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MINISTRIES

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Parashah Points: Shoftim – Humble Torah Observance

Welcome to another episode of Parashah Points—short thoughts from the weekly Torah Portion.

This week’s Parashah Point comes from Shoftim, which is Hebrew for “Judges,” and it goes from Deuteronomy 16:18 to Deuteronomy 21:9.

This Torah portion is primarily focused on giving a basic societal framework for ancient Israel. Moses lists laws concerning judges, kings, Levities, prophets, cities of refuge, trial witnesses, warfare, and unsolved murders.

There is a lot we can talk about in this Torah Portion. Today we’re going to talk about one of the responsibilities of a king of Israel, and what it teaches us about Torah observance.

Deuteronomy 17:18-20

And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord [YHWH] his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

So the king of Israel, under the supervision of the Levitical priests, he was to write his own copy of the Torah. He was to read it every day so that he would learn God’s will and therefore rule righteously. Another purpose of this commandment was to prevent the king’s heart from being “lifted up above his brothers.”

While this passage is speaking specifically to kings, there are some principles that we can all learn from this. For instance, one of the intended results of the king studying the Torah was so that his heart would not be lifted up above his brothers. In other words, studying the Torah was intended to keep the king humble. Even though he is a king, in God’s eyes, he is not any better or more special than anyone else—and the Torah is intended to remind him of that.

So, what does that teach us? In essence, studying and keeping the Torah is designed by God to humble us. Regardless of our position or status in life—regardless of who we think we are and what we think we know—we are not to think of ourselves as “better” than other believers. We’re all saved by grace through faith in the Messiah, and we are all on a journey of learning how to please God as best as we can.

What’s perhaps ironic about this passage, is that when some believers start seeing the validity of the Torah—particularly things like the Sabbath, feasts, and dietary instructions—often the opposite of what’s supposed to happen...happens. They become prideful and self-righteous, and they begin to look down on other believers in Messiah who have not yet had this revelation. Rather than being humbled and grateful for having their eyes opened to this wonderful truth, their heart is lifted up above their brothers.

How many times have we seen arrogant so-called Torah keepers ranting on Facebook about how all “mainstream Christians” are lawless? Well, that’s simply not the case. Most faithful Christians *do* keep God’s Law in many ways, and are perhaps even *more* Torah observant in other ways than the arrogant believers who are condemning them. “Mainstream Christians” are often on the front lines seeking justice for the oppressed and caring for the “least of these”—the poor, the widow, and the orphan. These are things that YHWH cares very deeply about, as we see throughout the Torah and the Prophets.

Yes, even most Christians do not see commandments like the dietary instructions as applicable to them today, but in most cases that isn’t out of a heart of rebellion and lawlessness. It’s just what they’ve been taught, and they haven’t thought to challenge it. Many of us who now see the validity of such commandments used to be in the exact same spot.

We should understand that the Torah is to humble us, not make us arrogant and proud. We are not any better or more special than anyone else. The revelation we have is ultimately a gracious gift from God, not because we’re more special or more righteous than other faithful Christians—and shame on us if we start to think that we are.

Let’s study the Torah so that we will learn to fear YHWH. And let’s walk out His commandments, not out of a spirit of pride and self-righteousness, but in humility and gratitude. And then maybe those we hope to influence will see the value in what we do, because they will see the good fruit it has produced.

Thank you for joining us for another Parashah Point!

*We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.
Remember, continue to test everything.*

Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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