paper “**Third Pillar - The Way of God**” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

⁹ See section **2.1.3 The Resurrection of the Dead** in the paper “**Second Pillar - The Plan of God**” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

¹⁰ See footnote 7

For God, who said,
“Let light shine out of darkness,”
has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
But we have this treasure in jars of clay,
to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.
(2 Corinthians 4:6-7 ESV)

But he said to me,
“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.
(alluding to Isaiah 43:2, 40:29-31)

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses,
so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
(2 Corinthians 12:9 ESV)

Do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,
that by testing you may discern what is the will of God,
what is good and acceptable and perfect.
(Romans 12:2 ESV)

Now the Lord is the Spirit,
and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.
And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,
are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.
For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Corinthians 3:17-18 ESV)

Even Jesus experienced “perfecting” by the experiences of human life,
and being perfect, Jesus is able to take True Worshippers to a state of perfection:

For it was fitting that he,
for whom and by whom all things exist,
in bringing many sons to glory,
should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Although he was a son,
he learned obedience through what he suffered.
And being made perfect,
he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him ...
(Hebrews 2:10, 5:8-9 ESV)

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins,
he sat down at the right hand of God,
waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.
For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.
(Hebrews 10:12-14 ESV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,
let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely,
and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,
looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith,
who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame,
and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,
and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,
and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven,
and to God, the judge of all,
and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect ...
(Hebrews 12:1-2, 22-23 ESV)

The “clay” is fired at the First Resurrection.¹¹ Whatever we are lacking will be supplied by God
as he transforms us. We will be perfect spirit beings – fully members of the God Family:

Indeed, I count everything as loss
because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.
... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection,
and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,
that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

¹¹ See footnote 9

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

But our citizenship is in heaven,
and from it we await a Savior, **the Lord Jesus Christ**,
who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body,
by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.
(Philippians 3:8a, 10-11, 14, 20-21 ESV)

And now, little children, **abide in him**,
so that **when he appears we may have confidence** and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.
If you know that he is righteous,
you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been [begotten] of him.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us,
that **we should be called children of God**; and **so we are**.

The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Beloved, **we are God's children now**,
and **what we will be has not yet appeared**;
but we know that **when he appears we shall be like him**,

because we shall see him as he is.

And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

(1 John 2:28-29, 3:1-3 ESV)

The Bible uses many words to describe the Nature of God, the character attributes which define "**Godly Character**". A number of these words are discussed in section **1.4.3 Attributes of God's Character** in the paper "**First Pillar - The Nature of God**" located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca. The Hebrew words ***mish^epat*** and ***mish^epatim*** are briefly discussed in that paper. Understanding these words is some of the most important information available for understanding what it means to attain "**Godly Character**". The full meaning of these words is generally missed in Bible translations, Bible dictionaries, and Bible lexicons. **By examining the context in the Bible in which these words are used it is possible to fully understand what God intends to communicate by these words.**

2 Terminology

The Hebrew word **מִשְׁפָט** - *mish^epat* is derived from the root **שֶׁפֶת** - *shaphat*, which carries a range of meaning including "to govern" and "to judge":

The primary sense of *shaphat* is to exercise the process of government.

1. To act as ruler.
2. ... to decide cases of controversy as judge in civil, domestic, and religious cases.

(**TWOT** article 2443 page 947)

... act as law-giver, judge, governor (giving law, deciding controversies, and executing law, civil religious, political, social; ...)

(**BDB** page 1047)

There are two other derived nouns of *shaphat*: **שֵׁפֶת** *shephet*, which only occurs in plural,

שֵׁפָטִים - *sh^ephatim*, and **שֵׁפֹת** - *sh^ephot*, which only occurs twice in Ezekiel 23:10 and

2 Chronicles 20:9. Both *shephet* and *sh^ephot* generally mean "**judgement**". Clearly the derived word ***mish^epat* retains a relationship to "the process of government"** judging, judgement, and justice:

... if it is to be rendered by a single English word with similar range of meaning, ought by all means to be the word "justice".

(**TWOT** article 2443 page 948)

Consider these definitions of these English words:¹²

- **Judge**: verb, to form an authoritative opinion ... to hear and determine (as in litigation question) or decide in the case ... in ... a court of justice
- **Judgement**: noun, a formal utterance or pronouncing of an authoritative opinion after judging
- **Justice**: the maintenance or administration of **what is just**: impartial adjustment of confliction claims; the quality or characteristic of being just impartial or fair: fairness, integrity, honesty; conforming to truth, fact, or reason: correctness, rightness

¹² From Webster's Third New International Dictionary
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The concept of “justice” carries a very broad range of meaning. The key to getting a deeper understanding of the Biblical word ***mish^epat*** is to factor out the instances where the meaning is **“what is just”**, or **“justness”**, from the perspective of the character of the subject or the object. Many instances of ***mish^epat*** do relate to “justice” in the sense “judging” or issuing a “judgement”, but these instances should be distinguished from those where **“what is just”**, or **“justness”**, is the meaning.

The second key to understanding the deeper meaning of the Bible is the fact that **in most cases the plural, *mish^epatim*, does NOT simply mean more of the singular.** The plural, ***mish^epatim***, most often has a completely different range of meaning derived from exercise of **Godly Character**, living a life of “justness”, living by the Way of God. The true meaning of ***mish^epatim*** in these cases is the **understanding, wisdom, and discernment** that result **from a life lived according to the Way of God.**

To get a feeling for the real meanings of these words, it is necessary to study their use in all instances available to us. **To an ancient speaker of Hebrew, *mish^epat* and *mish^epatim*, were simply two words.**

We do NOT have equivalent words in English. Each word carries the complete range of meaning implied by all its instances. **This was implicit to a natural speaker of ancient Hebrew.** The multiple English words which are used in translation are confusing because the choice of word in each case is made by a translator, and it may not actually convey the correct nuance. To understand the meanings of the texts in which these words occur, it is best to use the Hebrew words and let the context imply the nuance of meaning.

“Justice” is a desired outcome of “doing justness”. “Justice” results from a societal environment where “justness” is an overriding consideration among human relationships. The phrase **“do justice”** is something of an oxymoron. The only instance this phrase makes sense is as an idiomatic expression, such as “he did justice to his meal”; meaning he ate his whole meal; or, “Joe intends to do justice to Bill”; meaning Joe intends to kill Bill. **A person does “justness” in relation to other persons.** When all persons treat others with “justness”, “justice” prevails.

The verb **תִּשְׁפַּךְ** - *asah*, has the most general sense of **“to do”**, see Holladay pages 284-285; the ESV translations usually try to capture a more precise nuance, but to focus on the meaning of ***mish^epat***, it helps to reduce ***asah*** to its basic meaning. **In this paper**, in most cases, where ***asah*** is translated as other than “to do” in the ESV text, the basic meaning is inserted. The noun **מִשְׁפָּךְ** - *ma`aseh*, “works” is derived from the verb ***asah***. (See **TWOT** article 1708 pages 701-702)

There are a large number of Hebrew words which overlap the semantic range of ***mish^epat*** and ***mish^epatim***. Where these words occur in the texts under consideration, they are generally highlighted. Consider the following words:

- The verbal root **תִּצְדַּקֵּ** - *tzadeq*, has a related masculine noun, **תִּצְדְּקָה** - *tzedeq*, a related feminine noun, **צִדְקָה** - *tz^edaqah*, and a related adjective, **צִדְקִיָּה** - *tzaddiq*. All these words carry a similar range of meaning “rightness”, “lawful”, “just”, “justice” – with respect to the Nature of God, the meaning is usually “to be righteous” or “righteousness”. The various forms of the verb are most often used of human beings standing in “righteousness” before God. (See **TWOT** article 1879 pages 752-755)
- The verbal root **דִּין** - *din*, “judge”, “govern”, is more or less synonymous with **שִׁפְטָה** - *shaphat*. There is a derived noun, same spelling, **דִּין** - *din*, which is more or less synonymous with ***mish^epat***. The noun is used in direct association with ***mish^epat*** in Psalm 72:2 and the verb in Jeremiah 21:12. (See **TWOT** article 426 page 188)
- The verbal root **יָשַׁר** - *yashar*, has a very complicated range of meaning. The simple literal meaning is “to go straight or direct in the way” or “make a way straight”. Ethically it means to be “upright” or “blameless”; this generalizes to “doing what is right”. There are several derived words:
יְשַׁרְתָּה - *y^esharath* and **מִשְׁרָם** - *mesharim*, “uprightness”, “justly”, “justice”. It is frequently used both in conjunction with and in parallel with ***mish^epat***. (see **TWOT** article 930 pages 417-418)

- The verbal root **תָּמָם** - tamam, means literally “to be complete”. Morally and ethically it is used to mean “be or make blameless”. There are several derived words: **תָּמָם** - tom, “integrity”; **תָּמָם** - tam, “blameless”; **תָּמִימִים** - tamim, “blameless”. (See **TWOT** article 2522 pages 973-974)
- The word **נוֹכָהּ** - nakoah occurs only eight times. Its assumed root is **נוֹכָהּ** - nakah. It means “good” or “right”. (See **TWOT** article 1365 page 579)
- The word **כֶּן** - ken, used in the sense of “right” or “true” is derived from the root **כָּנָן** - kun, which has a very broad range of meaning. (See **TWOT** article 964 pages 433-434)
- The word **טוֹב** - tov is derived from the verbal root, **טוֹב** - tov. It carries much the same range of meaning as the English word “good”. (See **TWOT** article 793 pages 345-346)
- The verbal root **רִיב** - riv and the derived noun **רִיב** - riv, are frequently used in legal, judicial, contexts to mean “case”, “contention”, “lawsuit”. (See **TWOT** article 2159 pages 845-846)
- The root **עָוֵל** - `ul, generally means “deviate from”, “act unjustly”. The most important derivatives are **עָוֵל** - `awel, masculine, and **עָוֵלהּ** - `awelah, feminine; both mean “injustice”, “unrighteousness”. The noun **עָוֵל** - `awwal, is used primarily with persons, “unjust one”. The range of meaning of these words is essentially the opposite of all the positive words. (See **TWOT** article 1580 pages 652-654)

In the texts quoted in this paper, these words are highlighted when they are used in association with ***mish^epat*** or ***mish^epatim***. This helps to bring out the meaning of ***mish^epat*** and ***mish^epatim***.

3. Justice

This section examines instances of ***mish^epat*** in which the “governing”, the process of government, nuances of meaning apply. **These nuances very closely relate to the meaning of the English word “justice”**. Four aspects of “governing” are identified:

1. **Religious practice**: Israel was by definition a “theocratic nation”; therefore, the practice of the worship of YWHW was a critical aspect of national life. The “governance” of religious practice is extended in the wisdom literature and the prophets into broad principles applicable to all True Worshippers at all times.
2. **Social justice**: fundamental to all teaching of God is fairness and impartiality for all persons. The proscriptions and prescriptions concerning “social justice” are applicable to all societies over all times.¹³
3. **Criminal justice**: the proscriptions and prescriptions applicable to Israelite “criminal justice” provide a basis for all criminal justice in all human societies.
4. **Exercise of government**: the “exercise of government” in Isarel varied from the time of the Judges to the period of the Kings, but the principles remained the same. The principles of governing apply to God’s implicit government of all humanity in historic times and to the actual government of the world to be enacted by the Kingdom of God.¹⁴

¹³ See **Excursus – Analysis of Social Justice**

¹⁴ See section **2.3.5 The Kingdom of God** in the paper “Second Pillar - The Plan of God” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

3.1 Religious Practice

Religious practice for the nation of Israel pertained to all aspects of the corporate worship of God.

In particular, the temple service and the sacrificial system were carefully included in mish^epat related to "governance". Nevertheless, God intended for each individual Israelite to have an active personal relationship with God.

In terms of "religious practice", mish^epat focuses on the relationship between God and man – both individually and corporately. The definition of the relationship is according to mish^epat. The exercise of the relationship is according to mish^epat. God always acts according to mish^epat. Man must strive to attain mish^epat.

3.1.1 The Writings of Moses

The garment of the High Priest included a "breastpiece", as shown in the diagram. The breastpiece was highly symbolic as well as functional. It is called the "breastpiece of mish^epat". The twelve stones on the front represented the twelve tribes of Israel:

You shall make a breastpiece of [mish^epat], in skilled work.

In the style of the ephod you shall make it—of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen shall you make it.

There shall be twelve stones with their names according to the names of the sons of Israel.

They shall be like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes.

(Exodus 28:15, 21 ESV)

The breastpiece represented the whole nation of Israel composed of the twelve tribes. When the High Priest performed his duties before God, he was preforming on behalf of the whole nation. The sacrifices he performed were on behalf of the whole nation. In this, the High Priest foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ on behalf of all humanity:

So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of [mish^epat] on his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, to bring them to regular remembrance before [YHWH].

And in the breastpiece of [mish^epat] you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron's heart, when he goes in before [YHWH].

Thus Aaron shall bear the [mish^epat] of the people of Israel on his heart before [YHWH] regularly.

(Exodus 28:29-30 ESV)

The breastpiece is associated with the heart to symbolize sincerity and commitment:

You shall love [YHWH] your God with all your heart
and with all your [mind] (nephesh)¹⁵
and with all your might.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

And now, Israel,
what does [YHWH] your God require of you,
but to fear [YHWH] your God,

The High Priest's Holy Garments

The illustration depicts the holy garments worn by the high priests (Exodus 28; 39).

The *turban* of fine linen held a plate of pure shining gold, on which were engraved the Hebrew words for "Holy to YHWH."

The *ephod* (a colorful linen torso garment held by a skillfully woven waistband) had two shoulder pieces, each holding an onyx stone. The names of the 12 sons of Israel were engraved on these two stones. The cloth *breastpiece of judgment* had four rows, each with three precious stones. Each of these stones had engraved upon it the name of one of the tribes of Israel. The breastpiece also contained the Urim and the Thummim, and was attached to the ephod by gold chains and rings. The blue *robe* was worn under the ephod (Lev. 8:7-8); colorful imitation pomegranates lined the hem of the robe, alternating with golden bells. The white *coat* or tunic of checkered weave and fine linen was probably held by the embroidered sash under the robe.



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¹⁵ The Hebrew word, נֶפֶשׁ - nephesh, and the Greek word, ψυχή - psyche, are both correctly translated by the English word "soul". However, the English word "soul" has been rendered an unusable word due to the implication of the pagan concept of the "immortal soul". Hence, in this paper, a more meaningful word is substituted. The most general word is "being", but more specific words such as "mind", "heart", "life" are also used. For further discussion, see *Excursus 2 - נֶפֶשׁ and ψυχή* in the paper "The Transfiguration and the Tabernacle" located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca.

to walk in all his ways, to love him,
to serve [YHWH] your God with all your heart and with all your [mind] (nephesh),
and to keep the commandments and statutes of [YHWH],
which I am commanding you today for your good?
Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.
(Deuteronomy 6:5-6, 10:12-13, 16 ESV)

The Urim and Thummim were in the breastpiece, next to the heart, as they were to be used in sincerity and truth to obtain from God decisions:

So [YHWH] said to Moses,
“Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him.
Make him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation,
and you shall commission him in their sight.
You shall invest him with some of your authority,
that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey.
And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest,
who shall inquire for him by the [mish^epat] of the Urim before [YHWH]. ...”
(Numbers 27:18-21a ESV)

The “breastpiece of mish^epat” was central to the role of the High Priest. Through it, the High Priest represented the people before God. The “breastpiece” was next to the heart as God requires of the commitment of every True Worshipper. The Urim and Thummim, in the “breastpiece”, provided direct communication with God. This foundation of “sincerity”, “commitment”, and “truth”, defines the meaning of “mish^epat” with respect to religious practice.

The Israelites were at Horeb for about one year while they constructed the Tabernacle. Then they traveled to the Wilderness of Paran and camped at Kadesh-barnea.¹⁶ From there, Moses sent the spies into the Promised Land. The spies brought back an evil report and the people rebelled.¹⁷

As punishment, God pronounced the death sentence on the men of the Exodus Generation:

And [YHWH] spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying,
“How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me?
I have heard the grumblings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me.
Say to them,
‘As I live, declares [YHWH],
what you have said in my hearing I will do to you:
your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness,
and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward,
who have grumbled against me,
not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell ...”
(Numbers 14:26-30a ESV)

Immediately after this incident, the Book of Numbers reports God reiterating his promise that Israel would enter the Promised Land. This reiteration of the promise is included at this point to assure the Israelites that God is faithful to his promise. Despite the punishment of the Exodus Generation, Israel will enter the Promised Land. Next, God provides the Israelites some instruction on offerings and how to repair the damaged covenant relationship. This instruction provides further insight into the meaning of mish^epat:

[YHWH] spoke to Moses, saying,
“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them,
When you come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving you,
and you offer to [YHWH] from the herd or from the flock a fire offering,
or a burnt offering or a sacrifice,
to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or at your appointed feasts,
to make a pleasing aroma to [YHWH] ...”
(Numbers 15:1-3 ESV)

And if a stranger is sojourning with you, or anyone is living permanently among you,
and he wishes to offer a fire offering, with a pleasing aroma to [YHWH], he shall do as you do.

¹⁶ See Numbers 10:11-12

¹⁷ See Numbers chapters 13 and 14

For the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you, a statute forever throughout your generations.

You and the sojourner shall be alike before [YHWH].

One [torah]¹⁸ and one [mish^epat] shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you."

(Numbers 15:14-16 ESV)

Similar provisions had already been given for **a stranger to participate in the Passover**:

And if a stranger sojourns among you and would keep the Passover to [YHWH],
according to the statute of the Passover and according to its [mish^epat], so shall he do.

You shall have one statute, both for the sojourner and for the native.

(Numbers 9:14 ESV)

The first point is that **God is completely impartial**, he makes no distinction between persons, "**you and the sojourner shall be alike**", "**you shall have one statute**". Complete fairness is fundamental to the meaning of **mish^epat**. **When sin does occur**, the attitude of the sinner and the proper presentation of the offering are paramount:

But **if you sin unintentionally**,

and do not observe all these commandments that [YHWH] has spoken to Moses, all that [YHWH] has commanded you by Moses, from the day that [YHWH] gave commandment, and onward throughout your generations, then if it was done unintentionally without the knowledge of the congregation, all the congregation shall offer one bull from the herd for a burnt offering, a pleasing aroma to [YHWH], with its grain offering and its drink offering, **according to the [mish^epat]**, and one male goat for a sin offering.

And **the priest shall make atonement** for all the congregation of the people of Israel, and **they shall be forgiven** ...

(Numbers 15:22-25a ESV)

The second point is that offerings are to be given "**according to the mish^epat**". In order for God to accept an offering, it must be presented in a **correct way both attitudinally and technically**, "**the priest shall make atonement**", "**they shall be forgiven**".

The **Song of Moses**, Deuteronomy chapter 32, recounts, in verses 1-18, God's dealings with Israel until the Golden Calf incident.¹⁹ Then starting in verse 19, **Moses reports the direct words of YHWH**.

God reiterates his right to administer **vengeance** on the wicked, but also his **mercy** on those he elects. God is emphatic that his vengeance is **administered with mish^epat**:

Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.

For [YHWH] will vindicate his people and have **compassion on his servants** ...

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me;

I kill and I make alive;

I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.

For I lift up my hand to heaven and swear,

As I live forever,

if I sharpen my flashing sword and **my hand takes hold on [mish^epat]**,

I will take vengeance on my adversaries and will repay those who hate me.

(Deuteronomy 32:35-36a, 39-41 ESV)

In the Writings of Moses, religious practice with respect to **mish^epat** is very much concerned with corporate issues, such as: the attire of the High Priest, the Urim and Thummim, the role of the High Priest on behalf of the nation, congregational sin. However, religious practice with respect to **mish^epat** is also personal for each and every individual. Each person was to learn to "**love YHWH your God with all your heart**". God is completely impartial with regards to persons, "**one torah and one mish^epat shall be for you and for the stranger**".

¹⁸ The Hebrew word תֹּרַה - torah, means "teaching", "instruction", "direction". There is almost no overlap of meaning with the English word "law"; hence, in this paper the transliteration is always used. For further discussion, see *Excursus 3 - torah* and *Excursus 5 - torah and nomos* in the paper "**Covenants of Grace**" located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca.

¹⁹ See Exodus chapter 32

3.1.2 Historic Books

At the dedication of the Temple, the **Book of First Kings** reports a long dedicatory prayer of Solomon. **Solomon** **prays** for God's blessing in battle and for forgiveness of the people upon repentance. **Solomon** **ties his requests to God's dealing with Israel according to mish^epat**:

If your people go out to battle against their enemy, by whatever way you shall send them, and they pray to [YHWH] toward the city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, then **hear in heaven their prayer** and their plea, **and [do] ('asah) their [mish^epat]**.

If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near, yet **if they turn their heart** in the land to which they have been carried captive, **and repent** and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, 'We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly,'

if they repent with all their heart and with all their [mind] (nephesh)²⁰ in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, **then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer** and their plea, **and [do] ('asah) their [mish^epat]** and **forgive your people** who have sinned against you ...

(1 Kings 8:44-50a ESV // 2 Chronicles 6:34-39)

Let these words of mine, with which I have pleaded before [YHWH], be near to [YHWH] our God day and night, and **may he [do] ('asah) [mish^epat] of his servant and [mish^epat] of his people Israel**, as each day requires, that all the peoples of the earth may know that [YHWH] is God; there is no other.

(1 Kings 8:59-60 ESV)

The usage of mish^epat by Solomon is in the context of religious practice, conducting holy war, **"your people go out to battle"**, sin and repentance, **"if they sin against you"**, **"if they repent with all their heart"**, and serving God, **"his servant"**, **"his people Israel"**. When the people are rightly serving God, Solomon implores God to support the people, to respond to their prayer, **"hear in heaven their prayer"**, and **"do their mish^epat"**. Solomon implores God to apply his loving justice to the situation of the people. This embodies **the whole relationship between the people and God**.

3.1.3 The Wisdom Literature

A major theme of the **Book of Job** is Job's desire to present his "case" to God. **Job feels his plight is unfair and if God would give him an audience, he could convince God of his righteousness**.

Job begins to develop his position in his first response to **Eliphaz**:

Then **Job** answered and said:

"Oh that my vexation were weighed,
and all my calamity laid in the balances!

Please turn; **let no injustice ('aw^elah) be done**.

Turn now; my vindication (tzedeq) is at stake.

Is there any injustice ('aw^elah) on my tongue?

If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of mankind?

Why have you made me your mark?

Why have I become a burden to you?

Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? ..."

(Job 6:1-2, 29-30a, 7:20-21a ESV)

²⁰ See footnote 15

After Job's speech, **Bildad** recognizes where Job is going and challenges Job with accusing God of "**perverting mish^epat**":

Then **Bildad** the Shuhite answered and said:

"How long will you say these things,
and the words of your mouth be a great wind?

Does God pervert [mish^epat]?

Or does the Almighty pervert the right (tzedeq)? ..."

(Job 8:1-3 ESV)

Clearly **mish^epat** is tied to the personal relationship between God and a True Worshipper. Job feels his plight is unfair; **Bildad accuses Job of questioning God's side of the relationship**. After this, Job wonders out loud whether or NOT it would be possible to bring his "case" to God:

How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him?

Though I am in the right (tzadeq), I cannot answer him;
I must appeal for mercy to my accuser (shaphat).

If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty!

If it is a matter of [mish^epat], who can summon him?

Though I am in the right (tzadeq), my own mouth would condemn me;
though I am blameless (tam), he would prove me perverse.

For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him,
that we should come to [mish^epat] together.

(Job 9:14-15, 19-20, 32 ESV)

Then, **Job becomes convinced of the validity of his "case"** and of his ability to convince God:

This will be my salvation, that the godless shall not come before him.

Keep listening to my words, and let my declaration be in your ears.

Behold, **I have prepared my [mish^epat]**:

I know that I shall be in the right (tzadeq).

Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!

I would lay my [mish^epat] before him and fill my mouth with arguments.

I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me.

Would he contend (riv) with me in the greatness of his power?

No; **he would pay attention to me**.

There an upright (yashar) man could argue with him,
and **I would be acquitted** forever by my judge (shaphat).

(Job 13:16-18, 23:3-7 ESV)

Job's "case" revolves around his perceived notion that he is being unjustly treated by God.

Job rightly believes himself to be "blameless"; therefore, his suffering is unjust. Job feels that he could attain justice from God, if only he could present his "case" directly to God. As the theme develops,

Eliphaz challenges Job, and Job begins to question his chances of success:

Then **Eliphaz** the Temanite answered and said:

Can a man be profitable to God?

Surely he who is wise is profitable to himself.

Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are in the right (tzadeq),
or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless (tamam)?

Is it for your fear of him that **he reproves you and enters into [mish^epat] with you?**

Is not your evil abundant?

There is no end to your iniquities.

(Job 22:1-5 ESV)

How many are my iniquities and my sins?

Make me know my transgression and my sin.

Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy?

And do you open your eyes on such a one and **bring me into [mish^epat] with you?**

... know then that God has put me in the wrong and closed his net about me.

Behold, I cry out, 'Violence!' but I am not answered;

I call for help, but **there is no [mish^epat]**.

As God lives, who has taken away my [mish^epat],
and the Almighty, who has made my [life] (nephesh)²¹ bitter,
as long as my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils,
my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit.
(Job 13:23-24, 14:3, 19:6-7, 27:2-4 ESV)

Eliphaz wrongly accuses Job of grievous sin, “Is not your evil abundant”, for which God is justly punishing him “he reproves you and enters into mish^epat with you”. Job maintains his integrity, “my lips will not speak falsehood”, “there is no mish^epat”. Job is convinced that God is wrongly applying punishment to him, “bring me into mish^epat”, “taken away my mish^epat”.

Finally, the young Sage, Elihu, has the last word, pointing out the futility of Job’s “case”:

Then Elihu answered and said:

“Hear my words, you wise men, and give ear to me, you who know;
for the ear tests words as the palate tastes food.

Let us choose what is [mish^epat]:

let us know among ourselves what is good (tov).

For Job has said,

‘I am in the right (tzadeq),
and God has taken away my [mish^epat];
in spite of my [mish^epat] I am counted a liar;
my wound is incurable, though I am without transgression.’

Of a truth, God will not do wickedly, and the Almighty will not pervert [mish^epat].

For God has no need to consider a man further,
that he should go before God in [mish^epat]. ...”

(Job 34:1-6, 12, 23 ESV)

Elihu rightly takes God’s perspective regarding justice, “let us choose what is mish^epat”. Job’s “case” has no merit because “the Almighty will not pervert mish^epat”. God’s justice is inherent. It is futile for a person to “go before God in mish^epat”. A person’s relationship with God must be on God’s terms. God is inherently right – human beings can only participate in the relationship as God allows.

The various forms of mish^epat occur 64 time in the Psalms and another 26 times in the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The following instances use mish^epat related to religious practice. The parallelism between mish^epat and the other words within the same semantic range is striking.

First from Davidic Psalms:

- David importunes God for “justice” from enemies:

Arise, [YHWH], in your anger;
lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies;
awake for me; you have appointed [mish^epat].

[YHWH] judges (din) the peoples;
judge (shaphat) me, [YHWH], according to my righteousness (tzedeq)
and according to the integrity (tom) that is in me.
(Psalm 7:6, 8 ESV)

When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish before your presence.

For you have [done] (‘asah) my [mish^epat] [even my]²² cause (din);
you have sat on the throne, giving righteous (tzedeq) judgment (shaphat).

But [YHWH] sits enthroned forever;
he has established his throne for [mish^epat],
and he judges (shaphat) the world with righteousness (tzedeq);
he judges (din) the peoples with uprightness (mesharim).

[YHWH] has made himself known;
he has [done] (‘asah) [mish^epat];
the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands.
(Psalm 9:3-4, 7-8, 16 ESV)

²¹ See footnote 15

²² The Hebrew particle ֱ - waw, has several meanings. The most common is as a conjunction, “and”, “but”. Very importantly to be distinguished is when it identifies “apposition” – in these cases, this paper substitutes “even”.

- David prays for personal “justice” from God:

Hear a just cause (tzedeq), [YHWH]; attend to my cry!
 Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit!
From your presence let my [mish^epat] come!
 Let your eyes behold the right (mesharim)!
 (Psalm 17:1-2 ESV)

You have seen, [YHWH]; be not silent!
 O Lord, be not far from me!
Awake and rouse yourself for my [mish^epat],
 for my cause (riv), my God and my Lord!
 Vindicate (shaphat) me, [YHWH], my God,
 according to your righteousness (tzedeq),
 and let them not rejoice over me!
 (Psalm 35:22-24 ESV)

Hear my prayer, [YHWH];
 give ear to my pleas for mercy!
 In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness (tz^edaqah)!
Enter not into [mish^epat] with your servant,
 for no one living is righteous (tzadeq) before you.
 (Psalm 143:1-2 ESV)

- David expresses confidence that God will treat True Worshippers with “justice”:

I know that [YHWH] will [do] ('asah) the cause (din) of the afflicted,
 and {will execute}²³ **[mish^epat] for the needy.**
 Surely the righteous (tzadiq) shall give thanks to your name;
 the upright (yashar) shall dwell in your presence.
 (Psalm 140:12-13 ESV)

Similar instances occur in the non-Davidic Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes:

- **The latter Psalmists** express confidence in the “justice” of God both to deal with the “wicked” and with True Worshippers:

The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
 Therefore **the wicked will not stand in the [mish^epat],**
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous (tzaddiq);
 for [YHWH] knows the way of the righteous (tzaddiq),
 but the way of the wicked will perish.
 (Psalm 1:4-6 ESV)

But you, you are to be feared!
 Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused?
 From the heavens you uttered judgment (din);
 the earth feared and was still,
when God arose to {establish}²⁴ **[mish^epat],**
 to save all the humble of the earth.
 (Psalm 76:7-9 ESV)
- **The Sages** contrast “justice” under good government with evil perpetrated by the wicked in power:

When [mish^epat] is done ('asah),
 it is a joy to the righteous (tzaddiq) but terror to evildoers.
Evil men do not understand [mish^epat],
 but those who seek [YHWH] understand it completely.
 (Proverbs 21:15, 28:5 ESV)

When the righteous (tzaddiq) increase, the people rejoice,
 but when the wicked rule, the people groan.
By [mish^epat] a king builds up the land,
 but he who exacts gifts tears it down.

²³ These words are supplied by the translator; there is no corresponding Hebrew.

²⁴ This word is supplied by translator.

An evil man is ensnared in his transgression,
but a righteous (tzaddiq) man sings and rejoices.
A righteous (tzaddiq) man knows the rights (din) of the poor;
a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.
(Proverbs 29:2, 4, 6-7 ESV)

- **The Preacher** summarizes God's "justice" as his evaluation of a person's deeds throughout life:

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.
Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes.
But know that **for all these things God will bring you into [mish^epat]**.
(Ecclesiastes 11:9 ESV)

The end of the matter; all has been heard.
Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.
For God will bring every deed into [mish^epat], with every secret thing, whether good or evil.
(Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 ESV)

In the Book of Job, **mish^epat** is at the heart of the relationship between God and Job. Job is certain of his righteousness, "**my lips will not speak falsehood**", and believes he can present it to God, "**I would lay my mish^epat before him**". But Elihu has the clearer understanding of how the relationship works, "**the Almighty will not pervert mish^epat**". In the end, Job comes to an understanding of the relationship:

Then Job answered [YHWH] and said:
"I know that you can do all things,
and that **no purpose of yours can be thwarted**.
I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;
therefore **I despise myself**, and **repent in dust and ashes**."
(Job 42:1-2, 5-6 ESV)

Throughout Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, the relationship of the authors with God focuses on **mish^epat**. David prays for God to exercise his side of the relationship, "**awake and rouse yourself for my mish^epat**". A later Psalmist emphasizes God's relationship with True Worshippers "**when God arose to mish^epat to save all the humble of the earth**". A Sage acknowledges the need in a ruler, "**by mish^epat a king builds up the land**". The Preacher summarizes the relationship, "**for all these things God will bring you into mish^epat**".

3.1.4 Prophetic Books

From a religious perspective, the various prophets cover a range of nuances of meaning of **mish^epat** as it applies to "justice". First, God's wrath is expressed, as **mish^epat, for the sins of nations and individuals**. Unrepented sin is the ultimate fracturing of the relationship between God and man:

Draw near, O nations, to hear, and give attention, O peoples!
Let the earth hear, and all that fills it;
the world, and all that comes from it.
For **[YHWH] is enraged against all the nations**, and furious against all their host;
he has devoted them to destruction, has given them over for slaughter.

For **my sword** has drunk its fill in the heavens;
behold, it **descends for [mish^epat]** upon Edom,²⁵
upon the people I have devoted to destruction.
(Isaiah 34:1-2, 5 ESV)

Moab is put to shame, for it is broken; wail and cry!
Tell it beside the Arnon, that Moab is laid waste.

[mish^epat] has come upon the tableland,
upon Holon, and Jahzah, and Mephaath, and Dibon, and Nebo, and Beth-diblathaim,
and Kiriaathaim, and Beth-gamul, and Beth-meon, and Kerioth, and Bozrah,
and all the cities of the land of Moab, far and near.

The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, declares [YHWH].

Thus far is the [mish^epat] on Moab.
(Jeremiah 48:20-25, 47b ESV)

²⁵ Edom is here used as "type" of the nations.

Hear this, O priests!
Pay attention, O house of Israel!
Give ear, O house of the king!

For **the [mish^epat] is for you**;
for you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread upon Tabor.
And the revolters have gone deep into slaughter, but **I will discipline all of them**.
(Hosea 5:1-2 ESV)

Ephraim shall become a desolation in the **day of punishment**;
among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure.

The princes of Judah have become like those who move the landmark;
upon them **I will pour out my wrath** like water.

Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in [mish^epat],
because he was determined to go after filth.

But I am like a moth to Ephraim, and like dry rot to the house of Judah.
(Hosea 5:9-12 ESV)

Babylon is sited for punishment because of her "**mish^epat**", which is used sarcastically implying corruption of "**mish^epat**":

Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken; wail for her!
Take balm for her pain; perhaps she may be healed.
We would have healed Babylon, but she was not healed.
Forsake her, and let us go each to his own country,
for **her [mish^epat] has reached up to heaven** and has been lifted up even to the skies.
[YHWH] has brought about our vindication (tz^edaqah);
come, let us declare in Zion the work of [YHWH] our God.
(Jeremiah 51:8-10 ESV)

The **Prophet Hosea** compares **corrupted mish^epat** to poisonous weeds:

For now they will say:
"We have no king,
for we do not fear [YHWH];
and a king—what could he do for us?"

They utter mere words; with empty oaths they [cut] (karath)²⁶ covenants;
so **[mish^epat] springs up like poisonous weeds** in the furrows of the field.
(Hosea 10:3-4 ESV)

The **Prophet Habakkuk** is bewildered by God's use of Babylon to administer **mish^epat** to punish Isreal:

Are you not from everlasting, [YHWH] my God, my Holy One?
We shall not die.²⁷
[YHWH], **you have ordained them as [mish^epat]**,
and you, O Rock, have **established them for reproof**.
You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong,
why do you idly look at traitors
and remain silent when the wicked swallows up
the man more righteous (tzaddiq) than he?
(Habakkuk 1:12-13 ESV)

God's deals with **True Worshippers** with **mish^epat** as **the basis of the relationship**:

And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy,
everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem,
when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion
and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst
by a spirit of [mish^epat] and **by a spirit of burning**.
(Isaiah 4:3-4 ESV)

If anyone stirs up strife, it is not from me;
whoever stirs up strife with you shall fall because of you.

Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals
and produces a weapon for its purpose.
I have also created the ravager to destroy;

²⁶ The Hebrew קָרַת - karath, "to cut", is the technical term for creating a "new covenant", see TWOT pages 456-457.

²⁷ The Hebrew is לֹא נָמַת - lo namuth, literally "not we shall die"; perhaps better posed as a question "**shall we not die?**"

no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed,
and **you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in [mish^epat]**.

This is the heritage of the servants of [YHWH]
and their vindication (tz^edaqah) from me, declares [YHWH].
(Isaiah 54:15-17 ESV)

Rejoice not over me, O my enemy;
when I fall, I shall rise;
when I sit in darkness, [YHWH] will be a light to me.

I will bear the indignation of [YHWH] because I have sinned against him,
until **he pleads my cause (riv)** and **[does] (`asah) [mish^epat] for me**.
He will bring me out to the light;
I shall look upon his vindication (tz^edaqah).
(Micah 7:8-9 ESV)

The **Prophet Isaiah** and the **Prophet Ezekiel** look to the World Tomorrow when God teaches the nations the Way of God. All nations, all people, will learn **the true relationship with God based on mish^epat**:

Listen to me in silence, O coastlands;
let the peoples renew their strength;
let them approach, then let them speak;
let us together **draw near for [mish^epat]**.
(Isaiah 41:1 ESV)

Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation;
for [torah]²⁸ will go out from me,
and **I will set my [mish^epat] for a light to the peoples**.

