

Gaining Clarity on Justice and Righteousness in the Bible

March 5, 12, 19

Minnehaha Academy

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Lesson One: Understanding the Words

Highlights on Our Journey of Leading this Series

Preston's Story

- A hunger for truth
- Working for and living next to an orthodox Jewish family
- Learning Hebrew history, culture and words

Bill's Story

- Love studying the Bible – especially using www.BlueLetterBible.org
- A fan of the www.BibleProject.com -- **Justice** video and 4 podcast episodes
- Began a study of all the occurrences of Mishpat (and then other words)

Introduction – Seeing the Bible with different “glasses”

Remember putting on the “discipleship” glasses?

- Stories of Jesus had a whole new importance.
- Verses on sin suddenly hit a lot harder.
- Reading Acts went from reading about history to seeing a model to imitate
- References to baptism became visible in many verses I’d previously read



Common Understandings of Justice and Righteousness

Justice

- A police officer giving a speeding ticket, and the judge giving a fine
- A judge with a gavel in a courtroom
- A criminal being punished for wrong-doing; the sword of justice
- Lady Justice – wearing a blindfold and holding an accurate scale

Righteousness

- Not lying, stealing, lusting, having immoral sex, getting drunk or cheating
- Being right with God – having our sins forgiven and putting on the white robe of Christ's righteousness

Hebrew Words related to Justice and Righteousness

Šāpāt (Shaphat)

- Judge (person/role)
- Judgment – determining right and wrong
- Judgment – bringing the consequences (penalty or vengeance) for doing wrong

Mišpāt (Mishpat)

- God's gracious way of doing what is fair and right for people – even if they have not earned it
- Caring for the vulnerable, marginalized and oppressed (victims of wrong-doing)
- Loving our neighbors as ourselves
- Honoring the human rights, dignity and worth of all people
- A secondary use (multiple times, but much less common) is for “fair” as in honest weights and scales and courtrooms that are not corrupted

Four Hebrew Words related to Justice and Righteousness

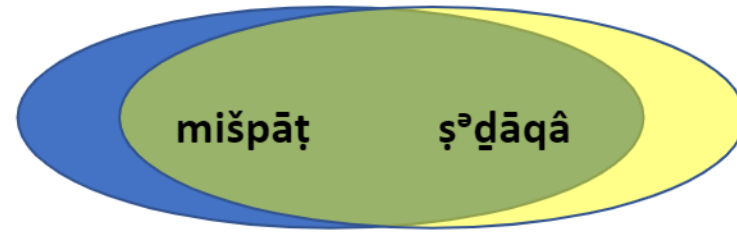
S^ədāqâ (Tzedakah)

- Very similar to Mishpat -- Used together very often
- Having “right relationships” that are positive and benefit others (even at a cost to ourselves)
- Sometimes associated with cleanness, purity, and innocence
- Multiple variations:
 - Feminine Noun for the characteristic, S^ədāqâ
 - Masculine Noun for the characteristic = righteousness = **ṣedeq**
 - Adjective – a **ṣadîq** person is someone who does
 - Verb - **ṣādaq** - to have a just cause

Yāšār (Yashar)

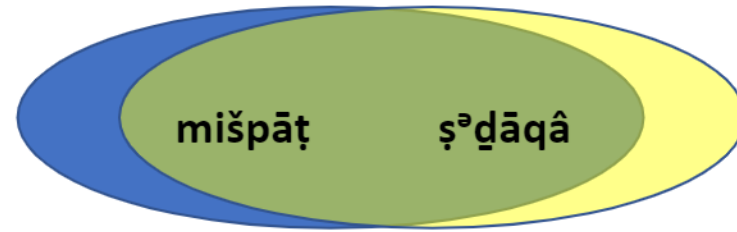
- Being upright or blameless
- Not committing sins like hatred, lust, theft, hurting others, drunkenness, adultery
- Living with personal morality and integrity

Lots of Overlap – and Commonly Used Together



- **Psalm 106:3** “Blessed are those who act **mišpāṭ**, who always do what is **ṣ̣ḏāqâ**.”
- **Proverbs 8:20** “I walk in the way of **ṣ̣ḏāqâ**, along the paths of **mišpāṭ**”
- **Isaiah 28:17** “I will make **mišpāṭ** the measuring line and **ṣ̣ḏāqâ** the plumb line.
- **Psalm 97:1-2** “The LORD ...will fill Zion with his **mišpāṭ** and **ṣ̣ḏāqâ**.”

