



*Parashat Shoftim,
Shabbat 3 September 2011
4 Elul 5771*

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NEWS

FRENCH CAMP MEETING

As I said it last week, I had the privilege to participate to the camp meeting organized by the North-France Conference from 22 to 28 August 2011. I had a very good group of interested people in my workshop on the Jewish ministry. I led 5 workshops from Tuesday to Sabbath. Many people joined us on Sabbath and came to my workshop on Saturday afternoon.

CELEBRATION IN BUENOS AIRES

The Tenth year anniversary of the Jewish Adventist congregation in Buenos Aires, Argentina was celebrated on August 27, 2011. It was a very emotional moment for each one of us. This celebration was attended by officials of institutions of the Jewish community in Argentina. There was also the Pastor Armando Miranda, Vice-President of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, Dr. Reinaldo Siqueira, director of the Jewish-Adventist communities in South America, Pastor Carlos Gil, President of the Seventh-day Adventist Union in Argentina and pastors Horacio Cayrus and David del Valle, members of the Union's team. In addition, we were visited by the choir from the River Plate Adventist University, led by Professor. Deny Luz.

It was a unique experience to see representatives of the Jewish community in Argentina and Seventh-day Adventist pastors celebrating this special time together. They both showed the same joy and joined in wishing all the best for the continuity of our community. We could see the doors are open on both sides for a closer dialogue.



religious experience of a Jewish-Adventist community. Coinciding with the tenth anniversary, we launched the second edition of our prayer book, *Sepher Tefilot* (Siddur). The Siddur is accompanied by three companion volumes of music scores, about a thousand music scores arranged for piano or guitar. We are currently working in the English version and we think that the work will be ready by the end of the year. On Saturday morning Pastor Armando Miranda, General Conference's Vice-President, gave to the congregation a spiritual reflection. Pastor Miranda emphasized that when we work for God, we must remember that we are only creatures who serve our Father and that this protects us from discouragement. Remember every time God helped us in the past, and preparing for eternal life, should be the strength that encourages us to move forward. I thank all who prayed for us during these ten years, those who sent messages of encouragement and those who were happy with our joys.



OVERVIEW

SHOFTIM

Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9

Moshe tells Israel to appoint judges and officers in their cities. A bribe of even an insignificant sum is forbidden.

Trees are not to be planted near Hashem's altar, as was the way of idolaters.

Blemishes in animals designated for offerings and other points of disqualification are listed.

The Sanhedrin is to make binding decisions on new situations according to Torah criteria.

Any one who refuses to accept the decisions and laws of the Sanhedrin incurs the death penalty.

A Jewish king may only have possessions and symbols of power commensurate with the honor of his office, but not for self-aggrandizement. He is to write for himself two *sifrei Torah*, one to be kept with him wherever he goes, so that he doesn't become haughty.

Neither the *kohanim* nor the *levites* are to inherit land in the land of Israel, rather they are to be supported by the community by a system of tithes.

All divination is prohibited.

Hashem promises the Jewish people that He will send them prophets to guide them, and Moshe explains how a genuine prophet may be distinguished from a false one.

Cities of refuge are to be provided an accidental killer to escape the blood-avenger from the deceased's family. However, someone who kills with malice is to be handed over to the blood-avenger.

Moshe cautions the children of Israel not to move boundary markers to increase their property.

Two witnesses who conspire to "frame" a third party are to be punished with the very same punishment that they conspired to bring upon the innocent party.

A *kohen* is to be anointed specifically for when Israel goes to war, to instill trust in Hashem.

Among those disqualified from going to war is anyone who has built a new house but not lived in it yet, or anyone who is fearful or fainthearted. An enemy must be given the chance to make peace, but if they refuse, all the males are to be killed.

Fruit trees are to be preserved and not cut down during the siege. If a corpse is found between cities, the elders of the nearest city must take a heifer, slaughter it, and wash their hands over it, saying that they are not guilty of the death.

JUDGE YOURSELF

The Torah states: "Judges and police you shall place for yourself" (Deut. 16:18). Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Parshicho commented: Make for yourself judges and police, that is, before you go and make judgments about other people, judge yourself first. As the Sages said, "First correct yourself and only then correct others" (Bava Basra 60b).

HOW MANY WIVES FOR A KING?

The Torah states: "And he shall not take many wives for himself, in order that his heart will not turn away" (Deut 17:17). If a King has too many wives, he may become selfish full of proud and forget about G-d. Also, if the wives are from foreign religions, although they had to convert before he could marry them, he might not be able to determine whether their conversions were sincere, since it's hard to keep track of so many wives, and may thereby bring idolatry into his palace. Yachanan Zweig continues in the name of Rabbi Kolakowski "So we see that too many wives for a king is forbidden by the Torah, but how do we derive how many is too many? The classic commentary of Rashi on that verse in Deuteronomy says the limit of 18 wives is from the Talmud, where it is derived from another verse in the Bible, **2Samuel 12:8**, where the prophet Nathan tells King David, who had six wives at the time, that "if this is too little, I would add for you like them, and like them." Each time it says "like them" means to add the same number, so since there were six already, Nathan would say it would be OK to add that many twice, which would total eighteen. If that number of wives were not permitted for a king, the prophet would not have suggested it."

