



## Shoftim

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 16:18 – 21:9

"Justice, Justice shall you pursue, that you may live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy G-d gives you" (Deuteronomy 16:20). With this famous verse, G-d makes clear his passion for justice. Judges and officers of good character and impervious to outside influence were to be appointed in every town. When necessary, the more difficult cases would be decided by higher judges and priests. The people are warned to heed the decisions of duly authorized courts.

After settling in the Land, if the people decided to appoint a king, they were to choose a G-d-fearing Israelite who did not misuse his position to accumulate wealth, women or the strength to wage war. He was to observe G-d's commandments, thus securing the monarchy for future generations. The king was to be a leader of the people, but he was obligated to follow the same rules as the rest of the community.

In a major section on criminal justice and the laws of war, Moses detailed the purpose of the cities of refuge and the circumstances under which the willful murderer (as opposed to the accidental killer) could be executed. He also outlined laws relating to theft and the giving of false evidence. Israel was urged to display kindness, even in wartime. Those who had just become engaged were exempt from military service, as were those who had just built a house or planted a vineyard, or displayed fear. Offers of peace were to be made to every city attacked and fruit trees were not to be destroyed during a siege.

The Parshah concludes with the rules of dealing with an unsolved homicide.



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