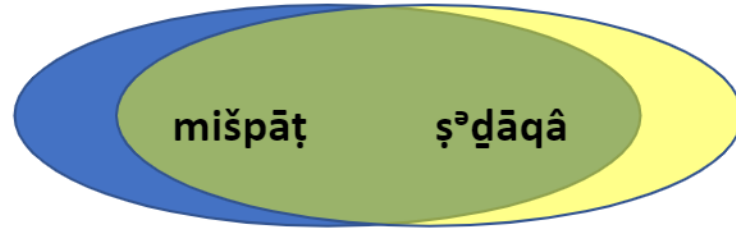
Lots of Overlap – and Commonly Used Together



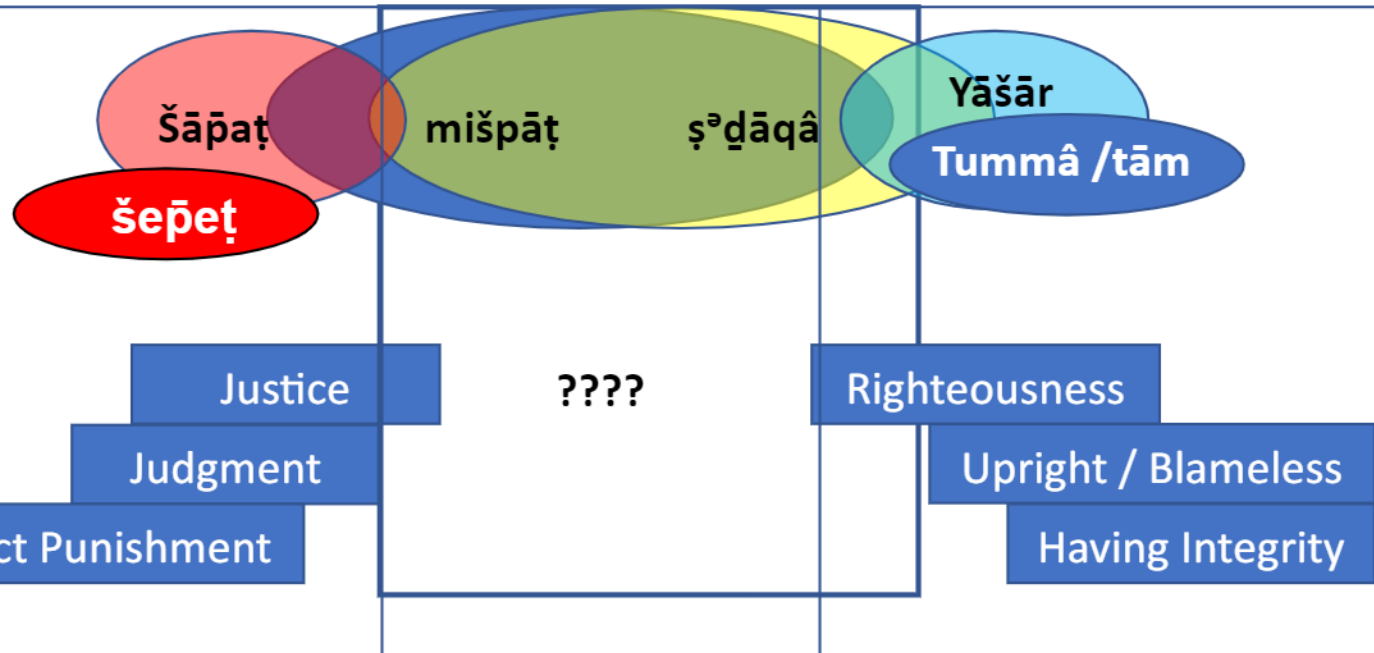
- **2 Sam. 8:15** “This is what the LORD says: “Maintain **mišpāt** and do what is **ṣ̣ḏāqâ**.”
- **Jeremiah 22:3** “This is what the LORD says: Do what is **mišpāt** and **ṣ̣ḏāqâ**.”
- **2 Sam. 8:15** “David reigned over all Israel, doing what was **mišpāt** and **ṣ̣ḏāqâ** for all his people.
- **Ezekiel 18:5** “Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is **mišpāt** and **ṣ̣ḏāqâ**...”

