

The Owner's Manual

The Law of Moses...

What is it, and what are we supposed to do with it?

By

Ken Power



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The Owner's Manual

*What Every Christian should know about
The Law of Moses*

Volume One

By

Ken Power



Chapter 1

Instructions and Signs

It's one of the stickiest conundrums in Scripture: are we today supposed to keep the Mosaic Law, or aren't we? On the one hand, He gave Moses hundreds of specific instructions that govern everything from how to approach Almighty God to what to do if a wall develops a stain that won't go away. On the other hand, the New Covenant scriptures clearly teach that the Law is powerless to deliver us from the curse of sin. What does Yahweh want us to do?

Some today would say (with ample scriptural backing) that we are no longer expected to keep the Law—that Yahshua's sacrifice on Calvary did away with these requirements. Others would insist (with ample scriptural backing) that these are the unabrogated precepts of the Eternal God, recorded for our benefit and enlightenment, the observation of which is essential if we wish to lead a life pleasing to Yahweh.

A third group of believers—the vast majority—has only a vague idea that something called “the Law of Moses” or the “Torah” even exists. They have no clear concept of what it prescribes, what it will do for them, or what will happen if they don't “keep it.” As a former member of group three, whose daily life betrays an affinity to group one but whose conscience (or is that the Spirit?) constantly prods him toward group two, I have no facile answers for you. I'm convinced, however, that the solution will present itself if we prayerfully take a close look at the “Laws” themselves in light of the balance of scripture. The New Testament has quite a bit to say about how the Law of Moses functions in the post-resurrection world. Now and then in our study, we'll take a break from the list of “laws” to delve into relevant commentary from the Apostles, Prophets, and indeed, from Yahshua Himself.

First, however, we need to define our terminology and discuss our sources. The Hebrew word we translate “law” is *torah*. Strong's defines it as: “a precept or statute, especially the Decalogue [the Ten Commandments] or Pentateuch [the five books of Moses]—law.” But there's more to it than that. Here's Baker and

Carpenter's definition: "*torah*: a feminine noun meaning instruction, direction, law, the whole Law. It comes from the verb *yarah*, which has as one of its major meanings, to teach, to instruct. The noun means instruction in a general way from God.... It is used regularly to depict priestly instruction in general or as a whole.... The term takes on the meaning of law in certain settings.... [It is] used as a summary term of various bodies of legal, cultic, or civil instructions.... The word can refer to a single law—for example, the law of the burnt offering."

It is clear, then, that the spirit of the word *torah* leans less toward rigid legality than it does toward instruction. It is less a laundry list of dos and don'ts than it is a prescription for successful living—an Owner's Manual, if you will, directing us toward our Creator's intended purpose and function.

Perhaps stretching that metaphor a bit will help to clarify things. My car's owner's manual includes a "*torah*" that says I am to get the oil changed every 3,000 miles using a particular type of lubricant. If I do that "religiously" I will have "kept the law" of the oil change. But I have to keep the *whole* law. If I use the right oil but wait until I've driven 30,000 miles, or if I get the car lubed on schedule but use Aunt Jemima's Pancake Syrup instead of Mobil One, I have "broken the law" of the oil change, even though I have actually kept part of it. Now here's the question: who gets hurt if I break the law of the oil change? *I do*—I have shortened my engine's life to some degree or caused it to run at less than optimum efficiency. Thus breaking the "law" carries a penalty with it. But does "god" (in this case, the Chairman of General Motors) get hurt? No. Even if he were omniscient—somehow knowing that I'd gone past my 3,000-mile schedule—all he might feel would be sadness or disgust because in some distant way it's a poor reflection on him if my car falls apart in months instead of decades. Does he *want* me to follow the instructions? Of course he does. That's why they were provided. But they are there for *my* benefit, not his.

The foregoing metaphor is admittedly oversimplified. God's Torah goes far beyond keeping our bodies healthy. Quite a bit of it has no temporal value whatsoever, but is there purely for its instructional significance—its spiritual value. Do you remember the old movie *The Karate Kid*? The kid wanted to learn karate moves from the old master, but ended up out back waxing cars: *wax on, wax off*. He didn't realize until later that going through the motions of waxing the cars was in fact training him in martial arts maneuvers. Much of the Torah is like that. It's full of rituals, holidays, feasts, and offerings that don't seem to do much for anybody in the near term. As rules go, they're not as "practical" as (for example) the one instructing us not to eat buzzards. Rather, they're there to teach us specific things about Yahweh's plan of redemption, the depth of His love for us, and His schedule—His to-do list. They're prophecy, if you will, most of which was fulfilled in the atoning sacrifice of Yahshua the Messiah.

Because the Torah is less a list of rules than it is an instruction manual from our Maker, it should come as no surprise that coming up with a straightforward inventory of all the “Laws of Moses” is easier said than done. Both Christians and Jews include the Pentateuch in their scriptures, but since Christians (to our detriment) pay comparatively little attention to the Torah, we will defer to the Jews in the matter of coming up with a definitive list. Have they done this? (Does the pope wear a funny hat?)

The most widely accepted listing is that of Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, a.k.a. Maimonides, a.k.a. the Rambam (1135-1204 A.D.). A physician from Moorish Cordoba, Maimonides eventually became a leader in the Jewish community in Cairo. He was deeply influenced by Aristotle and Greek thought in general. Maimonides authored the massive *Mishneh Torah*, a compilation of every conceivable topic of Jewish law, arranged by subject. It provided contemporary Jews with an easy-to-understand plain-language rendition of the prevailing view of the Torah’s meaning. The rabbis of his day, of course, didn’t appreciate the fact that the *Mishneh Torah* went a long way toward demystifying the Talmud—encroaching on their territory, as it were. There’s nothing like a good old-fashioned mystery religion to keep the sheeple in line and paying their salaries.

The *Babylonian Talmud* (in tractate Makkoth 23b) asserts that according to Rabbi Simlai, the Torah contains 613 *mitzvot*. (“*Mitzvot*” is the plural of *mitzvah*, meaning “precept,” from *tzavah*: “to command.”) Of these, 248 are *mitzvot aseh* (positive commandments)—equal to the number of bones in the human body (okay, so he missed it by a tad: an infant has 275 bones, and some of these fuse together as he grows, making a total of 206 in the adult human)—and 365 *mitzvot lo taaseh* (negative commandments)—equal to the number of days in the solar year. With the Midrash, the Talmud calculates that the numerical value (gematria) of the word Torah is 611, so one might (following this tortured line of reasoning) expect there to be 611 laws, or *mitzvot*. Au contraire! The Torah itself states that Moses transmitted the Law (presumably this first 611 *mitzvot*) from God to the Jewish people: “**Moses commanded a law for us, a heritage of the congregation of Jacob.**” (Deuteronomy 33:4). And God *Himself* directly delivered two more *mitzvot*—the first two of the Ten Commandments, phrased in the first Person—directly, written with His own finger upon tablets of stone. The grand total is thus $611+2 = 613$. Get used to this kind of convoluted, unfounded logic—a sure sign that the men foisting it upon us have something to hide. We’re going to see a lot of it in the coming pages.

Anyway, Maimonides accordingly formulated a list of precisely 613 laws comprising the “Jewish Law,” or *halakhah*. (Of course, if you worked at it, you could identify thousands. The 613 target is a transparently man-made construct.) Others have compiled similar lists, but that of Maimonides is considered the most

“authoritative.” As we’ve seen, some mitzvot are positive (“do this”), and some are negative (“don’t do this”). Some apply only within Israel, some apply only to specific populations or within specific historical timeframes, and some are universal. Some cannot be observed today because they relate to the Temple, its sacrifices and services (since the Temple does not exist at the present time). And the criminal procedures mandated in the Torah can’t be performed because the theocratic state of Israel is no longer extant—and hasn’t been for two and a half millennia. Anybody who tells you that he’s keeping the Torah today is lying to you. It can’t be done. Those Jews who claim to adhere to the Torah today are generally using Maimonides’ list, not the Torah. They accept it as authoritative. Therefore, we will be using it as the roadmap for our study, a convenient structural skeleton to flesh out with Yahweh’s actual instructions. The telling little differences and ominous gaps will become apparent as we proceed.

An excellent resource for all things “Judaic” is www.jewfaq.org, home of “Judaism 101,” a vast repository of information on the subject. Its author, Tracey R. Rich, has some cogent things to say about the “keeping of the Law.” He writes, “Judaism is not just a set of beliefs about G-d [he means God, a title for deity translated from the Hebrew *El* or *Elohim*—heaven forbid he should use “God’s” actual name, Yahweh], man and the universe. Judaism is a comprehensive way of life, filled with rules and practices that affect every aspect of life: what you do when you wake up in the morning, what you can and cannot eat, what you can and cannot wear, how to groom yourself, how to conduct business, who you can marry, how to observe the holidays and Shabbat, and perhaps most important, how to treat G-d, other people, and animals. This set of rules and practices is known as *halakhah*. The word ‘halakhah’ is usually translated as ‘Jewish Law.’ A more literal translation might be ‘the path that one walks.’ The word is derived from the Hebrew root *heh-lamed-kaf*, meaning to go, to walk, or to travel.”

He continues: “Some non-Jews and non-observant Jews criticize this legalistic aspect of traditional Judaism, saying that it reduces the religion to a set of rituals devoid of spirituality. While there are certainly some Jews who observe halakhah in this way, that is not the intention of halakhah, and it is not even the correct way to observe halakhah. On the contrary, when properly observed, halakhah increases the spirituality in a person’s life because it turns the most trivial, mundane acts, such as eating and getting dressed, into acts of religious significance. When people write to me and ask how to increase their spirituality or the influence of their religion in their lives, the only answer I can think of is: observe more halakhah. Keep kosher or light Shabbat candles; pray after meals or once or twice a day. When you do these things, you are constantly reminded of your faith, and it becomes an integral part of your entire existence.”

Just when he seems to be getting near the heart of Yahweh in the matter, Rich swerves off course. Yes, the mitzvot were designed to draw their observer into a closer relationship with Yahweh. But they were never intended to be an end in themselves. The path to deeper spirituality is not to smother God's influence under a mountain of religious minutiae—it is, rather, to open your heart to God's will and teaching. Seeking for "religious significance" is the surest way to obfuscate the one-on-One relationship Yahweh is seeking to establish and maintain with us.

We can be drawn closer to Yahweh via the Torah only because it is *His* precepts, *His* instructions. So Mr. Rich's explanation of what constitutes the halakhah is truly heartbreaking: "Halakhah is made up of mitzvot from the Torah *as well as laws instituted by the rabbis and long-standing customs*. All of these have the status of Jewish law and all are equally binding." I would beg to differ. For that matter, so would Yahshua: "**He answered and said to [the Pharisees and scribes], 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.'** He said to them, 'All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.'" (Mark 7:6-9) I submit to you that "laws instituted by the rabbis and long-standing customs" carry no weight at all; only God's word counts. Thus although we will employ Maimonides' list of mitzvot as an organizational starting point, the Torah will be our sole authority in this study.

Does this mean that I think the scholars of Judaism can have nothing to bring to the party? Not necessarily. If and when a Jew acknowledges his Messiah, when he becomes a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, he is in a position to add depth to our knowledge of God's will. As Yahshua said, "**Every teacher of religious law who has become a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a person who brings out of the storehouse the new teachings as well as the old.**" (Matthew 13:52) The best example we have of this is undoubtedly the Apostle Paul. Therefore we will, from time to time, consult with this learned rabbi. His writings are our clearest expositions on how the Law of Moses relates to the practice of Christianity. As we shall see, they are a hand in a glove, two sides of the same coin, part A and part B of the spiritual epoxy that Yahweh has given us to hold our mortal lives together as we live here awaiting the return of His Messiah in glory.



A few notes on our format: the order of this version of the Rambam's list is courtesy of Judaism 101; I find Mr. Rich's order and grouping system more logical than those of Maimonides (who listed affirmative and negative mitzvot in separate places, regardless of their subject matter). The mitzvot are not necessarily listed in order of their importance (although there are some critically foundational entries near the top of the list). A summary of each rabbinical mitzvah is shown in italics at the beginning of the entry. These mitzvot use a pronoun (e.g. "His") to identify Yahweh; I have replaced it with His actual self-revealed name. Each mitzvah is followed by the scripture(s) from the Torah that supports it, the words in bold. That's the part you really want to pay close attention to. Following all of that is my commentary. I am using Strong's (marked "S") and Baker and Carpenter's ("B&C") Hebrew dictionaries (among others) to help us define the salient words. Be aware that I have taken the liberty of abridging their definitions as needed for clarity.

GOD

- (1) *Know there is a God.* **"God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.'"** (Exodus 20:1-2, cf. Deuteronomy 5:6) The very first mitzvah is the most basic of all, and the heart of the First Commandment: the realization that there is indeed a supreme being who is personally involved in our lives. The rabbis suppressed an essential element of this, however, in refusing to acknowledge His name, Yahweh (or Yahuweh), a failing that is reflected in virtually every English translation, where He is erroneously called "The Lord." The point is that the God who brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt is the One True God, whose self-revealed name, Yahweh (literally, "I Am"), indicates His eternal, self-existent nature. His provision of salvation extends beyond Israel: all of us can be "brought out of the house of bondage," if only we will accept His gift. Yahweh is not only our Creator; He is our Emancipator. Moreover, the rabbinical emphasis on knowing that God exists, rather than knowing Him personally by name, sucks all the life out of the mitzvah. As James put it, **"You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!"** (James 2:19) It doesn't do you much good to know *about* God if you don't *know* Him.

However, once we come to terms with the fact that God exists and that we owe our existence and allegiance to Him, the obvious question—the question that precipitated this study and thousands like it—is: **"What does God want us to do?"** God Himself provided a succinct answer to this question when Yahshua said, **"This is what God wants you to do: Believe in the one he has sent."** (John 6:28-29 NLT) Again, it's not just acquiescence to the fact of His

existence, but a trusting belief, a personal relationship. A child may be aware that his friend's father exists, but he *believes in* his own father.

- (2) *Do not entertain thoughts of other gods besides Yahweh.* **“You shall have no other gods before Me.”** (Exodus 20:3) This is the payoff line of the first commandment, the whole point of Yahweh identifying Himself by name, so there would be no mistaking Him for other locally worshipped gods (Ba'al, for example, whose name, not coincidentally, meant “the Lord”). A “god” in this context, however, isn't restricted to carved idols in Caanan: it is anything or anyone we place before Yahweh in our affections and devotion. And the “You” here isn't restricted to Israel, though they would be the only people to be entrusted with His name for some time. He's instructing all of us: worship Yahweh alone. Put nothing ahead of Him.
- (3) *Do not blaspheme.* **“You shall not revile God.”** (Exodus 22:28) There is a penalty for doing so: **“Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. And whoever blasphemes the name of Yahweh shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of Yahweh, he shall be put to death.’”** (Leviticus 24:15-16) “Revile” and “curse” are the same Hebrew word: *qalal*. It means “to be or to make light (literally swift, small, sharp, etc., or figuratively easy, trifling, vile)—to abate, bring into contempt, curse, or despise” (S). B&C say the verb means “to be slight, to be trivial, to be swift. The basic idea of this word is lightness. In it's most simple meaning, it referred to the easing of a burden, lightening judgment, lessening labor, or lightening a ship.... When describing an event or a circumstance, it means trivial. In many instances it is used to describe speaking lightly of another or cursing another person, people cursing God, or God cursing people.” Blasphemy uses a different word, *naqab*, meaning “to puncture, to perforate, or figuratively, to libel—blaspheme, bore, curse, express, pierce, strike through.” (S)

Yahweh is being very specific here. He who thinks lightly of God, he who would shrug off the weight of Yahweh's glory from his life, refusing to take Him seriously, shall bear (literally, lift or carry) his sin (*chet*: a crime or offense). The lack of appropriate reverence will *in itself* be a heavy burden to him, because man must bear one thing or another: love for Yahweh or the curse of sin. That's why Yahshua invited us to **“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”** (Matthew 11:29-30) The “heavy burden” we put down when we become “yoked” with Yahshua is sin itself. If you yoke an impala with an ox, you *know* who's going to be doing all the work.

In contrast, speaking out in direct opposition to Yahweh—*naqab*: libeling and verbally lashing out at Him—carries a more direct and immediate punishment: death by stoning. This penalty was to be carried out by “the congregation,” that is, the children of Israel in their theocratic assembly, so the penalty cannot be meted out today. But the lesson is clear. Slandering Yahweh is a heinous offence, one worthy of death. The difference between *qalal* and *naqab* is that of spiritual indifference vs. false teaching—the first merely hurts us; the second endangers those around us—something Yahweh despises.

- (4) *Sanctify Yahweh’s Name.* **“I will be hallowed among the children of Israel. I am Yahweh who sanctifies you.”** (Leviticus 22:32) There’s an exchange or reciprocation here that gets lost in the English. “Hallow” and “sanctify” are the same word in Hebrew: *qadash*. It means, “to be clean (i.e., to make, pronounce or observe as clean, ceremonially or morally)—to appoint, consecrate, dedicate, hallow; to be or keep holy [that is, set apart], prepare, proclaim, purify, or sanctify” (S). B&C define it as “a verb meaning to set apart, to be holy, to show oneself holy, to be treated as holy, to dedicate, to be made holy, to declare holy or consecrated, to behave or act holy, or to dedicate oneself.” Gee, I guess we’d better look up “holy.” It’s a related word, *godesh*, meaning a sacred place or thing—a consecrated, dedicated, or hallowed thing, holiness, sacredness; something set aside for sacred use, not to be put into common or profane use. Here’s what Yahweh is saying then: “I have set Israel apart for My sacred purpose—the salvation of the world through the atoning sacrifice of My Messiah, who will come through Israel. Therefore, it is essential that Israel in turn holds Me to be holy and sacred—not one god among many, but the sole deity of the universe.” There is also a prophetic aspect to this. When Yahweh says, “I *will be* hallowed among the children of Israel,” He means it. Though they have in fact turned their backs on Him for almost three millennia now, their eventual national repentance and restoration is predicted in hundreds of Old Covenant passages. It is, in fact, the most often repeated prophetic theme in the entire Bible.
- (5) *Do not profane Yahweh’s Name.* **“I am Yahweh. You shall not profane My holy name.”** (Leviticus 22:31-32) This is roughly the same thought as the previous mitzvah, “Sanctify His name” (#4), but stated as a negative. In the worst sort of misinterpretation imaginable, the rabbis eventually twisted this to say in effect, “You shall not *use* My holy name (for fear of profaning it).” It’s like my “law-of-the-oil-change” metaphor: I could decide that the only way I could be absolutely sure of not exceeding the recommended mileage was never to start the engine. I would be keeping the “law,” of course, but in the process my car would become a useless piece of expensive junk to me—which is sort of what Judaism without Yahweh is to the Jews.

There are a few words we need to examine to get the full import of this. First, “name.” The Hebrew word is *shem*: “an appellation, as a mark or memorial of individuality; by implication honor, authority, character—name, renown, or report.” (S). It is what you are called, to be sure, but it also implies your reputation; it reflects your character. In the case of Yahweh, His *shem* speaks not of being our lord or owner, but of being eternally self-existent: it means “I am,” an infinitely more majestic concept. Thus by replacing “Yahweh” with “the Lord” in speech or writing, we *automatically* profane His holy name. And what does “profane” mean? The Hebrew *chalal* denotes “properly to bore, that is, by implication, to wound, to dissolve; figuratively to profane (a person, place or thing), to break one’s word, defile, pollute, prostitute, slay, sorrow, stain, or wound” (S). Not a very pretty word. But when we hold Yahweh’s name and character to be something common, something less than sacred to us, we do all these things to his name. We can’t wound Yahweh, of course, but we can defile His *shem*, His reputation, among our fellow men—most dramatically if we deny His very existence by refusing to speak His name. That’s what this mitzvah warns against. How horribly ironic it is that the very people tasked by Yahweh to transmit His name to the world have systematically profaned it through neglect.

- (6) *Know that Yahweh is One.* **“Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one!”** (Deuteronomy 6:4) When Christians sing of a “God in three persons, Holy Trinity,” knowledgeable Jews think of this verse and throw up their hands in disgust—as well they should. Maybe it’s semantic nitpicking, but the fact is, there is *one* God, not three divine persons. His name is Yahweh. The Holy Spirit living within us is Yahweh. And the Messiah, Yahshua of Nazareth, is Yahweh’s human manifestation—voluntarily bereft of one or more of the dimensions that ordinarily make His deity impossible for mortal man to comprehend or relate to. The word for “one” here is the Hebrew *’echad*, meaning “united, alike, alone, altogether, first, one, only, or together.” (S) This word makes it clear that God is not restricted to a single form or manifestation: He is a “unity,” not a “singularity.” So it’s clear that calling the Messiah Immanuel—“God with us”—is not a problem in Yahweh’s theology. Yahshua and Yahweh are in no way separate “persons”: He is united, together, alone as deity—Yahweh is One.
- (7) *Love Yahweh.* **“You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”** (Deuteronomy 6:5) In a fascinating historical account, the Bible records the deeds of one king of Judah who was said to have done this—just one, and it wasn’t David; it was Josiah. Read his story in II Kings 23. He was what we today would call a religious extremist, a narrow-minded, intolerant, and politically incorrect radical fundamentalist who “turned to Yahweh” (verse 25) with every fiber of his being, doing

everything he could to keep his countrymen from following the false teaching prevalent in his day. According to this commandment, that's what we are supposed to do—every one of us. Yahshua identified this as the “first and great” commandment of the Torah, one of only two upon which all of the truth of scripture depended (see Matthew 22:36-40) I should note, however, that in the end, our love of Yahweh is an outgrowth of our personal relationship with Him; it's not a magic pill to cure the world's ills: Josiah's fever did not permanently stem the tide of apostasy in Judah, and our corporate end is a prophetic *fait accompli* as well. We are not called to force people to behave themselves; we are called to love Yahweh.

- (8) *Fear Yahweh.* “**You shall fear Yahweh your God.**” (Deuteronomy 10:20, cf. Deuteronomy 6:13) The obvious question is, what does “fear” mean—to be “afraid of,” or to “respect”? Actually, it's both, though leaning heavily toward the latter. The Hebrew word is *yare*. Strong's defines it: “to fear; morally to revere; causatively to frighten—affright, be or make afraid, to dread, (to be held in) reverence.” B&C expand this: “A verb meaning to fear, to respect, to reverence, to be afraid, to be awesome, to be feared, to make afraid, to frighten.” The Greek verb *phobeo* (Luke 12:5) carries exactly the same dual connotation.

In light of the command to love Yahweh and in view of His constantly demonstrated love toward us, it's obvious that God doesn't want dread or terror to define our relationship. So we naturally lean toward the “respect” or “reverence” definitions. But there's more to it. I think the key to the conundrum is in the common New Testament characterization of Yahweh as our “heavenly Father.” (He is called our Father very few times in the Old Covenant scriptures. In Isaiah 9:6, the Messiah is clearly in view: “**Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**” And in Deuteronomy 32:6 the Messianic act of redemption is stressed: “**Do you thus deal [perversely] with Yahweh, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?**”) If we see our relationship with Yahweh as small children (ideally) see their loving fathers, an accurate picture of “fear” emerges: Father is awesome, big and powerful; He uses His power to protect us and provide for us, so it's obvious that He loves us. His authority is unquestioned, and as long as we respect that authority we will see nothing but His “good side.” But if we defy Him, he will become angry and raise His voice (a terrifying prospect), and if we willfully disobey Him, He might even spank us (and believe me, brothers and sisters, we *don't* want that to happen!)

- (9) *Do not put the word of God to the test.* “**You shall not tempt [i.e., test] Yahweh your God as you tempted Him in Massah.**” (Deuteronomy 6:16) What happened

at Massah? In Exodus 17 we read that a few months after they left Egypt, Yahweh led the Israelites to Rephidim, where there was no water to drink (or so they thought). The prospect of dying of thirst should have led them to enquire of Yahweh. But instead, it turned them into a riotous mob threatening to stone Moses. So God instructed him to take some of the elders (as witnesses) to Horeb (which means “desolate”) and strike the rock there. Moses did this, and an abundant water supply gushed out—plenty for a million thirsty Israelites and their flocks. The people were saved, but Moses named the place Massah (literally, “temptation”) to commemorate their lack of faith.

The incident sheds some badly needed light on what it means to “tempt” or “test” Yahweh. Note first that they didn’t simply inform Moses that there was no water in that place so he could petition Yahweh about it. They angrily questioned his motives (verse 3) while ignoring the fact that Yahweh Himself, who had recently demonstrated His power on their behalf a dozen times, was leading them. Their sandals were still squishy from their little stroll across the floor of the Red Sea and they had dined sumptuously on quail and manna-cotti, but they still didn’t bother to ask God for help. Second, notice that this all happened *before* the “Law” was given, so failure to keep the rules of the Torah was not what “tried” God. Third, the incident (as we can see in retrospect) was a dress rehearsal for the crucifixion of the Messiah: by striking God’s Rock (see I Corinthians 10:4) before the elders of Israel, life was given to the world. The next time they came to a similar situation, Moses was instructed to *speak* to the rock (Numbers 20:7-13) but he lost his temper and struck it a couple of times with his rod instead—goofing up the picture of how we can now petition the Rock of our Salvation in prayer.

The word “tempt” is from the Hebrew *nasah*: to test, try, prove, or assay. At issue is our faith: we are not to demand that Yahweh perform for us—to show us signs and wonders because of our unbelief, just to prove that He’s there. Yahshua flatly stated that only an “evil and adulterous generation” would ask for such a sign. In the context of established belief, however, it’s another matter: the example of Gideon’s fleece (Judges 6:36-40) demonstrates the proper attitude. And in Malachi 3:8-10 Yahweh specifically challenges Israel to test Him in the matter of tithing—again, a testing based on trust, not unbelief.

- (10) *Imitate Yahweh’s good and upright ways.* **“Yahweh will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of Yahweh your God and walk in His ways.”** (Deuteronomy 28:9) As is often the case with these mitzvot, the rabbis have tweaked the words of God to say

something different, something that fits their agenda a bit better. Yahweh didn't actually tell them to imitate or emulate Him. We are to be godly, not god-like. What does it mean to "walk in His ways?" *Halak* is a "verb meaning to go, to come, to walk. This common word carries with it the basic idea of movement: the flowing of a river, the descending of floods, etc. The word is also used metaphorically to speak of the pathways (i.e., behavior) of life." (B&C) "Ways" picks up on the metaphor. *Derek* means "path, journey, way, the path that is traveled. The word may refer to a physical path or road or to a journey along a road, but it more often refers metaphorically to the pathway of one's life, suggesting the pattern of life, whether obedient and righteous or wicked and in darkness." (B&C)

As we go through life, then, we are to follow the path Yahweh has clearly set before us in His Scriptures. Significantly, the text for this mitzvah was taken from a long and painful recounting of how Israel would be blessed only if they "walked in His ways" and cursed if they did not—a list of dozens of very specific consequences for national obedience or unbelief. The subsequent history of Israel demonstrates that they stubbornly refused to "walk in His ways" through most of their existence, and they suffered greatly as a result. It didn't have to be like that.

TORAH

- (11) *Honor the old and the wise.* **"You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am Yahweh."** (Leviticus 19:32) The children of Israel didn't really have to be told to honor their elders. They normally did that anyway; it was engrained into their traditions. (We have regrettably forgotten this in today's youth-oriented culture.) What we need to notice here is that Yahweh connected respect for our fathers with reverence for Himself. Why do you suppose our Creator built us with such a convoluted reproductive process? Why a mother *and* a father, requiring such sophisticated plumbing, such a long gestation period, and such a prolonged and nurture-intensive childhood? It's because He wanted us to have the same deep kind of parent-child relationship with Him. If we see him merely as "Lord" we will miss the loving, mentoring aspects of a relationship between a father and son, or between a teacher and pupil. Wisdom is a hard-won commodity; we should value it above strength or beauty. And the wisdom of Yahweh is to be valued above the best human understanding.
- (12) *Learn the Torah and teach it.* **"These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."** (Deuteronomy 6:7) Deuteronomy is a series of sermons Moses

delivered to the nation of Israel immediately before they were to enter the Promised Land. It is a restatement and summation of the instructions Yahweh had given them during the wilderness wanderings. This admonition comes directly on the heels of two of the most fundamental mitzvot: to know that God is One (#6) and to love Him (#7), and it comes shortly after a full recounting of the Ten Commandments. Moses is saying that God's word should not be an inconvenient interruption to their daily lives (i.e., something to be practiced only on Sabbaths and holidays), but rather woven into the very fabric of their existence, second nature, a way of life. It is to be discussed, taught, and meditated upon, as much a part of life as the air we breathe. Moreover, we are not to leave our children's education concerning Yahweh's commandments in the hands of others, but we are to teach them with our own lips and demonstrate them with our own actions.

- (13) *Cleave to those who know Him.* **“You shall fear Yahweh your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast.”** (Deuteronomy 10:20) Confused? You should be. The passage says to cleave to Yahweh, not to “those who know Him.” What gives? This is a case of man's law attempting to supersede God's. The Talmud, believe it or not, states that cleaving to scholars is equivalent to cleaving to God. *Oh really?* This phony mitzvah might have a shred of credence (not really) if it were coming from someone other than the scholars themselves; as it is, it's merely a confession of damnable arrogance, the kind Yahshua railed against in Mark 7:6-9, quoted above. So let's start over: *Cleave to Yahweh.* Yeah, that's more like it. “Cleave” is the Hebrew *dabaq*: “to cling to, join with, stay with. It is used of something sticking to or clinging to something else.... It depicts relationships created as an act of joining together, to follow.” (B&C) We are to stick to Yahweh as if our lives depended on it (because they do), following wherever He leads us. That being said, let us not forget the admonition: **“Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”** (Hebrews 10:24-25) If we're all cleaving to Yahweh, we'll all be together, won't we?
- (14) *Do not add to the commandments of the Torah, whether in the Written Law or in its interpretation received by tradition.* **“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for Yahweh your God is testing you to know whether you love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”** (Deuteronomy 13:1-3) The whole second half of this mitzvah is a perfect example of what the first half (the part actually supported by the scriptural

text) is warning against. The mitzvah should simply read: *Do not add to the commandments of the Torah.* Period. Do not add other scriptures (e.g. the Talmud) or “interpretation received by tradition,” a.k.a. the Oral Law (e.g. the Mishna). And what was supposed to happen to the one who added to the commandments of the Torah? **“That prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from Yahweh your God.”** (Deuteronomy 13:5) The rabbis who took it upon themselves to declare their interpretations of equal (or greater) weight with Yahweh’s words should have been stoned on the spot.

- (15) *Do not take away from the commandments of the Torah.* **“If there arises among you a prophet [who says], ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet.”** (Deuteronomy 13:1-3) This is the converse of the previous mitzvah, supported by the same scripture (edited here, ironically—[see #14](#)) Yahshua gave a good example of how the Pharisees (read: rabbinical scholars) did precisely that. **“He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’ and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban’—(that is, a gift to God), ‘then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.’”** (Mark 7:9-13) You have to read between the lines to see what’s happening here: the rabbis had devised a “wealth preservation” scheme that *legally* allowed selfish Jews to shirk their budget-bending family responsibilities, in direct defiance of the spirit of the Torah. Well did Yahweh say through the prophet Hosea, **“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.”** (Hosea 4:6). This was written to people who thought that by keeping their own traditions they were observing the “law of their God.” How wrong you can be.
- (16) *Every person shall write a scroll of the Torah for himself.* **“Yahweh said to Moses... [v.16] ‘Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel.’”** (Deuteronomy 31:19) Once again, the rabbis have seen something that just isn’t there—thereby adding to the Torah ([see #14](#)). As I said, the book of Deuteronomy is a series of sermons, and Moses had been the one preaching them. Here Yahweh was instructing Moses to write down for posterity what he had just finished saying—his obedience is recorded in verses 9, 22, and 24, and it’s confirmed by the obvious fact that we still have his words to this day. Yahweh uses the plural pronoun

“yourselves” because Moses is about to die: Joshua’s role is in view. God had just gotten through telling them how badly the children of Israel would fail in the coming years. The written record Moses and Joshua were to produce would remind future Jews that they had been warned in no uncertain terms to “cleave to Yahweh.” **“This song will testify against them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants.”** (Deuteronomy 31:21)

Okay, so it’s not a legitimate mitzvah (except for Moses and Joshua). Still, it seemed like a pretty good idea anyway for everybody to write down a copy of the Torah for themselves, doesn’t it? At first glance, maybe. But think about it. These were the children of ex-slaves. They had been wandering in the wilderness all their lives. The majority of them were semi-literate at best and illiterate at worst. (The “officers,” a select group mentioned in Numbers 11:16, were *shoter*, scribes, making it clear that the general population were not literate.) The last thing Yahweh wanted was to have a couple of hundred thousand error-packed parchments floating around. His words are precise, and Paleo-Hebrew was not the simplest language ever invented.

SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

It’s no secret that Yahweh uses sign and symbols to communicate deeper truths than we would understand if He just stated everything in a matter-of-fact fashion. I believe, in fact, that most of the Torah is symbolic of something far greater than what appears on the surface: it all points, one way or another, to the coming of the Messiah in the role of our Redeemer. But the religious leaders of Yahshua’s day couldn’t see this. **“One day the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus’ claims by asking him to show them a miraculous sign from heaven. He replied, ‘You know the saying, “red sky at night means fair weather tomorrow, red sky in the morning means foul weather all day.” You are good at reading the weather signs in the sky, but you can’t read the obvious signs of the times! Only an evil, faithless generation would ask for a miraculous sign, but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah.’ Then Jesus left them and went away....”** The entire Torah had pointed directly to Him, but the religious leaders, being evil and faithless, couldn’t comprehend the signs God had already given them. Yahshua said He would offer only one more sign, that of the prophet Jonah: three days in the heart of the earth, followed by resurrection.

“Later, after they crossed to the other side of the lake, the disciples discovered they had forgotten to bring any food. ‘Watch out!’ Jesus warned them. ‘Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’ They decided he was saying this because they hadn’t brought any bread. Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he said, ‘You have so little faith! Why are you worried about having no food? Won’t you ever understand? Don’t you

remember the five thousand I fed with five loaves, and the baskets of food that were left over? Don't you remember the four thousand I fed with seven loaves, with baskets of food left over? How could you even think I was talking about food? So again I say, beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' Then at last they understood that he wasn't speaking about yeast or bread but about the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (Matthew 16:1-12 NLT) In finally grasping the significance of the symbol Yahshua has used (yeast or leaven representing sin), the disciples had been given a lesson in the nature of the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees: a stubborn rejection of the signs Yahweh had *already* given them concerning their Messiah.

As we look at these signs then, let us not fall into the same trap. Let us dig beneath the surface to explore what Yahweh was teaching us through his signs.

(17) *Circumcise your male offspring.* "God said to Abraham: 'As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised (*mul*); and you shall be circumcised (*namal*) in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised (*Arel*) male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.'" (Genesis 17:9-12) "Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, saying: "If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child... on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.'" (Leviticus 12:1-3) The surgical removal of the foreskin of the male penis was said to be a sign of the covenant Yahweh made with Abraham. The eighth-day rule, by the way, is astounding confirmation that Yahweh knows how we're built because He built us. The blood's clotting mechanism for an infant doesn't fully stabilize until the eighth day after birth. The obvious question is: why would God require a surgical alteration to a part of the human male anatomy that any urologist will tell you was flawlessly—even ingeniously—designed to begin with? Some assert that there are hygienic advantages to circumcision, but the evidence for that is far from conclusive. Indeed, it may even result in a mitigation of sexual response to some small degree. So what gives?

The answer again is in the words themselves. The word used for the act of circumcision is *namal*: "to become clipped; to be cut down or off." (S)

But there is an entirely different word used for the state of *being* circumcised: *mul* is “a verb meaning to cut short, to cut off.... To “circumcise the heart” was to remove the hardness of heart and to love God. Used in the causative sense, the verb gives the meaning to cut off, to destroy.” (B&C) We gain a bit more insight when we consider the alternative. The word for “uncircumcised” is *arel*, which comes from a verb meaning “to consider uncircumcised, forbidden, to be exposed. It indicates setting aside or apart as not available for regular use.” (B&C) Circumcision, then, signified that the barrier of sin that separated us from Yahweh had been removed, cut off, destroyed—a process that involved blood and pain, but one that made us available for God’s use.

Paul alludes to this quintessential sign of God’s covenant with man: **“When you came to Christ, you were ‘circumcised,’ but not by a physical procedure. It was a spiritual procedure—the cutting away of your sinful nature. For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to a new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins. He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ’s cross. In this way, God disarmed the evil rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross of Christ.”** (Colossians 2:11-15 NLT)

It should also be noted that just as physical circumcision was an irreversible procedure (there was no way to regain or replace one’s foreskin), so is spiritual circumcision. When our sins are removed from us through our acceptance of the atoning power of the blood of the Messiah, there is no way our future sins can ever become part of us. Our sinful nature cannot be restored. It’s a strong argument for eternal security: once saved, always saved. The salient question becomes: are you indeed *mul*, or are you *arel* and faking it? Only an examination of our most private spiritual anatomy will tell the tale.

Because circumcision was to be sign, it was commanded to be implemented only by the people who were set apart to bear the signs: the Jews. In Acts 15, we are told quite plainly that gentile believers are not required to “become Jews” or to keep the mitzvot in the Torah (specifically including this one) as a precondition for following Yahshua. We will see this hundreds of times in the following pages: the children of Israel—and they alone—were set apart to bear the signs of Yahweh’s redemption throughout their generations. They are, through their rehearsal of the signs, the living testimony of Yahweh’s provision of life for all men. The gentile

believers, for their part, were to thankfully comprehend and heed what those signs meant, blessing the Jews for their role in delivering the message and the Savior to them.

- (18) *Put tsitzit on the corners of your clothing.* **“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of Yahweh and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. I am Yahweh your God.’”** (Numbers 15:37-41) Again, this is a sign through which Yahweh meant to convey an everlasting truth to the world, a sign the “children of Israel” alone were to bear. The word “tassels” is the Hebrew *tsiytsith*, or *tsitzit*, as it’s spelled nowadays. Yahweh Himself told us what this was all about. The tassels were to remind the wearers of His instructions (which is, not coincidentally, the whole point of this book). The idea was that an Israelite (being human) would be tempted to sin—to fall short of Yahweh’s holy standard—if he weren’t constantly reminded of God’s presence and provision for him. In other words, he might be tempted to take Yahweh lightly (see #3). So he was to attach these fringes with blue threads onto the corners of his garments. Every time the blue cord caught his eye, he would be reminded of Yahweh’s precepts.

Why blue? For one thing, it was almost the only game in town. Remember, the Israelites had no chemical or aniline dyes. The manmade part of their world was rather bland. Yellows were non-existent. The greens of nature weren’t stable as dyes. Their basic red pigment was iron oxide—a rusty brown, and scarlet or crimson (*toleah*) was apparently made from crushed crimson grubs—again, not a very vibrant color. But blue was doable—at a price. The cerulean mussel, the murex, yielded a blue or purple dye that was indelible and relatively bright. The terms blue and purple (Exodus 25:4) are both descriptive of a single ill-defined color derived from this source. Harvesting and processing the substance was a difficult and expensive proposition, however—thus for millennia purple was considered the color of royalty, who were the only people who could afford to wear it. Yahweh specified that a single thread in the *tsitzit* was to be dyed “blue.” It was a picture of Him whose unique and costly royal sacrifice would be required to purchase our salvation. (Modern orthodox Jews don’t include the blue thread in their *tsitzit* because they fear that the dye might not have come from the “right” species of cerulean mussel. So once again, they violate God’s law and the picture it paints so they can observe their man-made tradition instead. It’s so sad. By removing the blue thread, they’ve

removed the symbolism of the Messiah—they've subtracted *salvation* from their religion.)

Yashua, being a Jew (and one of royal blood), wore these *tsitzit* fringes: **"But as He went, the multitudes thronged Him. Now a woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any, came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped. And Jesus said, 'Who touched Me?'"** (Luke 8:42-45) This is a direct fulfillment of Malachi 4:2, where Yahweh said, **"To you who fear My name the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings."** A "wing" is a *kanaph*: an edge or extremity, a corner, flap, or border—a pretty good physical description of the *tsitzit*. When the woman touched His *tsitzit*; He asked who had touched Him—not His garment, but *Him*. The blue thread, as I said, was symbolic of the Messiah. After He had healed her, He said, **"Your faith has made you well. Go in peace."** He wasn't just talking about healing her body. It was her spirit that had been made whole, for as Malachi had specified, she revered (see #8) the name of Yahweh. That's the only way any of us may go in peace.

- (19) *Bind tefillin on the head.* **"These words which I command you today shall be in your heart.... They shall be as frontlets between the eyes."** (Deuteronomy 6:6-8) The rabbis twisted this simple simile into a hyper-literal directive that prescribed strapping onto the forehead a leather pouch (I kid you not) that contained a small piece of parchment, upon which was written a bit of scripture. This is the rough equivalent of trying to learn chemistry by sleeping with your textbook under your pillow: any idiot can see that it won't work. Yashua, of course, perceived their motivation: **"The scribes and the Pharisees...bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders (see #18) of their garments."** (Matthew 23:1-5) The word "phylacteries" (transliterated from the Greek phylacterion) comes from a verb (*phulasso*) that means to watch, to be on guard; by implication, to preserve or save. (S) The idea is that of an amulet, which is precisely how the Pharisees thought of the *tefillin*.

Yahweh had no such thing in mind. He wanted us to put His word *in* our heads, not *on* them. Nevertheless, it's an interesting phrase, "frontlets between the eyes." What, precisely, is the function of the brain's frontal lobe, the place "between the eyes"? It controls our emotions and personality, motor function, problem solving, spontaneity, memory, language, initiation, judgment, impulse control, and social and sexual behavior. All of that is surrendered to the will of Yahweh in the life of the spirit-filled believer.

(20) *Bind tefillin on the arm.* “These words which I command you today shall be in your heart.... You shall bind them as a sign on your hand.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-8) Same song, second verse. Again, Moses wasn’t talking about strapping little leather scripture boxes to the wrists. The word for hand here, *yad*, metaphorically signifies strength, power, authority, or the right of possession. (B&C) He’s saying that God’s word must be evident in the things we do, the way we interact with people, and the things we own, for these things are all evidence (“a sign”) of our attitude toward the mind of Yahweh. With **Mitzvah #19** then, the meaning is clear: what we think and what we do are to be influenced, directed, and inspired by God’s word.

Yahshua may have kept bits and pieces of the Jewish oral law out of sheer coincidence with the teaching of the Torah. But catching a glimpse of the Pharisees’ showy *tsitzit* and broad *tefillin* really set him off: “**Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ‘The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the Scriptures.’**” This translation misses the meaning. More literally: **The scribes and Pharisees have sat in Moses’ seat**—that is, they have taken for themselves the position of Moses’ authority. “**So practice and obey whatever they say to you [i.e., when what they say is in full accordance with the Torah, as their position demands], but don’t follow their example. For they don’t practice what they teach.**” The word translated “practice” is *ergon*, which means what you do—your business, undertakings, enterprise, acts, mindset, or thoughts. “**They crush you with impossible religious demands and never lift a finger to help ease the burden....**” He was telling us to follow the Torah, but not to bother observing the rabbinical baggage the scribes and Pharisees had loaded onto it. In short, He was telling us to do as *He* did—look for Yahweh’s truth, not blindly follow a list of rules.

He continued, “**Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes [*tefillin*, or phylacteries] with Scripture verses inside, and they wear extra long tassels [*tsitzit*] on their robes. And how they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the most prominent seats in the synagogue! They enjoy the attention they get on the streets, and they enjoy being called ‘rabbi.’**” The word “rabbi” came to be used of teachers of the Law, but that’s not what it meant. It really signified “master.” Yahshua saw right through the arrogance. “**Don’t ever let anyone call you ‘rabbi,’ for you have only one teacher, and all of you are on the same level as brothers and sisters. And don’t address anyone here on earth as ‘Father,’ for only God in heaven is your spiritual Father. [Listen up, my Catholic brothers.] And don’t let anyone call you ‘Master,’ for there is only one master, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be a servant. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you won’t let others enter the Kingdom of Heaven, and you won’t go in yourselves. Yes, how**

terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn him into twice the son of hell as you yourselves are.” (Matthew 23:1-15 NLT) We are once again reminded of the difference between taking God lightly (*qalal*) and blaspheming Him (*naqab*)—[see #3](#) The same pride that was manifested in long *tsitzits* and broad phylacteries showed up in their desire to be called “teacher,” “father,” and “master.” God is too angry to be disgusted with them.

- (21) *Affix the mezuzah to the doorposts and gates of your house.* “**These words which I command you today shall be in your heart.... You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.** (Deuteronomy 6:6-9) As usual, the rabbis twisted what Yahweh actually said, turning knowledge and truth into semi-useless religious ritual. The Great Commandment in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is called the *shema* (“hear”) because it says, “**Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one! You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.**” ([See #6](#) and [#7](#).) These were words Israel was to remember at all times, taking them to heart, thinking about them with their minds [\(#19\)](#), and working them out with their hands [\(#20\)](#)

Here we see that God’s words were also to be openly displayed by writing them on the doorposts (*mezuzah*) of their private homes and in public places like the city gates. (A “gate,” or *sha’ar*, is not a small door in a white picket fence, but the main entrance to a city, where the elders met to discuss weighty matters—read: “city hall.”) In private life and public, the reality of Yahweh’s presence among the children of Israel was to be in constant evidence. His precepts and provision were to be verbally acknowledged everywhere you turned. Yahweh was instructing that His *shem* was to have what advertising agencies nowadays spend fortunes trying to achieve for their clients: “top-of-mind awareness” among the target demographic—in this case, the entire nation of Israel.

This mitzvah presupposed two things: that the children of Israel would enter the Land and establish permanent homes (since the tents they lived in during the wilderness wanderings had no doorposts), and that they would become a literate society, able to read and write God’s instructions—something they, as the children of slaves, were not—yet. Yahweh wanted His people to be reminded of Him everywhere they looked when they settled into their new homeland.

But then the rabbis came along and contradicted Yahweh, saying that instead, the *shema* had to be written on a little piece of parchment in a particular style of script, rolled up in a particular way, and stuffed into a fancy little case they called a *mezuzah* (these guys just *love* little cases). In reality, the *doorpost itself* is the *mezuzah*. Anyway, this little box would be

marked with a particular Hebrew initial (the *shin*) and attached to a particular place on your front doorpost, at a particular angle, while performing a particular ceremony called a *Chanukat Ha-Bayit*. I suspect that Yahweh finds all this religious obfuscation particularly annoying. All He wanted the children of Israel to do was keep the Word of God in front of them, one way or another, at all times. He wanted them to be constantly reminded that He was their God and that they had a Covenant relationship with Him. I get the feeling He didn't really care *how* they did it, only that they did.



