

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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THE WORD "JUDGMENT"

The Lord Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because they made "the Word of God of none effect" through their traditions. In man's handling of God's Word at the present time, we find a parallel to this in the way the word *judgment* is treated. In all theology, almost without exception, the word *judgment* is taken to mean punishment; so much so, that this has fixed upon it one definition given in the dictionary that makes it to mean "a calamity sent by God by way of recompense for wrongs committed." It has come to mean this in English because men have persisted in using it this way, but it is a very serious error when this definition is carried into the Word of God. Promises of infinitely great blessings are turned into dire threats of terrible calamities when this false meaning is read into the word *judgment*. Thus, the truth of God is turned into a lie.

Many who handle God's Word are prone to use such adjectives as "fearful," "frightful," and "terrible" when speaking of the judgments of God. This is sheer misrepresentation and such descriptions do not come from the sacred Scriptures. In Scripture we are told that **God's judgments are more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold, that they are sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb, that by them God's servants are warned, and in the keeping of them there is great reward.** (See Psalm 19:10, 11). How can these things be true if God's judgments have to do with punishments, calamities, curses, and woes? This passage alone should settle it - that judgment does not mean wrath or punishment. And it will settle it for all who allow God's Word to settle things. But there is more to be said.

The English word *judgment* is found 294 times in the Old Testament as the translation of the Hebrew word *mishpat*, and it never means punishment in a single one of these occurrences. At times it may signify an adverse

judgment, and this, of course, could result in the punishment of the one who has been so judged; but we should never confuse the two. In 118 other occurrences *mishpat* is translated twenty-eight different ways. In view of this wealth of occurrences it is possible for the diligent student *to* discover what the Spirit of God meant by this word from the use that is made of it.

I often wonder if there are very many who realize the great wealth of truth that God has provided for us in the fact that most major words are found in numerous sentences where the meaning of them becomes unmistakably clear from the use made of them and where variations and shades of meaning can be detected and established.

In the making of dictionaries, this is the way that words are defined. Vast amounts of literature are constantly read by researchers; and as they read they copy every new, interesting or rare word, also new and different uses of common words along with the sentences in which they occur. They may collect as many as five hundred sentences in which a word has appeared as it is used by speakers of ability and importance. To give a word a definition, an editor will take the group of cards that illustrate its usages, and after careful consideration he writes its definition. He is guided solely by what the sentences reveal as to the usage made of it.

In defining new words, especially those that come to us from other languages, the editors of dictionaries will often find that their definitions are challenged. In reply or defense their only appeal can be to the way in which the word is generally used. They cannot, of course, appeal to the dictionary. All they can do is show that the meaning given is in harmony with the general use of the word being made by the best speakers and writers.

It is my conviction and practice that God's words can best be defined by the usage made of them by the Holy Spirit in the sacred Scriptures. And since the meaning of a word is determined by the use made of it, there is indeed a wealth of truth to be found in a word that occurs in 412 sentences in the Old Testament, as does the word *mishpat*. The *Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance* gives a full list of these occurrences on page 776. It is a formidable task to examine each one of these and it cannot be done in this brief study. However, the meaning of this word can be established in its first ten occurrences; and, once this is done, when we come upon the word *judgment*, we can check and see if it is *mishpat* (other words are also translated "judgment") and if it is we can read this meaning into it.

I do not believe that anyone who makes an honest study of these first ten occurrences will ever again be guilty of perverting it to mean punishment. Here is the list. The italicized word or words in each segment represent the Hebrew word *mishpat*.