So... What does it mean

A Core Concept
in the OT



In the context of two
other Hebrew Words



English language words
and understanding

Šāpāṭ

Exodus 18:16

“Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I *decide* (šāpāṭ) between the parties and inform them of God’s decrees and instructions.”

Deut. 16:18

“Appoint *judges* (šāpāṭ) and officials for each of your tribes in every town the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall *judge* (šāpāṭ) the people *fairly* (mišpāṭ).”



Šāpāṭ Shaphat

Šāpāṭ



Deut 25:1-2

“When people have a dispute, they are to take it to *court* (**mišpāṭ**) and the *judges will decide the case* (**šāpāṭ**), acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty. If the guilty person deserves to be beaten, the *judge* (**šāpāṭ**) shall make them lie down and have them flogged in his presence with the number of lashes the crime deserves,”

English (NASB) [?]	Strong's	Root & Transliterated	Parsing
and the judges decide their case, PHRASE	H8199	שָׁפַט šāpāṭ	

Šāpāt



Psalms 51:4 (David's prayer, after his sin with Bathsheba.)

“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you *judge* (šāpāt).”

Šāpaṭ



Isaiah 66:16

For with fire and with his sword the LORD will execute *judgment* (**šāpaṭ**) on all people, and many will be those slain by the LORD.

.

Šāpāṭ Shaphat

Šāpāṭ

Ezekiel 7:3

The end is now upon you, and I will unleash my anger against you. I will *judge* (**šāpāṭ**) you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices.



English (NASB) [?]	Strong's	Root & Transliterated	Parsing
I will judge you PHRASE	H8199	שָׁפַט šāpāṭ	

šepet



Ezekiel 16:41

“They will burn down your houses and *inflict punishment* (**šepet**) on you in the sight of many women. I will put a stop to your prostitution, and you will no longer pay your lovers.”

English (NASB) [?]	Strong's	Root & Transliterated	Parsing
judgments	H8201	שֶׁפֶט šepet	

šep̄eṭ

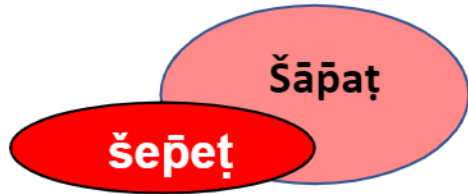


Proverbs 19:29

“*Penalties* (**šep̄eṭ**) are prepared for mockers, and beatings for the backs of fools.”

English (NASB) [?]	Strong's	Root & Transliterated	Parsing
judgments	H8201	שֶׁפֶט šep̄eṭ	

Šāpaṭ Shaphat



The *Justice* System
Justice-involved youth
Department of *Justice*



The Sword of *Justice*



Yāšār Yashar and Tummâ /tām

Job 1:1

This man was *blameless* (**tām**) and *upright* (**yāšār**); he feared God and shunned evil.



Job 23:7

There the *upright* (**yāšār**) can establish their innocence before him, and there I would be delivered forever from my judge.

Job 33:27

And they will go to others and say, 'I have sinned, I have perverted what is *right* (**yāšār**), but I did not get what I deserved.'

Yāšār Yashar and Tummâ



Job 31:1

“I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman.

Job 31:5-6

“If I have walked with falsehood or my foot has hurried after deceit—let God weigh me in honest scales and he will know that I am *blameless* (**tummâ**).

Yāšār

Deut. 12:28

Be careful to obey all these regulations I am giving you, so that it may always go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is *good* (**yāšār**) and right in the eyes of the LORD your God.



Yāšār



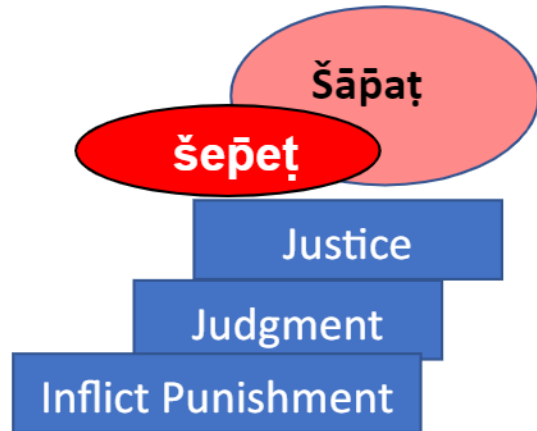
Proverbs 2:7

He holds success in store for the *upright* (**yāšār**), he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,

English (NASB) [?]	Strong's	Root & Transliterated	Parsing
for the upright PHRASE	H3477	יָשָׁר yāšār	