DEFENSE WAR

It could surprise us but since Israel is a country in this world of sin, it has to defend its people against its enemies. We all have heard that the

Iran president would like to destroy Israel. Since 1948 year of the independence of Israel the Arab nations surrounding Israel provoked five major wars. In each one of them Israel won. The text of the parasha for this week states: **“When you go out to war against your enemy and you see horses and chariots, an army greater than you, do not fear them, for the Lord your God, Who took you out of Egypt, is with you.” (Deut 20:1.)** The Lord is with you... what a wonderful promise... The enemies of Israel tried to destroy its nation, its identity and to deny its role in this world, Israel has been through war, persecution, holocaust, crusades, inquisition, forced conversions, but Israel is still here to testify the goodness of G-d and the trueness of the Bible to the world.

However, this protection requires a high awareness of the role and mission of Israel in the world. Rabbi Zev Leff says, “How can we possibly expect to achieve such a high level that we do not fear when we go into battle?” That means Israel is very aware of its responsibility in this world and before God..

WHEN THE SHOFAR WAS SOUNDED FOR THE FIRST TIME?

We are in a period when the shofar (old trumpet) is very important for the Jewish people. We blow the shofar on the feast of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, but in fact the month before Rosh Hashana, which is the month of Elul, is a month of repentance, revival and transformation for the Jewish people. They blow the shofar every morning after the prayer service (except on Shabbat) to call the people of Israel to this spiritual revival.

We remember that according to the Jewish tradition, the second tablets (after the golden calf) of the Ten Commandments were given to Moses on Yom Kippur, to expiate the Golden Calf sin. However Moses stayed on the Mount Sinai 40 days, since Yom Kippur is on the 10th of Tishri (in the Bible the 10th of the Seventh Month) and he came down on the 11th of Tishri, the first day of these 40 days is the 1st of Ellul (1st of the Sixth Month). Moses asked the Jewish people to repent and revive spiritually during the time he went to meet God on the Mount Sinai. All the month of Ellul and the first days of Tishri he was on the month Sinai (1st of Ellul to 11 Tishri). That is why according to the Jewish tradition, the first time the shofar was sounded was when Moses started his ascension of the

Mount Sinai on the 1st of Ellul, and to remind to the Jewish people that they have to repent from the Golden Calf experience, they have to repent every day until Moses comes back from the Mount Sinai, and not to repeat the same mistake of worshipping an idol.

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

At the end of this week’s parasha the Torah teaches us about the responsibility we have for each other., **“If a man is found slain, lying in a field in the land the L-RD your G-d is giving you to possess, and it is not known who killed him, your elders and judges shall go out and measure the distance from the body to the neighboring towns. . . . Then all the elders of the town nearest the body shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley, and they shall declare: “Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. Accept this atonement for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, O L-RD, and do not hold your people guilty of the blood of an innocent man.” (Deut. 21:1-9)**

Our sages ask, “Would anyone think that the elders of the city have committed this crime? Why do they have to say ‘Our hands have not shed this blood . . . and ask for forgiveness?’”

This, explain the sages, is an instruction for each and every believer. It teaches us that their is in some cases a collective responsibility.

This responsibility lies foremost upon the elders of the community. Thus, even the most righteous people are in some way responsible for the act of the murderer.

Sources: These comments of the parasha are based on comments published by Rabbi Zalmen Pakouz, Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, Rabbi Ari Kahn, Rabbi Noson Weisz, and Rabbi Avigdor Bonchek, from Aish HaTorah (Aish.com). By Rabbi Naftali Reich, Rabbi Berel Wein and Rabbi Yochanan Zweig, Rabbi Yissocher Frand from Torah.org (Project Genensis). By Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair from Ohr Somayach, by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky. and Rabbi Zalmen Marozov.

BRIBERY

The Torah warns us that “bribery blinds the eyes of the wise, and perverts the words of the righteous.” [Deut. 16:19]

G-d is not talking about a corrupt person here, He is talking about the “wise” and the “righteous”!

The Talmud tells us that the ‘bribery’ discussed also goes well beyond passing money to the judge and back-room deals. In one case discussed in the Talmud, two litigants are sent to a noted sage for arbitration. One of them recognizes the judge and asks, “didn’t you stay in my hotel?”

The Rabbi answered, “yes I did, and now I can’t judge your case!”

