

An Eye for an Eye or Measure for Measure?

Matthew 7:2 *“For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.”* (Also see Luke 6:38)

Case Study 1: Samson, Boaz and the line of King David and Yeshua:

Most are familiar with the basic story of Samson, the amazing Israelite whose hair appeared to give him amazing strength, but who was ultimately undone by a woman (as all men are!).

The Talmud/Midrash gives a fascinating back story though.

Samson’s name properly transliterated is Shimshon which in Hebrew is ‘tov may sheesheem’ meaning ‘better than 60’. Why would his parents have named him ‘better than 60’?

The story of Samson (Shimshon) takes place soon after the story of Ruth, according to Midrashic sources. Ivtzan (Ibzan) was a judge shortly before Shimshon. The Gemara and Talmud (Bava Batra 91a) identify Ivtzan/Ibzan as Boaz, who married Ruth.

In Judges 12: 8-10 we read: “After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem led Israel. He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He gave his daughters away in marriage to those outside his clan, and for his sons he brought in thirty young women as wives from outside his clan. Ibzan led Israel seven years. Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem.”

Apparently following local custom, Ibzan/Boaz made feasts when he married his children off. The custom was for guests to reciprocate and invite their former hosts to the feasts for their own children's marriages. Ibzan/Boaz did not invite Manoach (who would become father of Shimshon/Samson and who was married to a niece of Boaz) to his feasts.

The Talmud argues that because Boaz was aware that Manoach and his wife were barren, they could never reciprocate and invite Boaz to their children’s weddings. So 60 times, Manoach and his wife miss out on these great festive occasions and are left at home humiliated.

Bava Batra 91a relates that as a punishment, Ivtzan/Boaz saw all 60 of those children die in his lifetime.

Thus, when in her old age, Manoach’s wife gives birth, she and her husband, Manoach name the child ‘Better than 60’ i.e. Shimson/Samson.

So the arrogance and petty-mindedness of Ibzan/Boaz results in a ‘eye for an eye’ type of consequence. The measure he receives as a consequence for his lack of charity though seems harsh to us. However, perhaps such suffering also helped develop the great character of this man, so that when Ruth arrived he acted with great kindness, restraint and consideration towards her. Ultimately, he was greatly rewarded with his lineage giving rise to King David and the Messiah!

It appears that Boaz is a fairly old man when Ruth arrives in Bethlehem (possibly still with several wives, but probably no sons left). Note that the Tanakh quotes Boaz as stating to Ruth (who was clearly still quite young): “May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.” (Ruth 3:10).

If the Jewish commentary is correct then, Obed (the father of Jesse/Yishai, the father of King David) becomes the heir of Boaz’s wealth and position.

Now consider Shimshon/Samson though. The Talmud also explains that God has treated Shimson measure for measure. Shimshon misuses his eyes to chase Gentile unbelievers - Philistine women, and is ultimately blinded by the very same Philistines (see Sota, p9).

So now you may be a little better prepared to reconsider the ‘eye for an eye’ texts in the Tanakh (Ex 21:24; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21).

While there are also some contextual issues to consider here, the crucial issue is that the Jewish people never took this text as totally literal.

The sages and Rabbis took this as 'measure for measure' and interpret the verse simply: "Full compensation must be paid for the loss of an eye, a tooth, a hand or a foot." No Jew/Israeli ever had his eye punched out, or tooth punched out, or hand or foot cut off, by the judges and local sanhedrin. The words used are merely a Hebrew idiom (another example of the Hebraic mindset), meaning that fair and reasonable compensation is to be paid to the injured person in proportion to the damage caused.

- The story of Samson & Boaz related here is one of a great many very interesting stories related by Yossi Maimon in *'Discover The Land Of Israel: A guided Tour In Biblical Israel With Talmud and Midrash'*.

Case Study 2: Three darts for three hearts

King David's son Absalom/Avshalom (meaning father of peace) rebel's against his father so that he can become King of Israel. He uses deceit to win his Kingship but is ultimately paid back measure for measure.

To quote Yossi Maimon:

"Avshalom used his attractive appearance as a tool to manipulate and control the people of Israel. Now his hair is being used, measure for measure, to hang him on a tree (2Samuel 14:25-26; 18:9,10)...."

Why was Avshalom struck in the heart with three darts? The Talmud tells us that the three darts are, measure for measure, for the three hearts Avshalom betrays. (Sota 9)

First Avshalom steals his father's heart, when he tricks him into writing a letter for the people to help him, though he is really planning to use the letter to turn the people against his father.

The second heart he steals is the heart of the elders of Israel - using his father's letter deceptively.

The third heart he steals is the heart of the common people of Israel. When the people are about to be judged by King David, Avshalom tells them that they will not be treated justly and only if he were the judge, would they receive justice.

When any man had a suit which should come to the king for judgment, Avshalom said to him: "See, your matters are good and right, but there is no man authorized by the king to hear you. If I were judge in the land, every man who had any suit or cause might come to me and I would do him justice!"

So Avshalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. (2 Samuel 15)"

These few examples may help you appreciate that the 'eye for an eye' commandment in the Tanakh, was not and is not understood in a totally literal sense. While it is still a very important and relevant instruction from the Almighty (Torah = divine instructions or teaching), it was always understood in terms of equity, or fairness, and to also have a degree of context sensitivity.

Therefore, we can see that Yeshua was declaring most clearly and succinctly that the understanding of 'measure for measure' was a correct interpretation of Torah when he stated: *"... and with the measure you use it will be measured to you."*