A Common Understanding

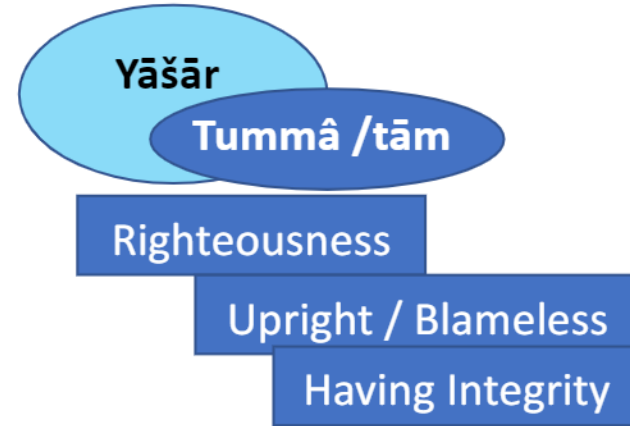
... so we don't get
judged (justice)



Because Jesus was punished
for our sins, God can be both
Holy and Just.



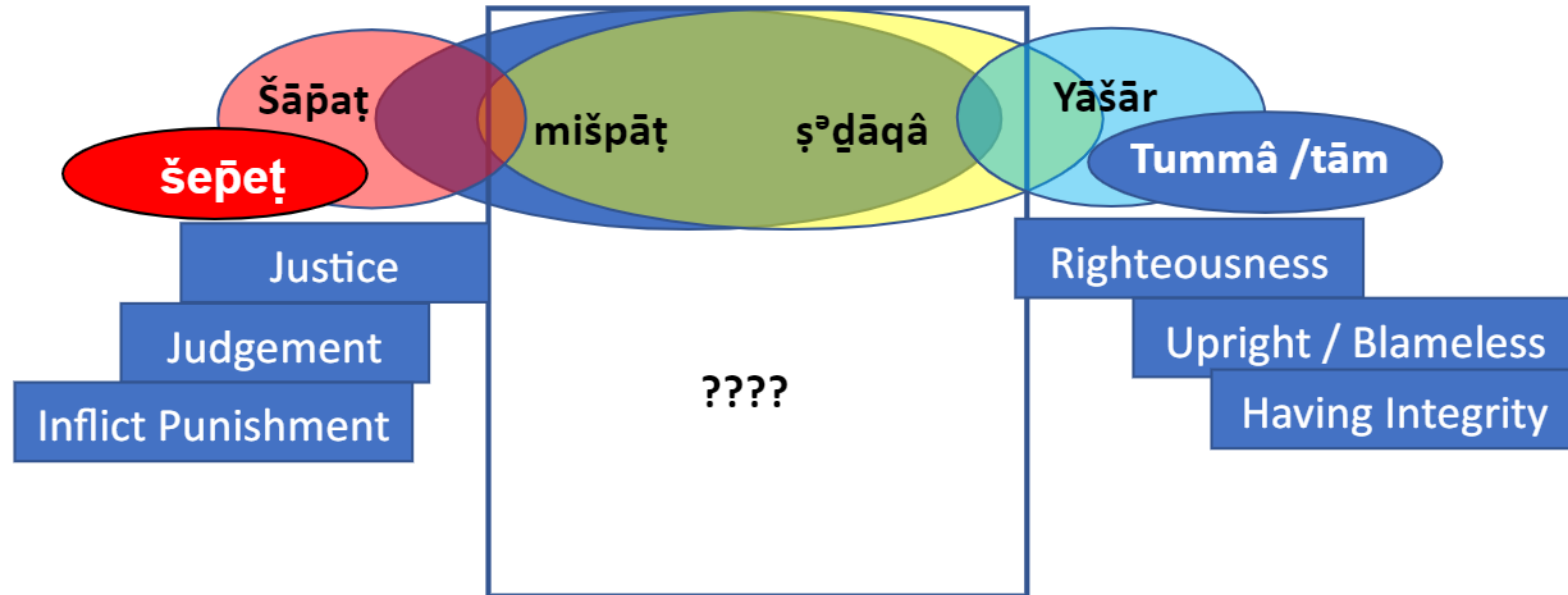
We should do our best to
be righteous (not sin)...



