

Justice: מִשְׁפָּט (*mish^epat*) in Isaiah

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Life Situation: the ‘stiz im leban’ as it is called is generally well defined for most parts of Isaiah – see the ‘Life and Times of Isaiah’ for a summary. While individual pericopes may not be assignable to a specific date or situation, the way the book is constructed indicates the general date and situation to which each pericope applies.

For each occurrence of *mish^epat* in Isaiah, the following analysis first lists the ESV translation, then a brief note attempts to elucidate the actual nuance of meaning. For almost all instances of *mish^epat*, the KJV translates “judgement”. The NKJV generally follows the KJV but frequently uses “justice”. Hebrew words are transliterated in italics.

Is1:17 “justice” Isaiah calls for repentance; *mish^epat* is parallel to ‘good’; therefore, it is an attribute of character required of one who is repentant: ‘justness’ (the second instance of ‘justice’ in verse 17 is based on the verb form *shiph^etu*: it has essentially the same meaning as *mish^epat*)

Is1:21 “justice” Jerusalem in the past was full of *mish^epat*, which is parallel to ‘righteousness’; so, it is a desirable attribute of the social condition of a society: ‘justness’, ‘application of justice’

Is1:27 “justice” *mish^epat* has the same meaning as verse 21, except that it is a prophecy of what is to occur

Is3:14 “judgement” verses 11-15 promise ‘retributive justice’ on the wicked; *mish^epat* is application of justice to those who refuse to repent

Is4:4 “judgement” verses 2-6 are the first Messianic prophecy in Isaiah; *mish^epat* has essentially the same meaning as Is3:14 except that is more specific in that it is the Messiah who will apply the ‘retributive justice’

Is5:7 “justice” *mish^epat* is an attribute of character that YHWH sought in the people of Israel: ‘justness’

Is5:16 “justice” *mish^epat* is parallel to ‘righteousness’ not only as attributes of God’s nature but also as characteristics by which he makes himself known: ‘justness’

Is9:7 “justice” verses 2-7 are one of Isaiah’s most famous Messianic prophecies, verses 6-7 list his virtues as King of Kings in the World Tomorrow, *mish^epat* and ‘righteousness’ are the ultimate attributes which enable the throne of David to be established for evermore: *mish^epat* is more than just an attribute of character – it is a fundamental property enabling the establishment of the Kingdom of God (both the KJV and the NKJV have a very poor translation of this verse)

Is10:2 “justice” verses 1-4 condemn the leaders (likely Ahaz and his administration) for systematically oppressing and taking from the poor; *mish^epat* is denied to those oppressed – it is a missing property of society

Is16:5 “justice” verses 4b-5 seem to be Messianic; again, *mish^epat* is parallel to ‘righteousness’ as in Is5:16, but here the ‘one’ on the throne ‘judges and seeks *mish^epat*’; therefore, *mish^epat* is a desired quality of the subjects and the realm of the ‘one on the throne’

Is26:8 & 9 “judgements” (twice) chapter 26 deals with the work of the Church in the World Tomorrow – in verses 7-9 the ‘righteous’ pray for success of their efforts: verse 8 the ‘righteous’ wait for the *mish^epat* of YHWH to become the ‘path’, the way, of society; and in verse 9, it is only when the *mish^epat* of YHWH is in the earth that the inhabitants can come to learn righteousness: *mish^epat* is a fundamental attribute of the nature of God which is required by society and individuals in order for the World Tomorrow to succeed

Is30:18 “justice” verses 18-26 deal with the New Israel in the World Tomorrow; in verse 18a, YHWH’s attributes of ‘being gracious’ and ‘showing mercy’ are highlighted; in verse 18b, YHWH is identified as a God of *mish^epat* – an attribute of character enabling him to provide the blessings outlined in verses 19-26

Is32:1 “justice” *mish^epat* is parallel to ‘righteousness’ but in contrast: the King is righteous and the princes rule with *mish^epat*; verses 2-6 go on to discuss social conditions in the World Tomorrow: clearly, the ‘King’ is the King of Kings and the ‘princes’ are the resurrected saints ruling with him in the Kingdom of God: *mish^epat* is a required attribute of character of the resurrected saints

Is32:7 “right” the wicked are characterized as oppressing the ‘needy’ whose plea is *mish^epat*: this is a classic definition of oppression, the opposite of justice: *mish^epat* is the way that is right, but the wicked take advantage of those in the right

Is32:16 “justice” verses 15-20 deal with social conditions in the World Tomorrow; *mish^epat* is parallel to ‘righteousness’ as fundamental properties of new order