My righteousness (tzedeq) draws near,
my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge (shaphat) the peoples;
the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait.
(Isaiah 51:4-5 ESV)

And I will set my glory among the nations,
and **all the nations shall see my [mish^epat] that I have [done] (`asah)**,
and my hand that I have laid on them.

The house of Israel shall know that I am [YHWH] their God, from that day forward.
(Ezekiel 39:21-22 ESV)

The various prophets all see **mish^epat** as central to the relationship God requires with humanity. Nations and individuals are punished for violating the required relationship. Corruption of the relationship is castigated. True Worshippers are required to display **mish^epat** in their relationship with God. In the World Tomorrow, God will ensure that nations and individuals understand **mish^epat** as the basis of the required relationship with God.

3.2 Social Justice

The Bible is the standard by which nations should design their Social Justice systems and processes.

The Bible contains the right balance between **caring for others** and **requiring personal responsibility**.

Socialism is the curse of the modern world – governments thinking they can take over facets of life which should be left strictly to personal responsibility. If the provisions in the Bible were understood and followed, we would have true Social Justice. Social Justice is defined in the statutes and other provisions contained in the Writings of Moses.²⁹ These provisions are analyzed in **Excursus – Analysis of Social Justice**. The meaning of **mish^epat** in the context of Social Justice is tied to the relationships among persons and among groups in society.

²⁸ See footnote 18

²⁹ See section **3.4.1.2 The Covenant Code and Other Statutes** in the paper “**Third Pillar - The Way of God**” and **Excursus 4- Statutes and Ancient Law Codes** in the paper “**The Writings of Moses**”; both papers are available at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

3.2.1 The Writings of Moses

Much of the **Covenant Code**, as well as the other collections of statutes, comprises statutes concerning social justice.³⁰ These are summarized using ***mish^epat*** in a statute of the Covenant Code and two similar statutes in the **Book of Deuteronomy**:

You shall not pervert the [mish^epat] due to your poor in his lawsuit (riv).

Keep far from a false charge,
and do not kill the innocent and righteous (tzadiq),
for I will not acquit the wicked.
And you shall take no bribe,
for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right (tzadiq).
You shall not oppress a sojourner.
You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.
(Exodus 23:6-9 ESV)

You shall not pervert the [mish^epat] due to the sojourner or to the fatherless

or take a widow's garment in pledge,
but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt
and [YHWH] your God redeemed you from there;
therefore I command you to do this.

Cursed be anyone who perverts the [mish^epat] due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.'

(Deuteronomy 24:17-18, 27:19a ESV)

Just from these brief quotations some important characteristic of Social Justice³¹ are identified:

- **"mish^epat"** is identified with Social Justice
- The focus of Social Justice is to prevent those in advantaged positions, from **taking advantage of others who are NOT able to fend for themselves**, **"your poor"**, **"the sojourner"**, **"the fatherless"**, **"the widow"**
- Violations of Social Justice are common in formal legal proceedings, **"pervert the mish^epat due to your poor in his lawsuit"**, "a false charge", "acquit the wicked", "kill the innocent"
- **Bribery is a root cause of corruption**, "take no bribe", "a bribe blinds the clear-sighted"
- **Corruption disrupts the social order**, "subverts the cause of those who are in the right"

3.2.2 The Wisdom Literature

Throughout the Wisdom Literature, Social Justice is a main theme. **The theme of Social Justice is tied to mish^epat in the following passages:**

- **Job has been accused of gross social injustice by Eliphaz.**³² Job protests his innocence. The words translated "manservant" and "maidservant" are better translated as "slave" and "female slave".³³ **Job asserts that he has honoured God's teaching and extended Social Justice even to persons in the lowest strata of society:**

If I have rejected the [mish^epat] of my manservant or my maidservant,
when they brought a complaint against me,
what then shall I do when God rises up?
When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him?
(Job 31:13-14 ESV)

³⁰ See the discussion of statutes in section [6.1.2 Obey My Voice](#) and the relationship with *mish^epatim* in section [6.3 Statutes and mish^epatim](#)

³¹ For further discussion see [Excursus – Analysis of Social Justice](#)

³² See Job 22:6-9

³³ תַּדְעַת - 'eved, slave, see Holladay page 262; נָמָת - 'amah, female slave, see Holladay page 19

- **Elihu rightly tries to help Job see the true nature of God.** He points out the impartiality of God, “**does not despise any**”, but God will not support the “wicked”. However, God does see that True Worshippers receive justice, “**gives the afflicted their mish^epat**”:

Behold, **God** is mighty, and **does not despise any**
 he is mighty in strength of understanding.
 He does not keep the wicked alive,
 but **gives the afflicted³⁴ their [mish^epat]**.
 (Job 36:5-6 ESV)
- In stanza ၂, KAPH, of the **119th Psalm**, **the Psalmist pleads with God for justice from persecutors**:

My [being] (nephesh)³⁵ longs for your salvation; I hope in your word.
 My eyes long for your promise;
 I ask,
 “When will you comfort me?”
 For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke,
 yet I have not forgotten your statutes.
 How long must your servant endure?
When will you [do] ('asah) [mish^epat to] those who persecute me?
 (Psalm 119:81-84 ESV)
- **Psalm 146** is a **הָלְלָה יְהָה** - hal^elu yah, “praise YHWH”, Psalm. The Psalmist extols God for administering justice to the oppressed:

Blessed is he whose help is **the God of Jacob**,
 whose hope is in [YHWH] his God,
 who made heaven and earth,
 the sea, and all that is in them,
 who keeps faith forever;
who [does] ('asah) [mish^epat] for the oppressed,
 who gives food to the hungry.
 (Psalm 146:5-7 ESV)
- **The Sages** contrast the potential of the “poor”, which is **lost through lack of justice**, with great **wealth gained by means which lack justice**:

The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food,
 but it is swept away through **[not mish^epat]**.
Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with [not mish^epat].
 (Proverbs 13:23, 16:8 ESV)

God watches out for the disadvantaged, “**gives the afflicted their mish^epat**”, “**does mish^epat for the oppressed**”. God hears their pleas, “**when will you do mish^epat to those who persecute me**”. Those in positions of advantage, need to watch out for the disadvantaged, “**if I have rejected the mish^epat of my manservant or my maidservant**”. Wealth gained by corruption will prove worthless, “**better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with not mish^epat**”.

3.2.3 Prophetic Books

While the Wisdom Literature tends to deal with Social Justice as an abstract concept, **the Prophets are nearly always specific to the sins of Israel**. Lack of Social Justice was symptomatic of the apostacy of Israel. As with Western Civilization today, when the people cease to have reverence for God, lack of Social Justice becomes rife.

In the introductory chapter of his book, the **Prophet Isaiah**, reports YHWH’s words calling the people to repentance. The focus of the call is **lack of Social Justice manifest in oppression**:

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes;
 cease to do evil, learn to do good;
seek [mish^epat], correct oppression;

³⁴ The adjective, **עֲנוֹן** - 'ani, is frequently used in the sense of being contrite, i.e., a True Worshipper; see the discussion in section **5.2 The Human Condition** in the paper “**David – A Man After My Own Heart**” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca.

³⁵ See footnote **15**

bring justice (shaphat) to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.
(Isaiah 1:16-17 ESV)

Looking to the establishment of the Kingdom of God,³⁶ **Isaiah identifies those who practice oppression as fools and scoundrels.** They will NOT be tolerated; there will be Social Justice:

The **fool** will no more be called noble,
nor the **scoundrel** said to be honorable.

For the **fool** speaks folly, and his heart is busy with iniquity,
to practice ungodliness, to utter error concerning [YHWH],
to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied,
and to deprive the thirsty of drink.

As for the **scoundrel**—his devices are evil;
he plans wicked schemes to ruin the poor with lying words,
even **when the plea of the needy is [mish^epat]**.
(Isaiah 32:5-7 ESV)

The **Prophet Jeremiah** reports **YHWH's condemning the perpetrators of oppression as "wicked",** and liable to God's punishment:

For **wicked men are found among my people**;
they lurk like fowlers lying in wait.

They set a trap; they catch men.
Like a cage full of birds, their houses are full of deceit;
therefore they have become great and rich; they have grown fat and sleek.

They know no bounds in deeds of evil;
they judge (din) not with justice (din) the cause (din) of the fatherless, to make it prosper,
and **they do not defend (shaphat) the [mish^epat] of the needy.**
(Jeremiah 5:26-28 ESV)

Isaiah establishes the fact that it is **corrupt leaders** taking advantage of their position for personal gain that causes oppression and general lack of Social Justice. They promulgate legislation, "**decree iniquitous decrees**", for their own advantage, "**to rob the poor of my people of mish^epat**". God will hold them to account, "**YHWH will enter into mish^epat with the elders and princes**":

Woe to those **who decree iniquitous decrees**,
and the writers who keep writing oppression,
to turn aside the needy from justice (din)
and **to rob the poor of my people of [mish^epat]**,
that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey!
(Isaiah 10:1-2 ESV)

[YHWH] has taken his place to contend (riv); he stands to judge (din) peoples.
[YHWH] will enter into [mish^epat] with the elders and princes of his people:

"It is you who have devoured the vineyard,
the spoil of the poor is in your houses.

What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?"
declares the Lord [YHWH] of hosts.
(Isaiah 3:13-15 ESV)

The **Prophet Jeremiah** frequently uses **juxtaposition to make a point**. In the first four verses of chapter 17, Jeremiah quotes YHWH's punishment of exile to be imposed on Israel. Then in verses 5 and 6, YHWH identifies the cause of the nation's problem, **believing the lies of corrupt leaders**, "**cursed is the man who trusts in man**" :

Thus says [YHWH]:

Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength,
whose heart turns away from [YHWH].

He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come.

He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. ..."

(Jeremiah 17:5-6 ESV)

In juxtaposition, Jeremiah then cites, in verses 7-8, a blessing on a person who trusts YHWH and lives by his Way, "**blessed is the man who trusts in YHWH**". Following this, Jeremiah states the cause of the problem, "**the heart is deceitful above all things**". **People are easily taken in by the lies of**

³⁶ See footnote 14

corrupt leaders. The motivation of corrupt leaders is manifest in **greed which violates all Social Justice**,

"so is he who gets riches but not by mish^epat":

- (7) **Blessed is the man who trusts in [YHWH]**, whose trust is [YHWH].
- (8) He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.
- (9) **The heart is deceitful above all things**, and desperately sick; who can understand it?
- (10) I, [YHWH], search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.
- (11) **Like the partridge that gathers a brood that she did not hatch,**
so is he who gets riches but not by [mish^epat];
in the midst of his days they will leave him, and at his end he will be a fool.

(Jeremiah 17:7-11 ESV)

In chapter 22, Jeremiah explicitly identifies **Jehoiakim**³⁷ as an example of **corrupt leadership**, in contrast with his father **Josiah** who **ruled with Social Justice**:

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness (lo tzedeq),
and **his upper rooms by [not mish^epat]**,
who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing and does not give him his wages, who says,
'I will build myself a great house with spacious upper rooms,'
who cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar and painting it with vermilion.
Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar?
Did not your father³⁸ **eat and drink and do [mish^epat]** and righteousness (tz^edaqah)?
Then it was well with him.
He judged (din) the cause (din) of the poor and needy; then it was well.
Is not this to know me? declares [YHWH].
But you have eyes and heart only for your dishonest gain,
for shedding innocent blood, and for **practicing oppression and violence**.
(Jeremiah 22:13-17 ESV)

The **Prophet Ezekiel** reports YHWH's message identifying the same problem of **corrupt leaders feeding the people lies and corrupting them resulting in lack of social justice**:

Her **princes** in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain.
And her **prophets** have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and **divining lies** for them, saying,
'Thus says the Lord [YHWH]',
when [YHWH] has not spoken.
The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery.
They have **oppressed the poor and needy**, and have **extorted from the sojourner without [mish^epat]**.
(Ezekiel 22:27-29 ESV)

Adjuring the "**princes of Israel**" to proper Social Justice in the World Tomorrow, the **Prophet Ezekiel** reports the command of YHWH to "**do mish^epat and righteousness**":

Thus says the Lord [YHWH]:
Enough, **O princes of Israel!**
Put away violence and oppression,
and **[do] (‘asah) [mish^epat] and righteousness (tz^edaqah)**.
Cease your evictions of my people, declares the Lord [YHWH].
You shall have just balances, a just ephah, and a just bath.
The ephah and the bath shall be of the same measure,
the bath containing one tenth of a homer,
and the ephah one tenth of a homer;
the homer shall be the standard measure.
(Ezekiel 45:9-11 ESV)

³⁷ See verse 18

³⁸ Josiah

Isaiah chapter 61 contains **the Fifth Servant Song**, quoted by Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth.³⁹ In the synagogue, Jesus read only as far as the First Advent, “**the year of YHWH’s favour**” (verse 2a). Verse 2b refers to the **Day of YHWH**, the Second Advent, “**the day of vengeance of our God**”, and verse 2c looks to the establishment of the Kingdom of God,⁴⁰ “**comfort all who mourn**”. Verse 3a alludes to the First Resurrection,⁴¹ “**give them a beautiful headdress**”. The rest of the chapter deals with the Resurrected Saints working with the New Israel to create the World Tomorrow. In verse 8, “**them**” refers to the people of New Israel. **God expresses the fact that true Social Justice will be foundational to the World Tomorrow, “for I YHWH love mish^epat”**:

- (2a) ... **to proclaim the year of the [YHWH’s] favor**,
- (2b) and **the day of vengeance of our God**;
- (2c) **to comfort all who mourn**;
- (3a) to grant to those who mourn in Zion
—**to give them a beautiful headdress** instead of ashes,
- (8) **For I [YHWH] love [mish^epat]**;

I hate robbery and wrong;
I will faithfully give **them** their recompense,
and I will [cut] (karath)⁴² an everlasting covenant⁴³ with **them**.
(9) Their offspring shall be known among the nations,
and their descendants in the midst of the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge them,
that they are an offspring [YHWH] has blessed.

(Isaiah 61:2-3a, 8-9 ESV)

The **Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah** focus on “**oppression**” as the greatest sin of failed Social justice, “**seek mish^epat, correct oppression**”, “**they do not defend the mish^epat of the needy**”. Isaiah identifies the leaders, “**elders and princes**”, as the perpetrators of oppression. Jeremiah identifies it as a common failure of human nature, “**the heart is deceitful above all things**”, to trust in the lies of corrupt leaders, “**cursed is the man who trusts in man**”. The Prophet Ezekiel has even more scathing words for the “**princes**”, the “**prophets**” and even the “**people of the land**” who “**have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without mish^epat**”.

In Ancient Israel, as in Western Civilization today, it is the so called, “**leaders**”, of society who have caused the degeneration and the corruption. Today “**politicians**” are the most visible “leaders”, but the real culprits are the “**leftist elites**” who have hijacked the political and social agenda since the Second World War. God will soon put a stop to all the corruption. Looking to the World Tomorrow, Ezekiel reports the words of YHWH, “**O princes of Israel! Put away violence and oppression, and do mish^epat and righteousness**”. Isaiah quotes YHWH, “**For I, YHWH, love mish^epat, I hate robbery and wrong**”.

3.3 Criminal Justice

In modern Western Civilization, **Criminal Justice has become utterly corrupt**. Judges have no concern for justice but make decisions based on their political agenda. Lawyers have no concern for the truth but only how they can manipulate technicalities. Criminals are coddled and victims are stigmatized. Police have little concern for the law but only how to serve and protect themselves. **The Bible teaches that Criminal Justice must be based on only the truth**. What actually happened? Who did what? What was the motivation? Criminal Justice must be swift, and penalties must fit the crime.

³⁹ See Luke 4:16-19

⁴⁰ See footnote 14

⁴¹ See footnote 9

⁴² See footnote 26

⁴³ The New Covenant, see Jeremiah 31:31-34, 32:37-41, Ezekiel 11:17-19, 36:23-29, Luke 22:20; see also the discussion of these verses in **6.1.2 Obey My Voice**

3.3.1 The Writings of Moses

The Writings of Moses contain the definition of *mish^epat* with respect to Criminal Justice.

The objective of Criminal Justice is to determine the truth in a fair and impartial manner; and, based on that, pronounce punishment that fits the crime and is consistent for all cases.

This is the meaning of *mish^epat* in this context:

- ***mish^epat* must be determined in the same way for all persons:**

You shall do no injustice ('awel) in [mish^epat].

You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness (tzedeq) shall you judge (shaphat) your neighbor. (Leviticus 19:15 ESV)

Whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death. Whoever takes an animal's life shall make it good, life for life.

If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him.

Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, and whoever kills a person shall be put to death.

You shall have the same [mish^epat] for the sojourner and for the native,

for I am [YHWH] your God.

(Leviticus 24:17-22 ESV)

And I charged your judges (shaphat) at that time,

'Hear the cases between your brothers, and judge (shaphat) righteously (tzedeq) between a man and his brother or the alien who is with him.

You shall not be partial in [mish^epat].

You shall hear the small and the great alike.

You shall not be intimidated by anyone,

for **the [mish^epat] God's.**

And the case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.'

(Deuteronomy 1:16-17 ESV)

- ***mish^epat* cannot be susceptible to manipulation** by privilege, by special interest, or by bribery, and ***mish^epat* must be readily available** to all persons:

You shall appoint judges (shaphat) and officers in all your towns that [YHWH] your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and **they shall judge (shaphat) the people with righteous (tzedeq) [mish^epat].**

You shall not pervert [mish^epat].

You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous (tzadiq).

Justice (tzedeq), and only justice (tzedeq), you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that [YHWH] your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 16:18-20 ESV)

- **A rendered decision is final;** there is no further recourse:

If any difficult⁴⁴ case arises [for] [mish^epat] between

one kind of homicide and another,
one kind of legal (din) right (din) and another,
or one kind of assault and another,

any case (riv) within your towns that is too difficult for you, then you shall arise and go up to the place that [YHWH] your God will choose.

And you shall come to **the Levitical priests**

and to **the judge (shaphat)** who is in office in those days, and you shall consult them, and **they shall declare to you the [mish^epat].**

Then you shall do according to what they declare to you from that place that [YHWH] will choose. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they direct you.

According to the instructions that they give you,

and **according to the [mish^epat] which they pronounce to you, you shall do.**

⁴⁴ The verb, נָלַד pala', implies "difficult", see Holladay page 291.

You shall not turn aside from the verdict that they declare to you, either to the right hand or to the left.

The man who acts presumptuously by not obeying the priest who stands to minister there before [YHWH] your God, or the judge (shaphat), that man shall die.

So you shall purge the evil from Israel.
(Deuteronomy 17:8-12 ESV)

- Once a decision is rendered, **punishment is to be administered swiftly**:
If **there is a dispute (riv) between men and they come into [the mish^{pat}]** and the judges (shaphat) decide between them, acquitting (tzadeq) the innocent (tzadiq) and condemning the guilty, then if the guilty man deserves to be beaten, **the judge (shaphat) shall cause him to lie down** and **be beaten in his presence** with a number of stripes **in proportion to his offense**.
Forty stripes may be given him, but not more, lest, if one should go on to beat him with more stripes than these, your brother be degraded in your sight.
(Deuteronomy 25:1-3 ESV)

- Two or more witnesses are required; false witnesses cannot be tolerated**:
A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed.
Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.
If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute (riv) shall appear before [YHWH], before the priests and the judges (shaphat) who are in office in those days.
The judges (shaphat) shall inquire diligently, and **if the witness is a false witness** and has accused his brother falsely, then **you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother**.
So you shall purge the evil from your midst.
And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you.
Your eye shall not pity.
It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.
(Deuteronomy 19:15-21 ESV)⁴⁵

- In a case of "**accidental death**", following due process, **the killer may remain in refuge in a designated city**. If it is determined that the killing was NOT accidental, the killer is delivered for punishment:

And [YHWH] spoke to Moses, saying,
"Speak to the people of Israel and say to them,
When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan,
then you shall select cities to be **cities of refuge** for you,
that the **manslayer** who kills any person without intent may flee there.
The cities shall be for you a refuge from the avenger,
that **the manslayer may not die**
until he stands before the congregation for [mish^{pat}]. ..."

And **these things shall be for a statute [of mish^{pat}]**⁴⁶
for you throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.
(Numbers 35:9-12, 29 ESV)

This is the provision for the manslayer, who by fleeing there may save his life.
If anyone kills his neighbor unintentionally without having hated him in the past —as when someone goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down a tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies —**he may flee to one of these cities and live**, lest the avenger of blood in hot anger pursue the manslayer and overtake him, because the way is long, and strike him fatally,

⁴⁵ The word *mish^{pat}* does NOT occur in this passage, but the concept under discussion is applicable to the understanding of *mish^{pat}*.

⁴⁶ This identical phrase occurs in Numbers 27:11; see the discussion in section [3.4.1 The Writings of Moses](#).

though the man did not [mish^epat maweth],⁴⁷

since he had not hated his neighbor in the past.

... lest innocent blood be shed in your land that [YHWH] your God is giving you for an inheritance, and so the guilt of bloodshed be upon you.

But if anyone hates his neighbor

and lies in wait for him and attacks him and strikes him fatally so that he dies,

and he flees into one of these cities,

then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there,

and hand him over to the avenger of blood, so that he may die.

Your eye shall not pity him,

but you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from Israel,

so that it may be well with you.

(Deuteronomy 19:4-6, 10-13 ESV)

Criminal Justice must be impartial and consistent, “you shall have the same mish^epat for the sojourner and for the native”, “you shall not be partial in mish^epat”, “you shall not pervert mish^epat”.

Rendered judgement is final and punishment must be swift, “according to the mish^epat which they pronounce to you, you shall do”, “the judge shall cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence”. A rendered judgement must be correct, “only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established”, “if the witness is a false witness, you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother”.

When the crime involves the death of a person, the Fundamental Principle of Justice⁴⁸ is operative:

And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning:

from every beast I will require it and from man.

From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man:

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.”

for God made man in his own image.

(Genesis 9:5-6 ESV)

Anyone who commits murder must die, “hand him over to the avenger of blood”.

However, the punishment for accidental killing is modified: the killer may seek refuge in a designated city, “this is the provision for the manslayer”, “he may flee to one of these cities and live”, “the man did not mish^epat maweth”.

3.3.2 Historic Books

There are two important incidents reported in the Historic Books which shed light on the meaning of mish^epat with respect to Criminal Justice. First, when Joshua established the cities of refuge, he makes it clear that there was due process to evaluate the case of a “manslayer”.

It was the responsibility of the “elders” in the city of refuge to determine whether or NOT the killing was indeed accidental. If they determined that the killing was NOT accidental, the “manslayer” was turned over to he “avenger of blood”. If the killing was determined to be accidental, the punishment imposed on the “manslayer” was to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest:

Then [YHWH] said to Joshua,

“Say to the people of Israel,

‘Appoint the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, that the manslayer who strikes any person without intent or unknowingly may flee there.

They shall be for you a refuge from the avenger of blood.

He shall flee to one of these cities

and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city and explain his case⁴⁹ to the elders of that city.

⁴⁷ The idiom, מִשְׁפָט מַמְוֵת - mish^epat maweth, literally “mish^epat of death”, implies a death sentence; the ESV translation, “deserve to die”, is reasonable.

⁴⁸ See section 2. The Covenant of Justness in the paper “Covenants of Grace” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

⁴⁹ The word “case” here is translated from בָּזֶק - literally, “word” or “matter”.

Then they shall take him into the city and give him a place,
and he shall remain with them.

And if the avenger of blood pursues him,
they shall not give up the manslayer into his hand,
because he struck his neighbor unknowingly, and did not hate him in the past.

And he shall remain in that city
until he has stood before the congregation for [mish^epat],
until the death of him who is high priest at the time.

Then the manslayer may return to his own town and his own home,
to the town from which he fled.”

(Joshua 20:1-6 ESV)

After the split between North and South Israel, the first two kings in the Southern Kingdom, Rehoboam and Abijam, introduced a certain amount of apostacy in Israel.⁵⁰ King Asa took steps to reform the apostacy,⁵¹ but when his son Jehoshaphat came to the throne there was still work to be done. In addition to residual problems in South Israel, Ahab and Jezebel were ruling in North Israel. They were among the vilest of “rulers” in all history. They had no understanding of mish^epat.⁵²

It is against this background that Jehoshaphat introduced his reforms:

Jehoshaphat lived at Jerusalem.

And he went out again among the people, from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim,
and brought them back to [YHWH], the God of their fathers.

He appointed judges (shaphat) in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city,
and said to the judges (shaphat),

“Consider what you do, for you judge (shaphat) not for man but for [YHWH].
He is with you in giving [mish^epat].

Now then, let the fear of [YHWH] be upon you.

Be careful what you do,
for there is no injustice ('aw^ela) with [YHWH] our God,
or partiality or taking bribes.”

Moreover, in Jerusalem Jehoshaphat appointed certain Levites and priests and heads of families of Israel,
to give [mish^epat] for [YHWH] and to decide disputed cases.

They had their seat at Jerusalem.

And he charged them:

“Thus you shall do in the fear of [YHWH], in faithfulness, and with your whole heart:
whenever a case (riv) comes to you from your brothers who live in their cities,
concerning bloodshed, [torah]⁵³ [even]⁵⁴ commandment, statutes, or [mish^epatim],⁵⁵
then you shall warn them, that they may not incur guilt before [YHWH]
and wrath may not come upon you and your brothers.

Thus you shall do, and you will not incur guilt.

(2 Chronicles 19:4-10 ESV)

From the pericope in the Book of Joshua, it is clear that refuge required due process,
“stand at the entrance of the gate of the city and explain his case to the elders of that city”,
“stood before the congregation for mish^epat”. Also, even accidental killing incurred the punishment
of banishment, “until the death of him who is high priest at the time”.

King Jehoshaphat’s reforms emphasized the role of God in Criminal Justice, “YHWH is with you
in giving mish^epat”. The judges were to be competent in all aspects of life under God:
Criminal Justice, “bloodshed”; Religious Practice, “torah even commandment”;
Social Justice, “statutes”; and Exercise of Government, “the Way of God, “mish^epatim”.

⁵⁰ See 1 Kings 14:21-24, 15:1-3

⁵¹ See 1 Kings 15:9-13

⁵² Consider the incident of “Naboth’s Vineyard” in 1 Kings 21:1-16

⁵³ See footnote 18

⁵⁴ See footnote 22

⁵⁵ For discussion of this “plural form”, see section [6.1.2 Obey My Voice](#)

3.3.3 The Wisdom Literature

There are three proverbs which echo and reinforce the meaning of mish^epat with respect to criminal justice:

The wicked accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the ways of [mish^epat].
(Proverbs 17:23 ESV)

It is not good to be partial to the wicked or to deprive the righteous (tzadiq) of [mish^epat].
(Proverbs 18:5 ESV)

Partiality in [mish^epat] is not good (tov).

Whoever says to the wicked,
“You are in the right (tzadiq),”
will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations,
but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight,
and a good (tov) blessing will come upon them.
(Proverbs 24:23b-25 ESV)

The Sages reiterate the evil of bribery, “the wicked accepts a bribe”,
and partiality, “partiality in mish^epat is not good”.

3.3.4 Prophetic Books

In the Forth Servant Song,⁵⁶ the trial and condemnation of Jesus is prophesized:

By oppression and [without] [mish^epat] he was taken away;
and as for his generation,
who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
(Isaiah 53:8 ESV)

The Hebrew phrase is טֶפֶשׁ מִמְשָׁר מַעֲצָר - me'otzer umimmish^epat. It is a merism summarizing the whole arrest, trial and execution of Jesus. The noun, עֲצָר - 'otzer, means “oppression”.⁵⁷ The preposition מִ - min carries a causative sense “by” and a partitive sense “away from” or “without”.
Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion were carried out with greatest oppression and totally without mish^epat.

In grieving over the destruction of Jerusalem, the Prophet Jeremiah comments on the Nature of God. God is not happy to have to punish human beings. In hesed, God will have compassion, and he always deals with humans with mish^epat:

For the Lord will not cast off forever,
for, though he cause grief, **he will have compassion**
according to the abundance of his [hesed],⁵⁸
for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men.
To crush underfoot all the prisoners of the earth,
to deny a man [mish^epat] in the presence of the Most High,
to subvert a man in his lawsuit (riv),
the Lord does not approve.
(Lamentations 3:31-36 ESV)

In contrast, when God, in the person of Jesus Christ, stood before human beings in a court of law, he was given no justice, “without mish^epat he was taken away”; however, it is God's nature never to deny justice to human beings, “to deny a man mish^epat in the presence of the Most High”.

⁵⁶ See Isaiah 52:13-15 and all of chapter 53

⁵⁷ See Holladay page 281

⁵⁸ The most important word for understanding the Nature of God is hesed. Briefly, hesed is the expression of God's covenantal commitment to fulfill his side of a covenant agreement. See section **1.4.3 Attributes of God's Character** in the paper “**First Pillar - The Nature of God**” and **Excursus 2 - hesed** in the paper “**Covenants of Grace**”; both papers are located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca.

3.4 Exercise of Government

The use of ***mish'pat*** with the exercise government, emphasizes God's perspective on government: **those in positions of "authority" are there to serve**. Learning an attitude of "service" is fundamental to living by the Way of God. The purpose of government is to facilitate peace, order, prosperity, and freedom for those governed. **The exercise of government according to the Way of God is the mechanism that will make the World Tomorrow to be the utopia prophesized throughout the Bible.**

3.4.1 The Writings of Moses

In the Plains of Moab, **the five daughters of Zelophehad approached Moses** and explained that their father was among those of the Exodus Generation who died in the wilderness. Their petition was that Moses would grant their father an inheritance through them, since he had sons.⁵⁹ Moses takes it to God and receives **a ruling on inheritances**, which is declared to be a "**for statute of *mish'pat***".⁶⁰

Moses brought their [mish'pat] before [YHWH].

And [YHWH] said to Moses,

"The daughters of Zelophehad are right.

You shall give them possession of an inheritance

among their father's brothers and transfer the inheritance of their father to them.

And you shall speak to the people of Israel, saying,

'If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter.

And if he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers.

And if he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers.

And if his father has no brothers,

then you shall give his inheritance to the nearest kinsman of his clan, and he shall possess it.

And it shall be for the people of Israel [for] statute [of] [mish'pat],

as [YHWH] commanded Moses."

(Numbers 27:5-11 ESV)

The first instance of "***mish'pat***" is idiomatic, "**Moses brought their *mish'pat* before YHWH**"; the implication is that the "***mish'pat***" is a desired decision. In the second instance of "***mish'pat***", the phrase is טַפְשָׁת מִשְׁפָּט לְחַקְתָּה - l¹huqqath mish'pat; לְ - l¹e, preposition, "for"; חַקְתָּה construct noun, "statute of"; "for statute of *mish'pat*". **The sense is that the statute is contributing to the application of *mish'pat*; or contributing to the understanding of *mish'pat*.**

3.4.2 Historic Books

The Historic Books contain several examples of the use of ***mish'pat*** with the various stages of government over the history of Israel. During the **period of the Judges**, the combined meaning of *shaphat* was very evident. **The Judge** was the governing authority and the administrator of "justice" in its broadest sense. The **Prophetess Deborah** filled this role, and **the people came to her for *mish'pat***:

Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging (shaphat) Israel at that time.

She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and **the people of Israel came up to her for [mish'pat]**.

(Judges 4:4-5 ESV)

At the end of the Judges Period, the **Prophet Samuel** attempted to install **his sons** as Judges, but they **were corrupt** – the administration of "justice" became perverted:

When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges (shaphat) over Israel.

The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges (shaphat) in Beersheba.

Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain.

They took bribes and perverted [mish'pat].

(1 Samuel 8:1-3 ESV)

⁵⁹ See Numbers 27:1-4

⁶⁰ See the discussion of Numbers 35:29 in section **3.3.1 The Writings of Moses**

Several years into David's reign in Jerusalem, before the Bathsheba/Uriah incident,⁶¹ the author of the Book of Second Samuel summarizes David's reign as successful. As King, David is governing all Israel. As highest authority, he is administering *mish'pat* and "equity" to all the people:

So David reigned over all Israel.

And David administered [mish'pat] and equity (tz'edaqah) to all his people.

(2 Samuel 8:15 ESV // 1 Chronicles 18:14)

David's son Absalom carefully planned and prepared his rebellion⁶² against David.

When people came looking for the King for *mish'pat* over a dispute, Absalom would step in and promote his agenda. Absalom's objective was to usurp David as King. He sold his position to the people by claiming he would provide them with better *mish'pat* than David was providing:

After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him.

And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate.

And when any man had a dispute (riv) to come before the king for [mish'pat],

Absalom would call to him and say,

"From what city are you?"

And when he said,

"Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel,"

Absalom would say to him,

"See, your claims are good (tov) and right (nakoah),

but there is no man designated by the king to hear you."

Then Absalom would say,

"Oh that I were judge (shaphat) in the land!

Then every man with a dispute (riv) or [mish'pat] might come to me,

and I would give him justice (tzadeq)."

And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him,

he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him.

Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for [mish'pat].

So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

(2 Samuel 15:1-6 ESV)

As an example of King Solomon's ability to administer *mish'pat*, the author of the Book of First Kings recounts the incident of the baby claimed by two women.⁶³ The author sites Solomon's ability to do *mish'pat* as a gift from God:

Then the king answered and said,

"Give the living child to the first woman,

and by no means put him to death; she is his mother."

And all Israel heard of the [mish'pat] that the king had rendered (shaphat),

and they stood in awe of the king,

because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do [mish'pat].

(1 Kings 3:27-28 ESV)

The author of First Kings also reports that Solomon's throne room was called "the Hall of the *mish'pat*":

And he made the Hall of the Throne

where he was to pronounce judgment (shaphat),

even the Hall of [the mish'pat].

It was finished with cedar from floor to rafters.

(1 Kings 7:7 ESV)

The proper governmental administration of *mish'pat* is attributed to Deborah, "the people of Israel came up to her for *mish'pat*", and David, "David administered *mish'pat* and equity to all his people".

The sons of Samuel, although given the same opportunity, became corrupt, "they took bribes and perverted *mish'pat*". In his plot to usurp David, Absalom gained support by claiming he could deliver better *mish'pat*, "every man with a dispute or *mish'pat* might come to me, and I would give him

⁶¹ See Second Samuel chapter 11

⁶² See 2 Samuel 15:13-17, 16:15-23

⁶³ See 1 Kings 3:16-28

justice". King Solomon was renowned for *mish'pat*, "all Israel heard of the *mish'pat* that the king had rendered"; and, he named his Throne Room after it, "the Hall of the *mish'pat*".

3.4.3 The Wisdom Literature

The Wisdom Literature contains three terse statements that relate *mish'pat* to the process of government:

Shall one who hates [mish'pat] govern?

(Job 34:17a ESV)

There thrones for [mish'pat] were set,

the thrones of the house of David.

(Psalm 122:5 ESV)

The King in his might loves [mish'pat].

You have established equity (mesharim);

you have [done] ('asah) [mish'pat] and righteousness (tzedaqah) in Jacob.

(Psalm 99:4 ESV)

The first statement is particularly profound and applies most aptly to modern Western Civilization.

Most persons in leadership positions, especially in government, have no real feeling that they are there to serve. Their interest in their position is purely for their own benefit – they have no concept of *mish'pat*, "shall one who hates *mish'pat* govern". King David practiced *mish'pat*, as did the few kings of his line which served God, as David did, with their whole heart, "thrones for *mish'pat* were set, the thrones of the house of David". The soon coming King of kings sets the ultimate example, "the King in his might loves *mish'pat*".

3.4.4 Prophetic Books

The Prophet Isaiah reports three Messianic prophecies that clearly associate *mish'pat with the rule of the King of kings* after the Second Advent. The King of kings will perform the full process of government; he will be "one who judges and seeks *mish'pat*". Under the King of kings, *mish'pat* will be established over the whole earth, "he will bring forth *mish'pat* to the nations", "he will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established *mish'pat* in the earth".

He will teach *mish'pat* to all peoples "he will faithfully bring forth *mish'pat*"; in particular, for people who are tasked with participating in the process of government, "a spirit of *mish'pat* to him who sits in the *mish'pat* at the gate":

Give counsel;
grant justice (p^elilah);⁶⁴
make your shade like night at the height of noon;
shelter the outcasts;
do not reveal the fugitive;
let the outcasts of Moab sojourn among you;
be a shelter to them from the destroyer.

When the oppressor is no more, and destruction has ceased,
and he who tramples underfoot has vanished from the land,
then a throne will be established in [hesed],⁶⁵
and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David
one who judges (shaphat) and seeks [mish'pat]
and is swift to do righteousness (tzedeq).
(Isaiah 16:3-5 ESV)

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my [heart] (nephesh)⁶⁶ delights;
I have put my Spirit upon him;
he will bring forth [mish'pat] to the nations.

He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth [mish'pat].

⁶⁴ The noun, **פָּלַילָה** - p^elilah, occurs only Isaiah 16:3; it is derived from the root, **פָּלַל** - palal, "intervene", "interpose"; see TWOT article 1776 page 725.

