

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

miqdashbethel.org | miqdashbethel@gmail.com | 402-218-9530

PO Box 762, Pearl River, Louisiana 70452

Document 131 | Covenant Research Study

YASHAR BEEINAV YAASEH

"Each Man Did What Was Right in His Own Eyes"

A Covenant Deep Dive on Self-Authority, Covenant Anarchy, and the Plumb Line of Yahweh

June 2026 | Three-Religion Audience Standard Applied

DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY -- STANDING RULE OF MIQDASH BETHEL

The sole binding authority of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Institution is the Written Tanakh -- the Torah (Instruction), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings) -- interpreted by the evidentiary standard of Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15: no charge shall be established except by two or three independent witnesses. Rabbinic tradition, Church councils, and hadith are consulted as historical record only and carry no binding doctrinal authority. Josephus is cited only when corroborated and with awareness of his pro-Roman editorial bias. Scholars and lexicons provide linguistic orientation; the Written Tanakh speaks for itself at the plumb line.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This study uses Hebrew book names throughout. English equivalents appear in parentheses on first use. Yahweh and Elohim are used throughout -- never "God" or "LORD." All scripture citations follow the two-or-three witness standard of Devarim 19:15. The three-religion audience -- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam -- is addressed simultaneously. Any commentary, rabbinic source, or traditional teaching cited in this document is accepted only insofar as it follows and confirms the Written Tanakh. Where tradition departs from the Written Text, the Written Text governs. Lexical references draw from BDB (Brown-Driver-Briggs), HALOT (Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament), Strong's Concordance, and TWOT (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament).

TANAKH BOOKS CITED IN THIS DOCUMENT

HEBREW NAME	ENGLISH NAME	HEBREW NAME	ENGLISH NAME
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<i>Bereishit</i>	Genesis	<i>Shemot</i>	Exodus
<i>Devarim</i>	Deuteronomy	<i>Yehoshua</i>	Joshua
<i>Shoftim</i>	Judges	<i>Shemuel Aleph</i>	1 Samuel
<i>Melakhim Aleph</i>	1 Kings	<i>Yeshayahu</i>	Isaiah
<i>Yirmeyahu</i>	Jeremiah	<i>Amos</i>	Amos
<i>Tehillim</i>	Psalms	<i>Mishlei</i>	Proverbs

"In those days there was no king in Yisra'el; each man did what was right in his own eyes."

-- Shoftim (Judges) 21:25

*"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes,
but Yahweh weighs hearts."*

-- Mishlei (Proverbs) 21:2

PART I -- THE PHRASE AND ITS COVENANT WEIGHT

I. INTRODUCTION: A VERDICT, NOT A DESCRIPTION

The phrase **יָשָׁר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה** -- **yashar beeinav yaaseh** ("each man did what was right in his own eyes") -- appears at both the opening and the closing of the book of **Shoftim (Judges)**, functioning not as casual historical commentary but as a covenant verdict. It is the Tanakh's own summary judgment on an entire generation: a people who had received the Torah at Sinai, witnessed the miracles of the wilderness, inherited the land through covenant promise -- and then systematically replaced the authority of Yahweh with the authority of their own perception.

This document examines that phrase through four lenses: the Hebrew lexical foundation, the historical covenant context of the Judges period, the Wisdom tradition's expansion of the warning, and the three-religion covenant application for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam today. The evidentiary standard of Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15 -- two or three witnesses -- is applied throughout.

PART II -- LEXICAL FOUNDATION

II. HEBREW WORD STUDY: THREE KEY TERMS

Three Hebrew terms govern the full meaning of this phrase. Each carries a covenant weight that standard English translations flatten. The Devarim 19:15 two-witness standard requires corroboration from both BDB and HALOT before any lexical conclusion is drawn.