Chapter 2

The Law of Love

The relationship Yahweh seeks to establish between Himself and mankind is defined in the Torah, bit by bit, piece by piece. Thousands of His “puzzle pieces” fit together seamlessly to form a clear picture of God’s plan, and like any jigsaw puzzle, the whole is far greater than the sum of the parts. The picture that emerges as we “work” this puzzle is much more significant than what the sum total of the individual pieces seems to be—a list of regulations that must be followed to the letter. Rather, it is a portrait of a loving Creator whose “rules” are there to teach us about His love, to protect us, to comfort us, and to keep us healthy, both physically and spiritually. We shouldn’t be too surprised, then, to see that He gets angry with those who would obfuscate His instructions.

Yahshua spoke of such people: **“Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep, but are really wolves that will tear you apart.”** While appearing to be pious and godly, they are really dangerous and destructive. **“You can detect them by the way they act, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit. You don’t pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles. A healthy tree produces good fruit, and an unhealthy tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, the way to identify a tree or a person is by the kind of fruit that is produced.”** (Matthew 7:15-20 NLT)

And what is this fruit? A “good tree” produces love, further defined by Paul as **“joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”** The apostle puts two and two together and observes, **“Against such things there is no law.”** (Galatians 5:22-23) The fruit of “bad trees” is defined in the same passage as **“adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like.”** (Galatians 5:19-21) These New Testament “lists” are in no way contradictory to the Torah, for the same God inspired both of them.

Yahshua spoke of the difference between doing good things and obeying Yahweh: they’re not necessarily the same thing. **“Not all people who sound religious are really godly. They may refer to me as ‘Lord,’ but they still won’t enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven. On judgment day many will tell me, ‘Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Go away; the things you did were unauthorized.’”** (Matthew 7:21-23 NLT) Huh? Prophecy is listed among the gifts of the Holy Spirit, is it not? Casting out demons and

performing miracles are good things, aren't they? Yes, but that doesn't mean they're automatically the work of God. As Yahshua put it, **"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."** (John 6:29) Our trusting belief in Yahshua establishes a relationship with God—without which all the good works in the world are nothing but filthy rags. We must "know" each other—there must be a familial relationship between us—if our works, however well intended, are to have any value. Think about it: how "proud" are you when your neighbor's kid gets an "A" in school? You're only proud of your own child when he does well.

If you're looking with despair at the Law of Moses and the Galatians lists, saying to yourself, *I can't do all this, as much as I want to—it's too hard, and I fall on my face every time I try*, then congratulations; you're starting to figure it out. You're right: you *can't* do it. None of us can. It is only through our relationship with Yahshua, whose Spirit abides within us, that we can find rest from the burden of the Law. **"Jesus said, 'Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light.'"** (Matthew 11:28-30 NLT) It's not that the Law shouldn't be kept. It's that we can't pull its weight by ourselves. We need to be "yoked" with Someone who can, Someone who *has*: Yahshua.

So as we return to our study of the 613 mitzvot, let us be mindful that our burden isn't meant to be heavy. If we try to shoulder the weight of the Torah in our own strength, we'll find it impossible to carry, but if we allow Yahshua to do the heavy lifting, what little burden He allows us to assume will be carried joyfully, thankfully, and with a sense of honor for having been entrusted with the task. It's a privilege to serve Him, not a duty—and certainly not a payment we must make for services rendered.

PRAYER AND BLESSINGS

(22) *Pray to God.* **"So you shall serve Yahweh your God, and He will bless your bread and your water."** (Exodus 23:25) **"You shall fear Yahweh your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name."** (Deuteronomy 6:13) I didn't see "prayer" anywhere in there. But Tracey Rich writes, "According to the Talmud, the word 'serve' in these verses refers to prayer." Oh really? The word in both cases is '*abad*, "a verb meaning to work, to serve. "This labor may be focused on things, other people, or God.... This term is also applied to artisans and craftsmen.... When the focus of labor is the Lord, it is a religious "service" to worship Him. Moreover, the word does not have connotations of toilsome labor but instead of a joyful experience of liberation." (B&C) Apparently, "serve" means *serve*, and the Talmud rabbis have blown it again. There is no Mosaic commandment to pray to God.

There is a word for prayer, of course, but surprisingly, it's used very sparingly—only twice—in the Pentateuch. *Palal* means to pray, to intercede, to entreat or make supplication. The word was used when Abraham interceded with Yahweh for Abimelech and when Moses interceded for the snake-bitten Israelites. Both times, you'll notice, the prayer was a plea to Yahweh to provide a remedy for sin. The opinion of the rabbis notwithstanding, prayer is not some task you perform or favor you do for God so He'll bless you. Yahweh knows who we are and what we've done: the first prayer He wants to hear from us is a cry for mercy, an acknowledgment that we've sinned against Him.

But in the New Testament, we're admonished to “pray without ceasing.” The question, then, is why *weren't* the Old Covenant Jews told to pray? What changed? The whole Torah revolves around the tabernacle and the priesthood Yahweh set up. These were not ends in themselves, but an exquisite and detailed picture of God's plan of redemption: the innocent sacrificial lamb, the altar of judgment, the priest entering the holy place with the incense of prayer—and once a year the high priest going behind the veil to sprinkle the blood of atonement on the mercy seat. It's all an elaborate metaphor for the sacrifice of Yahshua our Messiah. But now, the veil has been torn in two (Matthew 27:51); access to Yahweh through prayer has been made available to us through Christ's death. Now, if we need to talk with our Father (and we *do*), all we have to do is ask.

- (23) *Read the Shema in the morning and at night.* **“These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”** (Deuteronomy 6:6-7) If you look at the world through a microscope, you're going to miss the big picture. This mitzvah, of course, refers to the same “Hear, O Israel...” passage we saw before (#21, etc.)—called the “*Shema*.” All the rabbis saw was “lie down” and “rise up,” and they made a mathematical equation out of it. But look at the whole thing: Yahweh wants them to have this truth in their hearts; He wants them to think about His love, and how they can love Him, all day long—when they wake up in the morning and fall asleep at night and every moment in between. In a personal sense, “separation of church and state” is at its core a principle that Yahweh despises. We are rather to make the One True God, Yahweh, the focal point and the motivation for everything we do. He is the background, the foreground, the air we breathe, the light by which we find our way through the world. As I said, He wants to have in our hearts what they call in the advertising business “top-of-mind awareness.” Such a thing has never come cheap: you can't buy Him off by mechanically reciting a few Bible verses twice a day.

- (24) *Recite grace after meals.* **“When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless Yahweh your God for the good land which He has given you.”** (Deuteronomy 8:10) How could you go wrong with this one? Being thankful is pretty much axiomatic, isn’t it? You’d think so, but once again that telltale word “recite” gets the rabbis into trouble. You see, according to the Talmud, you can’t just thank Yahweh. Oh, no! Rather, you must *recite* four specific “blessings” included in the *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, or “grace-after-meals” formula. These were all composed during the second-temple period: the *Birkat Hazan*, the blessing for providing food; the *Birkat Ha-Aretz*, the blessing for the land—something of a bad joke for the last two thousand years; the *Birkat Yerushalayim*, the blessing for Jerusalem, which prays for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the coming of the Messiah (words which, coming from the Jews who murdered Him and who continue to reject Him, must *really* impress Yahweh); and the *Birkat Ha-Tov v’Ha-Maytiv*, the blessing for Yahweh’s being good and doing good—and let’s face it: in light of God’s prophetic promises this is the only possible reason the Jews haven’t gone the way of the Philistines.

Enough of this foolishness. Let’s let God Himself provide commentary on the verse above: **“Beware that you do not forget Yahweh your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget Yahweh your God... then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’”** (Deuteronomy 8:11-14, 17) He says in effect, *Don’t bother me with ritual prayers that don’t have any bearing on your present reality. I want you to thank Me by name for My daily provision simply because it is in your interests to do so. If you don’t do this, you’ll eventually forget Who I Am and what I’ve done for you.*

- (25) *Do not lay down a stone for worship.* **“You shall not make idols for yourselves; neither a carved image nor a sacred pillar shall you rear up for yourselves; nor shall you set up an engraved stone in your land, to bow down to it; for I am Yahweh your God.”** (Leviticus 26:1) This is actually a subset of the second commandment (see Mitzvah #312) in which Yahweh prohibited the making of images for the purpose of worship—even of Himself. Here it seems God used about every word for “idol” in the entire Hebrew language trying to get His point across: His people were not to have anything to do with them, in any form, in any way.

If we amplify the verse with our Hebrew dictionaries, we’ll perceive this quite clearly: **“You shall not make** (*asah*: accomplish, advance, appoint, bear,

bestow, bring forth, have charge of, commit, deal with, do, execute, exercise, fashion, follow, fulfill, furnish, gather, get, keep, labor, maintain, make, observe, offer, bring to pass, perform, practice, prepare, procure, provide, serve, set, show, take, work, yield to, or use) **idols** (*eliyl*: something that's good for nothing, vanity, an idol) **for yourselves; neither a carved** (*pesel*: carved or engraved as an idol) **image** (*tselem*: a phantom, that is, an illusion, resemblance, a representative figure—an idol or image) **nor a sacred pillar** (*matstsebah*: something stationed, that is, a column or memorial stone; an idol, standing image, pillar) **shall you rear up** (*qum*: accomplish, confirm, continue, decree, enjoin, get up, make good, help, hold, lift up, make, ordain, perform, pitch, raise up, rear up, remain, set up, establish, cause to stand, strengthen) **for yourselves; nor shall you set up** (*nathan*: give, put, make, add, apply, appoint, ascribe, assign, bestow, bring forth, cast, cause, commit, consider, count, direct, distribute, fasten, grant, hang up, lay up, lift up, offer, ordain, perform, place, put forth, render, send out, set forth, show, thrust) **an engraved** (*maskiyth*: a figure, carved on stone, the wall, or any object—imagination, conceit, image, or picture) **stone** (*eben*: building material, a stone—precious or non-precious—plumb weight) **in your land, to bow down** (*shachah*: to depress, that is, prostrate, especially reflexively in homage to royalty or God, bow down, crouch, fall down, humbly beseech, do or make obeisance, do reverence, make to stoop, worship) **to it; for I am Yahweh your God.”** Yeah, that would about cover it.

LOVE & BROTHERHOOD

- (26) *Love all human beings who are of the covenant.* **“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 19:18) The mitzvah is worded to convey the idea that Jews must love their fellow Jews, but that it's okay to hate everybody else. However, if we let scripture comment on scripture we find that this is not the whole story. On one side of the coin is the negative admonition not to take vengeance or bear a grudge against Jews: Yahweh says, **“Is this [i.e., the sin of Israel] not laid up in store with Me, sealed up among My treasures? Vengeance is Mine, and recompense.”** (Deuteronomy 32:34-35) Jews aren't to take vengeance against their fellow Jews because God reserves judgment for Himself—especially when it comes to Israel. The second half of the equation, “love your neighbor,” was shown by Yahshua to refer not only to those “who are of the covenant,” but to anyone who *needed* our love—potentially every soul on the planet (see the parable of the good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37). And what, precisely, does it mean to love your neighbor as you do yourself? If you truly love yourself, you meet your

own needs. You feed, clothe, and shelter yourself, keep yourself from danger and pain, and do what you can to maintain your health and happiness. If you're smart, you'll know that that includes more than just meeting physical needs, but spiritual needs as well. Therefore, if we encounter another human being in need, we are to do what we can to meet that need. And we should not forget that in Yahshua's parable, the one in need would have normally considered the one who stopped to help him his mortal enemy.

In reference to this very thing, Yahshua provided commentary: **"You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust, too. If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."** (Matthew 5:43-48 NLT) So if our Father Yahweh is to be emulated in this matter, how does He show His love, and to whom, His friends or His enemies? **"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Romans 5:8) We are to show God's love to both our friends and enemies alike. I would hasten to add, however, that "love" does not include tolerating false doctrine. It's a poor love indeed that encourages its object to commit spiritual suicide.

- (27) *Do not stand by idly when a human life is in danger. "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am Yahweh."* (Leviticus 19:16) I think the rabbis missed the point, though their version seems generally consistent with Yahweh's admonition to "love your neighbor as yourself." What is being said here, however, gets closer to the heart of the matter. The KJV rendition is closer to the literal meaning: don't "stand against the blood of thy neighbor." And the NLT addresses the thought for modern ears: "Do not try to get ahead at the cost of your neighbor's life." At issue here is human pride—something Yahweh detests. It is the antithesis of the love spoken of in #26. Pride says: *I'm better than this other guy. If I trash his reputation I will be exalted by comparison. And if his death—physically, professionally, socially, or spiritually—will enhance my relative position, then he must die.* This attitude of pride was endemic among the scribes and Pharisees of Yahshua's day. It was what drove them to demand His death, relying on "talebearers" to witness against Him. How ironic it is that they had been specifically warned not to do this.

- (28) *Do not wrong any one in speech.* **“Therefore you shall not oppress one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am Yahweh your God.”** (Leviticus 25:17) This says nothing about speech, but the rabbis asserted that this verse meant “Don’t *wrong* one another,” and then they applied it exclusively to speech. Thus it became the basis for silly Talmudic rules like: “You may not call a person by a derogatory or embarrassing nickname, even if he is used to it,” or “You may not ask a merchant how much he would sell something for if you have no intention of buying,” or “You may not compliment a person if you do not mean it.” Once again, the rabbis in their unending quest for self-justification have missed (or purposely obfuscated) what Yahweh had to say. The Hebrew word for “oppress” is *yahah*: “to rage or be violent, to suppress, to maltreat, destroy, oppress, be proud, vex, or do violence.” (S) It’s *way* beyond unkind speech. We need to pay attention to the context (since the rabbis didn’t). What is the “therefore” there for? Checking the surrounding verses, we find that this is the “bottom line” of the law of Jubilee. Once every fifty years—kind of a Sabbath of Sabbaths—all leased land was to revert to its original owners, all indentured servants would receive their freedom, and the land would be given an extra year of rest. The rabbis knew that talk is cheap, but keeping the terms of Jubilee could cost them. So they figured that if they could confuse the issue of Jubilee, they could extract more labor from their servants, more grain from their land, and more rent payments from their properties. Yahweh wanted His people to live free; the rabbis wanted to subjugate them and reap the financial rewards. Oppression is the opposite of reverence for Yahweh.
- (29) *Do not carry tales.* **“You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 19:16) Once again (see #27) we see that we miss the impact and importance of these mitzvot if we look at them only under a microscope, isolated from one another. Yes, it’s naughty to whisper gossip into the ears of a gullible and impressionable audience. But the issue here is pride: the purposeful demeaning of another person—going so far as to be a threat to his life—with the express intent of elevating oneself in comparison. Why do you suppose God punctuated so many of these instructions with a reminder of who He is? I believe it’s to remind us that in His eyes, we’re all pretty much the same—sinners in need of grace. To us, the best garden slug looks pretty much the same as the worst one. I imagine it’s sort of like that when God looks at us in our unredeemed state. We would find it ludicrous to observe one slug demeaning the others in order to gain prestige among the other backyard vermin. *I hear he’s got inferior slime.* The Gardener has every right to salt us all down and watch us shrivel, the good slugs and the evil slugs alike—’cause let’s face it, who can tell the difference? Amazingly though, He

would rather transform us into gardeners a bit like Himself. Granted, my poor *limax maximus* brain has a hard time comprehending that.

- (30) *Do not cherish hatred in your heart.* **“You shall not hate your brother in your heart.”** (Leviticus 19:17) Could it be that the rabbis actually got one right? This is apparently a no-brainer, the converse of #26, “You shall love your neighbor as you do yourself.” But look at what follows: it almost sounds like a contradiction: **“You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.”** In light of this close contextual connection, we shouldn’t automatically assume Moses has moved on to a different subject. Actually, I believe the second phrase *defines* what it is to “hate your brother.” And the truth that emerges if we make this connection has stunning relevance for us today: we are not to be tolerant of false teaching, but are rather to “rebuke” those in error—to neglect this correction is to hate our brother. Remember the rabbinical mitzvah (#27) that said *Do not stand by idly when a human life is in danger?* This is the practical outworking of the principal: if your brother is in spiritual error, if he espouses doctrines that Yahweh’s Word says will kill him in the end, then to withhold rebuke and admonition is to hate him. By tolerating his heresy, you are sending him to hell, like indulging a diabetic’s sweet tooth.

What does it mean to “bear” sin? The Hebrew word is *nasa*, meaning to lift, or carry. It is “used in reference to the bearing of guilt or punishment for sin” leading to the “representative or substitutionary bearing of one person’s guilt by another.” (B&C) Yahweh did not want false teaching tolerated in Israel because the guilt—and thus the punishment—incurred would eventually be borne by the entire nation. He would have spared them that pain. He would spare *us* that pain.

This ought to shed new light on Yahshua’s confirmation of the principle that loving Yahweh and our fellow man is the path to life. **“One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: ‘Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?’ Jesus replied, ‘What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?’ The man answered, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ‘Right!’ Jesus told him. ‘Do this and you will live!’”** (Luke 10:25-28 NLT) Friends don’t let friends fall prey to false teaching.

- (31) *Do not take revenge.* **“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 19:18) The rabbis are on safe ground when they say precisely what the Torah does. They ought to do that more often. We’ve seen this verse before (#26) and we shall see it again (#32). The word for “take vengeance” here is *naqam*: to avenge, punish, or take one’s revenge.

As we have seen, that's Yahweh's prerogative. Therefore, for men to take for themselves the right of revenge is to usurp the authority of God. Later in this study we shall see that there are certain mitzvot that carry explicit punishments with them. Because these punishments were specified in the Torah, men were not guilty of "taking revenge" when they carried them out—the authority remained with Yahweh. But to avenge a wrong, real or imagined, personal or national, that is not delineated in God's Word, is to overstep our bounds. And lest there should be any confusion, Yahshua clarified our instructions in the matter: **"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise."** (Luke 6:27-31) To insist on collecting our due, to demand that life be "fair" to us, is to betray a lack of trust in Yahweh's wisdom and love.

- (32) *Do not bear a grudge.* **"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am Yahweh."** (Leviticus 19:18) Here's another facet of the same diamond. "Grudge" is from the Hebrew verb *natar*: "to keep, to take care of, to be angry, to maintain a grudge. It means to hold something against another person, to disdain him or her." (B&C) This speaks not of outbursts of righteous indignation, something Yahshua Himself was known to display at appropriate moments. Rather it warns against the kind of simmering resentment that eats away at the soul—the opposite of a forgiving spirit. To cherish hatred in our hearts is the antithesis of the last part of the admonition: "love your neighbor." Also note that whereas the primary thought is warning Jews not to bear grudges against their fellow Jews, the "neighbors" clause (as we have seen) broadens this to a universal principle.
- (33) *Do not put any Jew to shame.* **"You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him."** (Leviticus 19:17) We've seen this verse before (#30), and once again, the Rabbis have been caught extrapolating. In fact, the verse implies just the opposite of their mitzvah: to *refrain* from rebuking your brother who is living in sin or idolatry—even though such a rebuke might shame him—would be tantamount to hating him. It would be like refusing to throw a drowning man a life preserver because you're afraid he'd be ashamed of his poor swimming technique. I think God is saying: *Go ahead, throw the life preserver. If he receives it, your "rebuke" will have saved him, and even if he doesn't, his shame is not your fault. Either way, you will be innocent of his blood.*

(34) *Do not curse any other Israelite. “You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 19:14) The rabbis figure it this way: if you mustn’t curse those who cannot hear, then you *really* shouldn’t curse those who can. While they would no doubt do well by refraining from cursing their brothers, it’s obvious to me that Yahweh has something more fundamental, more significant, in mind here. The deaf and the blind are representative of people who have been hindered by society and circumstances from hearing and seeing the truth. That’s practically everybody, or at least it was when the Torah was handed down. The Jews, on the other hand, were gifted with sight and hearing—it was they who were tasked with the transmission of Yahweh’s truth to the nations. God’s redemption was never intended to be the exclusive possession of Israel. Rather, they were to display the *menorah* and blow the *shofar* that would lead the gentiles to salvation. Israel was chosen to be the keeper of the signs, the celebrants of Yahweh’s seven prophetic appointed feasts, and the family through which God’s Messiah would come.

By recasting the Torah as an impenetrable maze of rules, regulations, dos and don’ts, the Jews did precisely what Yahweh was telling them not to do—cursing the deaf and tripping the blind. The Torah told them to conduct themselves as children of God, to show the world outside what it was like to have a personal relationship with Yahweh. Instead, they told the orphan gentiles that God demanded that they keep their rooms tidy and their shoes polished. They shouted lies and half-truths into ears that were straining to hear the truth, and they concealed the light from a vision impaired world. It’s no wonder the goyim didn’t want to be adopted into Yahweh’s family.

(35) *Do not give occasion to the simple-minded to stumble on the road. “You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 19:14) Based on the same verse as the previous mitzvah, this permutation betrays the pride of the rabbis. They interpreted this as a prohibition against doing anything that would cause another to sin. This is a fine thing in itself, of course, but it was based on an arrogant presupposition: they considered anyone who hadn’t steeped themselves in their oral traditions to be “simple minded,” and thus in dire need of their deep wisdom and impeccable discernment. Yahshua took one look at them and observed, “**They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.**” (Matthew 15:14) He knew their condescending arrogance was nothing but a “stumbling block before the blind.” As for us simple-minded folk, Yahweh’s grace is sufficient for us. David put it this way: “**The law of Yahweh is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of Yahweh is sure, making wise the simple.**” (Psalm 19:7) It was never the rabbis’ job to look after the simple minded anyway; it’s God’s job: “**Yahweh preserves the**

simple.” (Psalm 116:6) Notice again that the mitzvah is underscored with the reminder: “I am Yahweh.” His omniscience and omnipotence leave no room for our arrogance.

- (36) *Rebuke the sinner.* **“You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.”** (Leviticus 19:17) We saw this passage in #30 and again in #33. I would only reiterate here that to be tolerant of your neighbor’s sinful attitudes—to withhold the truth from him through some misplaced sense of political correctness or open-mindedness—is to hate him. That’s right: God calls religious tolerance a hate crime! When we see our brother in sin, we are to rebuke him, not out of self-righteousness but in a spirit of meekness, knowing that but for the grace of God, we too might fall. It’s also worth mentioning the flip side of this principle: if and when we are rebuked for the sins of our own life, we need to immediately repent. The classic example is David in II Samuel 12—rebuked by Nathan, acknowledging his sin, and turning to Yahweh in repentance. Nathan did the right thing in confronting the king with his sin, rebuking him in terms that David was sure to understand. We should do no less when we encounter a brother fallen into sin.

That doesn’t mean we are to set ourselves up as the arbiters of morality in our communities. We aren’t called to force unbelievers to behave themselves. But those who claim a relationship with Yahweh are another matter: they are “our brothers,” whom we are told not to “hate” through our neglect or misplaced tolerance. Paul addresses these same issues in I Corinthians, Chapter 5.

- (37) *Relieve a neighbor of his burden and help to unload his beast.* **“If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.”** (Exodus 23:5) This has far less to do with pack animals than it does with loving one’s neighbor (as we saw in #31). The point is that our love should not be restricted to our friends—to those who can be expected to love us in return. If Yahweh’s love had been offered on that basis, none of us would ever have experienced it, for as we saw earlier, **“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** (Romans 5:8) The Exodus verse is but one example of how our love for our “neighbor” might manifest itself. Another is found in Proverbs (and repeated in Romans): **“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and Yahweh will reward you.”** (Proverbs 25:21-22) We are to meet the needs of those we encounter, regardless of their disposition toward us. This kindness, like that of God toward us, is designed to bring the recipients to repentance (see Romans 2:4). The “coals of fire” mentioned can be one of two things: conviction (the

impetus for repentance) or judgment (for refusing to do so)—depending on the enemy/neighbor’s response to our loving act.

- (38) *Assist in replacing the load upon a neighbor’s beast. “You shall not see your brother’s donkey or his ox fall down along the road, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely help him lift them up again.”* (Deuteronomy 22:4) We don’t see too many donkeys in need of assistance these days. But again, the true meaning goes far beyond the actual example. This is another corollary to “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” It could be generalized thus: *If you observe your brother in real need, don’t pretend you didn’t see it, and don’t go out of your way to avoid being confronted with it. Rather, do whatever you can to meet the needs of your fellow man.* Most of us would consider this mere good manners at the very least, an outworking of the “golden rule.”

But we have been warned that as the days of grace grow short—as the time of the end approaches—we should expect to see common courtesy become increasingly rare: **“Then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another... and because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”** (Matthew 24:10-13) This will certainly be true during the Tribulation, but we can see the trend gaining momentum in our own day. As lawlessness increases, ordinary people are becoming reticent to “stick their necks out” in defense of those in need. The incident that brought this disturbing trend to America’s attention happened on March 13, 1964, when 28 year old Kitty Genovese was brutally stabbed multiple times outside her Queens apartment. As she cried out in distress, no less than thirty-eight witnesses who could have helped stood by and did nothing as she bled to death—not wanting to get involved. America was shocked but not enough: our willingness to betray our fellow man to preserve the illusion of personal safety has only increased over the intervening years.

- (39) *Do not leave a beast unaided that has fallen down beneath its burden. “You shall not see your brother’s donkey or his ox fall down along the road, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely help him lift them up again.”* (Deuteronomy 22:4) This is based on the same passage as #38. The rabbis have drawn a distinction between helping a man get his overloaded beast of burden up and going again, and helping the beast itself—making it clear once again that they’ve missed the entire point. But okay, since they’ve brought it up, let’s look at what Yahweh has to say about the treatment of work animals. Later in our study, we’ll see that they aren’t to be unequally yoked or bred with animals of other kinds, and that they aren’t to be prevented from munching on grain as they work. Maimonides somehow missed the admonition that beasts of burden were to enjoy the same Sabbath rest as their owners (see

Exodus 23:12). It's clear throughout scripture that animals were a significant part of the biosphere over which man was given dominion. We may safely infer from Genesis 2:19-20 that Yahweh made them Adam's responsibility—and therefore ours as well, on some level. So here in the Torah we see a caution against shirking that responsibility: if you burden your ox or donkey to the point where he collapses under the load, you're not only going to have to work harder to alleviate his suffering, but others in your society will be obligated to help you correct the mess you've made. I don't think I'm stretching the mitzvah too far to read into it a caution against plundering the environment. It's one thing to be a careful steward of God's earth, thankfully utilizing the bounty it provides; it's something else entirely to greedily rape the landscape with no regard for man or beast.

THE POOR AND UNFORTUNATE

- (40) *Do not afflict an orphan or a widow.* **“You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.”** (Exodus 22:22-24) Yahshua is sometimes criticized—invariably by people with money—for “heartlessly” observing that the poor would always be with us (which is actually a concept God first put forth in Deuteronomy 15:11). But from the beginning, Yahweh has instructed the blessed among us how to provide for those less fortunate. It's fascinating to examine how Yahweh designed the Israelites' “welfare” system, which we will examine over the next few mitzvot. Though the rabbis got this one right (because they took the words right out of the Torah), by the time of Christ they had worked out some clever ways to steal the assets of the poor without violating their oral traditions. Yahweh's scathing denouncement of them is recorded in all three synoptic Gospels: **“Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.”** (Mark 12:38-40)

Yahshua's brother James, as leader of the Jerusalem church, was all too aware of the propensity of his fellow Jews to substitute a system of rules and rituals in place of a relationship with God, for the purpose of circumventing His true intentions. **“If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”** (James 1:26-27) His point was that it wasn't enough to know the Torah; one had to *do* it—

perfectly—if his religion was to be worth anything at all. **“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”** (verse 22) James perceived that the issue of caring for widows and orphans would separate the men from the boys in this regard—*no one* kept the law perfectly, but the first place the Pharisees’ hypocrisy was likely to show up was in the matter of money: taking care of Israel’s widows and orphans was expensive—it required “loving their neighbors as themselves.” Visiting the undeserving poor in their distress was the last thing the rabbis wanted to do. They saw it as throwing good money after bad—there was no way to get a good return on their “investment.”

As a personal note, I can confirm that the Pharisees were wrong about that. God’s math and man’s math don’t add up the same way. Over the years, my wife and I adopted nine “orphans,” most of them at times when it looked like financial suicide for us to do so. But God saw to it that we never missed a meal or a house payment, no matter how broke we looked on paper. Yahweh is always faithful.

- (41) *Don’t reap the entire field.* **“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am Yahweh your God.”** (Leviticus 23:22) How wasteful! How inefficient! Not really. It’s one of Yahweh’s ways of taking care of the poor. Landowners were instructed not to harvest their entire crop, but to leave the corners or edges of their fields untouched so that the poor could come and harvest a little grain for themselves. Note three things. First, it wasn’t considered theft for a poor person to harvest what he could carry himself—he wasn’t taking enough grain to sell for a profit, only that which was sufficient to keep himself and his family alive. Second, he wasn’t in competition with the reapers—there were sections of the field especially set aside for the poor to harvest from. Third (and this is important for us to notice today) the poor weren’t given a handout on a silver platter; they were required to work for it just like everybody else. God saw to it that they wouldn’t have to starve just because they didn’t own their own land, but neither could they just sit back in their government-subsidized apartments, watching soap operas on TV, eating food-stamp potato chips, and waiting for the welfare check to arrive. The poor had to go out, harvest, and process the bounty that Yahweh had provided. In modern America, if we were smart enough to follow God’s law, that might translate into public works jobs—beneficial to society however menial they might seem, paid for through the taxes of those fortunate enough to have jobs. But no work, no welfare: society should alleviate poverty, not reward it.

- (42) *Leave the unreaped corner of the field or orchard for the poor.* **“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am Yahweh your God.”** (Leviticus 19:9-10) This is the affirmative statement of the negative mitzvah we just saw. The Leviticus permutation mentions vineyards as well as fields, leading us to the conclusion that God intended the principle to be applied broadly—not exclusively to grain crops, but everywhere it made sense to leave an opportunity for the poor to help themselves. I believe Yahweh is telling us to be creative in finding ways to alleviate suffering (to love our neighbors as we do ourselves) without humiliating or financially emasculating those less fortunate than ourselves.
- (43) *Do not gather gleanings (the ears that have fallen to the ground while reaping).* **“...nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard.”** (Leviticus 19:9) This is an example of the kind of creativity I just spoke of. Not only were the edges and corners of the field to be left for the poor to harvest, the reapers were to leave whatever they missed on their “first pass” through the field, vineyard or orchard. We see this being played out in Ruth 2, where the young widow is observed following behind the reapers (verse 7) as they worked, picking up what they had left unharvested. When the owner of the field, Boaz, saw how hard she was working, he instructed his workers to provide even more opportunities for her (verses 15-16). Note that although she worked hard and was rewarded with preferential treatment for her diligence, she wasn’t getting rich—she gathered a little over half a bushel of barley a day during the peak harvest.
- (44) *Leave the gleanings for the poor.* **“And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger.** (Leviticus 19:10) This is merely the affirmative statement of negative Mitzvah #43. I get the feeling that Maimonides was milking this project in order to come up with the Talmudic requisite of 365 negative and 248 positive commandments. Note that the Torah includes something here that the rabbis left out: *strangers* were to benefit from the same system of “welfare” as poor folk. Strangers would by definition include some people whom the rabbinical Jews considered enemies or “lowlives”—gentiles and Samaritans. People who didn’t live and work in the local fields or vineyards were free to eat a few grapes or a bit of raw grain as they passed through. Yahshua and His disciples did this very thing (Matthew 12:1-8), though the Pharisees negated the spirit of the commandment by accusing them of violating the Sabbath by “threshing” when they rubbed the kernels of wheat

or barley between their hands to separate the grain from the chaff. Here we have one of our clearest illustrations of the difference between God's intention for our observance of the Torah and man's ideas on the subject. I find it fascinating that man's version is hard and inflexible (and ultimately impossible to follow perfectly), while Yahweh's is full of what we'd call loopholes—it's user friendly and far more concerned with heart attitude than strict outward observance.

- (45) *Do not gather ol'loth (the imperfect clusters) of the vineyard. "And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am Yahweh your God."* (Leviticus 19:10) Once again, we see the rabbis attempting to circumvent the spirit of the commandment by zeroing in on the particulars. *If God mentions only barley fields and vineyards, then we're free to treat the poor like dirt in our orchards and gardens.* Beyond that, if they can redefine "gleanings" as "imperfect clusters," then they won't feel they have to leave much of anything edible behind for the poor, circumventing the spirit of love that's supposed to underlie all of these mitzvot. But Yahshua was right: if you truly love Yahweh and love your neighbor, the rest of the Torah is second nature.
- (46) *Leave ol'loth (the imperfect clusters) of the vineyard for the poor. "When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this thing."* (Deuteronomy 24:21-22) This is the converse of #45. The Deuteronomy restatement includes a reminder that the Israelites had been poor strangers in the land of Egypt when God had mercy on them. As they had received, they were now to give. It's another universal truth we would all do well to heed.

The whole issue of leaving crops to be gathered by the poor for their sustenance is clarified elsewhere—from the point of view of the poor people who were to do the gathering: **"When you come into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put any in your container. When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain."** (Deuteronomy 23:24-25) In other words, they weren't to just go in to somebody's field or vineyard and harvest his crop for themselves, competing with the landowner or his employees. But it was okay to take away as many grapes as you could carry—in your stomach. This put practical limits on what a poor person could take and how much impact he could have on the farmer's livelihood. It's the epitome of wisdom.

- (47) *Do not gather the grapes that have fallen to the ground. “And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am Yahweh your God.”* (Leviticus 19:10) This is closer to the real meaning of “gleaning,” which Webster defines as gathering something slowly or by degrees. We aren’t to obsess over every last grape (or dollar, as the case may be). Rather, we are to take it for granted that Yahweh’s provision will be sufficient for our needs—even if we make a habit of taking food off our own table and giving it to perfect strangers. Do we *owe* it to them? I don’t know—does Yahweh *owe* us our salvation? Same difference. What we give and receive are both outpourings of love from the giver to the recipient. And note that Yahweh isn’t instructing us to give away something He hasn’t already provided. It’s like He’s saying, *I gave you the vineyard, and I made your vines bear fruit. Some of that fruit is for you, and some of it is for the widows, orphans, and strangers among you. If you don’t like this arrangement, perhaps you’d prefer that your wife play the role of widow, and your children to be the fatherless* (as we saw in Exodus 22:24—#40).
- (48) *Leave peret (the single grapes) of the vineyard for the poor. “And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am Yahweh your God.”* (Leviticus 19:10) Okay, Maimonides, we get it already. This is the converse of #47, an affirmative restatement of the previous negative mitzvah. It bears notice that this arrangement between “haves” and “have-nots” is a *system*: it does no one any good to leave crops unharvested for the poor to gather if the poor don’t know they’re supposed to do that, or if the fields are inaccessible to them. The system was designed for a small homogeneous local population and an agrarian society—early Israel. It won’t work if the wheat field with the unreaped corners is in Kansas and the poor widows are in Kentucky. But we aren’t locked into the *method* of providing for the poor. Yahweh’s heart has been revealed: take care of the truly needy among you.
- (49) *Do not return to take a forgotten sheaf. “When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that Yahweh your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.* (Deuteronomy 24:19) Here’s another example of how to provide for the needy in an agrarian society like early Israel’s. Again, I believe God is showing us that (1) we should be creative in our charity, inventing new ways to give as the nature of our civilization shifts, (2) the recipient should always have an active role in his own assistance, and (3) God’s future blessings are predicated on what we do today—disobedience in the matter of charity betrays a lack of trust in Yahweh’s provision for our own needs.

In a rare display of insight, the rabbis proclaimed that this mitzvah applied to all fruit trees. The Torah apparently concurs. **“When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.”** (Deuteronomy 24:20) Barley, wheat, grapes, olives, cash—it doesn’t matter: leave some for the poor to collect.

- (50) *Leave the forgotten sheaves for the poor. When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that Yahweh your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.*” (Deuteronomy 24:19) Again, we have an affirmative statement of a previous negative mitzvah. Let’s face it—the last ten mitzvot have really only been one “law:” provide for the less-fortunate out of the bounty Yahweh has showered upon you already. The bottom line? If God is providing our daily bread, we won’t miss a slice or two.

A byproduct of all this generosity on the part of the farmer was that he and his hired hands weren’t working all that hard—certainly not as hard as they would have if they wanted to gather every last grape, olive, or ear of corn. Yahweh seems to be fostering a relaxed, there’s-plenty-more-where-that-came-from attitude, based on a comfortable reliance upon Yahweh’s bounty. To some people, there’s no such thing as “enough.” To a child of Yahweh who’s trusting his Father, there’s no such thing as a shortage.

- (51) *Do not refrain from maintaining a poor man and giving him what he needs. “If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which Yahweh your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother.”* This is actually part of the instructions concerning the Sabbatical year: **“But you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,’ and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to Yahweh against you, and it become sin among you. You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing Yahweh your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand.”** (Deuteronomy 15:7-10) Picture this: you’re an Israelite, the Sabbatical year is close, and your brother needs a loan. Ordinarily, you wouldn’t hesitate, because you’d get your money back. But Yahweh had said, **“At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release: every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called Yahweh’s release. Of a foreigner you may require it; but you shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother.”** (Deuteronomy 15:1-3) And you’re thinking, *if I loan him the money now, I’ll never see it again.* Here Yahweh is telling us:

don't calculate, don't scheme, and don't factor into your plans your beneficiary's inability to repay you. Just meet needs where you find them, according to the resources He has already provided, at home first, and then further afield. After all, it's only money, and Yahweh owns the universe—there's a lot more where that came from.

By the way, the Sabbatical year (as well as Jubilee, a sabbatical of Sabbaths), are prophetic of Yahweh's forgiveness of *our* debts—something all believers will experience viscerally during the seventh millennium, coming soon to a planet near you. (See Mitzvot #210-226, as well as *Future History* Chapters 26-28, and the appendix on chronology.)

- (52) *Give charity according to your means.* **“The poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.’** (Deuteronomy 15:8-11) Although the scripture quoted here doesn't really support this particular mitzvah, we've seen the rabbinical principle demonstrated elsewhere in the Torah. The poor were to gather their sustenance from the crop Yahweh had *already* provided to the landowner. As Yahshua pointed out in His praise of the poor widow who contributed only a couple of pennies to the temple treasury (Luke 21:1-4), her small donation was seen by God as a fortune. As I said, His math and our math are quite different.

Before leaving this subject, we should address the problem of who, precisely, are the “poor.” Who is a legitimate recipient of our charity? Clearly, it isn't just “anybody who thinks they don't have enough.” Many rich men fall into that category. And God's attitude toward those who are poor because they're lazy is clear: **“How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep—So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man.”** (Proverbs 6:9-11); **“The lazy man will not plow because of winter; he will beg during harvest and have nothing.”** (Proverbs 20:4) So greed and laziness are deal breakers. This category would presumably include poor people who have nothing because they are living in sin—feeding a drug habit, for example. I don't believe God is asking us to facilitate their addictions. But there are people who, through no fault of their own, find themselves in dire straits. The story of Ruth has parallels in today's society. First, Boaz' charity was extended on an individual basis to someone who had already demonstrated character and loyalty without regard for her own welfare. Second, his aid was bestowed first upon a fellow believer—there was no shortage of poor people in Israel, but Boaz perceived that any aid Ruth received would ultimately honor Yahweh. It's easy and safe for us today to ease our consciences by writing a check to some big charity factory.

And it's not necessarily wrong to do that. It's God's pattern, however, that we get personally involved in people's lives—one on one. Don't worry if you can't write it off your income taxes.

TREATMENT OF GENTILES

- (53) *Love the stranger.* **“Yahweh your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”** (Deuteronomy 10:17-19) It's easy to get it right when you say what Yahweh says. This mitzvah, of course, is merely a corollary to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Yahweh lists as reasons for doing this His own authority, power, and justice. Because Yahweh loves the gentiles, His Chosen are to demonstrate that same kind of love. We should not forget why the Israelites ended up as “strangers” in Egypt: it's because God put them there. He was perfectly capable of keeping the famine from touching Canaan when Jacob and his sons lived there. But He wanted them as a nation to experience all the things that characterize the human race at large—servitude, for we're all slaves to sin at some point; deliverance, for the Messiah died so that we all could live; choice, for we're all faced with the decision of whether or not to seek God's will. Israel's four hundred years as strangers in Egypt was the first phase of their training to become the people who would deliver the Messiah to the world.
- (54) *Do not wrong the stranger in speech.* **“You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”** (Exodus 22:21) The Torah draws a distinction between mistreating and oppressing the strangers living among the Israelites. “Mistreat” here is from the Hebrew *Yanah*: “to rage or be violent; by implication to suppress, to maltreat, destroy, thrust out by oppression, vex, do violence.” (S) The word for “oppress” is *lachats*: “to press, that is, to distress: to afflict, crush, force, hold fast, oppress, or thrust.” A whole range of negative attitudes and behaviors is indicated, all of which are taken care of with the observance of Mitzvah #53. Although “wronging strangers in speech” is clearly included, the Torah goes far beyond the watered-down rabbinical mitzvah. Again, the Jews are instructed to remember their former status as slaves in Egypt and apply the golden rule with that in mind.
- (55) *Do not wrong the stranger in buying or selling.* **“You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”** (Exodus 22:21) This is based on the same verse as #54; the rabbis are extrapolating again. How ironic it is that the stereotypical Jewish foible—of being greedy

and shrewd in their financial dealings with gentiles (whether or not it's true)—is in direct violation of this mitzvah. As usual, I think that if we sacrifice the Torah's breadth on the altar of the Talmud's specificity we will misunderstand and misapply what Yahweh really wanted us to know. He's speaking specifically to Israel here, telling them that their national job is going to be bearing the signs and means of Yahweh's deliverance to the rest of the world—to the gentiles—culminating in Yahshua the Messiah. For that reason, they are to treat the “strangers” with the same kindness and sense of purpose with which Yahweh treated them. God's salvation, in other words, may be *of* the Jews (John 4:22), but it's not exclusively *for* the Jews: **“Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God.”** (Romans 9:4-5).

- (56) *Don't intermarry with gentiles.* **“...Nor shall you make marriages with [gentiles]. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son.”** (Deuteronomy 7:3) Taken out of context, it looks like the Jews are supposed to act like racist bigots—too “good” in their own eyes to intermarry with the inferior goyim. But from what we now know of Yahweh's loving concern for gentiles (see #53-55), this overly simplistic explanation won't fly. What we have here is a call for separation, dedication, and holiness—as opposed to concession, contamination, and compromise. The Jews, as I have said, were being given a job to do, and they could only do it if they were set apart from the world's influences. It's like communicable-disease biochemists wearing rubber suits and face masks: they can't save the world from disease if the germs are allowed to take up residence within them. It's all perfectly clear when you consider the context: **“When Yahweh your God brings you [Israelites] into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when Yahweh your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son.”** And why does Yahweh want them to take these drastic precautions? **“For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of Yahweh will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire.”** (Deuteronomy 7:1-5) If the Canaanites had been believers in Yahweh, there would have been no need to keep Israel separated from them; as it was, their corruption had

reached the point where, like Sodom and Gomorrah, they were beyond redemption as a civilization.

There is a parallel to this in Christian theology. **“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.”** (II Corinthians 6:14-16) This applies to any relationship, but especially to marriage. As the “body of Christ,” believers today are faced with a conundrum similar to the one the Jews faced—how to live in the world without becoming contaminated by it. We—like they—must be holy, for Yahweh our God is holy.

- (57) *Exact the debt of an alien.* **“At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called Yahweh’s release. Of a foreigner you may require it; but you shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother....”** (Deuteronomy 15:1-3) Here, the rabbis took a feature of the law of the Sabbath-year and turned it into a justification for withholding financial mercy from gentiles. Ignoring the context and the heart of God, they missed the point entirely. The law of the sabbatical year was a picture of grace. Every seven years, all debts among Hebrews were to be released, as we saw in Mitzvah #51. Debts from foreigners, however, were exempt from this particular amnesty. It’s pretty easy to see (from our vantage point on this side of the cross) what Yahweh is doing here: He’s prophesying that those whose relationship with Him enables them to enjoy his ultimate Sabbath rest will be forgiven their debt of sin. Those who are “foreign” to Him—that is, those who have no relationship with Yahweh—will bear the burden of their debt.

In practice, this mitzvah has no meaning outside of the context of the celebration of the Sabbath year. Jewish lenders who aren’t keeping the other provisions of the Sabbath year (like letting their lands lie fallow and forgiving debts to their fellow Jews) are unjustified in using this as an excuse to be greedy and conniving in their everyday business dealings with gentiles.

- (58) *Lend to an alien at interest.* **“You shall not charge interest to your brother—interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest. To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that Yahweh your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess.”** (Deuteronomy 23:19-20) According to rabbinical tradition, charging interest to gentiles is mandatory. The Torah disagrees,

although it is certainly permitted. The point of the passage, however, is that Jews were to be set apart from the world—a family who loved each other and wouldn't take advantage of each other. Part of that was a prohibition against charging interest on loans to one's fellow Jews (see #171).

The whole subject of lending and borrowing, on a national scale, was to be an indicator (one of many) of how well Israel was following their God. Moses promised them that if they “diligently obeyed the voice of Yahweh,” He would **“open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.”** (Deuteronomy 28:12) If they did not, they would **“not prosper in [their] ways; you shall be only oppressed and plundered continually.”** (Deuteronomy 28:29) The 3500-year history of the Jewish people reveals a sad proportion: a hundred verse-29 curses for every verse-12 blessing. The Jews need to come to terms with the fact that either Yahweh is a liar or they have *not* been “diligently obeying the voice of Yahweh their God, to observe carefully all His commandments,” (verse 1) no matter what their rabbis say.

Chapter 3

Marriage, Sex, and Family Ties



The church in Rome to which Paul wrote his epistle was comprised of both gentiles and Jews, so they were a perfect audience for a treatise on what the Law is supposed to do—and what it's not. Paul was probably more conversant with the Law of Moses than any other Christian of his time. Knowing first-hand the nature of God's Law and how it made grace essential, he pointed out that our sins deserve, and will receive, punishment (if they haven't already)—regardless of whether we're Jews or gentiles. **"There will be trouble and calamity for everyone who keeps on sinning—for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. But there will be glory and honor and peace from God for all who do good—for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism. God will punish the Gentiles when they sin, even though they never had God's written law. And he will punish the Jews when they sin, for they do have the law."** In other words, possession of the Law of Moses is not the issue, nor is knowledge of the Torah. **"For it is not merely knowing the law that brings God's approval. Those who obey the law will be declared right in God's sight. Even when Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, instinctively follow what the law says, they show that in their hearts they know right from wrong. They demonstrate that God's law is written within them, for their own consciences either accuse them or tell them they are doing what is right."** (Romans 2:9-15 NLT) Paul is saying something remarkable here for a rabbi—a *Pharisee*—who was schooled at the feet of Gamaliel. He's saying that the innate knowledge of right and wrong that is hard-wired into the consciences of those who never even heard of Moses is the *same thing* as "God's Law." They intrinsically know, for instance, that murder is wrong, even if they never read the sixth Commandment. This goes a long way toward leaving the rabbinical "letter-of-the-Law-and-nothing-but" interpretation out to dry.

