

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

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Life Situation: the ‘stiz im leban’ as it is called is very difficult to determine for most Psalms. A small number of Psalms contain an expanded title which provides some information as to the life situation. For all other Psalms, the life situation must be inferred from allusions in the text – this is of course speculative and subjective.

Poetry: Psalms are perhaps the purest examples of Hebrew poetry in existence. As with all poetry, they use many literary devices and figures of speech. Poetry can be understood at ‘face value’ – what do the words say? But, very often the poet tries to imply a deeper or symbolic meaning, this makes understanding Hebrew poetry that much harder. Finally, with the Psalms because they are inspired by God, there is occasionally a still deeper meaning which the psalmist may not have even understood, but which can be determined based on other information in the Bible.

For each occurrence of *mish^epat* in Psalms, 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 occasionally uses “justice”. Hebrew words are transliterated in italics.

Ps1:5 “judgement” parallel to *tzadiqim*, ‘the righteous’, – application of justice: ‘in the light of justice’

Ps7:6 “judgement” literally ‘... awake to me *mish^epat* you have commanded’ (NEB ‘... ordered justice be done’; NIV ‘... decree justice’) the psalmist prays for the application of *mish^epat* in contrast with treatment from enemies

Ps9:4 “just cause” literally ‘... for you have done *mish^epat* of me and claim of me’; therefore, a character attribute of a person seeking God’s protection, who ‘trusts God’ verse 10

Ps9:7 “justice” psalmist looked to longevity of Davidic line; to be fulfilled in Christ as King of Kings; therefore, *mish^epat* is an attribute of God’s nature

Ps9:16 “judgement” psalmist looked to Davidic victories over surrounding nations; ultimately looks to Day of YHWH when all nations are brought under the Kingdom of God; verses 8 & 19 look to judging of the nations; therefore, *mish^epat* is application of justice, perhaps ‘retributive justice’

Ps10:5 “judgements” verses 2-11 characterize the oppressive ways of the wicked; verse 5b contrasts the *mish^epat* of God; therefore, *mish^epat* is an attribute of God’s nature

Ps17:2 “vindication” the psalmist is praying for God’s favour: *mish^epat* is requested - *mish^epat* is the application of justice to the psalmist’s situation

Ps18:22 “rules” - *mish^epat* is parallel to *huqoth*, ‘statutes’; therefore, ‘rules’ in the general sense of directions in life

Ps19:9 “rules” - *mish^epat* is parallel to *yir^eath*, ‘fear’; and characterized as ‘*emeth*, ‘true’ and *tzad^eq*, ‘righteous’; therefore, more than ‘rules’ seems to be implied: *mish^epat* as an attribute of God’s nature

Ps25:9 “what is right”: the psalmist prays for *yish^ei*, ‘salvation’ verse 5; all the adjectives describing God’s nature in verses 4-10, imply that *mish^epat* as also an attribute of God’s nature, but one that the psalmist prays for in himself

Ps33:5 “justice” is loved by God; therefore, *mish^epat* is an attribute of character required by one seeking to be righteous (verse 1)

Ps35:23 “vindication” the psalmist has been lamenting vicious treatment from enemies; he asks God to apply *mish^epat* on his behalf – to justify him in the face of the enemies

Ps36:6 “judgements” parallel to *tzid^eqath^eka* ‘your righteousness’; therefore, *mish^epat* is an attribute of God’s nature: ‘justness’

Ps37:6 “justice” parallel to *tzid^eqeka* ‘your righteousness’ applied to the psalmist; therefore, *mish^epat* is a required attribute of character of a converted person: ‘justness’

Ps37:28 “justice” is loved by YHWH: follows from verse 6 - *mish^epat* is an attribute of character loved by God: ‘justness’

Ps37:30 “justice” is spoken by the righteous: implies *mish^epat* is a characteristic of a converted way of life: ‘application of justice’

Ps48:11 “judgements” the psalmist is extolling the beauty of ancient Jerusalem; *b^enoth y^ehudah*, daughters of Judah, poetic term for ‘women’ rejoice in *mish^epat* of God; therefore, *mish^epat* is an attribute of God’s nature and an expression of his *hesed*, steadfast love (verse 10)