⁶⁵ See footnote 58

⁶⁶ See footnote 15

He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established [mish^epat] in the earth;

and the coastlands wait for his [torah].⁶⁷

(Isaiah 42:1-4 ESV)

In that day [YHWH] of hosts will be a crown of glory,
and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people,
and a spirit of [mish^epat] to him who sits in [the mish^epat],
and strength to those who turn back the battle **at the gate.**

(Isaiah 28:5-6 ESV)

In dealing directly with **King Jehoiakim**,⁶⁸ the **Prophet Jeremiah** addresses **the Davidic Dynasty**

enjoining them to **embrace mish^epat**:

And to the house of the king of Judah say,

“Hear the word of [YHWH], O house of David!

Thus says [YHWH]:

‘Execute (din) [mish^epat] in the morning,

and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed,

lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it,

because of your evil deeds. ‘...’

(Jeremiah 21:11-12 ESV)

Looking to **King Zedekiah**, the **Prophet Ezekiel** prophesizes the **end of the physical Davidic Dynasty**

to be restored by the Messiah. The Messiah is the one to whom “**the government**”, “**the mish^epat**”,

will be given in perpetuity:

And you, O profane wicked one, prince of Israel,⁶⁹
whose day has come, the time of your final punishment,
thus says the Lord [YHWH]:

Remove the turban and take off the crown.

Things shall not remain as they are.

Exalt that which is low, and bring low that which is exalted.

A ruin, ruin, ruin⁷⁰ I will make it.

This also shall not be,

until he comes, **the one to whom [the mish^epat] belongs**,

and I will give it to him.

(Ezekiel 21:25-27 ESV)

The **Prophet Micah** castigates the **ruling class** for gross violation of their position;

whereas, **they should know and dispense mish^epat**:

And I said:

Hear, you **heads of Jacob [even]**⁷¹ **rulers of the house of Israel!**

Is it not for you to know [the mish^epat]?

—you who hate the good and love the evil,
who tear the skin from off my people and their flesh from off their bones,
who eat the flesh of my people,
and flay their skin from off them,
and break their bones in pieces
and chop them up like meat in a pot,
like flesh in a cauldron.

(Micah 3:1-3 ESV)

⁶⁷ See footnote 18

⁶⁸ See Jeremiah 22:18

⁶⁹ In the Book of Ezekiel, Zedekiah is NEVER acknowledged as “king”.

⁷⁰ The Hebrew is עֲוָה עֲוָה עֲוָה - `awah `awah `awah; “awah” is a noun that means “ruin” or “destruction”. The triple repetition makes it a superlative expression, “absolute destruction”, “total ruin”. The old KJV translation of “overturn overturn overturn” is completely incorrect in modern English because it can be taken to imply movement, i.e. verbal action. This incorrect translation is taken by some to twist this scripture to support fabulous legends of a moving rock. The “scone stone” used in British coronations is tied by these legends to Jacob’s pillar stone in Genesis 28:18.

⁷¹ See footnote 22

The Prophet Habakkuk bemoans the lack of *mish'pat* among his contemporaries, “*mish'pat never goes forth*”, “*mish'pat goes forth perverted*”. Then he reports God’s applying *mish'pat* sarcastically to the Chaldeans, “*their mish'pat and dignity go forth from themselves*”:

Habakkuk Prays

Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong?
Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.
So [torah]⁷² is paralyzed, and *[mish'pat] never goes forth*.
For the wicked surround the righteous (tzadiq); so *[mish'pat] goes forth perverted*.

YHWH Responds

Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded.
For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.
For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation,
who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own.
They are dreaded and fearsome; *their [mish'pat] and dignity go forth from themselves*.
(Habakkuk 1:3-7 ESV)

The prophet Isaiah looks to establishment of the Government of God: the King of kings will exemplify *mish'pat*, “*he will faithfully bring forth mish'pat, he will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established mish'pat in the earth*”. The failing House of David, in Jehoiakim, was counselled to “*execute mish'pat in the morning*”, and the last exponent of the House of David, Zedekiah, was told the crown would be removed until the Messiah came, “*the one to whom the mish'pat belongs*”. The Prophet Micah castigates the “*heads of Jacob, rulers of the house of Israel*”, “*is it not for you to know the mish'pat*”. The Prophet Habakkuk laments the corruption of *mish'pat* in Israel, “*mish'pat goes forth perverted*”, while God sarcastically attributes *mish'pat* to the destroying Chaldeans, “*their mish'pat and dignity go forth from themselves*”.

4. That Which is Right

The nance of *mish'pat* which comes to play here is the sense of “*what is customary*” either by tradition or by definition. In some instances, that which is right, is *inherently right*, and it does NOT require any qualification or elaboration. For example, at the beginning of his reign God appeared to King Solomon in a dream, and Solomon made a wise request. God responded positively affirming Solomon’s desire to understand “*mish'pat*”, “*that which is right*”:

Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people,
that I may discern between good and evil,
for who is able to govern (shaphat) this your great people?
It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this.
And God said to him,
“Because you have asked this,
and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies,
but have *asked for yourself understanding to discern what is [mish'pat]*,
behold, I now do according to your word.
Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind,
so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you.
(1 Kings 3:9-12 ESV)

In challenging Job, Elihu generalizes Job’s complaint against God, and asks Job how he thinks his position can possibly be right, “*do you think this to be mish'pat*”
And Elihu answered and said:

“*Do you think this to be [mish'pat]*?
Do you say,
‘It is my right (tzedeq) before God,’
that you ask,
‘What advantage have I?
How am I better off than if I had sinned?’
(Job 35:1-3 ESV)

⁷² See footnote 18

A Sage pithily specifies **the fate of the wicked**, because “**they refuse to do what is *mish^epat***”:

The violence of the wicked will sweep them away,
because **they refuse to do what is [mish^epat]**.
(Proverbs 21:7 ESV)

Alluding to **the prophecy of the “wine cup”**,⁷³ the **Prophet Jeremiah** reports the words of YHWH that relative to others **it is only right for Edom to drink from the cup**:

Thus [YHWH], the God of Israel, said to me:

“**Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath**,
and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. ...”

Concerning Edom.

For thus says [YHWH]:

“**If those who did not [mish^epat] to drink the cup must drink it**,
will you go unpunished?
You shall not go unpunished, but you must drink. ...”

(Jeremiah 25:15, 49:7a, 12 ESV)

Some things are obviously inherently right. God granted Solomon the ability to discern that which was inherently **mish^epat** so that he could govern. Elihu questioned how Job could assume his case to be **mish^epat**. The wicked who refuse **mish^epat** will suffer their fate. YHWH asserts that it is only **mish^epat** for Edom to drink the cup of wrath.

4.1 Right by Definition

The definition of something that is right is usually to be found in the teaching of the Bible.

Sometimes the definition is a mundane instruction from God. **For example**, after the Covenant Ratification Ceremony, Moses and Joshua went up Mount Sinai to receive the instructions for building the Tabernacle. These instructions are **the prescribed definition for the Tabernacle**:

So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God.

Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to [mish^epat] you were shown on the mountain.
(Exodus 24:13, 26:30 ESV)

Where ethical, moral, or cultic issues are discussed there is usually either a well-defined precedent or more detailed instruction. The prescriptions and proscriptions in the Writings of Moses provide most of the definitions of what is **mish^epat**.

4.1.1 The Writings of Moses

The first example deals with **a girl sold as a slave**⁷⁴ to become a wife or concubine of the purchaser.

The focus of the teaching is the humane treatment of the girl. The use of **mish^epat** alludes to the specification of the humane treatment, “**do with her mish^epat as a daughter**”:

When a man sells his daughter as a slave,
she shall not go out as the male slaves do.

If she does not please her master,
who has designated her for himself,
then **he shall let her be redeemed**.

He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people,
since he has broken faith with her.

If he designates her for his son,
he shall [do] ('asah) with her [mish^epat] as a daughter.
(Exodus 21:7-9 ESV)

⁷³ See Jeremiah 25:15-29

⁷⁴ For a discussion of the moral and ethical implications of this, see section **5.2 Slavery** in the paper “**The Human Condition**” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

The problem of **a goring ox** was common in the ancient world. The provisions of the Book of Exodus chapter 21 are similar to other ancient codes. However, the Bible is specific that the provisions apply to children as well as adults. The use of ***mish'pat*** alludes to the statute as specified for adults:

When an ox gores a man or a woman to death,
the ox shall be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten,
but the owner of the ox shall not be liable.

But if the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past,
and its owner has been warned but has not kept it in,
and it kills a man or a woman,
the ox shall be stoned,
and its owner also shall be put to death.

If a ransom is imposed on him,
then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is imposed on him.

If it gores a man's son or daughter,
he shall [do] ('asah) according to [mish'pat] this same.
(Exodus 21:28-31 ESV)

The problem of the **firstborn son of a secondary wife**⁷⁵ is considered in chapter 21 of the **Book of Deuteronomy**. The use of ***mish'pat*** alludes to **the enforcement of the standard provision** of a greater share for the actual firstborn son:

If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved,
and both the loved and the unloved have borne him children,
and **if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved**,
then on the day when he assigns his possessions as an inheritance to his sons,
he may not treat the son of the loved as the firstborn in preference to the son of the unloved,
who is the firstborn,
but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved,
by giving him a double portion of all that he has,
for he is the firstfruits of his strength.

[mish'pat] of the firstborn is his.
(Deuteronomy 21:15-17 ESV)

For keeping the **Passover**, there were several instructions previously given;⁷⁶
these insyructions are alluded to by ***mish'pat***:

And if a stranger sojourns among you and would keep the Passover to [YHWH],
according to the statute of the Passover
and **according to its [mish'pat]**, so shall he do.
You shall have one statute, both for the sojourner and for the native.
(Numbers 9:14 ESV)

The portion of certain sacrificial animals to be assigned to the presiding priest, is defined as ***mish'pat***:

And **this shall be the priests' [mish'pat] from the people**,
from those offering a sacrifice, whether an ox or a sheep:
they shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach.
(Deuteronomy 18:3 ESV)

The next examples all relate to **the process of providing an animal for sacrifice**. In each case, the allusion of ***mish'pat*** is to the well-known specifications for each type of offering. The implications are more than just physical killing and preparation of the animal – **the attitudinal state of the offeror is also implied**:

He shall bring them to the priest, who shall offer first the one for the sin offering.
Then he shall offer the second for a burnt offering according to the [mish'pat].
And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin that he has committed,
and **he shall be forgiven.**
(Leviticus 5:8a, 10 ESV)

Then he presented the people's offering
and took the goat of the sin offering that was for the people
and killed it and offered it as a sin offering, like the first one.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of the moral and ethical implications of this, see section **5.10 Polygamy** in the paper **"The Human Condition"** located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

⁷⁶ See Exodus 12:1-13,43-49, Leviticus 23:4-8

And he presented the burnt offering and [did] (*‘asah*) it according to the [mish^epat].
(Leviticus 9:15-16 ESV)

... then if it was done unintentionally without the knowledge of the congregation, all the congregation shall offer one bull from the herd for a burnt offering, a pleasing aroma to [YHWH], with its grain offering and its drink offering, according to the [mish^epat], and one male goat for a sin offering.
(Numbers 15:24 ESV)

... besides the burnt offering of the new moon, and its grain offering, and the regular burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offering, according to [mish^epat] for them, for a pleasing aroma, a fire offering to [YHWH].
(Numbers 29:6 ESV)

In the **Book of Numbers** chapters 28 and 29, there is a summary of all the **ongoing public sacrifices**. During the **Feast of Tabernacles**, the greatest number of sacrifices were performed. Each day uses the following phrase, where **mish^epat** alludes back to the well-known specifications for each type of offering: “**in the prescribed quantities**”

Numbers 29:18, 21, 24, 27, 30, 33, 37

טַפְשָׁת בְּמִשְׁׁפָרָם - b^emis^eparam kammish^epat

Literally: **in number of them according to the mish^epat**

In a statute related to Social Justice, the Writings of Moses specified the humane treatment of a girl sold as a slave to be **mish^epat**. Similarly, the provisions for dealing with a goring ox were NOT to be applied only to adults, but it is **mish^epat** to apply them also to children. The inheritance of a firstborn son is his inalienable **mish^epat**. All of the statutes related to the Passover are the **mish^epat** for both a natural Israelite and a sojourner. Certain portions of a sacrificial animal were the **mish^epat** of the presiding priest. The various instructions for each sacrifice were **mish^epat** for both the presiding priest and the offeror. The quantities of sacrificial animals on Holy Days was a matter of **mish^epat**.

4.1.2 Historic Books

When **Manoah and his wife** were told they would have a son, **Samson**, Manoah inquired about the purpose of the miraculous birth. **He uses mish^epat allude to a definition of the purpose of Samson's life:**

And Manoah said,
“Now when your words come true,
what is to be the child's [mish^epat] of life,
and what is his mission?”

(Judges 13:12 ESV)

When the people of Israel demanded a king, God acquiesced.⁷⁷ When **Saul was installed as king**, **Samuel reviewed the requirements of a king**,⁷⁸ and probably, as well, his own assessment.⁷⁹

The mish^epat of the king alludes to these descriptions:

Then **Samuel told the people [mish^epat] of the kingship**, and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before [YHWH]. Then Samuel sent all the people away, each one to his home.
(1 Samuel 10:25 ESV)

⁷⁷ See 1 Samuel 8:22

⁷⁸ See Deuteronomy 17:14-20

⁷⁹ See 1 Samuel 8:11-18

David's first attempt to move the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem met with disaster.⁸⁰

His second attempt went better because he followed the prescriptions in the Writings of Moses for moving the Ark.⁸¹ The prescribed manner of moving the Ark is referred to as *mish'pat*.

Because you did not carry it the first time,
[YHWH] our God broke out against us,
because we did not seek him according to the [mish'pat].
(1 Chronicles 15:13 ESV)

The Chronicler twice uses *mish'pat* in the account of David's organization of the Levites and priests for the Temple Service. First, the Levitical singers are to sing, as the offerings are performed, "according to the mish'pat". This usage is the same as discussed in the previous section – the customary or prescribed manner. Secondly, the divisions of the priests are to perform their duties "according to mish'pat for them by Aaron". This is an allusion to the instructions for priests in the Writings of Moses:

And they were to stand every morning, thanking and praising [YHWH], and likewise at evening, and whenever burnt offerings were offered to [YHWH] on Sabbaths, new moons, and feast days, according to the number [according to the mish'pat] of them, regularly before [YHWH].
(1 Chronicles 23:30-31 ESV)

These had as their appointed duty in their service to come into the house of [YHWH] according to [mish'pat] for them by Aaron their father, as [YHWH] God of Israel had commanded him.
(1 Chronicles 24:19 ESV)

Before his death, David prepared the plans for the Temple and delivered them to Solomon.⁸² David also organized the priests and Levites to work in the Temple.⁸³ In the construction and commissioning of the Temple, these instructions are alluded to as *mish'pat*:

And he made ten golden lampstands [according to mish'pat for them], and set them in the temple, five on the south side and five on the north.
(2 Chronicles 4:7 ESV)

So Solomon made all the vessels that were in the house of God:
the golden altar,
the tables for the bread of the Presence,
the lampstands and
their lamps of pure gold to burn before the inner sanctuary,
[according to mish'pat];
(2 Chronicles 4:19-20 ESV)

According to the [mish'pat] of David his father, he appointed the divisions of the priests for their service, and the Levites for their offices of praise and ministry before the priests as the duty of each day required, and the gatekeepers in their divisions at each gate, for so David the man of God had commanded.
(2 Chronicles 8:14 ESV)

During the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah, the Chronicler reports the keeping of the Passover.⁸⁴

During the restoration under Nehemiah, the author reports the keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles.⁸⁵

In all three cases, allusion is made to the instructions in the Writings of Moses as *mish'pat*:

They took their posts [according to mish'pat of them] according to the [torah]⁸⁶ of Moses the man of God.
The priests threw the blood that they received from the hand of the Levites.
(2 Chronicles 30:16 ESV)

⁸⁰ See 2 Samuel 6:1-9

⁸¹ See Exodus 37:14-15, Numbers 4:5-6,15, 1 Chronicles 15:1-15

⁸² See 1 Chronicles 28:11-19

⁸³ See 1 Chronicles chapters 23, 24, 25, and 26

⁸⁴ See 2 Chronicles chapter 30 and 35:1-19

⁸⁵ See Nehemiah 8:13-18

⁸⁶ See footnote 18

And they roasted the Passover lamb with fire according to the [mish^epat]; and they boiled the holy offerings in pots, in cauldrons, and in pans, and carried them quickly to all the lay people.

(2 Chronicles 35:13 ESV)

And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the [torah]⁸⁷ of God.

They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the [mish^epat].

(Nehemiah 8:18 ESV)

When the return group headed by Zerubbabel got to Jerusalem, they built an altar to perform sacrifices and the Book of Ezra reports that they kept the Feast of Tabernacles making offering as prescribed in Numbers chapter 29 – mish^epat is used here in the same senses “as prescribed”:⁸⁸

Then arose Jeshua the son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel with his kinsmen, and they built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the [torah] of Moses the man of God.

They set the altar in its place, for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands, and they offered burnt offerings on it to [YHWH], burnt offerings morning and evening.

And they kept the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to [mish^epat], as each day required ...

(Ezra 3:2-4 ESV)

The required way of life of Samson, and the anticipated way of life of a human king, are mish^epat. David’s second attempt to move the Ark was successful because he did it according to mish^epat. David’s organization of Levitical singers was done according to mish^epat. In constructing and accoutering the Temple, Solomon carefully followed the mish^epat specified by David. During various reforms, the reformers were careful to observe the Holy Days according to mish^epat.

4.1.3 The Wisdom Literature

A Psalmist prays for God’s grace to keep him/her from iniquity.

The Psalmist uses mish^epat in parallel with God’s promise:

Turn to me and be gracious to me,
[according to mish^epat] with those who love your name.
Keep steady my steps according to your promise,
and let no iniquity get dominion over me.

(Psalm 119:132-133 ESV)

A Sage alludes to the Urim and Thummim, asserting the result is mish^epat from God:

The lot is cast into the lap,
but its every [mish^epat] is from [YHWH]
(Proverbs 16:33 ESV)

A claimed promise of God is mish^epat. All communication from God is mish^epat.

4.1.4 Prophetic Books

The Prophet Isiah presents the “metaphor of the farmer”⁸⁹ to teach that God always does things in the right way and according to his Plan. The “farmer” is taught mish^epat, the “right way”:

Give ear, and hear my voice; give attention, and hear my speech.
Does he who plows for sowing plow continually?
Does he continually open and harrow his ground?
When he has leveled its surface,
does he not scatter dill, sow cumin, and put in wheat in rows,
and barley in its proper place, and emmer as the border?

⁸⁷ See footnote 18

⁸⁸ See the discussion of Numbers chapter 29 in section 4.1.1 The Writings of Moses

⁸⁹ See Isaiah 28:23-29; compare Jesus’ agricultural parables in Mark chapter 4, Matthew chapters 13 & 20, Luke chapter 8

For he is [to the mish^epat] instructed;

his God teaches him.

This also comes from [YHWH] of hosts;
he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom.

(Isaiah 28:23-26, 29 ESV)

As a sign act, the **Prophet Jeremiah** is directed by God to buy a field.⁹⁰

Jeremiah has the legitimate right of purchase, the mish^epat:

Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle will come to you and say,

‘Buy my field that is at Anathoth,
for **the [mish^epat] of redemption by purchase is yours.**’

Then Hanamel my cousin came to me in the court of the guard,
in accordance with the word of [YHWH], and said to me,

‘Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin,
for **the [mish^epat] of possession and redemption is yours;**
buy it for yourself.’

Then I knew that this was the word of [YHWH].

(Jeremiah 32:7-8 ESV)

Through the **Prophet Zephaniah**, God instructs True Worshippers to be patient.

The Plan of God will be carried out. **It is God’s mish^epat to accomplish his purpose:**

“Therefore wait for me,”
declares [YHWH],
“for the day when I rise up to seize the prey.

For my [mish^epat] is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms,
to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger;
for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed. ...”

(Zephaniah 3:8 ESV)

The instructions of God are **mish^epat**. Jeremiah’s right to buy a field was by **mish^epat**.

It is God’s **mish^epat** to carry out his Plan.

4.2 Right by Custom

In the instances of the use of **mish^epat** cited in this section, **mish^epat** is **a course of action** or **a manner of life** that is **well known and customary**.

The **mish^epat** is considered **the normal or the “right” way to do things**.

4.2.1 The Writings of Moses

In prison,⁹¹ the **Patriarch Joseph**, is requested to interpret a dream. Joseph uses “**mish^epat**” to identify **the former normal state of the relationship** between “the chief cupbearer” and the Pharaoh:

So **the chief cupbearer** told his dream to Joseph and said to him,

“In my dream there was a vine before me,
and on the vine there were three branches.
As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth,
and the clusters ripened into grapes.

Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand,
and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup
and placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.”

Then Joseph said to him,

“This is its interpretation:
the three branches are three days.

In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office,
and you shall place Pharaoh’s cup in his hand **[according to the mish^epat the former]**,
when you were his cupbearer. ...”

(Genesis 40:9-13 ESV)

The customary relationship, the **mish^epat**, of the chief cupbearer with the Pharaoh, was to be restored.

⁹⁰ See Jeremiah 32:6-12

⁹¹ See Genesis 39:19-23, 40:1-8

4.2.2 Historic Books

When the Israelites were attacking Jericho,⁹² they marched around the city for six days.

On the seventh day, they circled the city seven times, “**according to the mish^epat the this**”, where **mish^epat** refers to their customary manner of circling the city:

And the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of [YHWH] walked on, and they blew the trumpets continually.

And the armed men were walking before them, and the rear guard was walking after the ark of [YHWH], while the trumpets blew continually.

And the second day they marched around the city once, and returned into the camp. So they did for six days.

On the seventh day they rose early, at the dawn of day, and marched around the city [**according to the mish^epat the this**] seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times.

(Joshua 6:13-15 ESV)

The **Tribe of Dan** had been unable to defeat the Canaanites in the territory to which they had originally been allocated.⁹³ They dispatched scouts to locate an alternate territory. They identified the city **Laish** as a candidate. **Laish was associated with Sidon, and the people lived in the mish^epat of the Sidonians**:

Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were there, how they lived in security, [**according to the mish^epat**] of the Sidonians, quiet and unsuspecting, lacking nothing that is in the earth and possessing wealth, and how they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone.

(Judges 18:7 ESV)

The sons of the **Priest at Shiloh, Eli**,⁹⁴ were corrupt.

Their **mish^epat** was to forcibly take a portion of meat from offerors:

Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know [YHWH].

[**and mish^epat**] of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself.

This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there.

(1 Samuel 2:12-14 ESV)

God commanded the **Prophet Samuel** to give the people the king they demanded,⁹⁵ but at the same time Samuel was to warn the people **how the king would treat them**, the **mish^epat** of the king:

And [YHWH] said to Samuel,

“Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.

Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them [**mish^epat**] of the king who shall reign over them.”

So Samuel told all the words of [YHWH] to the people who were asking for a king from him. He said,

“These will be [**mish^epat**] of the king who will reign over you ... ”

(1 Samuel 8:7, 9-11a ESV)

⁹² See Joshua 6:1-11

⁹³ See Judges 1:34, 18:1-2

⁹⁴ See 1 Samuel 1:3

⁹⁵ See 1 Samuel 8:4-6

During his marauding days,⁹⁶ **David's mish'pat was to kill all potential witnesses of his activities:**

And David would leave neither man nor woman alive to bring news to Gath, thinking,
"lest they should tell about us and say,
'So David has done.'"

Such was his [mish'pat] all the while he lived in the country of the Philistines.
(1 Samuel 27:11 ESV)

King Solomon required the people of each of his administrative districts to provision his needs for one month of the year. This was the **mish'pat of the officers in each district:**

And those officers supplied provisions for King Solomon,
and for all who came to King Solomon's table, each one in his month.
They let nothing be lacking.
Barley also and straw for the horses and swift steeds they brought to the place where it was required,
each according to his [mish'pat].
(1 Kings 4:27-28 ESV)

King David organized the singers for the Temple Solomon would build.

They readily assumed their role and "**performed their service according to mish'pat of them**":

These are the men whom David put in charge of the service of song
in the house of [YHWH] after the ark rested there.
They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting
until Solomon built the house of [YHWH] in Jerusalem,
and they **performed their service according to [mish'pat of them].**
(1 Chronicles 6:31-32 ESV)

When the **Prophet Elijah** challenged the **prophets of Ba`al at Mount Carmel**,⁹⁷
they followed their **mish'pat of lacerating themselves**:

And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying,
"Cry aloud, for he is a god.
Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself,
or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."
And they cried aloud and cut themselves **[according to mish'pat of them]** with swords and lances,
until the blood gushed out upon them.
(1 Kings 18:27-28 ESV)

An **unnamed Prophet challenged Ahab** when Ahab had defeated Ben-hadad then let him go free.⁹⁸

The Prophet posed as a soldier who had lost a prisoner. Ahab endorsed the "**customary punishment**",
the mish'pat, "your life shall be for his life":

And as the king passed, he cried to the king and said,
"Your servant went out into the midst of the battle,
and behold, a soldier turned and brought a man to me and said,
'Guard this man;
if by any means he is missing, **your life shall be for his life**,
or else you shall pay a talent of silver.'

And as your servant was busy here and there, he was gone."

The king of Israel said to him,
"So shall your **[mish'pat]** be; you yourself have decided it."
(1 Kings 20:39-40 ESV)

The **Prophet Elijah** intercepted the **messengers of King Ahaziah** and informed them of the death sentence against Ahaziah.⁹⁹ When the messengers returned to him, Ahaziah inquired about interceptor, "**what mish'pat of man was he**"; the **mish'pat** of Elijah allowed Ahaziah to recognize him:

He said to them,
"What **[mish'pat]** of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things?"
(2 Kings 1:7 ESV)

⁹⁶ See section **1.3 The Wandering Years** in the paper "**David – A Man After My Own Heart**" located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

⁹⁷ See 1 Kings 18:19-25

⁹⁸ See 1 Kings 20:3-34

⁹⁹ See 2 Kings 1:2-4

In describing **the coup-de-ta of the High Priest Jehoida**,¹⁰⁰ the author of Second Kings notes that it was standard procedure for the new king to be seen “**standing by the pillar, according to the mish^epat**”:

When Athaliah heard the noise of the guard and of the people, she went into the house of [YHWH] to the people. And when she looked, there was the king **standing by the pillar, according to the [mish^epat]**, and the captains and the trumpeters beside the king, and all the people of the land rejoicing and blowing trumpets. And Athaliah tore her clothes and cried, “Treason! Treason!”
(2 Kings 11:13-14 ESV)

The **settlers placed in North Israel by the Assyrians**,¹⁰¹ paid “lip service” to YHWH, but also “**served their own gods**” “**after mish^epat of the nations**” – the “**custom**” of the nations: So they feared [YHWH] but also **served their own gods**, **after [mish^epat] of the nations** from among whom they had been carried away.
(2 Kings 17:33 ESV)

The Israelites established a **mish^epat** of marching around Jericho. The people of Laish lived according to the **mish^epat** of the Sidonians. The sons of Eli established a **mish^epat** of confiscating meat. Samuel described the way of life of the anticipated king as his **mish^epat**. David’s **mish^epat** was to kill unwanted witnesses. King Solomon’s district officers provisioned Solomon as required by **mish^epat**. The Temple singers were happy to perform according to their **mish^epat**. The **mish^epat** of the prophets of Ba`al was to lacerate themselves. The **mish^epat** punishment for loss of a prisoner was death. Elijah was identifiable by his **mish^epat**. According to **mish^epat**, a new king would stand beside the Temple pillar. Pagan settlers followed their **mish^epat** in idol worship.

4.2.3 The Wisdom Literature

In chapter 8 of the **Book of Ecclesiastes**, the Preacher explores the concept of “**wisdom**”:

Who is like the wise?
And who knows the interpretation of a thing?
A man’s wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed.
(Ecclesiastes 8:1 ESV)

The Preacher then sites an **example of “wisdom”**, “**don’t challenge a king**”:

I say:
Keep the king’s command, because of God’s oath to him.
Be not hasty to go from his presence.
Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases.
For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him,
“What are you doing?”
(Ecclesiastes 8:2-4 ESV)

Then **the Preacher gets to the heart of the matter** – a wise person is able to discern “**what is right by custom**” in any given situation and thereby avoid trouble:

Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing,
and **the wise heart will know the proper time and [mish^epat]**.
For there is a time and [mish^epat] for everything,
although man’s trouble lies heavy on him.
(Ecclesiastes 8:5-6 ESV)

The preacher identifies it as a **part of wisdom**, to understand what is **mish^epat** in any given situation.

¹⁰⁰ See 2 Kings 11:4-12

¹⁰¹ See 2 Kings 17:24

4.2.4 Prophetic Books

The Prophet Isaiah challenges as to why the people accuse God of ignoring their *mish^epat*:

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel,
“My way is hidden from [YHWH],
and my [mish^epat] is disregarded by my God”?
(Isaiah 40:27 ESV)

The Prophet Jeremiah looks to the day of a rebuilt Jerusalem with the palace where it always stood, “on its *mish^epat*”, the normal place for it to stand:

“Thus says [YHWH]:
Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob
and have compassion on his dwellings;
the city shall be rebuilt on its mound,
and the palace shall stand [on its *mish^epat*]. ...”
(Jeremiah 30:18 ESV)

In retrospect, Jeremiah acknowledges God’s help but implores him one more time
“take up my cause, ... my *mish^epat*”, “help me in my course of life”:

You have taken up my cause (riv), O Lord;
you have redeemed my life.
You have seen the wrong done to me, [YHWH];
judge (shaphat) my [mish^epat].
(Lamentations 3:58-59 ESV)

Isaiah challenges the people for questioning God, “my *mish^epat* is disregarded by my God”.
Jeremiah looks beyond the destruction, “the city shall be rebuilt on its mound”,
and foresees the Palace in its customary location, “the palace shall stand on its *mish^epat”*.
Jeremiah pleads with God to acknowledge his way of life, “judge my *mish^epat”*.

5. Justness

The character attribute which allows a person to dispense justice is “justness”: impartiality, fairness, uprightness. “Justice” is a concept. “Justness” is a character attribute. “Justice” results from the application of “justness”. Where *mish^epat* is used in with *tzadeq*, or one of its related nouns, the meaning of *mish^epat* is nearly always “justness”. “Righteousness” is a character attribute. “Justness” is a character attribute. To be “just”, an adjective, a person must have the character attribute “justness”, a noun. Similarly, to act “justly”, an adverb, a person must have the character attribute of “justness”.

5.1 Seminal Scriptures

The young Sage, Elihu, provides a good introduction to the use of *mish^epat* with the nuance of “justness”. He asserts that “understanding” comes from God.

To “understand *mish^epat*” requires revelation from God to the mind, “the spirit in man”.

The point being that *mish^epat* is a character attribute which is fundamental to the Nature of God, and it is a character attribute God requires in True Worshippers:

But it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand.
It is not the old who are wise, nor the aged who understand [mish^epat].
(Job 32:8-9 ESV)

The Book of Proverbs ties the meaning of *mish^epat* to knowledge, wisdom, and discretion.

In Proverbs chapter 8, the Sage uses *tzadeq* twice and *tz^edaqah* twice to relate *mish^epat* to knowledge, wisdom, and discretion, indicating that *mish^epat* requires the application of knowledge, wisdom, and discretion. “Rulers”, “nobles”, “princes”, “kings”, requires *mish^epat* to govern.

Finally, the “paths of *mish^epat*” are defined to be the “way of righteousness”.

Only God is truly “righteous”, “holy”.

God gives us our human life to learn the “way of righteousness”, the “paths of mish^epat”:

I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,¹⁰² and I find knowledge and discretion.

The fear of [YHWH] is hatred of evil.

Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

I have counsel and sound wisdom;

I have insight; I have strength.

By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just (tzedeq);

by me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern (shaphat) justly (tzedeq).

I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.

Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness (tz^edaqah).

My fruit is better (tov) than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver.

I walk in the way of righteousness (tz^edaqah), in the paths of [mish^epat],

granting an inheritance to those who love me, and filling their treasures.

(Proverbs 8:12-21 ESV)

The Book of Proverbs also makes it clear that knowledge, understanding, and wisdom

come only from God. These are available from God only to those he calls, who repent,

and learn to live by the Way of God, “the way of his saints”, “those who walk in integrity”.

To live by the Way of God is to be walking on “the paths of mish^epat”. Only those who learn to live by the Way of God “will understand righteousness, mish^epat, and equity”.

Those who learn to walk in “the paths of mish^epat”, “every good path”,

will grow in knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and discretion:

For [YHWH] gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;

he stores up sound wisdom for the upright (yashar);

he is a shield to those who walk in integrity (tom),

guarding the paths of [mish^epat] and watching over the way of his saints.

Then you will understand righteousness (tzedeq) and [mish^epat] and equity (mesharim),
every good (tov) path;

for wisdom will come into your heart,

and knowledge will be pleasant to your [mind] (nephesh);¹⁰³

discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you ...

(Proverbs 2:6-11 ESV)

King David emphasizes the need for repentance, “turn away from evil and do good”,

to begin one’s life walking on “the paths of mish^epat”. David emphasizes that God “loves mish^epat” and that God “will not forsake his saints”, those who are living by the Way of God.

David refers to the hope of eternal life, “so shall you dwell forever”, and the promise of God,

“the righteous shall inherit earth and dwell upon it forever”,

for those walking in “the paths of mish^epat”

Turn away from evil and do good (tov);

so shall you dwell forever.

For [YHWH] loves [mish^epat];

he will not forsake his saints.

They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.

The righteous (tzadiq) shall inherit [earth] ('eretz)¹⁰⁴ and dwell upon it forever.

(Psalm 37:27-29 ESV)

In the Writings of Moses, the importance of mish^epat to the correct functioning of the social order is stated, “you shall do no wrong in mish^epat”. “Justness” is exemplified by fair and equitable measures to be used in business transactions:

You shall do no wrong ('awal) in [mish^epat],

in measures of length or weight or quantity.

You shall have just (tzedeq) balances,

 just (tzedeq) weights,

 a just (tzedeq) ephah,

 and a just (tzedeq) hin:

¹⁰² The rare noun, **רִמָּה** - 'arema, “prudence”, is used in this sense in verse 5 and in Proverbs 1:4; 'arema is used in a negative, but related, sense in Exodus 21:14 and Joshua 9:4, where it translated “cunning”.

¹⁰³ See footnote 15

¹⁰⁴ The noun **אֶרֶץ** - 'eretz, can be translated “land” or “earth”, depending on the context; see Holladay page 28.

I am [YHWH] your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.
(Leviticus 19:35-36 ESV)

A Sage reiterates the importance of *mish'pat* in fair business practices, “*mish'pat balance and scales*”, and adds rulers must speak with *mish'pat*, “*the lips of a king do not sin in mish'pat*”:

An oracle is on *the lips of a king*;
his mouth *does not sin in [mish'pat]*.
A [mish'pat] balance and scales are [YHWH's];
all the weights in the bag are his work.
(Proverbs 16:10-11 ESV)

The **Prophet Isaiah** looks to the establishment of the Kingdom of God¹⁰⁵ when the King of kings, “*will reign in righteousness*”, and will bring *mish'pat* to the whole world, “*then mish'pat will dwell in the wilderness*”. The “kings” or “princes” who rule under the King of kings “*will rule in mish'pat*”. This will bring to the world “*peace*”, “*quietness*”, “*trust*”, and “*secure dwelling*”:

Behold, *a king will reign in righteousness* (tzedeq),
and princes will rule in [mish'pat].

Each will be like a hiding place from the wind, a shelter from the storm,
like streams of water in a dry place,
like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.

... until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.

Then [mish'pat] will dwell in the wilderness,

and righteousness (tz'daqah) abide in the fruitful field.

And the effect of righteousness (tz'daqah) will be *peace*,
and the result of righteousness (tz'daqah), *quietness* and *trust* forever.

My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in *secure dwellings*, and in quiet resting places.
(Isaiah 32:1-2, 15-18 ESV)

The Sages define “*the paths of mish'pat*” to be “*the way of righteousness*”, “*the way of his saints*”, “*those who walk in integrity*”. The meaning of *mish'pat* is tied to *knowledge*, *wisdom*, and *discretion*. Isaiah prophesizes a time when “*a king will reign in righteousness*” and *princes will rule in mish'pat*”. King David identifies the princes, “*YHWH loves mish'pat; he will not forsake his saints*”. Clearly, *mish'pat* is a character attribute of God, “*justness*”, and developing *mish'pat*, “*justness*”, is fundamental to living by the Way of God.

5.2 An Inherent Attribute of God

God's inherent nature of mish'pat, “justness”, is asserted throughout the Bible. In every case, the various words in the semantic range of “righteousness” are used in relation to *mish'pat*, demonstrating that the usage of the word *mish'pat* relates to *a character attribute*, “*justness*.”