Paul goes on to say, **"If you are a Jew, you are relying on God's law for your special relationship with Him. You boast that all is well between yourself and God. Yes, you know what He wants; you know right from wrong because you have been taught His law. You are convinced that you are a guide for the blind and a beacon light for people who are lost in darkness without God. You think you can instruct the ignorant and teach children the ways of God."** Well, that's how it was supposed to be. The Jews were chosen to be the communicators of Yahweh's salvation to the world. **"For you are certain that in God's law you have complete knowledge and truth..."** Properly understood and applied, of course, that's not far from the truth, although "complete" is a pretty tall order: at the moment, we can only "see through a glass, darkly."

"Well then, if you teach others, why don't you teach yourself? You tell others not to steal, but do you steal? You say it is wrong to commit adultery, but do you do it? You

condemn idolatry, but do you steal from pagan temples? You are so proud of knowing the law, but you dishonor God by breaking it. No wonder the Scriptures say, ‘The world blasphemes the name of God because of you....’” The Jews had made a fine art of observing the letter of the law while blatantly violating its spirit. Ogle your neighbor’s wife all you want, as long as you don’t lay a hand on her. Wag your finger at pagan idolatry, but feel free to defraud pagan gentiles through your unscrupulous business dealings, betraying an allegiance to your own false god—money. It looks like the whole list-of-rules idea is on shaky ground.

Paul then specifically addresses one of the “sign” mitzvot, circumcision (see #17). **“The Jewish ceremony of circumcision is worth something only if you obey God’s law [all of it]. But if you don’t obey God’s law, you are no better off than an uncircumcised Gentile. And if the Gentiles obey God’s law, won’t God give them all the rights and honors of being his own people? In fact, uncircumcised Gentiles who keep God’s law [i.e., by heeding their consciences, as we saw above] will be much better off than you Jews who are circumcised and know so much about God’s law but don’t obey it [that is, through meticulously observing the letter of the law as a way to avoid dealing with issues of the heart]....”** An example of this contrast in modes of “Law keeping” would be that the Jews, knowing Mitzvah #41, would not reap the corners of their fields, though they might leave as little unharvested as they thought they could get away with without being in violation of the Law. Pious gentiles, meanwhile, might never have heard of this Jewish agricultural custom but they’d still show compassion for their less fortunate neighbors by providing material assistance to them in times of need. Cornelius the Centurion was described in Acts 10:2 as just such a man.

Now the Apostle muddies the waters by re-defining who a “real Jew” is. I should point out that this in no way abrogates the promises Yahweh made to “biological Israel” back in the Old Covenant scriptures. Paul is merely pointing out that in the end, being God’s children has everything to do with “rightness of heart” and nothing to do with genetic serendipity or blind adherence to a list of regulations. **“For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the Jewish ceremony of circumcision. No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not a cutting of the body but a change of heart produced by God’s Spirit. Whoever has that kind of change seeks praise from God, not from people.”** (Romans 2:17-29, NLT) He flatly states that the value of circumcision is not in the physical act, but in what it symbolizes, “a change of heart produced by God’s Spirit.” If you feel that my treatment of the 613 mitzvot is off base for stressing the spirit over the letter, you need to deal with that.

“Then what’s the advantage of being a Jew? Is there any value in the Jewish ceremony of circumcision? Yes, being a Jew has many advantages. First of all, the Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God. True, some of them were unfaithful; but just

because they broke their promises, does that mean God will break his promises? Of course not! Though everyone else in the world is a liar, God is true. As the Scriptures say, ‘He will be proved right in what he says, and he will win his case in court.’” (Romans 3:1-4 NLT) This is particularly significant in light of our current study. The transmission of Yahweh’s instructions to us, called here the “whole revelation of God,” was accomplished through the Jews. So the children of Israel have had the great privilege of being the custodians of God’s truth. Were they always worthy of this exalted position? No. So what? The fact remains, the blessings of Yahweh came to man through the Jews.

There’s a vast difference, however, between being the sole *custodians* of Yahweh’s blessing the sole *recipients*. Paul addresses this next: “**Now then, is this blessing only for the Jews, or is it for Gentiles, too? Well, what about Abraham? We have been saying he was declared righteous by God because of his faith. But how did his faith help him? Was he declared righteous only after he had been circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? The answer is that God accepted him first, and then he was circumcised later! The circumcision ceremony was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are made right with God by faith. And Abraham is also the spiritual father of those who have been circumcised, but only if they have the same kind of faith Abraham had before he was circumcised.**” (Romans 4:9-12) This is why Yahshua said, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” (John 6:29)

Paul continues his explanation: “**It is clear, then, that God’s promise to give the whole earth to Abraham and his [spiritual] descendants was not based on obedience to God’s law, but on the new relationship with God that comes by faith.**” It should be noted that “biological” Israel—specifically the faithful Jewish remnant—was not promised the “whole earth,” but will occupy only *eretz* Israel—the Promised Land—during the Millennium. The rest of the earth will be populated by Abraham’s *other* spiritual descendants, by default, gentiles. “**So if you claim that God’s promise is for those who obey God’s law and think they are ‘good enough’ in God’s sight, then you are saying that faith is useless. And in that case, the promise is also meaningless. But the law brings punishment on those who [unsuccessfully] try to obey it. (The only way to avoid breaking the law is to have no law to break!)**” He’s not saying ignorance is bliss, however, because as he already pointed out, the “law” is written into our consciences, whether we have access to the Torah or not. By trying to keep the law, you’re quite literally “damned if you do and damned if you don’t” if you’re doing it as a method of reaching God. “**So that’s why faith is the key! God’s promise is given to us as a free gift. And we are certain to receive it, whether or not we follow Jewish customs, if we have faith like Abraham’s. For Abraham is the father of all who believe.**” Yes, not Moses, but *Abraham*: a gentile (or pre-Jew, if you will) who was “counted as righteous” by Yahweh long before the law existed.

“Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith [i.e., not our works], Christ has brought us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory.” (Romans 4:13-16, 5:1-2) I’ll say a hearty Amen to that!

We’ll continue our New Testament commentary later. But for now, let’s return to Maimonides’ list.

MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND FAMILY

(59) *Honor your father and mother.* **“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which Yahweh your God is giving you.”** (Exodus 20:12) This is the Fifth Commandment of the Decalogue. The case can be made that the Ten Commandments were listed in order of their importance. If that is true, then this is the most vital of the six that govern relationships between people. The word for “honor” is the Hebrew *kabad*, which at its root means “to be heavy, or to make weighty.” (It’s therefore the opposite of *qalal*. See #3.) We are not to take our relationship with our parents lightly, but rather we are to respect them, hold them in esteem, and take their instructions very seriously. Paul provides the practical application when he simply instructs children to “obey their parents in (or “out of respect for”) Yahweh, for this is right.” (Ephesians 6:1) The Exodus commandment adds the incentive of long life in the Promised Land for those Israelites who comply, something that could be applied equally to individuals or to the nation as a whole.

But there’s more to it. There is a virtually universal perception that God assumes a strictly male persona—a view that often leads to an unscriptural and erroneous attitude that men are somehow “better” than women. It’s true that Eve’s starring role in the introduction of sin into the world earned her a place of permanent subservience (**“Your desire shall be toward your husband, and he shall rule over you.”** Genesis 3:16). But God’s original and intended pattern was equal honor between men and women. As I pointed out in #8, Yahweh is referred to as “father” only once or twice in the Old Covenant scriptures—most memorably in Isaiah 9:6, where the Messiah is called **“Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”** We aren’t surprised to find that the name Yahweh is a masculine form in Hebrew. But consider this: the word for

“Spirit” (*ruwach*) as used of deity in passages like Genesis 1:2 (“**And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters...**”) is a *feminine* noun. Yahweh is not only our Father; “He” is also our *Mother!* The reason God designed us as He did—children of *both* our mothers and our fathers—was to demonstrate a spiritual truth: in order to be truly alive, we need to be born not only in body and soul, but also in spirit. Yahshua pointed out this very thing to Nicodemus in the third chapter of the Gospel of John.

So when Yahweh inscribes with His own hand on tablets of stone that we are to “honor our fathers and our mothers,” He is speaking of something far more significant than respecting and obeying our earthly parents (though we are certainly to do that). He is teaching us about the relationship He wants to have with us. *He* is our Father *and* our Mother—ultimately, it is He whom we are to honor (i.e., be serious about, give weight to). Yahweh our “Father” is our Creator, our Protector, our Savior. Yahweh our “Mother” is our Comforter, our “Helper,” the One who restrains evil in the world—the “maternal” aspects of deity. The attendant promise “**that your days may be long upon the land which Yahweh your God is giving you**” is thus clearly a reference to the eternal life that we who honor Yahweh will enjoy. As we explore these 613 mitzvot, we will discover that the same sort of spiritual truths will underlie each of the “ten commandments,” and indeed, the entire Torah.

- (60) *Do not smite one’s father or mother. “He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.”* (Exodus 21:15) If the honor due one’s father and mother is based, as we saw in #59, on the honor of Yahweh Himself, then to strike one’s parent is tantamount to striking God, because our parents stand in for God on this earth. The word for “smite” or “strike” implies the intention to inflict harm. *Nakah* means “to strike (lightly or severely, literally or figuratively), to beat, wound, kill, slaughter, murder, punish, or slay.” (S) I can’t help but cringe when I think of those who beat Yahshua, spat on Him, and nailed Him to a Roman cross. In a very real sense, they were “striking their father and mother,” and are thus worthy of death, the Messiah’s dying prayer for their forgiveness notwithstanding. But if we rebuff Yahweh’s Holy Spirit, we are no less guilty.

As far as the mitzvah’s prescribed temporal punishment is concerned, it should be understood that the death sentence for striking your earthly father or mother was reserved for Israel under its theocratic government. We today are not to exact this penalty. But Yahweh’s word is not obsolete: he who strikes out at the God who is represented in this life by his parents “**shall surely be put to death.**” There’s no getting around it.

- (61) *Do not curse your father or mother. “He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.”* (Exodus 21:17) This is even harsher than it looks at

first glance in the English. The word for “curse” is one we’ve seen before—*qalal*: to trivialize, to bring into contempt, curse, despise, or revile. (See #3.) Admittedly, the death penalty seems a bit extreme for merely taking your parents lightly. But as we have seen, our mothers and fathers stand in the place of Yahweh on this earth. Ultimately, if we take *God* lightly, we shall “bear our sin.” Aside from the metaphor of father and mother representing God, keeping the parent-child relationship intact in Israel during the years between the exodus and the coming of the Messiah was a crucial factor in delivering our Deliverer to a lost world. Sending the promised Messiah into a dysfunctional society the likes of the Canaanites’, the Babylonians’, the Romans’, or today’s America for that matter, would have been, shall we say, problematical.

Yahshua once referred to this very passage: “Jesus replied, ‘Why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God? For instance, God says, “Honor your father and mother,” and “Anyone who speaks evil of father or mother must be put to death.” But you say, “You don’t need to honor your parents by caring for their needs if you give the money to God instead.” And so, by your own tradition, you nullify the direct commandment of God. You hypocrites! Isaiah was prophesying about you when he said, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away. Their worship is a farce, for they replace God’s commands with their own man-made teachings.”’” (Matthew 15:3-9 NLT) The “direct commandment” taught us about the relationship between God and man. By creating their greed-inspired loopholes, the Pharisees had destroyed the picture God had painted for us.

- (62) *Reverently fear your father and mother.* “Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: “You shall be holy, for I, Yahweh, your God, am holy. Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I am Yahweh your God.”’” (Leviticus 19:1-3) As if to confirm everything I’ve said in the last few entries, Moses now reports Yahweh’s instructions to “revere” one’s mother and father in the larger context of reverence for *Him* and separation from the world. The reference to “mother and father” here is in fact a bit incongruous if taken strictly as the earthly relationship between parents and children. But if you “read” it: “You shall revere *Me* and keep My Sabbaths,” it all makes perfect sense. Yahweh is our Father, our Mother, our reason for being, the One whose love brought us into existence. And again, it makes little sense to link reverence for our earthly fathers and mothers to the weekly Sabbath rest, but if you see that Yahweh is equating the Sabbath to our eternal salvation as He is identifying our parents with Himself, the picture becomes clear and stunningly beautiful: those who are holy—separated to Yahweh’s will and purpose—are children of their Heavenly Father/Mother, and it is these who

will “keep His Sabbaths”—in other words, enjoy everlasting life. Why? Because Yahweh is their God.

- (63) *Be fruitful and multiply.* “**So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’**” (Genesis 1:28) First, notice that when God created “man” in His own image, He created both male and female, i.e., *both* were made in the image of God. Men like Muhammad who treat women like cattle—as sub-human possessions—must answer to Yahweh for their disrespect. Second, notice that the “command” to be fruitful and multiply was a blessing—the ability to do this was the result of Yahweh’s love and goodness toward us. In fact, one of the implied consequences of Israel’s obedience was to be that their numbers would increase: “**If you diligently obey the voice of Yahweh your God...[He] will set you high above all nations of the earth.... Blessed shall be the fruit of your body.**” (Deuteronomy 28:1-4) The converse, however, is equally true: “**If you do not obey the voice of Yahweh...cursed shall be the fruit of your body.... You shall beget sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours; for they shall go into captivity.... You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and daughters whom Yahweh your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you.**” (Deuteronomy 28:15, 18, 41, 53) How ironic it is that our unwillingness to heed the voice of Yahweh will result in our *inability* to obey Him.

This mitzvah also flies in the face of the odd Victorian attitude that sex is somehow dirty or profane in itself—that its bliss is inherently sinful and those who enjoy it should feel guilt-ridden and embarrassed, and that sex is strictly for procreation, not pleasure. Within the context of marriage (which Yahweh Himself instituted) the godly order was: “**A man shall...be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.**” (Genesis 2:24-25) Let’s face it: the Creator *made* the process pleasurable so we would “be fruitful and multiply.” That being said, it’s not the sex itself that’s holy, but the marriage bed—the context of pleasure through relationship. It’s a metaphor for our eternal relationship with God. That’s why Satan tries so hard to break down the bonds of family relationship, using sex, ironically enough, as a primary tool.

- (64) *A eunuch shall not marry a daughter of Israel.* “**He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of Yahweh.**” (Deuteronomy 23:1) The mitzvah here bears no resemblance to what Yahweh said. The rabbis simply took the ball (so to speak) and ran with it. This has nothing to do with marriage or family, and everything to do with symbols. It’s not that

God is somehow put off by those unfortunate enough to have become eunuchs; it's that these poor guys were a ready metaphor for fruitlessness. Yahweh is teaching us that "entering into His assembly" in truth will be evidenced by spiritual "fruit" in one's life, defined later by Paul as love (hence: joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—Galatians 5:22). Just as a physical eunuch is not equipped to father children, a "spiritual eunuch" is inherently unable to transmit the spirit of God's love to those around him.

Does the Torah here unfairly condemn (as it seems to) the one who has been emasculated to an eternity separated from Yahweh? In a word, no. There are at least two examples of eunuchs in the Bible who were obviously true worshippers of Yahweh—Daniel (see 1:3) and the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8. So is this a scriptural contradiction? Not if you take the Torah's directive in the spirit in which it was obviously meant. The prophet Isaiah clears the whole mess up for us: **"Do not let the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to Yahweh speak, saying, 'Yahweh has utterly separated me from His people'; nor let the eunuch say, 'Here I am, a dry tree.' For thus says Yahweh: 'To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, even to them I will give in My house and within My walls a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.'" (Isaiah 56:3-5)**

- (65) *A mamzer shall not marry the daughter of a Jew. "One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of Yahweh; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of Yahweh."* (Deuteronomy 23:2) As we shall see in the next section ("Forbidden Sexual Relations"), a man may not marry certain close blood relatives, the ex-wives of certain close blood relatives, a woman who has not been validly divorced from her previous husband, the daughter or sister of his ex-wife, etc. The progeny of such forbidden relationships are known as *mamzerim*—those of "illegitimate birth." The Talmud, strangely enough, does not include people merely born out of wedlock in this technically "illegitimate" group, but only the children of these specifically forbidden relationships. The Torah doesn't elaborate. Strong's defines the Hebrew word for "one of illegitimate birth" (*mamzer*) as being derived from the root word for "to alienate; a mongrel, that is, born of a Jewish father and a heathen mother—a bastard," so apparently we have a difference of opinion as to precisely what a *mamzer* was.

As in the case of eunuchs (see #64), Yahweh is not arbitrarily condemning a group of people who had no control over their familial situation. Rather, He is instituting a symbol, a picture, of the necessary state of being set apart for Yahweh's use. "Bastards" in this context represent the

fruit, or result, of sin. The metaphor demonstrates that the ends do not justify the means in God's economy—the “Assembly of Yahweh” cannot be populated through corrupt methods or impure motives, but only through a “legitimate” relationship with Yahweh. Thus when Constantine's Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) *de facto* “converted” all of the Roman Empire to “Christianity,” it was a pointless and counterproductive tactic. When you baptize a pagan, all you get is a wet pagan.

- (66) *An Ammonite or Moabite shall never marry the daughter of an Israelite. “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of Yahweh; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of Yahweh forever, because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. Nevertheless Yahweh your God would not listen to Balaam, but Yahweh your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because Yahweh your God loves you. You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever.”* (Deuteronomy 23:3-6) Once again, we see the rabbis equating “entering the assembly of Yahweh” with marriage to a Jew. If it wasn't clear before, it should be now: marriage has next to nothing to do with what He was really trying to help us understand. Here, I believe, the metaphor is a warning against compromise and accommodation with unbelievers—even if they're our neighbors or relatives—if those unbelievers are actively attempting to lead us astray.

Moab and Ammon (bordering Israel's Promised Land on the east) were the descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew. But by the time of the exodus, they had become so thoroughly pagan that their hostility to Yahweh's people was guaranteed. The “Balaam episode” (Numbers 22-25) became the universal Biblical metaphor for false teaching leading to destruction (cf. Revelation 2:14). So here God tells His people not to have anything to do with them—do not allow their religion, their culture, their political presence, their commerce, and yes, even their bloodline, to have any part in the life of Israel—ever. (In an ironic twist that proves that the underlying symbol outweighs the plain reading of the mitzvah, Yahweh arranged for a godly Moabite woman, Ruth, to show up in the Messiah's family tree—she was the great grandmother of King David. In Ruth's case, of course, it was clear that she had turned her back on Moab and its gods in favor of Israel and Yahweh—Ruth 1:16) God's instruction is to maintain our holiness, our separation from the world's influence. As usual, Yahweh's clear intention goes far beyond the face value of the mitzvah.

- (67) *Do not exclude a descendant of Esau from the community of Israel for three generations. “You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother.... The children*

of the third generation born to them may enter the assembly of Yahweh.”

(Deuteronomy 23:7-8) The devil, they say, is in the details. Edom, the descendants of Esau (brother of Jacob/Israel) had also become implacable enemies of Yahweh’s people by the time of the exodus, refusing to allow the Israelites to cross their land (Numbers 20:18-21). So why does the Torah cut them so much slack? Yes, Israel was instructed to be wary of them, but after three generations of cohabitation with Jews, Edomites who worshipped Yahweh (unlike Moabites or Ammonites) could be admitted to “the assembly of Yahweh.” What’s the difference? It all goes back to Balaam: the Edomites as a nation may have been generally hostile to the Jews, but they never attempted to seduce them away from Yahweh. Remember what I said (#3) about trivializing Yahweh’s name versus blaspheming it—*qalal* vs. *naqab*? The same distinction appears here: bad behavior is one thing; false teaching is infinitely worse in Yahweh’s estimation. It’s worth noting that in the end, Edom will be utterly wiped out because of its sins (Jeremiah 49:10). But between Moses and Judgment Day, Yahweh always left the door of repentance open to them.

- (68) *Do not exclude an Egyptian from the community of Israel for three generations. “You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land. The children of the third generation born to them may enter the assembly of Yahweh.”* (Deuteronomy 23:7-8) Same song, second verse. Unlike Moab and Ammon, Egypt’s crimes against Israel and its God were not those of false teaching and seduction, but rather of lost men behaving badly—something that’s (let’s face it) inevitable for lost men. So Yahweh offered to consider their repentance (though there’s no evidence that they ever did, at least on the national level). Egypt is a common scriptural metaphor for the world: not particularly good or bad, just *there*—a place of routine, mediocrity, malaise, and finally slavery. It’s the place we must leave in order to enter the “Promised Land” of Yahweh’s salvation. Unlike Edom, a remnant of Egypt will “make it” into the Millennium (see Isaiah 19:23-24), serving Yahweh with Israel at her side. The children of Egypt’s third generation (following paganism and Islam) will indeed “enter the assembly of Yahweh.”
- (69) *There shall be no harlot in Israel; that is, there shall be no intercourse with a woman without a formal declaration of marriage. “There shall be no ritual harlot of the daughters of Israel, or a perverted one of the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of Yahweh your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to Yahweh your God.”* (Deuteronomy 23:17-18) The rabbis have missed the point entirely (although what they prescribed is no doubt a fine thing). By making us the way He did—males and females designed to mate for life and produce

offspring as a byproduct of our love for each other—Yahweh is showing us something wonderful about the spiritual pattern He has designed for us. He pictures Israel as His wife (just as the Church is described as the bride of Christ) and He is her “husband.” The essence of our marital faithfulness is monogamy—restricting our sexual contact to one partner. This is a picture of our faithfulness to Yahweh. We are not to “cheat” on Him by giving our affections to false gods—even stealthy idols like wealth, pleasure, or pride.

There is, however, a more prosaic application of this mitzvah. When Moses wrote these words, the Canaanites whom Israel was to displace practiced a licentious religion that included temple prostitution—both male and female—as part of its rites. Thus if an Israelite (either male or female—the passage specifies both) were to become a purveyor of pagan worship by becoming a ritual prostitute, it would be the antithesis of faithfulness to Yahweh—an abomination. As we have seen before and will see again, this is simply a call to holiness—being set apart as Yahweh’s people.

The Deuteronomy passage also makes another point: a harlot’s wages weren’t acceptable as offerings before Yahweh. In other words, the ends do not justify the means. We are called to holiness in ministry, not productivity, efficiency, or success. God does not need venture capital from Satan.

- (70) *Take a wife by kiddushin, the sacrament of marriage.* **“When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man’s wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before Yahweh, and you shall not bring sin on the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance.”** (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) God gave us lots of information on whom to marry, but He had precious little to say about how. In Jewish tradition, marriage is a two step process. *Kiddushin*, or betrothal, is in effect from the time the bride accepts a bridal contract, money, or even sexual relations from the groom. It is far more binding than our modern “engagement,” and can only be dissolved by death or formal divorce. The final step to full-blown “marriage,” called *nisuin*, is achieved when the bride moves in with the groom. There is nothing at all wrong with this system, but the scripture the rabbis use to support it has nothing to do with the marriage/wedding process. As a matter of fact, Yahweh never actually specified a particular wedding formula (except for the obvious—one man and one woman sharing a life together—becoming

“one flesh”). The Deuteronomy passage is, rather, a discussion about divorce and an admonition against certain abuses of the practice (which we’ll cover shortly).

At first glance, Yahweh seems resigned to, even comfortable with, the fact of divorce here, but how does He really feel? **“You cover the altar of Yahweh with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because Yahweh has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. For Yahweh, the God of Israel, says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence, says Yahweh of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”** (Malachi 2:13-16) Marriage is a picture of our relationship with Yahweh. So breaking our marriage vows is like betraying our God—it tears down a relationship that was meant to endure for life. Yahweh is merciful and forgiving, but we can’t destroy what He has built and expect Him to be happy about it.

- (71) *The newly married husband shall be free for one year to rejoice with his wife.* **“When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken.”** (Deuteronomy 24:5) Boy, does our Maker know us or what? Here Yahweh honors the institution of the honeymoon, that magical time when the bride and groom can’t get enough of each other. The newlywed husband is not to be separated from His bride for a whole year—there will be no military service or other duties that would put distance or stress between the happy couple. This doesn’t mean that the husband can’t go to work to support his family for a whole year, only that he won’t be separated from his bride during that time. Only when they have become thoroughly familiar with each other, when they have had ample time to explore every nook and cranny of each other’s personalities, psyches, and anatomies, does God say, “Okay, now you two could use a little space.”
- (72) *A bridegroom shall be exempt for a whole year from taking part in any public labor, such as military service, guarding the wall and similar duties.* **“When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken.”** (Deuteronomy 24:5) This, of course, is simply the converse of Mitzvah #71. (The rabbis felt compelled to come up with a certain number of positive and negative rules, which explains why the list seems so contrived in places.) Consider this: if marriage is a picture of Yahweh’s

relationship with His people, then there ought to be a spiritual counterpart to this honeymoon period—and there is. Yahshua the Messiah is prophesied to reign on earth as King of Kings for a thousand years—a period of time generally referred to as the Millennium, actually the seventh of seven millennia Yahweh has ordained as mortal man’s time upon the earth. Following the “marriage supper of the Lamb,” spoken of in Revelation 19, God’s thousand-year-long honeymoon with the redeemed of the earth will usher in the wedded bliss of eternity with Him. As a confirmed “old married person,” that sounds pretty good to me.

- (73) *Do not withhold food, clothing or conjugal rights from your wife. “If he takes another wife, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage rights. And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without paying money.”* (Exodus 21:10-11) What the rabbis said to do here was such a no-brainer, God never even mentioned it. What He did say was intended to protect *subsequent* wives from abuse. It is abundantly clear that Yahweh’s intended pattern for marriage was two people, a man and a woman, joined as one for a lifetime. However, strange as we may find it, He never overtly prohibited polygamy—although He made sure that every time we see it in practice in the scriptures, there’s trouble attached. *Caveat emptor*. This admonition in Exodus says, in our vernacular, *You think you’re such a stud that you can handle two wives? Very well, I see it as a sign of arrogant stupidity, but knock yourself out. Just be aware that you’re going to have to be twice the man you were before—twice the man I made you, by the way. You can’t short-change your new wife in any way, not in financial matters, not in attention, not in support, and not in the bedroom. And if you find out the hard way that you can’t keep up your end of the bargain, don’t come crying to me when she cleans out your bank account.* Okay, that’s a paraphrase, but you get the idea.

In a symbolic sense, Yahweh Himself is polygamous. He has separated Himself from His “first” wife, Israel, because of her unfaithfulness (see the book of Hosea). And now He has betrothed Himself to a new bride, the Ekklesia of Christ, who looks forward to consummating the union at the “marriage supper of the Lamb,” spoken of in Revelation 19. According to His own Law, Yahweh is prepared to treat the Church with the same level of devotion He affords to Israel. Will He restore Israel to her former place of blessing? Yes, but only after she repents of her wickedness. (Actually, it’s more complicated than that: see #78.) And how does Yahweh view this potentially awkward three-way relationship between Himself, the Church, and Israel? Brace yourself for some *really* heavy symbolism, and read the Song of Solomon. The key is: Solomon represents the Messiah, the

Shulamite is the Church, and the daughters of Jerusalem are, well, the daughters of Jerusalem—Israel.

- (74) *The woman suspected of adultery shall be dealt with as prescribed in the Torah.* **“This is the law of jealousy, when a wife, while under her husband’s authority, goes astray and defiles herself, or when the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man, and he becomes jealous of his wife; then he shall stand the woman before Yahweh, and the priest shall execute all this law upon her. Then the man shall be free from iniquity, but that woman shall bear her guilt.”** (Numbers 5:29-31) The “this” at the beginning of the quoted scripture refers to a lengthy passage that immediately precedes it (Numbers 5:11-28) in which if a husband suspects his wife of cheating on him but has no proof, he is to bring her before the priest, who turns the whole thing over to Yahweh. If she denies wrongdoing, a complicated ritual is performed which is the rough equivalent of saying, “Cross my heart and hope to die,” only *for real*, because Yahweh’s doing the judging. As a practical matter, this convoluted procedure protects both the husband and the wife from injustice: if the wife is innocent, she can’t be condemned on the suspicions of a jealous and paranoid husband. But if she is guilty, her own words condemn her before God, leaving the husband “free from iniquity.”

In *Future History*, Chapter 3, I describe how this “Law of Jealousy” demonstrated the spiritual adultery of both Israel and the Church in the milestone year of 1033. Yahweh describes himself as a “jealous God.” He refuses to share our affections with other “gods,” whether serious idols or frivolous pursuits. If we are guilty of unfaithfulness toward Him, it will do us no good to deny it, swearing our innocence on the proverbial “stack of Bibles,” for He knows the truth even before we do. The only thing we can do is to fall on His mercy, repent, and beg His forgiveness. Unfaithful Israel has not done this—yet. But they will, and a remnant of them will be restored to a place of honor. A somewhat different destiny awaits the Church.

- (75) *One who defames his wife’s honor by falsely accusing her of unchastity before marriage must live with her all his lifetime.* **“If any man takes a wife, and goes in to her, and detests her, and charges her with shameful conduct, and brings a bad name on her, and says, ‘I took this woman, and when I came to her I found she was not a virgin,’ then the father and mother of the young woman shall take and bring out the evidence of the young woman’s virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. And the young woman’s father shall say to the elders, ‘I gave my daughter to this man as wife, and he detests her. Now he has charged her with shameful conduct, saying, “I found your daughter was not a virgin,” and yet these are the evidences of my daughter’s virginity.’ And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city. Then the elders of that city shall take that man and punish him; and**

they shall fine him one hundred shekels of silver and give them to the father of the young woman, because he has brought a bad name on a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife; he cannot divorce her all his days. (Deuteronomy 22:13-19) The actual passage is pretty self-explanatory. In our decadent culture, of course, the first hurdle we have to get over is the idea of pre-marital sexual abstinence. It's not quaint and outmoded; rather, it's God's plan for our lives. Why? Because (as I've said before) the marriage of a man and a woman is a metaphor for Yahweh's relationship with His people. He won't share our affections with false gods—He wants His bride pure and spotless, undefiled by compromise with the world.

That leaves us in a bit of a pickle, doesn't it? All of us have sinned and therefore fall short of the glory of God. None of us are "spotless bride" material. The old joke asks, "What's the difference between a pregnant woman and a light bulb? You can unscrew a light bulb." If you'll pardon the crude metaphor, we have all been "screwed" by Satan—we've all allowed ourselves to become defiled. But Yahshua *can* "unscrew" us. It requires a miracle of love, redemption, and sacrifice, but if we'll let Him, He will restore our purity and take us as His bride.

- (76) *A man may not divorce his wife concerning whom he has published an evil report about her unchastity before marriage. "...He cannot divorce her all his days."* (Deuteronomy 22:19) This is one more contrived rabbinical restatement designed to let them arrive at the requisite number of affirmative and negative mitzvot. They missed (okay, they *purposely ignored*) a golden opportunity here, however. The Deuteronomy passage quoted in #75 goes on to state the consequences if the bride is *guilty*: **"But if the thing is true, and evidences of virginity are not found for the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel, to play the harlot in her father's house. So you shall put away the evil from among you."** (Deuteronomy 22:20-21) A man who accused his bride of unchastity in Israel, in other words, had to be prepared to either live with her all his life or see her stoned to death. In other words, one did not make such accusations lightly. A truly loving husband, it seems to me, would rather cover his bride's failings, forgiving her of her past sins, than see her stoned to death. In fact, this compassionate attitude is exactly how Yahweh treats us if we ask Him for mercy. If we do not, however, we must face judgment.

This spiritual application rings true for Israel, unfortunately. She was unchaste. She did—and continues to—follow false gods. And the "men of her city" (i.e., the world) have in obedience to the Law been stoning her for

thousands of years. If only Israel had understood what Yahweh was teaching them in His Torah.

- (77) *Obtain a divorce by a formal written document.* “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man’s wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before Yahweh, and you shall not bring sin on the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance.” (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) The rabbis are homing in here on the mechanism for divorce. It should be reiterated right up front that although Yahweh allows it, He *hates* divorce, permitting it only because of the hardness of Israel’s heart (Matthew 19:8). Judaism 101 explains the Certificate of Divorce: “The document in question is referred to in the Talmud as a *sefer k’ritut* (scroll of cutting off), but it is more commonly known today as a ‘get.’ The get is not phrased in negative terms. The traditional text does not emphasize the breakdown of the relationship, nor does it specify the reason for the divorce; rather, it states that the woman is now free to marry another man.” Sad, isn’t it? The relationship—the thing symbolized by marriage—is arguably the *only* thing Yahweh cares about. And yet we often throw it away without a second thought.

Yahshua put the issue into perspective for us. “Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question: ‘Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife for any reason?’ ‘Haven’t you read the Scriptures?’ Jesus replied. ‘They record that from the beginning “God made them male and female.” And He said, “This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.” Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together.’ ‘Then why did Moses say a man could merely write an official letter of divorce and send her away?’ they asked. Jesus replied, “Moses permitted divorce as a concession to your hard-hearted wickedness, but it was not what God had originally intended. And I tell you this, a man who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery—unless his wife has been unfaithful.” (Matthew 19:3-8 NLT; cf. Mark 10:2-12) We mess up God’s metaphors all too often through sheer thick-headedness. But to my mind its worse to do it through stubborn, willful disobedience of His instructions. He didn’t tell us these things for His health; He told us for *our* health.

In identifying the only legitimate cause for divorce, Yahshua pinpointed the very thing that caused Yahweh to separate Himself from Israel: unfaithfulness. **“You have heard that the law of Moses says, ‘A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a letter of divorce.’ But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”** (Matthew 5:31-32 NLT)

- (78) *One who divorced his wife shall not remarry her if after the divorce she had been married to another man. “...Then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled.”* (Deuteronomy 24:4)
- From the same passage as #77 above, we see a restriction placed on the husband of the broken marriage: he is not to remarry the wife he previously divorced if she had been married to someone else in the meantime. This is where it gets a little confusing. The book of Hosea, especially the second chapter, seems at first to imply that Yahweh has different standards for Himself. In verse 2 He says, **“She [Israel] is not my wife, nor am I her husband.”** Israel, after unsuccessfully seeking other “lovers,” says in verse 7, **“I will go and return to my first husband.”** But then down in verse 16, we read, **“It shall be in that day, says Yahweh, that you will call me ‘my Husband.’”** And in verse 19, **“I will betroth you to Me forever.”** What gives? Is Yahweh breaking His own rules? He would be, except for one stunning detail: **“From now on, we regard no one [e.g., Jews] according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”** (II Corinthians 5:16-19) The Israel to whom Yahweh will betroth Himself in the Last Days is *not* His old unfaithful wife, for she is prohibited by law from re-marrying her old Husband. Rather, she is now a new creation that, with the Church, has been made pure and undefiled by the blood of the Lamb of God. But until she is transformed in Spirit by receiving Yahshua, her renewed relationship with God is legally impossible. The implications should be stunning for any practicing Jew today: it is *impossible* to form a relationship with Yahweh through Judaism.
- (79) *A widow whose husband died childless must not be married to anyone but her deceased husband’s brother. “If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband’s brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. And it shall be that the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.”* (Deuteronomy 25:5-6) In ancient Israel, this mitzvah

was part of the welfare system, intimate and practical, as usual. To become a widow was bad enough, but to be left with no sons to carry on the family name and provide familial support was considered a catastrophic tragedy. The widow wasn't to remarry just anybody. God's ideal solution was for the dead husband's brother to marry the widow (even if he was already married, so the rules governing polygamy apply—see #73). The first son born of this union of necessity would bear the name, status, and inheritance rights of the deceased husband. This also kept the DNA—the genetic profile—of the son as close as possible to what it would have been had the dead brother been his actual father.

There were several big “ifs” attached to this mitzvah, however. First, the brothers had to have dwelled “together” with each other before the first died. *Yachad* comes from a word that means “unit.” It's not specified just how close this togetherness had to be, but if the guy never saw his brother except at gatherings like the Feast of Tabernacles, all bets were apparently off. Second, there was a “get-out-of-marriage-free card,” so to speak. We'll address that under #81.

- (80) *One must marry the widow of a brother who has died childless. “...her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.”* (Deuteronomy 25:5) The scripture supporting the affirmatively stated converse to Mitzvah #79 stresses that the widow was not to be looked at as a charity case, but was to be a full-fledged member of the family with all the rights and privileges of any wife, including conjugal rights. The primary idea, after all, was to ensure that the dead brother's line continued. This whole “marry-your-brother's-widow” concept was not new with the Law of Moses, by the way. God took this issue of genetic heritage very seriously generations before the exodus: consider the case of Judah's son Onan in Genesis 38. Yahweh killed him (verse 10) for refusing to father a son for his dead brother Er. It's a pretty convoluted tale, but the bloodline of the Messiah was at stake here. Judah himself unwittingly ended up fathering his own grandson (i.e., the son of his daughter-in-law), Perez (a direct ancestor of King David). Twisted but true.
- (81) *The widow (as in #79 and 80) must formally release the brother-in-law if he refuses to marry her. “But if the man does not want to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate to the elders, and say, ‘My husband's brother refuses to raise up a name to his brother in Israel; he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother.’ Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him. But if he stands firm and says, ‘I do not want to take her,’ then his brother's wife shall come to him in the presence of the elders, remove his sandal from his foot, spit in his face, and answer and say, ‘So shall it be done to the man who will not build up his*

brother's house.' And his name shall be called in Israel, 'The house of him who had his sandal removed.'" (Deuteronomy 25:7-10) Okay, so it's not a stoning offense. This puts the "marry-your-brother's-widow" rule in the "strongly suggested" category. Notice that three times in the greater passage, the phrase "in Israel" or "of Israel" is used. This is a strong indication that the mitzvah was never intended to apply outside *eretz* Israel, or beyond the time frame of the theocratic assembly (which admittedly was designed to last more or less forever). This is one of those "Laws" that can't possibly be kept today (if only because modern Israel forbids polygamy). If keeping the letter of the whole Law was what justified us with Yahweh, we'd all be in deep spit.

FORBIDDEN SEXUAL RELATIONS

- (82) *Do not indulge in familiarities with relatives, such as kissing, embracing, winking, or skipping, which may lead to incest. "None of you shall approach anyone who is near of kin to him, to uncover his nakedness: I am Yahweh."*

(Leviticus 18:6) This verse does not, as the rabbis suggest, prohibit specific ostensibly innocent activities that could be preludes to sexual sin. Rather, it introduces and summarizes an entire category of taboo relationships listed in Leviticus 18. In this whole next section, then, we will explore these specific forbidden relationships one at a time. One thing we should make clear at the outset: to "uncover one's nakedness" is an unambiguous Hebrew euphemism for sexual relations—it does not merely mean to strip (or *skip*, for that matter). However, the use of the word "approach" (Hebrew *qarab*: to come near, approach, bring forth) signals that not only is the actual act forbidden, but also the intent—read: "Don't attempt to seduce them." This of course meshes perfectly with what Yahshua had to say in Matthew 5:28—to look at a woman with lust is tantamount to committing adultery with her. God looks at the heart.

We should not skip over the admonition that punctuates this summary verse: "I am Yahweh." This oft-repeated formula is the reason given for all the detailed instruction on sexual purity that would follow. It's a reminder that Yahweh created a certain order to things: one man and one woman becoming one flesh, metaphorically in their life together, and literally in the procreation of offspring through physical union driven by mutual love. This is a picture, of course, of our relationship with God. When we are "born from above" or "born of the Spirit," we become the spiritual offspring of our Heavenly Father, Yahweh, and our "Mother," the Holy Spirit (remember, the word for Spirit, *ruwach*, is a feminine noun in Hebrew). This makes us Christ's adopted brothers and sisters! Yahshua said, "For whoever does the will

of God is My brother and My sister and mother.” (Mark 3:35) And that’s why Paul could write, **“We are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.”** (Romans 8:16-17) If we indulge in sexual relationships that violate the divine metaphor, we have defaced the priceless masterpiece Yahweh has created, like scribbling a moustache on the Mona Lisa.

- (83) *Do not commit incest with your mother.* **“The nakedness of your...mother you shall not uncover. She is your mother; you shall not uncover her nakedness.”** (Leviticus 18:7) On a human level, I find it hard to believe that instruction on this matter was even deemed necessary. Could the whole Oedipus thing have been such a big problem in ancient Israel that it had to be singled out for condemnation? Probably not, although it might have been in Canaan. We must remember the family metaphor Yahweh is employing here: to commit incest with one’s mother is to usurp the place of your father—thus it is tantamount to seizing the authority of Yahweh.
- (84) *Do not commit sodomy with your father.* **“The nakedness of your father...you shall not uncover.”** (Leviticus 18:7) Though the rabbis have taken the usual stance that the mitzvot are written to an exclusively male audience, there’s no reason to suppose that this prohibition applied exclusively to sons: all sexual relations between parents and children are forbidden by the Torah. Frankly, it’s shocking to consider that mentioning the possibility was even found necessary. But again, the family metaphor is being brought into play: to have sex with one’s father was to steal the place of one’s mother: it’s a picture of usurping the role of the Holy Spirit.

As an aside, there’s an incident recorded in Genesis 9:20-24 that may well be foundational for this mitzvah. Sometime after the flood, Noah planted a vineyard, made some wine, got drunk, and passed out butt-naked in his tent. His younger son Ham, the record says, “saw” his father in this state. The Hebrew word for “saw” is *ra’ah*, which implies more than a fleeting glance. It means “to behold, consider, enjoy, gaze...” Also, the same words for “uncover” and “nakedness” we find so often in Leviticus 18 are used here, and as B&C point out, when used together they imply sexual relations. Could it be that Ham did more to his father Noah than our English translations actually report? After all, verse 24 says, **“So Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his younger son had done to him.”** The result was a curse on the house of Ham through *his* youngest son, Canaan. The point of all this is that the father (because he represents Yahweh in the family structure) is to receive reverence and respect at all times from all his children.

- (85) *Do not commit incest with your father’s wife.* **“The nakedness of your father’s wife you shall not uncover; it is your father’s nakedness.”** (Leviticus 18:8) Incest

with your mother was covered in #83, so this mitzvah, it seems, is expanding and refining the rule to include other wives your father may have married, either as a widower or in a polygamous union. Either way, it supports the basic tenet of being respectful of your father, who stands in for God in the family constitution. Again we see that wrongly exercising your father's prerogative and privilege is equated to usurping the authority of Yahweh, which (in case you've lost your bearings) is a bad thing. And again, this mitzvah is a subset of the Seventh Commandment: **"You shall not commit adultery."** When we are totally faithful to our spouses (and our God), we don't have to go out of our way to obey any of these "Laws." They're perfectly natural.

- (86) *Do not commit incest with your sister.* **"The nakedness of your sister, the daughter of your father, or the daughter of your mother, whether born at home or elsewhere, their nakedness you shall not uncover."** (Leviticus 18:9) Now the instructions are getting a bit more real-world practical. Sisters and half-sisters are now taken off the eligible-wife-material roster. Abram, you'll recall, had married his half-sister, Sarai. This was not an uncommon practice in the patriarchal era, when local populations were sparse and the gene pool was still relatively deep. But here, half a millennium later, we see Yahweh prohibiting such unions among the children of Israel. God, having designed our DNA, knew that successive generations of inbreeding could bring debilitating recessive genes to the surface, making the population as a whole more susceptible to a wide range of hereditary diseases and genetic abnormalities. Like many of these mitzvot, the *reason* for God's instruction would not be understood for thousands of years, but those who followed the "Owner's Manual" carefully in the meantime were nevertheless protected in spite of their lack of scientific knowledge.
- (87) *Do not commit incest with your father's wife's daughter.* **"The nakedness of your father's wife's daughter, begotten by your father—she is your sister—you shall not uncover her nakedness."** (Leviticus 18:11) Is there an echo in here? Under normal circumstances, the object here would be the same as in #86. But if the father has remarried or taken a second wife, a daughter of that union (i.e., one's step-sister) is also included in the do-not-marry list. According to the Inventor of our human genome, the relationship is still too close to avoid weakening the gene pool.
- (88) *Do not commit incest with your son's daughter.* **"The nakedness of your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter, their nakedness you shall not uncover; for theirs is your own nakedness."** (Leviticus 18:10) Chafetz Chayim's list of the 613 mitzvot lists this one and #89 together, while Maimonides lists them separately. They're way ahead of me. I'm still scratching my head trying to

figure out who would be sick enough to want to have sex with his own granddaughter. But we should not neglect the overall context of the passage. Yahweh explains why He took the trouble to describe the filth the Israelites were *not* to roll around in: **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘I am Yahweh your God. According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am Yahweh your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 18:1-5) They had apparently seen all of these aberrant behaviors being practiced in Egypt, and they would see them again taking place in Canaan (that is, if they let the inhabitants of the Land live long enough to observe their deviant lifestyles first hand—something they were not supposed to do). God in His wisdom knew that it wouldn’t be sufficient to simply say “Be faithful to your own wife” after the children of Israel had been exposed to pagan sexual practices in Egypt for four hundred years. He had to spell it out.

- (89) *Do not commit incest with your daughter’s daughter.* **“The nakedness of your son’s daughter or your daughter’s daughter, their nakedness you shall not uncover; for theirs is your own nakedness.”** (Leviticus 18:10) Forget the DNA thing for a moment. Wanting to have sex with someone two generations removed is just plain creepy; which explains why Satan promotes the idea. In 622, Muhammad, who was fifty at the time, married a six-year-old girl named Aisha, the daughter of his best (okay, his *only*) friend, Abu Bakr. Even if he waited a while to consummate the marriage, there’s still only one accurate word for that kind of behavior: pedophilia. Allah loves it; Yahweh hates it. By the way, the highest rate of close-family marriage in the world to this very day is Muhammad’s homeland, Saudi Arabia, where 56.8 percent of all marriages are between close relatives. Maybe all that inbreeding explains the way they think.
- (90) *Do not commit incest with your daughter.* Tracey Rich of Judaism 101 observes that this is not found explicitly in the Torah but is inferred from other commands that would include it. I would single out Leviticus 18:17 as a proof text—**“You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter.”** If you have a daughter, it is axiomatic that you have at one point “uncovered the nakedness” of her mother, whether or not she is actually your wife. I’d say the mitzvah is more than “inferred.” It’s commanded.
- (91) *Do not commit incest with your father’s sister.* **“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s sister; she is near of kin to your father.”** (Leviticus 18:12) In other words, do not marry (or merely have sexual relations with) your

aunt on your father's side, even if your uncle has passed away and she is free to remarry: she is too near a relation to you to be genetically safe.