Gen. 18:19 - to do justice and *judgment*
Gen. 18:25 - shall not the Judge of all the earth do *right*?
Gen. 40:13 - after the former *manner*
Exo. 15:25 - made for them a statute and *ordinance*
Exo. 21: 1 - these are the *judgments*
Exo.21:9 - after the *manner* of daughters
Exo. 21:31- according to this *judgment* shall it be done
Exo.23:6 - shalt not wrest *the judgment* of thy poor
Exo. 24:3 - and all the *judgments*
Exo. 26:30 - according to *the fashion* thereof

These ten passages are sufficient to show us that the word *mishpat* does not mean punishment and they give us some indication as to what it does mean. It has to do with an established order, system, or arrangement; and when it is used of God's judgments, it has to do with an established order, system, or arrangement that has its source in Him. This is quite clear in those passages where *mishpat* is translated "order," such as Judges 13:12, 1 Chron. 6:32, 15:13, 23:31, 2 Chron. 8:14, or in any of the thirty-nine places where it is translated "manner." Any single aspect of God's order may be designated by the word *mishpat*, so our definition must not be too narrow or limited. We are now awaiting that day when we can say among the nations that, "**the LORD reigneth: the world (order or system) also shall be established that it shall not be moved: He shall judge the peoples righteously**" (Psalm 96:10). Consider the following illustration.

In the State of California there is a body of laws, directives, regulations, and interpretations which are properly called the judgments of the people of this State regarding the operation of motor vehicles within its boundaries. Each detail can be called a "judgment." When one comes upon a stop sign on the highway, it is the judgment of a traffic engineer that such a sign is needed there for the safety of those who travel. The driver of an automobile will find an abundance of signs, lines, warnings, instructions, etc., posted along the highway which inform him of these judgments. All who drive are expected to study and know these judgments. Ignorance of them is no excuse

if they are violated.

To state the obvious, it can be said that there are judgments in this State which set the order, determine the manner, and regulate the operation of motor vehicles. The driver who knows the laws knows the judgments, those who keep them keep the judgments; and the one who violates them can be charged with failure to observe the judgments of this State. However, these judgments cover only one aspect of life in California. Other judgments cover other aspects of life. Personally, I do not find it difficult to live and work in harmony with these judgments. And if all these should suddenly be superseded by the judgments of God (Psa. 76:8), I am sure I would have no difficulty living, working, and serving in harmony with His judgments.

There are many who believe that God's judgments are in the earth today, that we live in a moral universe, and His judgments regulate, control, and set the order for all life upon it. In proof of this they usually cite Eph. 1: 11, which seems to say that God is now working all things after the counsel of His own will. They tear this text from its context and ignore the meaning of *ta panta* (all things) which Paul himself defines for us by usage in Colossians 3:8 (all these), which is limited to things in the context. However, if God's judgments are in the earth, then the inhabitants of the earth should be learning righteousness (Isa. 26:9), which they are not. Furthermore, it would be God's responsibility to make His judgments unmistakably clear and known to all men. He would need to make the facts known concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. And He would need to maintain His judgments by punishing all who violate them. All this awaits the coming of the kingdom (government) of God. Then we can say, "**His judgments are in all the earth**" Psa. 105:7. And how do they get here? He caused judgment to be heard from heaven (Psa. 76:8). The people of the earth will stand in awe and become quiet.

In the New Testament the Spirit speaks of the coming of the kingdom of God upon the earth while in the Old Testament the prophets speak of the same thing and call it the coming of the judgments of God. Some of the most glorious prophecies of the Old Testament are those that promise the coming of God's judgments upon the earth. We will consider some of these in which the writers speak prophetically of the day when God's judgments will control and regulate all life upon this planet.

One of the most important prophecies has already been mentioned. Isaiah

declares: "**When Thy JUDGMENTS are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness**" (26: 9). This will be accomplished. He will not fail, neither will He be discouraged till He has set JUDGMENT in the earth (Isa. 42:4). "**The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this**" (Isa. 9:7), is the divine decree concerning this. And when the context is examined, it will be found that this statement has to do with the order of His government, to establish it with judgment and with justice.

God's judgments will be in the earth from the moment He speaks and causes judgment to be heard from heaven (Psa. 76:8). He will send forth judgment and thus gain the victory. He will show judgment to the nations (Matt. 12: 18, 20).

The promises of judgment to come are some of the most precious in the Bible. Let us not be guilty of twisting these into threats of destruction.

END ISSUE NO. SB033