When YHWH appeared at Abraham's tent on the way to destroy Sodom,¹⁰⁶ Abraham reasoned with YHWH to try to save his nephew, Lot. Abraham appealed to YHWH's position as “*the Judge of all the earth*” that he should inherently “*do mish'pat*”, i.e., NOT destroy Lot:

Far be it from you to do such a thing,
to put the righteous (tzadiq) to death with the wicked,
so that the righteous (tzadiq) fare as the wicked!
Far be that from you!

Shall not the Judge (shaphat) of all the earth do [mish'pat]?
(Genesis 18:25 ESV)

In the prologue of the **Song of Moses**, Moses extolls the “*greatness of our God*”, indicating that *mish'pat* is fundamental to God's nature, “*all his ways are mish'pat*”.

The young Sage, **Elihu**, echoes Moses, “*he is great in power and mish'pat*”

For I will proclaim the name of [YHWH];
asccribe greatness to our God!
The Rock, his work is perfect, for *all his ways are [mish'pat]*.

¹⁰⁵ See footnote 14

¹⁰⁶ See Genesis 18:1,17-21

A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just (tzadiq) and upright (yashar) is he.
(Deuteronomy 32:3-4 ESV)

The Almighty—we cannot find him;
he is great in power [and mish^epat]
and [abundance of]¹⁰⁷ righteousness (tz^edaqah) he will not violate.
(Job 37:23 ESV)

The Psalmist of the **99th Psalm** looks to the Kingdom of God.¹⁰⁸ YHWH is established as King of kings, “**YHWH reigns**”, “**he is exalted over all the peoples**”. The power of God is awesome, “**let the peoples tremble**”, but God wields his power with **mish^epat**, “**you have done mish^epat**”, and he brings **mish^epat** to the people, “**the King in his might loves mish^epat**”.

The Psalmist of the **33rd Psalm** concurs, “**he loves righteousness and mish^epat**”:

[YHWH] reigns; let the peoples tremble!
He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!
[YHWH] is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples.
Let them praise your great and awesome name!
Holy is he!

The King in his might loves [mish^epat].
You have established equity (mesharim);
you have [done] ('asah) [mish^epat] and righteousness (tz^edaqah) in Jacob.
(Psalm 99:1-4 ESV)

For the word of [YHWH] is upright (yashar),
and all his work is done in faithfulness
He loves righteousness (tz^edaqah) and [mish^epat];
the earth is full of the [hesed]¹⁰⁹ of [YHWH].
(Psalm 33:4-5 ESV)

The **111th Psalm** extolls the **Nature of God** as it is displayed by God’s works – the working out of the Plan of God. The Psalmist uses **words in the semantic range of mish^epat** to show the relationships between the Nature of God, the Plan of God, and the teaching of God:

Great are the works (ma`aseh) of [YHWH], studied by all who delight in them.
Full of splendor and majesty is his work,
and **his righteousness (tz^edaqah) endures forever**.

He has caused his wondrous works (ma`aseh) to be remembered;
[YHWH] is gracious and merciful.
He provides food¹¹⁰ for those who fear him;
he remembers his covenant forever.

He has shown his people the power of his works (ma`aseh),
in giving them the inheritance of the nations.

The works (ma`aseh) of his hands are faithful and [mish^epat];
all his precepts are trustworthy;
they are established forever and ever,
to be [done] ('asah) with faithfulness and uprightness (yashar).
(Psalm 111:2-8 ESV)

The Psalmist of the **97th Psalm** also looks to the Kingdom of God, “**YHWH reigns**”, and asserts God’s character attribute of **mish^epat** to be foundational, “**the foundation of his throne**”. The Psalmist of the **89th Psalm** concurs verbatim. The Psalmist of the **119th Psalm** adds that **God’s mish^epat is eternal, “mish^epat endures forever”**:

[YHWH] reigns, let the earth rejoice;
let the many coastlands be glad!
Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;
righteousness (tzedeq) and [mish^epat] are the foundation of his throne.
(Psalm 97:1-2 ESV)

¹⁰⁷ The Hebrew is רֹבֶדֶקָה - u^{rof} tz^edaqah, “rov” is construct, “abundance of” righteousness.

¹⁰⁸ See footnote **14**

¹⁰⁹ See footnote **58**

¹¹⁰ “Food” is used metaphorically for the teaching of God.

Righteousness (tzedeq) and **[mish^epat] are the foundation of your throne**;

[hesed]¹¹¹ and faithfulness go before you.

(Psalm 89:14 ESV)

The sum of your word is truth,

and [all] your righteous (tzedeq) **[mish^epat] endures forever**.

(Psalm 119:160 ESV)

The Psalmist of the **72nd Psalm** prays that God will give the king, Solomon, **mish^epat** of God, **give the king your mish^epat**, in order that Solomon may govern the “**people with righteousness**” and the “**poor with mish^epat**”:

Of Solomon.

Give the king your [mish^epat], O God, and your righteousness (tz^edaqah) to the royal son!

May he judge (din) your **people with righteousness** (tzedeq), and your **poor with [mish^epat]**!

(Psalm 72:1-2 ESV)

The **Prophet Isaiah** affirms that **mish^epat** is fundamental to the nature God,

“YHWH is a God of mish^epat”. Isaiah rhetorically asks, “**who taught him the path of mish^epat**”?

Therefore [YHWH] waits to be gracious to you,
and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you.

For [YHWH] is a God of [mish^epat];

blessed are all those who wait for him.

(Isaiah 30:18 ESV)

Whom did he consult, and who made him understand?

Who taught him the path of [mish^epat],

and taught him knowledge,

and showed him the way of understanding?

(Isaiah 40:14 ESV)

Isaiah further asserts that **mish^epat** will be fundamental to God’s establishment

of the Kingdom of God,¹¹² **“to establish it and to uphold it with mish^epat”**;

and, that True Worshippers will be filled with **mish^epat** from God, **“he will fill Zion with mish^epat”**:

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it with [mish^epat] and with righteousness (tz^edaqah)
from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of [YHWH] of hosts will do this.

(Isaiah 9:7 ESV)

[YHWH] is exalted, for he dwells on high;

he will fill Zion with [mish^epat] and righteousness (tz^edaqah),

and he will be the stability of your times,

abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge;

the fear of [YHWH] is Zion’s treasure.

(Isaiah 33:5-6 ESV)

The **Prophet Jeremiah** reports the word of YHWH claiming **mish^epat** as what he does

and in which he delights, **“I am [YHWH]”, “who does hesed, mish^epat, and righteousness”**,

“in these things I delight”:

Thus says [YHWH]:

“Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom,
let not the mighty man boast in his might,
let not the rich man boast in his riches,
but let him who boasts boast in this,
that he understands and knows me,
that **I am [YHWH]**

who [does] (‘asah) [hesed], [mish^epat], and righteousness (tz^edaqah) in the earth.

For **in these things I delight, declares [YHWH]**.”

(Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV)

Claiming the **mish^epat** of God, **Jeremiah prays for appropriate correction**:

I know, [YHWH], that the way of man is not in himself,

that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.

¹¹¹ See footnote 58

¹¹² See footnote 14

Correct me, [YHWH], but in [mish^epat]:
not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing.
(Jeremiah 10:23-24 ESV)

Jeremiah later reports YHWH's promise to **discipline the nation "in mish^epat"**:

Then fear not, O Jacob my servant, declares [YHWH], nor be dismayed, O Israel;
for behold, I will save you from far away,
and your offspring from the land of their captivity.
Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease, and none shall make him afraid.
For I am with you to save you, declares [YHWH];
I will make a full end of all the nations among whom I scattered you,
but of you I will not make a full end.
I will discipline you in [mish^epat],
and I will by no means leave you unpunished.
(Jeremiah 30:10-11 ESV // 46:27-28)

Jeremiah further reports that YHWH in his role as the Messiah, "**The Branch**",¹¹³
will "**do mish^epat and righteousness**":

Behold, the days are coming, declares [YHWH],
when I will raise up for David **a righteous (tzadiq) Branch**,
and **he shall reign as king** and deal wisely,
and **shall [do] ('asah) [mish^epat] and righteousness (tz^edaqah)** in the [earth] ('eretz)¹¹⁴.
(Jeremiah 23:5 ESV)

In those days and at that time I will cause **a righteous (tz^edaqah) Branch to spring up for David**,
and **he shall [do] ('asah) [mish^epat] and righteousness (tz^edaqah)** in the [earth] ('eretz).
(Jeremiah 33:15 ESV)

The **Prophet Zephaniah** laments the state of sin of Jerusalem, "**the oppressing city**";
in contrast, YHWH does NOT cease to do **mish^epat**, "**every morning he shows forth his mish^epat**":

Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, the oppressing city!

She listens to no voice; she accepts no correction.

She does not trust in [YHWH];

she does not draw near to her God.

[YHWH] within her is righteous (tzadiq);

he does no injustice ('aw^{rah}ah);

every morning he shows forth his [mish^epat];

each dawn he does not fail;

but the unjust ('awwal) knows no shame.

(Zephaniah 3:1-2, 5 ESV)

God's dealings with human beings are governed by, "justness", **mish^epat**, "**shall not the Judge of all the earth do mish^epat**", "**all his ways are mish^epat**", "**he is great in power and mish^epat**".

The character attribute of **mish^epat** is something God loves, "**the King in his might loves mish^epat**", "**he loves righteousness and mish^epat**". God's fundamental nature includes **mish^epat**,

the works of his hands are faithful and mish^epat", "**YHWH is a God of mish^epat**",

who does hesed, mish^epat, and righteousness". God rules with **mish^epat**, "**righteousness and mish^epat are the foundation of his throne**", "**every morning he shows forth his mish^epat**".

God makes **mish^epat** available to others, "**give the king your mish^epat**", "**he will fill Zion with mish^epat**".

God provides correction with **mish^epat**, "**correct me, YHWH, but in mish^epat**",

"I will discipline you in mish^epat".

¹¹³ See **Excursus 3 – The Branch** in the paper "**The Transfiguration and the Tabernacle**" located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

¹¹⁴ See footnote [104](#)

5.3 A Required Attribute of True Worshippers

The purpose of human life is to overcome sinning human nature and attain **Godly Character**. This process can only be completed at the First Resurrection;¹¹⁵ but, in this life, we must strive to replace human nature with divine nature. **Since *mish'pat* is inherent in divine nature, it is axiomatic that we humans must also attain *mish'pat*, "justness".**

Prior to the negotiation over the destruction of Sodom,¹¹⁶ YHWH had expressed confidence in Abraham that he would live by the Way of God, "**keep the way of YWHW**", and that he would demonstrate it by "**doing righteousness and *mish'pat***":

[YHWH] said,

"Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,
seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation,
and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?

For I have chosen him,
that he may command his children and his household after him
to keep the way of [YWHW] by doing righteousness (tz'daqah) and [mish'pat],
so that [YHWH] may bring to Abraham what he has promised him."

(Genesis 18:17-19 ESV)

On her famous visit to **King Solomon**,¹¹⁷ the **Queen of Sheba** expressed admiration for Solomon, "**the report was true that I heard**". She acknowledged Solomon's quality of ***mish'pat*** as central to his success as king, "**you may do *mish'pat* and righteousness**":

Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of [YHWH],
she came to test him with hard questions.

And she said to the king,

"**The report was true that I heard** in my own land of your words and of your wisdom ...
Blessed be [YHWH] your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel!
Because [YHWH] loved Israel forever, he **has made you king**,
that you may [do] ('asah) [mish'pat] and righteousness (tz'daqah)."

(1Kings 10:1, 6, 9 ESV // 2 Chronicles 9:1a, 5, 8)

In his final response to the young Sage, Elihu, the **Patriarch Job** continues to assert his integrity, "**I put on righteousness**", claiming ***mish'pat*** as central to his character, "**my *mish'pat* was like a robe and a turban**":

I put on righteousness (tzedeq), and it clothed me;

my [mish'pat] was like a robe and a turban.

I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame.

I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know.

I broke the fangs of the unrighteous ('awwal) and made him drop his prey from his teeth.

(Job 29:14-17 ESV)

The **Book of Proverbs** opens with a statement of purpose, "**to know wisdom and instruction**", "**to understand words of insight**". Key to the purpose is "**instruction in wise dealing**" related to "**righteousness, *mish'pat*, and equity**":

The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:

To know wisdom and instruction,

to understand words of insight,

to receive instruction in wise dealing,

in righteousness (tzedeq), [mish'pat], and equity (mesharim);

(Proverbs 1:1-3 ESV)

Other proverbs indicate the efficacy of ***mish'pat***, "**by *mish'pat* a king builds up the land**"; the value of ***mish'pat*** in the eyes of God, "***mish'pat* is more acceptable to YHWH than sacrifice**"; and, the internal nature of ***mish'pat***, "**the thoughts of the righteous are *mish'pat***":

By [mish'pat] a king builds up the land,

but he who exacts gifts tears it down.

(Proverbs 29:4 ESV)

¹¹⁵ See footnote 9

¹¹⁶ See Genesis 18:27-33

¹¹⁷ See 1 Kings 10:1-13 // 2 Chronicles 9:1-12

Every way of a man is right (yashar) in his own eyes, but [YHWH] weighs the heart.
To do righteousness (tzedaqah) and **[mish^epat] is more acceptable to [YHWH] than sacrifice.**
(Proverbs 21:2-3 ESV)

The thoughts of the righteous (tzadiq) are [mish^epat];
the counsels of the wicked are deceitful.
(Proverbs 12:5 ESV)

King David looks to YHWH to teach ***mish^epat***, “**he leads the humble in *mish^epat***”.
Recognizing that ***mish^epat*** is a gift from God, “**he will bring forth your *mish^epat***”, “**the mouth of the righteous speaks *mish^epat***”, David will extoll the nature of God, “**I will sing of *hesed* and *mish^epat***”:

Good (tov) and upright (yashar) is [YHWH];
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in [mish^epat],
and teaches the humble his way.
(Psalm 25:8-9 ESV)

Commit your way to [YHWH]; trust in him, and he will act.

He will bring forth your righteousness (tzedeq) as the light, and **your [mish^epat] as the noonday**.

The righteous (tzadiq) shall inherit [earth] ('eretz)¹¹⁸ and dwell upon it forever.

The mouth of the righteous (tzadiq) utters wisdom, and his tongue **speaks [mish^epat]**.
[torah]¹¹⁹ of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip.
(Psalm 37:5-6, 29-31 ESV)

I will sing of [hesed]¹²⁰ and [mish^epat]; to you, [YHWH], I will make music.

I will ponder the way that is blameless (tamim).

Oh when will you come to me?

I will walk with integrity (tom) of heart within my house;

(Psalm 101:1-2 ESV)

Later Psalmists emphasize ***mish^epat*** as fundamental to the character of True Worshippers,
“***mish^epat* will return to the righteous**”, “**blessed are they who observe *mish^epat***”,
“**blessed is the man who fears [YHWH] ... who conducts his affairs with *mish^epat***”:

For [YHWH] will not forsake his people;
he will not abandon his heritage;
for **[mish^epat] will return to the righteous (tzedeq)**,
and all the upright (yashar) in heart will follow it.
(Psalm 94:14-15 ESV)

Blessed are they who observe [mish^epat],
who do righteousness (tzedaqah) at all times!
(Psalm 106:3 ESV)

Praise [YHWH]!

Blessed is the man who fears [YHWH], who greatly delights in his commandments!
His offspring will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright (yashar) will be blessed.
Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness (tzadiq) endures forever.

Light dawns in the darkness for the upright (yashar); he is gracious, merciful, and righteous (tzadiq).
It is well with the man who deals generously and lends;

who conducts his affairs with [mish^epat].

For the righteous (tzadiq) will never be moved; he will be remembered forever.
(Psalm 112:1-6 ESV)

I have done [mish^epat] and right (tzedeq);
do not leave me to my oppressors.
(Psalm 119:121 ESV)

The **Prophet Isaiah** looks to a restored Jerusalem, “**Zion shall be redeemed by *mish^epat***”,
where True Worshippers will exhibit ***mish^epat*, “keep *mish^epat*, and do righteousness”**,
“**blessed is the man who does this**”:

And I will restore your judges (shaphat) as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning.
Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness (tzedeq), the faithful city.

Zion shall be redeemed by [mish^epat],

¹¹⁸ See footnote 104

¹¹⁹ See footnote 18

¹²⁰ See footnote 58

and those in her who repent, by righteousness (tz^edaqah).
(Isaiah 1:26-27 ESV)

Thus says [YHWH]:

“Keep [mish^epat], and do righteousness (tz^edaqah),
for soon my salvation will come, and my righteousness be revealed.
Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast,
who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.”
(Isaiah 56:1-2 ESV)

The Prophet Jeremiah emphasizes that repentance, “if you truly amend your ways and your deeds”, requires demonstration of mish^epat, “if you truly do mish^epat”, “in truth, in mish^epat, and in righteousness”:

If you return, O Israel, declares [YHWH], to me you should return.
If you remove your detestable things from my presence, and do not waver,
and if you swear,
‘As [YHWH] lives,’

in truth, in [mish^epat], and in righteousness (tz^edaqah),
then nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory.
(Jeremiah 4:1-2 ESV)

For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds,

if you truly [do] ('asah) [mish^epat] one with another,
if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow,
or shed innocent blood in this place, and
if you do not go after other gods to your own harm,
then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.
(Jeremiah 7:5-7 ESV)

Jeremiah reports YHWH’s castigation of King Jehoiakim,¹²¹ challenging him to do mish^epat, “do mish^epat and righteousness”, as his father Josiah had done, “did not your father eat and drink and do mish^epat and righteousness”:

Thus says [YHWH]:

“Go down to the house of the king of Judah and speak there this word, and say,
‘Hear the word of [YHWH], O king of Judah,¹²² who sits on the throne of David,
you, and your servants, and your people who enter these gates.

Thus says [YHWH]:

Do [mish^epat] and righteousness (tz^edaqah),
and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed.
And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless,
and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. ...

Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar?
Did not your father¹²³ eat and drink and do [mish^epat] and righteousness (tz^edaqah)?
Then it was well with him.’ ...”

(Jeremiah 22:1-3, 15 ESV)

The Prophet Ezekiel reports several proclamations of YHWH emphasizing individual responsibility.¹²⁴ A key component of individual responsibility is mish^epat, “if a man is righteous and does mish^epat and right, he shall surely live”, “when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does mish^epat and right, he shall live by this”:

If a man is righteous (tzadiq) and does [mish^epat] and right (tz^edaqah),
withholds his hand from injustice ('awel),
[does] ('asah) true [mish^epat] between man and man,
he shall surely live, declares the Lord [YHWH].

Yet you say,

‘Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?’

When the son has done [mish^epat] and right (tz^edaqah),
and has been careful to [do] ('asah) all my statutes, he shall surely live.

¹²¹ See Jeremiah 22:18

¹²² Jehoiakim

¹²³ Josiah

¹²⁴ See Ezekiel 3:16-21, all of chapter 18, 33:1-20

But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does [mish^epat] and right (tz^edaqah), he shall surely live; he shall not die.

Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does [mish^epat] and right (tz^edaqah), he shall save his life.

Again, though I say to the wicked,
'You shall surely die,'

yet if he turns from his sin and does [mish^epat] and right (tz^edaqah) ...

None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him.

He has done [mish^epat] and right (tz^edaqah); he shall surely live.

And when the wicked turns from his wickedness
and does [mish^epat] and right (tz^edaqah), he shall live by this.

(Ezekiel 18:5, 8b, 9b, 19, 21, 27, 33:14, 16, 19 ESV)

The Prophet Hosea reports YHWH's intention to establish a "family" relationship with people of New Israel, "you will call me 'My Husband'",

in which mish^epat will be a major component,

"I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in mish^epat":

And in that day, declares [YHWH],

you will call me 'My Husband',

and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.'¹²⁵

For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth,
and they shall be remembered by name no more.

And I will [cut] (karath)¹²⁶ for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field,
the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground.

And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety.

And I will betroth you to me forever.

I will betroth you to me in righteousness (tzedeq) and in [mish^epat],

in [hesed]¹²⁷ and in mercy.

I will betroth you to me in faithfulness.

And you shall know [YHWH].

(Hosea 2:16-20 ESV)

The Prophet Micah asserts that he has attained mish^epat, "I am filled with power,

with the Spirit of YHWH, and with mish^epat". Micah goes on to specify this as a requirement of God,

"what does YHWH require of you but to do mish^epat":

But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of [YHWH],
and with [mish^epat] and might,

to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.

(Micah 3:8 ESV)

With what shall I come before [YHWH],
and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

Will [YHWH] be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my [life] (nephesh)?¹²⁸

He has told you, O man, what is good;

and what does [YHWH] require of you but to do [mish^epat],

and to love [hesed], and to walk humbly with your God?

(Micah 6:6-8 ESV)

The Prophet Hosea had previously foreshadowed the words of Micah:

So you, by the help of your God, return,

hold fast [hesed] and [mish^epat],

and wait continually for your God.

(Hosea 12:6 ESV)

¹²⁵ "Ba'al" is used here in the sense of "Master". This creates a play-on-words with "Ba' alim", in the next line, referring to pagan deities.

¹²⁶ See footnote 26

¹²⁷ See footnote 58

¹²⁸ See footnote 15

The **Prophet Zephaniah** identifies True Worshippers as those “**who do his mish^epat**”:

Seek [YHWH], all you humble of the land,
who do¹²⁹ his [mish^epat];
seek righteousness (tzedeq); seek humility;
perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of [YHWH].
(Zephaniah 2:3 ESV)

Fundamental to **Godly Character** is **mish^epat**, “justness”. The purpose of human life is to strive for **Godly Character**, **mish^epat**, “justness”. A person can only attain **Godly Character** by living by the Way of God, “**to keep the way of YHWH by doing righteousness and mish^epat**”.

The attainment of Godly Character requires “**instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, mish^epat, and equity**”. This can only come from God, “**he leads the humble in mish^epat, and teaches the humble his way**”. The teaching must be internalized, “**the thoughts of the righteous are mish^epat**”, “**the mouth of the righteous speaks mish^epat**”. Living by the Way of God is the only path to happiness, “**keep mish^epat, and do righteousness; blessed is the man who does this**”. When God calls a person to repentance, all past sins can be eradicated, “**if he turns from his sin and does mish^epat, he shall surely live**”. God looks to the day when salvation will become generally available, “**in that day, declares YHWH, you will call me ‘My Husband’, I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in mish^epat**”. This summarizes God’s requirement, “**what does YHWH require of you but to do mish^epat, and to love hesed**.”

5.4 Lack of Justness

When “justness”, **mish^epat**, is missing, is repressed, or is perverted, extremely negative social conditions result. **The Preacher** laments the fact that “**wickedness**” can be found where there should be only **mish^epat** and **righteousness**; but, he adds that it is common due to bureaucratic corruption of officials:

Moreover, I saw under the sun that in **the place of [mish^epat]**, even there was **wickedness**, and in **the place of righteousness (tzedeq)**, even there was **wickedness**.

I said in my heart, God will judge (shaphat) the righteous (tzadiq) and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.

(Ecclesiastes 3:16-17 ESV)

If you see in a province

the **oppression of the poor** and the **violation of [mish^epat] and righteousness (tzedeq)**, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them.

(Ecclesiastes 5:8 ESV)

The **Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah** both lament the sad state of Jerusalem due to lack of **mish^epat**:

How **the faithful city** has become a whore, **she who was full of [mish^epat]**!

Righteousness (tzedeq) lodged in her, but now murderers.

(Isaiah 1:21 ESV)

Run to and fro through the streets of **Jerusalem**, look and take note!

Search her squares to **see if you can find a man**, one **who does [mish^epat]** and seeks truth, that I may pardon her.

(Jeremiah 5:1 ESV)

The **Prophet Micah** decries the leaders of Israel for their rejection of **mish^epat**, “**who detest mish^epat**”. This rejection results violent crimes, “**who build Zion with blood**”; in corruption, “**judgment for a bribe**”; and, religious deception, “**yet they lean on YHWH**”:

Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob [even]¹³⁰ rulers of the house of Israel, **who detest [mish^epat] and make crooked all that is straight**, **who build Zion with blood** and Jerusalem with iniquity (‘aw^{lah}).

¹²⁹ The verb פָּעַל - pa`al, “to do”, is a lesser used synonym of `asah; see Holladay page 295.

¹³⁰ See footnote 22

Its heads give judgment (shaphat) for a bribe;

its priests teach for a price;

its prophets practice divination for money;

yet they lean on [YHWH] and say,

“Is not [YHWH] in the midst of us?

 No disaster shall come upon us.”

(Micah 3:9-11 ESV)

The **Prophet Isaiah** further comments that **the people have no mish^epat**

resulting in **“bloodshed”** and **“outcry”**:

For the vineyard of [YHWH] of hosts is the house of Israel,

and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting;

and **he looked for [mish^epat], but behold, bloodshed;**

for righteousness (tz^etaqah), but behold, an outcry!

(Isaiah 5:7 ESV)

God commands that **“transgression”** and **“sins”** be declared because the people have actually forsaken **mish^epat** although they make a pretense of seeking **mish^epat**. Still, the people pretend to want to learn the Way of God, **“they delight to draw near to God”**:

Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet;

declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins.

Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways,

as if they were a nation that did righteousness (tz^etaqah)

and did not **forsake the [mish^epat] of their God;**

they ask of me righteous (tzedeq) [mish^epatim],¹³¹

they delight to draw near to God.

(Isaiah 58:1-2 ESV)

Sounding very much like a description of modern Western Civilization,

the **Prophet Isaiah** summarizes **the breakdown in society due to lack of mish^epat**:

Their feet run to evil, and they are **swift to shed innocent blood**;

their thoughts are **thoughts of iniquity**;

desolation and **destruction** are in their highways.

The way of peace they do not know,

and **there is no [mish^epat] in their paths**;

they have made their roads crooked;

no one who treads on them knows peace.

Therefore **[mish^epat] is far from us**, and righteousness (tz^etaqah) does not overtake us;

we hope for light, and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.

We grope for the wall like the blind; we grope like those who have no eyes;

we stumble at noon as in the twilight,

among those in full vigor we are like dead men.

We all growl like bears; we moan and moan like doves;

we hope for [mish^epat], but there is none;

for salvation, but it is far from us.

For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us;

for our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities:

 transgressing, and denying [YHWH],

 and turning back from following our God,

 speaking oppression and revolt,

 conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words.

[mish^epat] is turned back, and righteousness (tz^etaqah) stands far away;

for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness (nakoh^h) cannot enter.

Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.

[YHWH] saw it, and it displeased him that **there was no [mish^epat]**.

(Isaiah 59:7-15 ESV)

When the majority in society **“forsake the mish^epat of their God”**, the results are **wickedness** and **oppression of the poor**. There is no good to be found, **“he looked for mish^epat, but behold,**

bloodshed”, **“we hope for mish^epat, but there is none”**. The leaders of society **“detest mish^epat and**

¹³¹ For discussion of the plural form, *mish^epatim*, see section ***6. Understanding, Wisdom, & Discernment***
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make crooked all that is straight” and practice “**violation of mish^epat and righteousness**”. This is when the majority are living in the way of the world, the way of Satan, “**there is no mish^epat in their paths**”. Sadly, this is where we are in modern Western Civilization, “**YHWH, Jesus Christ, saw it, and it displeased him that there was no mish^epat**”.

5.5 Wholistic Instances

To a Hebrew speaker during Old Testament times, **the word mish^epat inherently carried the entire range of meaning that we are investigating**. It was a single concept to them. **The nuances were implicit by context**. There are a number of instances of *mish^epat* where it is impossible to put a finer point on the word than to simply accept the whole range of meaning that it covers.

When the young Sage, **Elihu**, is getting to the end of his castigation of Job, Elihu alludes to God’s mercy, “**he delivers the afflicted**”. Elihu alleges that Job had been well treated by God, “**your table was full of fatness**”. Then he accuses Job of denigrating the wicked, “**you are full of the judgment on the wicked**”. Elihu further accuses Job, that in his self righteousness, Job feels justified in judging others because of his perceived superior ***mish^epat*, “**judgment and mish^epat seize you**”**:

He delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ear by adversity.

He also allured you out of distress into a broad place where there was no cramping, and what was set on **your table was full of fatness**.

But you are full of the judgment (din) on the wicked:

Judgment (din) and [mish^epat] seize you.

Beware lest wrath entice you into scoffing, and let not the greatness of the ransom turn you aside.
(Job 36:15-18 ESV)

Psalm 81 is festive. The Psalmist enjoins singing, “**sing aloud to God**”. He alludes to the Day of Trumpets, “**blow the trumpet at the new moon**”, and the Feast of Tabernacles, “**the full moon, on our feast day**”. Then he identifies these as integral to the Way of God, “***mish^epat of the God of Jacob***”:

Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob!

Raise a song; sound the tambourine, the sweet lyre with the harp.

Blow the trumpet at the new moon,
at the full moon, on our feast day.

For it is a statute for Israel, **[mish^epat] of the God of Jacob**.

He made it a decree in Joseph when he went out over the land of Egypt.

(Psalm 81:1-5a ESV)

Psalm 149 is highly metaphoric, but also festive, “**sing to YHWH a new song**”. The Psalmist is inspired by the Holy Spirit to look to the Second Advent, the establishment of the Kingdom of God,¹³² “**rejoice in their King**”, and the First Resurrection,¹³³ “**he adorns the humble with salvation**”. The appellatives “**the godly**” and “**the humble**” are common in the Psalms for True Worshippers.¹³⁴ The metaphor of violence, “**two edged sword in their hands**”, “**vengeance ... punishments**”, is discussed in detail in **Excursus 2 – The Metaphor of Violence** in the paper “**God of Every Nation**” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca. Metaphorically, the “**doing of mish^epat**” appears negative; however, the real sense is **all the positive implications of mish^epat** throughout the prophecies of the World Tomorrow:

Praise [YHWH]!

Sing to [YHWH] a new song, his praise in **the assembly of the godly**!

Let Israel be glad in his Maker;

let the children of Zion **rejoice in their King**!

Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!

For [YHWH] takes pleasure in his people;

he adorns the humble with salvation.

Let **the godly** exult in glory;

let them sing for joy on their beds.

¹³² See footnote 14

¹³³ See footnote 9

¹³⁴ See section **5. The Davidic Psalms** in the paper “**David – A Man After My Own Heart**” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

Let the high praises of God be in their throats and **two-edged [sword]¹³⁵ in their hands**, to execute ('asah) **vengeance** on the nations and **punishments** on the peoples, to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron, **to [do] ('asah) on them [mish^epat] written!**

This is honor for all **his godly ones**.

Praise [YHWH]!

(Psalm 149:1-9 ESV)

Jeremiah chapter 5 seems best taken as an assessment of the **reform of Josiah** as the end of Josiah's reign is approaching. The people have paid lip service to the efforts of Josiah, but in truth "**they have refused to repent**". Jeremiah accepts that the lower classes of society "**do not know the way of YHWH**", but he hopes better for the higher classes. **Jeremiah asserts the Way of YHWH to be more or less equivalent to "the mish^epat of their God"**:

[YHWH] do not your eyes look for truth?

You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish;
you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction.
They have made their faces harder than rock;
they have refused to repent.

Then I said,

"These are only the poor; they have no sense;
for **they do not know the way of [YHWH]**,
the [mish^epat] of their God.

I will go to the great and will speak to them,
for **they know the way of [YHWH]**
the [mish^epat] of their God."

But they all alike had broken the yoke; they had burst the bonds.
(Jeremiah 5:3-5 ESV)

In **Jeremiah chapter 8**, the Prophet reports YHWH's assessment of the people's refusal to repent. YHWH is grieved by the people, "**I have paid attention and listened**", but the people refuse to embrace the Way of God, "**my people know not mish^epat of YHWH**":

You shall say to them, Thus says [YHWH]:

"When men fall, do they not rise again?
If one turns away, does he not return?

Why then has this people turned away in perpetual backsliding?
They hold fast to deceit; they refuse to return.

I have paid attention and listened,
but they have not spoken rightly (ken);
no man relents of his evil, saying,
'What have I done?'

Everyone turns to his own course,
like a horse plunging headlong into battle.
Even the stork in the heavens knows her times,
and the turtledove, swallow, and crane keep the time of their coming,
but my people know not [mish^epat] of [YHWH].

(Jeremiah 8:4-7 ESV)

Through the **Prophet Amos**, God implores the people of the Northern Kingdom to "**seek YHWH and live**". The people have rejected the Way of God, "**O you who turn mish^epat to wormwood**". YHWH pleads with them to turn from evil and embrace good, "**establish mish^epat in the gate**", "**let mish^epat roll down like waters**". But their actual actions are characterized as an oxymoron, "**you have turned mish^epat into poison**".

Seek [YHWH] and live,

lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph,
and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel,

O you who turn [mish^epat] to wormwood

and cast down righteousness (tz^edaqah) to the earth!

¹³⁵ The Hebrew is singular: the sword of God is the Bible, the Word of God; see Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12, Revelation 1:16, 2:12,16, 19:15,21, and the double entendre in Matthew 10:34, Luke 2:35, 22:36.

Seek good, and not evil, that you may live;
and so [YHWH], the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said.

Hate evil, and love good, and establish [mish^epat] in the gate;
it may be that [YHWH], the God of hosts,
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.

But let [mish^epat] roll down like waters,
and righteousness (tz^edaqah) like an ever-flowing stream.

Do horses run on rocks?

Does one plow there with oxen?

But you have turned [mish^epat] into poison
and the fruit of righteousness (tz^edaqah) into wormwood ...
(Amos 5:6-7, 14-15, 23-24, 6:12 ESV)

The Prophet Zechariah reports the word of YHWH defining mish^epat in terms of social justice,
“do not oppress”, and individual justness, “in your hearts”:

And the word of [YHWH] came to Zechariah, saying,

“Thus says [YHWH] of hosts,

Render judgments (shaphat) [mish^epat]¹³⁶ of truth
and [do] ('asah) [hesed]¹³⁷ and mercy to one another,
do not oppress the widow, the fatherless,
the sojourner, or the poor,
and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.”

These are the things that you shall do:

Speak the truth to one another;
render in your gates judgments (shaphat) that are true
and [mish^epat] of peace;
do not devise evil in your hearts against one another,
and love no false oath,
for all these things I hate,
declares [YHWH].
(Zechariah 7:8-10, 8:16-17 ESV)

Job is accused of feeling he has superior mish^epat, “judgment and mish^epat seize you”.

The concept of mish^epat is integral to the Way of God, “mish^epat of the God of Jacob”,
“they know the way of YHWH, the mish^epat of their God.” The net result of prophecies is mish^epat,
“do on them mish^epat written”. Rather than embrace mish^epat, the people treat it like poison,
“you have turned mish^epat into poison”. The people are enjoined to embrace “mish^epat of peace”.

5.6 Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions combine words to form meanings that the individual word by themselves would NOT express. There are several idiomatic expressions using mish^epat. Generally the meaning of idiomatic expressions must be inferred from context.

The expression תְּפִלְעַל וְמִלְחָמָה - hoq umish^epat, occurs in the following verses:

And he cried to [YHWH], and [YHWH] showed him a log,
and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.
There [YHWH] made for them [hoq umish^epat], and there he tested them ...
(Exodus 15:25 ESV)

So Joshua [cut] (karath)¹³⁸ a covenant with the people that day,
and put in place [hoq umish^epat] for them at Shechem.
(Joshua 24:25 ESV)

¹³⁶ The ESV translator omits mish^epat; the phrase is מִשְׁפָט אַמְתָּה שְׁפָטְתָּה - mish^epat 'emeth sh^ephatotu, literally “mish^epat of truth you (plural) render judgements”.

¹³⁷ See footnote [58](#)

¹³⁸ See footnote [26](#)

For Ezra had set his heart to study [torah]¹³⁹ of [YHWH],
and to do it and to teach his **[hoq umish^epat]** in Israel.
(Ezra 7:10 ESV)

The slight variation **לְהָקָר וְלִמְשָׁפֵט** - **l^ehoq u^ele mish^epat**, occurs in First Samuel:
And he made it **[l^ehoq u^ele mish^epat]** for Israel from that day forward to this day.
(1 Samuel 30:25 ESV)

The expressions literally mean “statute and *mish^epat*” or “for/of statute and for/of *mish^epat*”.