- (92) *Do not commit incest with your mother's sister.* **"You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is near of kin to your mother."** (Leviticus 18:13) There went the apparent loophole left by verse 12: your aunt on your mother's side is out of bounds as well. The odd phrasing is not due to the fact that there is no generic word for "aunt" in Hebrew (it's *dodah*, used in verse 14—see #93). Yahweh is just leaving no stone unturned—a man's father's sister and his mother's sister are both forbidden as sexual partners.
- (93) *Do not commit incest with your father's brother's wife.* **"You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother. You shall not approach his wife; she is your aunt."** (Leviticus 18:14) Though there is no genetic link to be wary of, there's still the little matter of adultery to deal with. Beyond that, one's uncle is the closest of relations to your father or mother; therefore the same sort of respect is due to them as should be shown to one's parents.
- (94) *Do not commit sodomy with your father's brother.* **"You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother."** (Leviticus 18:14). Sodomy, or any sort of homosexual relationship, is singled out for prohibition elsewhere (see #103). The actual Torah wording does not presuppose an all-male audience; this applies to women as well. Sexual intimacy of any kind with one's uncle is forbidden.
- (95) *Do not commit incest with your son's wife.* **"You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law—she is your son's wife—you shall not uncover her nakedness."** (Leviticus 18:15) This is the one that Judah—had there been a written law at that time—would have blown in Genesis 38—which brings up an interesting question. Was it, or was it not, a sin for Judah, since the Law had not yet been handed down, and he didn't know the prostitute he was hiring was his daughter-in-law anyway? It's like the old "If a tree falls in the forest and there's nobody there to hear it, does it make a sound?" conundrum. The answer here, as with the tree, is yes. **"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."** (Romans 3:19-20) Sin existed before the Law was given; the Law merely made us aware of how badly we were failing. It doesn't matter how many laws there are, six million, six hundred thirteen, or only one (as in "Don't eat the fruit of that tree"). If we fall short of God's standard in any way (and we all do), we will find ourselves in need of redemption, a means of reconciliation with our Father. Nor does the mechanism for that reconciliation reside in the Law: Abraham *believed* God, and it was counted

unto him as righteousness. Or stated in terms of our own dispensation, “Jesus answered and said unto them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’” (John 6:29)

- (96) *Do not commit incest with your brother’s wife.* **“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother’s wife; it is your brother’s nakedness.”** (Leviticus 18:16) No gene-pool issues here, just respect for another son of your father—and in the larger context of adultery in general, respect for another child of your Heavenly Father. This mitzvah obviously applies only to a living brother’s wife, not a dead brother’s widow, for whom the rules are reversed under certain conditions (see #79, 80, and 81).
- (97) *Do not commit incest with your wife’s daughter.* **“You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter.”** (Leviticus 18:17) This would include not only your own daughter, but also any daughters that your wife might have brought from a previous relationship. This is the sort of thing that will (or at least should) get you thrown in jail in this country. Where would we be without the influence of the Old Testament Scriptures on our society and its laws? It’s sad that God should even have felt like He had to bring this up, but as I said, this whole passage is a warning not to adopt the sick pagan practices of Israel’s former or future homelands. They were to remain holy, set apart for Yahweh’s purposes. If only they had.
- (98) *Do not commit incest with the daughter of your wife’s son.* **“You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, nor shall you take her son’s daughter...to uncover her nakedness. They are near of kin to her. It is wickedness.”** (Leviticus 18:17) For reasons too numerous to recount, a man is to abstain from sexual relations with his granddaughter. Duh.
- (99) *Do not commit incest with the daughter of your wife’s daughter.* **“You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, nor shall you take her...daughter’s daughter, to uncover her nakedness. They are near of kin to her. It is wickedness.”** (Leviticus 18:17). Okay, one more time, ’cause we might have missed it. It doesn’t matter what side of the family your granddaughter is on, your son’s or your daughter’s, it doesn’t matter how cute she is, or how much older than her age she looks, or how little self restraint you’re willing to exercise: incest is a bad thing—*keep your hands off of her.*
- (100) *Do not commit incest with your wife’s sister.* **“Nor shall you take a woman as a rival to her sister, to uncover her nakedness while the other is alive.”** (Leviticus 18:18) This is the very type of multi-wife relationship that jump-started the nation of Israel, not that it was Jacob’s fault or plan. God allowed it and used it for His own purposes in that instance, but He’s making it clear here that it is not His pattern for the ideal family unit. If polygamy is

dynamite with a short fuse, polygamy with sisters is like nitroglycerine on a bumpy road—it's apt to blow up in your face with no warning at all.

- (101) *Do not have intercourse with a woman during her menstrual period. “You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness as long as she is in her customary impurity.”* (Leviticus 18:19) There is a large body of Torah law about which the rabbis are relatively clueless—that of ritual purity. They have identified the *what*, of course, but not the *why*. We will discuss these issues at length later (Mitzvot #561-576). Here we see the physiological side of what Mitzvah #572 will cover from a symbolic viewpoint: the disposition of women during their periodic menstrual cycle. They and their husbands are to abstain from sexual intercourse during this time. Again, we see that our Manufacturer knows how we're built, and His instructions reflect the proper use of the equipment: intercourse during menstruation, as it turns out, makes a woman more vulnerable to a variety of vaginal infections, and puts her at greater risk for cervical cancer. Moreover, abstinence during menstruation is known today to be a safe, low-tech method for enhancing a couple's fertility (see #63).

This passage doesn't specify a duration for sexual abstinence. It merely describes it: “as long as she is in her customary impurity,” which typically lasts about five days for a healthy woman. Leviticus 15:19 defines the duration of *ritual* impurity as a seven-day period. According to the rabbis, however, the time of separation ends only after the woman's seventh *clean* day (following the five days or so of her menses) making the period of separation a minimum of twelve days—almost twice what Yahweh mandated. Typical rabbinical bungling, the result of which in this case is a degree of sexual frustration Yahweh never intended.

One wonders if perhaps this monthly week-long hiatus was what Paul had in mind when he wrote, “**Do not deprive one another [of sexual contact] except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.**” (I Corinthians 7:5) We can only imagine how different the attitude and walk (and love life, for that matter) of the average young Christian husband would be if he and his wife “gave themselves to fasting and prayer” in place of sex for five or six days out of every month while God took care of the routine periodic maintenance chores on his wife's sexual apparatus.

- (102) *Do not have intercourse with another man's wife. “Moreover you shall not lie carnally with your neighbor's wife, to defile yourself with her.”* (Leviticus 18:20) More simply stated is the way Yahweh wrote it with His own hand on a stone tablet: “**You shall not commit adultery.**” (Exodus 20:14). That's a pretty

good summary of most of the mitzvot in this section. I can only reiterate that Yahweh ordained marriage between a man and a woman to be a picture of the relationship He seeks to enjoy with His people—lifelong, fruitful, devoted, faithful, and loving. As the prophet Malachi puts it, **“Did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.”** (Malachi 2:15) Adultery is the ultimate treachery.

Yahshua provided commentary for us during the Sermon on the Mount. **“You have heard that the law of Moses says, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart. So if your eye—even if it is your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your hand—even if it is your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”** (Matthew 5:27-30) The problem is, it’s not really our eye or our hand that “causes us to sin,” though we use our bodily members to facilitate our crimes. It’s our sinful character, our darkened heart, our carnal nature. It is *this* that we need to “cut off and throw away.” Paul characterized it as “dying to self” in order that we might “live to Christ.”

- (103) *Do not commit sodomy with a male.* **“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.”** (Leviticus 18:22) There. He said it. It’s wrong. I don’t want to hear any more politically correct hogwash about how homosexuality is an “acceptable alternative lifestyle,” or how “God made some people different from others in their sexual propensities.” If He did, then He’s awfully confused. Granted, this is merely one of hundreds of behaviors that are prohibited in the Bible, any one of which is sufficient to define us as “sinners.” On the other hand, Yahweh goes beyond merely telling us not to do this; He uses the word “abomination” to describe this particular “alternative lifestyle.” The Hebrew word translated abomination is *toebah*, which means: “something morally disgusting, that is, an abhorrence; especially idolatry or an idol—an abominable custom or thing.” (S) It comes from the root *ta’ab*, a verb meaning “to abhor, the logical response to a strongly detestable activity. It is associated with a severe sense of loathing.” (B&C) To put things in perspective, this is the strongest language you can find in the Bible. Make no mistake: God *hates* homosexuality.
- (104) *Do not have intercourse with a beast.* **“Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it.”** (Leviticus 18:23) I guess I’ve led a sheltered life. Under normal circumstances, this one never would have entered my mind,

much less would I have needed instructions prohibiting it for me to know it was wrong. I mean, *duh!* We don't really need a special mitzvah telling us not to hit ourselves over the head with a frying pan, do we? So why are we told something like this? As I observed at the beginning of this section, the land to which the Israelites were moving was populated with a people whose "iniquity was full." They had grown so perverse in so many ways, God had no choice but to eradicate them and their practices if He wanted to keep His chosen people set apart for His purposes. This sort of sick behavior was part of what Yahweh wanted to wipe out.

Beyond that, our sexual relationships are once again pressed into service as a picture of our relationship with Yahweh—or not. Genesis 1:26 reports that we are made in the "image of God." In all of nature, God designed his creatures to mate only with their own kind—you can't cross a cat with a gnat. And *we* are God's "kind." At least, we become so when we are "born from above." (John 3) But it's also possible to be born from below—to become indwelt with the spirit of Satan (whether metaphorically or in fact). This is the spiritual equivalent of "having intercourse with a beast."

- (105) *A woman shall not have intercourse with a beast. "Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion."* (Leviticus 18:23) In the interests of being thorough, Yahweh makes sure that the women of Israel understand that this applies to them, too. Their purity was every bit as important to God's plan of redemption as that of the men. And as for the spiritual application, we are reminded that when "God made man in His image, He made them male *and* female."
- (106) *Do not castrate the male of any species; neither a man, nor a domestic or wild beast, nor a fowl. "You shall not offer to Yahweh what is bruised or crushed, or torn or cut; nor shall you make any offering of them in your land."* (Leviticus 22:24) The rabbis have missed the point entirely here. Yahweh's instruction was not about castration at all—it was about respect. The Israelites were not to offer imperfect sacrifices, animals that had been injured or for some other reason had become worthless (or worth less) to them as livestock. They were to offer perfect specimens, without spot or blemish, usually specified as males, often of a certain young age. Why? Because their sacrifices were a prophetic dress rehearsal—a symbol—for what Yahweh Himself was about to offer up as a propitiation for our sins: a perfect Sacrifice, without sin, a young male full of promise, as flawless in character as the lambs or goats of the Levitical sacrifices were in body.

The rabbis weren't stupid, of course. They were fully aware that the mitzvah they delivered and the Torah it was based on didn't exactly agree.

But to admit that there was a prophetic reason for the required perfection of the sacrifices would have put them in an awkward position: it points directly and unequivocally to the cross of Christ and the fact that while the Christians among them accepted God's Messiah, they did not—and were indeed complicit in His murder. So here we see them desperately trying to cover their trail, obfuscating the truth, and creating a smokescreen so their followers wouldn't be able to perceive the truth. The truth, after all, would set them free.

We are less than twenty percent of the way through our list of the “613 mitzvot,” and some startling truths are beginning to emerge. First, as we just saw, the rabbis haven't been completely forthright in their recounting of the Law. If there was something they felt they needed to sweep under the rug, they did not hesitate to do so. The most common way of doing this was to convert (or is that *pervert*?) what Yahweh actually said into something that, while sounding reasonable enough, while being similar in tone to what Moses handed down, was somehow different in content. They didn't *always* do this, but they did it often enough to make any serious researcher question their motives in everything they wrote.

Second, God's *actual* instructions fall into two basic categories (neither of which is mutually exclusive). Some are practical instructions on how to maintain the “equipment” of the human race, how to keep our bodies and our communities free from physical ailments and undue degradation—even down to the molecular level, by keeping the DNA in our gene pool vigorous and healthy. Others are spiritual in nature, instructing us how to approach and relate to our God. But the spiritual mitzvot invariably work themselves out in our relationships with our fellow men, and the practical “Laws” just as often include a symbolic component instructing us how to remain holy, set apart for Yahweh's use.

Third, as strange as it may sound coming from a dyed-in-the-wool literalist like myself, God's symbols, lurking just beneath the surface in these mitzvot, are the *primary* point; in many cases the rules seem to be there largely to serve as vehicles for the deeper truth. As we can readily observe from Yahshua's *modus operandi*, teaching in parables is one of God's favorite methods: the lessons would be somehow less personal if we didn't have to glean the truth from the story and watch the “light bulb” go on above our heads. What matters is not that the stories are true or untrue—it's that they aren't in themselves the point. A good example is the tale told to David by the prophet Nathan about a poor man whose

sole possession, a little ewe lamb, was callously slaughtered by his rich neighbor so he could entertain a guest. David was rightly indignant, and being king, declared that the rich man should die for his crimes. Only then did Nathan tell him, “You are the man.” If the prophet had chastised the king to his face (as John the Baptist later did to Herod) David might never have repented and asked forgiveness for his role in the Bathsheba affair. His defenses would have been up, and his human nature might have gotten the better of him. But since the story had been presented in symbolic form, the king was able to relate to the core truth of it and make the proper response.

I believe that a great deal of the Torah uses exactly the same instruction technique. I’m not suggesting that there’s some hidden meaning that only an illumined inner circle of religious devotees can perceive—a secret kabalistic (or is that Babylonian?) system of hidden knowledge that elevates the cognoscenti above the unwashed masses. Rather, I’m asking the reader to merely scratch one layer beneath the surface, to blow the dust off the cover—to look at the obvious underlying truth. What Yahweh said to do, and what He meant for us to learn by so doing, are as obvious as any parable recorded in the Gospels. But as Yahshua observed, the meanings of the parables are only for those who are willing to see the light: **“The disciples came and said to Him, ‘Why do You speak to them in parables?’ He answered and said to them, ‘Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: “Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.” But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”** (Matthew 13:10-17)

Holy Appointments



A couple of dozen mitzvot ago, I don't think we would have been ready to discuss Yahshua's assessment of the church-age validity of the Law of Moses. But perhaps we're far enough along now to perceive what He meant. **"Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to fulfill them...."** As long as we're of the mindset that the Law of Moses consists merely of rules and rituals, this statement makes no sense at all. How does one fulfill "Don't make idols" or "Honor your father and your mother?" You can *do* them, of course, but to fulfill them requires that the mitzvot have a collective sense of purpose, an overarching principle centered in the One doing the fulfillment. Besides, Yahshua didn't actually *perform* the letter of the whole Law. For example, He never owned a vineyard or field, so He never left any grapes or sheaves for the poor to collect. He never married (modern fiction notwithstanding), so biologically speaking, He never kept the law that said to "be fruitful and multiply." Not being of the tribe of Levi, He never performed any of the Temple rites mandated for the priests in the Law. In short, for Yahshua to have come to "fulfill" the Law of Moses, the Law must point to Him in its symbols and practices. And as we have seen, it does.

That is why He insisted that the Law was not being abrogated by His coming. **"I assure you, until heaven and earth disappear, even the smallest detail of God's law will remain until its purpose is achieved."** *Until* its purpose is achieved? This indicates that there will indeed come a time when the Law is put behind us, and He has even told us when that would be: when "heaven and earth disappear." This isn't a euphemism for "never," (like saying "when hell freezes over") but is, rather, a matter-of-fact statement of what Yahweh has said He will do after the close of the Millennial Kingdom—a new heaven and new earth will be created, in which there will be no Temple and *no Law*. **"So if you break the smallest commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God's laws and teaches them will be great in the Kingdom of Heaven...."** I for one take this very seriously. Most Christians have no idea what the commandments are. (And the Jews, who do, have no idea what they *mean*.) How can we avoid leading others astray if we don't know the Way ourselves? I undertook this study so that we all (starting with myself) might gain an appreciation and understanding of what's here for us.

So the Law is here for the duration. There's a problem, however—a fatal flaw—with even the most skillful observance of the outward letter of the Law: it's impossible to perform it well enough to get you into the Kingdom: **"But I warn you—**

unless you obey God better than the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees do, you can't enter the Kingdom of Heaven at all!" (Matthew 5:17-20 NLT) Contrary to the popular stereotype, the Pharisees of Yahshua's day weren't considered evil by their contemporaries—wicked men bent on twisting the Law to their own advantage. They were seen as pious, sober, and totally committed to the scrupulous observance of the Law—religious overachievers. Because of their strict standards of behavior, becoming a Pharisee was not something one did on a whim. In fact, the standards were so high, there were never more than 6,000 Pharisees in Israel at any one time. But their dedication earned them the admiration and respect of the ordinary populace, and it brought them far more political clout than their numbers would suggest. They were meticulous to a fault about keeping the details of the Law. They knew it backward and forward, and as far as the casual observer could tell, they were actually succeeding in keeping it. Yahshua knew better, seeing the condition of their hearts. Something other—something greater—than a nearly perfect outward observance of the rules would be required of those who wished to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The Law would have to be fulfilled in Yahshua Himself—in His life, His sacrificial death, His resurrection, His authority as King of Kings, and His very deity. Yahshua was not impressed with the scrupulousness of the Pharisees because He knew that for all their ostensible devotion, they had missed the entire point: that the Law was a picture of God's Messiah.

Because He *was* the Messiah, Yahshua's recorded handling of the Law can teach us a lot about what God actually wanted to convey. **"Jesus was walking through some grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, so they began breaking off heads of wheat and eating the grain."** As you'll recall, this was perfectly legal according to the plain reading of the Torah (see #41-50). **"Some Pharisees saw them do it and protested, "Your disciples shouldn't be doing that! It's against the law to work by harvesting grain on the Sabbath."** Wrong. According to Deuteronomy 23:25, if you don't use a sickle, you're not "harvesting." But Yahshua didn't quibble over fine points of the Law with them. He (as usual) cut straight to the heart of the matter—that the Sabbath was made for man's benefit, not the other way around, and that the ultimate benefit was to be the rest from our labors that only He could provide. **"But Jesus said to them, "Haven't you ever read in the Scriptures what King David did when he and his companions were hungry? He went into the house of God, and they ate the special bread reserved for the priests alone. That was breaking the law, too. And haven't you ever read in the law of Moses that the priests on duty in the Temple may work on the Sabbath? I tell you, there is one here who is even greater than the Temple! But you would not have condemned those who aren't guilty if you knew the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to be merciful; I don't want your sacrifices.' For I, the Son of Man, am master even of the Sabbath...."** Clearly, there was more (and less) to the Sabbath Law than what the scribes and Pharisees had made of it.

The admonition about being merciful apparently went right over their heads, for next we read: **“Then he went over to the synagogue, where he noticed a man with a deformed hand. The Pharisees asked Jesus, ‘Is it legal to work by healing on the Sabbath day?’ (They were, of course, hoping he would say yes, so they could bring charges against him.) And he answered, ‘If you had one sheep, and it fell into a well on the Sabbath, wouldn’t you get to work and pull it out? Of course you would. And how much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Yes, it is right to do good on the Sabbath.’ Then he said to the man, ‘Reach out your hand.’ The man reached out his hand, and it became normal, just like the other one. Then the Pharisees called a meeting and discussed plans for killing Jesus.”** (Matthew 12:1-13 NLT) I’ve never quite comprehended the Pharisees’ reaction. Simply suggesting that a man reach out his hand is not “work.” Did Yahshua heal the man, or did He not? Healing of this nature (i.e., miraculous, not medical) is obviously not within man’s ability. It is the work of God—the same God who instituted the Sabbath. So the Pharisees had a terrible problem here. If they accused Yahshua of healing the man on the Sabbath, they would also be admitting that He was exercising the power of Yahweh. By His act of mercy, Yahshua had forced the Pharisees to make a choice: commit intellectual suicide by denying the miracle they had just witnessed with their own eyes, or accept the premise that He was operating in the power and authority of Yahweh. They chose poorly.

The Apostle Paul had been trained as a Pharisee. He knew what it was to outwardly keep the Law (to all appearances) through sheer determination and force of will. He knew, in point of fact, that it was impossible. As he addresses the Colossian believers, he begins as one might expect a Pharisee to begin—talking about obedience. **“And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to live in obedience to him.”** Spoken like a true Pharisee, but he’s not done. **“Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him, so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all he has done....”** This “obedience” of which he speaks bears little resemblance to the rigid rule-keeping of his former life. Now it consists of “growing in faith” and “overflowing with thanksgiving,” two very different concepts from standard Jewish religious thought.

The legalistic regimen that he used to follow with such rabid devotion is now described as “high-sounding nonsense,” something to be avoided at all costs. **“Don’t let anyone lead you astray with empty philosophy and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the evil powers of this world, and not from Christ. For in Christ the fullness of God lives in a human body, and you are complete through your**

union with Christ. He is the Lord over every ruler and authority in the universe.”

(Colossians 2:6-10 NLT) The Law, he’s saying, cannot make you complete. Only your “union with Christ” can do that, and then only because He is actually Immanuel, God with us.

“So don’t let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new-moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. For these rules were only shadows of the real thing, Christ himself.” As we have seen, Yahshua Himself said that He came to fulfill the Law. The Reality had finally come into view, making the shadow, if not irrelevant, a mere memorial of what God had already accomplished. **“Don’t let anyone condemn you by insisting on self-denial. And don’t let anyone say you must worship angels, even though they say they have had visions about this. These people claim to be so humble, but their sinful minds have made them proud. But they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For we are joined together in his body by his strong sinews, and we grow only as we get our nourishment and strength from God....”** In a nutshell, Paul is warning us about the deceit of religious observance. Monastic self-denial will get you nowhere, he says, and the worship of anything or anyone except Yahweh/Yahshua is destructive, no matter how sincere or pious the devotees seem to be. The Jews had a thing for angels. Catholics venerate their saints and Popes, and they go nuts over anything that looks like Mary. Protestants all too often see godlike qualities in their pastors and politicians. We’re all tarred with the same brush here. We need to disassociate ourselves from anything that is not “connected to Christ.”

Paul ties it all together: **“You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the evil powers of this world....”** My dad passed away in 1994. Since that time he hasn’t filed a single tax return. The government doesn’t seem to care, however, because dead people aren’t required to do anything; they are “free” from the law. We believers have two natures—the fallen nature we were born with, and the new spiritual nature that was born within us when we aligned ourselves with Yahshua. Positionally, though, our old nature is dead. It died when Christ took our sins to the cross with Him. And if it’s dead, there’s no further reason for it to observe the Law, is there?

But what about our new nature, the one that’s alive? Is *that* required to keep the Law? Yes, it is. But the requirements of the Law have already been met—fulfilled in Yahshua. All of the tax returns (to return to my metaphor) have already been filed. There’s nothing left to do. Yahshua satisfied the requirements of the Law for us—all of them. **“So why do you keep on following rules of the world, such as, ‘Don’t handle, don’t eat, don’t touch.’ Such rules are mere human teaching about things that are gone as soon as we use them. These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, humility, and severe bodily discipline. But they have no effect when it comes to conquering a person’s evil thoughts and desires.”** (Colossians 2:16-23

NLT) Paul had been a Pharisee. He knew all about devotion, humility, and discipline. These are all good things as far as they go, but when it comes to overcoming sin they're as useless as a knife at a gunfight. Likewise, the rules, while being beneficial in themselves, are useless as a means of reaching God. They are but a shadow. Yahshua is the Reality who casts that shadow. But speaking of shadows, let us now return to our discussion of the 613 Mitzvot.

TIMES AND SEASONS

(107) *The new month shall be solemnly proclaimed as holy, and the months and years shall be calculated by the Supreme Court only. "Now Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, 'This month (Abib/Nisan) shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.'" (Exodus 12:1-2)* Oh, good grief. Here we go again. The rabbis have not only gotten the mitzvah wrong, they have in the process usurped the authority of Yahweh and placed it in their own hands. According to [\[Judaism 101\]](#) the authority to declare months is inferred from the use of the words "to you." Sorry, guys, it's not. The passage supporting the mitzvah indicates that the first month of the year was to be the month of Passover, now called Nisan (in March or April on the Gregorian calendar. See my [\[Chronology appendix to Future History\]](#) for a full discussion of lunar and solar calendars). Each month began at the first sliver of the new moon—Passover would fall two weeks later in the first month, near the full moon phase.

Here's how Yahweh set it up: there would be twelve lunar months in the year, adjusted to the solar calendar by adding an intercalary month now and then (it worked out to seven times every nineteen years). Within the first seven of these months (beginning in the Spring with Abib, later called Nisan) there would be seven solemn convocations, or *miqra'ey*, holy appointments instituted by Yahweh, beginning with Passover. These seven "Feasts of Yahweh" would prove to be prophetic of Yahweh's plan for the redemption of mankind. The Jews, as keepers of the Messianic signs, were supposed to keep these divine appointments throughout their generations.

But what did they do? First their idolatry and apostasy got them exiled to Babylon. Then, while they were there, they rearranged the calendar, putting their new year's day in the fall, where their Babylonian captors had it. They actually assigned another of Yahweh's seven *miqra'ey* as their "head of the year," or *Rosh Hashanah*. The day they picked is the Feast of

Trumpets, which was set up by Yahweh to be number five in the series—prophetic of the rapture of the Church. (Ironically though, *Rosh Hashanah* will mark a new “year” for the forces of Babylon, for with the rapture of the Ekklesia and the removal of the Holy Spirit that indwells us, evil will at last be given free rein in the world.) As it stands, the Jewish civil calendar has goofed up the beautiful portrayal of redemption that it was designed to symbolize—all because the rabbis never learned to take instructions from Yahweh.

- (108) *Do not travel on Shabbat outside the limits of your place of residence.* “Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather [manna], but they found none. And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For Yahweh has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.’ So the people rested on the seventh day.” (Exodus 16:27-30) This is a clear case of taking a sentence out of context. Yahweh here was telling the Israelites (again) not to go out to gather manna on the Sabbath, because He had already provided what was needed the previous day. In short, they were being told to trust Him. The universal lesson was this: just as no manna would be provided on the seventh day, salvation for mankind would be offered only temporarily—the day would come when man could no longer go out to freely gather God’s bounty. (And that day, if I’m not mistaken, is rapidly approaching.)

According to the Gospel record, however, the Pharisees didn’t make a big deal out of where Yahshua happened to be on the Sabbath. They didn’t suggest that He had broken the Sabbath by not staying home (wherever *that* was). Instead, they were upset that he didn’t take a break from healing people on the Sabbath. **“One Sabbath day Jesus was in the home of a leader of the Pharisees. The people were watching him closely, because there was a man there whose arms and legs were swollen. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in religious law, ‘Well, is it permitted in the law to heal people on the Sabbath day, or not?’”** I just love this. That’s precisely the same question with which they had hoped to entrap Him back in Matthew 12. This time, Yahshua beat them to the punch, putting the question to them before they could demand an explanation of Him. **“When they refused to answer, Jesus touched the sick man and healed him and sent him away. Then he turned to them and asked, ‘Which of you doesn’t work on the Sabbath? If your son or your cow falls into a pit, don’t you proceed at once to get him out?’ Again they had no answer.”** (Luke 14:1-6 NLT) He had responded in the affirmative when asked this question, but they couldn’t answer without incriminating themselves. If they said healing on the Sabbath was permissible, they would be

contradicting their own traditions. But if they said it was not, they would be denying the power of God, for Yahshua frequently manifested that power by healing people on the Sabbath.

- (109) *Sanctify Shabbat*. **“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of Yahweh your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”** (Exodus 20:8-11) This is the fourth Commandment of the Decalogue. Notice first that there *is* a proper time for work—the first six days of the week, or metaphorically/prophetically, the first six millennia of man. The seventh day, however, is holy or hallowed (*qadash*, meaning set apart, made clean, consecrated, withdrawn from profane or ordinary use). As Yahshua Himself said, **“I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is yet day; the night is coming when no one can work.”** (John 9:4) Second, Sabbath (alternately spelled *Shabbat* or *Sabbat*) comes from a verb (*sabat*) meaning to take an intermission, rest, or repose. It is thus a mirror of Yahweh’s symbolic “rest” on the seventh day of creation and a prophetic hint that our work—even if it’s godly or creative behavior—has no place in God’s plan of redemption. Third, note that there are no exceptions to the Sabbath Law: it applies to everybody, even the servants and beasts of burden: *nobody* works for a living on this appointed day of intermission, for if they do, they will be cut off from God’s people (see Exodus 31:14). The Sabbath speaks eloquently of Yahweh’s provision of our salvation. It’s no stretch to apply Psalm 118:24 to the ultimate Sabbath: **“This is the day that Yahweh has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.”**

After one of the many incidents recorded in the Gospels in which the Pharisees erroneously accused Yahshua of “working” on the Sabbath, He said, **“The Sabbath was made to benefit people, and not people to benefit the Sabbath. And I, the Son of Man, am master even of the Sabbath!”** (Mark 2:27-28 NLT) There is only one way to be “master” of a sign like the Sabbath: be the *fulfillment* of that sign. But like any sign, once the destination has been reached, the sign pointing toward it becomes more or less obsolete, good only as a reminder of where you’ve been and how far you’ve come. That’s why Paul could write: **“One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it.”** (Romans 14:5-6 NLT)

The topic of “observation of the Sabbath” is guaranteed to precipitate an argument. Specifically, are we to gather for corporate worship on Saturday (the seventh day of the week, the day set apart as the Sabbath) or on Sunday (the day of the resurrection of Christ, a celebration of our new life in Him)? The answer is an unequivocal *yes*—by all means, congregate for worship. But *when*? Well, the Scriptures don’t actually say. The Sabbath law, you’ll recall, said nothing about gathering for worship. All it said was “remember” the day (*zakar*: to mark, to mention in remembrance, to be mindful of), to set it apart from the others, and to rest from our ordinary labors. And we should be doing all of that. But gathering for worship and study? That’s a different matter. Or at least, it can be.

For example, Yahshua taught in the synagogues on the Sabbath (e.g. Luke 4:16) and the disciples were known to gather on the first day of the week, Sunday (e.g. Acts 20:7). The Day of Pentecost, the day on which the Spirit of God fell upon the Ekklesia for the first time, fell on a Sunday—and remember, the timing of the *miqra'ey* was according to Yahweh’s design. But nowhere are we *commanded* to meet together on one day to the exclusion of all others. I think maybe it’s sort of like our instructions about when to pray, i.e. unceasingly. Meet with your brothers and sisters for the purpose of praising God and studying His Word whenever you can. In my own life that regularly translates into Sunday morning worship services, for starters, but I also usually get together with smaller groups on Saturday mornings, Sunday nights, and Wednesdays, and I teach Bible classes on Monday nights and Tuesdays as well. At least, that’s my current schedule as I write these words. Personally, I would be ecstatic if my fellowship would hold its primary worship service on the Sabbath day instead of on Sunday: there is far more scriptural precedent for it. However, the tradition is so deeply ingrained in our culture, hardly anyone even thinks about it anymore. For my part, I *do* think about it. But moving the “Sabbath” back where it belongs would take an act of God (or should I say, *will* take an act of God). Anyway, is Yahweh upset with me because I don’t *restrict* my worship to the Sabbath? I think not.

I now make a point of being purposefully cognizant of the significance of the Sabbath, specifically taking note of the day’s importance when it rolls around. Have I always done this? No, to my shame. My traditional Christian upbringing has been both a blessing and a handicap. But today as I study and learn, I’m making a conscious effort to avoid automatically equating American-style Christian traditions with what Yahweh actually instructed. They aren’t necessarily the same thing. If I had been raised as an observant Jew, I would doubtless have a whole different set of traditions to unlearn.

- (110) *Do not work on Shabbat.* “In it [the Sabbath] you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.” (Exodus 20:10) As we have seen, the very word Sabbath indicates a period of repose, of rest from our labors. Yahweh wanted the Israelites to trust Him, and He began with a simple demonstration: On six days each week, He would provide manna for them to eat. Ordinarily it would spoil overnight, but on the sixth day they were to gather enough for the Sabbath as well, and He would miraculously keep it fresh. Thus every Sabbath, those who trusted Yahweh witnessed a miracle of preservation (in addition to the *usual* miracle of provision). God’s sustenance here is a metaphor for our salvation. Yahweh will provide sustenance/salvation on the seventh day of the week to those who trusted Him on the first six days.

In a passage parallel to the Matthew 12 verses we saw earlier, Yahshua helps us define what, precisely, is the “work” from which we are to rest on the Sabbath. Is it *any and all* activity (the rabbinical view), or is it only what we ordinarily do to provide for ourselves? “Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand. Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus’ enemies watched him closely. Would he heal the man’s hand on the Sabbath? If he did, they planned to condemn him. Jesus said to the man, ‘Come and stand in front of everyone.’ Then he turned to his critics and asked, ‘Is it legal to do good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing harm? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?’ But they wouldn’t answer him. He looked around at them angrily, because he was deeply disturbed by their hard hearts. Then he said to the man, ‘Reach out your hand.’ The man reached out his hand, and it became normal again! At once the Pharisees went away and met with the supporters of Herod to discuss plans for killing Jesus.” (Mark 3:1-6 NLT) The principle is this: It is never bad to do good. Yes, we were commanded in the Torah to refrain from doing our regular jobs on the Sabbath—from doing those tasks with which we provide for our own needs. But that’s not what Yahshua was doing here. Thus by definition, our “ordinary work” (that which is restricted on the Sabbath) is not the same thing as “doing good works.” The motive is the key: our jobs are done through a spirit of self-preservation. But any “good works” we do must be done through a spirit of trust in Yahweh; if they are not, they are nothing but “filthy rags.” We cannot work *for* our salvation. But we would be ungrateful if we did not work *because of* it.

- (111) *Rest on Shabbat.* “Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed.... In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest.” (Exodus 23:12; 34:21) This of course is merely the affirmative

restatement of negative Mitzvah #110. The supporting passages, however, shed some added light on God's mindset here. First, notice that Yahweh understands that the servants and beasts of burden won't be able to enjoy their Sabbath rest if their "master" does not observe it. This places the burden of responsibility squarely on his shoulders: those in control are held to a higher standard of obedience, whether in a household, a business, or a whole nation, for their actions and beliefs affect the lives of those beneath them in the hierarchy, for good or ill. This is why Yahshua said the religious leaders of His day would "receive the greater condemnation."

Second, the Sabbath rest was to be observed "in plowing time and in harvest," that is, even when things were at their busiest and "rest" seemed to be a luxury one could do without. At issue here is our trust in Yahweh's provision. In early Israel, this mistrust might have taken the form: *We've gotta get this crop in before the weather turns bad, or we'll all starve to death this winter, so let's work through the Sabbath to get the job done.* Today we might say: *This deadline the client has saddled us with is so tight, if we don't skip church and work all weekend on it we'll lose the contract and go out of business.* Oh really? Who took care of you yesterday? Who can be trusted to do so tomorrow? Who brought you the client, and gave you the skills you need to serve him? If you can't trust Yahweh with your day-to-day material needs, how can you trust Him with your eternal soul?

Before we leave the subject of Sabbath Law, let's take a look at one more telling incident during Yahshua's ministry. **"One Sabbath day as Jesus was teaching in a synagogue, he saw a woman who had been crippled by an evil spirit. She had been bent double for eighteen years and was unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are healed of your sickness!' Then he touched her, and instantly she could stand straight. How she praised and thanked God!"** Her response was right and proper. What did the religious bigwigs have to say? **"But the leader in charge of the synagogue was indignant that Jesus had healed her on the Sabbath day. 'There are six days of the week for working,' he said to the crowd. 'Come on those days to be healed, not on the Sabbath.'** Yeah, right, like *he* was planning on coming back and healing the lady himself the following Tuesday. **"But the Lord replied, 'You hypocrite! You work on the Sabbath day! Don't you untie your ox or your donkey from their stalls on the Sabbath and lead them out for water? Wasn't it necessary for me, even on the Sabbath day, to free this dear woman from the bondage in which Satan has held her for eighteen years?' This shamed his enemies. And all the people rejoiced at the wonderful things he did."** (Luke 13:10-17 NLT) The final word on what should have been considered "work" to be avoided on the Sabbath was illustrated here. It boils down not to *what*, but to *why*. If a

deed is done for the purpose of supporting yourself financially or materially, then you should refrain from doing it on the Sabbath. But if it is done out of a spirit of love, mercy, or just plain good manners—even if it's only feeding the family pet—then it's not really considered work under the Sabbath Law.

Remember, nothing has been abrogated. The Instructions of God are still there for our benefit, even if they are only shadows cast by the looming form of the Messiah. We cheat ourselves if we do not pay close attention to what they symbolize. The Sabbath is one of God's most significant symbols, not only giving us the timeline for Yahweh's plan of redemption (seven days equaling seven thousand years—see II Peter 3:8), but also telling us that salvation—eternal life—cannot be earned by our own efforts: it must be received as a gift, a provision of unmerited favor from Yahweh's bountiful hand. All we can do is rest in the knowledge of His grace, and thank Him for loving us.

- (112) *Celebrate the festivals [Pesach, Shavu'ot, and Sukkot].* **“Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field. Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord Yahweh.”** (Exodus 23:14-17)

Yahweh instituted seven annual *Miqra'ey*, holy appointments or convocations, commonly referred to as “feasts,” during the Jewish calendar. The reason we see only three of the seven listed here is that there are three *groups of miqra'ey*. The first three were mandated to occur on three successive days in the spring. These were followed seven weeks later by a single *miqra*, and the final three fell within a few weeks of each other in the fall. Thus by convention and observation, the Jews tend to lump the spring feasts together as one, calling them the Feast of Unleavened Bread or Passover, and the three fall feasts are similarly grouped under the umbrella name of the last one, *Sukkot*, or Tabernacles. Yahweh attached memorial significance to a couple of the feasts, but there are definite prophetic implications to every one of the seven. I covered the subject in detail in [\[Future History\]](#) so I'll just review the highlights here.

Pesach, or Passover, (scheduled by Yahweh on Nisan 14, in our March or April) is memorial of the night in which the death angel killed the firstborn of every family in Egypt whose dwelling was not protected by the blood of the sacrificial lamb. It is thus prophetic of the sacrifice of the

Lamb of God, Yahshua of Nazareth, which occurred on Nisan 14 in 33 AD. Everyone whose “house” is not marked by the blood of *this* sacrifice is similarly doomed.

Chag Matzah, or the Feast of Unleavened Bread, (on the very next day, Nisan 15) is memorial of the Israelites’ hasty flight from Egypt in the wake of the death of the Egyptian firstborn—a move so sudden they didn’t even have time to let the bread in their kneading bowls rise. Leaven (yeast) is a picture of sin, of corruption. The Jews were instructed to remove all the leaven from their homes—a metaphor for the removal of sin from their lives. The *miqra* is prophetic of the day Yahshua spent in the tomb. His death was what removed the sin from our lives, if only we’ll trust Him to do so. This feast was the beginning of a weeklong festival—the seven days being symbolic of the fact that our sins have been removed *completely*.

Yom HaBikkurim, or the Day of Firstfruits, (on the following day, Nisan 16) was a celebration thanking Yahweh for the upcoming barley harvest. It was not actually observed in Israel until they entered the Promised Land—almost forty years after the Law was given (see Joshua 5:10-12). The day is prophetic of Yahshua’s resurrection from the dead on Nisan 16, 33 AD, in which He Himself was the “firstfruit” of many who would subsequently rise from their graves immortal and undefiled because of their faith in Him. This is the last of the “Spring Feasts,” though since the Feast of Unleavened Bread was a week-long affair, the national party went on for six days past Firstfruits.

Shavuot, or the Feast of Weeks, was scheduled on the day after the seventh Sabbath after the Feast of Unleavened Bread—making an interval of fifty days, hence the Greek name: Pentecost. It works out to Sivan 6 on the Jewish calendar. Traditionally it was supposedly the day Moses announced the covenant between Yahweh and Israel, but the evidence for this is rather thin. The prophetic aspect, however, is obvious: this was the very day, in 33 AD, on which the *Ruach Kodesh*, the Holy Spirit, came to indwell the believers of the risen Messiah. Even though there were no gentiles present that day, this indwelling continues to the present time—in both believing Jews *and* gentiles, a group known as the “called-out assembly (the *Ekklesia*), or simply the Church. Yahweh’s revelation of His redemptive plan has thus been extended beyond the bounds of Israel. *Shavuot* was the second of the three national gatherings mentioned in the Exodus 23 passage—there called the Feast of Harvest.

The first four of these prophetic feasts have been fulfilled, then, in the sacrificial work of the Messiah and in the coming of His Spirit to indwell

the believers. It is worth noting that every single one of them was fulfilled on the precise day of its Levitical mandate (the odds against that happening by chance are over 16 billion to one) and we therefore have strong reason to believe that the last three will be fulfilled in the same way. The three yet-to-be-fulfilled *miqra* convocations occur in the month of Tishri, in September or October—the seventh month on the Hebrew Levitical calendar. They are as follows:

Yom Teruah (i.e., the Day of Blowing or Shouting), a.k.a. the Feast of Trumpets, is slated for Tishri 1. It is sometimes called *Rosh Hashanah*—erroneously, since it isn't the day Yahweh designated as “head of the year.” *That* happens on the first day of Nisan, in the spring—a date that is not among the *miqra'ey*). It's also known as *Yom Hakeseh*, the “Day of Hiding,” for rabbinical tradition held that this was the day Satan went before God to accuse Israel—so the day had to be kept a secret. The day isn't really memorial of anything that happened during the exodus. (Some try to tie it to the entrance into the Promised Land, but that happened during the barley harvest, in the spring.) However, it is prophetic of the event commonly known as the rapture of the Church, the “catching up” of the saints, living and dead, described in I Thessalonians 4 and I Corinthians 15. *Shavuot* and *Yom Teruah* comprise bookends for the Church Age—after which Yahweh will again deal directly with Israel as a nation.

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, comes on Tishri 10. This *miqra* isn't really a “feast” like the other six, but is rather a day of repentance, remorse, fasting (perhaps), and affliction of the soul. Again, it isn't actually memorial of anything specific in Israel's history, but the future fulfillment in light of the weight of Scripture is overwhelmingly plain: this will be the day Israel recognizes her Messiah for who He was—and is. It will coincide with the day Yahshua returns to earth to reign in glory (cf. Zechariah 12:10-11). On that day, the remnant of Israel will at last acknowledge her King. Better late than never.

Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles, the anchor of the three fall feasts, is the last of the seven-*miqra* series, occurring five days later, on Tishri 15. Like the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it kicks off a weeklong party. It can properly be said to be memorial of the wilderness wanderings, and I can state with some assurance that it marks the birthday of Yahshua in 2 BC (again, see [Future History's chronology appendix](#)) but there is a far more significant future role for this festival: it is prophetic of the Millennial reign of Yahshua the Messiah, specifically its first day, five days after His *Yom Kippur* return to earth. (He's going to be a little busy in the interim,

what with the Battle of Armageddon and the incarceration of Satan to attend to.) The Israelites were instructed to build temporary structures—booths or huts—to live in during the festival. This is a poignant picture of the real point of the Feast of Tabernacles: that Yahweh Himself would “camp out” among men for a thousand years of perfect peace.

- (113) *Rejoice on the festivals.* **“You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates.”** (Deuteronomy 16:13-14) As we can see from the context, the command to rejoice is specifically applicable to the Feast of Tabernacles. Rejoicing is also an expressly mandated feature of the Feast of Weeks (predictive of the coming of the Holy Spirit) and the Feast of Trumpets (prophetic of the rapture), and implied in the celebration of the Feast of Firstfruits—the three other events that are obviously cause for celebration. The rabbis’ blanket statement is inappropriate in the case of the other three *miqra’ey*, however, and it betrays a lack of understanding as to why Yahweh instituted them in the first place. Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Day of Atonement all speak of the negative aspects of our salvation—our certain death if our sins are not covered by the atoning blood of the Lamb of God, the elimination of sin from our lives through the death of the Messiah, and the essential affliction of our souls when faced with our unworthiness. These things are all necessary and good, but they are not in and of themselves cause for celebration. The fact that these three *miqra’ey* are needed at all is actually cause for mourning. Yahweh was precisely accurate in His instructions as to *when* we were to rejoice.
- (114) *Appear at the Sanctuary on the festivals.* **“Three times a year all your males shall appear before Yahweh your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles.”** (Deuteronomy 16:16) As we saw in #112, the festivals of Yahweh were lumped into three groups, three *miqra’ey* in the spring, one in early summer, and three in the fall. All the men living within Israel were to congregated at a central location three times each year. The meeting place was wherever the Tabernacle happened to be at the time. It eventually settled permanently at God’s chosen location, Jerusalem, with the building of the Temple. Thus every man in Israel would be gathered together for the worship of Yahweh for at least five of the seven festivals, for one week in the spring, a couple of days in the summer, and a week or more in the fall. Only the men were required to go, but as a practical matter, whole families often made the journey (cf. Luke 2:41-44).

Why was everyone's presence required so often? Because Yahweh was making a point. The annual cycle of holy convocations was prophetic of God's plan of redemption for mankind. Every part of the plan is essential for our ultimate reconciliation with Him. Sacrificial death without removal of sins or subsequent resurrection in glory is an unfinished story. If a holy God were to "camp out" among a race of men who had chosen not to love Him, the result would be fatal for them. All seven *miqra'ey* are needed to communicate God's plan.

It's interesting that Maimonides specifies the Jews' appearances at the Sanctuary (though the Torah delineates only "the place God chooses," which would eventually settle at Jerusalem). The "Sanctuary," the remodeled second Temple, had been torn down by the Romans over a millennium before he wrote his *Mishneh Torah*. Like so many of these mitzvot, the lack of a Temple makes compliance with this one impossible. Jews today who claim to be "Torah observant" are kidding themselves. They must pick and choose which mitzvot they can and will observe and which are unfeasible. If keeping the letter of the Law were the path to salvation, no one alive today could be saved.

- (115) *Remove chametz on the Eve of Passover.* **"Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel."** (Exodus 12:15) *Chametz* is leaven, or yeast. [Judaism 101](#) says that in addition to being memorial of the Jews' hasty departure from Egyptian bondage, the removal of *chametz* "is also a symbolic way of removing the 'puffiness' (arrogance, pride) from our souls." Close, but no cigar. Yeast is a picture of sin, of corruption, of rotteness. Its removal is thus symbolic the elimination of sin from our lives—something that could only be accomplished by the sacrificial death of the Messiah.

The rabbis misspoke when they connected the removal of leaven with "Passover." Yahweh is very precise: there is a separate *miqra* for the elimination of yeast: the seven-day-long Feast of Unleavened Bread—beginning on the day *after* Passover (which was symbolic of the Messianic sacrifice, the crucifixion). I may seem to be nitpicking here, but we obscure the prophetic significance of the *miqra'ey* if we don't keep them straight in our minds. Passover—the death of the Lamb of God—came first. The elimination of our sin for eternity (symbolized by the seven-day duration of the Feast) can only follow.

- (116) *Rest on the first day of Passover.* **"On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No**

manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month [of Nisan] at evening. For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.” (Exodus 12:16-20). The passage makes it clear that the Feast of Unleavened Bread, not Passover, is in view. The first and last days of the seven-day event were to be set aside as special Sabbaths—whether or not they actually fell on the seventh day of the week. (But proving that Yahweh knows precisely what He’s doing, the Feast actually did fall on a Sabbath in its fulfillment year, 33 A.D.) Here again, we see that the Sabbath rest is associated metaphorically with a state of sinless perfection for eternity. By sundown on the fourteenth of Nisan (Passover) the homes of the Israelites were to be free of leaven. This condition was to last until sundown on the twenty-first.

