

Shof'tim

Deuteronomy 16:18 - 21:9

This translation was taken from the JPS Tanakh

¹⁸ You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice. ¹⁹ You shall not judge unfairly: you shall show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just. ²⁰ Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

²¹ You shall not set up a sacred post — any kind of pole beside the altar of the Lord your God that you may make — ²² or erect a stone pillar; for such the Lord your God detests.

Chapter 17

¹ You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or a sheep that has any defect of a serious kind, for that is abhorrent to the Lord your God.

² If there is found among you, in one of the settlements that the Lord your God is giving you, a man or woman who has affronted the Lord your God and transgressed His covenant — ³ turning to the worship of other gods and bowing down to them, to the sun or the moon or any of the heavenly host, something I never commanded — ⁴ and you have been informed or have learned of it, then you shall make a thorough inquiry. If it is true, the fact is established, that abhorrent thing was perpetrated in Israel, ⁵ you shall take the man or the woman who did that wicked thing out to the public place, and you shall stone them, man or woman, to death. — ⁶ A person shall be put to death only on the testimony of two or more witnesses; he must not be put to death on the testimony of a single witness. — ⁷ Let the hands of the witnesses be the first against him to put him to death, and the hands of the rest of the people thereafter. Thus you will sweep out evil from your midst.

⁸ If a case is too baffling for you to decide, be it a controversy over homicide, civil law, or assault — matters of dispute in your courts — you shall promptly repair to the place that the Lord your God will have chosen, ⁹ and appear before the levitical priests, or the magistrate in charge at the time, and present your problem. When they have announced to you the verdict in the case, ¹⁰ you shall carry out the verdict

that is announced to you from that place that the Lord chose, observing scrupulously all their instructions to you. ¹¹ You shall act in accordance with the instructions given you and the ruling handed down to you; you must not deviate from the verdict that they announce to you either to the right or to the left. ¹² Should a man act presumptuously and disregard the priest charged with serving there the Lord your God, or the magistrate, that man shall die. Thus you will sweep out evil from Israel: ¹³ all the people will hear and be afraid and will not act presumptuously again.

¹⁴ If, after you have entered the land that the Lord your God has assigned to you, and taken possession of it and settled in it, you decide, "I will set a king over me, as do all the nations about me," ¹⁵ you shall be free to set a king over yourself, one chosen by the Lord your God. Be sure to set as king over yourself one of your own people; you must not set a foreigner over you, one who is not your kinsman. ¹⁶ Moreover, he shall not keep many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses, since the Lord has warned you, "You must not go back that way again." ¹⁷ And he shall not have many wives, lest his heart go astray; nor shall he amass silver and gold to excess.

¹⁸ When he is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this Teaching written for him on a scroll by the levitical priests. ¹⁹ Let it remain with him and let him read in it all his life, so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God, to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching as well as these laws. ²⁰ Thus he will not act haughtily toward his fellows or deviate from the Instruction to the right or to the left, to the end that he and his descendants may reign long in the midst of Israel.

Chapter 18

¹ The levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no territorial portion with Israel. They shall live only off the Lord's offerings by fire as their portion, ² and shall have no portion among their brother tribes: the Lord is their portion, as He promised them.

³ This then shall be the priests' due from the people: Everyone who offers a sacrifice, whether an ox or a sheep, must give the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach to the priest. ⁴ You shall also give him the first fruits of your new grain and wine and oil, and the first shearing of your sheep. ⁵ For the Lord your God has chosen him and his descendants, out of all your tribes, to be in attendance for service in the name of the Lord for all time.

⁶ If a Levite would go, from any of the settlements throughout Israel where he has been residing, to the place that the Lord has chosen, he may do so whenever he pleases. ⁷ He may serve in the name of the Lord his God like all his fellow Levites who are there in attendance before the Lord. ⁸ They shall receive equal shares of the dues, without regard to personal gifts or patrimonies.

⁹ When you enter the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. ¹⁰ Let no one be found among you who consigns his son or daughter to the fire, or who is an augur, a soothsayer, a diviner, a sorcerer, ¹¹ one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead. ¹² For anyone who does such things is abhorrent to the Lord, and it is because of these abhorrent things that the Lord your God is dispossessing them before you. ¹³ You must be wholehearted with the Lord your God. ¹⁴ Those nations that you are about to dispossess do indeed resort to soothsayers and augurs; to you, however, the Lord your God has not assigned the like.

¹⁵ The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet from among your own people, like myself; him you shall heed. ¹⁶ This is just what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb, on the day of the Assembly, saying, "Let me not hear the voice of the Lord my God any longer or see this wondrous fire any more, lest I die." ¹⁷ Whereupon the Lord said to me, "They have done well in speaking thus. ¹⁸ I will raise up a prophet for them from among their own people, like yourself: I will put My words in his mouth and he will speak to them all that I command him; ¹⁹ and if anybody fails to heed the words he speaks in My name, I myself will call him to account. ²⁰ But any prophet who presumes to speak in My name an oracle that I did not command him to utter, or who speaks in the name of other gods — that prophet shall die." ²¹ And should you ask yourselves, "How can we know that the oracle was not spoken by the Lord?" — ²² if the prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and the oracle does not come true, that oracle was not spoken by the Lord; the prophet has uttered it presumptuously: do not stand in dread of him.