Having previously conducted a commercial transaction, with no ulterior motive or quid pro quo, isn’t something we would understand as ‘bribery’ at all. But the scholarly Rabbi correctly understood that even this was enough to create a small connection, and perhaps was enough to intimidate the other party.

LANGUAGE OF BIRDS

Rabbi Yissocher Frand gives us the following story regarding Shlomo HaMelech [King Solomon]. The Midrash teaches that the wise king knew the language of the birds (sichat haTziporim). A person came to Shlomo HaMelech and asked that Shlomo HaMelech teach him this language. At first, the king refused but the man pestered him until he finally relented and taught him the language of the birds. The fellow was then walking in the field and heard two birds talking with one another. One bird told the other “You see this fellow; his entire flock of cattle are going to die within the next couple of weeks.” The man went home and immediately sold his entire flock of cattle at the very first opportunity. Lo and behold, two weeks later the entire flock died. The man avoided a major financial setback!

Sometime later, the man was again walking in the field and heard one bird tell another that the fellow they saw was going to have his house and everything therein burn down within two weeks. Again, he sold his house and all his possessions lock stock and barrel. Sure enough, two weeks later the house burned to the ground. Again, he avoided catastrophe! When he next went out to the field, he heard one bird tell the other that the fellow near them was going to drop dead the following week. He then went back to Shlomo HaMelech and desperately asked for his advice what to do. Shlomo HaMelech said “I told you that I did not want to teach you the language of the birds! You did something terribly wrong and G-d wanted to give you a punishment. He was going to punish you through the death of your cattle. However, you “outsmarted Him” and found out through the birds how to avoid that punishment. The punishment would have been for your benefit that financial setback would have shaken you up and forced you to repent and amend your ways.

Then the Almighty was going to get you to do Teshuva by burning your house down, but again you avoided the tragedy and hence the opportunity to repent. Your sins however now remain and the only option that you left the Almighty is to bring about your death as punishment for those sins.

Whether the story with Shlomo HaMelech is literal or is a parable is beside the point. The lesson that this story teaches is “you shall be innocent before the L-rd your G-d” and we have to believe that “all G-d does is for the best.”

EDITOR

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HAFTARA

Isaiah 51:12-52:12

This Shabbat is the fourth Shabbat after Tisha B'Av. We are in a period called Shiva D'nechemta—"Seven weeks of comfort." The seven Haftarat of the weeks between Tish'a B'av and Rosh Hashana are prophesies of comfort and hope for Israel and God's people at large.

HAFTARA: G-d himself continues to comfort Israel. "I, I am he who comforts you" (Is. 51:12). Isaiah shows us that the L-rd is aware of the situation of his people "You have forgotten the LORD, your Maker" (13). However the L-rd continues to love his people and reminds them of what he has done for them in the past "For I am the LORD your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is his name. I have put my words in your mouth, and hidden you in the shadow of my hand, stretching out the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth, and saying to Zion, "You are my people." (15-16). G-d calls Israel to rise, to come back to him and to fulfill her mission "Rouse yourself, rouse yourself! Stand up, O Jerusalem," (17). God gives another wonderful promise to Israel saying, he is the intercessor, he will plead her cause. "Thus says your Sovereign, the LORD, your God who pleads the cause of his people: See, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; you shall drink no more from the bowl of my wrath." (22).

If God is the intercessor, who will be against G-d's people? Shaul says, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Rom. 8:35-37). Jerusalem is still a holy city and will no longer be threatened by the nations. "Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for the uncircumcised and the unclean shall enter you no more." (Is. 52:1). Jerusalem will be joyous for G-d's protection. "Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem" (9). G-d reaffirms his protection for his people, "for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard." (12).

BRIT HACHADASHA

Luke 21:5-28

The text of our parasha says "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. . . . If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken." (Deut 18:18-22). God has sent to Israel many prophets, Yeshua is the Mashiach-prophet sent by G-d to tell us the truth. Many Jews have not accepted Yeshua and don't believe that he is the Mashiach. However the torah says "If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account". Do we have to listen Yeshua or do we not? What the Torah says in order to recognize the true prophet sent by G-d. "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken." (Deut 18) One of the characteristics of the true prophet, is that his prophecy must "take place" must be fulfilled, if not he is not a true prophet. Yeshua made many prophecies, one of them in in Luke 21 when he said about the Temple: "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down." (5) He announced that the Temple will be destroyed. How? "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near." (20). It is exactly what happened thirty years after the words of Yeshua. in 70 CA the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem and the temple was destroyed. This destruction was not expected. When the Roman Empire submitted a nation, that was enough for them, according to the story even Titus did not want the temple to be destroyed, but a soldier sent a torch of fire inside and the temple started to burn, nobody could save it. Yeshua announced that there would be a time when Jerusalem would not be trampled any more by the nations, "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." (Luke 21:24)