

The Law #3 Precepts & Judgments

Michael Heiss—September 28, 2024

This is session #3 in our study of the Law. We started out with Torah and Testimonies (The Law #1). Then we went to Statutes and Ordinances (the Law #2).

Really they're all subsidiaries, one of another; they're all synonyms, one from another; they all fit. Many times they're interchangeable. So, today we are going into *precepts and judgments!*

PRECEPTS:

We're not going to spend much time at all on precepts once we realize what it really is. Precepts are found throughout the Bible and we talk about them. We just don't know that we're talking about them; they're all pervasive. Let's get a decent working definition of a precept:

A commandment or injunction. A commandment or direction given as a rule of action or conduct. An injunction as to moral conduct. Personal moral instruction.

So we will see that a precept has more to do with one's conduct as such, and doesn't have to do with what we call national statutes.

- we're not talking about tithing
- we're not talking about clean or unclean meats
- we're not talking about how we're going to build something

This is moral instruction!

The main Hebrew word for precept is 'piqqud' and it means *mandate from God for the law and commandment, moral restraint!* That's very important: moral restraint; we'll see that.

There's another word for precept which is (inaudible), which is more of a command. We'll see that they can be actually interchangeable, believe it or not.

So let's just look at two or three instances of where precepts can be found 21 times to my counting in Psa. 119 alone. That's where the bulk of them are. You can find them here and there in Jeremiah, Isa. 28 and Psa. 19. So, let's look at two or three of them.

What we're going to find is they don't really tell you what they are; we have to know that.

Psalm 19:8: "The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart..."

What are the precepts that rejoice the heart?
Doesn't tell us!

Psalm 119:104: "Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore, I hate every false way."

- How does he get understanding through a precept?
- What is the precept that gives him understanding?

We're going to find out and we're going to smile when we do!

Verse 159: "Consider how I love Your precepts; O LORD, according to Your loving kindness give me life."

Well, somehow precepts are connected with life. But really, what is a precept?

Jeremiah 35:18: "And Jeremiah said to the house of the Rechabites, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and have kept all his precepts, and have done according to all that he has commanded you."'"

You could just as easily translate all three of these words, commands or commandments. Why is that? *Because the command was given to his son for moral instruction, for following his father's instructions!*

What commands can you think of, can any of us think of, that have moral restraint for individuals?

- Has anybody ever heard of, 'thou shalt not murder'?
- Has anybody heard of, 'thou shalt not commit adultery'?
- Has anybody heard of, 'thou shalt not steal'?

That's the Ten Commandments, but they're precepts! What is a precept? *Moral instruction, a command for moral restraint.* All the Ten Commandments are all precepts.

Have you read where it says, do not go across the land being a talebearer? *That's a precept!* Moral instruction! Anybody ever read the book of Proverbs? That's one big book of precepts.

'My son, stay away from the strange woman—moral restraint; individual. Every one of those admonitions in the book of Proverbs is a precept. We just don't think of them as such.

But that's what they are. They're precepts. There's no need to spend a lot of more time there, except for one place in Isaiah, because there we have precept, but comes from still a different word.

Isaiah 28:10: "For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept..."

All right. What does that mean, 'precept upon precept.' It's referring to, again, a moral form of instruction, but it is 'tsav'—*a command!*

Remember, a command with moral restraint is a precept. So we can properly translate this word as *precept*, but it's in the form of a command, just as is the Ten Commandments. They're given in the form of commands, but they are precepts. It all fits together.

Whether you're talking statute, whether you're talking precept, ordinance, judgment, commandments, it all fits.

Humorously, I tend to think of when I talk about a thing like this, I think of the famous O.J. far. Remember O.J. Simpson and Johnny Cochran, the attorney. 'If it does not fit, you must acquit.' You know, the glove.

Well, all of God's words for laws and commandments, fit like a glove. *But not O.J.'s glove!*

That's all precepts are. There's nothing mysterious about them. There's nothing strange. What is this precept? *It's just:*

- an admonition
- a law
- a command

urging moral restraint, moral conduct. What you should do, what you should not do.

Not the nation as a whole, although obviously all the people put together form the nation, **but it's individual instruction with a moral debt to it!**

And basically speaking, that is what precepts are. We could go on and on, but we won't learn anymore. So, don't worry about this precept.

You read about these precepts; ***it's just instruction with a moral content to it!***

JUDGMENTS

Now I want to get to the meat of today, which is actually going to be judgments, because judgments are very, very, **very** important. What is a judgment anyway? *Judgments are verdicts or decisions rendered by:*

- a court of law
- a court official
- other officials, like in the days of ancient Israel, the king
- a family decision can be rendered

That is 'mishpat'; a judgment.

