



Judges in the Scripture

Part 2 – Preparing to Judge

by Tim Kelley

The thought of being judged by our spiritual family is repulsive to many believers. We've been raised to think that judgment should only come from God, yet we willingly allow those outside the believing community to make judgments about us every day. Our mates judge us ("Honey, aren't you driving a little fast?"), our coworkers judge us ("Speed it up Bob; you're not keeping up"), our bosses judge us ("Sorry Bob, your job performance is not up to par"), and of course the court system judges us ("... you were driving 65 in a 55 mph zone?"). So being judged is an accepted part of our life. When then do our feathers get ruffled when our believing brother points out an error in our spiritual life?

The likely answer is that we've been conditioned by our churches that judging is wrong for two reasons; 1) one has to be nearly perfect in order to be qualified to judge another, and 2) if we were to judge another, our judgment would be more severe when we ourselves are judged. In sermon after sermon, we've heard passages like these –

^{NKJ} **Luke 6:37** Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned.

^{NKJ} **Romans 14:10** But why do you judge your brother? . . . For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

^{NKJ} **Romans 14:13** Therefore let us not judge one another anymore . . .

Of course, these passages are oftentimes quoted out of context to make one feel unqualified to judge another person. Take, for instance, the "granddaddy" of all anti-judgment passages –

^{NKJ} **Matthew 7:1** "Judge not, that you be not judged. ² "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. ³ "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴ "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye?"

Reading this passage only to this point would lead one to believe that we must not judge one another because we've all got those "beams" sticking out of our eyes and thus we're not qualified to make a judgment about another person. These types of arguments have conditioned us to look the other way when we see our brother stepping off the straight and narrow path that leads to the Promised Land and slowly veer off towards the cliff that leads to destruction.

But this is not the way it's supposed to be. Our teachers have not taught us correctly. Instead, they've been a false witness against the God of Israel, His Messiah, and His apostles. Contrary to what our teachers have taught, God made it clear that his people are to judge each other – albeit with righteous judgment - and the Messiah and His apostles continued to support what YHVH said.

To bring us up to speed, let's review some of the points of the last study –

- God commanded His people to establish judges. It was one of the first things that Moses did as he left Egypt, the first thing he reminded the 2nd generation of Israelites to do, and will be one of the major roles of the Messiah
- The purpose of judging is to "balance the scales" so as to restore relationships
- The basis of all judgment is to be the straight and narrow path as defined by the Torah.

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As we continue this study, we're going to see that "judging" is not a problem to God. What is a problem is the improper judgment rendered by unqualified judges that provoke problems in the community of Israel. If we want to help build the community of Israel, we'll need to see how the scripture defines a "righteous judge", and then become one. So today we're going to see what one should do to qualify to be a righteous judge.

In the last study I showed that the purpose for having judges is to balance the scales in the event a person has been wronged. We also talked about how in a broad way, the Torah defines the process by which balance is achieved. In order for us to be instrumental in bringing that balance, we must first further define what it means "to judge". Let's look at the two most common Hebrew words for judge and judgment.

The first word we'll look at is the root word "diyn" (דִּין – Strong's 1777). This is the word from which we get the idea of a "Beit Diyn" or "House of Judgment". In most cases it carries the thought of judging or being judged, but in some cases it's translated "strive", which is the case at its first appearance in the scripture.

^{NKJ} **Genesis 6:3** And the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive (*diyn*) with man forever, for he *is* indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."

In this passage, YHVH appears to be fed up with mankind and is thus preparing to destroy human kind with a flood, but one man stood out from all the others, and because of him, eight people were spared and the human race continued.

Hold that thought for a moment and let's look at the pictographic meaning of the word "diyn". "Diyn" is spelled with a dalet (ד) and a nun(נ). In this word, the yud (ך) is a vowel that makes the "ee" sound. The pictographic meaning of the dalet is that of a tent door hanging down, and the nun is that of a freshly germinated seed – that is, a new life. Thus the idea of "diyn" is "door to life". With that in mind, let's replace the word "strive" with "door of life" in this Genesis passage –

^{TLK Version} **Genesis 6:3** And the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not *be a door to life* with man forever, for he *is* indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."

Could it be that YHVH was saying that His Spirit would not continue to be offered to that generation and thus they would die?

The "door to life" concept also works well in the passage where Rachael gains a son by her handmaid Bilhah.

^{TLK Version} **Genesis 30:6** Then Rachel said, "God has ~~judged me~~ *become my door to life*, and has also heard my voice and given me a son." Therefore she called his name Dan.

This understanding of the word "diyn" implies judging for the purpose of preserving life and is used that way in a number of passages, thus "diyn" is often used when YHVH is judging His people. This is the case in David's psalm –

^{KJV} **Psalms 54:1** . . . Save me, O God, by thy name, and judge (*diyn*) me by thy strength.