In **Numbers** 27:11¹⁴⁰ and 35:29,¹⁴¹ the similar expression occurs, **לְחִקָּת מִשְׁפָט** - **l^ehuqqath mish^epat**,
“for statute of *mish^epat*”:

And it shall be for the people of Israel [for] statute [of] [mish^epat],
as [YHWH] commanded Moses.”
(Numbers 27:11 ESV)

And these things shall be for statute [of *mish^epat*]
for you throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.
(Numbers 35:29 ESV)

The meanings of these idiomatic expressions are probably very similar. The phrase in **First Samuel** could be translated almost identically to the phrase in **Numbers**. It could be argued due to the use of a **coordinate conjunction** “waw”, “and”, that the instances in **Exodus**, **Joshua**, and **Ezra** indicate that “*hoq*” and “*mish^epat*” are equivalent concepts, but from all other usage is clear that “*mish^epat*” is an **abstract** concept, “justice” or “justness”, while “**statutes**” are specific **prescriptions** and **proscriptions**. Therefore it is probably best to think of “*hoq*” as being governed by “*mish^epat*” in the idiomatic expressions. In other words, **the prescriptions and proscriptions help to define the nature of “*mish^epat*”, “statutes of *mish^epat*”.**

In the following passage, **the author of Second Kings uses *mish^epat* as the most all-encompassing word available to describe the lack of knowledge of the Assyrian settlers**. No theological insight can be gained from the use of *mish^epat* in this passage. Certainly the pagan settlers did NOT attain any true reverence for YHWH. Given that the “**priest**” was from Northern Israel, **his understanding was corrupted by the innovations of Jeroboam** – he was incapable of teaching any truth in the worship of YHWH:

And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel.
And they took possession of Samaria and lived in its cities.
And at the beginning of their dwelling there, they did not fear [YHWH].
Therefore [YHWH] sent lions among them, which killed some of them.
So the king of Assyria was told,
“The nations that you have carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know **[mish^epat]** of the god of the land.
Therefore he has sent lions among them, and behold, they are killing them, because they do not know **[mish^epat]** of the god of the land.”

Then the king of Assyria commanded,
“**Send there one of the priests** whom you carried away from there, and let him go and dwell there and teach them **[mish^epat]** of the god of the land.”
(2 Kings 17:24-27 ESV)

When YHWH takes Job to task, **YHWH also¹⁴² alludes to Job’s perceived superiority in *mish^epat*, “will you even put me in the wrong”**. This translation is from the following phrase, **הַאֲפָר תָּפֵר מִשְׁפָט** - **ha’aph tapher mish^epati**, literally, “**will you nullify *mish^epat* of me**”.

The implication being, “**Do you really think you have greater *mish^epat* than I?**”:

Then [YHWH] answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:
“Dress for action like a man;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.
Will you even put me in the wrong?

¹³⁹ See footnote 18

¹⁴⁰ See the discussion in section 3.4.1 *The Writings of Moses*

¹⁴¹ See the discussion in section 3.3.1 *The Writings of Moses*

¹⁴² See the discussion of Elihu’s castigation of Job in Job 36:15-18 in section 5.5 *Wholistic Instances*

Will you condemn me that you may be in the right (tzadeq)?
Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?
(Job 40:6-9 ESV)

The following passage is from the **Third Servant Song**,¹⁴³ which deals with individual responsibility. In verses 4 through 6, the servant recounts his commission and humility. In this passage, the servant thanks God for giving him the strength to complete his commission, “**the Lord YHWH helps me**”. The servant acknowledges that no one can oppose God, “**who will contend with me**”.

The phrase “**Who is my adversary?**” is from מִי־בַּעַל מִשְׁפָטִ - mi va'al mish'pati, literally, “**who master of mish'pat of me**”. Trusting in God, the servant challenges anyone who thinks he has greater **mish'pat** to come forward:

But **the Lord [YHWH] helps me**;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like a flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame.

He who vindicates (tzadeq) me is near.

Who will contend (riv) with me?

Let us stand up together.

Who is my adversary?

Let him come near to me.

Behold, **the Lord [YHWH] helps me**;
who will declare me guilty?
Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment;
the moth will eat them up.

(Isaiah 50:7-9 ESV)

In the **allegory of Oholah and Oholibah**,¹⁴⁴ the **Prophet Ezekiel** uses **mish'pat** with a sense of passing sentence. In the impending destruction of Israel, the invading Chaldean army will execute **mish'pat** upon Israel:

And they shall come against you from the north with chariots and wagons and a host of peoples.
They shall set themselves against you on every side with buckler, shield, and helmet;
and **I will commit [mish'pat] to them**,
and they shall judge (shaphat) you according to their **[mish'patim]**.¹⁴⁵

(Ezekiel 23:24 ESV)

When Nebuchadnezzar's army entered Jerusalem, **King Zedekiah** attempted to escape.

The author of the Book of Second Kings uses **mish'pat** in the sense of a decision rendered, i.e., a “sentence”, “**they spoke mish'pat on him**”:

Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah,
and **they [spoke mish'pat] on him**.
(2 Kings 25:6 ESV)

The next five passages are all variations of the same theme. We have already examined the idiom

מִשְׁפָט־מָוֶת - mish'pat maweth, “**mish'pat of death**”, “**death sentence**”.¹⁴⁶

The exact idiom occurs three more times:

And **if a man has committed a crime [mish'pat maweth]** and **he is put to death**,
and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree,
but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God.
(Deuteronomy 21:22-23a ESV)

Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people,
“This man deserves **[mish'pat maweth]**,
because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears.”
(Jeremiah 26:11 ESV)

¹⁴³ See Isaiah 50:4-9

¹⁴⁴ See Ezekiel chapter 23

¹⁴⁵ This is one of the rare case where **mish'patim** may simply be a plural of **mish'pat**; see section [6.6 Common Plural and Idiomatic Expressions](#).

¹⁴⁶ See discussion of Deuteronomy 19:6 in section [3.3.1 The Writings of Moses](#)

Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets,

“This man does not deserve **[mish^epat maweth]**,

for he has spoken to us in the name of [YHWH] our God.”

(Jeremiah 26:16 ESV)

The **Prophet Ezekiel** uses a variation of the idiom four times. The idiom is used of **laying a charge** as opposed to passing sentence. The phrase in Ezekiel 7:23, “**bloody crimes**”,

is from **מִשְׁפַּט דָמִים** - mish^epat damim, literally, “**mish^epat of blood**”. The phrase in Ezekiel 16:38,

“**as women who commit adultery**”, is from **מִשְׁפֵּט נָאָפֹת** - mish^epe^t no’aphoth,

and the phrase in Ezekiel 23:45, “**the sentence of adulteresses**”, is from the nearly identical¹⁴⁷

מִשְׁפֵּט נָאָפֹת - mish^epat no’aphoth, both literally mean, “**mish^epat of ones committing adultery**”.

The phrase in Ezekiel 23:45, “**the sentence of women who shed blood**”, is from

וּמִשְׁפֵּט שְׁפָכוֹת קָם - umish^epat shoph^ekoth dam, literally “**mish^epat of ones shedding blood**”:

Forge a chain!

For the land is full of **[mish^epat damim]** and the city is full of violence.

I will bring the worst of the nations to take possession of their houses.

I will put an end to the pride of the strong, and their holy places shall be profaned.

(Ezekiel 7:23-24 ESV)

And I will judge (shaphat) you **[mish^epe^t no’aphoth]** and shed blood are judged, and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy.

(Ezekiel 16:38 ESV)

Then I said of her who was worn out by adultery,

‘Now they will continue to use her for a whore, even her!’

For they have gone in to her, as men go in to a prostitute.

Thus they went in to Oholah and to Oholibah, lewd women!

But righteous men shall pass judgment (shaphat) on them **[mish^epat no’aphoth]**, **[umish^epat shoph^ekoth dam]**,

because they are adulteresses, and blood is on their hands.”

(Ezekiel 23:43-45 ESV)

The idiomatic expressions around **statutes** (**קָו** - hoq and **הָקְקָה** - huqqah) and **mish^epat** indicate that the statutes are useful to help understand **mish^epat**. This relationship is even more important with the plural form, **mish^epatim** -see the discussion in section [6.3 Statutes and mish^epatim](#).

The idiomatic expressions around “**passing sentence**” go back to the original derivation of **mish^epat** from **shaphat**, “to judge”.

6. Understanding, Wisdom, & Discernment

Knowledge is the raw material of the human mind, but memorized facts of and by themselves are useless. Knowledge is only of value when it is understood. **Understanding** implies considering relationships among facts. **Understanding** implies knowing the significance of knowledge, how to apply knowledge. With experience in the application knowledge, a person gains wisdom.

Wisdom implies the ability to understand when a piece of information is of value and when it is of no significance. **Wisdom** implies the ability to reject a piece of information found to be false or of no significance. Through the exercise of wisdom, a person becomes able to extrapolate from known circumstances to new circumstances. **Discernment** implies the ability to apply wisdom learned in one situation to a new situation. **Discernment** implies the ability to go beyond what has already been established and apply wisdom to new and not previously determined situations.

The process of advancing from mere knowledge to possessing the ability of discernment, is what education and experience are all about. The process applies in every sphere of human activity.

With Christian living, it is no different. A person called to be a True Worshipper must first gain **rudimentary knowledge of the Bible**. If Biblical teaching is accepted, a person then, based on the Bible,

¹⁴⁷ In Ezekiel 16:38, **mish^epe^t**, is a plural form; whereas **mish^epat** in 23:45 is a singular form; see the discussion of these verses in section [6.6 Common Plural and Idiomatic Expressions](#)

begins to live by the Way of God. Living by the Way of God allows the Holy Spirit to work with the True Worshipper and come to an understanding of the fundamental teachings of the Bible. Continued experience living by the Way of God provides growth in understanding until the True Worshipper begins to attain wisdom in the application of Biblical understanding. A lifetime of living by the Way of God gives the True Worshipper discernment in the things of God as revealed in the Bible. This is the process implied by the Hebrew word *mish'patim*. This is the target of the Christian life: to develop Godly Character as specified by *mish'patim*.

6.1 What is *mish'patim*?

A good place to commence the study of *mish'patim* is in chapter 4 of the Book of Deuteronomy. In chapters 1 through 3, Moses summarized the 40-year trek of Israel in the Wilderness. At the beginning of chapter 1, Moses stated his purpose in the speeches he was about to deliver. In chapter 4, he commences to satisfy his purpose:

In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month,

Moses spoke to the people of Israel

according to all that [YHWH] had given him in commandment to them ...

Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab,

Moses undertook to explain this [torah],¹⁴⁸ saying ...

(Deuteronomy 1:3, 5 ESV)

And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the *mish'patim* that I am teaching you, and do ('asah) them, that you may live ...

You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of [YHWH] your God that I command you.

See, I have taught you statutes and *mish'patim*, as [YHWH] my God commanded me, that you should do ('asah) them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

Keep them and do ('asah) them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say,

‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’

For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as [YHWH] our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?

And what great nation is there, that has statutes and *mish'patim* so righteous (tzadiq) as all this [torah] that I set before you today?

(Deuteronomy 4:1a, 2, 5-8 ESV)

The Book of Deuteronomy contains the record of Moses' speeches to the people of Israel in the Plains of Moab during the last few weeks of Moses' life just before the people of Israel crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land. **The teaching is eternal.**¹⁴⁹ It is as much for us as it was for them:

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4 ESV)

Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. (1 Corinthians 10:11 ESV)

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully ... It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you

through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

(1 Peter 1:10, 12 ESV)

God requires all True Worshippers to come to an understanding of *mish'patim*.¹⁵⁰ Moses' teaching is extremely illuminating, but the whole Bible must be considered. The purpose the New Testament documents is to elucidate and elaborate the teaching of the Old Testament. **The entire Bible comprises**

¹⁴⁸ See footnote 18

¹⁴⁹ See the paper “**The Words of Eternal Life**” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

¹⁵⁰ I do NOT intend to imply that all must attain the technical understanding contained in this paper. Living a Christian life based on the Bible will naturally bring a True Worshipper to a state of *mish'patim*.

torah. As quoted above, Moses' teaching comprises **the word** of God, **the commandments**, **statutes**, and **mish^epatim**. These things are **torah**, which is declared to be **righteous**. Moses is NOT discussing mere facts, knowledge to be memorized. The key to **torah** is to **do them**, to **keep them**, to **live by the Way of God**. The person who does this will become **wise** and **understanding**. The **torah** of God will be **your wisdom** and **your understanding**. As a True Worshipper lives by the **Way of God** and comes to a deeper understanding of the **word of God**, the **commandments**, the **statutes**, and the **gospel**, which comprise **torah**, the True Worshipper grows in **mish^epatim**.

The **New Testament documents** are clear and specific that
the process of mish^epatim is required of Christians:

Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for **I will give you a mouth and wisdom**, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. (Luke 21:14-15 ESV)

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that **you may be filled with the knowledge** of his will in **all spiritual wisdom and understanding**, so as to **walk in a manner** worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and **increasing in the knowledge of God**; (Colossians 1:9-10 ESV)

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of **full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery**, which is Christ, in whom are hidden **all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**. (Colossians 2:1-3 ESV)

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, **in all wisdom and insight** making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth in him. (Ephesians 1:7-10 ESV)

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you **the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him**, for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and **try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord**. (Ephesians 1:16-17, 5:8-10 ESV)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that **by testing you may discern what is the will of God**, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2 ESV)

But solid food is for the mature, for **those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice** to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:14 ESV)

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But **grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Peter 3:17-18 ESV)

Summary of Moses' definition of mish^epatim:

- The objective of Moses' teaching is **mish^epatim**, **"I am teaching you mish^epatim"**
- There is a relationship between **mish^epatim**, statutes, commandments, and **torah**, **"I have taught you statutes"**, **"keep the commandments"**, **"all this torah"**
- The key to **mish^epatim** is to live by the Way of God, **"keep them and do them"**, **"that you may live"**
- The outcome is to be **"wise and understanding"**, **"that will be your wisdom and your understanding"**

6.1.1 The Sinai Covenant and the New Covenant

The purpose of the Sinai Covenant was to constitute the people of Israel into a nation. God had freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, establishing God's ownership of the people. The Sinai Covenant established Israel as a vasal nation under God as suzerain.

The great periods of God's revelation to humanity began with the Sinai Covenant:¹⁵¹

[YHWH] called to him out of the mountain, saying,

"Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel:

'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians,
and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.'

Now therefore, if you will indeed **obey my voice and keep my covenant**,
you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples,
for all the earth is mine;
and you shall **be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**'

These are **the words** that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

All the people answered together and said,

"All that [YHWH] has spoken we will do."

(Exodus 19:3b-6, 8a ESV)

The three stipulations of the Sinai Covenant are:

1. **obey my voice**
2. **keep my covenant**
3. **be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation**

The "**word of God**" is what is spoken by the "**voice of God**", "**obey my voice**".

The "**word of God**" is all powerful. Jesus used the "**word of God**" to defeat Satan the Devil:

Then **Jesus was** led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be **tempted by the devil**.

And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

And the tempter came and said to him,

"If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

But he answered,

"It is written,

'**Man shall not live** by bread alone,

but **by every word that comes from the mouth of God.**'" (citing Deuteronomy 8:3)

(Matthew 4:1-4 ESV)

The Bible contains the "word of God":

But as for you, **continue in what you have learned** and have firmly believed,
knowing from whom you learned it
and how from childhood you have been acquainted with **the sacred writings**,
which are able to **make you wise** for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is breathed out by God

and profitable for **teaching**, for **reproof**, for **correction**,

and for **training in righteousness**,

that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

(2 Timothy 3:14-17 ESV)

The True Worshipper of God must understand and live by the teaching of the "**word of God**", the Bible, the entire Bible, NOT selections from the Bible. This is what it means to "**live by the Way of God**".

But **does NOT the New Covenant supersede the Sinai Covenant?**

Is NOT the Sinai Covenant obsolete and passed away?

When he said above,

"You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings
and burnt offerings and sin offerings"

(these are offered according to the [nomos]),¹⁵² then he added,

"Behold, I have come to do your will."

He does away with the first in order to establish the second.

¹⁵¹ See section [3.4 The Three Great Periods of Revelation](#) in the paper "[Third Pillar: The Way of God](#)" located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

¹⁵² See footnote 7

And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant,

so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance,
since **a death has occurred**

that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

For **where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.**

For **a will takes effect only at death**, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.
(Hebrews 10:8-10, 9:15-17 ESV)

The Old Covenant, **the Sinai Covenant, officially ended with the death of Jesus Christ.**

In his Old Testament role as YHWH, Jesus Christ was the “testator”, the party imposing the Sinai Covenant on the nation of Israel. The history of Israel is a litany of the nation’s violations of the Sinai Covenant. Ancient Israel did NOT “**obey my voice**”. Ancient Israel did NOT “**keep my covenant**”. Ancient Israel refused to “**be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation**”. Therefore the Sinai Covenant had to be terminated. However, **just before his death, Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant:**

And **when the hour came**, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him.

And he said to them,

“I have earnestly desired to eat **this Passover** with you before I suffer.

For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said,

“Take this, and divide it among yourselves.

For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine
until the kingdom of God comes.”

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying,

“**This is my body**, which is given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me.”

And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying,

“**This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.** ...”

(Luke 22:14-20 ESV)

The **New Testament Passover**¹⁵³ is the **sign of the New Covenant** for True Worshippers of God.

But **what is the New Covenant?** The seminal scriptures on the New Covenant are in the **Book of Jeremiah** and The **Book of Ezekiel**. The prophecies frame the New Covenant in terms of the New Israel after the Second Exodus.¹⁵⁴ However, Jesus clearly inaugurated the New Covenant with the Apostles for the New Testament Church; so, it is clear that **the New Covenant is in effect now for all True Worshippers**, which those called to the New Israel will be:

Behold, the days are coming, declares [YHWH],
when **I will [cut] (karath)**¹⁵⁵ **a new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,
not like the covenant that I [cut] (karath) with their fathers
on the day **when I took them** by the hand to bring them **out of the land of Egypt,**
my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares [YHWH].

For **this is the covenant that I will [cut] (karath)** with the house of Israel after those days,
declares [YHWH]:

I will put my [torah]¹⁵⁶ **within them**, and **I will write it on their hearts.**

And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying,
‘Know [YHWH],’

for **they shall all know me**, from the least of them to the greatest, declares [YHWH].

For **I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.**

(Jeremiah 31:31-34 ESV see also 32:37-40)

¹⁵³ For further discussion, see section **9:10 The New Testament Passover** in the paper “True Worship of the True God” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

¹⁵⁴ See section **2.4.5 The World Tomorrow and Beyond** in the paper “Second Piller - The Plan of God” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

¹⁵⁵ See footnote **26**

¹⁵⁶ See footnote **18**

Therefore say,

‘Thus says the Lord [YHWH]:

I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.’

And when they come there,

they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations.

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them.

I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my [mish^epatim] and [do] ('asah) them.

And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.

And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my Spirit within you,

and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to [do] ('asah) my [mish^epatim].

My servant David shall be king over them,

and they shall all have one shepherd.

They shall walk in my [mish^epatim] and be careful to [do] ('asah) my statutes.

(Ezekiel 11:17-20, 36:25-27, 37:24 ESV)

Since its inauguration,

the New Covenant has been available only to those called to the New Testament Church.

After the Second Advent, the New Covenant will be made available to all humanity

starting with the nation of New Israel. **The key provisions of the New Covenant are:**

- **I will put my torah within them”**

For I delight in the [nomos]¹⁵⁷ of God, in my inner being ...
(Romans 7:22 ESV)

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith —that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
(Ephesians 3:14, 16-19 ESV)

- **I will write it on their hearts”, “I will give you a new heart”**

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit [which] has been given to us.
(Romans 5:3-5 ESV)

And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.
(2 Corinthians 1:21-22 ESV)

¹⁵⁷ See footnote 7

- “**they shall all know me”**

I am the good shepherd.
I know my own and my own know me,
just as the Father knows me and I know the Father;
and I lay down my life for the sheep.
(John 10:14-15 ESV)

We are from God.

Whoever knows God listens to us;
whoever is not from God does not listen to us.
By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.
Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God,
and **whoever loves has been [begotten] of God and knows God.**
Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.
(1 John 4:6-8 ESV)

- “**I will forgive their iniquity”, “you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses”**

But that you may know that **the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins** ...
(Mark 2:10a ESV)

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying,
“Drink of it, all of you, for **this is my blood of the covenant,**
which is poured out for many **for the forgiveness of sins.** ...”

(Matthew 26:27-28 ESV)

In him **we have redemption through his blood,**
the **forgiveness of our trespasses,**
according to the riches of his grace ...
(Ephesians 1:7 ESV)

- “**I will remember their sin no more”**

And **the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us;** for after saying,
“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord:
I will put my [nomos]¹⁵⁸ on their hearts, and write them on their minds,”
(citing Jeremiah 31:33)

then he adds,

“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”
(citing Jeremiah 31:34b)

Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.
(Hebrews 10:15-18 ESV)

For there is no distinction:

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
and are justified by his grace as a gift,
through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
whom God put forward **as a propitiation by his blood,**
to be received by faith.

This was to show God’s righteousness,
because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.
(Romans 3:22b-25 ESV)

- “**I will put my Spirit within you”**

Or do you not know that **your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,**
[which] you have from God?

You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.

So glorify God in your body.

(1 Corinthians 6:19-20 ESV)

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit,
if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,

he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead

will also give life to your mortal bodies **through his Spirit [which] dwells in you.**

(Romans 8:9, 11 ESV)

¹⁵⁸ See footnote 7

- **cause you to walk in my statutes**

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him:

bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;
(Colossians 1:9-10 ESV)

Whoever says
“I know him”

but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.

By this we may know that we are in him:

whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.
(1 John 2:4-6 ESV)

And this is love,
that we walk according to his commandments;
this is the commandment,
just as you have heard from the beginning,
so that you should walk in it.
(2 John 6 ESV)

- **do my mish'patim**

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the [nomos] and the Prophets.

Enter by the narrow gate.

For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.
(Matthew 7:12-14 ESV)

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

And you know the way to where I am going.

Thomas said to him,

“Lord, we do not know where you are going.
How can we know the way?”

Jesus said to him,

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me.

(John 14:3-6 ESV)

The first provision of the Sinai Covenant was to “obey my voice”. The voice of God is the Word of God. We have the written Word of God in the Bible. Jesus Christ is the living Word of God.

The record of Jesus' teaching is the Bible. The Sinai Covenant was obviated by the First Advent, and the New Covenant was inaugurated. Both covenants are based on the same teaching – the Bible. By the New Covenant, True Worshippers are to have the “Teaching of God”, the torah, written on their hearts. This is the key to becoming like God, to attain “Godly Character”, to be considered a candidate for the gift of eternal life.

6.1.2 Obey My Voice

It is clear then that although the Sinai Covenant itself is no longer in force, **the teaching given to Ancient Israel under the Old Covenant, the *torah***,¹⁵⁹ **remains the basis of God's requirements of True Worshippers**. What exactly does *torah* comprise?

After Israel agreed to the Sinai Covenant, the first teaching from God was the **Ten Commandments**.

All Israel heard the voice of God pronouncing the Ten Commandments:

So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that [YHWH] had commanded him.

All the people answered together and said,
"All that [YHWH] has spoken we will do."

And Moses reported the words of the people to [YHWH].

And **God spoke all these words**, saying,

"I am [YHWH] your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
You shall have no other gods before me."

(Exodus 19:7-8, 20:1-3 ESV)

The Ten Commandments are the foundation of all *torah*. The Hebrew words for the

Ten Commandments are מִצְוָה mitz'wah and עֲדָת `eduth. After the Ten Commandments, the next teaching given to Israel was the **Covenant Code**, reported in the **Book of Exodus** chapter 19 verses 22-26 and all of chapters 21, 22, and 23. **The Hebrew words for "statute"**, are הָקֵד - hqod and הָקֵדָה - huqqah. These words do NOT occur in the Covenant Code; however, **the Covenant Code is the first large collection of statutes**. Most of the material in the **Book of Leviticus** comprises statutes. The **Book of Numbers** also contains statutes, for example, chapter 9 verses 1-14, chapters 18 and 19, chapter 27 verses 1-11, and chapters 30, 35, and 36. In the **Book of Deuteronomy**, most of chapters 13 through 25 comprises statutes.

See section [6.3 Statutes and *mish'patim*](#) for further discussion of statutes. Another related term is מִשְׁמֶרֶת - mish'mereth, "obligation", "duty", "service",¹⁶⁰ - special instruction given by God.

All God's instruction, in fact **the entire Bible comprises *torah***.¹⁶¹

But how are all these terms related to ***mish'patim***?

It is clear that the entire Bible is the inspired revelation from God of what is required of True Worshippers. The Sinai Covenant is over, but **the New Covenant requires much deeper understanding of teaching of God** than was required of Ancient Israel. The meaning of ***mish'patim*** is critical to True Worshippers under the New Covenant.

In many places in the Bible there are lists including ***mitz'wah*, *eduth*, *hqod*, *huqqah*, *mish'mereth*, *torah*, and *mish'patim***, for example:

... Abraham **obeyed my voice** and **kept my charge (mish'mereth)**, **my commandments (mitz'wah)**, **my statutes (huqqah)**, [even]¹⁶² **my [torah]**.¹⁶³ (Genesis 26:5 ESV)

You shall therefore love [YHWH] your God and **keep his charge (mish'mereth)**, **his statutes (huqqah)**, **his [mish'patim]**, and **his commandments (mitz'wah)** always. (Deuteronomy 11:1 ESV)

This is the **[torah]** that Moses set before the people of Israel.

These are the **testimonies ('eduth)**, the **statutes (huqqah)**, and the **[mish'patim]**, which Moses spoke to the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt ... (Deuteronomy 4:44-45 ESV)

¹⁵⁹ The word "torah" encompasses the entire teaching of God, the Bible.

¹⁶⁰ See Holladay page 220

¹⁶¹ For further discussion see [Excursus 3 – torah](#) and [Excursus 5 -torah and nomos](#) in the paper "Covenants of Grace" located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

¹⁶² See footnote 22

¹⁶³ See footnote 18

Now this is the **commandment (mitz^ewah)**, the **statutes (hog)**, and the **[mish^epatim]**, that [YHWH] your God commanded me to **teach you**, that you may **do them** in the land to which you are going over, to possess it ...
(Deuteronomy 6:1 ESV)

You have declared today that [YHWH] is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and **keep his statutes (hog) and his commandments (mitz^ewah) and his [mish^epatim]**, and will obey his voice.
(Deuteronomy 26:17 ESV)

... and **keep the charge (mish^emereth)** of [YHWH] your God, walking in his ways and **keeping his statutes (huqqah)**, his **commandments (mitz^ewah)**, his **[mish^epatim]**, and his **testimonies (‘eduth)**, as it is written in the **[torah]**¹⁶⁴ of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn ...
(1 Kings 2:3 ESV)

And the **statutes (hog)** and the **[mish^epatim]**, [even]¹⁶⁵ the **[torah]**, and the **commandment (mitz^ewah)** that he wrote for you, **you shall always be careful to do**.

You shall not fear other gods ...
(2 Kings 17:37 ESV)

We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept **the commandments (mitz^ewah), the statutes (hog), and the [mish^epatim]** that you commanded your servant Moses.
(Nehemiah 1:7 ESV)

You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them **right (yashar) [mish^epatim]** and **true [torah]**, **good (tov) statutes (hog)** and **commandments (mitz^ewah)**, and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them **commandments (mitz^ewah)** and **statutes (hog)** and **[torah]** by Moses your servant.
(Nehemiah 9:13-14 ESV)

The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to **the [torah] of God**, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to **walk in God’s [torah]** that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the **commandments (mitz^ewah)** of the [YHWH] our Lord and his **[mish^epatim]** and **his statutes (hog)**.
(Nehemiah 10:28-29 ESV)

With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your **commandments (mitz^ewah)**! I have stored up **your word** in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, [YHWH]; teach me your **statutes (huqqah)**! With my lips I declare all the **[mish^epatim]** of your mouth. In the way of your **testimonies (‘eduth)** I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your **statutes (huqqah)**; I will not forget your word.
(Psalm 119:10-16 ESV see also verses 18-24, 33-39, 59-64, 75-80, 97-102, 137-144, 163-168, 171-176)

The meaning of all of these words is specific and well defined, except for mish^epatim:

- **torah** is the all-encompassing term for the teaching of God, the Bible
- **mitz^ewah** and **‘eduth**, the Ten Commandments, are specifically listed twice, Exodus 20:3-17 and Deuteronomy 5:7-21
- **hog** and **huqqah**, specific prescriptions and proscriptions, are scattered throughout the Writings of Moses, but they are always obvious and clearly identifiable
- **mish^emereth** refers to some specialized instruction from God, as to Abraham in Genesis 12:1, 17:1, and all of chapter 22

¹⁶⁴ See footnote 18

¹⁶⁵ See footnote 22

But **nowhere is there a clear specification or definition of *mish^epatim*,**

yet it is clearly intimately related to these other terms.

The next section examines some specific aspects of ***mish^epatim***.

6.1.3 Characteristics of *mish^epatim*

In the **Covenant of Life**,¹⁶⁶ **God clearly ties “life” to *mish^epatim***,

and **Nehemiah** alludes to the **Covenant of life**:

See, **I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.**

[If you obey the commandments of [YHWH] your God]¹⁶⁷ that I command you today, by **loving [YHWH] your God**, by **walking in his ways**, and by **keeping his commandments (mitz^ewah)** and his **statutes (huqqah)** and his **[mish^epatim]**, **then you shall live** and multiply, and [YHWH] your God will bless you ...
(Deuteronomy 30:15-16 ESV)

And **you warned them in order to turn them back to your [torah]**.¹⁶⁸

Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your **commandments (mitz^ewah)**, but **sinned against your [mish^epatim]**, which **if a person does them, he shall live by them**, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey.
(Nehemiah 9:29 ESV)

The purpose of the Covenant of Life is to bring the True Worshipper of God to an understanding of the **reciprocal nature of *hesed***. God promises that he will unequivocally perform his side of the covenant – for True Worshippers today, this is the **New Covenant**. In the Covenant of Life, God enjoins the True Worshipper to commit unequivocally to his/her side of the covenant – **choose life**. The protasis in verse 16, “**loving YHWH your God**”, defines reciprocal love to God as “**walking in his ways**”, living by the Way of God. To live by the Way of God requires “**keeping his commandments**”; but also his “**statutes**” and “**mish^epatim**”. The apodosis verifies the outcome, “**then you shall live**”. “Statutes” are discussed further in section **6.3 Statutes and mish^epatim**, but how is ***mish^epatim*** related to the “**commandments**” and “**walking in his ways**”?

After God spoke the Ten Commandments in the hearing of the people, **God called Moses along with some others up into Mount Sinai**. The others went part way up, Moses, possibly accompanied by Joshua,¹⁶⁹ went into the presence of God. **This is the occasion of the delivery of the Covenant Code to Moses**. Moses came down the mountain, back to the assembly, and delivered the Covenant Code:

Then he said to Moses,

“Come up to [YHWH], you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar.

Moses alone shall come near to [YHWH],

but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.”

Moses came and told the people all the words of [YHWH] and **all the [mish^epatim]**.

And all the people answered with one voice and said,

“**All the words that [YHWH] has spoken we will do.**”

And **Moses wrote down all the words** of [YHWH].

(Exodus 24:1-4a ESV)

The words that Moses wrote, “**Moses wrote down all the words**”, comprised the Covenant Code, “**all the words that YHWH has spoken**”. Moses read the words to the people, “**Moses came and told the people all the words**”, but he also explained and elaborated the words “**told the people ... all the mish^epatim**”. This teaching comprised “***mish^epatim***”. The explanation and the understanding of the words of the Covenant Code comprise “***mish^epatim***”.

¹⁶⁶ See section **9. The Covenant of Life** in the paper “**Covenants of Grace**” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

¹⁶⁷ This phrase is NOT in the Masoretic Text, it is supplied by the translator, based on the Septuagint.

¹⁶⁸ See footnote **18**

¹⁶⁹ See Exodus 24:13

In the **blessing of the Tribe of Levi**, Moses is explicit that ***mish^epatim* implies teaching**. All the written words of God are encompassed in “***torah***”. The elaboration, the **teaching of the torah**, is implied by ***mish^epatim***. The process of coming to an understanding of God’s word requires teaching, ***mish^epatim***.

And **of Levi he said**,

“Give to Levi your Thummim, and your Urim to your godly one,
whom you tested at Massah,
with whom you quarreled at the waters of Meribah;
who said of his father and mother,
‘I regard them not’;
he disowned his brothers and ignored his children.
For they observed your word and kept your covenant.

They shall teach Jacob your [mish^epatim] and Israel your [torah],¹⁷⁰
they shall put incense before you and whole burnt offerings on your altar.

Bless, [YHWH], his substance, and accept the work of his hands;
crush the loins of his adversaries, of those who hate him, that they rise not again.”

(Deuteronomy 33:8-11 ESV)

The **Prophet Hosea** reports God’s word **linking *mish^epatim* with *hesed* and knowledge of God to define “true worship”**:

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?
What shall I do with you, O Judah?

Your [hesed]¹⁷¹ is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away.

Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets;
I have slain them by the **words of my mouth**,
and **my [mish^epatim] goes forth as the light**.

For **I desire [hesed]** and not sacrifice,
the **knowledge of God** rather than burnt offerings.
(Hosea 6:4-6 ESV)

The Psalmist of **Psalm 105**, a “historic Psalm”, makes the point of the universal nature of the ***mish^epatim*** of God. The Psalmist identifies the ***mish^epatim* as something “uttered” by God**, a spoken word rather than written word:

Oh give thanks to [YHWH]; call upon his name;
make known his deeds among the peoples!
Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!
Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek [YHWH] rejoice!
Seek [YHWH] and his strength; seek his presence continually!
Remember the wondrous works that he has done,
his miracles, and **[mish^epatim] he uttered**,
O offspring of Abraham, his servant, children of Jacob, his chosen ones!
He is [YHWH] our God; **his [mish^epatim] [is]**¹⁷² **in all the earth**.
(Psalm 105:1-7 ESV // 1 Chronicles 16:8-14)

The Psalmist of the **119th Psalm** alludes to the **teaching nature of *mish^epatim***, and the fact that learning ***mish^epatim* is prerequisite to the hope of attaining eternal life**:

I will praise you with an upright heart, **when I learn your righteous [mish^epatim]**.

Accept my freewill offerings of praise, [YHWH], and **teach me your [mish^epatim]**.

I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, **to keep your righteous [mish^epatim]**.

And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for **my hope is in your [mish^epatim]**.

Hear my voice according to your [hesed]; [YHWH], **according to your [mish^epatim] give me life**.

Great is your mercy, [YHWH]; **give me life according to your [mish^epatim]**.

When I think of your [mish^epatim] from of old, **I take comfort**, [YHWH].

(Psalm 119:7, 108, 106, 43, 149, 156, 52 ESV)

¹⁷⁰ See footnote 18

¹⁷¹ See footnote 58

¹⁷² The verb “are” is supplied by the translator. As a “concept” *mish^epatim* is best thought of in the singular; hence, “is” is the preferred verb.

It is clear that *mish^epatim* is a completely abstract concept. There is nowhere in the Bible that gives a specification, listing, or definition of *mish^epatim*. The processes of teaching and learning are embraced by *mish^epatim*. Ultimately, the teaching of *mish^epatim* comes from God. The understanding of the Ten Commandments and the various prescriptions and proscription contained in statutes requires *mish^epatim*. Living by the Way of God is necessary to attain *mish^epatim*. Finally, the hope of eternal life is only possible with *mish^epatim* as a prerequisite. The best summary of *mish^epatim* is that it is the understanding, wisdom, and discernment that come from a life lived by the Way of God.

6.2 Other Seminal Scriptures

Given an understanding of the meaning of *mish^epatim*, there are many scriptures that elaborate and elucidate the meaning. God's hesed is expressed through the covenantal nature of the relationship God requires with True Worshippers.

In several instances, it is clear that *mish^epatim* is central to this relationship:

Know therefore that [YHWH] your God is God,
the faithful God who keeps covenant and [hesed]¹⁷³
with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,
and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them.
He will not be slack with one who hates him.
He will repay him to his face.
You shall therefore be careful to do ('asah)
the commandment and the statutes and the [mish^epatim]
that I command you today.
And because you listen to these [mish^epatim] and keep and do ('asah) them,
[YHWH] your God will keep with you the covenant and the [hesed] that he swore to your fathers.
(Deuteronomy 7:9-12 ESV)

This day [YHWH] your God commands you to do ('asah) these statutes and [mish^epatim].
You shall therefore be careful to do ('asah) them with all your heart
and with all your [being] (nephesh).¹⁷⁴

You have declared today that [YHWH] is your God, and that you will walk in his ways,
and keep his statutes and his commandments and his [mish^epatim], and will obey his voice.

And [YHWH] has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession,
as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments,
and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made,
and that you shall be a people holy to [YHWH] your God, as he promised.
(Deuteronomy 26:16-19 ESV)

The path of the righteous is level; you make level the way of the righteous.
In the path of your [mish^epatim], [YHWH], we wait for you;
your name and remembrance are the desire of our [being] (nephesh).
My [being] (nephesh) yearns for you in the night;
my spirit within me earnestly seeks you.

For when your [mish^epatim] are in the earth,
the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

(Isaiah 26:7-9 ESV)

¹⁷³ See footnote 58

¹⁷⁴ See footnote 15

The Psalmist of the **119th Psalm** clearly looked to the **19th Psalm**, a Davidic Psalm, as a pattern. Verses 7-9 of the 19th Psalm contains a sequence of **torah**, **‘eduth**, **piqqudim**,¹⁷⁵ **mitz‘wah**, and **mish‘patim**, that is repeated so many times Psalm 119.