Of course, the judgments, two judgments we're going to look at specifically, are going to be found in Exo. 21 to 23; but let's not turn there, yet.

Let's look at the first time we have an example of a judge, Exo. 18. Here we have the story of Moses. They've gone through the sea and Jethro, his father-in-law, has come to meet him bringing Zipporah. Jethro is startled at seeing Moses sitting there and talking to all the people.

Exodus 18:13: "And on the next day it came to pass that Moses sat to judge the people. And the people stood by Moses from the morning to the evening. And when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, 'What *is* this thing which you do for the people? Why do you sit alone by yourself...?'" (vs 13-14).

Verse 15: "And Moses said to his father-in-law, 'Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a matter, they come to me. And I judge between one and another, and I make known the statutes of God and His laws'" (vs 15-16).

Well, let's review statutes, laws—'torah'—they're the same. It's just that the statute is under the heading of 'torah.' Moses is simply telling him, 'Look, I'm judging the people. I'm telling them:

- you do this under this situation
- you do that in that situation

He's doing it! That's just one example.

Now, in the book of Judges, which I always find fascinating, from Othniel unto Samson, there is only one individual in the book of Judges where it says, 'she specifically judged people out of the law,' and that's my gal Deborah.

Years ago, there used to be a phrase and a description, and it was called a 'pistol-packing mama.' Deborah was a 'pistol-packing mama.' You just didn't mess with her.

Judges 4:4: "And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, judged Israel at that time.... [she was a judge] ...And she lived under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in Mount Ephraim. **And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment**" (vs 4-5). *So, she was making decisions!*

We don't know of any other judge listed in the book of Judges. We're not talking about Samuel. He was outside the book of Judges; he certainly was one who adjudicated matters.

But seriously, can anybody think of Samson as sitting down and judging out of the Book of the Law?

Now, maybe one or two did; but the only one we know was Deborah. Interesting, very interesting individual. Now let's look at two other good examples.

1-Kings 3—here we have Solomon, son of David; he started out magnificently:

- he was righteous judging
- he obeyed God
- he was blessed beyond what anybody can imagine

1-Kings 3:16: "Then there came two women, harlots, to the king and stood before him."

We know the story; they each had a baby and somehow one died during the night, and she took the live baby and pretended it was hers, and gave the dead one to the other one.

They're coming to Solomon to render a judgment. What does Solomon do? *With wisdom, he knows the love of a mother for a child!* So what does he say?

Verse 23: "And the king said, 'The one says, "This *is* my son who lives, and your son *is* the dead." And the other says, "No, but your son *is* the dead, and my son *is* the living.'"" 'She said/she said.' That's what we've got!

Verse 24: "And the king said, 'Bring me a sword.' And they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, 'Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other'" (vs 24-25).

But the mother, *the real mother*, said, 'Oh no! Please, Lord, don't! Let the child live.' *That was the tip-off to Solomon!*

Verse 27: "Then the king answered and said, 'Give her the living child, and in no way kill it. She *is* the mother of it.' **And all Israel heard of the judgment, which the king had judged. And they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to do judgment**" (vs 27-28).

Solomon was a judge. He wasn't the court of law. He wasn't officially designated as judge, but he was the king. And as king, he had to make decisions, which are judgments.

Now let's look quickly at a New Testament decision. In this case, we're going to look at Acts 15. We're talking here about the Jerusalem Conference. We know the story there about Gentiles coming into the Church:

- Do they need to become Jews to become Christians?
- What smaller aspects of the law do they need to obey?

Paul explained what was going on. Then Peter came and said what he saw and did. Then James says:

Acts 15:19: "Therefore, my judgment is *that* we do not trouble those of the Gentiles who have turned to God."

He explained why; there was a judgment; so James acted as a judge.

Now we need to understand two prerequisites, two pieces of knowledge before we go into Exo. 21.

Years and years ago, I well remember working with Dr. Herman Hoeh—he was my boss at the time—when he would say:

- **IF** you want to understand the Law
- **IF** you want to really understand the mind of God and how God thinks
 - ✓ read the Torah
 - ✓ read the judgments

You will see decisions God made, and you will be able to see how He thinks. Good advice!

Then the second piece we're going to look at is found in Isa. 55. This is ***really important*** for us to understand.

Isaiah 55:8—*God speaking*: "'For **My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways My ways,**' says the LORD. 'For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, **so are My ways higher than your ways,** and **My thoughts than your thoughts**'"

In Exo. 21-23 we have the judgments of God. Hebrew: 'mishpat' or 'mishpatim' for the plural. We're specifically going to look at two of them:

Exodus 21:35: "And in the event the ox of a man damages the ox of a neighbor, so that it dies, then they shall sell the living ox, and they shall divide the money of it. And they shall also divide the dead ox."