Another common Hebrew word for "judge" is the root word "shaphat" (שָׁפַט – Strong's 8199). It's the word from which we get "mishpat" (מִשְׁפָּט - Strong's 4941) or "judgment". Whereas "diyn" oftentimes applies to God as the judge, "shaphat" applies more to the cases between brothers as in the case of this Torah command –

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^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 25:1** "If there is a dispute between men, and they come to court (*mishpat*), that the judges may judge (*shaphat*) them, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked . . .

Just as we did with the Hebrew word “diyn”, we can gain understanding of “shaphat” by looking at the pictographic meaning of the letters. The center letter in the word “shaphat” is the letter “pey” (פ). “Pey” is also the Hebrew word (פִּי - Strong’s 6310) for “mouth” as well as the word that’s translated “commandment” in every instance of the phrase “the commandment of the LORD” in the Torah. In addition, the last letter – the tet (ט) has the pictographic meaning of “surrounding” something. Thus it can be implied that to “shaphat” is to surround yourself with the commandments.

The words “diyn” (*door to life*) and “shaphat” (*wrapped in Torah*) seem to imply that a judge will use the Torah as a means preserve a spiritual life. This idea is clearly shown in Isaiah’s prayer for Israel –

^{ESV} **Isaiah 33:22** For the LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver; the LORD is our king; he will save us.

In this we see that YHVH judges by the law and preserves life. As judges, we will be doing the same; we will be acting out in a small way the role that God has given Himself. Thus the role of judging God’s people must be taken with knowledge, wisdom, and humility, traits not found in most of us unless we prepare ourselves for that role. I believe there are (at least) five things a person must do to prepare to be a judge. They are (not necessarily in order of importance) –

- 1) Gain a good understanding of the Torah
- 2) Clearly understand what you’re trying to achieve by being a judge
- 3) Understand the importance of your role as a judge
- 4) Maintain a walk that qualifies you to judge
- 5) Be humble

Let’s briefly examine each of these points.

Understand Torah -

We learned last time that the word “righteous” (as in “righteous judge”) implies holding to the straight and narrow path – the Torah. From other studies and discussions we’ve seen that YHVH is the one who brings us to the path, but it’s our responsibility to stay on that path; and if we find that we’ve deviated from the path (sin), we are then to turn back towards the path (repentance) and continue our walk.

In most cases, when we’re called to make a judgment it’s because someone has veered from the path - thus committing a Torah infraction. Therefore, if the judge wants to help that person return to the path, he must educate himself in regards to the laws of Israel – the Torah.

The Torah has been the basis for judging Israel since the time she became a people. Even before Israel entered into covenant with YHVH she was judged by the Torah. Moses explained this to his father-in-law Jethro while they were at the base of Mount Sinai -

^{NKJ} **Exodus 18:16** "When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge (*shaphat*) between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws (*torah*)."

This remained the standard of judgment for Israel down through the times of the judges, even after Israel rejected YHVH as her judge and king, and will continue to be the standard when Yeshua establishes his kingdom. Speaking of the priests during the messianic kingdom, Ezekiel says -

^{NKJ} **Ezekiel 44:24** "In controversy they shall stand as judges (*shaphat*), and judge (*shaphat*) it according to My judgments (*mishpat*). They shall keep My laws (*torah*) and My statutes in all My appointed meetings, and they shall hallow My Sabbaths.

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Therefore, if we're going to be a righteous judge, we will need to become very familiar with the Torah.

Be Fixed on Your Goal -

As a judge, we must understand what we hope to accomplish when we're called to make a judgment. We might call it the goal. I believe the goal in making any type of judgment should be these three things:

1. To save a spiritual life
2. To restore fellowship between individuals or between an individual and the community
3. To bring happiness to the fellowship

Paul, in dealing with a very difficult situation in the congregation at Corinth instructed the leadership to remove a certain individual from the fellowship due to immoral practices. In his instructions he said –

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 5:5** . . . you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Paul understood what havoc an open and continual violation of a basic Torah principle could bring on a person and on the community, so he made a judgment in that person's case and instructed the leaders to carry it out. According to some commentaries, Paul's willingness to make this judgment resulted in the repentance of the wrongdoer and led to his eventual return to the community.¹ His judgment saved a life spiritually and restored a relationship within the fellowship.

King Solomon had to make some pretty hard judgments as well. We're all aware of the story of his wisdom and discernment in regards to the baby that was claimed by two. Solomon became king at a young age and knew he would need help in order to be a good king and judge. In his well-known vision at the beginning of his reign, Solomon asked –

^{NKJ} **1 Kings 3:9** "Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

The Hebrew word for "understanding" in this passage is the word "shama" (שָׁמָע) – Strong's 8085). The word means to "hearken diligently and obey" and is often translated "hear". Solomon had to be a good listener and hear the cases of those who came before him.