Chapter 19

¹ When the Lord your God has cut down the nations whose land the Lord your God is assigning to you, and you have dispossessed them and settled in their towns and homes, ² you shall set aside three cities in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess. ³ You shall survey the distances, and divide into three parts the territory of the country that the Lord your God has allotted to you, so that any

manslayer may have a place to flee to. ⁴ — Now this is the case of the manslayer who may flee there and live: one who has killed another unwittingly, without having been his enemy in the past. ⁵ For instance, a man goes with his neighbor into a grove to cut wood; as his hand swings the ax to cut down a tree, the ax-head flies off the handle and strikes the other so that he dies. That man shall flee to one of these cities and live. — ⁶ Otherwise, when the distance is great, the blood-avenger, pursuing the manslayer in hot anger, may overtake him and kill him; yet he did not incur the death penalty, since he had never been the other's enemy. ⁷ That is why I command you: set aside three cities.

⁸ And when the Lord your God enlarges your territory, as He swore to your fathers, and gives you all the land that He promised to give your fathers — ⁹ if you faithfully observe all this Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day, to love the Lord your God and to walk in His ways at all times — then you shall add three more towns to those three. ¹⁰ Thus blood of the innocent will not be shed, bringing bloodguilt upon you in the land that the Lord your God is allotting to you.

¹¹ If, however, a person who is the enemy of another lies in wait for him and sets upon him and strikes him a fatal blow and then flees to one of these towns, ¹² the elders of his town shall have him brought back from there and shall hand him over to the blood-avenger to be put to death; ¹³ you must show him no pity. Thus you will purge Israel of the blood of the innocent, and it will go well with you.

¹⁴ You shall not move your countryman's landmarks, set up by previous generations, in the property that will be allotted to you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.

¹⁵ A single witness may not validate against a person any guilt or blame for any offense that may be committed; a case can be valid only on the testimony of two witnesses or more. ¹⁶ If a man appears against another to testify maliciously and gives false testimony against him, ¹⁷ the two parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests or magistrates in authority at the time, ¹⁸ and the magistrates shall make a thorough investigation. If the man who testified is a false witness, if he has testified falsely against his fellow, ¹⁹ you shall do to him as he schemed to do to his fellow. Thus you will sweep out evil from your midst; ²⁰ others will hear and be afraid, and such evil things will not again be done in your midst. ²¹ Nor must you show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Chapter 20

¹ When you take the field against your enemies, and see horses and chariots — forces larger than yours — have no fear of them, for the Lord your God, who brought you from the land of Egypt, is with you. ² Before you join battle, the priest shall come forward and address the troops. ³ He shall say to them, "Hear, O Israel! You are about to join battle with your enemy. Let not your courage falter. Do not be in fear, or in panic, or in dread of them. ⁴ For it is the Lord your God who marches with you to do battle for you against your enemy, to bring you victory."

⁵ Then the officials shall address the troops, as follows: "Is there anyone who has built a new house but has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another dedicate it. ⁶ Is there anyone who has planted a vineyard but has never harvested it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another harvest it. ⁷ Is there anyone who has paid the bride-price for a wife, but who has not yet married her? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another marry her." ⁸ The officials shall go on addressing the troops and say, "Is there anyone afraid and disheartened? Let him go back to his home, lest the courage of his comrades flag like his." ⁹ When the officials have finished addressing the troops, army commanders shall assume command of the troops.

¹⁰ When you approach a town to attack it, you shall offer it terms of peace. ¹¹ If it responds peaceably and lets you in, all the people present there shall serve you at forced labor. ¹² If it does not surrender to you, but would join battle with you, you shall lay siege to it; ¹³ and when the Lord your God delivers it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword. ¹⁴ You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, the livestock, and everything in the town — all its spoil — and enjoy the use of the spoil of your enemy, which the Lord your God gives you.

¹⁵ Thus you shall deal with all towns that lie very far from you, towns that do not belong to nations hereabout. ¹⁶ In the towns of the latter peoples, however, which the Lord your God is giving you as a heritage, you shall not let a soul remain alive. ¹⁷ No, you must proscribe them — the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites — as the Lord your God has commanded you, ¹⁸ lest they lead you into doing all the abhorrent things that they have done for their gods and you stand guilty before the Lord your God.

¹⁹ When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw

before you into the besieged city? ²⁰ Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed; you may cut them down for constructing siegeworks against the city that is waging war on you, until it has been reduced.

Chapter 21

¹ If, in the land that the Lord your God is assigning you to possess, someone slain is found lying in the open, the identity of the slayer not being known, ² your elders and magistrates shall go out and measure the distances from the corpse to the nearby towns. ³ The elders of the town nearest to the corpse shall then take a heifer which has never been worked, which has never pulled in a yoke; ⁴ and the elders of that town shall bring the heifer down to an everflowing wadi, which is not tilled or sown. There, in the wadi, they shall break the heifer's neck. ⁵ The priests, sons of Levi, shall come forward; for the Lord your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to pronounce blessing in the name of the Lord, and every lawsuit and case of assault is subject to their ruling. ⁶ Then all the elders of the town nearest to the corpse shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the wadi. ⁷ And they shall make this declaration: "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. ⁸ Absolve, O Lord, Your people Israel whom You redeemed, and do not let guilt for the blood of the innocent remain among Your people Israel." And they will be absolved of bloodguilt. ⁹ Thus you will remove from your midst guilt for the blood of the innocent, for you will be doing what is right in the sight of the Lord.