Ps72:1-2 “justice” (twice) the psalmist requests the *mish^epat* of God in verse 1 so that he can apply *mish^epat* to the people in verse 2; therefore; *mish^epat* is an attribute of God’s nature required in a king: ‘justness’; but in a broader sense *mish^epat* is applied in ruling: ‘application of justice’

Ps76:9 “judgement” this Psalm sounds like it could have been written at the destruction of Sennacherib’s army, but it definitely has overtones for the ultimate day of YHWH: in verse 8, ‘judgement’ is from *din*, which carries a much narrower range of meaning than *mish^epat* – in verse 9 God is establishing *mish^epat* in the whole world: therefore, the sense is God’s way, a fundamental part of what will make the world tomorrow a utopia: ‘application of justice’

Ps89:14 “justice” the psalmist is extolling the *hesed*, steadfast love, of God and the Davidic covenant, which clearly has Messianic implications; four attributes of God’s character are listed, *mish^epat* being parallel to ‘*emeth*, faithfulness; therefore, *mish^epat* is an attribute of God’s nature: ‘justness’

Ps89:30 “rules” here the psalmist is discussing kings of the Davidic line forsaking God’s *torathi*, ‘my law’ or ‘my teaching’; so *mish^epat* as ‘rules’ is a reasonable parallel, but *mish^epat* implies more than just ‘rules’ – way of life

Ps94:15 “justice” in verse 12, the psalmist extolls discipline from YHWH; verse 14 states that YHWH will not forsake ‘his people’, those whom he has called; to be ‘righteous’ and ‘upright of

heart' is to be converted; therefore, *mish^epat* is a required attribute of character of a converted person: 'justness'

Ps97:2 "justice" this is an 'enthronement Psalm'; therefore, looking to the World Tomorrow - *mish^epat* is a foundation of the throne of the King of Kings: therefore, *mish^epat* is an attribute of God's nature: 'justness', but also the broad application of *mish^epat* to create the World Tomorrow

Ps97:8 "judgements" taken in a historic sense, this has a meaning similar to Ps48:11; but given the nature of this Psalm, one is inclined to take *b^enoth y^ehudah* (daughters of Judah) in the New Testament sense of 'a Christian' (Rm2:28-29, 4:16, Gl3:26, 29); therefore, *mish^epat* is a required attribute of character of a converted person: 'justness'

Ps99:4 "justice" (twice) this is an 'enthronement Psalm'; therefore, looking to the World Tomorrow – the 'King' (verse 1 YHWH) loves *mish^epat* and he has executed *mish^epat*: these imply the broad meaning of the application of *mish^epat* to bring about the utopia of the World Tomorrow – the way of God

Ps101:1 "justice" the psalmist extolls the virtues of God, *hesed* (steadfast love) and *mish^epat*; therefore, *mish^epat* is an attribute of God's nature: 'justness'

Ps103:6 "justice" YHWH does righteousness and *mish^epat* for the oppressed: being part of God's nature *mish^epat* is also something he can bring about on behalf of others: 'justness' as expressed in the 'application of justice'

Ps105:5 "judgements" this Psalm looks to the World Tomorrow – 'wonderous works' is paralleled by both 'miracles' and *mish^epat*: *mish^epat* is something done by God, an application of his way, part of his nature: 'application of justice' and 'justness'

Ps105:7 "judgements" the *mish^epat* of God are in all the world – this implies his teaching; verse 45 mentions 'statutes' and 'laws'; therefore, 'application of justice' including 'rules'

Ps106:3 "justice" this is a *hal^elu yah* Psalm, verses 1-2 extoll the virtues of YHWH; *mish^epat* is parallel to 'righteousness' – these are virtues of God, part of his nature, part of his way of life, required of one who is converted: therefore, 'application of justice' combined with 'justness'