HEBREW TERM	STRONG'S #	DEFINITION
יָשָׁר (<i>yashar</i>)	H3477	Straight, level, upright, right -- moral sense. BDB: "straight" of a path; "right/pleasing in the eyes of." Root y-sh-r ("straight, upright"). Used 119x as an adjective. Synonym of tzaddiq (righteous). The Deuteronomic literature uses hayashar beinei Yahweh ("what is right in the eyes of Yahweh") as the positive covenant standard.
בְּעֵינָיו (<i>beeinav</i>)	H5869	"In his own eyes" -- ayin (eye) with 3ms suffix. Idiom for the subjective standpoint of the individual as the personal tribunal for judging one's own conduct. Contrasted throughout the Tanakh with "the eyes of Yahweh."
יַעֲשֶׂה (<i>yaaseh</i>)	H6213	From asah -- "he did / he made / he acted." Imperfect/frequentative: continuous, habitual action. Not a single act but a lifestyle, a settled pattern of conduct repeated over a generation.
אָוִיל (<i>evil</i>)	H191	Fool -- used in Mishlei 12:15. Not merely ignorant but stubbornly resistant to correction. One who despises reproof and hardens the heart against instruction. Morally unresponsive. Distinct from naval (moral perversity) and kesil (dullness).
תָּכַן (<i>takan</i>)	H8505	Weighs, measures, tests -- used in Mishlei 21:2 ("Yahweh weighs hearts"). The verb of a craftsman

		testing precision against a fixed standard. Yahweh does not merely observe the heart; He calibrates it against the standard of His covenant.
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III. THE PHRASE AS COVENANT VERDICT

The critical lexical discovery is the directional contrast built into the phrase itself. The word *yashar* ("straight/upright/right") is a covenant word -- the Tanakh uses it consistently to describe what is "right/pleasing in the eyes of **Yahweh**." The Deuteronomic literature especially uses *hayashar beinei Yahweh* ("**what is right in the eyes of Yahweh**") as the standard of covenant obedience.

The witness texts: Devarim 6:18; 12:25, 28; 13:19; 21:9; Shemot 15:26 -- all in the same Deuteronomic voice that later records the failure. The phrase in Shoftim does not use a different word. It uses the same word -- *yashar* -- but redirects its standard: not **Yahweh's** eyes, but each man's own eyes. The covenant perversion is structural, not merely behavioral. The people did not abandon the vocabulary of righteousness. They redirected its authority from Yahweh to themselves.

PART III -- COVENANT HISTORY: THE SHOFTIM PERIOD

IV. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: ISRAEL AS A LOOSE TRIBAL CONFEDERATION

The period of the Shoftim (Judges) spans roughly 1200-1020 BCE -- from the conclusion of the conquest under Yehoshua (Joshua) to the rise of the monarchy under Sha'ul (Saul). Yiftah's (Jephthah's) statement in Shoftim 11:26, that Israel had occupied the land for approximately 300 years, provides an internal anchor. Kenneth Kitchen places the loose tribal confederation c. 1150-1025 BCE.

Politically, Yisra'el in this period functioned as a loose tribal confederation with no central government, no standing army, and no permanent central sanctuary enforcing covenant observance. At moments of external threat -- from the Philistines along the coastal plain, the Moabites, Ammonites, and Midianites -- charismatic military leaders called shoftim (deliverer-judges) (judges, i.e. deliverers) arose to lead individual tribes or coalitions. These were not magistrates in the modern legal sense but ad hoc chieftains raised up under Yahweh's initiative.

The Song of Devorah (Shoftim 5), one of the oldest texts in the Tanakh, gives direct testimony to this fracture: several tribes failed to answer the call to battle, acting independently without regard for the covenant community. This intertribal fracture is the political expression of the spiritual condition the text names: each man doing what was right in his own eyes.

V. THE DOWNWARD COVENANT SPIRAL -- SEVEN CYCLES

The book of Shoftim (Judges) structures the covenant failure as a repeating sevenfold cycle. Seven times -- the number of completion in the Tanakh -- the same pattern unfolds:

1. Yisra'el serves **Yahweh** while elders who witnessed the wilderness live (Shoftim 2:7).
2. That generation dies. The next does not know **Yahweh** nor the work He performed (Shoftim 2:10).
3. Yisra'el abandons **Yahweh** and serves the ba'alim (Canaanite male deities) and asherot (Asherah poles/fertility shrines) (Shoftim 2:11-13).
4. **Yahweh** delivers them into the hand of their enemies (Shoftim 2:14).
5. Yisra'el cries out in distress (Shoftim 2:18).
6. **Yahweh** raises up a shofet (judge/deliverer) who delivers them (Shoftim 2:18).
7. The shofet (judge/deliverer) dies. The cycle restarts -- and deepens (Shoftim 2:19).