Is33:5 “justice” *mish^epat* has the same meaning as Is32:16

Is34:5 “judgement” verses 1-8 deal with retributive justice on the Day of YHWH; in verse 2, all nations are devoted to destruction; in verse 5, due to Edom’s long history of hostility to Israel, ‘Edom’ is used as symbol for the nations devoted to destruction; *mish^epat* is used to indicate that the destruction is required by the unrepentant attitude of the nations: ‘retributive justice’

Is40:14 “justice” verses 12-17 extoll YHWH as the creator; in verse 14 *mish^epat* is parallel to ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’ as fundamental attributes of God as the creator

Is40:27 “right” *mish^epat* is parallel to ‘way’; this is the attitude of thinking that all is well, and not truly seeing God in perspective – the problem with which Job struggled; possibly a result of Hezekiah’s reform – which had failed because individual Israelites had failed to repent: true repentance leads to having *mish^epat* as a trait of character, and a ‘way’ of life that is in accord with God

Is41:1 “judgement” this is the attitude requiring ‘retributive justice’ – ‘the peoples’ feel they are right, that they have the prerogative to face up to God and demand *mish^epat*.

Is42:1, 3, & 4 “justice” (thrice) verses 1-9 are the First Servant Song – the Calling of the Servant: the servant will ‘bring *mish^epat* to the nations’, ‘bring forth *mish^epat*’, and ‘establish *mish^epat*’ - *mish^epat* is an attribute of character of the servant which the servant will inculcate into society in the World Tomorrow

Is49:4 “right” verses 1-7 are the Second Servant Song – the Commission of the Servant: verse 4 seems to best describe the work of the Church since the second century, culminating in our work today: our impact on the world has been minimal – we have preached the gospel as a witness, but we have not changed the world; yet our *mish^epat* is with God – he recognizes our efforts and holds our developing character as valuable, so at the appropriate time our recompense (the resurrection) will occur

Is50:8 “adversary” verses 4-11 are the Third Servant Song – Individual Responsibility: in verse 8, the servant is expressing confidence in God; verses 7 and 9 use the appellative *’adona* YHWH for God, but ultimately it is the Father who is responsible to ‘vindicate’ any member of the servant; verse 8b is literally ‘who master of *mish^epat* of me let him draw near to me’ – in confidence that God will vindicate, no member of the servant needs fear anyone who challenges his *mish^epat*

Is51:4 “justice” God is speaking here to New Israel in the World Tomorrow: *mish^epat* is parallel to *thorah*, ‘law’ (Mc4:1-5, Is2:2-5), but better translated ‘teaching’ – these are the foundations of the World Tomorrow

Is53:8 “judgement” Is52:13-53:12 are the Fourth Servant Song – the Suffering Servant: verses 7-9 specifically discuss the suffering and death of Christ; verse 8aα is literally ‘from oppression and from *mish^epat* he was taken’ – this is usually taken to refer to Christ’s death; the ‘from’ is usually taken as causative, the reason being in the last line of the verse ‘for the transgression of my people’: oppression is frequently used as the opposite *mish^epat* (Is32:7); therefore, this could be a hendiadys including the whole range from oppression to *mish^epat*, implying that the entire treatment of Christ was unjust. (Both the KJV and the NKJV translate *’otzer*, ‘oppression’, as ‘prison’.)

Is54:17 “judgement” this is the same sense as Is50:8 – the righteous need not fear anyone who challenges them in respect of *mish^epat*

Is56:1 “justice” *mish^epat* is paired with righteousness as attributes of character required of one waiting for and desiring salvation: ‘justness’

Is58:2 “judgement”, “judgements” chapter 58 deals with a residual from Hezekiah’s reform: people were fasting ritualistically and expecting God to respond – the first *mish^epat* is used in parallel with righteousness, so it has the sense of a desired attribute of character, which the people had in fact forsaken; the second instance is actually *mish^epate~tzedeq*, “*mish^epat* of righteousness” – the way of righteousness, attributes of character required by God for one to be righteous (but not practiced by the people)

Is59:8, 9, 11, 14, & 15 “justice” (5 times) chapter 59 deals with social conditions under Manasseh when he became a willing vassal of Assyria, and the nation reverted to idolatrous practices of Ahaz: *mish^epat* is paralleled with ‘peace’, with ‘righteousness’ (twice), with ‘salvation’, and with ‘truth’ which show the sense of *mish^epat* as the way of life, the way of character, required by God (not being performed by the people)

Is61:8 “justice” *mish^epat* is loved by YHWH – this summarizes *mish^epat* as an attribute of the nature of God and an attribute of character he requires in converted individuals