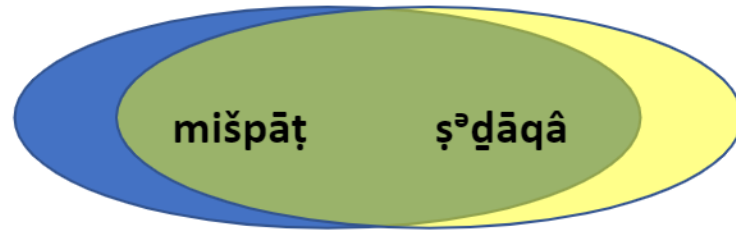
But, we all blow it and sin...

Praise God that in Christ, we are
washed in the Blood of Jesus, and
his righteousness is a gift to us.

But we're missing really important stuff!



Scriptures that Help us Understand the Meaning



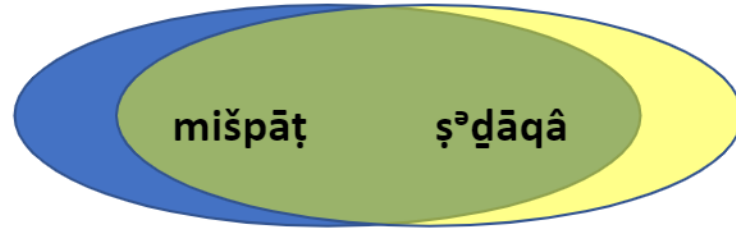
- Job 29:1-3, 10-17

Why start in the Book of Job?

- Most likely the oldest book in the Bible
- Early Scriptures that people could study before much of the OT was written
- Referred to in Ezekiel 14 along with Noah and Daniel

Scriptures that Help us Understand the Meaning

- Job 29:1-3, 11-17



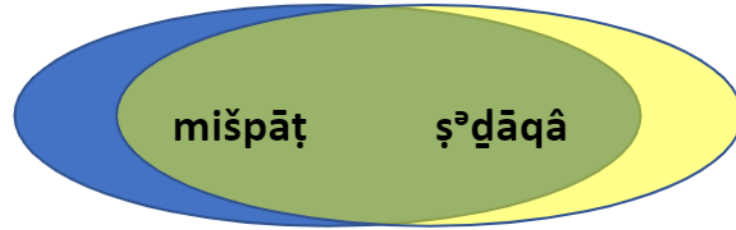
¹Job continued his discourse:, “How I long for the months gone by, for the days when God watched over me, when his lamp shone on my head and by his light I walked through darkness!”

¹¹Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me, because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist them. The one who was dying blessed me; I made the widow’s heart sing.

I put on *righteousness* (**šedeq**) as my clothing; *justice* (**mišpāt**) was my robe and my turban I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger. I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth.

Characteristics of Mishpat and Tzedakah

Job 29:1-3, 11-17



Job gives several examples of how he was clothed in **ṣ̣edeq** and wore **mišpāṭ** like a robe. (**ṣ̣edeq** is the masculine form of **ṣ̣ḏāqâ**)

- He delivered the poor who cried out for help.
- He made the widow's heart sing.
- He helped the blind, acting as their eyes.
- He helped the lame, acting as their feet.
- He was a father to the needy.
- He took up the case of strangers.
- He broke the power of wicked oppressors and rescued people being exploited by them.



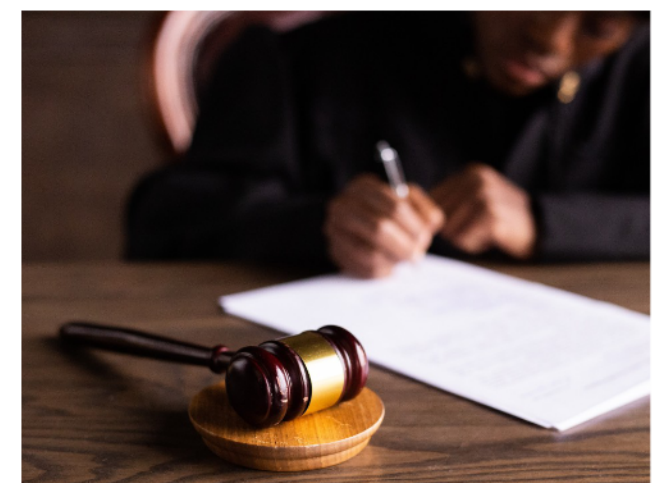
Shalom

“Their homes are safe (**šhālôm**), and they are free from fear”

Different from how we often think of “Justice”

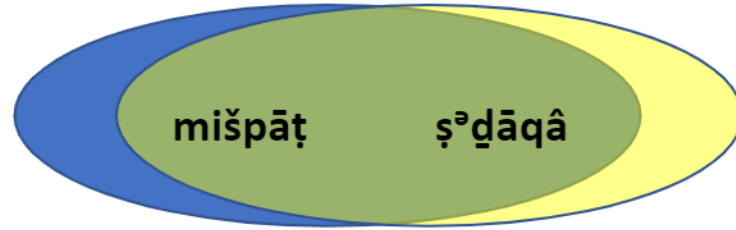
Do these images reflect the “justice” that Job was living as he walked with God?