Shoftim (Judges) 2:19 uses critical language: the people did not drop from their practices or from their stubbornness. The Hebrew word translated "stubbornness" -- *qasbeh* (**hard, stiff-necked**) -- is the same root used of Pharaoh's hardened heart in the Exodus. The covenant narrator draws a deliberate parallel: Yisra'el in the land has replicated the condition of Egypt in bondage.

VI. THE ANCHOR TEXTS: SHOFTIM (JUDGES) 17:6 AND 21:25

The phrase appears four times in Shoftim (Judges). Its two most prominent appearances -- 17:6 and 21:25 -- function as literary bookends around the most disturbing material in the entire book: Mikhah's household shrine (chapters 17-18) and the Binyamin civil war triggered by the atrocity at Giv'ah (chapters 19-21).

"In those days there was no king in Yisra'el; each man did what was right in his own eyes."

-- Shoftim (Judges) 17:6

The Mikhah narrative is not a dramatic battle or national catastrophe. It is an ordinary domestic religion. A man steals silver from his mother, returns it, she dedicates it to **Yahweh** -- then commissions a carved idol with it (Shoftim (Judges) 17:3-4). Mikhah establishes a private shrine, appoints his own son as priest, and eventually hires a wandering Levite for legitimacy. Everything about it is sincere. Everything about it violates Torah. **The narrator's verdict:** each man did what was right in his own eyes.

Chapter 19 presents the rape and murder of a Levite's concubine by men of Giv'ah of Binyamin -- an atrocity that triggers a near-annihilation of an entire tribe. The closing verse of the book (21:25) repeats the phrase identically to 17:6, sealing the entire period with a single diagnosis.

VII. THE MOSAIC WARNING: DEVARIM 12:8

The phrase did not originate with the narrator of Shoftim (Judges). Moshe used it first -- as a prohibition -- before the people entered the land:

"You shall not do as all that we are doing here today -- each man whatever is right in his own eyes."

-- Devarim (Deuteronomy) 12:8

Devarim 12 is the Torah's centralization-of-worship instruction. Moshe warns that the worship patterns of the wilderness -- transitional and geographically scattered -- cannot continue when the people settle the land. **Yahweh** will designate a place for His name to dwell (Devarim 12:5). Individual household religion -- each man offering as he sees fit -- is the precise pattern Moshe forbids. This is the specific sin Mikhah commits in Shoftim 17. The narrator's use of the same phrase is deliberate: Yisra'el is doing exactly what Moshe warned them not to do.

PART IV -- THE WISDOM TRADITION: MISHLEI (PROVERBS)

VIII. MISHLEI 12:15 -- THE ANATOMY OF THE FOOL

*"The way of the evil (fool) is right in his own eyes,
but the one who listens to counsel is wise."*

-- Mishlei (Proverbs) 12:15

The term used here for "fool" is evil (H191, "stubborn fool") -- not *naval* ("moral perversity") or *kesil* (dull, stubborn fool), but evil: one who is actively resistant to instruction, hardened against correction. Not intellectual limitation -- volitional rejection.

The verse is a Hebraic antithetic parallelism. The fool's path appears right in his own eyes (*yashar beeinav*, "right in his own eyes") -- precisely the language of Shoftim. The wise person, by contrast, listens to counsel (*eitzah*, "advice/guidance"). The distinction is not intelligence; it is the direction of the ear. Does the individual submit his perception to external authority -- ultimately **Yahweh's** covenant standard -- or does he make himself the final court of appeal?

IX. MISHLEI 21:2 -- YAHWEH AS THE WEIGHER OF HEARTS

*"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes,
but Yahweh weighs hearts."
-- Mishlei (Proverbs) 21:2*

This verse extends the diagnosis from individual foolishness (12:15) to a universal human condition: every man, every way. The repetition of *yashar beeinav* ("right in his own eyes") without the word "fool" removes the limitation. This is not exceptional wickedness -- it is the default condition of human moral self-assessment.