- (117) *Do not work on the first day of Passover.* **“On the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to Yahweh; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.”** (Leviticus 23:6-7) This is the negative counterpart to affirmative Mitzvah #116. Again, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, not Passover proper, is being described. Note that the fifteenth day of the month began (by Yahweh’s reckoning) on the evening of the fourteenth; in other words, the next day began at sundown, not at midnight as we commonly reckon it. Thus the apparent starting date contradiction between the Exodus passage and this one in Leviticus isn’t really there.
- (118) *Rest on the seventh day of Passover.* **“...and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you.** (Exodus 12:16) The festival ended as it began, with a holy convocation, a special Sabbath rest. Normally, food preparation (being somebody’s “customary work”) was forbidden on the Sabbath. Here, Yahweh makes an exception to His own rule, allowing the preparation of food on the special Sabbaths opening and closing the Feast of Unleavened Bread. He knew that there would be times when two Sabbaths (the normal seventh-day one and the special feast-day one) would fall back to back, and He didn’t wish to impose an undue hardship on His people for the sake of a metaphor. As He would later say

through His Messiah, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Modern rabbis, clueless as always to Yahweh’s provision and plan, simply tweak their calendar instead, adding or subtracting days as needed to keep the Sabbaths where they’re convenient.

- (119) *Do not work on the seventh day of Passover.* **“The seventh day [of the Feast of Unleavened Bread] shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.”** (Leviticus 23:8) We’ve caught Maimonides padding the list again so he could come up with the requisite number of affirmative and negative commandments. This is simply the converse of the previous mitzvah. We’re going to see a lot of the same sort of annoying junior high school writing technique in the next few mitzvot. Bear in mind that every time the rabbis mention “Passover” in Mitzvot #115 through #126, the correct term is the “Feast of Unleavened Bread” or *Chag Matzah*.
- (120) *Eat matzah on the first night of Passover.* **“In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening.”** (Exodus 12:18) *Matzah* is, at its most essential, simply bread baked without yeast—unleavened bread. Bread was *the* staple food in the Israelite diet. Thus the heart of the commandment wasn’t so much to “eat unleavened bread” as it was “don’t eat any bread with yeast in it.” Something that was ordinarily there within the bread (yeast) would be non-existent for the duration of the feast (not just the first night). Yahweh is saying that something that was ordinarily there within our lives (sin) would be non-existent for the duration of eternity. If we don’t understand the metaphorical connection between leaven and sin, we will miss the entire point of this Feast, and perhaps conclude that this is just one more pointless ritual God has instituted to make life more difficult for us. Nothing could be further from the truth. In my experience, Yahweh never does or says *anything* on a meaningless whim.
- (121) *No chametz shall be in the Israelites’ possession during Passover.* **“For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land.”** (Exodus 12:19) The complete removal of leaven/sin is the whole point of the Feast. The “congregation of Israel” is indicative of all believers of every age (cf. Galatians 3:6-9). “Strangers” (i.e., goyim like me) and “natives of the land” (biological Jews) alike must be made free of sin if they wish to be numbered among the “congregation of Israel.” But we can’t achieve this status by our own efforts. That is why the Feast of Unleavened Bread follows Passover—the cleansing is a result of the sacrifice.

- (122) *Do not eat any food containing chametz on Passover. “You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat [only] unleavened bread.”* (Exodus 12:20) There were two phases of the un-leavening of a Jewish home for the Feast: first all the yeast was to be removed from the home; second, nothing baked with leaven was to be eaten. Applying our established metaphor of leaven=sin, we perceive a subtle distinction between external and internal corruption. Not only is the evil influence of the world to be taken out of our environment, it will also be purged from within us: we will be sanctified and justified before Yahweh. The prophetic implications are spectacular. Remember, in these “rituals” we are acting out what God has already accomplished in the past or will achieve in the future. In this age, there is no way we can purge the world of sin any more than we can make our own lives sinless. But Yahweh’s plan achieves both of these objectives.
- (123) *Do not eat chametz on Passover. “And Moses said to the people: “Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand Yahweh brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten.”* (Exodus 13:3) This mitzvah seems to be identical to the one that precedes it. But the supporting passage sheds some added insight on the subject. Notice how Yahweh connects the absence of leaven with deliverance from bondage. The purging of sin from our lives is tantamount to our being freed from slavery to that sin: by memorializing one thing, the Jews were celebrating the other as well.
- (124) *Chametz shall not be seen in an Israelite’s home during Passover. “No leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters.”* (Exodus 13:7) The symbolic translation: “Sin shall not be evident in the life of a believer, nor shall it trouble him any longer.” I can’t help but think of a passage from Daniel describing the last seven years of this age. During this time, God promised to “finish the transgression, make an end of sins, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness.” (see Daniel 9:24) In other words, the *chametz* is on its way out.
- (125) *Discuss the departure from Egypt on the first night of Passover. “And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, ‘This is done because of what Yahweh did for me when I came up from Egypt.’ It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that Yahweh’s law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand Yahweh has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year.”* (Exodus 13:8-10) Allow me to quote something heartbreaking from [Judaism 101](#): “Watch out for Christianized versions of the haggadah. The Christian ‘last supper’ is

generally believed to have been a Pesach seder, so many Christians recreate the ritual of the seder, and the haggadahs that they use for this purpose tend to reinterpret the significance of the holiday and its symbols to fit into their Christian theology. For example, they say that the three matzahs represent the Trinity, with the broken one representing Jesus on the cross (in Judaism, the three matzahs represent the three Temples, two of which have been destroyed, and the third of which will be built when the moshiach comes). They speak of the paschal lamb as a prophecy of Jesus, rather than a remembrance of the lamb's blood on the doorposts in Egypt. If you want to learn what Pesach means to Jews, then these 'messianic' haggadahs aren't for you."

In context, Tracey Rich has just completed a detailed description of a *Pesach* seder, the annual rehearsal of the original Passover event. The Exodus passage above speaks of a "memorial," and today's Jews apparently have that down pat. The heartbreaking thing is that they completely missed the other half of it: "keeping this ordinance in its season from year to year" is also supposed to be a *sign* for them. Not just a memorial, but also a *sign*. And if it's a sign, what is it supposed to signify? Rich admits that his own symbol is all goofed up when he equates the *one* broken matzah with *two* Temples that have been destroyed. He is absolutely correct in perceiving that a third and final Temple will be built by Moshiach/Messiah (see *Future History*, Chapter 26 for an exhaustive study). But he can't explain this: if the Jews, who haven't changed their approach to the Torah in any material way for the better part of the last three millennia, are in the center of God's will, why did He allow their first two Temples to be destroyed? Why did he let them wander the earth like homeless vagabonds for nineteen hundred years? Could it be that, as Yahshua Himself implied, they were (and are) willingly ignorant of the signs that were given to them? I weep for a people who are so close to the truth and yet they refuse to see it: the Messiah came. They crucified Him. His death makes life possible for us. All of Yahweh's signs point directly and unequivocally to Yahshua of Nazareth.

- (126) *Do not eat chametz after mid-day on the fourteenth of Nisan. "You shall eat no leavened bread with it [the Passover Lamb]; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, that is, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), that you may remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life."* (Deuteronomy 16:3) Yahweh doesn't put this particular deadline on cleaning out the leaven from the Jewish households, but as a practical matter, this cut-off time works reasonably well. The schedule went like this: the Passover lamb was to be slain on the afternoon of the fourteenth day of Nisan (precisely the time of

day when Yahshua was crucified), and then roasted (not boiled, because fire is symbolic of the judgment Yahshua endured on our behalf). This is why the fourteenth, Passover proper, is often called the Day of Preparation. The Passover meal, then, took place after sundown—technically now the fifteenth, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (The Last Supper, therefore, was not technically a Passover seder, but a regular meal that took place within the timeframe of the Passover “day.” Neither the lamb nor *The Lamb* would be killed until the following afternoon.) The lamb was to be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (like horseradish) that were a reminder of the bitterness of slavery in Egypt—and symbolic of the sting of sin in the world. All the cooking had to be done by sundown, for the fifteenth of Nisan was a designated Sabbath. That meant that at the very latest, sundown on the fourteenth was the last possible opportunity to remove the *chametz* from the house, and it made sense to try to have the job done several hours earlier. But Yahweh didn’t expressly command it.

- (127) *Count forty-nine days from the time of the cutting of the Omer (first sheaves of the barley harvest). “You shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath [i.e., the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread—the “day after” this would be the Feast of Firstfruits], from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to Yahweh. You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 23:15-17) Don’t let the dual designation of “firstfruits” throw you. This *miqra* (*Shavuot*) is based on the wheat harvest, whereas the “Feast of Firstfruits” (*Yom HaBikkurim*) speaks of the earlier barley harvest. After all the hullabaloo about getting rid of the leaven during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we’re almost shocked to see a specific directive that the two loaves that were to be symbolically “waved” in offering before Yahweh here were to be baked *with leaven!* No explanation for this is given in the Torah, but it all becomes clear in the New Testament: *Shavuot*, or the Day of Pentecost, is prophetic of the coming of the *Ruach Kodesh*, the Holy Spirit, to dwell within the believers of the Messiah after His resurrection. The whole story is related in Acts 2: **“Now when the Day of Pentecost had fully come...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.”** The Law had been fulfilled in the sacrifice of the Messiah. Our sins (note: *not the law*, but our sins) had been nailed to the cross and taken to the tomb with Him. Thus leaven was no longer an issue: it’s not that we were no longer required to be holy—it’s that in God’s view, we already were.

- (128) *Rest on Shavuot*. “You shall proclaim on the same day [The Feast of Weeks] that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.” (Leviticus 23:21) Five of the seven *miqra'ey* are designated as special Sabbaths, days upon which no customary work is to be done. This begs the question: what’s different about Passover and the Feast of Firstfruits—*miqra'ey* that are not designated as Sabbaths? As it turns out, these are the only two whose symbolic fulfillment was accomplished by Yahshua alone, without any participation on the part of His believers. Passover represents His death, and Firstfruits prophesies His presentation before Yahweh after His resurrection—events we can only thankfully acknowledge, but in which we had no part whatsoever to play. The other five all imply some contribution, some involvement, by the Faithful.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread symbolizes the removal of sin from our lives. The Feast of Weeks marks the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us. The Feast of Trumpets heralds our “catching up” to be together with our Savior. The Day of Atonement speaks of the remorse and repentance of God’s people. And finally, the Feast of Tabernacles foreshadows the day when Immanuel will come once again to dwell among us. So whether in an active or passive role, we as believers are participants in each of these five *miqra'ey*.

Why then was each of them designated as a special Sabbath, a day of rest? Because Yahweh wanted to make it crystal clear that our work, our effort, has nothing to do with our redemption. We can’t work for it; we can only rest in it. Yes, there are many other days when work is necessary and appropriate, and we should not shirk our responsibility or despise our privilege to work for our Savior’s glory. But there’s absolutely nothing we can do to earn our reconciliation with God. That is a gift, provided for us long before we’re allowed to put on our hardhats and head for the jobsite.

In 33 AD, the year in which the first four *miqra'ey* were fulfilled, the Feast of Unleavened Bread fell on an actual Sabbath, i.e., Saturday. Because Shavuot came fifty days later (seven weeks and one day), the Day of Pentecost spoken of in Acts 2 fell on a *Sunday*. Was Yahweh telling us that the Spirit-indwelled *Ekklesia* would come to habitually gather not on the Sabbath day but on the first day of the week? I don’t know, but it certainly worked out that way. If this little detail means what it seems to, Yahweh is mandating the observance of *two* successive days each week for our spiritual benefit—the Sabbath rest as a symbol of our helplessness to work our way into the Kingdom of God, and the first day of the week as

a time when believers could all gather “with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1) to celebrate our Spiritual rebirth in Yahshua the Messiah.

A more cynical view states that Sun-day worship was nothing more than a pagan institution foisted upon an increasingly gentile Ekklesia by semi-converted Mithras worshippers at the time of Constantine. It’s true that all things “Jewish” (like the Sabbath) were forcibly suppressed from this time forward, robbing the Church of several millennia’s worth of priceless foundational insight. It’s also true that Scripture never overtly condones replacing Sabbath gatherings with Sunday worship. I honestly don’t know which theory is correct. But if informing us that Sunday would eventually become the primary day of worship for fifty generations of Christians *isn’t* what Yahweh meant by scheduling *Shavuot* on the first day of the week—fifty days (not forty-nine) after *Chag Matzah*—then I’ll leave it to you to figure out what He *did* mean.

- (129) *Do not work on Shavuot.* **“You shall proclaim on the same day [The Feast of Weeks] that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.”** (Leviticus 23:21) This of course is merely the converse of #128 above. The command is to refrain, on the day of this holy convocation, from doing the work you’d ordinarily do. In the previous mitzvah we explored the “why.” Perhaps we should take a moment to look at the “who.” In whose dwellings will it be a “statute forever,” and whose “generations” are in view? It’s crystal clear in context. Four times in Leviticus 23 we see this formula: **“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel....’”** These festivals are to be observed by the children of Israel, the Jews. It is to Abraham’s progeny alone that Yahweh entrusted the signs of his redemption. When He told Abram, **“In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,”** (Genesis 12:3) He was speaking of more than the coming of the Messiah. He was also referring to the signs heralding His great work—the seven *miqra’ey*, and at some level, the entire “Law of Moses.” The gentiles may study, contemplate, and rejoice, but it is up to the Jews to bear the signs of Yahweh’s deliverance. If only they would.
- (130) *Rest on Rosh Hashanah.* **“In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation.”** (Leviticus 23:24) First, be aware that the Feast of Trumpets is *not* Rosh Hashanah—the head of the year. That’s a convention the rabbis obsequiously borrowed from their Babylonian captors. Yahweh, however, had specifically designated the first day of Nisan—in the spring, two weeks before Passover—as the Hebrews’ “New Year’s Day.” The Feast of Trumpets is in Tishri, the seventh month; it is the first of the “fall

feasts.” Second, notice that this is the first *miqra* in the series that has not yet been fulfilled. In a nutshell, the first four feasts were fulfilled in the death, burial, resurrection, and Spiritual indwelling of Yahshua the Messiah. The Feast of Trumpets would logically signal the next crucial phase in God’s plan of redemption, and we don’t have to look too far to find it. Paul writes: **“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”** (I Corinthians 15:51-52) **“The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”** (I Thessalonians 4:16-17)

The word translated “blowing” in the Leviticus passage quoted above is *teruah*, which means “alarm, blowing (as of trumpets), joy, a loud noise, rejoicing, shouting, a sounding.” (S) If we look at the words associated with this event Paul is describing (“last trumpet... sound... shout... voice... trumpet of God”), we are confronted with a perfect match. And what is Paul describing? The popular term for this event is derived from the words “caught up.” That’s *harpazo* in Greek, translated as *rapiemur* in Latin, from which we get our English word “rapture.” The rapture is Yahweh’s exit strategy for the believers of the post-resurrection age—the “Church” age. Just as He took Lot out of Sodom before He torched the place, He will take His people out of a corrupt and decaying world before He visits judgment upon it. Coming soon to a world near you.

- (131) *Do not work on Rosh Hashanah. “You shall do no customary work on [the Feast of Trumpets]; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 23:25) Here’s the negative permutation of the affirmative mitzvah we saw in #130. The one unique thing about this *miqra* is the blowing of the ram’s horn “trumpet,” or *shofar*. Mr. Rich unwittingly points out the following absurdity concerning contemporary Jewish observation: “The *shofar* is not blown if the holiday falls on Shabbat.” I guess they think blowing the *shofar* is work. Gee, guys, can’t you see how dumb that is? *Every Feast of Trumpets by definition* falls on a Sabbath—if not the seventh day of the week, then a specially designated day of rest, as we see here in this mitzvah. The reason it’s a Sabbath is that we can’t do anything to earn it—the rapture, like the redemption that must precede it, is a gift from God.

As long as we’re here in verse 25, let’s look at that last bit: **“You shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh.”** Fire in Scripture is invariably a

metaphor for judgment. Here fire is intimately associated with the Sabbath rest of the Feast. Could Yahweh be telling us that our exodus from this corrupt world will lead to its judgment (like Lot's departure from Sodom did)? Or is this just a coincidence? I'll let you be the judge on that one.

- (132) *Hear the sound of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. "In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. For you it is a day of blowing the trumpets."* (Numbers 29:1) Since Yahweh didn't actually say *why* they were to blow the trumpets, the Jews came up with some fanciful myths of their own. First, it was a call to remembrance and repentance, for the day was the first of the ten "days of awe" that culminated in *Yom Kippur*, or the Day of Atonement, which we'll see in a moment. Second, it was to remind Israel of their covenant relationship with Yahweh. And third, this was supposed to be the one day of the year when Satan came before God to accuse Israel, so the Jews blew the *shofar* to confuse the devil. *It's not working, people.* This last tradition led to the day being known as *Yom Hakeseh*, or the "Hidden Day," for (the story went) if you never said *when* the Feast of Trumpets was coming, then Satan wouldn't know. (If only he were that stupid.) So they'd say, tongue in cheek, "No one knows but God." This goes a long way toward explaining Yahshua's enigmatic statement about not knowing the time of His return for His own people, recorded in Matthew 24:36. He was, in a backhanded way, informing us that He intended to gather His believers on some future Feast of Trumpets. He didn't say what year.

- (133) *Fast on Yom Kippur. "Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh."* (Leviticus 23:27) Whereas most of the *miqra'ey* of Yahweh call for rejoicing and feasting, this one is different. It calls for affliction of the soul, introspection, mourning—a somber response to the realization of one's guilt. Why this is will become apparent shortly. I must note that fasting and "affliction" are not the same thing. This, sadly, is one more instance of rabbinical meddling designed to "get them off the hook" with God—performing the letter of their law while willfully ignoring the true intention of Yahweh. In point of fact, fasting is never specifically commanded on the Day of Atonement, although if true "affliction of soul" is taking place, fasting could well be a manifestation of that attitude. But anybody, in any frame of mind, can fast for a day if they want to.

The key is the word "afflict." *Anah* is "a verb indicating to be afflicted, to be oppressed, to be humbled. It means to bow down, to humble oneself." (B&C) Only twice in Scripture it is shown to be

accompanied by fasting of any kind (Ezra 8:21, to punctuate a spirit of supplication as the Israelites began their return journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, and Daniel 10:3 (sort of), where Daniel mourned for three weeks, eating only bread and water as he awaited clarification concerning a troubling vision). Neither instance is connected in any way to the Day of Atonement.

But there is another *'anah* in Hebrew whose meaning is so different it has been assigned an entirely different reference number (though it's spelled identically). This verb means "to answer, to respond, to reply, to testify." It also means "to sing, to shout, to howl. It is used of singing joyously to the Lord and in praise of His Law, or in a riotous, uncontrolled way. It is used of a victory song or crying out in victory. It is used figuratively of a rested Israel singing again." (B&C) I find it fascinating that both meanings of the word (or should I say, *all* of them) fit the scenario scripture paints of the definitive Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*.

And what is this significant future event to which *Yom Kippur* points? All of the previous five *miqra'ey* (as we have seen) are linked to fulfillments of key milestones in Yahweh's plan of redemption, in chronological order. This one extends the pattern. After the Ekklesia has been raptured, Israel will find itself with no real friends left in the entire earth. At this point, Yahweh will begin a series of miraculous deliverance events designed to bring Israel as a nation back into the Land, and awaken them to an awareness of their true God. The climactic moment is prophesied by Zechariah: **"And I [Yahweh] will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. And the land shall mourn, every family by itself.... And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north, and half of it toward the south."** (Zechariah 12:10-12, 14:4) Yes, it's the appearance of Yahshua the King, returning in glory, that will cause those Jews who had witnessed their miraculous national deliverance to "afflict their souls." What else could they do, after their nation crucified their Messiah and rejected Him for the next two millennia? Somehow, saying "Oops, my bad," doesn't quite cover it. Will there be fasting? I wouldn't doubt it. Who could keep anything down? But after the shock and remorse sink in, the reality of their deliverance will emerge in their response, their answer, their joyous testimony. And before the day is through, they'll be singing and shouting

in reply to their Messiah's inevitable victory. The *'anah* of their *nephesh* (souls) will be the order of the day.

- (134) *Do not eat or drink on Yom Kippur.* **“For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people.”** (Leviticus 23:29) We've already established that Yahweh never actually said anything about fasting on *Yom Kippur*. But we need to pay close attention to the penalty for not being “*'anah*.” If, on the day of the ultimate Day of Atonement, anyone looks upon the returning King and is not awed by His presence, afflicted and humbled, if he does not respond, answer and shout joyfully, then he shall surely be “cut off.” This is no idle threat, by the way. The prophetic timeline places this last *Yom Kippur* within a couple of days of the Battle of Armageddon—a battle (if you can call it that) in which no enemies of Christ will survive.
- (135) *Do not do work on Yom Kippur.* **“You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.”** (Leviticus 23:31) There's a subtle difference here from the normal Sabbath: usually, it's “Don't do your customary work.” Now it's “Do *no manner* of work.” Perhaps this is indicative of the situation in which Israel will find itself during the three and a half “years” of the “time of Jacob's trouble,” a.k.a. the Great Tribulation—described to Daniel as a **“time and times and half a time...when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered.”** (Daniel 12:7) Yahweh will take Israel to a state of total dependence on Him. As late as the Magog War (Ezekiel 38-39) four or five years before this, the Jews will have some degree of participation in their own deliverance. (The details are delineated in [\[Future History\]](#)). But now, with Armageddon looming, there's absolutely nothing they can do to help themselves—all they can do is sit back and gratefully watch Yahshua destroy the forces of evil in their own backyard.
- (136) *Rest on Yom Kippur.* **“It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath.”** (Leviticus 23:32) Here's the converse of Mitzvah #135. Did you ever wonder why Yahweh begins the “day” at sundown? We see it described this way all the way back in the creation account, where we see the formula repeated: “The evening and the morning were the *nth* day.” What separates nighttime from daytime? The defining factor is light. It was not by accident that Yahshua said, **“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”** (John 8:12) John explains the connection: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made**

that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend [i.e., overcome] it.” (John 1:1-5) Yahweh’s pattern is to move us from darkness into light, from chaos into order, from ignorance into knowledge, from slavery into freedom. And so as we see in His instruction to rest on the Day of Atonement, it is reiterated that the Sabbath is to take us from affliction into celebration. In eschatological terms, as the inhabitants of Jerusalem see their returning Messiah split the Mount of Olives in two, they will realize with horror what a grievous error they and their forbears made. That horror, however, will fade into relief and then into joy as the realization dawns upon them that even now, Yahweh is ready to forgive repentant hearts.

It should be reiterated that not every *miqra* Yahweh specified as a “day of rest” in the Torah can actually fall on a Sabbath—a Saturday—in its definitive fulfillment. The math doesn’t allow it. The Feast of Unleavened Bread fell on a Sabbath in 33 AD, which requires that the Feast of Weeks that same year would fall on a Sunday, even though it’s set aside as a “day of rest.” Nevertheless, I would consider it probable (though it’s not absolutely required) that the ultimate Feast of Trumpets (that upon which the rapture will occur) will fall on a Saturday, as it will in 2009, 2020, 2023 and 2026. Further, since the last two Fall Feasts (Atonement and Tabernacles, each of which is designated a special Sabbath day of rest) come on the tenth and fifteenth of Tishri, it is obvious that they can’t both fall on natural Sabbaths in any given year. That being said, I find it significant that the mandated Sabbath Feast of Tabernacles in 2033—the precise millennial milestone Yahweh’s pattern of sevens would indicate—falls on a natural Sabbath, October 8, 2033. Food for thought.

- (137) *Rest on the first day of Sukkot.* **“The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to Yahweh. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 23:34-36) Here the Sabbath rest is back to being described as not doing one’s “customary work,” that is, the type of work one normally does to earn his living—to provide for his own needs. The rabbis, of course, aren’t satisfied with this definition (and the grace of God that it symbolizes) and generally state that *all* work must cease on this day. So verse 40 must give them migraines: **“And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before Yahweh your God for seven days.”** That’s right: they’re *supposed* to “work” on the first day of *Sukkot*, putting their temporary shelters together.

Although the rabbis have zeroed in on the things they can observe ritualistically (i.e., without thinking about them too much), there is a reason Yahweh instituted this Feast of Booths, or Tabernacles. (“Tabernacle” is admittedly a word we don’t use much anymore outside of the technical description of the “tent of meeting” used during the wilderness wanderings. All the word means, however, is a booth, pavilion, or tent—a temporary structure of some kind.) As I’ve said before, Yahweh doesn’t do things on a pointless whim—He invariably has some benefit or illustrative lesson in mind. So we must ask ourselves: why would God ask the Jews to leave their comfortable homes and build these temporary huts to live in for a week every year? It’s a picture of one of the most astounding concepts in all of scripture—God Himself is planning to leave His glorious heavenly abode and camp out personally among men for a season—a thousand years of perfect peace. Like the weeklong *Sukkot* celebration, it’s described as one big party—a barbecue, if you will. In the ultimate permutation, the inhabitants of earth will enjoy a flawless world with King Yahshua on the throne for an entire Millennium.

As I pointed out in my [Chronology appendix to *Future History*](#) (“No Man Knows...”), the Feast of Tabernacles has almost certainly been fulfilled once already, in the first-century advent of the Messiah. Although the date is not recorded in the Gospels, the evidence points to Yahshua’s birth occurring at *Sukkot* in 2 B.C.—not on December 25, a date which has a far older history as a pagan winter solstice festival. That’s why John told us, “**The Word became flesh and dwelt [Greek *skenoo*: to tabernacle or encamp] among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**” (John 1:14)

- (138) *Do not work on the first day of Sukkot. “On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it.* (Leviticus 23:35) It’s annoying, isn’t it—this habit of Maimonides to restate everything as both an affirmative and as a negative. I should remind the reader that this practice wasn’t quite so obvious in the original. There, the negative mitzvot were grouped together, and the affirmative rules were set aside by themselves. The order we’re using (that of [Tracey Rich of Judaism 101](#)) makes this childish propensity far more obvious—like a seventh grader trying to stretch one page of research into a three page report. What’s not so obvious is what Maimonides (and the rabbis before him) left out. There are thousands of rule-worthy statements in the Torah that could have been codified but for the fact that they point directly to Yahshua in His role as the Messiah. For example: (1) Select the perfect Passover lamb on the tenth day of Nisan and bring him into your household until he is slain on the fourteenth. (Exodus 12:1-6); (2) Don’t break any of the bones of the

Passover lamb. (Exodus 12:46); (3) All firstborn who are males are dedicated to Yahweh (Exodus 13:12); (4) The pure gold lamps lighting the holy place must burn continually, fed with the oil of pressed olives, and tended by the High Priest. (Leviticus 24:1-4) I could go on *ad infinitum*, but since neither these nor thousands of other possibilities were listed by Maimonides, they are beyond the purview of this study, nor will I take the time to explain how they tie into the revealed plan of man's redemption. My point is simply that what the rabbis left out is as revealing as what they put into their "613 Laws of Moses."

- (139) *Rest on the eighth day of Sukkot.* **"For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it."** (Leviticus 23:34-36) If the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles is prophetic of the beginning of the Millennial reign of Christ, then what in the world could the *eighth* day signify? Actually, it's not "in the world" any more at all, but "out of this world," if you'll excuse the lame play on words. The eighth day is predictive of what comes after the Millennium: eternity! Our life after the thousand-year reign of the King will be a completion of the process that was begun on the Feast of Trumpets. By this time, all believers of all ages will have received their immortal, spiritual bodies (see I Corinthians 15), and Yahweh will unveil a New Heaven and a New Earth (not to mention a New Jerusalem) in which we can enjoy His company forever. That's why it's called a "sacred assembly." There will be no one left who has not chosen to accept Yahweh's love. Once again, it's designated as a Sabbath rest. There's nothing we can do to earn this eternal state of blissful communion with our God—all we can do is relax and enjoy the gift.
- (140) *Do not work on the eighth day of Sukkot.* **"On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it."** (Leviticus 23:36) *Oy vey.* Read #139 again.
- (141) *Take during Sukkot a palm branch and the other three plants.* **"You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before Yahweh your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to Yahweh for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am Yahweh your God."** (Leviticus 23:40-43) Good grief. Only the

rabbis would try to make a mathematical formula out of this. *Let's see: palm fronds and (count 'em) three other kinds of trees. Not two, not four...* They've missed the entire point, as usual. This is what God is really saying to them: *Come to my holy city. Camp out. Have a good time. Enjoy each other's company, and Mine. Build a temporary shelter out of whatever's available, 'cause that's what Messiah's going to do when He comes. Tree branches would be a good choice, since they're going to lose their leaves in a month or two anyway—a reminder I've given you every autumn that the earth we live on is a temporary place. So have a big barbeque in honor of your God, Yahweh. Do it during a particular week every autumn (because it's prophetic sign of when I'm coming), and if you're a son of Israel living in the Land, never stop celebrating the holiday. Use it as an opportunity to teach your children about the wonderful deliverance I have brought to pass, not only during Moses' day, but in every generation since then.*

- (142) *Dwell in booths seven days during Sukkot. “You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths.”* (Leviticus 23:42) Seven is the number for completion, of perfection. Thus a seven-day festival is indicative of something that has eternal ramifications: Yahweh will dwell with man for eternity. Yes, only the first thousand years of it will be on this earth, but a change in environment doesn't signal a change in relationship. Our old mortal bodies were built for this earth. Our new immortal bodies (like the one Yahshua had when he rose from the tomb) will be built to inhabit an entirely different kind of universe.

Once again, we are reminded that the Jews were to be the bearers of the signs. The only people who were to participate in the *miqra* of *Sukkot* were “native Israelites.” The rest of us can only thankfully support the sons of Abraham. Yes, they've goofed up Yahweh's pictures—the truths His precepts are designed to prophesy—pretty badly. That's not our concern; we goof up the stuff with which we're entrusted as well. But the Jews are still God's designated sign-bearers. That will never change.

Chapter 5

The Dietary Laws

If you ask a hundred Christians if the dietary laws of the Old Testament are still valid for us today, ninety-five of them will say “No,” and point out a couple of places in the New Testament that seem to prove their case. For example, in an incident recorded in both Matthew and Mark, Yahshua answered the Pharisees’ criticism of His disciples’ eating with unwashed hands with what seems like a refutation of the Levitical dietary precepts:

“Jesus called to the crowds and said, ‘Listen to what I say and try to understand. You are not defiled by what you eat; you are defiled by what you say and do.’” His point here is actually that the Pharisees didn’t understand the nature of defilement—that which makes you unclean or unholy. They thought that neglecting the traditional ceremonial hand washing before meals would somehow separate you from God. **“Then Jesus went into a house to get away from the crowds, and his disciples asked him what he meant by the statement he had made.”** Yahshua’s disciples didn’t quite get it either, apparently. **“‘Don’t you understand either?’ he asked. ‘Can’t you see that what you eat won’t defile you? Food doesn’t come in contact with your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then comes out again.’ (By saying this, he showed that every kind of food is acceptable.)”** We’ll come back to this last sentence. It’s the heart of the argument, but there are problems with it.

“And then he added, ‘It is the thought-life that defiles you. For from within, out of a person’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, eagerness for lustful pleasure, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you and make you unacceptable to God.’” In other words, neither the food you eat nor the way you prepare it can make you unholy. What separates you from God is your sin. **“Then the disciples came to him and asked, ‘Do you realize you offended the Pharisees by what you just said?’ Jesus replied, ‘Every plant not planted by my heavenly Father will be rooted up, so ignore them. They are blind guides leading the blind, and if one blind person guides another, they will both fall into a ditch.’”** (Matthew 15:10-13 NLT, Mark 7:14-23 NLT, blended) Yahshua didn’t care if He offended the Pharisees’ delicate sensibilities. They were leading people astray; the record needed to be corrected. And He was just the Guy to do it.

The Pharisees were doing their best to follow the strict letter of the Mosaic Law, including the dietary part. So far, so good. The problem was that they were relying on their strict outward observance of the rules to earn favor with Yahweh—Who sees what’s in our hearts. Yahshua wasn’t saying that it was *wrong* to follow the precepts of Moses, or that they had somehow been rendered

obsolete by His coming. He was only saying that observance of the Law could not and would not reconcile us to a holy God. Just as “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath,” so was the rest of the Torah: the dietary laws were there for our benefit, not God’s.

But what about that incriminating parenthetical, “**(By saying this, he showed that every kind of food is acceptable.)**”? Isn’t this saying that all bets are off, that we have been given divine permission to eat whatever we want? Not exactly. The primary passage defining the dietary laws is found in Leviticus 11. The summary verse reads, “**This is the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.**” (Leviticus 11:46-47) Two things, it says, have been defined in the preceding passage. First are those things which are clean (as opposed to unclean). If an Israelite were even to *touch* anything on this list, he would be ceremonially defiled, or “unclean until evening,” that is, temporarily disqualified from certain duties or privileges that required ceremonial cleanliness. Second, those things which are edible (as opposed to inedible) are identified. Thus any animal that was prohibited in the Leviticus 11 list was, by definition, *not food*. So Yahshua is *not* saying, “Go ahead and eat spiders and mice—I’m telling you it’s okay, never mind what the Torah said.” He is, rather, saying, “Nothing you put in your mouth can establish or destroy your relationship with Yahweh. Only the condition of your heart—your love, faith, and trust in Him—has any bearing on this relationship.” The things that were not considered “food” in the first place never even entered into the discussion.

I should point out that the New Living Translation is probably guilty of unwarranted extrapolation at this point: “**(By saying this, he showed that every kind of food is acceptable)**” isn’t actually in the Greek text in any recognizable way. It’s *katharizo pas broma*: the New King James simply renders it, “**purifying all foods.**” The Greek *katharizo* means to cleanse, purge, or purify; or to pronounce clean in a Levitical sense. The phrase is generally thought to be an editorial insertion by Mark, not that it matters. The bottom line is that the Mark 7 passage does nothing to abrogate the Levitical dietary laws: that which is *not* food is *not* purified.

Okay, then, what about I Timothy 4? Surely *that’ll* prove the case. “**Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from what we believe; they will follow lying spirits and teachings that come from demons. These teachers are hypocrites and liars. They pretend to be religious, but their consciences are dead. They will say it is wrong to be married and wrong to eat certain foods.**” See? See? The people telling us it’s “wrong to eat certain foods” are hypocrites and liars! “**But God created those foods to be eaten with thanksgiving by people who know and believe the truth. Since everything God created is good, we should not reject any of it. We may receive**

it gladly, with thankful hearts. For we know it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.” (I Timothy 4:1-5 NLT) Hold on a minute here. What’s God’s definition of “food?” It’s all the stuff on the “okay” list in Leviticus 11. The items on the no-no list aren’t classified as food at all. But when the rabbis tell you not to eat beef or lamb that was butchered by someone other than an duly authorized *shochet*, or when the Catholic Church tells you (as they did for centuries) that you can’t eat meat on Fridays, you can be relatively certain you’re dealing with “hypocrites and liars.” Again, things that aren’t defined as food in the Torah aren’t even part of the discussion. I know you were probably all watered up for some barbecued buzzard breast with minced mousemeat stuffing, but neither this passage nor the Mark 7 statement has authorized any such culinary adventures. Sorry.

Alright then, what about Peter’s vision of the sheet with all the non-kosher sandwich fixin’s on it? Rule number one: don’t take my word for anything. Let’s look up the passage. The day after Cornelius, a devout Roman centurion, received a vision about Peter, **“Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” And a voice spoke to him again the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.”** (Acts 10:9-15) Peter, like the Pharisees and indeed, most Jews of his time, made an effort to follow the Mosaic dietary laws. They were such an ingrained religious tradition, nobody really thought about them much—they were second nature, as they should have been. But certain rabbinical prejudices had become equally ingrained in the culture, among them that gentiles were unclean dogs whom Jews were to despise and look down upon as lesser creatures.

So as Pete was puzzling over the meaning of his non-kosher vision, Cornelius’ messengers arrived and asked him to go with them to visit this gentile they worked for. Peter may have been impetuous, but he was teachable. He saw immediately what Yahweh was trying to tell him. He relates his conclusion in Acts 10:34-35, 43: **“In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation, whoever [i.e., not only Jews, but gentiles as well] fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.... Whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.”** Was Peter’s vision about food? No. It was about dropping errant prejudices about other people whom God loved. Note that God wasn’t telling Peter to be tolerant of other people’s false beliefs. Cornelius was a believer, or at the very least, an honest searcher, and Yahweh never slams the door shut on these folks, no matter what their cultural background is. The problem was on Peter’s end. He had assumed that because Yahweh had told the Israelites to keep themselves set apart from the

nations, that gentiles could not enter the Kingdom of Heaven, at least not without becoming Jews first. God was showing him that this just wasn't true. Peter got the message. Why don't we?

As we examine Maimonides' take on the Levitical dietary laws, then, let us bear in mind that nothing Yahweh instructed in the Torah has been abrogated, diminished, or otherwise done away with. There are, however, several ceremonial cleanliness issues, mentioned in Leviticus in the context of dietary law, that have been fulfilled in the person of the Messiah. Maimonides doesn't distinguish these from what and what not to eat, so I will, briefly. These seem to be indicative of whether or not an Israelite was to be admitted into the camp, to be a part of the congregation. If a person was ceremonially unclean, he was to remain outside the camp, separated from those who were not contaminated. It's never really spelled out, but we are given a picture of how it worked in Deuteronomy 23:10-11. **"If there is any man among you who becomes unclean by some occurrence in the night, then he shall go outside the camp; he shall not come inside the camp. But it shall be, when evening comes, that he shall wash with water; and when the sun sets, he may come into the camp."** Being admitted "into the camp" is a picture of entering the Kingdom of God. There is no shortage of ways we can "defile ourselves," making us unfit for the Kingdom. But the blood of the Messiah has washed us clean, allowing us to come into God's very presence "when the sun sets," that is, upon our death (or rapture, whichever occurs first).

As we read the Torah, it becomes plain that there's really no way to avoid becoming ceremonially unclean from time to time. (Actually, it's worse than that: it's next to impossible to remain ceremonially undefiled for longer than a New York minute.) Interestingly enough, Yahweh never commanded the Israelites to completely avoid this state, though being ceremonially clean is clearly to be preferred—a goal to shoot for. He said far less about how to avoid becoming "defiled" than He did about the subsequent purification process—typically, the washing of the body or clothes with water and the passage of time.

But as I said, Maimonides stuck pretty much to the practical dietary side of the subject—what and what not to eat and how to prepare it. Sadly, this makes perfect sense, because ever since the wilderness wanderings ended, there was no practical way to "go outside the camp." God's instructions in that regard became purely symbolic, and the symbols pointed toward Yahshua the Messiah. Therefore, it served the interests of the rabbis who'd rejected Him to bury the truth. But

we're following Maimonides' list for organizational purposes, so the dietary rules are where we're going next...

(143) *Examine the marks in cattle (in order to distinguish the clean from the unclean).* **“Now Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying, ‘These are the animals which you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth...’ (Leviticus 11:1-2)** What follows these verses is a litany of not just “cattle,” but all sorts of animals that might or might not be considered edible. The people weren't so much to examine the marks or characteristics on individual animals as to separate different *kinds* of beasts from each other: it wasn't that Angus beef might be okay but not Holstein, but rather that cows were clean and camels weren't. Yahweh would go on to speak not only of mammals, but also of sea creatures, bugs, reptiles, and birds. As we will see, the more complicated an animal's digestive system and the more “discriminating” its typical diet, the more likely it would be that its kind would be included in the “edible” category.

This was not the first time the issue of “clean” versus “unclean” animals was ever raised. 1,500 years (give or take) before the Law was handed down through Moses, Noah was instructed to **“take with you [into the ark] seven each of every clean animal, a male and his female; two each of animals that are unclean, a male and his female; also seven each of birds of the air, male and female, to keep the species alive on the face of all the earth.”** (Genesis 7:2-3) How did Noah know which was which? Either Yahweh told him specifically for this occasion, or more likely, Noah already knew because he had made sacrificial offerings to Yahweh of these kinds of animals in the past, as had his ancestors—going back to Adam. It isn't even hinted that what Noah did in Genesis 8:20 was an unprecedented act: **“Then Noah built an altar to Yahweh, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.”** However, using these animals for food—instead of eating only plants—was possibly a post-diluvian innovation. Yahweh told Noah after the flood subsided, **“The fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.”** (Genesis 9:2-4) At this point in time, Yahweh did not distinguish between “clean” and “unclean” animals for dietary purposes. Since we aren't told why, we're left to speculate. Perhaps the intervening degradation of the gene pools of both man and his potential supper did not

reach a critically detrimental stage until the time of Moses. Perhaps the increase in environmental pollution that went hand in hand with shorter post-diluvian lifespans eventually made eating the meat of scavenger animals more dangerous. In any case, by the time of Moses, new instructions were deemed necessary. God hadn't changed, but our world had.

- (144) *Do not eat the flesh of unclean beasts.* “**Speak to the children of Israel, saying, ‘These are the animals which you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth: Among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud—that you may eat. Nevertheless these you shall not eat among those that chew the cud or those that have cloven hooves: the camel, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, is unclean to you; the rock hyrax, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, is unclean to you; the hare, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, is unclean to you; and the swine, though it divides the hoof, having cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch. They are unclean to you.’**” (Leviticus 11:2-8) Yahweh made it easy to determine what animals were “edible” and which were not: of mammals, only those with divided hooves that also chewed the cud were to be used as food. This includes cattle (plus oxen, buffalos, bison, etc.), sheep (both wild and domestic), goats, and deer (including a broad range of wild herding animals inhabiting grasslands from one end of earth to the other). In Deuteronomy 14:4-5, the list looked like this: “**These are the animals which you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, the deer, the gazelle, the roe deer, the wild goat, the mountain goat, the antelope, and the mountain sheep.**”

Specifically excluded because they did not meet the dual criteria are several animals that would have been quite familiar to the Israelites: notably, pigs and camels. Horses, donkeys, zebras, and onagers (the indigenous wild asses to which Ishmael was prophetically compared in Genesis 16:12) are among other potentially familiar hoofed beasts that didn't make the cut. Carnivorous or omnivorous hunters and scavengers (e.g. lions, wolves, apes) were not to be eaten, nor were omnivorous or vegetarian species that were susceptible to various diseases, such as the hyrax and the rabbit. In clarification, Yahweh stated, “**Whatever goes on its paws, among all kinds of animals that go on all fours, those are unclean to you.**” (Leviticus 11:27)

Since horsemeat and 'possum aren't protein staples for most folks, it would seem eating Torah-Kosher isn't a real big problem for the most part. In fact, as far as the typical American diet is concerned, there are only two

food types on the “forbidden” list that are problematical—pork and shellfish. We’ll cover seafood a bit later, but for now, let’s take a close look at the “other white meat,” pork. I know, pigs are quite intelligent, they’re kind of cute, and their reputation as being “filthy” animals is somewhat exaggerated. More to the point (be honest, now), pork can be mighty tasty: bacon, chops, ribs, ham, sausage—why should we have to give it up just because of some moldy 3,000-year-old dietary guidelines? I don’t mind abstaining from vulture meat and barbecued rat, but...

Yes, we have a fondness for our carnitas and pork chow mein, don’t we? So we scour the Bible looking for loopholes. An Israeli friend of mine who would never openly admit to a fondness for pork nevertheless refers to pigs as “short cows.” *Wink wink, nudge nudge*. And because we like the taste of pork products, we Christians desperately cling to passages like Mark 7 that seem to abrogate the inconvenient portions of the Torah. Don’t bother, my friend. If you’re a believer in Yahshua’s grace, eating pork won’t send you to hell. As a matter of fact, it might even send you to *Heaven* a bit ahead of schedule.

Remember, the Torah is our Owner’s Manual. It was written for our benefit, not Yahweh’s. Why doesn’t he want us to eat pigs? It’s because of what he designed *them* to be—barnyard garbage disposals, made to cleanse the world of spoilage and death. Pigs raised for consumption these days are mostly fed corn, but left to themselves, they’ll eat almost anything, including rotting garbage and the feces of other animals. It’s their job. Being “food” isn’t. They have no mechanism in their digestive tracts to filter out the toxins they ingest—it ends up being secreted through their skin or hooves (pickled pigs’ feet, anyone?) or absorbed into the meat. A cow or sheep will take between twelve and sixteen hours to digest and process its food; a pig’s digestive system is so simple, it’ll get the job done in three or four hours.

And disease? Everybody seems to know that pork needs to be cooked thoroughly in order to kill the worms that infest the meat, but hardly anybody actually gets out the ol’ meat thermometer to check to see if the requisite *minimum* of 170 degrees Fahrenheit has actually been reached. That’s what it takes (if you’re lucky) to kill *trichinella spiralis*—the trichina worm, one of nineteen such worms commonly found in pork. Merely cooking your pork chops until they have the consistency of a baseball mitt is no guarantee that the worms are dead. And don’t take comfort in the USDA stamp: all that means is that the pigs have been inspected. But trichinae are microscopic and nearly transparent—it takes an expert to find them, and the government inspectors aren’t even looking.

The journal *Healthwise* reported that there are 150,000 new cases of trichinosis in the U.S. each year. Some authorities estimate that as many as twenty-five percent of the American population is infected. So why isn't this epidemic recognized and dealt with? Two reasons: first, the obvious—there's money to be made, and lots of it, if the pork industry is allowed to continue doing business as usual. The second reason is the stealthy nature of the disease. "Trichinosis is the chameleon of diseases," said the *Saturday Evening Post* (7/8/82). "The number and variety of ailments with which it is more or less commonly confused approach the encyclopedic." The journal goes on to list 41 disorders ranging from commonplace to esoteric that are frequently misdiagnosed instead of the real culprit, trichinosis—everything from arthritis and asthma to typhus and cholera.

I think it's safe to say that this is one place where our "Christian" traditions have led us into error. We should never have taken the Church's word over Yahweh's. But I'm afraid there's a sinister plot afoot there as well, and it's not over anything as trivial as money. You see, the original Babylonian mystery religion was predicated on the tragic death and miraculous rebirth of Tammuz (Satan's prototypical Messiah counterfeit), who was, the legend goes, killed by a wild boar in his fortieth year. Devotees of the religion would therefore symbolically "weep for Tammuz" for a forty-day Lenten period each year (cf. Ezekiel 8:14), at the end of which they would ritually slaughter the pig that killed Tammuz and celebrate his (Tammuz', not the pig's) resurrection as a god—in the form of an egg-laying rabbit (I'm not making this stuff up, I swear). Does any of this sound familiar? It should. After Constantine declared Christianity legal at the Council of Nicaea in 325, all sorts of pagan sun-god traditions were woven into the fabric of "Christianity," including the oh-so-popular "Easter" ham. It was an often-stated objective of the "Church" hierarchy at this stage to separate itself from all things Jewish. But you can't do that without separating yourself from Yahweh. It was a really stupid thing to do.

Satan's not stupid, of course. He's got something for everybody. And so we observe that the entire Muslim world is deathly afraid of pigs. Are they following the word of Yahweh, then? Hardly. They're merely buying into another of Satan's counterfeits. There's more to the Mosaic dietary laws than just pigs. Ask 'em about camels—specifically declared unclean in the Torah. Middle Eastern Muslims not only eat them, they sacrifice them in droves to Allah every year at the Ka'aba.