An interesting feature of the 19th Psalm is verse 9:

... the **fear (yir‘ah)** of [YHWH] is clean, enduring forever;
the **[mish‘patim] of [YHWH]** [is]¹⁷⁶ true, and righteous altogether.
(Psalm 19:9 ESV)

The word **ירא** - yir‘ah, “fear”, is used in parallel with **mish‘patim**. The verbal root from which *yir‘ah* is derived is **ירא** - yarah. The implication being that **reverence¹⁷⁷ for God is related to mish‘patim**. **This is almost axiomatic – true reverence for God can only be attained by a life of knowing God, and living by the Way of God**, which is the same process by which a person attains **mish‘patim**.

The **119th Psalm** echoes David’s point:

Confirm to your servant your promise, **that you may be feared (yir‘ah)**.
Turn away the reproach that I dread, **for your [mish‘patim] are¹⁷⁸ good**.
My flesh trembles for [reverence] (pahad)¹⁷⁹ of you,
and **[I reverence](yarah) of your [mish‘patim]**.
(Psalm 119:38-39, 120 ESV)

The **119th Psalm** is explicit that **mish‘patim is related to living by the Way of God**:

Make me understand the way of your precepts,
and I will meditate on your wondrous works.
I have chosen the way of faithfulness;
I set your [mish‘patim] before me.
(Psalm 119:27, 30 ESV)

In **Psalm 36**, David extols **mish‘patim** as **fundamental to the nature of God**:

Your **[hesed]**,¹⁸⁰ [YHWH], extends to the heavens,
your **faithfulness** to the clouds.
Your **righteousness** is like the mountains of God;
your **[mish‘patim]** [is] like the great deep; man and beast you save, [YHWH].
How precious is your **[hesed]**, O God!
(Psalm 36:5-7a ESV)

The Psalmists of the **48th and 97th Psalms** echo David and rejoice:

We have thought on your **[hesed]**, O God, in the midst of your temple.
As your name, O God, so your praise reaches to the ends of the earth.
Your right hand is filled with **righteousness**.
Let Mount Zion be glad!
Let the daughters of Judah **rejoice because of your [mish‘patim]**!
(Psalm 48:9-11 ESV)

Zion hears and is **glad**,
and the daughters of Judah **rejoice**,
because of your [mish‘patim], [YHWH].
(Psalm 97:8 ESV)

The Psalmist of the **119th Psalm** starts stanza **ל** - I^e, “LAMEDH”, by alluding to **General Revelation**.

He establishes **mish‘patim** to be fundamental to the Nature of God by using it in parallel with the “faithfulness” of God:

Forever, [YHWH], your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.
Your faithfulness endures to all generations;
you have established the earth, and it stands fast.

¹⁷⁵ Psalm 19 is the first instance of **פִּקְוּדִים** - piqqudim, “precepts”. The word occurs 24 times. David uses it again in the 103rd Psalm. It is also used in the non-Davidic 111th Psalm. The rest of the occurrences are in the 119th Psalm. It is more or less a synonym of *hoq* and *huqqah*; see TWOT article 1802e page 732.

¹⁷⁶ The verb “are” is supplied by the translator. As a “concept” mish‘patim is best thought of in the singular; hence, “is” is the preferred verb. Note the qualifying noun **תְּמִימָה** - ‘emeth, “true”, is singular.

¹⁷⁷ See **Excursus 5 – Reverence** **אֲדֹנָה** in the paper “**True Worship of the True God**” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

¹⁷⁸ The supplied verb “are” is technically correct here because the adjective **טוֹבִים** - tovim, “good”, is plural.

¹⁷⁹ The noun, **פָּהָד** - pahad, is a lesser used synonym of *yir‘ah*; see Holladay page 290.

¹⁸⁰ See footnote 58

By your [mish^epatim] they stand this day,
for all things are your servants.
(Psalm 119:89-91 ESV)

The relationship God requires with a True Worshipper requires ***mish^epatim***, the “**path of the righteous**”, the “**way of the righteous**”, is “**the path of your mish^epatim**”. Reverence for God, like ***mish^epatim***, is developed by living by the way of God, “**I have chosen the way ... I set your mish^epatim before me**”. Fundamental to God’s nature is ***mish^epatim***, “**your mish^epatim is like the great deep**”.

6.3 Statutes and mish^epatim

Statutes and mish^epatim have a special relationship to each other. The words are used juxtaposition on at least four dozen occasions. Statutes are prescriptions and proscriptions which apply to some specific set of circumstances. Statutes address **proper worship, civil duties, criminal activity, and moral and ethical responsibilities**. For Ancient Israel, statutes generally had a specific literal application. Israel was expected to literally carry out the statute.¹⁸¹ More importantly, however, **even in Ancient Isarel, statutes were intended to teach Godly Character** – how to apply the mind of God to related or similar situations. This is what ***mish^epatim*** is all about: understanding the mind of God behind any given statute; having the wisdom to know how and when to apply the statute literally; and, how and when to apply the principles behind the statute; and, being able to discern the relationships of statutes to other aspects of the Way of God. **Statutes can be thought of as raw material for mish^epatim** – there may be a literal application of the statute, but far more important is the understanding, wisdom, and discretion that can be derived from the statute.

In the modern world many of the statutes do NOT apply literally, but the application of mish^epatim to statutes remains vital. True Worshippers of God need to have knowledge of the Biblical statutes and understand them. Given this understanding the True Worshipper must attain wisdom in the application of the statutes and develop discernment in the mind of God behind the statutes – ***mish^epatim***.

In the Book of Leviticus, Moses reports God’s instruction **linking mish^epatim with statutes to define living by the Way of God**:

And [YHWH] spoke to Moses, saying,
“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am [YHWH] your God.
You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived,
and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you.
You shall not walk in their statutes.
You shall **follow my [mish^epatim]** and **keep my statutes** and **walk in them**.
I am [YHWH] your God.
You shall therefore **keep my statutes and my [mish^epatim]**;
if a person does (‘asah) them, he shall live by them: I am [YHWH].”

(Leviticus 18:1-5 ESV)

To “**walk in**”, “**follow**”, and “**keep**” imply **living by the Way of God**. Note this is contrasted with the “way of the world”, “**not walk in their statutes**”. The ability to understand the statutes of God requires ***mish^epatim***. Just memorizing “statutes” and performing them to the letter, is NOT living by the Way of God. A True Worshipper must learn to apply ***mish^epatim*** to the statutes and live by the full understanding of God’s teaching, “**does them**”, then “**he shall live**”.

This understanding is implied by the many places where “statutes” and “mish^epatim” are stated in juxtaposition, for example:

And you shall **observe all my statutes and all my [mish^epatim]**,
and **do (‘asah) them**: I am [YHWH].
(Leviticus 19:37 ESV)

You shall therefore **love [YHWH] your God**
and **keep his charge, his statutes, his [mish^epatim], and his commandments** always.

¹⁸¹ For further discussion of statutes in Ancient Israel, see ***Excursus 4 – Statutes and Ancient Law Codes*** in the paper “***The Writings of Moses***” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

... you shall be careful to do ('asah) all the statutes and the [mish^epatim]
that I am setting before you today.
(Deuteronomy 11:1, 32 ESV)

For I have kept the ways of [YHWH] and have not wickedly departed from my God.
For all his [mish^epatim] [was] before me, and from his statutes I did not turn aside.
(2 Samuel 22:22-23 ESV // Psalm 18:21-22)

Before his death, King David charged his son Solomon with the task of building the Temple.
David specifically associates "discretion and understanding" with *mish^epatim*:

Now, my son, [YHWH] be with you,
so that you may succeed in building the house of [YHWH] your God,
as he has spoken concerning you.

Only, may [YHWH] grant you discretion and understanding,
that when he gives you charge over Israel you may keep [torah]¹⁸² of [YHWH] your God.

Then you will prosper
if you are careful to [do] ('asah) the statutes and the [mish^epatim]
that [YHWH] commanded Moses for Israel.

Be strong and courageous.
Fear not; do not be dismayed.
(1 Chronicles 22:11-13 ESV)

Early in his reign, while the Temple was under construction, YHWH spoke to King Solomon:

Now the word of [YHWH] came to Solomon,
"Concerning this house that you are building,
if you will walk in my statutes and [do] ('asah) my [mish^epatim]
and keep all my commandments and walk in them,
then I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David your father.
And I will dwell among the children of Israel and will not forsake my people Israel."

(1 Kings 6:11-13 ESV)

At the consecration of the Temple, King Solomon invoked God's blessing:

Blessed be [YHWH] who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised.
Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant.
[YHWH] our God be with us, as he was with our fathers.
May he not leave us or forsake us,
that he may incline our hearts to him,
to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments, his statutes, and his [mish^epatim],
which he commanded our fathers.
(1 Kings 8:56-58 ESV)

Later, YHWH again spoke to Solomon:

As soon as Solomon had finished building the house of [YHWH]
and the king's house and all that Solomon desired to build,
[YHWH] appeared to Solomon a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon.
And [YHWH] said to him,
"I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you have made before me.
I have consecrated this house that you have built, by putting my name there forever.
My eyes and my heart will be there for all time.
And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked,
with integrity (tom) of heart and uprightness (yashar),
doing ('asah) according to all that I have commanded you,
and keeping my statutes and my [mish^epatim],
then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever,
as I promised David your father, saying,
'You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'

(1 Kings 9:1-5 ESV // 2 Chronicles 7:11-12, 16-18)

The Prophet Ezekiel reports the words of YHWH explicitly linking statutes and *mish^epatim*:

If a man is righteous (tzadiq) and does ('asah) what is just (mish^epat) and right (tz^edaqah)—
... walks in my statutes, and keeps my [mish^epatim] by acting faithfully
—he is righteous; he shall surely live, declares the Lord]YHWH].

¹⁸² See footnote 18

... withholds his hand from iniquity,
takes no interest or profit,
[does] ('asah) my [mish^epatim], and **walks in my statutes**;
he shall not die for his father's iniquity;
he shall surely live.
(Ezekiel 18:5, 9, 17 ESV)¹⁸³

The negative result of NOT properly using mish^epatim with statutes is also stated:

But you shall **keep my statutes and my [mish^epatim]** and **do none of these abominations**,
either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you ...
lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean,
as it vomited out the nation that was before you.
(Leviticus 18:26, 28 ESV)

You shall therefore **keep all my statutes** and **all my [mish^epatim]** and **do ('asah) them**,
that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out.

And **you shall not walk in the customs of the nation** that I am driving out before you,
for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them.
(Leviticus 20:22-23 ESV)

Take care lest you forget [YHWH] your God
by not keeping his commandments and his [mish^epatim] and his statutes,
which I command you today ...
then your heart be lifted up,
and you forget [YHWH] your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery ...
(Deuteronomy 8:11, 14 ESV)

... for thus says [YHWH], the God of Israel,
“Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon ...
because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians,
Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites,
and **they have not walked in my ways**,
doing ('asah) what is right (yashar) in my sight
and keeping my statutes and my [mish^epatim], as David his father did. ...”
(1 Kings 11:31b, 33 ESV)

And the carved image of the idol that [Manasseh] had made he set in the house of God,
of which God said to David and to Solomon his son,
“In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel,
I will put my name forever,
and I will no more remove the foot of Israel from the land that I appointed for your fathers,
if only they will be careful to do ('asah) all that I have commanded them,
all the **[torah]**,¹⁸⁴ the **statutes**, and the **[mish^epatim]** given through Moses.”

Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray,
to do more evil than the nations whom [YHWH] destroyed before the people of Israel.
(2 Chronicles 33:7-9 ESV)

God explicitly enjoined Moses to “**teach** **mish^epatim in conjunction with statutes**
and the people were enjoined to “**learn**”:

And **[YHWH] commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and [mish^epatim]**,
that you might do ('asah) them in the land that you are going over to possess.

And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them,
“Hear, O Israel, the **statutes** and the **[mish^epatim]** that I speak in your hearing today,
and **you shall learn them** and **be careful to do ('asah) them**. ...”

(Deuteronomy 4:14, 5:1 ESV)

And [YHWH] said to me,
‘I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you.
They are right in all that they have spoken.

Oh that they had such a heart as this always,
to fear me and to keep all my commandments,
that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever!

¹⁸³ See the detailed discussion of Ezekiel chapter 18 in section [5.3 A Required Attribute of True Worshippers](#)

¹⁸⁴ See footnote [18](#)

Go and say to them,
“Return to your tents.”

But you, stand here by me,
and I will tell you the whole commandment and the statutes and the [mish^epatim]
that you shall teach them,
that they may do ('asah) them in the land that I am giving them to possess.'

(Deuteronomy 5:28b-31 ESV)

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the [mish^epatim]
—that [YHWH] your God commanded me to teach you,
that you may do ('asah) them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it,
that you may fear [YHWH] your God, you and your son and your son's son,
by keeping all his statutes and his commandments,

which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long.

Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do ('asah) them,
that it may go well with you,
and that you may multiply greatly, as [YHWH], the God of your fathers, has promised you,
in a land flowing with milk and honey.

When your son asks you in time to come,

‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the [mish^epatim]
that [YHWH] our God has commanded you?’

then you shall say to your son,

‘We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt.
And [YHWH] brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ...’

(Deuteronomy 6:1-3, 20-21 ESV)

The **Prophet Ezekiel** reports **God's use of mish^epatim in conjunction with statutes to quantify the depth of sin of Jerusalem**. Jerusalem is used in synecdoche for the whole nation of Ancient Israel:

And I will bring you out of the midst of [Jerusalem],
and give you into the hands of foreigners,
and execute judgments (shephet) upon you.
You shall fall by the sword.
I will judge (shaphat) you at the border of Israel,
and you shall know that I am [YHWH].

For you have not walked in my statutes,
nor [done] ('asah) my [mish^epatim],
but have acted according to the [mish^epatim] of the nations that are around you.
(Ezekiel 11:9-10, 12b ESV)

Thus says the Lord [YHWH]:

This is Jerusalem.
I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her.
And she has rebelled against my [mish^epatim] by doing wickedness more than the nations,
and against my statutes more than the countries all around her;
for they have rejected my [mish^epatim] and have not walked in my statutes.

Therefore thus says the Lord [YHWH]:

Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you,
and have not walked in my statutes or [done] ('asah) my [mish^epatim],
and have not even acted according to the [mish^epatim] of the nations that are all around you,

therefore thus says the Lord [YHWH]:

Behold, I, even I, am against you.
And I will [do] ('asah) [mish^epatim] in your midst in the sight of the nations.
And because of all your abominations I will do with you what I have never yet done,
and the like of which I will never do again.

(Ezekiel 5:5-9 ESV)

Israel refused to live by the Way of God, “not walked in my statutes”. Israel refused to embrace the teaching of God, “rejected my mish^epatim”. Israel's actions were not even acceptable by the standards of the nations around, “mish^epatim of the nations”. Therefore, God had to apply the required result of his teaching, “I will do mish^epatim”, the covenant curses.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ See Leviticus 26:14-39, Deuteronomy 28:15-68

This brings us back to the **Covenant Code**, the first large collection of “**statutes**”, but as noted above in section **6.1.2 Obey My Voice**, neither of the words for statute, **hog** or **huqqah**, occurs in the Covenant Code. The following statement is in the Covenant Code in Exodus 21:1:

וְאַתָּה בְּפַנֵּיכֶם תַּשִּׂים אֲשֶׁר יְמִינְךָ הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים וְאֲלֵהֶם תַּعֲשֶׂה
liphenahem tasim 'asher hammish^epatim w^eelleh
before them you shall set that the mish^epatim now these

The verb **שִׂים** - sim, is very common, it means “to put” or “to place”.¹⁸⁶ The form **שִׂים** tasim, is “qal, imperfect second masculine singular”, which implies **ongoing action**.

Moses is enjoined to continuously present mish^epatim to the Israelites.

The relevance of this statement to the Covenant Code is that “statutes”, in large measure, provide the raw material for **mish^epatim**. **The objective of Moses’ teaching was mish^epatim**.

The statutes of the Covenant Code were the first example of the raw material given to Moses to be used to teach the Israelites.

6.4 An Object Lesson in mish^epatim

Chapter 20 of the **Book of Ezekiel** contains an object lesson on the meaning of **mish^epatim**, **hog**, and **huqqah**. **The setting is Ezekiel’s home in exile**. Some of the “elders” of the Exiles come to Ezekiel to inquire of God. YHWH states his refusal to respond to the elders,¹⁸⁷ and then goes into a historic summary of the apostacy of Israel:

But **they rebelled against me** and were not willing to listen to me.

None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on,
nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.

Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them
and spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.

But **I acted for the sake of my name**,

that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived,
in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

So **I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness**.

(Ezekiel 20:8-10 ESV)

The ongoing historic summary uses the word **mish^epatim** eight times; **huqqah** is used six times, and **hog** is used twice. **The object lesson reaches its climax** in verses 25 and 26.

Consider the ESV translation:

Moreover, I gave them **statutes (hog) that were not good**
and **[mish^epatim] by which they could not have life**,

and I defiled them through their very gifts in their offering up all their firstborn,
that I might devastate them.

I did it that they might know that I am [YHWH].

(Ezekiel 20:25-26 ESV)

These verses have caused considerable controversy over the years.¹⁸⁸ At face value there is an obvious contradiction: how can God’s “**statutes**” be “**not good**”? How can God’s “**mish^epatim**” be something “**by which they could not have life**”? The traditional rendering of the verses is similar to the ESV:

Wherefore I gave them also **statutes (hog) that were not good**,

and **[mish^epatim] whereby they should not live**;

And I polluted them in their own gifts,
in that they caused to pass through *the fire* all that openeth the womb,
that I might make them desolate,
to the end that they might know that I am [YHWH].

(Ezekiel 20:25-26 KJV)

¹⁸⁶ See TWOT article 2243 pages 872-873.

¹⁸⁷ See Ezekiel 20:1-7

¹⁸⁸ See the summary of interpretation in Block volume 1 pages 636-641

Even Block's own translation retains the ambiguity,

and his commentary does NOT bring the matter to a proper conclusion:

Indeed I gave them no-good decrees (hoq),
and [mish^epatim] that did not offer them life.
I defiled them through their gifts,
when they offered up every firstborn of the womb
so that I might devastate them,
that they might know that I am Yahweh.
(Block volume 1 page 634)

The key to properly understanding these verses is bound up in the words, *mish^epatim*, *hoq*, and *huqqah*.

Going back to the historic summary, continuing in chapter 20:

I gave them my statutes (huqqah) and made known to them my [mish^epatim],
by which, if a person does ('asah) them, he shall live.

Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them,
that they might know that I am [YHWH] who sanctifies them.

But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness.

They did not walk in my statutes (huqqah) but rejected my [mish^epatim],
by which, if a person does ('asah) them, he shall live;
and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned.

(Ezekiel 20:11-13a ESV)

Again, God relents of the destruction of Israel,¹⁸⁹ but the wilderness punishment follows:

... because they rejected my [mish^epatim] and did not walk in my statutes (huqqah),
and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols.

Nevertheless, my eye spared them,
and I did not destroy them or make a full end of them in the wilderness.

And I said to their children in the wilderness,

'Do not walk in the statutes (hoq) of your fathers, nor keep their [mish^epatim],
nor defile yourselves with their idols.
I am [YHWH] your God;
walk in my statutes (huqqah), and be careful to [do] ('asah) my [mish^epatim],
and keep my Sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you,
that you may know that I am [YHWH] your God.'

But the children rebelled against me.

They did not walk in my statutes (huqqah) and were not careful to [do] ('asah) my [mish^epatim],
by which, if a person does ('asah) them, he shall live; they profaned my Sabbaths.

(Ezekiel 20:16-21a ESV)

Once again, God relents of total destruction, but NOT without punishment:¹⁹⁰

... because they had not obeyed my [mish^epatim],
but had rejected my statutes (huqqah) and profaned my Sabbaths,
and their eyes were set on their fathers' idols.

(Ezekiel 20:24 ESV)

And that gets us back to our verses of controversy. Note the pattern: everywhere that it is God's "statutes" and *mish^epatim*, the word "*huqqah*" is used.¹⁹¹ In verse 18, it is the "statutes" and *mish^epatim* of the "fathers" which causes defilement by idols, and "*hoq*" is used for "statutes".

In verse 25, "*hoq*" is again used for "statutes". Ezekiel is reporting the words of God throughout this chapter. God uses the two distinct, but synonymous, words "*hoq*" and "*huqqah*" to partition the use of *mish^epatim* into two classes. The first class is of God; the second class is of the "fathers", i.e., of the world, NOT of God. It is the "statutes" and *mish^epatim* of the second class, the world, that are referenced in verse 25, "*hoq* that were not good" and "*mish^epatim* by which they could not have life". There is no contradiction.

¹⁸⁹ See Ezekiel 20:13b-15

¹⁹⁰ See Ezekiel 20:21b-23

¹⁹¹ See verses 11, 13, 16, 19, 21, and 24

6.5 Other Instances of *mish'patim*

This section discusses a number of incidence of ***mish'patim*** which were NOT discussed in any of the preceding sections. The provisions for the **cities of refuge** to which a “manslayer” could resort in the case of an accidental death, were discussed sections **3.3.1 The Writings of Moses** and **3.3.2**

Historic Books. The **Book of Numbers** chapter 35 makes it clear that the **due process requires deliberation and discernment, “the *mish'patim*”, based on the facts:**

But if he pushed him suddenly without enmity,
or hurled anything on him without lying in wait or used a stone that could cause death,
and without seeing him dropped it on him, so that he died,
though he was not his enemy and did not seek his harm,
then **the congregation shall judge (shaphat) between the manslayer and the avenger of blood,**
in accordance with these **[the *mish'patim*]**.
(Numbers 35:22-24 ESV)

The record of the **Covenant Blessings and Curses** in the **Book of Leviticus** ends with a reference to ***mish'patim***. The implication being that God expects the Israelites to learn from the teaching delivered at Mount Sinai. **The “curses” would be applied if the learning does NOT occur,** even then God continues to hold out the possibility of reconciliation:

But the land shall be abandoned by them and enjoy its Sabbaths while it lies desolate without them,
and they shall make amends for their iniquity,
because they spurned my [mish'patim] and their [minds] (nephesh)¹⁹² **abhorred my statutes.**

Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies,
I will not spurn them,
neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them,
for I am [YHWH] their God.

But I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers,
whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations,
that I might be their God: I am [YHWH].

(Leviticus 26:43-45 ESV)

At the end of the **Book of Numbers** and near the end of the **Book of Leviticus**, the contents of the books are summarized to include ***mish'patim***. This indicates that the contents of the books are not merely for rote knowledge, but they are to be used as **the basis for cogitation to attain understanding:**

These are the statutes and [mish'patim] and [torah]¹⁹³

that [YHWH] made between himself and the people of Israel through Moses [at] Mount Sinai.
(Leviticus 26:46 ESV)

These are the commandments and the [mish'patim]

that [YHWH] commanded through Moses to the people of Israel
in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho.
(Numbers 36:13 ESV)

The **Book of Deuteronomy** contains a similar summary of its contents as an introduction to the reiteration of the Ten Commandments. It is emphasized that **“Moses spoke”** – the material later assembled into a document was first presented as oral teaching, ***mish'patim***:

This is the [torah] that Moses set before the people of Israel.

These are the testimonies, the statutes, and the [mish'patim],
which Moses spoke to the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt,

beyond the Jordan in the valley opposite Beth-peor,
in the land of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon,
whom Moses and the people of Israel defeated when they came out of Egypt.

(Deuteronomy 4:44-46 ESV)

Moses' blessings of the twelve tribes are very cryptic, leaving wide open the interpretation of their meanings. In his blessing of the tribe of Gad, Moses' focus seems to be on the exploits of Gad east of the Jordan River, **“he chose the best of the land for himself”**. Moses commends him for setting a good example, **“with Israel he did the justice”**.

¹⁹² See footnote [15](#)

¹⁹³ See footnote [18](#)

Then ***mish'patim*** is best taken as the lessons learned by cogitation of Israel on the example of Gad:

And of Gad he said,

“Blessed be he who enlarges Gad!

Gad crouches like a lion; he tears off arm and scalp.

He chose the best of the land for himself,

for there a commander's portion was reserved;

and he came with the heads of the people,

with Israel he [did] ('asah) the justice (tz'daqah) of [YHWH],

and his **[mish'patim]** for Israel.”

(Deuteronomy 33:20-21 ESV)

Before delivering his public charge to Solomon, **King David** recounts God's words to himself in choosing Solomon. **Solomon's success** is predicated upon doing the Ten Commandments and living a life of learning the Way of God, ***mish'patim***:

He said to me,

‘It is Solomon your son who shall build my house and my courts,
for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father.

I will establish his kingdom forever

if he continues strong in [doing] ('asah) my commandments and my [mish'patim],
as he is today.’

(1 Chronicles 28:6-7 ESV)

The author of the **Book of Second Kings**, in chapter 17 verses 7 through 41, provides a detailed **assessment of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom**. In verses 24 through 34, he provides a description of the **settlers brought into Israel by the Assyrians**; verses 24-27 were discussed in section **5.6 Idiomatic Expressions** and verse 33 was discussed in section **4.2.2 Historic Books**. These verses contained only instances of “***mish'pat***”, singular; the following verses contain instances of “***mish'patim***”:

(34) **To this day they do according to the former [mish'patim].**

They do not fear [YHWH],

and **they do not [do] ('asah)**

[according to] **statutes** [of them]

or [according to] **[mish'pat]** [of them]

or [according to] the **[torah]**¹⁹⁴

or [according to] the **commandment**

that [YHWH] commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel.

(35) **[YHWH] [cut] (karath)¹⁹⁵ a covenant with them and commanded them,**

“You shall not fear other gods or bow yourselves to them or serve them or sacrifice to them,

(36) but you shall fear [YHWH], who brought you out of the land of Egypt with great power
and with an outstretched arm.

You shall bow yourselves to him, and to him you shall sacrifice.

(37) And the **statutes** and the **[mish'patim]** and the **[torah]** and the **commandment**
that he wrote for you, **you shall always be careful to do ('asah)**.

You shall not fear other gods,

(38) and **you shall not forget the covenant** that I have made with you.

You shall not fear other gods,

(39) but you shall fear [YHWH] your God,

and he will deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.”

(40) However, **they would not listen**,

but they did according to their former **[mish'pat]**.

(2 Kings 17:34-40 ESV)

In **verse 34**, “***mish'patim***” is used alluding back to the assessment of the settlers in verses 24 through 33. As in those verses, no theological significance can be taken from the word – it simply means their way of living, i.e., paganism, the way of the world.¹⁹⁶ In the rest of **verse 34**, the ESV translation omits details of the Hebrew in order to simplify the English, but the details are useful to ascertain the meaning of the verse. The verb **'asah** governs the next four clauses. The last clause, “**that YHWH commanded**

¹⁹⁴ See footnote 18

¹⁹⁵ See footnote 26

¹⁹⁶ This usage is similar to Ezekiel 20:18 and 25; see the discussion in section **6.4 An Object Lesson in mish'patim**

the children of Jacob", makes it clear that the "**statutes**", "**mish^epat**", "**torah**", and "**commandment**", are those from YHWH. Each item of God's teaching is introduced by **בְּ - k^e**, preposition, "**according to**", making the list very formal, as such the list is an introduction to **verses 35 through 39**.

In **verses 35 through 39**, the covenant obligations of Israel are summarized with a simpler list, in **verse 37**, of "**statutes**", "**mish^epatim**", "**torah**", and "**commandment**". There is no **k^e** and "**mish^epatim**" is specifically used in preference to "**mish^epat**". The final summary in **verse 40** reverts to "**mish^epat**".

In **verse 34**, the singular, "**mish^epat**", is best taken in the sense "**what is right**" as discussed in section **4.1 Right by Definition**; whereas, in **verse 40**, its meaning is as discussed in section **4.2 Right by Custom** – their former custom was "apostacy". In **verse 37**, "**mish^epatim**" has its normal meaning of **understanding**, **wisdom**, and **discernment** that come from **living by the Way of God**.

Verses 1 through 19 of the **89th Psalm**, are the words of the Psalmist. In verse 20 of the **89th Psalm**, YHWH begins to speak. **Verse 29** speaks of the **Messiah**.¹⁹⁷ **Verse 30** reverts to the kings

of the **Davidic Dynasty**, whom God expected to live according to his **torah**, **the Way of God**,

and in so doing come to attain **mish^epatim**:

(20) I have found David, my servant;
with my holy oil I have anointed him,
(21) so that my hand shall be established with him;
my arm also shall strengthen him.
(29) I will establish **his offspring** forever and his throne as the days of the heavens.
(30) If **his children forsake my [torah]**¹⁹⁸ and **do not walk according to my [mish^epatim]**,
(31) if they **violate my statutes** and **do not keep my commandments**,
(32) then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes,
(33) but I will not remove from him my [hesed]¹⁹⁹ or be false to my faithfulness.
(Psalm 89:20-21, 29-33 ESV)

In the **103rd Psalm**, David acknowledges **mish^epatim** as a gift to True Worshippers flowing from the Nature of God:

[YHWH] [does] (asah) righteousness (tz^edaqah) and [mish^epatim] for all who are oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.
[YHWH] is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in [hesed].
(Psalm 103:6-8 ESV)

In the **147th Psalm**, a later Psalmist echoes David's sentiment pointing out that it is **only by election** that God makes available **mish^epatim**:

He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and **[mish^epatim]** to Israel.
He has not dealt thus with any other nation;
they do not know his **[mish^epatim]**.
Praise [YHWH]!
(Psalm 147:19-20 ESV)

The **Prophet Isaiah** laments the **hypocrisy of the people** who fast pretending to seek understanding from God, but their actions display their true state of mind. The people pretend to seek **mish^epatim** of God, "**they ask of me righteous mish^epatim**", but then go and demonstrate oppression, "**oppress all your workers**", and wickedness, "**hit with a wicked fist**":

Yet **they seek me daily and delight to know my ways**,
as if they were a nation that did righteousness (tz^edaqah)
and did not forsake **[mish^epat]**²⁰⁰ of their God;
they ask of me righteous (tzedeq) [mish^epatim];
they delight to draw near to God.
'Why have we fasted, and you see it not?
Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?'

Behold, **in the day of your fast** you seek your own pleasure, and **oppress all your workers**.
Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to **hit with a wicked fist**.

¹⁹⁷ See Genesis 3:15, Galatians 3:16

¹⁹⁸ See footnote **18**

¹⁹⁹ See footnote **58**

²⁰⁰ See the discussion of the singular in section **5.4 Lack of Justness**

Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.
(Isaiah 58:2-4 ESV)

In his prayer of repentance on behalf of the Exiles, the **Sage Daniel** acknowledges the sin of the people in rejecting the Way of God, “**turning aside from your commandments and mish^epatim**”:

Then I turned my face to the Lord God,
seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.
I prayed to [YHWH] my God and made confession, saying,
“O Lord, the great and awesome God,
who keeps covenant and [hesed] with those who love him and keep his commandments,
we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled,
turning aside from your commandments and [mish^epatim]. ...”
(Daniel 9:3-5 ESV)

The discernment aspect of **mish^epatim** is evident in due process accorded a manslayer. God is explicit that **mish^epatim** is to be derived from the Writings of Moses. In the Plains of Moab, Moses orally presented **mish^epatim** to the people. Understanding the covenant obligations God put on Israel requires **mish^epatim**. David and later Psalmists emphasize the relationship between **mish^epatim** and living by the Way of God. Isaiah points out the hypocrisy of seeking **mish^epatim** while NOT living by the Way of God. Daniel laments that Israel did NOT attain **mish^epatim**.

6.6 Common Plural and Idiomatic Expressions

There are a few instances of **mish^epatim** where it is simply used as a plural of the singular, NOT with its derived meaning of understanding, wisdom, and discernment which come from living by the Way of God. First, the author of the **Book of First Kings** in summarizing the construction of the Temple, uses **mish^epatim** with the meaning of “Right by Definition”,²⁰¹ the same as Exodus 26:30: “Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to mish^epat you were shown on the mountain.”

In the fourth year the foundation of the house of [YHWH] was laid, in the month of Ziv.
And in the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month,
the house was finished in all its parts, and according to all its [mish^epatim].
He was seven years in building it.
(1 Kings 6:37-38 ESV)

Ezekiel uses the plural in the same way to describe out-buildings in the Second Temple Vision:

In the thickness of the wall of the court, on the south also, opposite the yard and opposite the building, there were chambers with a passage in front of them.
They were similar to the chambers on the north, of the same length and breadth,
with the same exits and [mish^epatim] and doors ...
(Ezekiel 42:10-11 ESV)

Ezekiel clearly uses a plural form and a similar a singular form with the same meaning:²⁰²

And I will judge (shapaht) you [mish^epatim]²⁰³ [of] women who commit adultery and shed blood and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy.
(Ezekiel 16:38 ESV)

But righteous (tzadiq) men shall pass judgment (shaphat) on them
with [mish^epat] of adulteresses, and with [mish^epat] of women who shed blood,
because they are adulteresses, and blood is on their hands.”
(Ezekiel 23:45 ESV)

In commissioning Jeremiah, **YHWH summarizes his case against Jerusalem**:²⁰⁴

Then [YHWH] said to me,
“Out of the north disaster shall be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land.
For behold, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, declares [YHWH],
and they shall come, and every one shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem,
against all its walls all around and against all the cities of Judah.

²⁰¹ See the discussion in section [4.1 Right by Definition](#)

²⁰² See the discussion of these passages in section [5.6 Idiomatic Expressions](#)

²⁰³ The Hebrew word is מִשְׁפָטִים - mish^ep^ete, plural construct.

²⁰⁴ This instance could be taken as similar to Ezekiel 5:8, discussed in section [6.3 Statutes and mish^epatim](#), in which case it would be “Idiomatic” NOT “Common Plural”.

And I will declare my [mish^epatim] against them, for all their evil in forsaking me.
They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands.
(Jeremiah 1:14-16 ESV)

The sense is similar to **YHWH's words reported by Ezekiel**:²⁰⁵

And I will set my glory among the nations,
and **all the nations shall see my [mish^epat] that I have [done] (‘asah)**,
and my hand that I have laid on them.
(Ezekiel 39:21 ESV)

Twice more Ezekiel uses the plural to identify YHWH's justice on the nation:²⁰⁶

Disaster comes upon disaster; rumor follows rumor.
They seek a vision from the prophet,
while [torah]²⁰⁷ perishes from the priest and counsel from the elders.
The king mourns, the prince is wrapped in despair,
and the hands of the people of the land are paralyzed by terror.

According to their way I will do to them,
and **according to their [mish^epatim] I will judge them**,
and they shall know that I am [YHWH]."
(Ezekiel 7:26-27 ESV)

And they shall come against you from the north with chariots and wagons and a host of peoples.
They shall set themselves against you on every side with buckler, shield, and helmet;
and **I will commit the [mish^epat] to them**,
and **they shall judge (shaphat) you according to their [mish^epatim]**.
(Ezekiel 23:24 ESV)

The **Prophet Jeremiah** makes two **idiomatic uses “mish^epatim”** where other authors had used **“mish^epat”**. In chapter 12, Jeremiah echoes Moses' idiom from the **Book of Numbers**.²⁰⁸

Righteous are you, [YHWH], when I complain to you;
yet **I would plead my [mish^epatim] before you**.
Why does the way of the wicked prosper?
Why do all who are treacherous thrive?
(Jeremiah 12:1 ESV)

Moses brought their [mish^epat] before [YHWH].
(Numbers 27:5 ESV)

In the **Book of Jeremiah** chapter 39 and paralleled in chapter 59, **2 Kings 25:6 is paralleled**,²⁰⁹ with the difference in the idiom being the use “**mish^epatim**”, וַיַּדְבֵּר אֲתֹה מִשְׁפָטִים - way^edabber ‘ito mish^epatim, “**he spoke on him mish^epatim**”, compared with the use of “**mish^epat**”, וַיַּדְבֵּר אֲתֹה מִשְׁפָט - way^edabb^eru ‘ito mish^epat, “**he spoke on him mish^epat**”: “**he passed sentence on him**”.

The idioms clearly are the same. The choice of words being merely a syntactic variant:

But the army of the Chaldeans pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho.
And when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,
at Riblah, in the land of Hamath; and he **[spoke mish^epatim]** on him.
(Jeremiah 39:5 ESV // 52:9)

Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah,
and they **[spoke mish^epat]** on him.
(2 Kings 25:6 ESV)

Zephaniah reports the lifting of the sentence on the nation:

[YHWH] has taken away [mish^epatim] against you;
he has cleared away your enemies.
(Zephaniah 3:15 ESV)

²⁰⁵ See the discussion of Ezekiel 39:21 in section [3.1.4 Prophetic Books](#)

²⁰⁶ These instances could be taken as similar to Ezekiel 20:18 and 25; see the discussion in section [6.4 An Object Lesson in mish^epatim](#), in which case they would be “Idiomatic” NOT “Common Plural”.