Ps111:7 "just" this is a *hal^elu yah* Psalm, verses 2-6 extoll the works of God, what he has done for his people – these works are faithful and *mish^epat* – 'trustworthy precepts' extend 'faithful and *mish^epat*' in synthetic parallelism: the works are an expression of God's nature, his way: therefore, 'application of justice' combined with 'justness'

Ps112:5 "justice" this Psalm extolls the virtues of a 'man who fears YHWH' (verse 1) - *mish^epat* is one of these virtues: therefore, 'justness' as an internal character trait combined with 'application of justice' as manifested in external dealings

Ps140:12 "justice" the psalmist prays for deliverance from evil men in verses 1-11; verse 12 expresses hope for support from YHWH, this is manifested as the execution by YHWH of *mish^epat*: an expression of God's nature, his way: therefore, 'application of justice' combined with 'justness'

Ps146:7 “justice” this is a *hal’elu yah* Psalm, the psalmist extolls the virtues of YHWH manifested in the execution of *mish’pat* on behalf of the oppressed: an expression of God’s nature, his way: therefore, ‘application of justice’ combined with ‘justness’

Ps147:19 & 20 “rules” (twice) this is a *hal’elu yah* Psalm, the psalmist extolls the greatness of God mostly in regard to general revelation, but also in regard to Jerusalem as his chosen ‘city’; verses 19 & 20 summarize by extolling the revelation of God’s ‘word’ to Jacob (i.e. Israel); ‘word’ is paralleled by statutes and *mish’pat*, so ‘rules’ may be what the palmist had in mind; although God’s ‘word’ implies far more than ‘rules’ – verse 20 certainly carries the fuller meaning encompassing an expression of God’s nature, his way: therefore, ‘application of justice’ combined with ‘justness’

Ps149:9 “judgement” this is a *hal’elu yah* Psalm, the psalmist exhorts the converted (the godly verse 1) to celebrate God’s purpose, his plan; in verses 6-7 the converted are to apply the ‘sword’ (the word of God, Hb4:12) to the nations – this looks to the conversion of the nations in the World Tomorrow: the execution of *mish’pat* is the application of God’s way to the nations; therefore, ‘application of justice’

Psalm 119: the overall theme of this Psalm is to extoll the virtues of God’s way as expressed in his teaching, *thorah*, which encompasses all the laws, rules, examples, and testimonies of God’s works which were known to the psalmist. On 17 occasions in Psalm 119, *mish’pat* is translated “rules” by the ESV. These include verses 7, 13, 20, 30, 39, 43, 52, 62, 75, 102, 106, 108, 137, 156, 160, 164, and 175. This translation may be a bit limiting, but given the nature of the Psalm, it may represent the general intention of the psalmist.

Ps119:84 “judge” in KAPH the psalmist prays for salvation; 84b is literally ‘when will you do on ones persecuting me *mish’pat*’ – the palmist is looking for the application of justice to his persecutors

Ps119:91 “appointment” in verses 89-90 the psalmist appeals to YHWH as the sustainer of the created order; verse 91a is literally ‘according to *mish’pat* of you they stand the day’; so, the psalmist is applying the *mish’pat* of God to the process of sustaining the created order; therefore, it is part of God’s nature, his capability, his way of doing things

Ps119:120 “judgements” in SAMEKH the psalmist laments those who turn away from God and prays that he might be delivered from their evil influence; ‘fear’ of God is usually best taken in the sense of ‘awe and respect’, which includes a healthy concern to remain faithful to God’s way: to fear *mish’pat* is to understand that God does ‘discard the wicked of the earth’ (verse 119): therefore, *mish’pat* is the application of justice, perhaps ‘retributive justice’

Ps119:121 “just” *mish’pat* is a character attribute of the psalmist: the ‘application of justice’, ‘justness’

Ps119:132 “way” the psalmist requests God to be gracious to him because that is God’s *mish’pat* to those love his name: therefore, *mish’pat* is an attribute of God’s nature: ‘justness’

Ps119:149 “justice” *mish’pat* is parallel to *hesed*, steadfast love, therefore an integral part of God’s nature: ‘justness’