- (145) *Examine the marks in fishes (to distinguish the clean from the unclean.*
"These you may eat of all that are in the water: whatever in the water has fins and

scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers—that you may eat. But all in the seas or in the rivers that do not have fins and scales, all that move in the water or any living thing which is in the water, they are an abomination to you.” (Leviticus 11:9-10)

As He did with mammals, Yahweh has provided very clear, simple instructions as to what aquatic creatures are to be considered “edible” and which are not. As before, there are two criteria, both of which must be met: both fins and scales had to be present, which pretty much restricted the category of seafood to true fish—i.e., the bony fishes. Cartilaginous “fish” like sharks and rays have fins but no scales. Sea snakes and certain sea creatures that might be construed to have scales (like shrimps or lobsters) don’t have fins. Both types are thus prohibited. All shellfish (clams, oysters, scallops, mussels, etc.) are out of bounds, as are crustaceans like crabs, lobsters, shrimp, and crayfish. Aquatic mammals like whales, dolphins, and porpoises (read: mahi-mahi) don’t have scales, so they’re not to be eaten, nor are the more exotic sea creatures like octopi, squids, sea cucumbers...you get the idea.

Once again, we don’t have to look too far to find practical reasons for nixing everything but regular fish. Most of the prohibited sea creatures are scavengers, no matter which end of the food chain they occupy. Their God-given job in life is to clean the waters of death and decay. Anybody who’s ever had a successful aquarium knows that one of the secrets of maintaining balance is to have a few scavengers and snails in with the pretty fish to keep the tank clean. Shellfish and mollusks filter pollutants out of their environment, but their simple digestive systems have no capacity for keeping these toxins out of their own tissues. Though they themselves are not normally adversely affected by the nasty stuff they ingest, their flesh retains the accumulated toxins. The bottom line: you never really know if they’re “safe.” So God made the decision easy for us. Fins and scales, or forget it. *Caveat emptor*.

- (146) *Do not eat unclean fish.* **“They [whatever in the water does not have fins and scales] shall be an abomination to you; you shall not eat their flesh, but you shall regard their carcasses as an abomination. Whatever in the water does not have fins or scales—that shall be an abomination to you.”** (Leviticus 11:11-12)
- Here we see the negatively stated converse to Mitzvah #145. It’s not a separate precept. But as long as we’re here, let me point out another detail that forces us to look beyond the mere letter of the law. We see here (as in other places) that not only weren’t the Israelites to eat the forbidden flesh, they weren’t even to touch the carcasses of these creatures after they had died. The consequences of touching the carcass of any unclean animal are summarized in verses 24-25: **“By these you shall become unclean; whoever touches the carcass of any of them shall be unclean until evening; whoever carries**

part of the carcass of any of them shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening.”

“Whoever carries part of the carcass of any of them?” I hate to tell you this, but Yahweh commanded every Israelite to do precisely that—or something very close to it. Remember Mitzvah #41? The Jews were instructed to attach tassels—called *tsitzits*—to the corners of their garments, each containing a single blue thread, the purpose of which was **“that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of Yahweh and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined.”** (Numbers 15:39) Where did the blue dye come from? There was only one source, the cerulean mussel, a.k.a. the murex. So by wearing the *tsitzit* with the required blue thread, the Jews *were* in a sense “carrying part of the carcass” of an unclean creature. At the very least, their keeping of the law of the *tsitzit* had required someone else to become ceremonially unclean for their benefit—processing the dye from the shellfish corpses. When they saw the blue threads in their *tsitzits*, they should have been reminded that somebody had borne their uncleanness for them. The blue thread was prophetic of the Messiah.

Yahweh was practically screaming that **“whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight....”** Did God *purposely* build this glitch into His Law, making it impossible to remain ceremonially clean? I believe He did. Paul goes on to explain: **“For by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** (Romans 3:19-23) We are all unclean, and keeping the Law cannot make us clean. Only the blood of Christ can do that.

- (147) *Examine the marks in fowl, to distinguish the clean from the unclean. “All clean birds you may eat. But these you shall not eat: the eagle, the vulture, the buzzard, the red kite, the falcon, and the kite after their kinds; every raven after its kind; the ostrich [a mistranslation in the NKJV: it’s ossifrage (Hebrew: *peres*), i.e. a lammergeyer or osprey], the short-eared owl, the sea gull, and the hawk after their kinds; the little owl, the screech owl, the white owl, the jackdaw, the carrion vulture, the fisher owl, the stork, the heron after its kind, and the hoopoe and the bat.”* (Deuteronomy 14:11-18) In Deuteronomy, Moses repeated many of the instructions he had delivered previously in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Here we see a list of forbidden fowl—although the precise species intended by Moses are in question, the picture’s pretty

clear: all of these are carnivorous birds of prey, scavengers, or otherwise indiscriminant in their dietary habits. The bat, of course, is not a bird (nor did Moses say it was) but it's listed here because it flies like one.

That leaves an unspecified litany of "clean" birds that were okay for food and sacrifices. Yahweh Himself provided quail to eat (Exodus 16:13, Numbers 11:31-32) and turtledoves and pigeons were specified as acceptable sacrifices—thus clean—in Leviticus 5:7, etc. Partridges are mentioned in passing in I Samuel 26:20. It's pretty clear that domestic fowl like chickens, turkeys, ducks, and geese would have been considered clean as well, although they're not specifically listed. It's apparent from inadvertent New Testament references (a hen and her chicks, eggs, cockcrowing) that chickens were kept in Judea at the time of Christ.

- (148) *Do not eat unclean fowl. "And these you shall regard as an abomination among the birds; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the buzzard, the kite, and the falcon after its kind; every raven after its kind, the ostrich [wrong word: see the note on #147], the short-eared owl, the sea gull, and the hawk after its kind; the little owl, the fisher owl, and the screech owl; the white owl, the jackdaw, and the carrion vulture; the stork, the heron after its kind, the hoopoe, and the bat."* (Leviticus 11:13-19) This is the negative permutation of the previous mitzvah, and the Leviticus passage supporting it is almost identical to the one we saw in Deuteronomy. It's no particular surprise that scripture agrees with scripture. But does science agree? We've (unfairly, perhaps) come to view science as somehow antithetical to matters of faith. But as time marches on, honest researchers perceive a growing correlation between the *data of science* (though not necessarily the common interpretation of that data) and the *words of scripture* (though not necessarily the spin put on them by the religious establishment). Our ignorance of this correlation is the fault of neither science nor scripture, but rather of scientists and clerics with agendas to advance.

So, does science agree with scripture in regard to the Torah's dietary precepts? In a word, yes. In 1953 (that's right, the facts have been available for over half a century now), the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine published an article in their "Bulletin of the History of Medicine" by a Jewish physician named David I. Macht, M.D. It was given the unwieldy title *An Experimental Pharmacological Appreciation of V'yrikra XI and D'varim XIV*. Perhaps if he had entitled the article *The Health Ramifications of the Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 Dietary Laws*, it might have received more attention (or have been rejected for publication altogether). At any rate, Dr. Macht set about testing extracts of the flesh and blood of a wide range of animals, including fifty-four

different kinds of fish, identified as “clean” or “unclean” in the Torah. Under controlled laboratory conditions, he subjected each sample to the same standard toxicological analysis. The results were, depending on your point of view, either yawningly predictable or stunningly revealing: every single sample that the Torah listed as “clean” or edible was shown to be non-toxic, while every subject tested from the Mosaic Law’s “unclean” or inedible list turned out to be toxic. There was a one hundred percent correlation between Yahweh’s instructions and Dr. Macht’s experiments. Pigs, by the way, ranked way up there in toxicity with rats and groundhogs.

- (149) *Examine the marks in locusts, to distinguish the clean from the unclean.* **“All flying insects that creep on all fours shall be an abomination to you. Yet these you may eat of every flying insect that creeps on all fours: those which have jointed legs above their feet with which to leap on the earth. These you may eat: the locust after its kind, the destroying locust after its kind, the cricket after its kind, and the grasshopper after its kind. But all other flying insects which have four feet shall be an abomination to you.”** (Leviticus 11:20-23) Bugs in general are on the “inedible” list. “Creeping on all fours,” of course, is merely a figure of speech: it says less about the number of legs than the mode of transport. Insects, spiders, centipedes, scorpions—all kinds of creepy crawlies are hereby declared unclean. But there’s one notable exception: insects that have jointed legs used for hopping are approved as food. Grasshoppers, locusts, and crickets are okay to eat.

Because of recent swarms in which billions of locusts have swept across 60 countries in Africa, Asia, and Australia eating everything in their path, researchers have been studying these creatures intently in recent years. They can eat their body weight (2 grams) in food every day while traveling up to 130 kilometers. But stopping them with pesticides has proven problematical. It turns out that they are incredibly fussy eaters who know better than humans how to regulate and balance their food intake. They “taste” their environment through microscopic “hairs” on their legs as well as through their mouthparts. This helps them avoid areas that have been treated with pesticides. Oxford University researchers have discovered that locusts will regulate their food intake: when given food diluted fivefold with indigestible cellulose, the locusts merely increase their intake—fivefold! They will also compensate for past deficiencies in their diet if given the opportunity, eating precisely the right balance of proteins, carbohydrates, and salts. So locusts and their cousins are safe to eat (which is not to say they’re not an acquired taste).

- (150) *Do not eat a worm found in fruit.* **“And every creeping thing that creeps on the earth shall be an abomination. It shall not be eaten. Whatever crawls on its belly,**

whatever goes on all fours, or whatever has many feet among all creeping things that creep on the earth—these you shall not eat, for they are an abomination.”

(Leviticus 11:41-42) What’s worse than finding a worm in your apple? Finding half a worm! Moses is clarifying here the description of what constitutes an unclean “creeping thing.” It includes worms, caterpillars, grubs, centipedes—things with many legs or no legs at all. If they crawl around on their bellies and don’t have hopping apparatus like locusts, they’re not good to eat.

- (151) *Do not eat of things that creep upon the earth. “And every creeping thing that creeps on the earth shall be an abomination. It shall not be eaten. Whatever crawls on its belly, whatever goes on all fours, or whatever has many feet among all creeping things that creep on the earth—these you shall not eat, for they are an abomination.”* (Leviticus 11:41-42) This is pretty much a restatement of #150, as are #152-154. It’s interesting to note that Yahweh’s issue with pork (among other things) has a lot to do with the avoidance of inadvertently eating “creeping things” that the Israelites couldn’t even see—creeping things that would nevertheless cause disease and death. They weren’t being asked to analyze and understand microbiology, however; they were merely being told to trust Yahweh for guidance.
- (152) *Do not eat any vermin of the earth. “For I am Yahweh your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”* (Leviticus 11:44) I can’t really see the distinction between “vermin” and “creeping things” in this context. But it’s clear that the Israelites had quite enough information to avoid eating unhealthful foods. Failure to observe God’s statutes in this regard carried its own natural consequences with it: **“It shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you...Yahweh will make the plague cling to you until He has consumed you from the land which you are going to possess. Yahweh will strike you with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with severe burning fever...”** (Deuteronomy 28:15, 21-22) God didn’t have to make a special effort to come and “punish” those who didn’t keep His dietary Laws. The fruit of disobedience was built in. The whole point of giving them the “law” was to spare them from the consequences of breaking it. The creepy crawlies of God’s creation all have their place, their jobs, their functions, whether the pollination of plants, breaking down organic matter into usable soil, cleaning up the carcasses of the dead, or any number of things. If we take them out of their proper environments and put them within our bodies, they’re going to do their jobs there instead if they can. And that could be a bad thing.

- (153) *Do not eat things that swarm in the water.* **“You shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creeps; nor shall you make yourselves unclean with them, lest you be defiled by them.... This is the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.”** (Leviticus 11:43, 46-47) These rabbinical directives are often maddeningly imprecise, but Yahweh’s words are crystal clear. Swarming in the water is not the issue; many clean fish, from sardines to tuna, “swarm,” that is, they swim in schools. When we elevate the commentary of man over the precepts of God, we’ll fall into error every time. As far back as the Garden of Eden, we have been twisting God’s words to our own harm. It seems funny to say it, but we need to constantly ask the very thing Satan asked Eve: “Has God really said that?” When men and angels presume to tell us what Yahweh wants, we need to go back and check—*Has God really said that?* (By the way, that goes for what I’m telling you as well. Test everything I say in the crucible of God’s Word. I’ve been known to make mistakes.)
- (154) *Do not eat winged insects.* **“Every creeping thing that flies is unclean for you; they shall not be eaten.”** (Deuteronomy 14:19) **“All flying insects that creep on all fours shall be an abomination to you.”** (Leviticus 11:20) In contrast to bugs that merely crawl along the ground, flying insects are singled out here as being unclean. We have already seen the exception to the rule: locusts and their hopping cousins—even though they also fly—have been declared clean. It’s worth noting that while flying insects themselves are unclean, the product that one of them manufactures—honey—is not. John the Baptist is said to have eaten “locusts and wild honey” in the wilderness. Yum.
- (155) *Do not eat the flesh of a beast that is terefah (literally, torn).* **“You shall be holy men to Me: you shall not eat meat torn by beasts in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs.”** (Exodus 22:30) It’s fascinating that Yahweh links the concept of “holiness” to obeying His rules concerning what and what not to eat. Here we see that animals—even those that would ordinarily be considered clean, or edible, must not be eaten if they have been killed by carnivorous beasts in the wild—even if the kill is fresh. The Israelites couldn’t have known what was going on at the microbiotic level, how the bite of a scavenger or carnivore could spread deadly microorganisms to the victim, or how the blood left to pool within the carcass could be harmful (see #167). If a shepherd saw a wolf kill one of his sheep, the natural reaction might be, *Well, it’s dead but it’s fresh—we might as well go ahead and eat it. Waste not, want not.* Yahweh didn’t bother telling them that it could be

hazardous to their health; He just said, *I have set you apart from the peoples around you, those who wouldn't hesitate to eat road kill like this. So trust Me to know what's best for you: you can feed it to your dogs—part of whose job is to be scavengers—but don't eat it yourself.* Part of being “holy,” or set apart to Yahweh, is trusting Him enough to obey Him, even if we don't understand His reasons.

- (156) *Do not eat the flesh of a beast that died of itself. “You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to the alien who is within your gates, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner; for you are a holy people to Yahweh your God.”* (Deuteronomy 14:21) Here we have a slightly different scenario: an otherwise clean animal that has died of “natural causes,” either old age, disease, or accident not involving a carnivorous predator. An Israelite, being set apart for Yahweh's purposes, was not to risk eating such meat, presumably for two reasons: first, it would be difficult to tell if the blood had been completely drained from the carcass, and second, it would have been hard to determine what role harmful microorganisms had had in the animal's death. (Yahweh didn't explain any of this, of course. He just said: *trust Me.*) Yet this situation clearly wasn't as risky as eating the meat from an animal that had been killed by a wild predator (see #155), so Yahweh gave permission to give away or sell the meat to the foreigners living in close proximity with the Israelites.

This is one of the rare cases where Yahweh makes a specific distinction between “laws” that must be kept by Israelites but may be ignored with impunity by non-Israelites. This distinction goes a long way toward verifying my contention that the Law of Moses was to be acted out by Israel as the sign of a people set-apart from all others for Yahweh's purpose. Its requirements, though useful and meaningful, were not religiously binding on gentiles—for instance, goyim believers were not asked to show up in Jerusalem three times a year to participate in the Feasts of Yahweh. That doesn't mitigate the instructional value of the Torah for gentiles: we will joyfully and attentively heed its spirit and lessons if we know what's good for us. And in cases like this, if steaks from a steer that died of old age were offered for sale by a Jew who wouldn't eat them for religious reasons, it might behoove the discerning gentile buyer to pass on the deal.

- (157) *Slay cattle, deer and fowl according to the laws of shechitah if their flesh is to be eaten. “When Yahweh your God enlarges your border as He has promised you, and you say, ‘Let me eat meat,’ because you long to eat meat, you may eat as much meat as your heart desires. If the place where Yahweh your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, then you may slaughter from your herd and from*

your flock which Yahweh has given you, just as I have commanded you, and you may eat within your gates as much as your heart desires. Just as the gazelle and the deer are eaten, so you may eat them; the unclean and the clean alike may eat them.” (Deuteronomy 12:20-22) According to the rabbis, the phrase “as I have commanded” in this passage refers to the technique of Jewish ritual slaughtering known as *shechitah*. The authorized butcher, called the *shochet*, is to kill the animal with a quick, deep stroke across the throat with a perfectly sharp blade. This method is relatively painless, causes unconsciousness within two seconds, and allows a rapid and complete draining of the blood. Because it is recognized as the cleanest and most humane method of slaughter possible, this method is used widely, even in non-kosher slaughterhouses.

I’ve got no problem with their method of *shechitah*. But the context of the Deuteronomy passage reveals another issue, one more definitive of Yahweh’s admonition: “as I have commanded.” After telling them (again) not to adopt the pagan practices of the nations the Israelites were supposed to displace, Yahweh told them, **“But you shall seek the place where Yahweh your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before Yahweh your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which Yahweh your God has blessed you.”** (Deuteronomy 12:5-7) God knew that His people were going to want to eat meat wherever they settled in the Land. And He said that was okay, as long as the meat was from a clean animal and the blood had been drained out properly (see verses 23-24; see also Mitzvah #168). But ritual sacrifices in which the meat was to be eaten were part of the prescribed Levitical worship, and these were to take place *only* at a designated central location He would choose (eventually to settle at Jerusalem). You could enjoy a nice steak wherever you were, but Yahweh didn’t want *offerings* made anywhere except where the Tabernacle/Temple and the Ark of the Covenant were. If you want to party with Yahweh, you have to go where Yahweh is hosting the party.

There is, of course, a practical application for us, even if we’re not Jews, even if we don’t live in the Land of Promise. We must meet God on God’s terms or not at all. People from Nimrod to Nadab and Abihu, from Ananias and Sapphira to Osama bin Laden, have attempted to force their way into the Kingdom of God, to sneak in through the side door, to do things their way. But Yahshua said, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”** (John 14:6)

- (158) *Do not eat a limb removed from a living beast. “Be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life; you may not eat the life with the meat.”*
 (Deuteronomy 12:23) The rabbis must have laid awake all night thinking up this stuff. I mean, whose mind works like that? All the Torah said was “Don’t eat blood.” (See #167.) So if that means you can’t cut the hind leg off a living animal and eat it, then okay, we won’t do that. Some things ought to go without saying, and this is one of them—which is probably why God didn’t say it.
- (159) *Do not slaughter an animal and its young on the same day. “Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: When a bull or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall be seven days with its mother; and from the eighth day and thereafter it shall be accepted as an offering made by fire to Yahweh. Whether it is a cow or ewe, do not kill both her and her young on the same day.”* (Leviticus 22:26-28) Remember what we discovered back in Chapter 3 (see Mitzvot #59-63) about the human parent/child relationship being symbolic of the relationship between our Creator and us? The present precept extends and clarifies the concept. This is actually a prophecy that predicts Yahweh’s amazing—dare I say *illogical*—mercy. All of the Levitical sacrifices ultimately point toward Yahshua’s death on Calvary’s cross. Think of Him as the “parent” in this equation. Yahweh manifested Himself as a human being, only to be nailed to a Roman cross bearing the sins of all mankind. If you or I had been God, we would have angrily turned the earth into a charcoal briquette before the sun had set, would we not? Don’t look so pious; you know it’s true.
- But what did Yahweh do? He calmly continued with His plan of redemption, the course of action He had put in motion before the foundation of the world: no judgment “by fire” would be made until “seven days” had passed. Seven *days*? Yes, metaphorically, the complete appointed time of man on this earth—7,000 years (see II Peter 3:8), beginning with the fall of Adam, and ending with the close of the Millennial Kingdom. (The whole thing is explained in my previous work, Future History. If you don’t know what I’m talking about, please go back and read it.) There is far more here than a mere plea for humanity and tenderness when dealing with livestock. This is an indication that no judgment (called here “an offering made by fire”) will fall upon sinful mankind until we have been given *all the time in the world* to repent and turn to Yahweh. But one way or another, God’s wrath is coming upon all of mankind. Either we will be protected from it—sheltered by the blood of our Messiah—or we will face it on our own. It’s our choice.
- (160) *Do not take the mother-bird with the young. “If a bird’s nest happens to be before you along the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs,*

with the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young; you shall surely let the mother go, and take the young for yourself, that it may be well with you and that you may prolong your days.” (Deuteronomy 22:6-7) As we saw in the previous mitzvah, the parallel relationships, parent-child and God-man, are in view. Here, however, neither judgments nor offerings are in the picture. Rather, God’s provision is seen: Yahweh’s Spirit (as the mother bird) is the one making the sacrifice; we are to thankfully accept the provision of sustenance and salvation being offered—at such great personal expense. The relinquishing of the hen’s “young ones or eggs” is a picture of God’s sacrifice of the Messiah.

But in this context, what would it mean to “**take the mother with the young**”? You can’t capture or kill God the way you might a bird in the field. Or can you? Some in this world, not content to gratefully acknowledge God’s provision, want to be seen as gods themselves—to be looked upon as providers, admired in all their fine-feathered glory, worshiped as lords of the air, while they exploit God’s people for their own gain. They covet the place and power of Yahweh, and by blocking others’ access to God (since they can’t actually kill Him) they conspire to take His place in the hearts and minds of the people who might otherwise benefit from Yahweh’s great gift. These verses in Deuteronomy are a warning to those who would usurp the place of God, whether through religion, politics, or commerce. Accept the Gift with thanksgiving; revere the Giver, and thereby “prolong your days.”

- (161) *Set the mother-bird free when taking the nest.* “**If a bird’s nest happens to be before you along the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, with the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young; you shall surely let the mother go, and take the young for yourself, that it may be well with you and that you may prolong your days.**” (Deuteronomy 22:6-7) This, of course, is merely the affirmative permutation of the previous mitzvah. Notice something, however: the instruction comes with a promise—the same promise that accompanied the Fifth Commandment. That shouldn’t be too surprising, since the precept, at its heart, is virtually the same: “**Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which Yahweh your God is giving you.**” (Exodus 20:12) Honoring our earthly father and mother is symbolic of our honoring our Maker, Yahweh. Leaving the mother bird unmolested while gathering her eggs is also a picture of honoring our Creator—gratefully availing ourselves of God’s sacrificial gift of salvation.
- (162) *Do not eat the flesh of an ox that was condemned to be stoned.* “**If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, then the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh**

shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be acquitted. But if the ox tended to thrust with its horn in times past, and it has been made known to his owner, and he has not kept it confined, so that it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death.” (Exodus 21:28-29) This has nothing to do with diet and everything to do with principles. First principle: no good comes from evil—the end must not justify the means, nor should the guilty prosper at the expense of the innocent. If one’s actions (or inactions) lead to death, there should be no “upside” to it for the negligent or guilty party. A modern twist on this is the idea of convicted criminals writing best-selling books about their crimes—making a fortune on others’ misfortune from behind bars. Thankfully, there are now laws prohibiting the practice. The Torah, it should be noted, always had one.

The second principle is that of personal responsibility. Accidents happen, but if they could have been prevented—even if such prevention meant inconvenience, expense, or risk to the one responsible—then they are no longer accidents, but crimes. I don’t think it’s too much of a stretch to apply this rule to one of Yahweh’s pet peeves: false teaching. If we tolerate false doctrine in our midst when it is in our power to bring the truth to light, we ourselves share the fault (see Ezekiel 3:18-19). To whom much is given, much is required.

- (163) *Do not boil meat with milk.* “**The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of Yahweh your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.**” (Exodus 23:19; cf. Exodus 34:26, Deuteronomy 14:21) This is a mitzvah that observant Jews today can really get their teeth into, so to speak. It’s a great example of how things can get totally out of hand if we refuse to pay attention to what Yahweh actually said and obviously meant. The first thing to go was the parent-child connection: instead of a young goat being boiled in its own mother’s milk, it was any kid being boiled in any goat’s milk. Then it was any meat being boiled in any kind of milk. Pretty soon, that became a blanket prohibition against eating dairy products (milk, cream, cheese, etc.) in the same meal with meat. Then the rabbis extended this simple instruction to forbid eating milk and *poultry* together. (Better safe than sorry, right?) The Talmud subsequently took the game to the next level, prohibiting the cooking of meat and fish together or even serving them on the same plates. For some unknown reason, though, it’s supposed to be okay to eat fish and dairy together. You can also eat dairy and eggs in the same meal. Confused yet?

All this behavioral evolution is brought to you by people who *swear* that an “oral law” explaining everything was delivered to the elders at the same time Moses was being given the written Torah. These traditions,

they say, were orally transmitted, *flawlessly*, from rabbi to student for almost two thousand years until somebody finally wrote it all down, calling it the *Mishnah*—which in turn became the basis of the Talmud—which in turn is chock full of contradictory rabbinical opinion. An oral law, orally transmitted for millennia without corruption? Yeah, picture that. Face it, guys. The oral law isn't worth the paper it's printed on.

But it gets worse. According to the rabbis, not only can't you eat meat with dairy products (and so forth), you can't even use the same utensils—pots, pans, dishes, silverware, etc.—to prepare and serve them. And cleaning up is a problem, too: you have to use separate sinks, or run *fleishik* (meat) and *milchik* (dairy) paraphernalia separately in the dishwasher (admittedly a compromise—you're ideally supposed to have *two* dishwashers). We are solemnly assured that G-d (that's "God," heaven forbid you should use His actual name) is terribly impressed with people who actually negotiate this outrageous obstacle course. On the other hand, if you eat a bacon cheeseburger, all hope of getting on His good side is lost forever.

Okay, I'm being silly. But not half as silly as this fraud the rabbis have foisted upon gullible and unsuspecting Jews who actually take their advice. What's really going on here? Go back to where the rabbis made their first wrong turn. "**You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.**" It's a parent-child illustration—*again*. And again, it's a Messianic prophecy with an instructive principle attached. The "mother" once again represents Yahweh's Spirit in this illustration, and the "young goat" represents the Messiah, specifically in His role as sin-bearer in our stead. And the "milk" is that which comes from the Spirit to sustain us, to help us grow, to keep us healthy—it's nothing short of God's holy Word. So what is the mitzvah telling us? We are never to use God's Word as a weapon against God's work. Ironically, the Jews have made a contact sport out of this very practice for thousands of years, and we just saw a classic example of it. Another example: TV preachers whose "ministries" have more to do with funding than with fundamental truth. Another: sects or denominations that use a few carefully selected passages to create doctrines and dogma designed to subjugate, control, and fleece the would-be faithful. Another: politicians who piously play the "Christian card," wooing the religious right while sacrificing the clear precepts of Yahweh on the altar of political expediency. Another: businessmen who think of the church or synagogue merely as fertile fields for new commercial contacts. I think you get the picture.

(164) *Do not eat flesh with milk.* “**The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring to the house of Yahweh your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.**” (Exodus 34:26) According to the Talmud, this passage is a distinct prohibition from the one we just reviewed. But as you can see, the wording in the Torah is virtually identical. The rabbis are hallucinating again. Notice that in both instances, this precept is contextually linked to the offering of firstfruits. In general, this indicates a spirit of grateful acknowledgement of Yahweh’s provision. In particular, the Feast of Firstfruits was one of seven specific annual holidays, or *miqra’ey*, set aside as prophetic markers of significant events in Yahweh’s plan of redemption—in this case the resurrection of the Messiah: the *miqra* was ultimately fulfilled on the Feast of Firstfruits in 33 A.D. Both of the Exodus passages are also concerned in a larger sense with the congregational worship of Israel, specifically the directive for all males to appear before Yahweh three times a year, at Passover/Unleavened Bread/Firstfruits in the spring, then at the Feast of Weeks, then at Trumpets/Atonement/Tabernacles in the fall. (But for what it’s worth, the precept is mentioned in the context of *dietary rules* in Deuteronomy 14:21.)

The first thing we need to ask ourselves is: why would Yahweh say something like this *three times*? What’s so all-fired important, and what could it possibly have to do with the third *miqra*? It is a well documented fact that both Egypt and Canaan practiced pagan fertility rites that included boiling a kid in its mother’s milk. By sprinkling the resulting broth on their gardens and fields after the harvest, they hoped to placate the gods into granting them a bountiful harvest in the coming season. By tying this odd commandment to the Feast of Firstfruits, Yahweh was in effect saying, *Don’t petition the false gods of your neighbors or give them thanks; they can’t do anything for you—or against you. Worship Me alone, for I am the sole source of your blessing, the One True God.* As a matter of fact, a few verses later He specifically reminded them: “**You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars.**” (Exodus 23:24)

The specifications for the Feast of Unleavened Bread stated that a male lamb (*not a goat*) a year old was to be sacrificed, an offering made by roasting it in fire (*not boiling it in milk*) (see Leviticus 23:12). If the Israelites substituted the pagan practice for the one Yahweh had instituted, the picture He was painting would be obliterated. The lamb was a picture of innocence—ultimately a metaphor for Yahshua the Messiah—whereas the goat symbolized sin (as in the prescribed services of the Day of Atonement). Likewise, it was fire, not hot water (or milk), that stood for

judgment. So boiling a goat in its mother's milk spoke of something quite different than Yahweh's intended picture lesson—a sinless Yahshua bearing our well-deserved punishment Himself, a sacrifice for which we should be eternally grateful. This is all a long, *long* way from “Don't put cheese on your burger.”

- (165) *Do not eat the of the thigh-vein which shrank.* “So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: “For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.” Just as he crossed over Penuel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip. Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which is on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the muscle that shrank.” (Genesis 32:30-32) Based on this incident, Jews even today consider the sciatic nerve and the adjoining blood vessels forbidden as food—it must be cut out. As a practical matter, however, this tissue is so difficult to remove, Jewish *sochets* normally don't deal with it; they just sell the hindquarters to non-kosher butchers. Moses states that the practice was a longstanding tradition even in his day (five centuries or so after Jacob's wrestling match). But nowhere in the Torah is there a hint of divine instruction about this. It's nothing but what it purports to be—a man-made tradition.

Believe it or not, I've got no problem with tradition. Traditions help us get through our days without having to re-invent the wheel every ten minutes. Think of them as habits on steroids. But while I see traditions as useful, even necessary, components of our collective human psyche, I have a serious issue with the equating of our traditions with God's commands. They are not the same thing. As a case in point, this mitzvah is clearly a tradition, not an instruction from Yahweh. Of course, there's no particular reason *not* to keep the custom if it helps you define your place in the world. But don't go saying that God told you to do it. He did nothing of the sort. This convention has no legitimate place in any listing of Yahweh's instructions.

- (166) *Do not eat chelev (tallow-fat).* “Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying: You shall not eat any fat, of ox or sheep or goat. And the fat of an animal that dies naturally, and the fat of what is torn by wild beasts, may be used in any other way; but you shall by no means eat it. For whoever eats the fat of the animal of which men offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh, the person who eats it shall be cut off from his people.’” (Leviticus 7:22-25) The context here is instruction concerning the peace offering (which could be either a thank offering, a freewill offering, or an offering consecrating a vow). This was a sacrifice that was to be consumed by the one offering it, shared with the priests, and dedicated to Yahweh. The “fat,” Yahweh's portion,

was defined thus: **“The fat that covers the entrails and all the fat which is on the entrails, the two kidneys and the fat that is on them by the flanks, and the fatty lobe attached to the liver above the kidneys, he shall remove, as it was taken from the bull of the sacrifice of the peace offering.”** (Leviticus 4:8-10) In other words, the fatty portions of the animal that existed in separate or unmixed areas, not necessarily the fat that was marbled in among the musculature. As it turns out, there are chemical differences between this “*chelev*” and ordinary muscle and sub-dermal fat which may explain Yahweh’s warning in a practical sense.

These fat portions of an offering were to be burned in homage to Yahweh, not eaten. The cultural baggage attached to the Hebrew word *heleb* tells us why. It not only means fat, but also “the best, the choice parts.” For instance, the word is used in Genesis 45:18 to describe the best the country had to offer—the “fat of the land.” So by burning it instead of eating it, one was symbolically offering Yahweh the best part of his sacrifice. It wasn’t until the twentieth century that we understood the health risks of a fatty diet. Yahweh however, having designed us, knew what was best for us—and it wasn’t fat.

Interestingly, Yahweh wasn’t particularly interested in “getting the fat portions for Himself,” only in making sure we dumb humans didn’t eat it. If a clean animal was unfit for sacrifice (having been attacked by wild beasts, for instance—see #155) its owner could still make use of the fat for purposes other than eating—making candles or soap, for example.

- (167) *Do not eat blood.* **“You shall not eat any blood in any of your dwellings, whether of bird or beast. Whoever eats any blood, that person shall be cut off from his people.”** (Leviticus 7:26-27) The rabbis got this one right. If the number of times we are instructed about something is any indication of the significance God attaches to it, then Yahweh considers not consuming blood to be *really* important. No fewer than fourteen separate times is the practice specifically condemned in scripture. Beyond these, passages like Psalm 16:4 link the drinking of blood to pagan religious rites, which were to be avoided at all costs.

Yahweh actually gave us a reason this time, explaining why blood was to be avoided—in biological terms that shed light on the spiritual aspects of the subject. **“Be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life; you may not eat the life with the meat. You shall not eat it; you shall pour it on the earth like water.”** (Deuteronomy 12:23-24) This concept wasn’t new with the Mosaic Law, either. It was first introduced way back in Noah’s day, right after the flood. **“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that**

is, its blood.” (Genesis 9:3-4) This is the first time in the Bible that God specifically put meat on the menu (although Abel kept flocks, so who knows?). And right here at the beginning, Yahweh instructs Noah not to eat blood with his meat because the life of the animal was in the blood—or as stated here, it *was* the blood. Again, we read: **“Whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”** (Leviticus 17:10-11) Yahweh is declaring those who consume blood to be His enemies. He’s really serious about this point.

Finally, the admonition was repeated for the benefit of the gentile believers of the fledgling *Ekklesia*: **“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these requirements: You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or eating the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well.”** (Acts 15:28-29) They weren’t asked to do much—they weren’t required to become Jewish proselytes in order to be Christians, undergo circumcision, keep the Jewish ceremonial law, or anything like that. But the few words of admonition that were handed down were considered absolutely essential for their spiritual growth and well-being, and these included Yahweh’s long-standing prohibition against eating blood.

It doesn’t take a trained medical professional to understand that “the life is in the blood.” If blood isn’t constantly flowing to the tissues of the body, the result is death, in very short order. It doesn’t matter where the problem is—if the pump that’s supposed to push it through the body has been damaged, or the arteries have been obstructed, or the blood has left the body through a wound—the body doesn’t care. No blood, no life. It’s that simple.

From a bio-spiritual viewpoint, blood serves several functions. First it brings oxygen and nourishment to the tissues. Think of the erythrocytes—the red blood cells—as being analogous to the Holy Spirit’s sustenance in our lives. If God’s *ruach*/breath is not supplying every nook and cranny of the body of Christ (the Church), the parts not receiving nourishment will be in danger of dying and falling away. Just as physical life requires oxygen, spiritual life requires God’s *Ruach Qodesh*—His Holy Spirit. In this world, you’re not truly alive unless you have both.

Second, the blood is the vehicle through which the body is cleansed. Metabolic waste products are collected by the blood and brought to collection centers like the liver and kidneys, where they are safely

extracted. If this were not done, our tissues would absorb and collect toxins and pollutants, making us sick and ultimately killing us. This is analogous to the Spirit's influence in our lives: removing the toxicity of sin allows the growth of love, which in turn leads to joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.

Third, the blood protects us from disease. Its leucocytes, or white blood cells, attack microorganisms that attempt to invade our bodies from outside. Think of this function as being roughly equivalent to the Holy Spirit's role as Comforter, the Spirit of Truth (cf. John 14:17) who gives believers discernment, the ability to fight off the attacks of Satan and spot the false teaching of his minions. If the Spirit is not present within us, we have no defense at all against these things.

There's far more to it, of course, but I think you get the picture. On a strictly practical note, I should point out that the toxicology study we saw earlier, the one by Dr. David Macht that demonstrated the remarkable scientific accuracy of the Mosaic dietary laws (see Mitzvah #148), also had something to say about eating blood. In every animal tested, both clean and unclean, the blood turned out to be more toxic than the flesh. If we know what's good for us, we will never question God's word.

Blood is sacred. It bears life. That's why the blood of bulls, lambs, and goats was deemed acceptable for the temporary atonement of man's sins in the Old Covenant economy. As we saw above, **"It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul."** (Leviticus 17:11). Blood does for our bodies what the Holy Spirit does for our souls, providing the breath of life, food, protection, and cleansing. So after being told time after time not to consume blood, how is it that we hear this provocative—no, *revolutionary*—statement leaving the lips of Yahshua? **"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.... Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."** (John 6:47-51, 53-58) He's not talking about us all becoming cannibalistic

vampires here—He’s not talking about consuming his body and blood, but rather incorporating His life and Spirit. Yahshua is saying as bluntly as He can that we must assimilate Him—that he must become a part of us—if we are to experience the eternal life that only He can provide. His flesh is His nourishing Word, and His blood is His Spirit—the breath of eternal life. **“Life is in the blood.”** No metaphor in the world is going to explain this adequately, but this comes close.

As we might expect from Yahweh, however, it’s not all metaphor. I’ll preface the following information with the blanket admission that I don’t have a shred of physical proof for what I’m about to tell you. I’m taking the word of men—some now passed on—who have nevertheless consistently honored Yahweh in their life, words, and work. I told most of this story in somewhat more detail in [Future History, Chapter 13:](#) [“Jerusalem, Jerusalem,”](#) so I’ll just cut to the chase. In 1982, an amateur archeologist named Ron Wyatt discovered the resting place of the Ark of the Covenant—in Jerusalem, in a cave located directly beneath the site of Yahshua’s crucifixion. The cross was held upright in a square hole cut in the limestone bedrock, and a prominent crack extended from this carved recess all the way to the hidden chamber some thirty feet below. This crevasse was apparently caused by the earthquake mentioned in Matthew 27:51. Wyatt found the inside of the crack coated with a black substance, some of which had splashed onto the top of the Ark—the mercy seat. Chemical analysis revealed the substance to be human blood. Whose? The One whose blood was *supposed* to be sprinkled on the mercy seat—the Lamb of God, Yahshua Himself!

It’s a great story so far, but it gets better. Wyatt, sometime before his death in 1999, had a lab in Israel test the blood (without telling them where it came from, of course). I’ll let Bill Fry, of Anchor Stone International, pick up the narrative:

“In order to perform a chromosome count (karyotype) test on human blood you must be able to isolate and culture living white blood cells. This is because white blood cells are the only cells in the blood that carry genetic material. These cells must also be alive because they have to be cultured so they mature and divide. At a certain stage of cell division the chromosomes within the cell become visible under a microscope. When this stage is reached a dye or chemical is added that stops the growth cycle. Then the chromosomes are counted by sight through a microscope.... Best case scenario, blood cells can live outside of the body approximately two weeks. A sample older than this would not contain living cells so there would be no way to perform a karyotype test. This is the reason Ron

[Wyatt] so specifically pointed out that the blood of Christ was alive. Even though the dried blood sample was 2,000 years old, when rehydrated and examined under a microscope, it contained living cells, including white blood cells....

“The results of the chromosome test conclusively affirms the identity of this man as the Christ because it testifies that he was the product of a virgin birth! Under normal circumstances all human beings have 46 chromosomes, 23 from their mother and 23 from their father. There are 22 pairs of autosomes which determine things such as our height, hair and eye color, etc. The 23rd pair is the sex determinant pair. They consist of either X or Y chromosomes. The mother only has X chromosomes. The father has both X and Y chromosomes.

“If the sex-determinant pair is matched XX, the child is a female. If XY, the child is a male. Thus we see that the single chromosome provided by the father in this chromosome pair determines the gender of the child. When the blood sample Ron Wyatt took from the crack in the rock ceiling above the Mercy Seat was tested, it contained 24 chromosomes—23 from the mother and one Y chromosome from the father, 24 chromosomes. As Dr. Eugene Dunkley states in his article on the genetics of the blood of Christ, 24 chromosomes is exactly what would be expected if a man was born of a virgin. There are 23 chromosomes from the mother and a Y chromosome from a father. But that father cannot be a human father because the other 22 chromosomes on the father’s side are missing. Therefore the existence of a Y chromosome is at the very least a mystery, if not a miracle.”

This puts the maxim “The life is in the blood” in a whole new light, doesn’t it? Yes, while our bodies are alive, our blood is the conveyor of life. But in the case of Yahshua, life—*eternal* life—really *was* in the blood. It still is. In any number of ways.

- (168) *Cover the blood of undomesticated animals (deer, etc.) and of fowl that have been killed. “Whatever man of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who hunts and catches any animal or bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust; for it is the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its life. Therefore I said to the children of Israel, ‘You shall not eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off.’”* (Leviticus 17:13-14) The draining of blood is not just a ritual sacrifice procedure. It’s a health rule (in addition to its weighty symbolism), and therefore applies to wild game hunted for food as well as to domesticated animals. If meat is to be eaten safely, it must fit within the definition of a “clean” animal (with divided hooves and chewing cud) or a

“clean” bird (not a carrion eater) and be completely drained of blood shortly after being killed (see #157). Moreover, the blood thus drained out must not be allowed to pool above ground, where carnivores, scavengers, and vermin could find it, but must be covered with earth. Yahweh designed us. He knows what it will take to keep us healthy.

- (169) *Do not eat or drink like a glutton or a drunkard (not to rebel against father or mother).* **“If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear.”** (Deuteronomy 21:18-21) And you thought *spanking* was over the top. The ACLU would love to get their hands on this one. This particular mitzvah puts teeth into the Fifth Commandment, **“Honor your father and your mother....”** (See #59.) The values Yahweh’s law instilled into Israel’s Theocratic society (and hopefully on some level, our own) manifested themselves in a citizenry that was devout, hard-working, and respectful of God and man alike. A man who despised these values and God’s instruction was likely to be just the opposite—rebellious, lazy, and self indulgent. He would have been what was described in Mitzvah #3 as a man who blasphemes (Hebrew: *naqab*, meaning to puncture or perforate, figuratively to libel, blaspheme, or curse”) God, or one who, as in Mitzvah #61, curses (*qalal*, meaning to take lightly, to bring into contempt, or despise) his parents. Both of these offenses carried the death penalty. In the present case, the focus is brought to bear on the likely symptoms: gluttony, drunkenness, and disobedience. But it’s all the same idea: Yahweh was protecting His chosen people against apostasy and rebellion.

The religious establishment of Yahshua’s time smelled an opportunity. They thought they might be able to invoke this precept in a misguided attempt to rid themselves of that inconvenient young rabbi in their midst who kept poking holes in their pretensions. Like lawyers today, they knew it wasn’t the evidence; it was what you could make out of it. First, they’d thought (and said) that John the Baptist was a demon-possessed lunatic for dressing up like a sack of potatoes and eating locusts and wild honey in the desert—and preaching the uncomfortable truth about them. But when Yahshua came along, refusing to fast while His disciples were with Him, drinking (and making) wine—and preaching the same uncomfortable truth about the religious bigwigs—they figured they might be able to arrange a

stoning party for him based on Deuteronomy 21. They figured wrong. Yahshua observed that these hypocrites were awfully hard to please: **“To what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying: ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not lament.’ For John [the Baptist] came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children.”** (Matthew 11:16-19)

It isn't eating (or even *over*-eating) that the Torah is warning against in this mitzvah. Nor is it drinking alcoholic beverages (though its excess is reproved time and again in scripture). God is warning His people about rebellion, about taking His Law lightly, about stubbornly refusing to heed His word. Deciding what (and how much) to eat is just the tip of the iceberg; all of God's Torah has practical ramifications for us, either because it helps us live our lives according to Yahweh's design, or because it points directly toward His plan of redemption. Disregarding the Mosaic dietary laws in the name of “freedom under Christ” is a big mistake, for these aren't so much “laws” as they are instructions. As often as not, they carry their own penalty—the natural consequence of failing to heed the Owner's Manual.

Chapter 6

Doing Things God's Way

It was inevitable, I suppose. Christianity had begun as a Jewish sect. Its roots were deep in the Jewish scriptures, and its *raison d'être* was a Jewish Messiah who had fulfilled a plethora of Jewish prophecies. So when *gentiles* began seeing and accepting the life-saving truth of Yahshua's mission, the question naturally arose: can gentiles be Christians without becoming Jews first? What, precisely, was the correlation between the Law of Moses and the saving grace of Yahshua?

The way the early *Ekklesia* dealt with the problem is recorded in Acts 15. **"While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the Christians: 'Unless you keep the ancient Jewish custom of circumcision taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.'" The Torah had never tied circumcision—or any other law—to the atonement for sin. Only the shedding of blood could achieve that. Paul, being an expert in the Law of Moses, knew that, so he called them on their error. "Paul and Barnabas, disagreeing with them, argued forcefully and at length. Finally, Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent the delegates to Jerusalem, and they stopped along the way in Phoenicia and Samaria to visit the believers. They told them—much to everyone's joy—that the Gentiles, too, were being converted...." *Phoenicia and Samaria? Antioch?* These were gentile and mixed-blood territories. Laid between the lines here is a remarkable transformation of spirit. Not that long before, devout Jews like Paul and Barnabas might have avoided any and all contact with gentiles out of sheer inbred national arrogance. But now, a believer was a believer—and a brother—wherever you found him, and whoever you found him to be.**

The center of the *Ekklesia* was still in Jerusalem, however, so that's where they went to iron out the issue. **"When they arrived in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported on what God had been doing through their ministry."** Interesting. Yahshua had told the Apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, beginning in Jerusalem and spreading outward. But hardly anybody had left their comfort zone yet. It wasn't until things got *uncomfortable* that the Christians in Jerusalem would follow Yahshua's instructions. **"But then some of the men who had been Pharisees before their conversion stood up and declared that all Gentile converts must be circumcised and be required to follow the law of Moses...."** The very reason Paul had come back to Jerusalem was that "men from Judea" had come up to Antioch trying to bind the Church in Jewish religious traditions. Here we learn who had probably sent them—converted Pharisees who, unlike Paul, didn't

understand that the Law of Moses had been given for our edification, not our salvation—it was a window into the heart of God, not a doorway into His kingdom.