Was he just acting with integrity and not cheating?



Characteristics of Mishpat and Tzedakah

Job 29:1-3, 11-17



Job gives several examples of how he was clothed in **šedeq** and wore **mišpāt** like a robe

- He delivered the poor who cried out for help.
- He made the widow's heart sing.
- He helped the blind, acting as their eyes.
- He helped the lame, acting as their feet.
- He was a father to the needy.
- He took up the case of strangers.
- He broke the power of wicked oppressors and rescued people being exploited by them.

Matt. 22:38-39

And the second is like it:
'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

All the Law and the
Prophets hang on these
two commandments

Scriptures that Help us Understand the Meaning

mišpāṭ

Deut. 10:18-19

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.

He defends the *cause* (**mišpāṭ**) of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.

And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

Scriptures that Help us Understand the Meaning

mišpāṭ

Deut. 24:17-22

Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of *justice* (**mišpāṭ**), or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.

When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow.

When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow.

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.

Do Not Deprive the Needy of Mišpāṭ

Deut. 24:17-22

mišpāṭ

Today, our individual, Western, understanding of the English word “**Justice**” in that agricultural economy might be...

It is MY right to own all the grain I can harvest.

- I planted it on MY land.
- I harvested it.

If I feel charitable and make MY decision to give some to the poor, then that would be virtuous of me.

It is **unjust** to command me to leave part of it for someone who didn't plant it.

Justice is making sure nobody steals it from me.

Justice also means I must not cheat in my business

Implicit in these Deuteronomy 24 Commands

The harvest really belongs to God

- All the land is really His
- He makes the crops/olives/grapes grow

God commands farmers (business owners) to operate in ways that create the opportunity for the less fortunate to provide for themselves and their families (with dignity, not depending on charity).

Not following those commands by focusing on profit maximization is **depriving** vulnerable and disadvantaged people of **justice** (**mišpāṭ**).

Scriptures that Help us Understand the Meaning

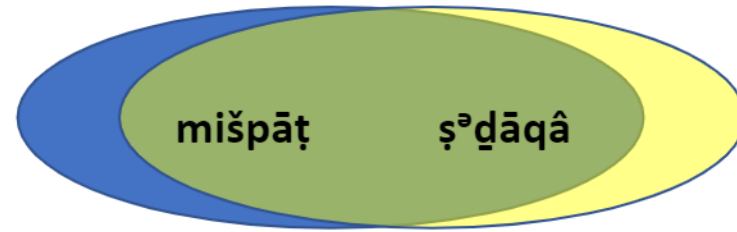
mišpāṭ

Isaiah 1:17

Learn to do right; seek *justice* (**mišpāṭ**). Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.

Mišpāṭ is *much more* than just giving charity to the poor and downtrodden.

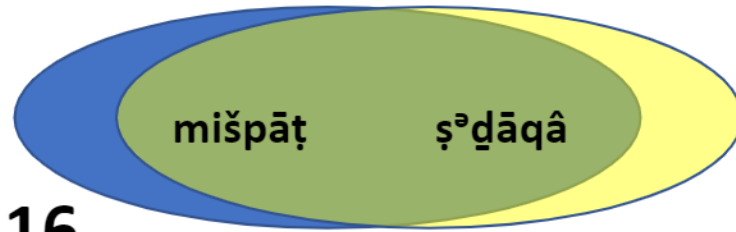
Scriptures that Help us Understand the Meaning



Psalm 146:6-9

He upholds the *cause* (**mišpāṭ**) of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the *righteous* (**šadīq**). The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

Scriptures that Help us Understand the Meaning



Jeremiah 22:11, 15-16

For this is what the LORD says about Shallum son of Josiah, who succeeded his father as king of Judah...

“Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father have food and drink? He did what was *right* (šׁdāqâ) and *just* (mišpāṭ), so all went well with him. He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well.

Is that not what it means to know me?” declares the LORD.

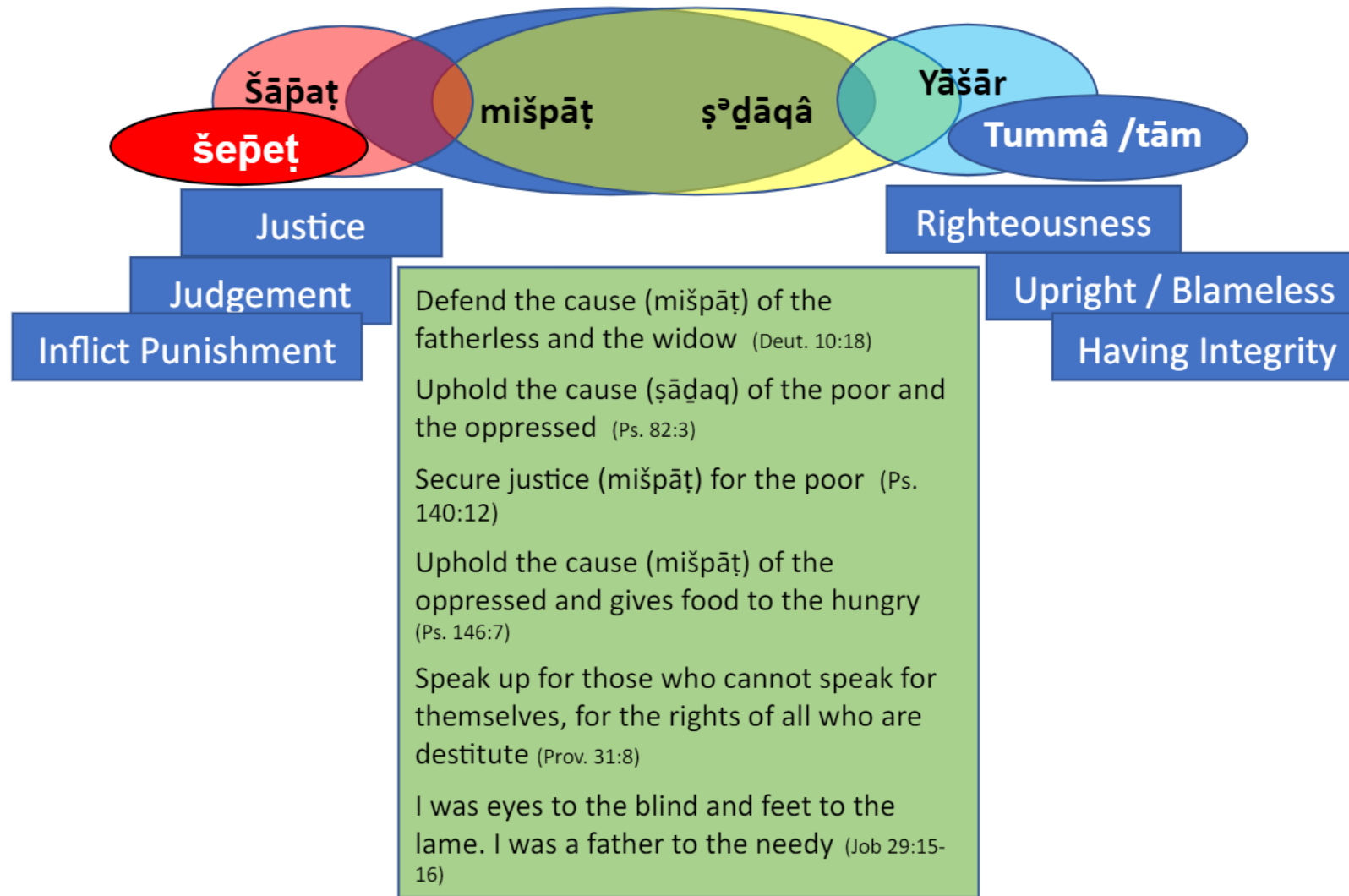
Scriptures that Help us Understand the Meaning

Gaining Clarity on Justice and Righteousness in the Bible

Put on your
Mishpat glasses!