The counter-claim is the most theologically significant part: but **Yahweh** weighs (*takan*, "measures/tests") hearts. The verb *takan* ("to weigh/test") is the language of a craftsman with a precision instrument -- testing, calibrating, measuring against an established standard. **In the Tanakh, that standard is covenant: the Written Torah. Yahweh does not merely observe; He tests the heart against His own plumb line.**

The contrast in **Mishlei (Proverbs) 21:2** is between two tribunals: **the human eye and the divine scale.** Each man sees his path as straight. **Yahweh** weighs what cannot be seen -- the *lev* (*heart*) (heart), the seat of will, intention, and covenant loyalty. **This is Tanakh's answer to every form of sincere self-justification: sincerity is not the standard. Covenant is the standard.**

PART V -- COVENANT APPLICATION: THREE-RELIGION AUDIT

X. THE FOUR WITNESSES -- DEVARIM (DEUTERONOMY) 19:15 STANDARD ESTABLISHED

The Shoftim phrase and Mishlei corroboration together establish a covenant principle with four witnesses:

Witness 1 -- Devarim 12:8: Moshe prohibits individual self-directed worship before the land is entered.

Witness 2 -- Shoftim 17:6: The narrator diagnoses the failure mid-book through Mikhah's sincere but unauthorized shrine.

Witness 3 -- Shoftim 21:25: The narrator repeats the verdict as the book's closing word -- the entire period's covenant summary.

Witness 4 -- Mishlei 12:15 + 21:2: The Wisdom tradition confirms the principle as universal and names the corrective: counsel, submission to Yahweh's weighing.

The root transgression is not any particular act of idolatry, immorality, or violence. Those are symptoms. The root is the usurpation of **Yahweh's** authority as the singular standard of right conduct -- replaced by the authority of the individual eye, conscience, or interpretation.

XI. JUDAISM: THE ORAL TORAH PROBLEM

The covenant critique that applies to rabbinic Judaism is structurally identical to the Mikhah problem. Mikhah's household religion was sincere, Levite-supervised, and theologically motivated -- and it violated Written Torah. The development of the Oral Torah as binding covenant authority (Talmud Bavli, Mishnah, Responsa literature) represents the institutionalization of *yashar beeinav* ("right in his own eyes") -- not at the individual level, but at the rabbinic council level.

Devarim 4:2 and 13:1 are explicit: "You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor subtract from it." The *yashar beeinav* ("right in his own eyes") principle, when applied institutionally, produces traditions that functionally replace the Written Torah with the tradition of the elders. **The covenant call to Judaism is to return to the Written Tanakh as sole authority and test every tradition against it under the Devarim 19:15 standard.**

XII. CHRISTIANITY: THE CREED AND CANON PROBLEM

The *yashar beeinav* ("right in his own eyes") pattern in Christianity operates through ecclesiastical councils. From Nicaea (325 CE) forward, doctrinal definitions not found in the Written Tanakh were legislated as binding -- the Trinity formulation, the divine nature councils of Chalcedon (451 CE), purgatory, Marian doctrines, apostolic succession -- all emerging from institutional bodies doing what was right in their own collective eyes.

The Protestant Reformation attempted a corrective through sola scriptura, but fragmented into thousands of denominations -- each doing what was right in its own eyes at the congregational level. The pattern repeated. The covenant call to Christianity is to return to the Written Tanakh and subject every creed, confession, and tradition to the two-or-three-witness standard of Devarim 19:15.

XIII. ISLAM: THE HADITH AND FIQH PROBLEM

The Qur'an itself repeatedly appeals to the Torah and the Prophets as prior revelation (Surah 5:44, 46; 10:94). The *yashar beeinav* ("right in his own eyes") pattern in Islam operates through the hadith literature -- sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad compiled one to three centuries after his death, through chains of transmission (isnad, "chain of narrators") whose reliability is contested even within Islamic scholarship.

The codification of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence, "legal rulings") through the four major schools (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali) produced legal frameworks that diverge from each other on foundational questions -- the institutional expression of *yashar beeinav* ("right in his own eyes") at the juridical level. The covenant call to Islam is to subject every hadith (saying) and fiqh (jurisprudential) ruling to the testimony of the Written Tanakh, which both the Qur'an and the hadith tradition identify as the foundational revelation.