²⁰⁷ See footnote [18](#)

²⁰⁸ See the discussion of Numbers 27:5 in section [3.4.1 The Writings of Moses](#)

²⁰⁹ See the discussion of 2 Kings 25:6 in section [5.6 Idiomatic Expressions](#)

This is similar to the “death sentence”:²¹⁰

Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets,

“This man does not deserve **[mish^epat maweth]**,

for he has spoken to us in the name of [YHWH] our God.”

(Jeremiah 26:16 ESV)

As Jehoshaphat commissioned his judges,²¹¹ so **Ezekiel reports just judges in the New Temple**:

Moreover, in Jerusalem

Jehoshaphat appointed certain Levites and priests and heads of families of Israel,

to give [mish^epat] for [YHWH] and to decide disputed cases.

They had their seat at Jerusalem.

(2 Chronicles 19:8 ESV)

In a dispute, they shall act as judges (shaphat),

and **they shall judge (shaphat) it according to my [mish^epatim]**.²¹²

They shall keep my [torah]²¹³ and my statutes in all my appointed feasts,

and they shall keep my Sabbaths holy.

(Ezekiel 44:24 ESV)

Only 1 Kings 6:38 and Ezekiel 42:11 are clearly “Common Plural”; Jeremiah 1:16, Ezekiel 7:27, 16:38, 23:24, and 44:24 could just as easily be considered “Idiomatic”; Jeremiah 12:1, 39:5, 52:9, and Zephaniah 3:15 are certainly “Idiomatic”.

7. The Fruit of Godly Character

On the night of the first Christian Passover, in his teaching for the Apostles, **Jesus lovingly explained to the Apostles what they as individual persons needed to do**:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

Every branch in me that does not **bear fruit** he takes away,
and every branch that does **bear fruit** he prunes, that **it may bear more fruit**.

Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

Abide in me, and I in you.

As **the branch cannot bear fruit by itself**, unless it abides in the vine,
neither can you, unless you abide in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, **he it is that bears much fruit**,
for apart from me you can do nothing.

By this my Father is glorified, that **you bear much fruit** and so prove to be my disciples.
As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Abide in my love.

If you **keep my commandments**, you will abide in my love,
just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you

that you should go and bear fruit and **that your fruit should abide** ...

(John 15:1-5, 8-10, 16a ESV)

The fruit of the Christian life is Godly Character. The way to “**bear fruit**” is to live by the **Way of God**, “**keep my commandments**”. That is the whole meaning of the word, “**mish^epatim**”. The **New Covenant**, which Jesus inaugurated with the first **Christian Passover**, is a personal commitment between God the Father and each individual person called to be a True Worshipper. Upon repentance and baptism, God will grant the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit a Christian can satisfy Jesus’ words, “**abide in me, and I in you**”. **Only through the New Covenant is salvation possible**:

But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old
as **the covenant he mediates is better**, since **it is enacted on better promises**.

²¹⁰ See the discussion in section **5.6 Idiomatic Expressions**

²¹¹ See the discussion in section **3.3.2 Historic Books**

²¹² This instance could be taken as “Idiomatic”, NOT “Common Plural”.

²¹³ See footnote **18**

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come ...
he entered once for all into the holy places,
not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood,
thus securing an eternal redemption.

For if the blood of goats and bulls,
and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer,
sanctify for the purification of the flesh,
how much more will the blood of Christ,
who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God,
purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant,
so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance ...
(Hebrews 8:6, 9:11a, 12-15 ESV)

The promise of the New Covenant is “salvation”, “eternal life”, in the Family of God:

This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.
And there is salvation in no one else,
for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.
(Acts 4:11-12 ESV)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
According to his great mercy,
he has caused us to be [begotten] again to a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,
who by God’s power are being guarded through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

(1 Peter 1:3-5 ESV)

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ,
for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth,
which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life,
which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began
and at the proper time manifested in his word
through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior;
(Titus 1:1-3 ESV)

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,
he [is saving] us, not because of works done by us in righteousness,
but according to his own mercy,
by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,
[which] he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,
so that being justified by his grace
we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

(Titus 3:4-7 ESV)

Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you.
If what you heard from the beginning abides in you,
then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.
Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.
I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.

(1 John 2:24-25, 5:11-13 ESV)

While we are human, we have the “promise of eternal life” and the “hope of eternal life”.

In order to attain the promise and realize the hope, to be considered by God to be a candidate
for the gift of eternal life, a True Worshipper must in this life attain Godly Character.

We human beings cannot attain perfection in this life; but, once called and imbued with the indwelling
of the Holy Spirit, a Christian must continually move along the path of the Way of God and, in so doing,
continue to overcome sin and develop Godly Character. For True Christians, the day of salvation is now:

Working together with him, then,
we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

For he says,

“In a favorable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” (citing Isaiah 49:8)

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.
(2 Corinthians 6:1-2 ESV)

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,
he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death,
in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,
if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast,
not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard ...
(Colossians 1:21-23a ESV)

Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard,
lest we drift away from it.

For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable,
and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,
how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?
(Hebrews 2:1-3a ESV)

Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant,
to testify to the things that were to be spoken later,
but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son.

And we are his house,
if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.
Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering,
for he who promised is faithful.
(Hebrews 3:5-6, 10:23 ESV)

Nothing a human being can do in this life puts God in position where he must grant salvation.

The promises are conditional. There is NO way to earn salvation.

Salvation is a free gift available only by God’s grace:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the [nomos],²¹⁴
although the [nomos] and the Prophets bear witness to it
—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

For there is no distinction:

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
and are justified by his grace as a gift,
through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood,
to be received by faith.

(Romans 3:21-25a ESV)

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand,
and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed?

For the end of those things is death.

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God,
the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

For the wages of sin is death,
but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 5:1-2, 6:20-23 ESV)

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses,
according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us,
in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will,
according to his purpose,
which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time,
to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth in him.
(Ephesians 1:7-10 ESV)

²¹⁴ See footnote 7

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ —**by grace you [are being] saved** —and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

For **by grace you [are being] saved through faith**.

And this is not your own doing; **it is the gift of God**, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:4-9 ESV)

The Christian life is a “**walk with God**”. The Christian life is to learn to **live by the Way of God** – overcoming sin and **developing Godly Character**, which the New Testament authors characterize as “**bearing fruit**”:

But I say, **walk by the Spirit**, and you will **not gratify the desires of the flesh**.

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

But **if you are led by the Spirit**, you are not under the [nomos].²¹⁵

Now **the works of the flesh** are evident:

- sexual immorality,
- impurity,
- sensuality,
- idolatry,
- sorcery,
- enmity,
- strife,
- jealousy,
- fits of anger,
- rivalries,
- dissensions,
- divisions,
- envy,
- drunkenness,
- orgies,
- and things like these.

I warn you, as I warned you before, that **those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God**.

But the **fruit of the Spirit** is

- love,
- joy,
- peace,
- patience,
- kindness,
- goodness,
- faithfulness,
- gentleness,
- self-control;
- against such things there is no [nomos].

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we **live by the Spirit**, let us also **keep in step with the Spirit**.

(Galatians 5:16-25 ESV)

Who is wise and understanding among you?

By his good conduct let him **show his works in the meekness of wisdom**.

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

²¹⁵ See footnote 7: to be “**under the nomos**” is to be under the death penalty for unrepented sin.

But the wisdom from above is

first pure,
then peaceable,
gentle,
open to reason,
full of mercy and good fruits,
impartial and sincere.

And **a harvest of righteousness** is sown in peace by those who make peace.

(James 3:13-18 ESV)

The Hebrew words **mish^epat** and **mish^epatim** define what it means to be “**wise and understanding**”. The most important meaning of **mish^epat** is “justness”. **This character attribute of God is fundamental to all his dealings with human beings**. God is completely fair at all times to all human beings.

God shows no partiality. God cannot be manipulated by human beings. God never plays favorites.

Each and every person who has ever lived will stand alone before God and make his/her choice: to choose eternal life or to choose eternal death.

Attainment of the character attribute of “justness”, **mish^epat**, is fundamental to God’s requirement of True Worshippers – to attaining “**Godly Character**”. It is through **mish^epat** that the World Tomorrow will become a utopia of peace, order, good government and freedom for every human being in every nation over the whole world. The second most important meaning of **mish^epat** is “justice”.

A world where justice prevails in all “**Religious Practice**”, all **social systems and processes**, all “**Criminal Justice**”, and all “**Exercise of Government**”, can only occur under the **Kingdom of God**.²¹⁶ Those persons granted the gift of eternal life in the **First Resurrection**²¹⁷ will comprise the Kingdom of God. Those persons will have developed **mish^epat**, “justness”, in their human life. Those persons will teach **mish^epat** to all humanity in the World Tomorrow. There will be a world based on “justice”, **mish^epat**.

The fruit that God requires of True Worshippers is **mish^epatim** – the understanding, wisdom, and discernment the comes from a life lived by the Way of God. The “**fruits of the Spirit**” listed by Paul and James are exemplary of the many character attributes associated with **mish^epatim**.

A person called by God to become a True Worshipper, must respond to God’s calling by sincere repentance – acknowledging “**the desires of the flesh**”, and accepting the need to overcome “**the works of the flesh**”. This requires coming to **knowledge of the Bible**. Having repented and been baptised, the True Worshipper is granted by God the **gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit**. Only through the Holy Spirit can any person come to an **understanding of the Bible**. With understanding of the Bible, the True Worshipper can learn to **live by the Way of God**. Living by the Way of God allows the True Worshipper to **grow in wisdom** with respect to the **teaching of God revealed in the Bible**. The exercise of wisdom leads to **discernment in the Way of God**. Then, at the First Resurrection, if God the Father so chooses, the True Worshipper can be **made perfect** and be granted the **gift of eternal life**:

And let steadfastness have its full effect,
that you may be perfect and complete,
lacking in nothing.
(James 1:4 ESV)

But **you have come** to Mount Zion and to **the city of the living God**, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to **the assembly of the firstborn** who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of **the righteous made perfect** ...
(Hebrews 12:22-23 ESV)

²¹⁶ See footnote 14

²¹⁷ See footnote 9

Excursus – Analysis of Social Justice

The purpose of this Excursus is to gather all the passages from the Writings of Moses which relate to Social Justice. Many of these passages are explicitly “statutes”. Many of the passages also have application to Religious Justice, Criminal Justice, or the Exercise of Government. The focus of the analysis remains on Social Justice. The literal application of each prescription or proscription to Ancient Israel is in most cases obvious. The analysis focuses on the underlying principles and what can be ascertained with respect to mish^epat and mish^epatim. This is NOT intended to be in any way an exhaustive analysis of these texts. Bringing the texts together with some initial analysis will facilitate further study.

The teaching given to Moses by God at Mount Sinai, during the Wilderness Period, and in the Plains of Moab contains the revelation from God with respect to Social Justice as to how the Nation of Israel was to be organized. We can infer much from this teaching with respect to the mind of God and how God will organize society in the World Tomorrow.

As the following passage shows, the Way of God is fundamentally different from the ways of the world:

And [YHWH] spoke to Moses, saying,

“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them,

I am [YHWH] your God.

You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you.

You shall not walk in their statutes.

You shall [do] (‘asah) my [mish^epatim] and keep my statutes and walk in them.

I am [YHWH] your God.

You shall therefore keep my statutes and my [mish^epatim];

if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am [YHWH]. ...”

(Leviticus 18:1-5 ESV)

Family

The building block of society is the “family”. The proper functioning of any family is determined by “love” and “respect”. There must be a “bond of love” among family members and there must be “mutual respect” – especially of children for parents:

Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death.

Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.

(Exodus 21:15, 17 ESV)

And [YHWH] spoke to Moses, saying,

“Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them,

You shall be holy, for I [YHWH] your God am holy.

Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father ...”

(Leviticus 19:1-3a ESV)

For anyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother; his blood is upon him.

(Leviticus 20:9 ESV)

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, and they shall say to the elders of his city,

‘This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’

Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones.

So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear.

(Deuteronomy 21:18-21 ESV)

Proper sexual conduct within a family is essential for the family to succeed. Jesus' teaching on marriage, divorce, and adultery, in the New Testament²¹⁸ is the filter through which the teaching in the Old Testament must be assessed. **The bottom line is that there must a loving sexual relationship between the husband and the wife.** In the Old Testament, multiple women were allowed within a family group. This is expressly prohibited by Jesus' teaching. There are multiple instances in the Old Testament where the existence of multiple women in a family caused problems.

The New Testament application of the following prescriptions and proscriptions is to define acceptable relationships. The following stipulations assume the individuals involved are NOT currently in a relationship, i.e., the persons have never been married, and are NOT betrothed, or the marriage has been terminated by a death or a divorce; otherwise, many of the following situations would be adulterous:

None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness.
I am [YHWH].

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father,
which is the nakedness of your mother;
she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness.

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife;
it is your father's nakedness.

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister,
your father's daughter or your mother's daughter,
whether brought up in the family or in another home.

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son's daughter or of your daughter's daughter,
for their nakedness is your own nakedness.

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife's daughter,
brought up in your father's family, since she is your sister.

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister; she is your father's relative.

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is your mother's relative.

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother,
that is, you shall not approach his wife; she is your aunt.

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law;
she is your son's wife, you shall not uncover her nakedness.

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife;²¹⁹ it is your brother's nakedness.

And you shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister,
uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive.²²⁰

(Leviticus 18:6-16, 18 ESV)

If a man lies with his father's wife, he has uncovered his father's nakedness;
both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.

If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death;
they have committed perversion; their blood is upon them.

(Leviticus 20:11-12 ESV)

A man shall not take his father's wife,
so that he does not uncover his father's nakedness.

(Deuteronomy 22:30 ESV)

If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother,
and sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace,
and they shall be cut off in the sight of the children of their people.
He has uncovered his sister's nakedness, and he shall bear his iniquity.

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister or of your father's sister,
for that is to make naked one's relative; they shall bear their iniquity.

If a man lies with his uncle's wife, he has uncovered his uncle's nakedness;
they shall bear their sin; they shall die childless.

²¹⁸ See sections **5.5.3 Jesus' Teaching on Marriage**, **5.7.3 Jesus' Teaching on Divorce**, and **5.8.3 Jesus' Teaching on Adultery** in the paper **"The Human Condition"** located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

²¹⁹ There was an exception to this in the case of a Levirate Marriage.

²²⁰ This assumes a polygamous situation.

If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity.
He has uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless.²²¹
(Leviticus 20:17, 19-21 ESV)

The following is the provision for the **Levirate marriage**. This was necessary in the ancient world, but it is prohibited by Jesus' teaching, because it assumes a man may have multiple wives.²²²

If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son,
the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger.
Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife
and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.
And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother,
that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.
And if the man does not wish to take his brother's wife,
then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say,
‘My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel;
he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.’
Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him, and if he persists, saying,
‘I do not wish to take her,’
then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders
and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face.
And she shall answer and say,
‘So shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother's house.’
And the name of his house shall be called in Israel,
‘The house of him who had his sandal pulled off.’
(Deuteronomy 25:5-10 ESV)

The notion that a parent would put their own **child into prostitution** is abhorrent – yet this very crime has been rampant throughout history, and it continues in the modern world:

Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute,
lest the land fall into prostitution and the land become full of depravity.
(Leviticus 19:29 ESV)

None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute,
and none of the sons of Israel shall be a cult prostitute.
(Deuteronomy 23:17 ESV)

The next two provisions deal with the problems of **infidelity** and **suspicion**. In a loving marriage, neither of these problems should occur; however, among human beings they do occur. These provision are cut-and-dried, and perhaps are harsh by New Testament standards as they do NOT make any allowance for repentance and forgiveness:

And [YHWH] spoke to Moses, saying,
“Speak to the people of Israel,
**If any man's wife goes astray and breaks faith with him,
if a man lies with her sexually,**
and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband,
and she is undetected though she has defiled herself,
and there is no witness against her, since she was not taken in the act,
and if the spirit of jealousy comes over him
and he is jealous of his wife who has defiled herself,
**or if the spirit of jealousy comes over him and he is jealous of his wife,
though she has not defiled herself,**
then the man shall bring his wife to the priest and bring the offering required of her ...
And the priest shall bring her near and set her before [YHWH].
And the priest shall take holy water in an earthenware vessel
and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it into the water.
And the priest shall set the woman before [YHWH]
and unbind the hair of the woman's head
and place in her hands the grain offering of remembrance,
which is the grain offering of jealousy.

²²¹ There was an exception to this in the case of a Levirate Marriage.

²²² See section [5.9 Levirate Marriage](#) in the paper **“The Human Condition”** located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

And in his hand the priest shall have the water of bitterness that brings the curse.
Then the priest shall make her take an oath, saying,
‘If no man has lain with you,
and if you have not turned aside to uncleanness
while you were under your husband’s authority,
be free from this water of bitterness that brings the curse.
But if you have gone astray,
though you are under your husband’s authority,
and if you have defiled yourself,
and some man other than your husband has lain with you, then’
(let the priest make the woman take the oath of the curse,
and say to the woman)

‘[YHWH] make you a curse and an oath among your people,
when [YHWH] makes your thigh fall away and your body swell.
May this water that brings the curse pass into your bowels
and make your womb swell and your thigh fall away.’

And the woman shall say,
‘Amen, Amen.’

Then the priest shall write these curses in a book
and wash them off into the water of bitterness.
And he shall make the woman drink the water of bitterness that brings the curse,
and the water that brings the curse shall enter into her and cause bitter pain.

And when he has made her drink the water,
then, if she has defiled herself and has broken faith with her husband,
the water that brings the curse shall enter into her and cause bitter pain,
and her womb shall swell, and her thigh shall fall away,
and the woman shall become a curse among her people.
But if the woman has not defiled herself and is clean,
then she shall be free and shall conceive children. ...”

(Numbers 5:11-15a, 16-24, 27-28 ESV)

If any man takes a wife and goes in to her and then hates her
and accuses her of misconduct and brings a bad name upon her, saying,

‘I took this woman, and when I came near her,
I did not find in her evidence of virginity’

then the father of the young woman and her mother
shall take and bring out the evidence of her virginity to the elders of the city in the gate.

And the father of the young woman shall say to the elders,
‘I gave my daughter to this man to marry,
and he hates her; and behold,
he has accused her of misconduct, saying,

“I did not find in your daughter evidence of virginity.”

And yet this is the evidence of my daughter’s virginity.’

And they shall spread the cloak before the elders of the city.

Then **the elders of that city shall take the man and whip him**,
and they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give them to the father of the young woman,
because he has brought a bad name upon a virgin of Israel.

And she shall be his wife.

He may not divorce her all his days.

But if the thing is true,
that evidence of virginity was not found in the young woman,
then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father’s house,
and **the men of her city shall stone her to death** with stones,
because she has done an outrageous thing in Israel by whoring in her father’s house.

So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

(Deuteronomy 22:13-21 ESV)

The following is the **provision for divorce** by which the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus.²²³ The assumption is implicit that a man could write a divorce certificate to a wife, but the grounds are explicit, “**he has found some indecency in her**”. There is no concept of “easy divorce”. Jesus summarized the situation, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.” (Mark 10:5b) The most important point of the provision is to prevent a **renewing of the previous relationship** after another marriage has occurred:

When a man takes a wife and marries her,
if then she finds no favor in his eyes **because he has found some indecency in her**,
and **he writes her a certificate of divorce** and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house,
and she departs out of his house,
and if she goes and becomes another man’s wife,
and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce
and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house,
or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife,
then **her former husband**, who sent her away, **may not take her again to be his wife**,
after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before [YHWH].
And you shall not bring sin upon the land that [YHWH] your God is giving you for an inheritance.
(Deuteronomy 24:1-4 ESV)

In ancient Israel **vows** were a very formal part of life. Parental wisdom is a useful precaution on commitments made by a young person. Under the New Covenant, a person’s commitment to God is very personal; however, in a marriage relationship neither partner should make a personal commitment, which could affect the relationship, or the other partner, without discussion and agreement:

If a woman vows a vow to [YHWH] and binds herself by a pledge,
while **within her father’s house in her youth**,
and her father hears of her vow and of her pledge by which she has bound herself
and says nothing to her, then all her vows shall stand,
and every pledge by which she has bound herself shall stand.
But if her father opposes her on the day that he hears of it,
no vow of hers, no pledge by which she has bound herself shall stand.
And [YHWH] will forgive her, because her father opposed her.
(Numbers 30:3-5 ESV)

If she marries a husband,
while under her vows or any thoughtless utterance of her lips by which she has bound herself,
and her husband hears of it and says nothing to her on the day that he hears,
then her vows shall stand, and her pledges by which she has bound herself shall stand.
But if, on the day that her husband comes to hear of it, he opposes her,
then he makes void her vow that was on her,
and the thoughtless utterance of her lips by which she bound herself.
And [YHWH] will forgive her.
(Numbers 30:6-8 ESV)

The general application of the following provisions is simple:

newly weds need time and space to start their life together:

When a man is newly married,
he shall not go out with the army or be liable for any other public duty.
He shall be free at home one year to be happy with his wife whom he has taken.
(Deuteronomy 24:5-9 ESV)

Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying,
‘Is there any man who has built a new house and has not dedicated it?
Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it.
And is there any man who has planted a vineyard and has not enjoyed its fruit?
Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man enjoy its fruit.
And is there any man who has betrothed a wife and has not taken her?
Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man take her.’
(Deuteronomy 20:5-7 ESV)

²²³ See Mark 10:1-12 // Matthew 19:1-12

The following provision concerns **taking a captured woman as a concubine** – this situation cannot occur under the New Covenant. The only general application of this provision is to be kind to a person in a disadvantaged position:

When you go out to war against your enemies,
and [YHWH] your God gives them into your hand and you take them captive,
and you see among the captives a beautiful woman,
and you desire to take her to be your [woman],²²⁴
and you bring her home to your house,
she shall shave her head and pare her nails.
And she shall take off the clothes in which she was captured
and shall remain in your house and lament her father and her mother a full month.
After that you may go in to her and be her [master],²²⁵
and she shall be your [woman] ('ishshah).
But if you no longer delight in her, you shall let her go where she wants.
But **you shall not sell her for money,**
nor shall you treat her as a slave,
since you have humiliated her.
(Deuteronomy 21:10-14 ESV)

The provision for the **firstborn son** speaks to the general need for parents NOT to play favorites among children. **All children should be treated fairly:**

If a man has two wives,²²⁶ the one loved and the other unloved,
and both the loved and the unloved have borne him children,
and if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved,
then on the day when he assigns his possessions as an inheritance to his sons,
he may not treat the son of the loved as the firstborn in preference to the son of the unloved,
who is the firstborn,
but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved,
by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the firstfruits of his strength.
The right of the firstborn is his.
(Deuteronomy 21:15-17 ESV)

Sadly, throughout human history, many parents have been killed for children, and many children have been killed for parents. This will NOT occur in the Word Tomorrow. Under the New Covenant, **each person stands alone before God:**

Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children,
nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers.
Each one shall be put to death for his own sin.
(Deuteronomy 24:16 ESV)

Sex Outside of Marriage

One of the greatest problems in modern Western Civilization is casual sex by uncommitted partners. In the ancient world, adultery was always defined in terms of the woman. Adultery occurred when a man had sex with a woman who was married or betrothed to another man.²²⁷ **Jesus' teaching in the New Testament is that any sex outside of marriage is a sin.** As with any sin, under the New Covenant, upon repentance, forgiveness of sexual sin is available:

And you shall not lie sexually with your neighbor's wife
and so make yourself unclean with her.
(Leviticus 18:20 ESV)

If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor,
both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.
(Leviticus 20:10 ESV)

²²⁴ The noun נִשְׁאָה - 'ishshah, can mean "wife" but most generally means "woman"; see Holladay page 29.

²²⁵ The verb בָּאֵל - ba al, can mean "be husband", but most generally it means "be master"; see Holladay page 43.

²²⁶ This is forbidden by Jesus' teaching.

²²⁷ See sections **5.8.1 Adultery in the Ancient World** and **5.8.2 Adultery in the Old Testament** in the paper **"The Human Condition"** located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

If a man is found lying with the wife of another man,
both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman.
So you shall purge the evil from Israel.
(Deuteronomy 22:22 ESV)

If a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her,
he shall give the bride-price for her and make her his wife.

If her father utterly refuses to give her to him,
he shall pay money equal to the bride-price for virgins.
(Exodus 22:16-17 ESV)

To “seize” and force a woman, is “rape”, a criminal act:

If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed,
and seizes her and lies with her, and they are found,
then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver,
and she shall be his wife, because he has violated her.

He may not divorce her all his days.
(Deuteronomy 22:28-29 ESV)

If there is a betrothed virgin,
and a man meets her in the city and lies with her,
then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city,
and you shall stone them to death with stones,
the young woman because she did not cry for help though she was in the city,
and the man because he violated his neighbor’s wife.
So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

But if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed,
and the man seizes her and lies with her,
then only the man who lay with her shall die.

But you shall do nothing to the young woman;
she has committed no offense punishable by death.

For this case is like that of a man attacking and murdering his neighbor,
because he met her in the open country,
and though the betrothed young woman cried for help there was no one to rescue her.
(Deuteronomy 22:23-27 ESV)

The provision for a “betrothed slave” would seem to have no ongoing application:

If a man lies sexually with a woman who is a slave,
assigned to another man and not yet ransomed or given her freedom,
a distinction shall be made.

They shall not be put to death, because she was not free;
but he shall bring his compensation to [YHWH],
to the entrance of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering.

And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering
before [YHWH] for his sin that he has committed,
and he shall be forgiven for the sin that he has committed.
(Leviticus 19:20-22 ESV)

The following situations are unthinkable under New Testament teaching:

You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and of her daughter,
and you shall not take her son’s daughter or her daughter’s daughter to uncover her nakedness;
they are relatives; it is depravity.
(Leviticus 18:17 ESV)

If a man takes a woman and her mother also, it is depravity;
he and they shall be burned with fire,
that there may be no depravity among you.
(Leviticus 20:14 ESV)

Avoiding sex during a menstrual cycle is a matter of cleanliness and decency:

If a man lies with a woman during her menstrual period and uncovers her nakedness,
he has made naked her fountain,
and she has uncovered the fountain of her blood.
Both of them shall be cut off from among their people.
(Leviticus 20:18 ESV)

You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness.
(Leviticus 18:19 ESV)

Homosexuality and lesbianism are strictly forbidden:

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.
(Leviticus 18:22 ESV)

If a man lies with a male as with a woman,
both of them have committed an abomination;
they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.
(Leviticus 20:13 ESV)

Bestiality is strictly forbidden:

Whoever lies with an animal shall be put to death.
(Exodus 22:19 ESV)

And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it,
neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion.
(Leviticus 18:23 ESV)

If a man lies with an animal, he shall surely be put to death,
and you shall kill the animal.

If a woman approaches any animal and lies with it,
you shall kill the woman and the animal;
they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.
(Leviticus 20:15-16 ESV)

Property

Strictly speaking, as the Creator, **God owns the entire planet** – everything and everyone on it.
However, God has granted tenancy of the various lands to their inhabitants. When Isarel was entering the Land of Canaan, God gave explicit instruction to allocate the land:²²⁸

And [YHWH] spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, saying,

“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them,

When you pass over the Jordan into the land of Canaan,
then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you
and destroy all their figured stones and destroy all their metal images
and demolish all their high places.

And **you shall take possession of the land and settle in it**,
for I have given the land to you to possess it.

You shall inherit the land by lot according to your clans.
To a large tribe you shall give a large inheritance,
and to a small tribe you shall give a small inheritance.
Wherever the lot falls for anyone, that shall be his.

According to the tribes of your fathers you shall inherit. ...”

(Numbers 33:50-54 ESV)

Within each tribal allotment, **individual families were given an inheritance**. A certain man, Zelophehad, had died without a son, so his daughters petitioned for an inheritance:²²⁹

Moses brought their case before [YHWH].

And [YHWH] said to Moses,

“The daughters of Zelophehad are right.

You shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father’s brothers
and transfer the inheritance of their father to them.

And you shall speak to the people of Israel, saying,

‘If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter.
And if he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers.
And if he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father’s brothers.
And if his father has no brothers,
then you shall give his inheritance to the nearest kinsman of his clan,
and he shall possess it.’

²²⁸ The land will be allocated again in the World Tomorrow; see Ezekiel 47:13-23, 48:1-29.

²²⁹ This passage was previously discussed in section [3.4.1 The Writings of Moses](#).

And it shall be for the people of Israel [for statute of mish^epat], as [YHWH] commanded Moses.”
(Numbers 27:5-11 ESV)

And Moses commanded the people of Israel according to the word of [YHWH], saying,

“The tribe of the people of Joseph is right.

This is what [YHWH] commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad:

‘Let them marry whom they think best,
only they shall marry within the clan of the tribe of their father.

The inheritance of the people of Israel
shall not be transferred from one tribe to another,
for every one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance
of the tribe of his fathers.

And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the people of Israel
shall be wife to one of the clan of the tribe of her father,
so that every one of the people of Israel may possess the inheritance of his fathers.

So no inheritance shall be transferred from one tribe to another,
for each of the tribes of the people of Israel shall hold on to its own inheritance.”

(Numbers 36:5-9 ESV)

The perpetual right to the land of inheritance was vital in Israel. The principle behind land ownership is that **personal freedom implies the right to own and control property** – both real estate and chattels.

Houses within cities could change hands, but rural lands and houses always reverted to the original owner at the Jubilee:

If a man sells a dwelling house in a walled city,
he may redeem it within a year of its sale.

For a full year he shall have the right of redemption.

If it is not redeemed within a full year,
then the house in the walled city shall belong in perpetuity to the buyer, throughout his generations;
it shall not be released in the jubilee.

But the houses of the villages that have no wall around them shall be classified with the fields of the land.
They may be redeemed, and they shall be released in the jubilee.

As for the cities of the Levites,
the Levites may redeem at any time the houses in the cities they possess.
And if one of the Levites exercises his right of redemption,
then the house that was sold in a city they possess shall be released in the jubilee.

For the houses in the cities of the Levites are their possession among the people of Israel.
But the fields of pastureland belonging to their cities may not be sold,
for that is their possession forever.

(Leviticus 25:29-34 ESV)

In Israel **animals were the most important chattel**.

Loss or damage to another person's property must be made up:

Whoever takes an animal's life shall make it good, life for life.
(Leviticus 24:18 ESV)

When one man's ox butts another's, so that it dies,
then they shall sell the live ox and share its price,
and the dead beast also they shall share.

Or if it is known that the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past,
and its owner has not kept it in,
he shall repay ox for ox, and the dead beast shall be his.
(Exodus 21:35-36 ESV)

If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed over,
or lets his beast loose and it feeds in another man's field,
he shall make restitution from the best in his own field and in his own vineyard.

If fire breaks out and catches in thorns
so that the stacked grain or the standing grain or the field is consumed,
he who started the fire shall make full restitution.
(Exodus 22:5-6 ESV)

And [YHWH] spoke to Moses, saying,
“Speak to the people of Israel,
When a man or woman commits any of the sins that people commit
by breaking faith with [YHWH],
and that person realizes his guilt, he shall confess his sin that he has committed.
And **he shall make full restitution** for his wrong,
adding a fifth to it and giving it to him to whom he did the wrong.
But if the man has no next of kin to whom restitution may be made for the wrong,
the restitution for wrong shall go to [YHWH] for the priest ...”

(Numbers 5:5-8a ESV)

**All persons are responsible to watch out for the property of others
and lend assistance when necessary:**

If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray,
you shall bring it back to him.
If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden,
you shall refrain from leaving him with it;
you shall rescue it with him.
(Exodus 23:4-5 ESV)
You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep going astray and ignore them.
You shall take them back to your brother.
And if he does not live near you and you do not know who he is,
you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall stay with you until your brother seeks it.
Then you shall restore it to him.
And you shall do the same with his donkey or with his garment,
or with any lost thing of your brother's, which he loses and you find;
you may not ignore it.
You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and ignore them.
You shall help him to lift them up again.
(Deuteronomy 22:1-4 ESV)

Borrowed property is the responsibility of the borrower:

If a man borrows anything of his neighbor,
and it is injured or dies, the owner not being with it,
he shall make full restitution.
If the owner was with it, he shall not make restitution;
if it was hired, it came for its hiring fee.
(Exodus 22:14-15 ESV)

A person who accepts **property for safe keeping** is responsible for the property:

If a man gives to his neighbor money or goods to keep safe,
and it is stolen from the man's house, then,
if the thief is found, he shall pay double.
If the thief is not found,
the owner of the house shall come near to God
to show whether or not he has put his hand to his neighbor's property.
For every breach of trust,
whether it is for an ox, for a donkey, for a sheep, for a cloak, or for any kind of lost thing,
of which one says,
‘This is it,’

the case of both parties shall come before God.
The one whom God condemns shall pay double to his neighbor.
(Exodus 22:7-9 ESV)

If a man gives to his neighbor a donkey or an ox or a sheep or any beast to keep safe,
and it dies or is injured or is driven away, without anyone seeing it,
an oath by [YHWH] shall be between them both
to see whether or not he has put his hand to his neighbor's property.
The owner shall accept the oath, and he shall not make restitution.
But if it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to its owner.

If it is torn by beasts, let him bring it as evidence.
He shall not make restitution for what has been torn.
(Exodus 22:10-13 ESV)

A thief is to be punished, and may be risking his life:

If a man steals an ox or a sheep,
and kills it or sells it,
he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.
If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies,
there shall be no bloodguilt for him,
but if the sun has risen on him,
there shall be bloodguilt for him.
He shall surely pay.
If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.
If the stolen beast is found alive in his possession,
whether it is an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double.
(Exodus 22:1-4 ESV)

Yield of crops, increase, is a gift from God. A person may eat from another's field but not reap there:

If you go into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes, as many as you wish,
but you shall not put any in your bag.
If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand,
but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain.
(Deuteronomy 23:24-25 ESV)

Slavery

Slavery was an unquestioned part of life in the ancient world. Slavery has been repudiated by the modern world – yet it continues unabated: see section [5.2 Slavery](#) in the paper “The Human Condition” located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca. The Biblical provisions for slavery were particularly humane. The provisions for the treatment of slaves provide guidance for the proper treatment of any person in a subordinate role. In general in the ancient world, slaves were merely chattel. In Israel, slaves were persons with rights.

Slave owners must respect the rights of slaves:

When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female,
and destroys it,
he shall let the slave go free because of his eye.
If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female,
he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth.
(Exodus 21:26-27 ESV)

When a man sells his daughter as a slave,
she shall not go out as the male slaves do.
If she does not please her master, who has designated her for himself,
then he shall let her be redeemed.
He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people,
since he has broken faith with her.
If he designates her for his son,
he shall deal with her as with a daughter.
If he takes another [woman] ('ishshah)²³⁰ to himself,
he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights.
And if he does not do these three things for her,
she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.
(Exodus 21:7-11 ESV)

If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you,
you shall not make him serve as a slave:
 he shall be with you as a hired worker and as a sojourner.
 He shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee.²³¹

²³⁰ See footnote [224](#)

²³¹ This would seem to be applicable only if the Jubilee was less than six years away.
Alternatively, it may apply to a person, and his family, who had chosen perpetual slavery.

Then he shall go out from you, he and his children with him,
and go back to his own clan and return to the possession of his fathers.
For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt;
they shall not be sold as slaves.
You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God.
(Leviticus 25:39-43 ESV)

Pressing an Israelite into slavery was a capital offense:

If a man is found stealing one of his brothers of the people of Israel,
and if he treats him as a slave or sells him,
then that thief shall die.
So you shall purge the evil from your midst.“
(Deuteronomy 24:7 ESV)

Israelite slaves had to be released after six years of service:

When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years,
and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing.
If he comes in single, he shall go out single;
if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him.
If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters,
the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out alone.
But if the slave plainly says,
‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’
then his master shall bring him to God,
and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost.
And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl,
and he shall be his slave forever.
(Exodus 21:2-6 ESV)

If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you,
he shall serve you six years,
and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you.
And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed.
You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress.
As [YHWH] your God has blessed you, you shall give to him.
You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt,
and [YHWH] your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.
But if he says to you,
‘I will not go out from you,’
because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off with you,
then you shall take an awl, and put it through his ear into the door,
and he shall be your slave forever.
And to your female slave you shall do the same.
It shall not seem hard to you when you let him go free from you,
for at half the cost of a hired worker he has served you six years.
So [YHWH] your God will bless you in all that you do.
(Deuteronomy 15:12-18 ESV)

A person sold as a slave to non-Israelite, could be redeemed at any time
and must be released at the year of Jubilee:

If a stranger or sojourner with you becomes rich,
and your brother beside him becomes poor and sells himself to the stranger or sojourner with you
or to a member of the stranger's clan,
then after he is sold he may be redeemed.
One of his brothers may redeem him,
or his uncle or his cousin may redeem him,
or a close relative from his clan may redeem him.
Or if he grows rich he may redeem himself.

He shall calculate with his buyer from the year when he sold himself to him until the year of jubilee,
and the price of his sale shall vary with the number of years.