There are various scenarios, but here is one scenario which can happen and God knew about it, He understood it; this is what He said to do:

Here we have two options:

1. One individual, he's fairly rich, he's well to do, and he's got this big oxen or bull worth \$1,000.
2. On the other hand, this poor guy, his animal is worth \$200; not much.

Now normally, you would expect that the big bull would kill the smaller one who's fighting. By some fluke, the smaller bull kills the larger one. What are you going to do? *God says to do is this:*

First of all, you look what God said. "...then they shall sell the living ox, and they shall divide the money of it...."

So the poor guy who had a \$200 animal, 'Sell it, 'God says—that's \$200—\$100 goes to the owner/ \$100 goes to the owner of the deceased animal: \$100 each.

Now you can begin to see that this is not really equitable financially. Then what about the dead animal?

"...And they shall also divide the dead ox."

- How are you going to divide it?
- What are you going to do?

You can't eat it, it's got to be properly bled! Well, maybe you can give it to a Gentile.

Where is a good Amorite or Jebusite when you need one? *You don't have one!* But they find a tanner, some other individual to take the animal off their hands—here's \$100—'I'll get the skin and the bones and all that; I'll make a profit from that.'

That's \$50 each! The individual with the \$200 animal, he's out only \$150. But the other individual, he's out \$950. *That's God's judgment!* Why?

- Didn't God know that could happen?
- Do you agree with God?
- Do you agree that this is equitable?

No, it's not!

But as Dr. Hoeh would say, 'Read that judgment carefully. What is God thinking? *When you read that, God thinking **limited liability!*** That is paramount in His eyes.

These animals are on the open range. Anybody who has an animal grazing on an open range takes a risk. You never know what's liable to happen. Nobody was at fault. It wasn't the owner of the dead ox or the owner of the live one's fault. It just happened. Animals just for some reason start to fight each other. You took the risk.

But you see, if God allowed the owner of the dead ox to go into the poor guy's house and take his firstborn. I'm kidding, of course. But you know what I mean, raid his bank account. God said ***NO!*** God said *inheritance, tribal inheritance, equity!*

It is like in modern times, we have the tax code. We're dealing with interest deductions. We have loans, real estate. There are recourse loans and non-recourse loans. Well, to make a long story short, with a recourse loan, if the individual doesn't pay up, doesn't make his payment, something happened, you could go after all his assets to make it good.

With a non-recourse loan, you can't. You go after the house and try to sell the house and recoup what you can. But you can't go after him, because God is concerned about the integrity of the tribal system. And He doesn't want anybody to go into poverty for something that really wasn't his fault.

We'll see the same principles here. But with the circumstances, they're reversed. God changes His mind. He really doesn't change His mind. It's just that the circumstances change.

Verse 36: "Or if it is known that the ox has been known to gore in time past..."

Now this owner of this \$200 animal, if this animal had been known to charge people, hire them, or in any way make mischief:

"...and his owner has not kept him in... [fenced in—responsibility] ...he shall surely pay ox for ox. And the dead ox shall be his own" (v 36).

So in this case, the oxen shall be his. The dead ox, he takes, he keeps. But he has to make good to the owner of the dead ox.

Wait a minute! Aren't you going to have the same problem? He's liable to come in and take his firstborn, raid his bank account?

Suddenly that's of primary importance to God, because now we have responsibility. In other places, God said, if you're digging a pit, you don't cover it—*liable!*

So in this particular case, it was responsibility. ***That's paramount in God's eyes. You could see how He thinks!***

But even though, even though with the second scenario, the owner of the dead ox can come in there and take whatever he wants and needs, maybe even force the other guy to sell his house, ***God still has an offset to that!***

Remember, ***a tribal inheritance is important to Him! Yes, it is!*** But then we have what

is known as everybody together, Jubilee! Jubilee!
We know what the Jubilee Law is.

Lev. 25:10-21^[transcriber's correction]—In a case like this, whatever his problem is, he loses his house. But you see, God doesn't want people to lose his house. So, what God says is, depending upon where you are in the Jubilee year:

- Are you in year 2-3?
- Are you in year 45-46?

You're going to judge the price accordingly, because what the individual is taking from you is actually the harvest year's crop. How many years of produce, and you're going to adjust the price accordingly!