Scriptures that Help us Understand the Meaning



Loving our (vulnerable) neighbors as ourselves

Scriptures that Help us Understand the Meaning

Defend the *cause* (mišpāṭ) of the fatherless and the widow (Deut. 10:18)

Uphold the *cause* (ṣādaq) of the poor and the oppressed (Ps. 82:3)

Secure *justice* (mišpāṭ) for the poor (Ps. 140:12)

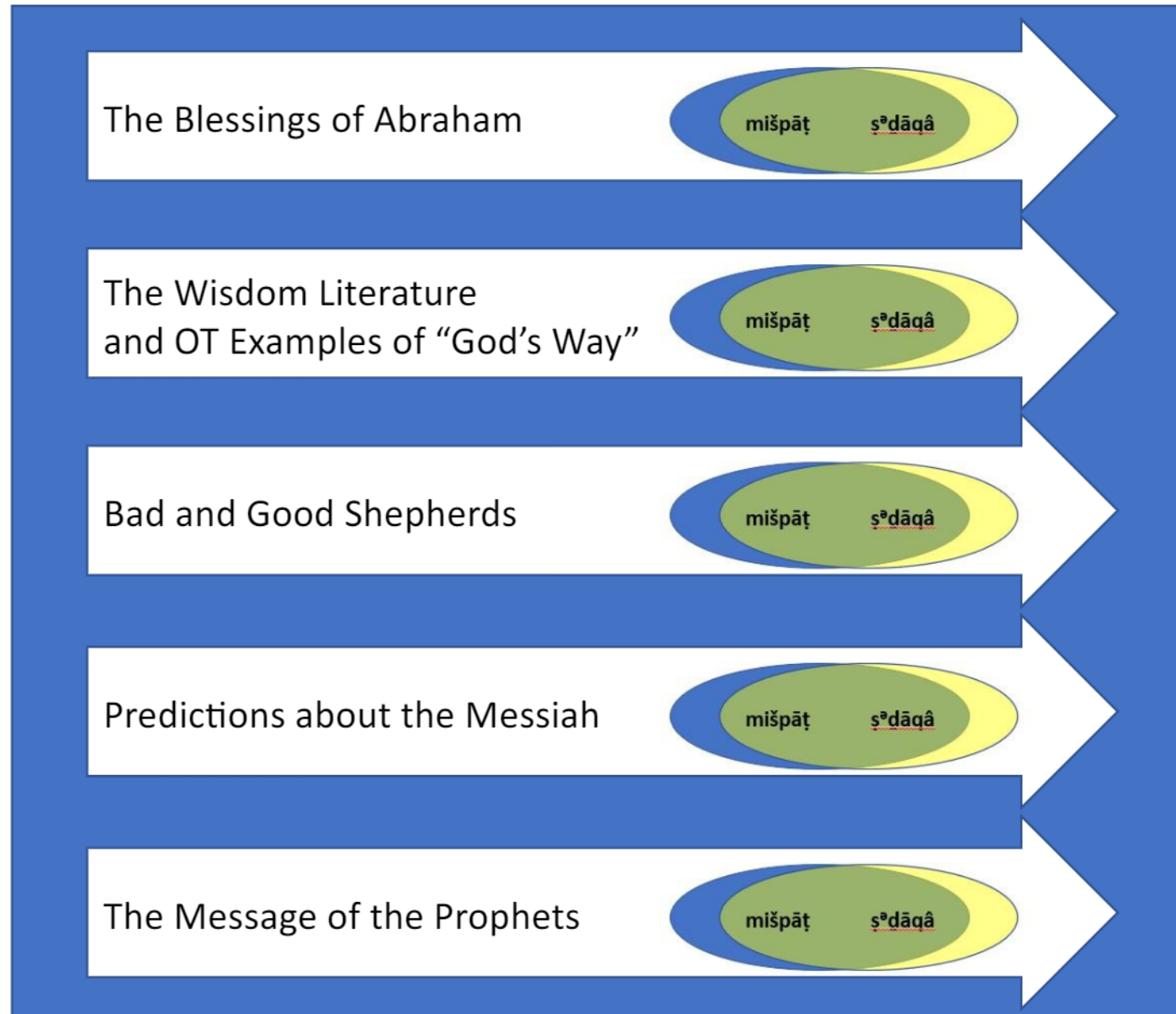
Uphold the *cause* (mišpāṭ) of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry (Ps. 146:7)

I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy (Job 29:15-16)

I made the widow's heart sing.

Loving our (vulnerable) neighbors as ourselves

Preview of Some Major Old Testament Themes



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