“So the apostles and church elders got together to decide this question. At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: ‘Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe.’ We saw how this happened in our previous chapter. **“God, who knows people’s hearts, confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he gave him to us [Jews]. He made no distinction between us and them, for he also cleansed their hearts through faith. Why are you now questioning God’s way by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the special favor of the Lord Jesus....”** The phrase “special favor” here is the Greek word *charis*, meaning “grace, particularly that which causes joy, pleasure, gratification, favor, or acceptance, for a kindness granted or desired, a benefit, thanks, or gratitude. It’s a favor done without expectation of return, the absolutely free expression of the loving kindness of God to man, finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the Giver; unearned and unmerited favor. *Charis* stands in direct antithesis to *erga*, works, the two being mutually exclusive.” (Zodhaites) Peter’s audience thus understood that God’s grace and our works could not *both* be the path to salvation, so **“there was no further discussion, and everyone listened as Barnabas and Paul told about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles....”**

James, ever the practical one, formulated the appropriate course of action: **“When they had finished, James stood and said, ‘Brothers, listen to me. Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for himself. And this conversion of Gentiles agrees with what the prophets predicted. For instance, it is written: “Afterward I will return, and I will restore the fallen kingdom of David. From the ruins I will rebuild it, and I will restore it, so that the rest of humanity might find Yahweh, including the Gentiles—all those I have called to be mine. This is what Yahweh says, he who made these things known long ago....”** His recommended advice to the gentiles would apparently absolve them from following the Torah, at least in the same way that Jewish believers did. Unfortunately, this differentiation has been the source of confusion and misunderstanding ever since.

The idea was to make it clear that gentiles did not have to become *Jews* before they could be saved. Yahweh had demonstrated the point Himself by filling the fledgling gentile believers with His Holy Spirit before they’d even *thought* about keeping the Law of Moses. **“And so my judgment is that we should stop troubling the Gentiles who turn to God...”** He did, however, add a few caveats: **“except that we should write to them and tell them to abstain from eating meat sacrificed to idols, from**

sexual immorality, and from consuming blood or eating the meat of strangled animals. For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations.” (Acts 15:1-21 NLT) Everything James added back in (and it wasn’t much) was directly related to the health of the congregation, whether physical or spiritual—things from the “Owner’s Manual” side of the Torah. None of these things were among the *signs* with which Israel was supposed to communicate Yahweh’s plan of redemption to the nations—things like circumcision, observing the Sabbath year, or keeping the holy appointments (the seven *miqra’ey*). Israel’s role remained Israel’s.

This, unfortunately, is where the whole thing tends to go sideways. The things that *weren’t* said have been tortured, twisted, tweaked and transmogrified over the intervening years until the simple intentions of God have been all but lost. Yahweh was not throwing His Law out the window, as is the usual Christian take on this. God’s word may get misunderstood, mistranslated, and misapplied, but it is never abrogated (not by God, anyway). Even the smallest detail will remain true until it is all brought to fruition (see Matthew 5:18).

Our confusion isn’t accidental, of course. Satan has done what he could to shape and bend doctrines within the Church. But if we’d all pay closer attention to what Yahweh actually told us, there would be far less misunderstanding and far less error. At the time of Constantine (early in the fourth century) a concerted—and satanic—effort was made to remove or downplay all things Jewish from the practice of Christianity. Using this passage and others as “proof texts,” the Church systematically attacked the Torah, alternately abusing and neglecting it, burying some of its rich truths and symbols so deep they’re only just now coming back to light. It became an article of faith that *the Law of Moses had been “nailed to the cross,” and therefore had no value; gentile Christians could ignore all this “Jewish” stuff, because it was outdated, obsolete, and of no further use.* Nothing, my friend, could be farther from the truth.

Inadvertently contributing to our confusion is Paul’s observation that **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”** (Galatians 3:27-29)

This seems at first glance to be saying that there is no difference between Jews and gentiles. And there isn’t, as far as our *salvation* is concerned: we are all “children of God through faith in Yahshua the Messiah.” However, this truth speaks of position, not function. Only a fool would deny that there are biological differences between men and women, or societal differences between slaves and free men. In the same way, Yahweh maintains a spiritual distinction between Jew and gentile believers in the way they are to *function* in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Jews delivered the Messiah to a lost world; the gentiles (some of us) gratefully accepted the gift God had sent. The Jews were to be the bearers of Yahweh's signs; gentiles were the intended audience, the readers of those signs. The Jews were to be a holy people, "set apart" from the nations by Yahweh; gentile believers were "called out" of the world for His purposes. These subtle differences—which have nothing to do with the means or reality of our salvation—were designed by Yahweh to form a complete circle, a symbiotic system in which all of the parts work together toward the goal of mankind's perception of His plan for our reconciliation.

In short, Jews have a different job to do than gentiles. If I may wax metaphorical for a moment, in the body of believers, Christ is the head, the Brain. So perhaps we could compare the Jews to the heart, and gentiles to the lungs in this body. The heart and lungs don't do the same things; they have separate, though related, functions, but both are necessary if the body is to survive. They both have to perform their respective functions—functions that are directed by the Brain. Now, if the heart were to conclude that because it's sooooo important, every part of the body should have to pump blood like it did, the body would be in trouble. Sure, pumping the life-blood throughout the body is an essential task, but no more so than absorbing the breath of life—the Spirit—for the body's use. Worse, if the heart decided to start "reinterpreting" the signals coming from the Brain, the body would find itself in quite a fix. *Lub-dub lub-dub is boring—I think lub dubity shamalama ding dong doink would sound better.* Or if the lungs made an executive decision: *exhaling is not as virtuous as inhaling, so we're not going to do that any more. I don't care what the Brain said to do—we're in charge of breathing down here.* As silly as it sounds, that's all too often what we see in practice in the Body of Christ.

What was supposed to happen was a distinction of function between Jewish and gentile believers, though we are all part of the same body. Although the Church at this time was composed of both Jewish and gentile believers, it is never even suggested that the Jewish contingent drop their day-to-day observance of the Torah. But Peter's point had been taken: **"burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear"** was tantamount to **"questioning God's way."** Let's pick up the narrative in Acts 15: **"Then the apostles and elders and the whole church in Jerusalem chose delegates, and they sent them to Antioch of Syria with Paul and Barnabas to report on this decision.... This is the letter they took along with them: 'This letter is from the apostles and elders, your brothers in Jerusalem. It is written to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Greetings! We understand that some men from here have troubled you and upset you with their teaching, but they had no such instructions from us.... For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these requirements: You must abstain from eating food offered to idols,**

from consuming blood or eating the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well. Farewell.” (Acts 15:22-29 NLT)

In the end, only three words of admonition were handed down. First, “not eating food that had been sacrificed to idols.” This was not a dietary precept, but a spiritual one. Paul later pointed out that although there was nothing intrinsically evil or even different about such food, eating it could easily cause a brother of tender conscience to stumble by emboldening him to do something contrary to what his inner compass was telling him. There are obvious parallels for us today: don’t hang out in bars, even if you’re only drinking soda pop; don’t condone your boss’s dishonest business practices, even if it endangers your job; don’t do anything that might encourage a “weaker” brother to do something he would ordinarily consider sin—even if it’s never explicitly forbidden in the Bible.

Second, “not consuming blood or eating the meat of strangled animals” seems to be an echo of the most fundamental of the Mosaic dietary laws—a precept that had a history going all the way back to Noah’s day. As we saw in our previous chapter, the life is in the blood; therefore, it’s sacred. Not to mention toxic. I said “seems to be” because eating blood *was* associated with pagan religious practice. It’s possible that the elders at Jerusalem were concerned about this as much as they were the health issues.

Third (and last), they warned against “sexual immorality.” This too was intimately associated with paganism, but you don’t have to be a pagan to fall into sexual sin. As Paul later wrote: **“Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”** (I Corinthians 6:18-20) Though the Torah had specifically forbidden a plethora of extra-marital sexual practices (see Chapter 3 of this book), the Antioch letter doesn’t address any particular Mosaic instruction. But nobody who had the Spirit of God within them had the slightest doubt what was meant.

And what was the reaction to this letter among the gentile Christians at Antioch? **“There was great joy throughout the church that day as they read this encouraging message.”** (Acts 15:31 NLT) What did they find so encouraging? Why did they rejoice? Because, as Peter had candidly admitted, the Torah had proven impossible for the Jews to keep. So the gentile believers would not be asked to bear this burden; they wouldn’t be required to become Jews—with all of the attendant privileges and responsibilities that entailed—in order to become Christians. I find it fascinating, however, that precisely the same reaction—rejoicing, happiness, delight—is seen of those who love and study the *Torah*: **“Blessed [i.e., happy] is the man [whose]... delight is in the law of Yahweh, and in His law**

[Torah] he meditates day and night." (Psalm 1:1-2) Apparently, if you're a child of God, you're blessed if you do *and* blessed if you don't—try to keep the letter of the Torah, that is. The only way this could be true, of course, is if the Law was never meant to be a job by which we could earn our own salvation, but rather was a path upon which we could walk hand in hand with our Heavenly Father as He taught us about His goodness, His love, and His design for our well-being.

This all begs the question: if you're a gentile, what's the Law for? According to Yahshua, the whole Law was summarized in two commandments: love Yahweh, and love your fellow man. He said that if we loved Him, we would show it by keeping His commandments, and He defined *that* as believing in the one sent by Yahweh, i.e., Himself. (John 6:29). Acts 15 makes it clear that "keeping His commandments" is not synonymous with observing the letter of the Torah—for gentile believers, anyway. For the gentile, following the *spirit* of the Torah is what it's all about. Sadly, most Jews don't realize that the Torah points directly and unequivocally toward their Messiah. And most Christians don't realize that the Torah reveals the heart of God, a heart that was demonstrated in the life of Yahshua. Both sides are prone to error because they don't perceive the underlying meaning of the Law: it's not an arbitrary list of rules; it's not a method for us to achieve our own reconciliation with our Creator; and it's certainly not supposed to be the basis of a religion designed to make us feel better about our place in the world. In tech-speak, the Torah is a "T-1 line" into the heart and mind of Almighty God. We twist it to our destruction, and we ignore it to our shame.

With that in mind, let us return to the Torah. Jewish believers should observe these precepts because they are a people set apart for the glory of Yahweh. Gentile believers should take them just as seriously because the Spirit of God dwelling within them testifies that this is what Yahshua wants us to do. But Jew or gentile, Christians are bound not by duty, but by love.

BUSINESS PRACTICES

- (170) *Do no wrong in buying or selling. "If you sell anything to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor's hand, you shall not oppress one another."* (Leviticus 25:14) Because the sentiment is covered by a boatload of other Mosaic precepts (*don't steal or covet; keep honest scales, don't move boundary markers, etc.*) the rabbis aren't exactly *wrong* with their reinterpretation of this mitzvot. But the context of the supporting verse reveals a meaning deeper

than merely being honest in one's business dealings. It is within the Law of Jubilee (something we'll look at more thoroughly later in this chapter). If we look at the surrounding verses, Yahweh's real agenda becomes clear: **"In this Year of Jubilee, each of you shall return to his possession. And if you sell anything to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor's hand, you shall not oppress one another. According to the number of years after the Jubilee you shall buy from your neighbor, and according to the number of years of crops he shall sell to you. According to the multitude of years you shall increase its price, and according to the fewer number of years you shall diminish its price; for he sells to you according to the number of the years of the crops. Therefore you shall not oppress one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am Yahweh your God. So you shall observe My statutes and keep My judgments, and perform them; and you will dwell in the land in safety. Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill, and dwell there in safety."** (Leviticus 25:13-18) Jubilee came once every fifty years (i.e., once in a lifetime, for all practical purposes). Every Israelite who had "sold" his land during the preceding half century (see #226) would get it back at Jubilee. In practice, this meant that the land was worth less and less as the year of Jubilee approached, for its lease value was related to how many crops one could raise on it. The admonition, then, is for both buyer and seller to refrain from taking opportunistic advantage of the situation—the approaching Jubilee. Buyers were to respond in love and fairness to a brother in need, and sellers were not to capitalize on their brothers' kindness or generosity.

The Jubilee is a metaphor for the coming eternal state, a time when believers' debts (read: sins) will be forgiven in practice as they now are in promise. Because of its symbolic nature, Jubilee was intended to be rehearsed by Israelites living within the Land, not by gentile believers living somewhere else. For gentiles, its message is: Yahshua has provided for our redemption, though our debt was impossibly large; therefore we are to also to forgive those who "owe" us. Freely we have received; freely we should give. Don't oppress your fellow man.

- (171) *Do not make a loan to an Israelite on interest. "If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you. You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit. I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God."* (Leviticus 25:35-38) Again, this passage is related to Jubilee—God's quintessential picture of gracious forgiveness. Which of us has not fallen on hard times? Oh, not materially, necessarily, but spiritually we have all become debtors. Yahweh has taken pity upon us, paid off our

debts, and put us on our feet. Should we not do the same thing for our brothers?

It is with deep sorrow that I must note that our entire monetary system today is based on a violation of this precept. In America, as in most of the rest of the world, money is *based* on debt. With little or nothing of intrinsic value to back it up, wealth is created out of thin air in tandem with loans—if every debt were paid off today, our entire money supply would cease to exist. Hardly anybody understands how our central banking boondoggle—I mean *system*—really works, of course; if we did, we would descend on Washington and New York *en masse*, pitchforks and torches in hand. Required reading: *The Creature from Jekyll Island: A Second Look at the Federal Reserve*, by G. Edward Griffin. (Copyright 1994-2002, American Media. www.RealityZone.com)

We (or is it just me?) are entirely too reluctant to trust Yahweh with our finances. Rather than living simply and within our means, we indulge our every whim and then feverishly scheme and calculate how to make ends meet. All too often, our solutions involve shortchanging the charitable end of the spectrum—not just by giving less to advance Yahweh’s cause, but also oppressing our brothers by selling what we should be giving away or taking advantage of others’ misfortune by buying things cheaply. One I am personally guilty of: *The house is priced under-market because the owners are getting a divorce and need a quick sale—we can make a killing here*. When are we going to learn that our Father owns *everything*? It’s an insult to Him to doubt His willingness to meet our needs—and to demonstrate that doubt by taking advantage of our fellow man.

- (172) *Do not borrow on interest (because this would cause the lender to sin). “You shall not charge interest to your brother—interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest. To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that Yahweh your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess.”* (Deuteronomy 23:19-20) It’s a fine sentiment, I suppose: don’t cause your brother to stumble by offering incentive to sin. But the rabbis have missed the point. The burden is upon the *lender*: he must not take advantage of a brother in need by making a profit on his misfortune. If God has blessed him to the point that he has more than he needs, he is not to leverage that blessing into a growth industry.

Yahweh makes a distinction here between “brothers” and “foreigners.” Those outside the fellowship of faith are not under God’s protection—by their own choice. Yahweh understands that there is a time-value to money.

But we are to conduct our business relationships with fellow believers as if we were dealing with God Himself. Would we charge Yahshua interest? Would we demand guarantees and collateral from Him? Of course not. We should be aware that He regards what we do for “His brothers” as being done for Him—*personally*. Remember the admonition concerning the separation of the “sheep from the goats” in Matthew 25.

In the real world, especially today, especially in America, we needn't be “poor” to feel like we need to borrow. But it's an illusion, for the most part. We have forgotten how to distinguish between needs and wants. If we borrow, we become debtors, and debt is a chain: one from which Yahweh would spare us. **“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.... Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”** (Romans 13:8, 10)

- (173) *Do not take part in any usurious transaction between borrower and lender, neither as a surety, nor as a witness, nor as a writer of the bond for them. “If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest. If you ever take your neighbor's garment as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down. For that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin. What will he sleep in? And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I am gracious.”* (Exodus 22:25-27) Although I don't disagree with what the rabbis said here, it isn't supported by the text, not all of it, anyway. The transaction in view is once again between the lender and the borrower (not a middleman). Yahweh is giving a real-world example of how collateral ought to work. The acceptance of a pledge is never to hinder or endanger (or as Leviticus 25 put it, *oppress*) the lender. A man's coat may be the only thing of value he could leave with you to ensure that he pays his debt, but if it's the only thing between him and pneumonia, make sure he gets it back when it gets cold. Use your imagination. I'm sure you can come up with half a dozen examples that fit our contemporary situation: a man's car, tools, home—you get the picture. In practical terms, if you can trust his word, what good is collateral? And if you *can't*, why are you expecting him to pay you back?

Again we see that the lending relationship in view is between “any of My people.” That is, if the borrower honors Yahweh, you (the God-fearing lender) ought to be able to trust him to keep his word and pay you back, for he didn't make his promises to you as much as he made them to God Himself. If he stiff's you, he'll answer to Yahweh—and he knows it (or ought to). Contrast this to what Solomon says about loaning money to strangers (i.e., those with whom you don't share a familial relationship with Yahweh): **“He who is surety for a stranger will suffer, but one who hates**

being surety is secure." (Proverbs 11:15) A "surety" is an old fashioned word for a guarantee. It's true on personal, corporate, and national levels: if we guarantee the performance of those who don't answer to Yahweh, we will suffer for it.

- (174) *Lend to a poor person.* **"If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him: you shall not charge him interest."** (Exodus 22:25) The word "if" (Hebrew: *'im*) is more positive than it may seem in the English. It means "when" or "whenever" as much as "if." It is a given under the Law that an Israelite with means will not oppress his less fortunate brother by refusing him a timely loan, nor, as we see here, is the lender to charge interest—to make a profit on his charity. Conversely, it is also a given that a man will not borrow money if he is not in dire straits—and certainly not if he has no intention of repaying the loan. Accepting a loan under such false pretenses is tantamount to stealing (see Exodus 20:15). Bear in mind that Yahweh put mechanisms in place in Israel through which the poor could provide for themselves (see Mitzvot #41-52 in Chapter 2). And in the larger sense, Israel was promised (Deuteronomy 28:1-14, etc.) abundant temporal blessings that would make poverty in the Land an aberration rather than the status quo, if only they would heed Yahweh's laws. In other words, this never should have been much of an issue.
- (175) *Do not demand from a poor man repayment of his debt, nor press him, when it becomes clear that he cannot pay.* **"If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest. If you ever take your neighbor's garment as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down. For that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin. What will he sleep in? And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I am gracious."** (Exodus 22:25-27) Maimonides has been caught padding the list again. We've already seen the supporting text of this Mitzvah in #173, and we've seen similar passages in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The bottom line here is that we are to be merciful, generous, and forgiving, for Yahweh is all of those things toward us. As far as not requiring repayment of loans, Yahweh never actually said anything about it. The closest He got was in a parable told by Yahshua (Matthew 18:21-35) in which a king forgave a gargantuan debt owed by a servant who asked for mercy, only to see him turn around and refuse to forgive a relatively small debt of a fellow servant. The point was not that the king had no right to press the first servant to repay his debts—the debt was real: *somebody* had to make up the shortfall—and that turned out to be the King Himself. But because the king was merciful, His servant should have been merciful as well. What made the king angry was not the debt, but the first

servant's unforgiving attitude. The carryover to our redemption and its intended effect upon our lives is self-evident. The "king" is Yahweh, and the "debt" we owe is due to our sin. Because God has forgiven us, we likewise should forgive those who have wronged us.

- (176) *Do not take in pledge utensils used in preparing food. "No man shall take the lower or the upper millstone in pledge, for he takes one's living in pledge."* (Deuteronomy 24:6) Food has nothing to do with it, and the supporting verse makes that plain (at least to me). The point was that a man's ability to earn a living was not to be infringed upon by requiring that he put up the tools of his trade as collateral. In other words, don't take a miller's millstone, a farmer's ox or plow, a weaver's loom, etc., in pledge for a loan, even if they are the only things of value a borrower may have. I get the feeling that the rabbis specified food-preparation utensils because they wanted to be able to broaden their horizons in the collateral department—thereby circumventing the clear intent of this precept.
- Yahweh didn't altogether forbid the taking of pledges to secure loans, for He wanted to protect lenders from potential abuse at the hands of shifty borrowers. At the same time, He clearly doesn't like the concept of resorting to legal means to minimize risk. His ideal is "Let your yes be yes, and your no be no," in other words, be as good as your word. If you borrow, pay your debts—as quickly as you can. If God has blessed you with a little more than you need to get by, don't be afraid to "risk it" helping someone in need. Consider that the overabundance you've received may have been given to you for that very purpose.
- (177) *Do not exact a pledge from a debtor by force. "When you lend your brother anything, you shall not go into his house to get his pledge. You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you lend shall bring the pledge out to you."* (Deuteronomy 24:10-11) I'm pretty sure the rabbis got this one wrong. If one found he had to use force to extract a pledge, he would simply refrain from making the loan. I think this has more to do with protecting the dignity of the borrower. He feels bad enough that he's in need of the loan; to have the lender invade his home and extract the pledge in front of the man's family would be adding insult to injury. It's no sin to be poor (though it's no great honor, either). A man should be treated with dignity and respect, whatever his station in life.
- (178) *Do not keep the pledge from its owner when he needs it. "And if the man is poor, you shall not keep his pledge overnight. You shall in any case return the pledge to him again when the sun goes down, that he may sleep in his own garment and bless you; and it shall be righteousness to you before Yahweh your God."* (Deuteronomy 24:12-13) This repeats the precept outlined in #173.

In God's economy, mercy outweighs justice, kindness trumps correctness, and compassion is worth more than fairness. When Yahweh called Abram, he "believed God and it was accounted unto him as righteousness." Here we see something very similar. The lender here is seen trusting not in the borrower, not even in the collateral that was offered to secure the loan, but in Yahweh Himself. He's saying, *It doesn't matter all that much if I get reimbursed; God will take care of me nevertheless. But I refuse to see my brother shivering in the cold just because he hasn't paid back his debt. I will extend mercy to him, even though justice says I'm not required to.* This attitude is seen as "righteousness" before Yahweh.

- (179) *Return a pledge to its owner.* **"And if the man is poor, you shall not keep his pledge overnight. You shall in any case return the pledge to him again when the sun goes down, that he may sleep in his own garment and bless you; and it shall be righteousness to you before Yahweh your God."** (Deuteronomy 24:12-13) This is merely the affirmative statement of negative Mitzvah #178. Maimonides is puffing this thing out like a seventh grader's term paper. The question may be properly asked, however, why *Yahweh* repeats this seemingly anachronistic tenet so many times. The answer becomes obvious when we realize that (1) we owe Him an impossibly large debt, (2) that the "pledges" we make to "do better" aren't worth the breath we expend on them if done in our own efforts, and (3) that if He "held our pledges," that is, if He held us to our word, we would all die of exposure before the night was over. We are entirely dependent upon His mercy. We are lost forever without His grace. The "garment" He provides—the righteousness of His salvation—protects us from the world and the judgment that follows. He never withdraws that protection, no matter how much we "owe."
- (180) *Don't take a pledge from a widow.* **"You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow's garment as a pledge. But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and Yahweh your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this thing."** (Deuteronomy 24:17-18) Taking a widow's protective outer garment as collateral against a loan is seen here as an example of "perversion of justice." Widows, orphans, and "strangers" are scriptural pictures of helplessness, and Yahweh invariably goes out of His way to protect and provide for them in His Law. Here He reminds us that He delivered us when we were slaves to sin—when we were as helpless as widows and orphans, as alienated as strangers in a foreign land. We are therefore to follow His lead by providing mercy and justice to those less fortunate than we are, whether materially or spiritually.
- (181) *Do not commit fraud in measuring.* **"You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume."** (Leviticus 19:35) This is a

corollary to the Eighth Commandment, “You shall not steal.” The point was not so much that measurements had to be accurate, but that no “injustice” was to be done in their application (a condition, of course, that was most easily achieved by measuring accurately). The first thing in Moses’ list is the one we tend to skip over: “do no injustice in *judgment*.” The Hebrew word for judgment, *mishpat*, means a verdict, judicial sentence, or formal legal decree. When weighing and measuring the evidence in a case, those judging are to be careful in their assessments. Injustice is to be avoided at all costs, whether it’s a case of murder, or a case of pickles.

- (182) *Ensure that your scales and weights are correct. “You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them: I am Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 19:36-37) Continuing the thought from the previous mitzvah, we see that measuring “justly” depended on using accurate paraphernalia, scales that balance properly and precisely accurate weights against which to measure the commodities being bought and sold. (An ephah is a unit of dry measure, approximately two thirds of a bushel. A hin is a unit of liquid measure equivalent to about one gallon.) The modern equivalent might be: don’t roll the odometer back on that used car you’re selling; don’t pad your hours when billing your clients for the time you’ve spent on their behalf, etc.

Another example: I used to design packaging for a living. One of my clients, a poultry merchandiser, refused to feed their chickens and turkeys antibiotics, even though this was standard industry practice. Why? Not only because of the health risks associated with administering subtherapeutic levels of antibiotics, but also because it was dishonest: these drugs raised the water weight of a growing bird by up to fifteen percent. So Shelton’s Poultry was (no doubt without realizing it) following the Law of God in this respect, though they were practically alone in heeding their convictions and their conscience.

Yahweh is saying something very basic here: don’t cheat each other. Then, as He does so often, He reminds us *why* we shouldn’t cheat. It’s because of who He is—the One who saved us, the One to whom we owe our very existence. His world, His rules. Bottom line: if we can’t trust Him to take care of us in petty financial matters, we can’t trust Him at all.

- (183) *Don’t possess inaccurate measures and weights. “You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a heavy and a light. You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large and a small. You shall have a perfect and just weight, a*

perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you. For all who do such things, all who behave unrighteously, are an abomination to Yahweh your God.” (Deuteronomy 25:13-16) This is the negative counterpart to the affirmative mitzvah we just listed. It’s all the same principle. Restated here in Deuteronomy, we see how the cheating was accomplished: a dishonest merchant would keep two sets of weights, a heavy one for measuring what was being paid to him, and a light one for measuring what he was selling. It’s cheating, theft, dishonesty, robbery, oppression—and Yahweh hates it. Any way you slice it, it betrays a lack of trust in Yahweh’s provision. The precept, however, came with a promise: if the Israelites would be honest in their business dealings, their “days would be lengthened in the land Yahweh was giving them.” As we know from history, unfortunately, their dishonest, cheating hearts eventually got them thrown out of the Land. Remember—Yahweh doesn’t change: the principle still applies today.

EMPLOYEES, SERVANTS, AND SLAVES

- (184) *Do not delay payment of a hired man’s wages. “You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.”* (Leviticus 19:13) Delaying payment (not just for wages, but for anything) is a form of oppression, and Yahweh considers it evil. To withhold payment of a legitimate debt, even temporarily, is seen by God as *robbery*. I’ve been on both sides of this equation, as an employer and as an employee (and as both contractor and client). I’ve felt the anguish of not knowing if the check was going to arrive on time, of not knowing if I’d be able to feed my family because some bureaucrat was holding my wages “all night.” I’ve also witnessed the puzzled gratitude of my suppliers when I paid what I owed them several weeks *early*. I can tell you from experience, doing business God’s way is a lot more fun.
- (185) *The hired laborer shall be permitted to eat of the produce he is reaping. “When you come into your neighbor’s vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put any in your container. When you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor’s standing grain.”* (Deuteronomy 23:24-25) The rabbis have blown it big time here (and in the next two mitzvot) by applying this precept to hired laborers. Could it be they were trying to engineer a loophole? *Sure, I’ll pay you: you can eat your fill of my produce while you’re harvesting my crop, but don’t expect a penny more.* This is not about employees, but about “neighbors,” that is, fellow Israelites or strangers who were passing through and got hungry. (Yahshua

and His disciples fell into this category from time to time.) As the text plainly indicates, this is part of God’s “welfare” system—it’s designed to take care of travelers and wayfarers. As we saw during our discussion of Yahweh’s provision for the poor (Mitzvot #41-50), God provided the land and its increase; it was therefore His prerogative to make it available to whomever He chose—to the landowner first, but also to those in immediate need.

- (186) *The hired laborer shall not take more than he can eat.* **“When you come into your neighbor’s vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put any in your container. When you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor’s standing grain.”** (Deuteronomy 23:24-25) There is a wonderfully practical balance here between the rights of the landowner and the needs of the wayfarer. The “neighbor” could walk through a field or vineyard and help himself to as much as he could carry—in his stomach (which only holds about a quart). No sickle or pruning hook, no container to haul away the booty, no equipment at all other than your bare hands and digestive tract would be allowed; this wasn’t a *raid* God was authorizing—it was charity. Thus there were practical limits to the impact such “harvesting” could have on the farmer’s crop. Again, the precept has absolutely nothing to do with relations between a landowner and his hired laborers.
- (187) *A hired laborer shall not eat produce that is not being harvested.* **“When you come into your neighbor’s vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put any in your container. When you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor’s standing grain.”** (Deuteronomy 23:24-25) Pardon me, Maimonides. Your agenda is showing. This is *not* about making sure your field hands aren’t getting overpaid. This is about reflecting Yahweh’s mercy, sharing God’s bounty, recognizing His provision, and emulating His generosity. It’s the very antithesis of the ugly attitude of imposing submission on those who find themselves beneath you on the economic scale in this world.
- (188) *Pay wages to the hired man at the due time.* **“You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates. Each day you shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to Yahweh, and it be sin to you.”** (Deuteronomy 24:14-15) Is there an echo in here? This is the same precept we saw under Mitzvah #184. We shouldn’t be too surprised to find a lot of the same things first

mentioned in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers to be repeated in Deuteronomy, for it is the record of Moses' delivering the Law to a whole new generation of Israelites—whose rebellious parents had died in the wilderness. Here we are told (as if we didn't know) why the hired laborers were to be paid promptly: they were poor, and their "hearts were set" on receiving what they had earned with the sweat of their brow. Been there; done that. Most of us have cried out in distress to Yahweh at some point, seeking protection from someone's abuse. I would simply note here that *being* the oppressor somebody is complaining to God about would be a very, very bad thing.

- (189) *Deal judicially with the Hebrew bondman in accordance with the laws appertaining to him. "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever."* (Exodus 21:2-6) This is only incidentally a precept about temporal master-slave relationships. In actuality, it is an elaborate metaphor of our ability and privilege to choose Yahweh. First, we see the ubiquitous six-plus-one pattern here, which should by now tell us instantly that Yahweh is instructing us about His plan for mankind—six thousand years of "work" and a millennium of "rest."

Next, we learn an often-misunderstood lesson about liberty: freedom is *neutral*. It's not important in itself; what's significant is what you're freed *from*. Who is the master from whom you wish to be released? Release from the service of a cruel taskmaster would be a good thing, of course. But be advised: escape may be more difficult than it looks. Parts of your old life of servitude could be hard to leave behind. This is obviously a metaphor for the service of Satan, a life of sin. Our acquaintances and addictions are part of our old life: if we aren't prepared to let them go, we will never be truly free.

On the other hand, what if your Master is kindhearted and generous? What if He has given you "everything that pertains to life and godliness?" What if the work you've been given to do has been a joy to perform, significant and fulfilling? And what if you've built a family within His household with whom the bond of love is sweet and enduring? If, as the poet said, "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose," then

perhaps liberty is not necessarily such a good thing after all. I'm speaking, of course, of having Yahweh/Yahshua as a master. Some of us have spent years in the service of God: we could conceivably say to ourselves, "I've paid my dues—I'm through." But retiring from this life is like leaving the best job in the world—how could we possibly top it? (The paycheck ain't so great sometimes, but the benefits and retirement plan are to die for.) Freedom from Christ is like freedom from health, love, security, from life itself—it's something no sane man would want. It's no accident that every letter writer in the New Testament called Himself a servant of Christ at one point or another (Paul, James, Peter, and Jude did so in their salutations, and John spoke incessantly of "keeping His commandments," which is what a servant does above all else.)

So what do we do when confronted with our "freedom" from the God we love? According to the passage at hand, we have the option of declining to leave. We can approach the doorpost (Hebrew: *mezuzah*: the place where God's word was to be displayed—see #21) and ask the Master—Yahshua—to pierce our earlobe with an awl. In this we are following our Messiah: the piercing is voluntary, involving blood and pain, but the Master subsequently adorns our wound with a golden ring, the symbol of eternity in the service of the King.

As long as we're this deep into symbols, perhaps you'd indulge me in a bit of poetry, a song lyric I wrote a long time ago describing my own salvation experience:

*When did I first dare to leave the realm of unnamed fears,
Of summers marred by constant thoughts of winter's tears?
And when did I become aware: this soul-invading peace
That follows like a shadow on a sunny day?
No one but a fool would wish to be released.*

*When did God untie the cords to set my spirit free
To join in heaven's joyous dance, eternally?
I can't recall the hour or day God's Spirit entered mine,
And yet as I relax my hold on all I am,
His Holy Spirit fills the void with His design.*

(190) *Do not compel the Hebrew servant to do the work of a slave. “If one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave. As a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you, and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee. And then he shall depart from you—he and his children with him—and shall return to his own family. He shall return to the possession of his fathers.”* (Leviticus 25:39-41) I find it fascinating that Yahweh never forbade slavery. He regulated it, mitigated its abuses, incorporated a temporary form of it into His welfare system, and used it as a springboard for His metaphors about service, but He never outlawed it. Perhaps He wanted us to come to grips with the fact that this side of heaven, we’re all “slaves” to something or other, whether good or evil, God or Satan.

This mitzvah has less to do with the *type* of work assigned to the bondservant than with the attitude of the master. A *slave* was property: you could buy or sell him, and if someone injured or killed him, it was the *master* who was reimbursed. But Israelites were not to “own” their brothers. If a man became poor and “sold himself” into the service of a fellow Israelite, he did not become a “slave,” but rather an indentured servant—sort of a “contract laborer.” He was not “owned” by the master, but was sort of “leased.” There was a term during which he would serve the master in exchange for a financial consideration—paid up front to satisfy a debt or support the man’s family. The master was to treat him as he would any hired laborer—with respect and dignity.

Most significantly, there was a time limit to his period of service. Leviticus 25 is all about the Jubilee, a once-every-fifty-year (i.e., once in a lifetime) occurrence, and thus we are being given a picture here of being granted release from our labors at the end of our lives: not our physical lives, but our lives as slaves—our lives bound to sin. Our freedom from that condition is pictured by Jubilee. There is, however, a variant on this Law that releases the bondservant after *six* years. **“If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you.”** (Deuteronomy 15:12) As a practical matter, Yahweh didn’t want Israelites selling themselves into bondage for their entire lifetimes. So the Sabbath year represents a sort of mini-Jubilee, in which many of the same things (debts, lands, servitude) were released. In the Sabbatical year, the once-in-a-lifetime picture is lost, but Yahweh’s mercy, forgiveness, and provision are seen even more clearly.

(191) *Do not sell a Hebrew servant as a slave. “...For they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves.”* (Leviticus

25:42) Continuing the thought from the previous mitzvah, we see that Yahweh's instructions concerning Israelite bondservants prohibited their being re-sold as ordinary slaves. The stated reason was that they were actually *Yahweh's* servants first (being Israelites and believers), and only bondservants to their earthly masters in a secondary role. The lesson for Christians should provide confidence and comfort: once we are Yahweh's servants—once we have asked the master to pierce our earlobe with His awl against the doorpost of testimony—we will never again be “sold” into sin. Satan can never own us. This is about as strong an evidence for “eternal security” as it gets. I should hasten to add, however, that since we *are* servants of God, He has the right to administer discipline as He sees fit. Read the story of David in II Samuel, I Kings, and I Chronicles. If Yahweh did not hesitate to discipline one so close to His own heart when he sinned, we should expect nothing less.

- (192) *Do not treat a Hebrew servant rigorously. “...You shall not rule over him [an Israelite bondservant] with rigor, but you shall fear your God.”* (Leviticus 25:43) A direct parallel is drawn between the fear—the reverence—of Yahweh and the treatment of one's bondservants. As we saw in #191, the servant is primarily Yahweh's; he is only being “loaned” to his earthly master, who is *also* a servant of Yahweh's. In effect, the “master” was being told not to mistreat the servant of Another. As believers, we need to remember that we all serve the same God. We may find ourselves higher or lower in the “pecking order,” but mercy rolls downhill. If we have received mercy, we should dispense mercy.
- (193) *Do not permit a gentile to treat harshly a Hebrew bondman sold to him. “He shall be with him as a yearly hired servant, and he shall not rule with rigor over him in your sight.”* (Leviticus 25:53) As we have seen, this entire chapter concerns the law of Jubilee. Here we see what is to happen if the indentured servant's master is not an Israelite, but a gentile living in the Land. Let's pick up the narrative in verse 47: “**Now if a sojourner or stranger close to you becomes rich, and one of your brethren who dwells by him becomes poor, and sells himself to the stranger or sojourner close to you, or to a member of the stranger's family, after he is sold he may be redeemed again.**” This, the law of redemption, is the main point of the passage—not the gentle treatment of Jewish servants. “**One of his brothers may redeem him; or his uncle or his uncle's son may redeem him; or anyone who is near of kin to him in his family may redeem him; or if he is able he may redeem himself....**” The servant's family can, at any time, buy back the man's “contract” from his master. In other words, even though he has sold his services to another, the bondservant still belongs to Yahweh. He himself cannot be sold.

How is the redemption price determined? **“Thus he shall reckon with him who bought him: The price of his release shall be according to the number of years, from the year that he was sold to him until the Year of Jubilee; it shall be according to the time of a hired servant for him. If there are still many years remaining, according to them he shall repay the price of his redemption from the money with which he was bought. And if there remain but a few years until the Year of Jubilee, then he shall reckon with him, and according to his years he shall repay him the price of his redemption. He shall be with him as a yearly hired servant, and he shall not rule with rigor over him in your sight....”** As we saw with land that was sold/leased to another, value is determined by how much productivity can be expected between now and Jubilee. The closer the time, the less the bondservant is worth to the master.

“And if he is not redeemed in these years, then he shall be released in the Year of Jubilee—he and his children with him. For the children of Israel are servants to Me; they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am Yahweh your God.” (Leviticus 25:47-55) Is there more to this than meets the eye? I believe there is. We now live in “the times of the Gentiles.” Israel has “sold herself” into bondage because of the spiritual poverty she has endured since her national rejection of Yahshua at Calvary. Yahweh is not (at present) dealing with His people Israel in any direct way. But that’s about to change. The most ubiquitous prophetic theme in the entire Bible is the eventual restoration of Israel to a place of fellowship with Yahweh through Yahshua their King—an earthly thousand-year Messianic Kingdom.

And when will that begin? On Jubilee—the *ultimate* Jubilee—commencing with the Day of Atonement spoken of in Zechariah 12:10 in which Israel will at last recognize her Messiah. As time marches toward this prophetic rendezvous, the Jews’ “value” to the world will be whittled away until there’s nothing left, just as stated in the law of Jubilee. As Daniel put it, **“When the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.”** (Daniel 12:7) A mere five days after this Day of Atonement, after the remnant of Israel has watched their Messiah annihilate their enemies at the Battle of Armageddon, the definitive Feast of Tabernacles will usher in the Millennial reign of Yahshua. The year, unless I’ve misread the obvious signs, will be 2033—two thousand years, forty Jubilees, since Christ paid the required price to redeem us all from our service to Satan. In the intervening years, some Jews, perceiving that they had been released, left their old master. The rest continued their servitude in ignorance, working for their adversary until released by the Law of Jubilee.

All of this sheds new light on the significance of the mitzvah we originally started out examining, **“He shall not rule with rigor over him in your sight.”** Even though Israel has been in bondage for the last two millennia, their gentile overlords have been warned by Yahweh not to treat them harshly. They have rarely listened.

- (194) *Do not send away a Hebrew bondman servant empty-handed when he is freed from service. “If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you send him away free from you, you shall not let him go away empty-handed; you shall supply him liberally from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your winepress. From what Yahweh has blessed you with, you shall give to Him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Yahweh your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today.”* (Deuteronomy 15:12-15) Justice says: *You agreed to work for six years for “X” amount of money. You were paid and you have fulfilled your contract. You’re free to go, but you will receive nothing more.* Mercy says: *Your poverty forced you to sell your services for six long years, and you have faithfully fulfilled your contract. But now you’re no better off than you were when you started, so as a bonus, your former master will “stake you” so you can begin anew—food, supplies, opportunities: whatever it takes to get an honest, hardworking man like you on your feet for good.*

As I said before, mercy trumps justice in God’s book. Rectitude is good, but love is infinitely better. It’s a fine thing to be correct, but Yahweh prefers us to be compassionate. Beyond that, if this, like the previous mitzvah, has a prophetic component to it, it would be demonstrated in any of a hundred passages like this: **“Thus says Yahweh Almighty: ‘Behold, I will lift My hand in an oath to the nations, and set up My standard for the peoples. They shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers; they shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am Yahweh, for they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me.’”** (Isaiah 49:22-23) The restoration of Israel will ultimately be an international affair, with the redeemed gentile survivors of the tribulation joyously aiding in the final regathering and restoration of Yahweh’s people to the Land of Promise. I realize that represents a 180-degree turnabout from their attitude today, but today the nations serve Satan, not Yahweh. And like I said, that’s all about to change.

- (195) *Bestow liberal gifts upon the Hebrew bondsman or bondwoman (at the end of their term of service). “If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew*

woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you send him away free from you, you shall not let him go away empty-handed; you shall supply him liberally from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your winepress. From what Yahweh has blessed you with, you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Yahweh your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today.” (Deuteronomy 15:12-15) This, of course, is merely the affirmative restatement of #194’s negative mitzvah. As we have seen so often in precepts concerning mercy or redemption, there is a reason attached to the commandment: Yahweh has blessed us, restored us, and given us freedom and prosperity. As far as it is within our powers, we are to do the same for our fellow man.

- (196) *Redeem a Hebrew maid-servant.* **“If a man sells his daughter to be a female slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. If she does not please her master who has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt deceitfully with her.”** (Exodus 21:7-8) This is a subset of the law of redemption designed to protect women from abuse. The word translated “go out” (Hebrew: *yoset*) is “used of going forth from one’s homeland into exile.” (B&C) Thus it doesn’t mean, *Keep your female bondservants indoors*, but rather, *There are different rules in effect for female bondservants*. The obvious problem was the potential for sexual abuse. Harlotry, especially selling one’s daughter into this life, was strictly forbidden: **“Do not prostitute your daughter, to cause her to be a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry, and the land become full of wickedness.”** (Leviticus 19:29) There were, of course, many legitimate non-sex-related roles for female bondservants to fulfill in a master’s household, so the practice of “leasing” one’s daughter into indentured servitude was not forbidden.

It was inevitable, however, that occasionally a man who had brought a female bondservant into his household would notice her qualities and decide she would make a good marriage partner—either for himself or for his son (see #198). In that case, if she failed to please her master after the betrothal, he could no longer treat her as an ordinary slave girl, but would be required to let her family redeem her. He was specifically prohibited from selling her to a foreign master.

Of course, slavery and indentured servitude aren’t terribly common any more. So is this precept obsolete? No. Once again, think prophetically. Israel has fallen into spiritual poverty, and has sold her daughters into the service of the world. Yahweh is announcing here that they cannot be sold to Satan; He reserves the right to redeem them—to restore them to His

family. The “daughters of Jerusalem” have not pleased their masters in exile, but they are under Yahweh’s protection. He has already paid the price of their redemption. We now await their realization that they are free to go back home.

- (197) *Do not sell a Hebrew maid-servant to another person.* “If a man sells his daughter to be a female slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. If she does not please her master who has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt deceitfully with her.” (Exodus 21:7-8) This is the negative counterpart to the previous mitzvah. Maimonides is padding the list again.
- (198) *Espouse a Hebrew maid-servant.* “...If she does not please her master, who has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt deceitfully with her. And if he has betrothed her to his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. If he takes another wife, he shall not diminish her food, her [i.e., the betrothed bondservant’s] clothing, and her marriage rights. And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without paying money.” (Exodus 21:8-11) Continuing the thought from the previous mitzvot, we see that the rabbis have done some judicious editing, and have therefore missed the whole point.

There are some big “ifs” here. *If* the female bondservant is “wife material,” then she is no longer bondservant material. You can’t have it both ways. In the same way, Israel, who has become the bondservant of the world through her spiritual bankruptcy, had (and has) the opportunity to be betrothed to the Master (Yahweh), or to His Son (Yahshua), in which case she would cease to be a bondslave, but would become a wife with all the rights and privileges of any wife—no matter what she was formerly. And what was that provision about “another wife?” It’s pretty obvious, this side of Calvary. Yahweh is referring to the Church, the Ekklesia—the other woman, His second wife, the bride of Christ. The Law here is flatly stating that if (actually, *when*) Israel accepts Yahweh’s marriage proposal, she will not be a second-class wife—a concubine, as it were—but will be a *real* wife, loved equally with her sister, the Church. As always with metaphors, if you put too much stress on them they’ll start to fray around the edges, but the central truth remains: God loves both Israel and the Ekklesia, even though Israel has sold herself into bondage temporarily.

- (199) *Keep the Canaanite slave forever.* “Moreover you may buy the children of the strangers who dwell among you, and their families who are with you, which they beget in your land; and they shall become your property. And you may take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them as a possession; they

shall be your permanent slaves.” (Leviticus 25:45-46) This one must have driven nineteenth-century abolitionists crazy. Is Yahweh *promoting* slavery? Not really, although for the sake of His illustration, He is permitting it. Yahweh is making a distinction here between those who would be set free through the law of Jubilee (the central subject of Leviticus 25), and those who would not. In other words, this is a lesson about the eternal status of *non-believers*.

Yahweh’s people, represented here by Israel, are protected by the Law of Jubilee: every fifty years they are granted total forgiveness. God through His Law redeems them from their bondage and debt. “Strangers,” however, are representative of those who are not under Yahweh’s protection; therefore the general amnesty of Jubilee does not apply to them. I hasten to note that this is not a statement defining one’s salvation or damnation based on race or culture. As I’ve said till I’m blue in the face, Israel’s job was and is to bear the signs of Yahweh’s redemptive plan—and this is one of them: they’re playing the *role* of the saved, whether or not they are actually followers of Yahweh as individuals. In the same way, the “strangers” are cast in the role of the unsaved. The point is simply that unbelievers will remain in bondage permanently. There will be no day of grace for them because they have no covenant relationship with Yahweh. Jubilee’s forgiveness is for God’s people, not Satan’s.

(200) *Do not surrender a slave who has fled to the land of Israel to his owner who lives outside Palestine. “You shall not give back to his master the slave who has escaped from his master to you. He may dwell with you in your midst, in the place which he chooses within one of your gates, where it seems best to him; you shall not oppress him.”* (Deuteronomy 23:15-16) Unlike Maimonides, Yahweh doesn’t actually specify the origin of the slave or his master here, for a very good reason. This is a poignant picture of flight from the oppression of slavery under sin to a new life under Yahweh’s protection. One dealing with a runaway slave had three logical options: he could return the slave to his former master, re-enslave the runaway for his own use, or set him free. Yahweh is hereby commanding His people to take door number three.