The time he was with his owner shall be rated as the time of a hired worker.
If there are still many years left, he shall pay proportionately for his redemption some of his sale price.

If there remain but a few years until the year of jubilee,
he shall calculate and pay for his redemption in proportion to his years of service.
He shall treat him as a worker hired year by year.
He shall not rule ruthlessly over him in your sight.
And if he is not redeemed by these means,
then he and his children with him shall be released in the year of jubilee.
For it is to me that the people of Israel are servants.
They are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am [YHWH] your God.
(Leviticus 25:47-55 ESV)

Non-Israelite slave were NOT accorded the same rights as Israelite slaves,

and they could be owned in perpetuity:

As for your male and female slaves whom you may have:
you may buy **male and female slaves from among the nations that are around you.**
You may also buy from among the strangers who sojourn with you
and their clans that are with you, who have been born in your land,
and they may be your property.
You may bequeath them to your sons after you to inherit as a possession forever.
You may make slaves of them,
but over your brothers the people of Israel you shall not rule, one over another ruthlessly.

(Leviticus 25:44-46 ESV)

You shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you.
He shall dwell with you, in your midst,
in the place that he shall choose within one of your towns, wherever it suits him.
You shall not wrong him.

(Deuteronomy 23:15-16 ESV)

When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod
and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged.
But if the slave survives a day or two,
he is not to be avenged, for the slave is his money.

(Exodus 21:20-21 ESV)

Idolatry

Idolatry is first and foremost a matter of Religious Justice; however, the implications of idolatry for Social Justice are also huge. **If it is tolerated, idolatry destroys the fabric of a society.**
Idolatry is the major factor destroying Western Civilization: leftist elites have been allowed to hijack the social and political agenda and have established their idols has societal goals. Their agenda is based on lies and deception: socialism, racism, abortion, easy divorce, feminine domination, transgenderism, climate change, “inclusivity”, “political correctness”. The provisions in the Bible against idolatry are unremitting and specific – NOT the slightest hint of idolatry is acceptable:

Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than [YHWH] alone,
shall be devoted to destruction.
(Exodus 22:20 ESV)

Pay attention to all that I have said to you,
and make no mention of the names of other gods,
nor let it be heard on your lips.
(Exodus 23:13 ESV)

Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves any gods of cast metal:
I am [YHWH] your God.
(Leviticus 19:4 ESV)

You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech,
and so profane the name of your God: I am [YHWH].
(Leviticus 18:21 ESV)

[YHWH] spoke to Moses, saying,
“Say to the people of Israel,

Any one of the people of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel
who gives any of his children to Molech shall surely be put to death.
The people of the land shall stone him with stones.

I myself will set my face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, to make my sanctuary unclean and to profane my holy name.
And if the people of the land do at all close their eyes to that man when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, then I will set my face against that man and against his clan and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in whoring after Molech.

(Leviticus 20:1-5 ESV)

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For [YHWH] your God is testing you, to know whether you love [YHWH] your God with all your heart and with all your [mind] (nephesh).²³² You shall walk after [YHWH] your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against [YHWH] your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which [YHWH] your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

(Deuteronomy 13:1-5 ESV)

If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife you embrace or your friend who is as your own [being] (nephesh) entices you secretly, saying,

'Let us go and serve other gods,' which neither you nor your fathers have known, some of the gods of the peoples who are around you, whether near you or far off from you, from the one end of the earth to the other, you shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him.

But you shall kill him.

Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. You shall stone him to death with stones, because he sought to draw you away from [YHWH] your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

And all Israel shall hear and fear and never again do any such wickedness as this among you.
(Deuteronomy 13:6-11 ESV)

If you hear in one of your cities, which [YHWH] your God is giving you to dwell there, that certain worthless fellows have gone out among you and have drawn away the inhabitants of their city, saying,

'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known, then you shall inquire and make search and ask diligently.

And behold, if it be true and certain that such an abomination has been done among you, you shall surely put the inhabitants of that city to the sword, devoting it to destruction, all who are in it and its cattle, with the edge of the sword.

You shall gather all its spoil into the midst of its open square and burn the city and all its spoil with fire, as a whole burnt offering to [YHWH] your God.

It shall be a heap forever.
It shall not be built again.

²³² See footnote 15

None of the devoted things shall stick to your hand,
that [YHWH] may turn from the fierceness of his anger and show you mercy
and have compassion on you and multiply you, as he swore to your fathers,
if you obey the voice of [YHWH] your God,
keeping all his commandments that I am commanding you today,
and doing what is right in the sight of [YHWH] your God.
(Deuteronomy 13:12-18 ESV)

If there is found among you, within any of your towns that [YHWH] your God is giving you,
a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of [YHWH] your God, in transgressing his covenant,
and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them,
or the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden,
and it is told you and you hear of it,
then you shall inquire diligently,
and if it is true and certain that such an abomination has been done in Israel,
then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has done this evil thing,
and you shall stone that man or woman to death with stones.

On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death;
a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.
The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death,
and afterward the hand of all the people.
So you shall purge the evil from your midst.
(Deuteronomy 17:2-7 ESV)

Occult

The “occult” is linked directly to Satan the Devil. The “occult” is closely associated with “idolatry”.
There has always been an undercurrent of the occult, but sadly more and more people
in Western Civilization are being drawn into it. As with idolatry, no aspect of the occult is acceptable:

You shall not permit a sorceress to live.
(Exodus 22:18 ESV)

A man or a woman who is a medium or a necromancer shall surely be put to death.
They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them.
(Leviticus 20:27 ESV)

Do not turn to mediums or necromancers;
do not seek them out,
and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am [YHWH] your God.
(Leviticus 19:31 ESV)

If a person turns to mediums and necromancers, whoring after them,
I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people.
Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am [YHWH] your God.
Keep my statutes and do them; I am [YHWH] who sanctifies you
(Leviticus 20:6-8 ESV)

You shall not interpret omens or tell fortunes.
You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard.
You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am [YHWH].
(Leviticus 19:26b-28 ESV)

You are the sons of [YHWH] your God.
You shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead.
For you are a people holy to [YHWH] your God,
and [YHWH] has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession,
out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.
(Deuteronomy 14:1-2 ESV)

When you come into the land that [YHWH] your God is giving you,
you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations.
There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering,
anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens,
or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead,
for whoever does these things is an abomination to [YHWH].

And because of these abominations [YHWH] your God is driving them out before you.
You shall be blameless before [YHWH] your God,
for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners.
But as for you, [YHWH] your God has not allowed you to do this.
(Deuteronomy 18:9-14 ESV)

Oppression

“Oppression” is one of the greatest evils in any society. **Oppression occurs when persons with advantage mercilessly take advantage of persons who are not in a position to withstand it.**

Again, this is an evil that is rampant in Western civilization. Governments, banks, unions, police, relentlessly press their own agenda with no regard to what is actually best for the individual in society. The average person has no way to stand up to these oppressors. The Bible highlights “sojourners”, “widows”, and “orphans” as some of the most vulnerable in society:

You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him,
for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.
(Exodus 22:21 ESV)

When a stranger sojourns with you in your land,
you shall not do him wrong.

You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you,
and you shall love him as yourself,
for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am [YHWH] your God.
(Leviticus 19:33-34 ESV)

You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child.

If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry,
and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword,
and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.
(Exodus 22:22-24 ESV)

You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless,
or take a widow’s garment in pledge,
but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt
and [YHWH] your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this.
(Deuteronomy 24:17-18 ESV)

Oppression is especially prevalent in legal proceedings. The party with money and influence can carry the day with no regard to what is actually true, fair, or right:

You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit.
Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous,
for I will not acquit the wicked.

And you shall take no bribe,
for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.

You shall not oppress a sojourner.
You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.
(Exodus 23:6-9 ESV)

You shall do no injustice in court.
You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great,
but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.

You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people,
and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am [YHWH].

You shall not hate your brother in your heart,
but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor,
lest you incur sin because of him.

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people,
but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am [YHWH].
(Leviticus 19:15-18 ESV)

You shall not spread a false report.
You shall not join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness.
You shall not fall in with the many to do evil,
nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit,
siding with the many, so as to pervert justice,
nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit.
(Exodus 23:1-3 ESV)

Similarly in financial dealings, the wealthy and the powerful,

i.e., "the banks", inevitably oppress the individual:

When you make your neighbor a loan of any sort,
you shall not go into his house to collect his pledge.

You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you make the loan shall bring the pledge out to you.

And if he is a poor man, you shall not sleep in his pledge.

You shall restore to him the pledge as the sun sets, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you.

And it shall be righteousness for you before [YHWH] your God.

You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy,
whether he is one of your brothers or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns.
You shall give him his wages on the same day,
before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it),
lest he cry against you to [YHWH], and you be guilty of sin.
(Deuteronomy 24:10-15 ESV)

You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely;
you shall not lie to one another.

You shall not swear by my name falsely,
and so profane the name of your God: I am [YHWH].

You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him.

The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning.
(Leviticus 19:11-13 ESV)

No one shall take a mill or an upper millstone in pledge,
for that would be taking a life in pledge.

(Deuteronomy 24:6 ESV)

The Disadvantaged

The "disadvantaged" are those who are most often oppressed. The Bible is explicit that
those in a position to do so, must look out for the disadvantaged and take steps help them:

If among you, one of your brothers should become poor,
in any of your towns within your land that [YHWH] your God is giving you,
you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother,
but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.

Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say,
'The seventh year, the year of release is near,'

and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing,
and he cry to [YHWH] against you, and you be guilty of sin.

You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him,
because for this [YHWH] your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.

For there will never cease to be poor in the land.

Therefore I command you,

'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'
(Deuteronomy 15:7-11 ESV)

The Sabbath is specifically designated as a rest for the disadvantaged:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Six days you shall labor, and do all your work,
but the seventh day is a Sabbath to [YHWH] your God.

On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter,
your male [slave],²³³ or your female [slave],²³⁴
or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.
(Exodus 20:8-10 ESV)

Six days you shall do your work,
but on the seventh day you shall rest;
that your ox and your donkey may have rest,
and the son of your [slave] ('amah) woman,
and the alien, may be refreshed.
(Exodus 23:12 ESV)

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as [YHWH] your God commanded you.
Six days you shall labor and do all your work,
but the seventh day is a Sabbath to [YHWH] your God.
On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter
or your male [slave] ('eved) or your female [slave] ('amah),
or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock,
or the sojourner who is within your gates,
that your male [slave] ('eved) and your female [slave] ('amah) may rest as well as you.
(Deuteronomy 5:12-14 ESV)

The provisions to allow the disadvantaged gleaning rights demonstrate God's requirement to provide sustenance to the disadvantaged:

When you reap the harvest of your land,
you shall not reap your field right up to its edge,
neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest.

And you shall not strip your vineyard bare,
neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard.

You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am [YHWH] your God.
(Leviticus 19:9-10 ESV)

And when you reap the harvest of your land,
you shall not reap your field right up to its edge,
nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest.

You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am [YHWH] your God."
(Leviticus 23:22 ESV)²³⁵

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field,
you shall not go back to get it.

It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow,
that [YHWH] your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again.
It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.

When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward.
It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this.
(Deuteronomy 24:19-22 ESV)

The "third-year tithe" serves the same purpose:

At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year
and lay it up within your towns.

And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you,
and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns,
shall come and eat and be filled,
that [YHWH] your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do.

(Deuteronomy 14:28-29 ESV)

²³³ Hebrew שָׂבָע - 'eved, "slave"; see Holladay page 262

²³⁴ Hebrew שָׁמֶן - 'amah, "slave", "concubine", see Holladay page 19

²³⁵ Note that this is include with the instructions for the "Feast of Weeks", Pentecost.
This clearly has implications for the provision of the Holy Spirit.

The following provision is extremely obvious in its literal application; but, **physically**, it implies doing nothing to get in the way of a disadvantaged person; and, **spiritually**, it implies doing nothing to impede the progress of a neophyte to come to an understanding of the Way of God:

You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind,
but you shall fear your God: I am [YHWH].
(Leviticus 19:14 ESV)

Violence

Physical violence of human beings one against another is from Satan the Devil.

Jesus' teaching and example are that human beings should treat each other with gentleness, never with violence:

Blessed are the **poor in spirit**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the **meek**, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are the **merciful**, for they shall receive mercy.
(Matthew 5:3, 5, 7 ESV)

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,
for **I am gentle** and lowly in heart,
and you will find rest for your [life] (psyche).²³⁶
(Matthew 11:29 ESV)

I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the **meekness and gentleness of Christ** ...
(2 Corinthians 10:1a ESV)

When he was reviled, **he did not revile in return**;
when he suffered, **he did not threaten**,
but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.
(1 Peter 2:23 ESV)

When violence does occur among human beings, there is never a good outcome.

If a person dies in a quarrel, it is treated as manslaughter²³⁷ or murder.

A person who injures another, is responsible to care for the injured:

When men quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist
and the man does not die but takes to his bed,
then if the man rises again and walks outdoors with his staff,
he who struck him shall be clear;
only **he shall pay for the loss of his time**,
and shall have him thoroughly healed.
(Exodus 21:18-19 ESV)

Whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death.

If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him,
fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth;
whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him.

Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, and whoever kills a person shall be put to death.
You shall have the same rule for the sojourner and for the native, for I am [YHWH] your God.
(Leviticus 24:17, 19-22 ESV)

The following provision is extremely important. From this provision, it is clear that **abortion is murder**.

Anyone who participates in an abortion is guilty of murder and requires execution:

When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman,
so that her children come out,
but there is no harm,
the one who hit her shall surely be fined,
as the woman's husband shall impose on him,
and he shall pay as the judges determine.

²³⁶ See footnote 15

²³⁷ See the discussion of the "manslayer" in sections 3.3.1 *The Writings of Moses* and 3.3.2 *Historic Books*

But **if there is harm**,
then **you shall pay life for life**,
eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,
burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.
(Exodus 21:22-25 ESV)

Decency is required even under the most extreme circumstances:

When men fight with one another
and the wife of the one draws near to rescue her husband from the hand of him who is beating him
and puts out her hand and seizes him by the private parts,
then you shall cut off her hand.
Your eye shall have no pity.
(Deuteronomy 25:11-12 ESV)

Business & Safety

Honesty and fairness are the bottom line all business transactions. **No person should attempt to take advantage of another.** The **setting of a landmark** has enormous implications. A physical landmark delineates property – the basis of all ownership. **A landmark is a standard by which business is to be governed.** Agreed upon standards must be adhered to:

You shall not move your neighbor's landmark,
which the men of old have set,
in the inheritance that you will hold in the land that [YHWH] your God is giving you to possess.
(Deuteronomy 19:14 ESV)

The existence of **fair weights and measures** implies fairness in all aspects of business transactions:

You shall do no wrong in [mish^{ep}at],
in measures of length or weight or quantity.
You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin:
I am [YHWH] your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.
(Leviticus 19:35-36 ESV)

You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small.
You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, a large and a small.
A full and fair weight you shall have, a full and fair measure you shall have,
that your days may be long in the land that [YHWH] your God is giving you.
For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are an abomination to [YHWH] your God.
(Deuteronomy 25:13-16 ESV)

To “**open a pit**” implies any kind of a construction, manufacturing, or any similar situation.

If the responsible party is in any way negligent, and harm occurs,

the owner of “the pit” is responsible for all damages:

When a man **opens a pit**, or when a man digs a pit and **does not cover it**,
and an ox or a donkey falls into it,
the owner of the pit shall make restoration.

He shall give money to its owner,
and the dead beast shall be his.
(Exodus 21:33-34 ESV)

Putting a “**parapet**” on a roof represents **any and all necessary safety precautions in a workplace:**

When you build a new house,
you shall make a parapet for your roof,
that you may not bring the guilt of blood upon your house,
if anyone should fall from it.
(Deuteronomy 22:8 ESV)

Usury

One of the greatest curses of the modern world is “the banks”. They have forced the vast majority of people into unmanageable debt. They have financed governments into crippling national debt. The Biblical provisions on “usury” require a complete rethinking and revamping of “banking” systems:

If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor,
you shall not be like a moneylender to him,
and you shall not exact interest from him.

If ever you take your neighbor’s cloak in pledge,
you shall return it to him before the sun goes down,
for that is his only covering,
and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep?

And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.
(Exodus 22:25-27 ESV)

If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you,
you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you.
Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you.
You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit.
(Leviticus 25:35-37 ESV)

You shall not charge interest on loans to your brother,
interest on money, interest on food, interest on anything that is lent for interest.

You may charge a foreigner interest,
but you may not charge your brother interest,
that [YHWH] your God may bless you in all that you undertake
in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.
(Deuteronomy 23:19-20 ESV)

Unnatural Practices

The situations proscribed in these provisions are so obviously wrong they require little comment.
The first two provisions speak to **giving respect where respect is due**:

You shall not revile God,
nor curse a ruler of your people.
(Exodus 22:28 ESV)

You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man,
and you shall fear your God: I am [YHWH].
(Leviticus 19:32 ESV)

The next four provisions relate to combining dissimilar things in unnatural ways.
These provisions speak to the “**purity**” that God requires in True Worshippers:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
(Matthew 5:8 ESV)

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more,
with knowledge and all discernment,
so that you may approve what is excellent,
and so **be pure and blameless for the day of Christ**,
filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ,
to the glory and praise of God.
(Philippians 1:9-11 ESV)

You shall keep my statutes.
You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind.
You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed,
nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material.
(Leviticus 19:19 ESV)

You shall not wear cloth of wool and linen mixed together.
(Deuteronomy 22:11 ESV)

You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed,
lest the whole yield be forfeited,
the crop that you have sown and the yield of the vineyard.
(Deuteronomy 22:9 ESV)

You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.
(Deuteronomy 22:10 ESV)

All forms of transvestitism and transgenderism are an abomination to God and will NOT be tolerated:

A woman shall not wear a man's garment,
nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak,
for whoever does these things is an abomination to [YHWH] your God.
(Deuteronomy 22:5 ESV)

The provisions for admittance to the “assembly” may provide insight into God's calling of people to be True Worshippers. Ultimately, all human beings will be given to opportunity for salvation. In Ancient Israel these provisions limited those who could be naturalized to be considered full Israelites. In calling people to be True Worshippers, God has his own criteria of election that he applies. There may be analogies between those allowed to enter the “assembly” and God's criteria for “calling”:

No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of [YHWH].
No one born of a forbidden union may enter the assembly of [YHWH].
Even to the tenth generation, none of his descendants may enter the assembly of [YHWH].
No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of [YHWH].
Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of [YHWH] forever, because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. But [YHWH] your God would not listen to Balaam; instead [YHWH] your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because [YHWH] your God loved you.
You shall not seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever.
You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother.
You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a sojourner in his land.
Children born to them in the third generation may enter the assembly of [YHWH].
(Deuteronomy 23:1-8 ESV)

God will NOT accept “dirty” offerings. This speaks loudly to those who would worship God.

Worship provided with less than sincerity is NOT acceptable.

A worshipper must set his/her heart right, then present worship:

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go.

First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.
(Matthew 5:23-24 ESV)

You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute or the wages of a dog into the house of [YHWH] your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are an abomination to [YHWH] your God.
(Deuteronomy 23:18 ESV)

The “muzzled ox” provision is very famous – Paul alludes to it twice:

Do we not have the right to eat and drink?
Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?
Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?
Who serves as a soldier at his own expense?
Do I say these things on human authority?
Does not the [nomos]²³⁸ say the same?
For it is written in the [nomos] of Moses,
“You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.”

Is it for oxen that God is concerned?
Does he not certainly speak for our sake?
(1 Corinthians 9:4-7a, 8-10a ESV)

²³⁸ See footnote 7

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

For the Scripture says,

“You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,”
and,

“The laborer deserves his wages.”

(alluding to Leviticus 19:13 and/or Deuteronomy 24:15, discussed in section **Oppression**)
(1 Timothy 5:17-18 ESV)

Paul said it best, “the laborer deserves his wages”:

You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.
(Deuteronomy 25:4 ESV)

This final provision can be a real “head-scratcher”. The grotesque image of actually **boiling a kid in its mother’s milk** was apparently something done by the Canaanites.

The instance in Deuteronomy is without context and clearly depends on the instance in Exodus.

The understanding of the provision is entirely dependent on the context.

Exodus chapter 23 verses 12-19a contain **a brief summary of the Holy Days**.

Then the quotation:

You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.
(Exodus 23:19b ESV)

You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.
(Deuteronomy 14:21b ESV)

Then Exodus chapter 23 verse 20-33 contain **instructions for the conquest of Canaan**:

Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way
and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.
But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say,
then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

... you shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them,
nor do as they do,
but **you shall utterly overthrow them** and break their pillars in pieces.
... for **I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand**,
and **you shall drive them out** before you.

You shall make no covenant with them and their gods.

They shall not dwell in your land,
lest they make you sin against me;
for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.
(Exodus 23:20, 22, 24, 31b-33 ESV)

The Holy Days are first discussed to set the context. **It is only through the Holy Days that True Worshippers can come to a deep understanding of the Way of God**. The way of the world, the way of the Canaanites, the way of Satan, the way of sin and death, is as diametrically opposite to the Way of God as “the grotesque image of actually boiling a kid in its mother’s milk”.

The purpose of the conquest of Canaan was to totally eradicate their society, their way of life.

The image of the “kid in its mother’s milk” was to inspire the Israelites to zeal to accomplish their purpose. It serves the same purpose for True Worshippers of all time – to hate sin and strive with zeal to eradicate the way of Satan.

Food

God created some animals fit to eat and some animals unfit to eat. Common sense should be sufficient for people to recognize that there is a reason why unclean animals should NOT be eaten, but it is a primary point of human rebellion to insist on eating unclean animals – and people's health suffers for it. The provisions are clear and specific which animals are fit to eat:²³⁹

Speak to the people of Israel, saying,

These are the living things that you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth.

Whatever parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat.

(Leviticus 11:2-3 ESV)

You shall not eat any abomination.

These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, and the mountain sheep.

Every animal that parts the hoof and has the hoof cloven in two and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat.

Yet of those that chew the cud or have the hoof cloven you shall not eat these:

the camel, the hare, and the rock badger, because they chew the cud but do not part the hoof, are unclean for you.

And the pig, because it parts the hoof but does not chew the cud, is unclean for you.

Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch.

(Deuteronomy 14:3-8 ESV)

These you may eat, of all that are in the waters.

Everything **in the waters that has fins and scales**, whether in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat.

But anything in the seas or the rivers that does not have fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and of the living creatures that are in the waters, is detestable to you.

You shall regard them as detestable;

you shall not eat any of their flesh, and you shall detest their carcasses.

Everything in the waters that does not have fins and scales is detestable to you.

(Leviticus 11:9-12 ESV)

Of all that are in the waters you may eat these:

whatever has fins and scales you may eat.

And whatever does not have fins and scales you shall not eat; it is unclean for you.

(Deuteronomy 14:9-10 ESV)

And these you shall detest among the birds ...

All winged insects that go on all fours are detestable to you.

(Leviticus 11:13a, 20 ESV)

You may eat all clean birds.

And all winged insects are unclean for you; they shall not be eaten.

(Deuteronomy 14:11, 19 ESV)

These are unclean to you among all that swarm.

Whoever touches them when they are dead shall be unclean until the evening.

And anything on which any of them falls when they are dead shall be unclean, whether it is an article of wood or a garment or a skin or a sack, any article that is used for any purpose. It must be put into water, and it shall be unclean until the evening; then it shall be clean.

(Leviticus 11:31-32 ESV)

To consume unclean food is a desecration of the human body.

It makes a person detestable in God's eyes. True Worshippers are called to be "Holy"; once converted a True Worshippers' body become the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

To consume unclean food is to violate the sanctity of the Holy Spirit:

You shall not make yourselves detestable with any swarming thing that swarms, and **you shall not defile yourselves** with them, and become unclean through them.

For I am [YHWH] your God.

Consecrate yourselves therefore, and **be holy, for I am holy.**

²³⁹ The following summaries omit some details; all of Leviticus chapter 11 and Deuteronomy 14:3-21a should be consulted.

You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground.

For I am [YHWH] who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God.

You shall therefore **be holy, for I am holy.**

(Leviticus 11:43-45 ESV)

You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean,
and the unclean bird from the clean.

You shall not make yourselves detestable

by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls,
which I have set apart for you to hold unclean.

You shall be holy to me,

for I [YHWH] am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.
(Leviticus 20:25-26 ESV)

The Covenant of Justness²⁴⁰ given to Noah laid down the principle that **“blood” is NOT to be eaten** because **“life is in the blood”**; this is reenforced in Leviticus. Under the Old Covenant, it was the **blood of the victims**, their life, which **made atonement for sin**. Under the New Covenant, it is the **life blood of Jesus Christ** which provides propitiation of sin.

To consume “blood” (or eat unclean food) is to denigrate the sacrifice of Jesus Christ:

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying,

“Drink of it, all of you, for **this is my blood of the covenant,**
which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ...”

(Matthew 26:27-28 ESV)

In him **we have redemption through his blood,**
the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ...

(Ephesians 1:7 ESV)

... he entered once for all into the holy places,
not by means of the blood of goats and calves but **by means of his own blood,**
thus securing an eternal redemption.

(Hebrews 9:12 ESV)

... since it is written,
“You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

And **if you call on him as Father** who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds,
conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,
knowing that **you were ransomed** from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers,
not with perishable things such as silver or gold,
but **with the precious blood of Christ**, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

(1 Peter 1:16-19 ESV)

... and from **Jesus Christ** the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.
To him who loves us and **has freed us from our sins by his blood ...**

(Revelation 1:5 ESV)

How much worse punishment, do you think,
will be deserved by the one who has **trampled underfoot the Son of God,**
and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified,
and has **outraged the Spirit** of grace?

(Hebrews 10:29 ESV)

But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

(Genesis 9:4 ESV)

You shall not eat any flesh with the blood in it.

(Leviticus 19:26a ESV)

If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood,
I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people.

For the life of the flesh is in the blood,

and **I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your [lives] (nephesh)**²⁴¹
for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life (nephesh).

²⁴⁰ See section **2. The Covenant of Justness** in the paper **“Covenants of Grace”** located at www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca

²⁴¹ See footnote **15**

Therefore I have said to the people of Israel,
No person among you shall eat blood,
neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.
(Leviticus 17:10-12 ESV)

In the wilderness, the Israelites were required to **bring any slaughtered animal to the Tabernacle** and present it as a “**peace offering**” before it could be consumed. The purpose of this was to prevent idolatry. Before the Israelites passed into the **Promised Land**, this was changed – **animals could be slaughtered and consumed in any town** and did NOT have to be presented as a “peace offering”:

If any one of the house of Israel kills an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or kills it outside the camp, and does not **bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting** to offer it as a gift to [YHWH] in front of the tabernacle of [YHWH], **bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man**.

He has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from among his people.

This is to the end that the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices that they sacrifice in the open field, that they may bring them to [YHWH], to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and **sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace offerings to [YHWH]**.

So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons, after whom they whored.

(Leviticus 17:3-5, 7a ESV)

However, **you may slaughter and eat meat within any of your towns**, as much as you desire, according to the blessing of [YHWH] your God that he has given you.

The unclean and the clean may eat of it, as of the gazelle and as of the deer.

Only you shall not eat the blood; you shall pour it out on the earth like water.

(Deuteronomy 12:15-16 ESV)

When [YHWH] your God enlarges your territory, as he has promised you, and you say,
‘I will eat meat,’

because you crave meat, **you may eat meat whenever you desire**.

If the place that [YHWH] your God will choose to put his name there is too far from you, then you may kill any of your herd or your flock, which [YHWH] has given you, as I have commanded you, and **you may eat within your towns** whenever you desire.

Just as the gazelle or the deer is eaten, so you may eat of it.

The unclean and the clean alike may eat of it.

Only be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life (nephesh),²⁴² and you shall not eat the life (nephesh) with the flesh.

(Deuteronomy 12:20-23 ESV)

When a “**peace offering**” was presented it had to be **eaten within two days**. This is to prevent consumption of spoiled meat – without refrigeration meat could begin to decay after two days:

When you offer a sacrifice of **peace offerings** to [YHWH], you shall offer it so that you may be accepted.

It shall be eaten the same day you offer it or on the day after, and anything left over until the third day shall be burned up with fire.

If it is eaten at all on the third day, it is tainted; it will not be accepted, and everyone who eats it shall bear his iniquity, because he has profaned what is holy to [YHWH], and that person shall be cut off from his people.

(Leviticus 19:5-8 ESV)

The provision for **fruit trees** is a matter of husbandry:

the tree will produce better if it is NOT harvested for three years:

When you come into the land and plant any kind of tree for food, then you shall regard its fruit as forbidden.

Three years it shall be forbidden to you; it must not be eaten.

And in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to [YHWH].

But in the fifth year you may eat of its fruit,

to increase its yield for you: I am [YHWH] your God.

(Leviticus 19:23-25 ESV)

²⁴² See footnote 15

Animals that die violently or naturally can set into decay very quickly – they are NOT fit to eat:

You shall be consecrated to me.
Therefore you shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field;
you shall throw it to the dogs.
(Exodus 22:31 ESV)

You shall not eat anything that has died naturally.
You may give it to the sojourner who is within your towns, that he may eat it,
or you may sell it to a foreigner.
For you are a people holy to [YHWH] your God.
(Deuteronomy 14:21a ESV)

Disease, Death, and Cleanliness

The provisions for leprous diseases are intended to demonstrate the principle of **quarantine for all communicable diseases**:

But if the spot is white in the skin of his body
and appears no deeper than the skin,
and the hair in it has not turned white,
the priest shall shut up the diseased person for seven days.

And the priest shall examine him on the seventh day,
and if in his eyes the disease is checked and the disease has not spread in the skin,
then the priest shall shut him up for another seven days.
(Leviticus 13:4-5 ESV)

... he is a leprous man, he is unclean.
The priest must pronounce him unclean; his disease is on his head.
The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes
and let the hair of his head hang loose,
and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out,
‘Unclean, unclean.’

He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease.
He is unclean.
He shall live alone.
His dwelling shall be outside the camp.
(Leviticus 13:44-46 ESV)

Take care, in a case of leprous disease,
to be very careful to do according to all that the Levitical priests shall direct you.
As I commanded them, so you shall be careful to do.
Remember what [YHWH] your God did to Miriam on the way as you came out of Egypt.
(Deuteronomy 24:8-9 ESV)

All discharges from a human body can become contaminated, so they must be treated as unclean:

If a woman has a **discharge of blood** for many days,
not at the time of her menstrual impurity,
or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity,
all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness.
As in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean.

But if she is cleansed of her discharge,
she shall count for herself seven days,
and after that she shall be clean.

And on the eighth day she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons and bring them to the priest,
to the entrance of the tent of meeting.
And the priest shall use one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering.
And the priest shall make atonement for her before [YHWH] for her unclean discharge.

**Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness,
lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst.**²⁴³
(Leviticus 15:25, 28-31 ESV)

²⁴³ This is elaborated in the next provision ...

To be physically “unclean” under the Old Covenant, required a cleansing sacrifice. Without the sacrifice, a person remained “spiritually unclean”, so any contact with something “holy” would require death: to be readmitted to the camp, and possible come into contact with the Tabernacle, i.e., that which is holy, required a sacrifice:

[YHWH] spoke to Moses, saying,

“Command the people of Israel that they put out of the camp everyone who is leprous or has a discharge and everyone who is unclean through contact with the dead.

You shall put out both male and female, putting them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camp, in the midst of which I dwell.”

And the people of Israel did so, and put them outside the camp; as [YHWH] said to Moses, so the people of Israel did.

(Numbers 5:1-4 ESV)

Anything associated with death can produce physical uncleanness.

Passage of time and washing is required to remove any potential uncleanness:

Whoever touches the dead body of any person shall be unclean seven days.

He shall cleanse himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and so be clean.

But if he does not cleanse himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not become clean.

Whoever touches a dead person, the body of anyone who has died, and does not cleanse himself, defiles the tabernacle of [YHWH], and that person shall be cut off from Israel;

because the water for impurity was not thrown on him, he shall be unclean.

His uncleanness is still on him.

(Numbers 19:11-13 ESV)

This is the [torah]²⁴⁴ when someone dies in a tent:

everyone who comes into the tent and everyone who is in the tent shall be unclean seven days.

And every open vessel that has no cover fastened on it is unclean.

Whoever in the open field touches someone who was killed with a sword or who died naturally, or touches a human bone or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.

For the unclean they shall take some ashes of the burnt sin offering, and fresh water shall be added in a vessel.

Then a clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water and sprinkle it on the tent and on all the furnishings and on the persons who were there and on whoever touched the bone, or the slain or the dead or the grave.

(Numbers 19:14-18 ESV)

If the man who is unclean does not cleanse himself, that person shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly, since he has defiled the sanctuary of [YHWH].

Because the water for impurity has not been thrown on him, he is unclean.

And it shall be a statute forever for them.

The one who sprinkles the water for impurity shall wash his clothes, and the one who touches the water for impurity shall be unclean until evening.

And whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean, and anyone who touches it shall be unclean until evening.”

(Numbers 19:20-22 ESV)

The provisions for an army camp are to prevent disease in the camp:

When you are encamped against your enemies,

then you shall keep yourself from every evil thing.

If any man among you becomes unclean because of a nocturnal emission, then he shall go outside the camp.

He shall not come inside the camp, but when evening comes, he shall bathe himself in water, and as the sun sets, he may come inside the camp.

You shall have a place outside the camp, and you shall go out to it.

And you shall have a trowel with your tools, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig a hole with it and turn back and cover up your excrement.

²⁴⁴ See footnote 18

Because [YHWH] your God walks in the midst of your camp,
to deliver you and to give up your enemies before you,
therefore **your camp must be holy**,
so that he may not see anything indecent among you and turn away from you.
(Deuteronomy 23:9-14 ESV)

Land Sabbath

The provisions for a seventh year Land Sabbath are a matter of husbandry – **the land needs to rest**.
Also, it allows the disadvantaged to glean that which grows voluntarily:

For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield,
but **the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow**,
that **the poor of your people may eat**;
and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat.

You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard.
(Exodus 23:10-11 ESV)

[YHWH] spoke to Moses [at] Mount Sinai, saying,
“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them,
When you come into the land that I give you,
the land shall keep a Sabbath to [YHWH].

For six years you shall sow your field,
and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits,
but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land,
a Sabbath to [YHWH].

You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.
You shall not reap what grows of itself in your harvest,
or gather the grapes of your undressed vine.
It shall be a year of solemn rest for the land.

The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you,
for yourself and for your male and female slaves
and for your hired worker and the sojourner who lives with you,
and for your cattle and for the wild animals that are in your land:
all its yield shall be for food.

(Leviticus 25:1-7 ESV)

The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and dwell in it securely.
And if you say,

‘What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?’
I will command my blessing on you in the sixth year,
so that it will produce a crop sufficient for three years.
When you sow in the eighth year, you will be eating some of the old crop;
you shall eat the old until the ninth year, when its crop arrives.
(Leviticus 25:19-22 ESV)

In conjunction with the Land Sabbath there is **a seven-year cycle of debt release**.
This is a lynch pin of social reform. In the World Tomorrow this will prevent people
from being locked into long-term debt arrangements. This will prevent inflation.

This will preclude anything like the current banking industry:

At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release.

And this is the manner of the release:

every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor.
He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother,
because [YHWH's] release has been proclaimed.

Of a foreigner you may exact it,
but whatever of yours is with your brother your hand shall release.

But **there will be no poor among you**:

for [YHWH] will bless you in the land that [YHWH] your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess
—if only you will strictly obey the voice of [YHWH] your God,
being careful to do all this commandment that I command you today.

For [YHWH] your God will bless you, as he promised you,
and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow,
and you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you.
(Deuteronomy 15:1-6 ESV)

Jubilee Year

This is another lynch pin of social reform. The **fifty-year Jubilee Cycle** will prevent generational poverty. Every generation there will be an opportunity for families to return to their heritage and start over without debt or encumbrance:

You shall **count seven weeks of years**, seven times seven years,
so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years.

Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month.
On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land.

And you shall **consecrate the fiftieth year**,
and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.

It shall be a jubilee for you,
when **each of you shall return to his property** and each of you shall return to his clan.

That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you;
in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines.
For it is a jubilee.

It shall be holy to you.

You may eat the produce of the field.
(Leviticus 25:8-12 ESV)

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for **the land is mine**.

For you are strangers and sojourners with me.

And in all the country you possess, you shall allow a redemption of the land.

If your brother becomes poor and sells part of his property,
then his nearest redeemer shall come and redeem what his brother has sold.

If a man has no one to redeem it
and then himself becomes prosperous and finds sufficient means to redeem it,
let him calculate the years since he sold it and pay back the balance to the man to whom he sold it,
and then return to his property.

But if he does not have sufficient means to recover it,
then **what he sold shall remain in the hand of the buyer until the year of jubilee**.

In the jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his property.

(Leviticus 25:23-28 ESV)

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