

Notes on Parshah Mishpatim Exodus 21:1-24:18

SOCIAL LAWS AND CONSEQUENCES

Mishpatim means laws or judgements, this parshah looks at some rules to govern social and civil life.

The laws or rules address many areas:

1. Rules concerning slaves, including responsibilities in treatment and how to free them.
2. It sets the death penalty for murder, kidnapping and insulting one's parents.
3. Rules about when your ox (and by extension other animals) injure or kill a neighbor
4. Fiscal laws, dealing with lending money, theft and sales.
5. There are laws to keep people holy: prohibition to curse God, what meat to eat, dedication of the first born.
6. A line of Torah used to define our practice of separation of milk and meat "Do not boil a kid in its mother's milk".
7. Creating a system of allowing the land to have a Sabbatical year every seven years. Letting the land go wild allowing the poor to glean anything that grows on its own.
8. The three pilgrimage festivals: Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot are mentioned and detailed.

This is but a few of the many detailed laws in this section of Torah.

A famous line is in this portion, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth...a life for a life" is part of the many laws mentioned here. However the idea seems to be more about paying restitution than actually taking a body part from the person who transgresses.

WALKING INTO ISRAEL

God promises that an angel will guide the people to Israel and that God will clear out the people who will stand in their way. In part saying to avoid the people from becoming idol worshippers.

God speaks of how big the land will be when the Israelites conquer it.

REPEATING THE STORY OF SINAI

There is a story of God setting apart Aaron and his sons as special to God, but singling out Moses to get the Torah from God.

Moses performs sacrifices and rituals for the people who agree to accept the rules of God that Moses brings down from the mountain.

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Moses climbs the mountain as cloud covered the mountain, being there for forty days and forty nights.

This narrative seems to take place before the narrative read earlier in Yitro. Keep in mind that the Torah tends to bounce around the story to emphasize important points, repeating them as a reminder.