If he still can't pay it back at the end of the 50th year, **it goes back to the original owner!** God is not going to let that property fall away from the original owner. That's how much God thinks of property rights. **That's what He thinks of tribal inheritance!**

God had it covered. He has everything covered. He really does, **He's thought of everything!**

We need to read these judgments to see the mind of God. Remember, **IF** this is important to God, **it better be important to us!**

Because one day, **IF** we're faithful and true, and endure to the end, as Christ said in Matt. 24, 'that person will be saved'; hopefully, that's all of us. **We will be elevated into the God Family!**

- How are we going to make judgments?
- How are we going to decide?

Well, what we find in the Books, the Book is still going to be there! It may not be in paper form, as we know it. **But those principles, those decisions are going to be there!**

So we need the mind of God!

Let us take another look at what God thinks of property rights and inheritance rights. In this particular case in Num. 27 we're going to have the daughter of Zelophehad, and here's the problem there:

Their father died. They were sisters, daughters, but they couldn't inherit. They said, 'Moses, this isn't fair. We should have a right to inherit.'

Moses thought, 'I don't know. We'll go to God.' Moses didn't have a crystal ball, but he did have a 'pipeline' to God. He had the Tent of Meeting or whatever it is, he went to God to find out. God told him what to do.

Numbers 27:1: "Then came the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hephher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh...."—*they are listed here!*

Verse 2: "And they stood before Moses and before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation..."

Verse 3: "'Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not in the company of those who gathered themselves against the LORD in the company of Korah, but died in his own sin and had no sons. Why should the name of our father be taken away from among his family because he has no son? Therefore, give us a possession among the brothers of our father'" (vs 3-4).

God said, 'She's right!' So they can go ahead and they can marry. But then the question is, whom do they marry? The elders had come to Moses said that if they marry outside the tribe, then the property attaches to the daughters, not those outside the tribe, and we know that happened because:

Numbers 36:1: "And the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh... [this was the family of those daughters] ...of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near and spoke before Moses, and before the rulers, the chief fathers of the children of Israel. And they said, 'The LORD commanded my lord to give the land for an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel. **And my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother to his daughters. And if they are married to any of the sons of the tribes of the children of Israel, then shall their inheritance be taken from the inheritance of our fathers** and shall be put to the inheritance of the tribe to which they are received'" (vs 1-3).

So, Moses had to go to God again and say, what do we do? And God said:

Verse 6: "This is the thing which the LORD commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, 'Let them marry to whom they think best. Only they shall marry into the family of the tribe of their father.' So, the inheritance of the children of Israel shall not be moved from tribe to tribe. For every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers" (vs 6-7).

They can marry whosoever they choose. But the property stays within the tribe. The property attaches to the descendants. It does not attach to the daughters. If the daughters marry within the tribe, wonderful, no problem.

What if they go outside the tribe, even though they may say, 'Oh please, I love him. This man is my dream beau. Please!'

God says, OK, go ahead and marry outside the tribe. But you don't get the land. The land belongs to the tribe. ***That's how much God places on tribal inheritance!***

The daughters can marry outside the tribe, but they can't take the land with them, because that's inheritance. God wanted those tribes intact.

So, you see the mind of God was inheritance. Whether we're talking about these five daughters, whether we're talking about the owner of an oxen, it doesn't matter. ***God's judgment is that the land stays with the tribe!***

It just shows us how God thinks. When we read these judgments, ask yourself:

- Why did God do this?
- What did God have in mind?
- What principle was He operating on?

Because God is operating under various principles. In some cases, principle one predominates. In other case, principle two predominates.

But these are judgments rendered by God Himself, and He expects all His people to render judgments accordingly. One day, who knows what judgments we will have to make. They need to be based on the principles that He established in what we call Torah. In this case, judgments that are made based on Torah.

So, let us appreciate these judgments. Let us study them and gain more understanding into the mind of God and how He thinks!

Scriptural References:

- 1) Psalm 19:8
- 2) Psalm 119:104, 159
- 3) Jeremiah 35:18
- 4) Isaiah 28:10
- 5) Exodus 18:13-16
- 6) Judges 4:4-5
- 7) 1 Kings 3:16, 23-28
- 8) Acts 15:19
- 9) Isaiah 55:8
- 10) Exodus 21:35-36
- 11) Numbers 27:1-4
- 12) Numbers 36:1-7

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Exodus 22-23

- Leviticus 25:10-21
- Matthew 24

MH:bo/po
Transcribed: 10-2-24

Copyright 2024—All rights reserved. Except for brief excerpts for review purposes, no part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means without the written permission of the copyright owner. This includes electronic and mechanical photocopying or recording, as well as the use of information storage and retrieval systems.