PART VI -- COVENANT WITNESS TO THE PRESENT HOUR

XIV. SELF-AUTHORITY IN THE AGE OF INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE

The phrase *yashar beeinav yaaseh* ("each man did what was right in his own eyes") has a modern institutional expression that transcends any single religion. The philosophical tradition of moral autonomy -- from Kant's categorical imperative through existentialist ethics to contemporary identity culture -- is the secular form of the same usurpation. "My truth." "What's right for me." "I define my own morality." These are not secular innovations. They are the ancient pattern the Tanakh named in the age of Shoftim.

Tanakh's answer is not a new king, a stronger government, or a better moral philosophy. The answer is covenant: a written, witnessed, unchangeable standard established by **Yahweh** at Sinai, transmitted through the Written Torah, tested by the Devarim 19:15 evidentiary standard, and applicable equally to every nation, religion, and individual.

XV. THE CORRECTIVE: RETURN TO THE PLUMB LINE

The prophet Amos uses the image of the plumb line (Amos 7:7-8): **Yahweh** standing beside a wall He built, holding a plumb line against it, and declaring that the wall cannot stand. **The plumb line is the Written Torah.** Every wall built by individual religious perception -- however sincerely, however elaborately constructed -- is measured against the same standard. What does not meet the plumb line does not stand.

The corrective across all three religion communities is identical in structure:

- Return to the Written Tanakh as the sole first-authority.
- Apply the Devarim 19:15 two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard to every doctrinal claim.
- Submit every tradition, creed, hadith, and rabbinic ruling to the test of Written Torah.
- Acknowledge that **Yahweh** weighs hearts -- not by the standard of sincerity, but by covenant.
- **"Doing what is right in your own eyes"** is a covenant verdict, not a virtue.

SCRIPTURE INDEX

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	COVENANT NOTE
<i>Shemot (Exodus) 15:26</i>	Do what is right in the eyes of Yahweh -- the positive covenant standard.
<i>Devarim (Deuteronomy) 4:2</i>	Do not add to or subtract from the word commanded.
<i>Devarim (Deuteronomy) 12:8</i>	Prohibition: do not do as each man doing what is right in his own eyes.
<i>Devarim (Deuteronomy) 12:25,28</i>	Do what is right and good in the eyes of Yahweh.
<i>Devarim (Deuteronomy) 13:1</i>	Do not add to the word.
<i>Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15</i>	Two or three witnesses required -- the institutional evidentiary standard.
<i>Shoftim (Judges) 2:7-19</i>	The covenant spiral -- the seven-cycle pattern of the Judges period.
<i>Shoftim (Judges) 17:1-6</i>	Mikah's shrine -- the opening case study; phrase first introduced.
<i>Shoftim (Judges) 18:1; 19:1</i>	Transitional uses of the phrase within the narrative.
<i>Shoftim (Judges) 21:25</i>	Closing verdict: the entire Judges period summarized in one phrase.
<i>Mishlei (Proverbs) 12:15</i>	The way of the evil fool is right in his own eyes.
<i>Mishlei (Proverbs) 21:2</i>	Every man's way is right in his own eyes; Yahweh weighs hearts.
<i>Amos 7:7-8</i>	The plumb line of Yahweh -- the standard against which all walls are measured.
<i>Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 5:21</i>	Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes.
<i>Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 17:9-10</i>	The heart is deceitful above all things; Yahweh searches and tests the mind.

CLOSING COVENANT CITATIONS

"You shall not do as all that we are doing here today -- each man whatever is right in his own eyes."

-- Devarim (Deuteronomy) 12:8

"The way of the fool is right in his own eyes, but the one who listens to counsel is wise."

-- Mishlei (Proverbs) 12:15

"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but Yahweh weighs hearts."

-- Mishlei (Proverbs) 21:2

"Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight."

-- Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 5:21

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately sick -- who can know it? I, Yahweh, search the heart and test the mind."

-- Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 17:9-10

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MIQDASHBETHEL@GMAIL.COM | 402-218-9530

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