Solomon made many judgments during his reign, and because he heard the cries of his people, was consistent in judgment, and because his judgments were according to God's Torah, the people could depend on him and were thus "happy" . . . and their happiness was noticed by the Queen of Sheba –

^{NKJ} **1 Kings 10:8** "Happy *are* your men and happy *are* these your servants, who stand continually before you *and* hear your wisdom!

So, the second part in preparation is to understand our goal – to restore a life, restore a fellowship, and preserve happiness.

Weightier Matters -

The role of a judge is one that's greater than determining what meats are clean or unclean, how to determine the end of the Sabbath, or other matters of halacha². Making a judgment is one of the "weightier matters".

Just days before Yeshua was crucified, He spoke to His disciples and the multitudes that followed Him. In His discourse he noted how some of the Pharisees – the ones who claimed the role of judges of the

¹ 2 Cor. 2:6-8

² Literally "the way to walk".

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people - concerned themselves more with the minute application of the Torah than they did with being a fair and impartial judge. He said about them –

^{NKJ} **Matthew 23:1-3; 23** . . . ² . . . "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³ "Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. . . . ²³ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

Even though it's important that we understand and properly apply the Torah in our lives, those things are not as important as applying strong Torah principles when it comes to making judgments that apply to our brother. Being that the same Hebrew word for "weight" is the same as the Hebrew word for "glory"³, it might be said that to properly apply justice, mercy, and faith "glorifies" God more so than ultra-strict Torah observance.

Be Qualified -

Another part of preparing to judge is to make sure you are qualified to judge the matter. A couple of reasons why a person may not be qualified is that he has a personal attachment to the case, or he's involved in the same type of activity as those who are party to the case. If either of these apply, it's likely the judge would find it hard to be impartial, and thus in today's secular court system, the judge is supposed to "recuse" himself from the case – that is, remove himself as judge. Yeshua addressed this problem in His "Sermon on the Mount" -

^{NKJ} **Matthew 7:1-4** "Judge not, that you be not judged. ² "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. ³ "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴ "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye?"

Like was said earlier, many have taken these words and miss-applied them, quoting only the portion of the scripture that suits their agenda. In this passage, Yeshua was clearly showing that if a person is entrenched in a sin that's similar⁴ to one for which he's supposed to make a judgment, his sin will not allow him to clearly see the facts of the case. Yeshua continues by saying –

^{NKJ} **Matthew 7:5** "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Though it's clear that a person may not judge if he has a "beam" in his eye, it's also clear that if he removes the beam from his own eye, he is then in a position to judge the other person. It seems to imply that YHWH is more interested in having repentant judges with humble hearts than He is with having Torah-perfect judges with self-righteous hearts. The bottom line is that if we ever hope to be righteous judges, we must remove from our lives the infractions and omissions (the sins) that cloud our vision as to what's right or wrong - sin or not sin. This ties in to the next point . . .

Be Humble -

Though I've listed it last, this point should be foremost in our mind if we've been chosen to be a judge, and that is that we must approach that responsibility with the utmost humility. Like his father David, King Solomon was chosen over all his older brothers to be the king, and therefore, the judge of Israel. One likely reason Solomon was chosen was because he approached the responsibility with humility. We've

³ 3519 כְּבוֹד kabowd

⁴ "speck" = "karphos" (Strong's 2595) which means "straw" or "stick" as opposed to a wooden beam that's large and heavy enough to hold up a bridge or a wall.

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read his request for wisdom in judgment; now compare his words with those of his older brother Absalom, the would-be judge and king of Israel –

^{NKJ} **2 Samuel 15:4** . . . Absalom would say, "Oh, that I were made judge in the land, and everyone who has any suit or cause would come to me; then I would give him justice."

Clearly, Absalom wanted to set himself up as a judge over the people, while Solomon knew that he was not worthy to be a judge. Absalom eventually did set himself up as king and wreaked havoc in Israel for many years. He was anything but a righteous judge.

As we can see, it takes preparation to be a judge. We must:

- Become knowledgeable in Torah
- Understand that our purpose is to restore life, fellowship, and happiness to the community
- Remember that being a judge of God's people is more important than one who determines halacha
- Guard our walk so as to not be disqualified from making a judgment
- Remain Humble

If we are striving to be judges, and doing these things, we are not only preparing ourselves to help rebuild the community of Israel and the Kingdom of God, we are also satisfying the requirements set forth for our lives by the God of Israel –

^{ESV} **Micah 6:8** He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice (*mishpat*), and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Shalom Alecheim