This is, at its core, a scathing denunciation of religion—*all sorts* of organized religious practice. Most people follow what they were taught as children: whether their parents were Hindus or Buddhists, atheists or Muslims, Catholics or Protestants, they naturally start out doing and believing the same kinds of things their parents did. But now and then, a person notices the *neshamah*, the “God-shaped vacuum” within him and endeavors to delve beyond the humdrum going-through-the-motions

existences being lived by those around them. At this point, they have “escaped from their masters.” But what happens to them? All too often, they are simply re-enslaved into something worse than the existence from which they were fleeing. If a nominal Muslim looking for a deeper faith doesn’t leave Islam, he becomes a terrorist or suicide bomber. The Buddhist seeker ceases being a productive member of his society and becomes a holy parasite, a monk, a living contradiction of outward asceticism achieved through total self-absorption. And what happens to those who wish to turn to Yahweh? As often as not, they are told to exchange their slavery to sin for another form of servitude—rules, rituals, and traditions, or worse, submission to ecclesiastical tyranny under self-appointed religious leaders. As Yahshua put it, **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”** (Matthew 23:15) But the Torah says to stop oppressing the runaway slave; let him enjoy his freedom. **“Jesus answered [the Pharisees], ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.’”** (John 8:34-36)

- (201) *Do not wrong a runaway slave.* **“You shall not give back to his master the slave who has escaped from his master to you. He may dwell with you in your midst, in the place which he chooses within one of your gates, where it seems best to him; you shall not oppress him.”** (Deuteronomy 23:15-16) The rabbis have drawn a distinction here between not returning a runaway slave to his owner and treating him well. Okay, whatever. More specifically, the Law says not to treat him as a second-class citizen because he used to be a slave, but accept him without prejudice. I personally know two pastors with checkered pasts—drugs, crime, prison—who are now serving Yahshua with enthusiasm and gratitude. Where would their congregations be if Christians had held their former bonds of slavery against them? If Yahweh has redeemed a person, if he has fled from his old life of slavery to sin, then according to Yahweh, he may “dwell in our midst.” Let’s face it: we have all been slaves at one time or another. If we exclude the one with obvious sins in his past, we must exclude ourselves as well. To the heavenly Gardener, the best slug in the yard is pretty much the same as the worst one.
- (202) *Don’t muzzle a beast while it is working: allow it to eat and enjoy.* **“You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.”** (Deuteronomy 25:4) Yes, Yahweh is concerned with the welfare of animals as well as of men. This precept, however, is not talking exclusively about “livestock rights.” Paul quoted this twice (in I Timothy 5:18 and in the following passage) to

demonstrate that one who works in ministry has a right to derive a living wage from such work. This is why we have salaried pastors today. Note, however, that although the ox had a right to munch on some grain as he worked, he was not given the deed to the wheat field, nor was he given the authority to plow the whole thing under and put up trendy condos to sell at an obscene profit to rich yuppies. Rather, his “living” was predicated on his participation in providing nourishment to the community.

Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth about his rights as an Apostle (rights he freely relinquished in order to avoid becoming a stumbling block): **“Don’t we have the right to live in your homes and share your meals? Don’t we have the right to bring a Christian wife along with us as the other disciples and the Lord’s brothers and Peter do?”** This sentence sets the remuneration bar high enough to support one’s family, not just a subsistence wage for the pastor himself. **“Or is it only Barnabas and I who have to work to support ourselves? What soldier has to pay his own expenses? And have you ever heard of a farmer who harvests his crop and doesn’t have the right to eat some of it? What shepherd takes care of a flock of sheep and isn’t allowed to drink some of the milk? And this isn’t merely human opinion. Doesn’t God’s law say the same thing? For the law of Moses says, ‘Do not keep an ox from eating as it treads out the grain.’ Do you suppose God was thinking only about oxen when he said this? Wasn’t he also speaking to us? Of course he was. Just as farm workers who plow fields and thresh the grain expect a share of the harvest, Christian workers should be paid by those they serve...”** I couldn’t have said it better myself. It’s handy when scripture provides commentary on scripture, don’t you think?

“We have planted good spiritual seed among you. Is it too much to ask, in return, for mere food and clothing?” Paul’s point is that spiritual nourishment should be rewarded with physical sustenance. Yet he didn’t capitalize on that principle. **“If you support others who preach to you, shouldn’t we have an even greater right to be supported? Yet we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than put an obstacle in the way of the Good News about Christ...”**

He then reminds us that this is nothing new in God’s economy: **“Don’t you know that those who work in the Temple get their meals from the food brought to the Temple as offerings? And those who serve at the altar get a share of the sacrificial offerings. In the same way, the Lord gave orders that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it.”** (I Corinthians 9:4-14 NLT)

VOWS, OATHS, AND SWEARING

- (203) *A man should fulfill whatever he has uttered.* **“That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to Yahweh your God what you have promised with your mouth.”** (Deuteronomy 23:23) This points out something few understand these days: when you say something, you’ve said it before Yahweh Himself. If you make any “statement of fact,” it’s as if you’re “swearing on a stack of Bibles.” You’ve *automatically* “sworn” that your words are true. If you’ve said you’d do something, your words are a promise you’ve made to God—even if you weren’t promising anything *to* Him, but merely to some other human. Yahweh, in short, expects us to keep our word, to tell the truth—whether we’re “under oath” or not. A promise to the least of men is a promise to Him.

Not surprisingly, Yahshua sounds irritated as he discusses the hypocrisy of swearing on this or that as though the greater the thing sworn upon, the more truthful the statement must be: **“You have heard that the law of Moses says, ‘Do not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.’ But I say, don’t make any vows! If you say, ‘By heaven!’ it is a sacred vow because heaven is God’s throne. And if you say, ‘By the earth!’ it is a sacred vow because the earth is his footstool. And don’t swear, ‘By Jerusalem!’ for Jerusalem is the city of the great King. Don’t even swear, ‘By my head!’ for you can’t turn one hair white or black. Just say a simple, ‘Yes, I will,’ or ‘No, I won’t.’ Your word is enough. To strengthen your promise with a vow shows that something is wrong.** (Matthew 5:33-37 NLT). That’s pretty clear, isn’t it?

- (204) *Do not swear needlessly.* **“You shall not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain, for Yahweh will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.”** (Exodus 20:7) It’s interesting that *this* verse was chosen to support the idea of not swearing needlessly: it has almost nothing to do with taking oaths. As we saw in the previous mitzvah, in fact, it is God’s will that we don’t swear at all (that is, don’t make vows or give testimony that must be backed by things that are more reliable than our own word). The “need” for swearing or taking an oath should never arise.

But since the rabbis brought it up, let’s look at what the actual Hebrew words of this most enigmatic of the Ten Commandments *really* means: **“You shall not take** (*nasa*: lift up, accept, advance, bear, tolerate, respect, regard, or yield to) **the name** (*shem*: the position, individual nature, designation, honor, authority, character, mark, fame, name, reputation, or report) **of Yahweh your God** (*elohiym*: supreme and mighty one, deity) **in an evil** (*shav*: destructive, beguiling, false, evil, ruinous, idolatrous, harmful, devastating, wasteful, immoral, deceptive, or dishonest) **way. For Yahweh will not exonerate** (*naqah*: cleanse, acquit, hold blameless, or leave unpunished) **him who accepts** (*nasa*: lifts up, accepts, advances, bears, or tolerates) **His**

character (*shem*: position, individual nature, designation, honor, authority, character, mark, fame, name, reputation, or report) **being used in a deceptive** (*shav*: destructive, evil, devastating, desolate, wasteful, beguiling, immoral, idolatrous, false, deceptive, or dishonest) **way.**" (Exodus 20:7)

The Third Commandment therefore has nothing to do with taking oaths or swearing (not directly, at least), and everything to do with using the name of God—Yahweh—properly and with respect. The unfortunate English translation of the Hebrew word *shav* (destructive, false, evil, ruinous, idolatrous, harmful, devastating, wasteful, immoral, deceptive, dishonest, etc.) as “vain” (which in this context means empty or frivolous) is part of the problem. This erroneous word choice has led generations of people to believe that saying the name of God (a name most people don’t even know) in a flippant or irreverent way is what He’s prohibiting here. They believe that the commandment merely means that we shouldn’t say things like “God damn it” or “I swear to God. . . .” While profanity—using His name in a common or disrespectful way or taking Him lightly—is indeed a bad thing, implied here and warned against explicitly elsewhere in scripture, the Third Commandment has a far deeper meaning: we are not to accept or advance anything that is false, deceptive, or destructive in Yahweh’s name, or associate these things with His character, or say that they’re His word. He won’t ignore it when we choose to worship counterfeit gods, for He is holy—separate from His creation.

In a remarkable and tragic miscalculation (and I’m probably being far too kind here—it smells more like purposeful and satanic deception) the rabbis eventually took this verse to mean that the name “Yahweh” couldn’t be spoken at all, for fear of inadvertently “taking it in vain.” The inevitable result was that the nation of Israel eventually forgot who their God was. Jews today call Him *HaShem*—“the Name.” And the loss was not confined to Israel: virtually every English Bible translation consistently renders the revealed name of God (Yahweh, which means: “I am”) as “the LORD”—neither a translation nor transliteration; it’s a blatant fraud. Thus Christians usually don’t know who God is, either. Not by name, anyway. It’s enough to make you *swear*.

- (205) *Do not violate an oath or swear falsely. “You shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 19:12) This is more serious than the rabbinical wording suggests. “Swearing by Yahweh’s name falsely” is tantamount to “profaning” the name (*shem*: the character or reputation) of God. The Hebrew word for “to profane” is *chalal*: “to bore, that is, by implication, to wound, to dissolve; figuratively to profane a person, place or thing, to break one’s word.” (S)

In other words, when we as believers in Yahweh don't keep our word, we are inflicting wounds upon the very reputation of our God in the eyes of the world. Paul pointed out the damage such hypocrisy causes: **"You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' as it is written."** (Romans 2:23-24; cf. Ezekiel 36:22-23)

Yahshua also had something to say about breaking your word, and it wasn't pretty: **"Blind guides! How terrible it will be for you! For you say that it means nothing to swear 'by God's Temple'—you can break that oath. But then you say that it is binding to swear 'by the gold in the Temple.' Blind fools! Which is greater, the gold, or the Temple that makes the gold sacred?"** Tell you what: Let's take the Temple out of the equation. Look out for a guy named Titus Vespasian. **"And you say that to take an oath 'by the altar' can be broken, but to swear 'by the gifts on the altar' is binding! How blind! For which is greater, the gift on the altar, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? When you swear 'by the altar,' you are swearing by it and by everything on it. And when you swear 'by the Temple,' you are swearing by it and by God, who lives in it. And when you swear 'by heaven,' you are swearing by the throne of God and by God, who sits on the throne."** (Matthew 23:16-22 NLT) His point, as usual, was to stop playing games with the truth. Our "yes" should mean yes, and our "no" should mean no.

- (206) *Decide in cases of annulment of vows according to the rules set forth in the Torah.* **"If a man makes a vow to Yahweh, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. Or if a woman makes a vow to Yahweh, and binds herself by some agreement while in her father's house in her youth, and her father hears her vow and the agreement by which she has bound herself, and her father holds his peace, then all her vows shall stand, and every agreement with which she has bound herself shall stand. But if her father overrules her on the day that he hears, then none of her vows nor her agreements by which she has bound herself shall stand; and Yahweh will release her, because her father overruled her."** (Numbers 30:2-5) There are other specific cases, which we'll look at in a moment, but I think we can see what's going on from these first few verses. Note first that the rabbinical mitzvah is one hundred percent correct for a change: *follow the Torah*. Good call, guys. The most striking thing about this passage is there are slightly different rules for women than there are for men in the matter of making vows. The knee-jerk reaction of the feminists, of course, is to cry "foul!" But as usual, Yahweh is using our family relationships to teach us deeper truths about His love, protection, and covenants. This has nothing to do with "keeping women in their place."

Basically, this is the rule: men who make vows must keep them. Period, end of story. However, under certain circumstances, women's vows may be annulled by the men whom Yahweh has assigned to protect them—their husbands or fathers. But there are limits even here. A protector has only a limited time to annul the vow his wife or daughter has made: he must decide on the day he hears of the matter; he may not “sleep on it.” This would have the effect of weeding out the “annulment material” to obviously frivolous, emotionally driven vows. Examples we might relate to: (1) A daughter vows to quit the cheerleading squad in order to spend more time on her studies—Dad knows there are pros and cons to weigh here; he would probably honor his daughter's decision and let the vow stand. (2) A daughter promises to kill herself if Johnny doesn't ask her to the big dance—Dad doesn't have to think about it; he'll annul the vow immediately.

Moses lists several other cases, all of which are similar: **“If indeed she takes a husband, while bound by her vows or by a rash utterance from her lips by which she bound herself, and her husband hears it, and makes no response to her on the day that he hears, then her vows shall stand, and her agreements by which she bound herself shall stand. But if her husband overrules her on the day that he hears it, he shall make void her vow which she took and what she uttered with her lips, by which she bound herself, and Yahweh will release her. Also any vow of a widow or a divorced woman, by which she has bound herself, shall stand against her.**

“If she vowed in her husband's house, or bound herself by an agreement with an oath, and her husband heard it, and made no response to her and did not overrule her, then all her vows shall stand, and every agreement by which she bound herself shall stand. But if her husband truly made them void on the day he heard them, then whatever proceeded from her lips concerning her vows or concerning the agreement binding her, it shall not stand; her husband has made them void, and Yahweh will release her. Every vow and every binding oath to afflict her soul, her husband may confirm it, or her husband may make it void. Now if her husband makes no response whatever to her from day to day, then he confirms all her vows or all the agreements that bind her; he confirms them, because he made no response to her on the day that he heard them. But if he does make them void after he has heard them, then he shall bear her guilt.” (Numbers 30:6-15)

Okay, so what's the point of all this? God *isn't* saying, “Women are silly, emotional creatures who need a man around to keep them from doing stupid things.” Anybody who's ever known a man knows that women don't have a monopoly on stupid. This isn't *about* men and women—it's about Yahweh and us. As we have seen, He has ordained a

structure for the family that symbolizes the relationship we share with Him. In this metaphor, Christ is the Head of the family, and we believers are His bride. Or put another way, Yahweh is our Father, and we are His children. The Father/Husband gives us a great deal of freedom, but because He loves us He's willing to protect us from our own emotions, doubts, faults, wishful thinking, and yes, even stupidity. At one end of the spectrum, men say, "I love you, Father. I promise never to let you down again," and they mean it; but He knows they won't keep that promise, no matter how hard they try. On the other end of the spectrum, men go through periods of despair when God seems a million miles away, and in their darkest moments they deny that He even exists. But Yahweh is patient and merciful, willing to open the door of His kingdom to repentant, seeking hearts even at the eleventh hour. Did you catch the Messianic overtones in the last sentence? **"If he does make [the vows] void after he has heard them, then he shall bear her guilt."** Our *Protector* (Yahshua) will bear the guilt *we* have incurred through our rash oaths and actions—actually, He already has.

- (207) *Do not break a vow.* **"If a man makes a vow to Yahweh, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."** (Numbers 30:2) Whether a man's vow is to Yahweh or to another man, he must not break his word. In point of fact, a vow to a person is a promise before God—He sees no difference. Of course, no one is forcing you to give your word. So consider carefully what you promise to do, including the implied promises of daily life—the "written-between-the-lines" stuff. Stand behind your workmanship. Be on time. Read the contract. Give your employer a full day's work for a full day's pay. Don't take out a loan if you're not sure if you can repay it—and that includes slapping down your credit card for something beyond your budget.
- (208) *Swear by His [Yahweh's] name truly.* **"You shall fear Yahweh your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name."** (Deuteronomy 10:20) When we take oaths, when we give our word, we are doing it before Yahweh, whether we realize it or not. As we saw in the Matthew 5 and 23 passages quoted above (#203 and 205), the Jews of Yahshua's day had developed a complicated hierarchy of things you could "swear on" that gave you greater or lesser wiggle room in your truthfulness, depending on how exalted the object of the oath was perceived to be. Yahshua and Moses both condemned this practice. Here Moses says, in so many words, "When you swear, do it in Yahweh's name. That way, you'll be serious about telling the truth." Of course, the rabbis subsequently arranged it so you couldn't even *speak* His name, which

made taking oaths on it a little difficult. But the verse at hand makes it clear: God's people were to revere Him, serve Him, cling to Him, and appeal to Him as the absolute standard of truth.

- (209) *Do not delay in fulfilling vows or bringing vowed or free-will offerings.* **“When you make a vow to Yahweh your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for Yahweh your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to Yahweh your God what you have promised with your mouth.”** (Deuteronomy 23:22) For the umpteenth time: keep your word. Fulfill your promises. Perform your vows promptly. Don't make promises you can't keep, and if you can avoid it, don't make commitments based on uncertain future events, for you don't know what will happen tomorrow. Whatever you say or do will be weighed against Yahweh's perfect standard of righteousness, so don't take these matters lightly.

SABBATICAL AND JUBILEE YEARS

- (210) *Let the land lie fallow in the Sabbatical year.* **“When you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a sabbath to Yahweh. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to Yahweh. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of rest for the land. And the sabbath produce of the land shall be food for you: for you, your male and female servants, your hired man, and the stranger who dwells with you, for your livestock and the beasts that are in your land—all its produce shall be for food.”** (Leviticus 25:2-7). As we have seen (#170, 171, 190-193, 199), the entire 25th chapter of Leviticus instructs the Children of Israel about the Sabbatical year and its heavy-duty, industrial-strength cousin, Jubilee. On the surface, this is a simple, low-tech way to ward off soil depletion. If the Sabbath was practiced faithfully, the land could be expected to produce more bountiful crops in six years than it would in seven if worked all the time without a break. Beyond that, it taught the Israelites to trust Yahweh. It took real faith to abstain from planting, or gathering the volunteer crop, and relying instead on Yahweh to make the provision of the previous years sufficient for their needs. In other words, the Law of the Sabbath Year flies in the face of human logic. It requires faith, just as abstaining from gathering manna on the Sabbath day required faith on the part of the exodus generation. It's the same lesson, scaled up.

Sadly, there's no Biblical indication that Israel ever systematically kept the Law of the Sabbath Year or Jubilee. I don't recall any "off-hand" mentions that "such and such an event took place within a sabbatical year." As a matter of fact, the Israelites' eventual expulsion from the land was due in part to their failure in this very thing. We read in II Chronicles 36:20-21: **"And those who escaped from the sword he [Nebuchadnezzar] carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years."** In other words, the Jews had neglected the Sabbatical Year and Jubilee for 490 years.

Was God really *that* concerned about soil nutrient depletion, or was there something else, something deeper, at stake here? Yahweh often comes down hard on Biblical "players" when they mess up His pictures. For example, Moses was denied entrance to the promised land because he struck the rock (a picture of Christ) instead of speaking to it to obtain life-giving water, as he had been told to do (Numbers 20:7-13). And I think that's what's going on here. Israel's failure to let the land enjoy its sabbaths destroyed a picture, a prophetic metaphor, of something Yahweh was trying to teach us about His plan of redemption. The whole idea of the Sabbath Year was to trust God for our provision when it seemed more logical to work for it ourselves. If we apply this principle to our reconciliation with Yahweh, it all becomes clear. Every religion on earth says you've got to work for it, either with the giving of alms, or the performance of rituals, or the practice of self denial, etc. But Yahweh says, "In the end, you *can't* work for it. You can only trust Me to provide for you." Provide what? Eternal life—an everlasting relationship with our loving Heavenly Father.

But what's the meaning of the six-plus-one formula? We saw it in God's description of the creation, and again in the Fourth Commandment (the Sabbath day), and now here in the Sabbath Year. What is Yahweh's point? Taking into account Psalm 90:4 and II Peter 3:8, where the principle is stated that with Yahweh one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as one day, it appears that God is telling us about the timing of His redemptive plan. Man will have six thousand years to work, learn, grow, and figure things out. But on the seventh day (i.e., the seventh millennium) our work will be superfluous. We will enter the Kingdom through the graciousness of the King, or not at all.

- (211) *Cease from tilling the land in the Sabbatical year. "Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie*

fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat.” (Exodus 23:10-11) If you’ll recall from the previous mitzvah, what grew voluntarily, either grain or fruit, was to be left unharvested during the Sabbatical year. This mirror passage in Exodus refines our understanding a bit. It seems that though the *landowner* wasn’t to harvest what grew of its own accord for profit, the poor could still gather what they needed to keep body and soul together. It makes sense: since they didn’t own the land, it didn’t matter how bountiful the crops had been in the previous years—they still didn’t have any reserves. The rules, presumably, were unchanged from other years—they couldn’t harvest with a sickle as if they owned the place. But neither they nor the beasts of the field would starve to death, either.

Is there a counterpart to the “poor” in Yahweh’s plan of redemption as pictured in the Law of the Sabbatical Year? Perhaps. The “poor” of the earth are those who haven’t formed a saving relationship with Yahshua—not those actively opposed to Him, but rather the merely “lost,” the searching, the hungry. They see the servants of the Landowner (Yahweh) working busily doing “religious things” most of the time: giving alms, gathering for worship, seeking for the Master’s lost sheep—that sort of thing. Though the servants know about and rely on His grace, this fact is sometimes hard for outsiders to see because of all their busyness. But the Landowner instructs them to occasionally leave the work and trust His provision—to favor Mary over Martha. If the “servants” do this, the “poor” will have an opportunity to see the trusting relationship the servants have with their Master. If, however, the servants ignore the Landowner’s directives and keep on practicing “churchianity,” the trust that should be evident will be hidden, and the poor will remain hungry and destitute.

- (212) *Don’t till the ground in the Sabbatical year. “In the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 25:4) This is merely the negative statement of affirmative Mitzvot #210 and #211. It’s not really a separate precept.
- (213) *Do not do any work on the trees in the Sabbatical year. “[In the seventh year] you shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard.* (Leviticus 25:4) This isn’t a separate precept either. Yahweh didn’t provide an exhaustive list of the things you couldn’t do during the Sabbatical year because His intended meaning was quite clear and simple: *Don’t provide for yourself—I will provide for you. Just relax and trust Me.* His precepts are usually detailed enough for us to understand the concept, but not so detailed that “religious practice” is required to carry them out. *That* is man’s fault.

- (214) *Do not reap the aftermath that grows in the Sabbatical year in the same way it is reaped in other years. “What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of rest for the land.”* (Leviticus 25:5) Maimonides, it seems, is trying to pull a fast one here. Yahweh is *not* talking about not harvesting the *aftermath*, that which is left over after the first pass by the reapers. He’s saying “During the Sabbatical Year, leave the fields, vineyards and orchards untended—*period*.” For that matter, even in a normal year, going back over the fields with a fine-tooth comb wasn’t supposed to be done, because the gleanings were to be left for the poor. See Mitzvah #41: “...**nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest.**” (Leviticus 23:22) If we trust Yahweh, we won’t obsess over every bushel—or every dollar. When we purposely let some of our income “slip through our fingers” in the interests of our fellow man, trusting God to look after us anyway, Yahweh is honored.
- (215) *Do not gather the fruit of the tree in the Sabbatical year in the same way it is gathered in other years. “You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of rest for the land.”* (Leviticus 25:4-5) Again, the precise wording of the rabbinical mitzvah is calculated to provide a possible loophole for the landowner. The “way it is gathered” has nothing to do with it. God’s precept is clear: don’t harvest your crop at all during the Sabbatical year. The poor may come in and gather the volunteer crop to sustain themselves, but no work is to be done by the landowner or his staff, and no profit is to be made from the bounty of the land. “**The seventh year you shall let [your land] rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove.**” (Exodus 23:11) The principle applies equally to all of the fruit of the soil—grain fields, orchards, vineyards, and olive groves. We are to be reminded that all of this is a gift from Yahweh. We have nothing that He did not provide. Including our salvation.
- (216) *Sound the Ram’s horn in the Sabbatical year. “Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you.”* (Leviticus 25:9-10) The ram’s horn, or *shofar*, was not blown to inaugurate the Sabbatical year (as the mitzvah says), but rather Jubilee—the fiftieth year, or more to the point, a special Sabbath year immediately following the seventh Sabbatical year in the series. (We’ll discuss Jubilee more fully under

Mitzvot #221-226.) Although Yahweh's mandated calendar year began in the spring (on the first day of Nisan, two weeks before Passover—see Exodus 12:2), Yahweh set the beginning of Jubilee at the sixth miqra, the Day of Atonement, on Tishri 10—in the fall. It should be noted that this is *not* the day celebrated as “Jewish New Year,” a.k.a. *Rosh Hashanah*, which is a rabbinical error left over from the Babylonian captivity set to coincide with the *fifth* miqra, the Feast of Trumpets. Sufficiently confused?

We need to ask ourselves: what's the connection (in Yahweh's mind) between Jubilee and the Day of Atonement? As we shall see, Jubilee is the day of liberty—a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have the slate wiped clean. Debts are forgiven, captives are set free, and lands revert to their original owners. And the Day of Atonement is its spiritual counterpart: the sins of the nation of Israel were covered—atoned for, counted as having been satisfied—through the sacrifices offered on this day, once each year. What we see is a picture of total freedom, total forgiveness, provided by Yahweh through the sacrifice of His Anointed, Yahshua, in the year 33 A.D.—a Jubilee year, I might add. Yahshua Himself predicted this in His Nazareth sermon recorded in Luke 4:16-21, in which He applied Isaiah 61 to Himself. It's worth noting that the next Jubilee year from our perspective will fall in 2033—precisely 40 Jubilees later. Could it be that Yahweh has something special planned?

“Jubilee,” by the way, is a transliteration of the Hebrew *yobel*, meaning “the blast of a horn, specifically the signal of trumpets; hence the instrument itself and the festival thus introduced:—jubilee, ram's horn, trumpet.” (S)

- (217) *Release debts in the seventh year.* “**At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called Yahweh's release.**” (Deuteronomy 15:1-2) Part of the Sabbatical Year program was the general release of debts. There are some underlying assumptions that need to be kept in mind, of course: first, this was designed to be done within the borders of the Land, among Israelites exclusively, in the simple, closely knit agrarian society that existed in the centuries after the exodus. It's clear from the verses immediately following these that gentile borrowers were *not* to be released from their debts (see #57 and 58). Second, it's also pretty clear that the precept was never intended to be pressed into service in a society with the culture of debt to which we have subjected ourselves today. Yahweh wasn't advocating buying a new car on credit or running up the balance on your credit card just before the Sabbath year so you'd be “forgiven” under

the Law. This wasn't a license to steal. Third, there were no such things as institutional lenders in those days. If someone borrowed some money or provisions from his neighbor, it was because he had fallen on hard times—presumably through no particular fault of his own (laziness, drunkenness, etc.), and apparently as a temporary condition—as in “Loan me a few shekels until the barley harvest.”

Still, I'd like to see those who insist that we must all keep the letter of the Torah in order to work our way into Yahweh's good graces toe the line on this one. They're generally all too happy to abstain from pork, wear the *tsitzit*, and worship on the seventh day—and deride those who don't. But loaning freely and then turning around and forgiving the debts just because a date on the calendar has passed is generally considered to be too much to ask. Sorry, guys. You can't have it both ways. Even Maimonides, who weasels out of the underlying principle in favor of the letter of the Law every chance he gets, has this one right.

It's the underlying principle, of course, that runs no risk of being rendered obsolete by changing times and cultural shifts. It's the underlying principle that will endure forever with “every jot and tittle” intact. In the case of the Law of the Sabbatical Year, the principle is that the day is coming when all who belong to Yahweh will be forgiven their debts and freed from their chains.

- (218) *Do not demand return of a loan after the Sabbatical year has passed. “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called Yahweh's release.”* (Deuteronomy 15:1-2) Maimonides is extrapolating here, but okay, he's made a good point. A debt forgiven under this Law is not just postponed for a year. It's eliminated, erased from the books, permanently expunged. Yahweh holds no grudges. If he has forgiven our sins, they are indeed forgiven, past, present, and future, never to be remembered or used against us ever again. The only way this is possible is that the debts are not technically *forgiven*—rather, they're *paid off*. If a bank “writes off” a bad debt, the loss is eventually spread over the whole customer base in the form of higher interest rates (or if the government has absorbed the loss, in the form of a hidden tax called inflation). Everybody pays; everybody suffers. But in God's economy, the debt isn't written off. Rather, God's own Son has paid our debt Himself—paid it off in full with the most valuable commodity in existence, His own blood.
- (219) *Do not refrain from making a loan to a poor man because of the release of loans in the Sabbatical Year. “Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your*

heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,' and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to Yahweh against you, and it become sin among you. You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing Yahweh your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'" (Deuteronomy 15:9-11) We've already seen this passage in the context of taking care of the poor (#51). It should be an embarrassing indictment to the preachers of the "Health and Wealth" doctrine (i.e., that God wants all His followers to be rich and successful in every way, and if you're not, you haven't shown enough faith—*by giving generously so this TV ministry of ours might stay on the air; hallelujah, praise Jee-suzz*). In stark contrast with this sort of foolishness, Yahweh says, "**The poor will never cease from the land.**" Why does He allow some of His followers to suffer poverty while He blesses others with riches? It should be obvious by now: He wants those of us that He's blessed with this world's goods to give freely to His children without them, for by doing so, we are reflecting the attributes of the God whose mercy has been freely given to us.

In the context of the prophetic underpinnings of the Sabbatical Year, the lesson seems clear: as the time grows short, let us not cease to freely distribute the real wealth—the truth concerning the salvation Yahweh has made available to us. The "poor" in this case are those without this truth—the lost world. As with Yahweh's entire "welfare" program, the poor aren't forced to accept a handout. They are, rather, to be active participants in their own redemption. Belief is their prerogative. Remember, Yahweh never abridges our right to choose Him—or not to.

- (220) *Assemble the people to hear the Torah at the close of the seventh year.* "And Moses commanded them, saying: 'At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before Yahweh your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear Yahweh your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear Yahweh your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.'" (Deuteronomy 31:10-13) It's significant that a periodic public reading of the Torah—the whole shootin' match—was timed to coincide with the forgiveness and freedom wrought by the Law of the Sabbatical Year. And it's doubly significant that this rehearsal of the Law was to take place at the Feast of Tabernacles. Three separate concepts

have been woven together by the command of Yahweh—our release from debt, the Word of God that releases us, and the seventh and final miqra, prophetic of God’s promise to “tabernacle” or camp out among us for a thousand years upon the earth. The closer you look, the more seamlessly flawless the plan of God is shown to be.

But wait: it gets better. Remember back in Mitzvah #216 where we observed that Jubilee would begin on the Day of Atonement? If you’ve been keeping score, you’ve noticed that many of the same things are mandated for both the Sabbatical Year and Jubilee—the release from debt, freedom from servitude, the rest from our labors, and the miraculous provision of our needs by Yahweh (see #226 for the one exception). But with the association of the Sabbatical Year with the *Feast of Tabernacles*, as we see here, it becomes clear that Yahweh is implying a significant distinction.

In practice, by the time Jubilee rolled around (the year immediately following the seventh Sabbatical Year), there would have been precious little left to restore or forgive. Jubilee should seem like a mere continuation of the same blessed state of affairs. And that is precisely what we find in Yahweh’s prophetic program. After the thousand-year Millennial reign of Christ (beginning with the Feast of Tabernacles) the redeemed of God will move—after a few hiccups—directly into eternity. (The hiccups? Yahshua has a few last-minute details to take care of—the last of man’s rebellions, the Great White Throne judgment, and Satan’s final incarceration.) Whereas the Feast of Tabernacles (corresponding to the Sabbatical Year) is prophetic of God dwelling with man during the Millennium, the Day of Atonement (corresponding to Jubilee) speaks of the forgiveness of sin—that which enables us to dwell forever in sweet fellowship with our God in His new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem. Like the scapegoat of old, our transgressions will have been eternally banished. And we shall at last be holy, separated *from* our sin and separated *to* our Heavenly Father.

- (221) *Count the years of the Jubilee by years and by cycles of seven years. “You shall count seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven sabbaths of years shall be to you forty-nine years. Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants.”* (Leviticus 25:8-10) Here we see the timeline of Jubilee. Presumably commencing when the children of Israel entered the Land of Promise (verse 2) they were to keep track of time in

“septades,” cycles of seven years—six years of regular activity followed by one “Sabbatical” year in which the land was to rest, etc. After seven of these seven-year cycles, an extra Sabbath year, called *yobel* or Jubilee, would be celebrated. Thus as we reckon time in terms of decades and centuries in our culture, the Hebrews related to the passing of years in terms of septades and Jubilees. The last Jubilee celebrated in Israel was at the beginning of Bar Kochba’s revolt, in 133 A.D. This, of course, means that 33, the year of Yahshua’s passion, was also a Jubilee year.

Yahweh has never forced mankind to believe in Him. He has always arranged things so that trust was an essential element in the formation of a relationship with Him. To do otherwise would abridge our ability to choose to love Him, and that’s what He desires—fellowship with people who have *chosen* to love Him, who *want* to be with Him. This explains why He has been somewhat coy in communicating His plan of redemption to us. If he left us no intellectual or emotional wiggle room, we would have no choice but to accept Him. So He used metaphors, pictures, types, symbols, and dress rehearsals to demonstrate His plan: they’re available, even obvious, to honest and diligent seekers after truth, but opaque and mysterious to those who don’t really care. The pattern of sevens we see here is ubiquitous in scripture, from God’s description of creation in Genesis to the bowl judgments of Revelation. The number seven (including sevenfold, sevens, and seventh) occurs over 600 times in scripture, more than any other number. To dismiss the recurrence of the six-plus-one pattern as coincidence is therefore highly presumptive.

But what does it mean? I can’t claim to have all the answers, but it seems obvious and unavoidable to me that Yahweh is telling us (those who will listen) that He has ordained seven thousand years as the time of man upon the earth—that is, seven thousand years will pass from the fall of Adam to the Last Judgment. In other words, His plan of redemption will take seven thousand years to unfold. And the six-one split? For the first six thousand years, God will reveal Himself primarily through the pictures and symbols I mentioned earlier. But during the seventh Millennium, He Himself will dwell on earth among us, reigning as King of kings. Where we used to live by faith, we will then live by sight, for God will dwell among us.

It’s conceivable, of course, that I’ve missed the whole point, that there’s some other explanation. But if I’m right, you should be aware that the seventh millennium is due to begin on the Feast of Tabernacles, a Sabbath, October 8, 2033.

- (222) *Keep the Jubilee year holy by resting and letting the land lie fallow. “...It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family. That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee to you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of its own accord.”* (Leviticus 25:10-11)
 In this respect, as with so many others, Jubilee is just like any Sabbatical year. The point is that Yahweh has provided what’s needful *beforehand*. It’s up to the child of Israel to recognize the bounty of God during the six normal years, putting a portion of the produce of the land aside for the Sabbath year. It’s up to Yahweh to make sure what was set aside is sufficient for the Israelite’s needs when he can no longer work. Clearly, this is all a picture of God’s plan of salvation. We rely on Yahweh’s Messiah for our redemption; Yahweh makes His sacrifice sufficient for us.
- (223) *Do not cultivate the soil nor do any work on the trees, in the Jubilee Year. “That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee to you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of its own accord, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine.”* (Leviticus 25:11) This is basically the negative permutation of the previous mitzvah. The rules apply equally to fields, orchards, groves, and vines: don’t plow, don’t plant, don’t prune, don’t harvest, and don’t gather. When you’ve reached the Sabbatical year (read: the Millennium) or the year of Jubilee (read: the eternal state), it’s too late to cultivate a relationship with Yahweh, or harvest the fruit of the Spirit. You will have already made your choice (during the “normal” years) to trust Him or not.
- (224) *Do not reap the aftermath of the field that grew of itself in the Jubilee Year, in the same way as in other years. “That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee to you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of its own accord, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine.”* (Leviticus 25:11) If this Jubilee precept sounds like déjà vu all over again, it’s because we’ve already seen the identical mitzvah when discussing the Sabbatical year (see #214). The point is, Yahweh’s lessons for mankind are practically identical for Jubilee and the Sabbatical year: it’s too late to start trusting God after the big day has arrived. The minor difference we see are due to the fact that during the Millennium, there will still be mortal, earthbound populations—the progeny of the Tribulation believers who somehow made it through to the end alive—in addition to the immortals, those who, whether dead or alive, were gathered together with their Savior on rapture day. In the eternal state, however, *every* believer will inhabit his immortal, incorruptible, resurrection body (see I Corinthians 15).
- (225) *Do not gather the fruit of the tree in the Jubilee Year, in the same way as in other years. “That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee to you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of its own accord, nor gather the grapes of your untended*

vine.” (Leviticus 25:11) Yeah, like I said, trees, vines, fields—it’s all the same metaphor. Aren’t you glad Maimonides made a separate and distinct “law” out of this? We might have missed it altogether.

(226) *Grant redemption of the land in the Jubilee year.* **“The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me. And in all the land of your possession you shall grant redemption of the land.”**

(Leviticus 25:23-24) This is the sole functional difference between the Sabbatical year and Jubilee: “leased” land did not revert to its original owners at the end of the Sabbatical year. This only happened at Jubilee. Therefore, it behooves us to determine what the land symbolized. To me, it can mean only one thing in the grand scheme of things: the land symbolized the earth itself—the whole world. It is our inheritance, to be sure, but **“The earth is Yahweh’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.”** Beyond that, we, through the sin of our father Adam, “sold” the earth to Satan back in the Garden of Eden. Through the law of Jubilee, Yahweh is arranging for us to get it back, to reclaim our inheritance. In case you haven’t noticed, Satan hasn’t been a very responsible tenant for the last six thousand years. And in anticipation of Yahshua’s return, he intends to trash the place even more than he already has.

Now, here’s the scary part. Satan’s time *isn’t* up when Christ returns to reign in glory. He’ll still have a thousand years left to go before his lease expires. That’s the bad news. The good news is that his lawlessness has finally caught up with him, and he’s going to prison for the duration of his lease. When he gets out, however, he’s going to go right back to his old tricks, deceiving the nations and unifying them in battle against Yahshua and His people—it’s the battle of Magog all over again; with the same results, I might add (see Revelation 20:7-9). Only then will Satan’s “lease” be up, and he will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 20:10).

The Law of Jubilee teaches us that our spirits won’t be the only thing in creation that God will redeem. He will also buy back the very earth beneath our feet.

Chapter 7

The Rule of Law

Back in Chapter 3, we took a quick glance at what Paul had to say about the Law in his letter to the Romans. Now let's return to the passage and take a closer look. The Apostle has just pointed out that death came to our race through Adam's sin, but the gift of God's forgiveness came to us through the single "righteous act" of Yahshua's sacrifice—an act capable of overcoming the death we inherited from Adam. In other words, grace outweighs sin; mercy outweighs justice. So where our sins proliferated (as demonstrated in our failure to keep the Law) God's grace flourished even more. **"Well then," he says, "should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more kindness and forgiveness? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? Or have you forgotten that when we became Christians and were baptized to become one with Christ Jesus, we died with him? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives...."** Dead people are not required to keep the laws of the land (obeying the speed limit, paying income taxes, and so forth). Therefore, if we have "died" with Yahshua (positionally and metaphorically), we are no longer required to keep the Law, either. But that's a big "if." It implies that those who have *not* "become one with Christ Jesus" are still bound to keep the Law—whether the Law of Moses or the Law of conscience. And as we've seen, nobody has ever done that: *all* have sinned; *all* fall short of the glory of God.

Paul continues the thought. **"Since we have been united with Him in his death, we will also be raised as he was."** Not only will we be raised, we'll be raised without the sin nature we inherited from Adam. **"Our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin."** In a very real sense, only death can separate us from sin's power, from the requirements of the Law. But through Christ, we can avail ourselves of the advantages of death (like ridding ourselves of sin) without all the unpleasant side effects. **"And since we died with Christ, we know we will also share his new life. We are sure of this because Christ rose from the dead, and He will never die again. Death no longer has any power over Him. He died once to defeat sin, and now He lives for the glory of God. So you should consider yourselves dead to sin and able to live for the glory of God through Christ Jesus...."** Ah, there's the rub. Yes, we've died with Christ *positionally*, but as long as we walk the earth, we're still trapped in the same old sin-prone carcasses. It's as if our souls are being pulled one way by our spirits (that part of us that was born anew when we received God's gracious gift), and at the same time they're being pulled back toward the world by our bodies (that part of us that was born with Adam's sin nature). In terms Moses

would relate to, we've left Egypt, but we haven't yet entered the Promised Land. It's up to us to *choose* which part of our nature we want to prevail—the body, or the spirit.

Which part of our nature will prevail? Look at it this way: who would be more likely to make it to the defensive line of an NFL football team, a corn-fed Midwestern farm boy, or an Ethiopian famine victim? The nature that prevails is the one that gets fed. If we're smart, we'll nourish the spirit and starve the flesh. Paul offers us this encouraging admonition: **"Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to its lustful desires. Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning. Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you are no longer subject to the law, which enslaves you to sin. Instead, you are free by God's grace."** (Romans 6:1-14 NLT) It's a conscious decision we all have to make—every moment of every day.

In a way, it's not helpful to know that our sins are forgiven, past, present, and future. It makes it hard to keep our guard up, to maintain our vigilance against sin. After all, if our future shortcomings are forgiven already, who cares if we let our bodies become "tools of wickedness?" Paul, of course, recognizes this obvious conundrum, and reminds us that there's more than our eternal destiny at stake here. We also need to be cognizant of our walk and our witness—and the fact that whoever we serve is *de facto* our master. **"So since God's grace has set us free from the law, does this mean we can go on sinning? Of course not! Don't you realize that whatever you choose to obey becomes your master? You can choose sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God and receive his approval. Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you have obeyed with all your heart the new teaching God has given you. Now you are free from sin, your old master, and you have become slaves to your new master, righteousness. I speak this way, using the illustration of slaves and masters, because it is easy to understand. Before, you let yourselves be slaves of impurity and lawlessness. Now you must choose to be slaves of righteousness so that you will become holy...."** Unfortunately (sort of) the total cessation of sin is not an inevitable byproduct of our salvation—not while we're still walking around in these mortal bodies. We still have to *choose* whom we're going to serve in this life, moment by moment. (It's not *really* unfortunate, of course. Choice is our primary legacy: it's what makes us human, made in the image of God. But don't you sometimes wish that you had only *one* choice to make (to love Yahweh), and after that you could let your guard down and relax a little? Alas, it's not the way we're built. As long as we're mortal, life is full of choices.)

Paul illustrates by reminding us of what our lives used to be like. **"In those days, when you were slaves of sin, you weren't concerned with doing what was right. And what was the result? It was not good, since now you are ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. But now you are free from the power of sin and have**

become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:15-23 NLT) At first glance, this seems to be implying we are expected to walk flawlessly from the moment we give our lives to Christ. But look closely: he doesn't say we become perfect instantaneously. Rather, "those things" we now do *lead* to holiness. Paul recognizes that the job is not completed at the beginning but at the end. We've all got to run our race; it's not over until we cross the finish line. And life is not a sprint—it's a cross country steeplechase: we're going to fall down now and then.

If life is a race we must run, then the end of that race—the finish line—is death. Once we've crossed the finish line, there are no more hurdles to clear, no more long uphill stretches to struggle through. The amazing thing about God's grace is that here, *now*, while we're still in the middle of our race, He counts our performance as if we had already finished—and finished well: He has already declared us winners. How can this be? Paul explains: **"Now, dear brothers and sisters—you who are familiar with the law—don't you know that the law applies only to a person who is still living? Let me illustrate. When a woman marries, the law binds her to her husband as long as he is alive. But if he dies, the laws of marriage no longer apply to her. So while her husband is alive, she would be committing adultery if she married another man. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law and does not commit adultery when she remarries."** What has happened? Through our association with Yahshua's sacrificial death, He has freed us from the constraints of the Law. He has finished our race for us. **"So this is the point: The law no longer holds you in its power, because you died to its power when you died with Christ on the cross. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, you can produce good fruit, that is, good deeds for God."** There is a subtle truth here that we should not skip over: our "fruit" (that is, the things we do) is only "good" if we are united with the risen Messiah. The exact same deed can be either righteous or worthless in God's eyes, depending upon whether it was done within, or outside of, a relationship with Yahweh. An unbeliever who gives money to his favorite charity earns no brownie points with God, even if his contribution has helped someone.

"When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced sinful deeds, resulting in death. But now we have been released from the law, for we died with Christ, and we are no longer captive to its power. Now we can really serve God, not in the old way by obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way, by the Spirit." (Romans 7:1-6 NLT) Serving God is the objective. Although many would deny it, that's a universal facet of the human condition. Our "gods," however, are not always the real thing. If you're a drunk, you serve your god alcohol; if you're a Muslim, you serve your god Allah (who looks an awful lot like Satan); if you're a homosexual, you serve your lifestyle; if you're a "religious" person, you might find yourself serving the church, or a set of rules, or

a substitute savior like the Virgin Mary or some charismatic religious personality—instead of Yahweh. If you ask an observant Jew, he'll tell you he serves God by keeping the Law. But the Law he's attempting to "keep" is (as this study is revealing) merely a twisted and pale caricature of what Yahweh actually instructed. In the end, serving God can only be done in the Spirit, by dying to the world and the Law and human effort and our very selves—and becoming alive to Yahweh through the life of the risen Yahshua.

The Torah, then, can't in itself save us. It can only point out how badly we're failing. That doesn't mean it's worthless; it only shows that it was never *designed* to save us. I have a toaster in my kitchen. It makes toast just the way I like it. But it doesn't wash my dishes or keep my milk cold. It only makes toast, and I use it and "respect" it for doing that for which it was designed. I don't stop using it just because it won't vacuum my floors. The Law is like that. It is a wonderful tool for revealing the mind of God to us. But it was designed neither to save nor to rule over us. The Law is a gift of insight and priceless information. If we use it and respect it as Yahweh intended, we will live richer, more enlightened lives. If we ignore it because we think it's obsolete or ineffectual, we ignore the very word of God, and that's not very smart.

The Torah covers more than lofty theological issues. It also condescends to teach us how Yahweh feels about the little things, the intimate facets of our lives, through the most mundane details of human interaction. His Law shows us that God values fair play, justice, and honesty in our dealings with one another. As usual, we could pretty much just skip this section if we were able to master one basic principle: love one another.

THE COURT AND JUDICIAL PROCEDURE

(227) *Appoint judges and officers in every community of Israel.* **"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which Yahweh your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which Yahweh your God is giving you."** (Deuteronomy 16:18-20) God knew that when His people had settled in the Land, disputes would arise from time to time. He therefore instructed that in any settlement big enough to have a city wall and a "gate" where the men of the place could come to discuss their issues,

judges and officers would be appointed to settle these issues. A judge (Hebrew: *shaphat*) is one who pronounces sentence (either for or against); by implication he is one who vindicates or punishes. An officer (*shoter*), properly speaking, is a scribe, who would function in this case as a magistrate of the court. So the first thing we see is that Yahweh is requiring that lawful justice be readily available to all. Vigilante justice—doing what is right in your own eyes, taking the law into your own hands—was not to be practiced in Israel. These judges and officers would be chosen not by God but by the people of their cities: “*You shall appoint...*” It would thus behoove the citizens to choose their judges wisely.

Moses gives the simplest of instructions to the judges and officers: they were to judge fairly, justly, without being influenced by conflicts of interest. Bribes of any kind were strictly forbidden, including the subtle or hidden pressures to pervert justice—family relationships, wealth, or social influence. They were not to show partiality, but were to judge strictly on the facts of the case and the Law of God.

- (228) *Do not appoint as a judge a person who is not well versed in the laws of the Torah, even if he is expert in other branches of knowledge. “...So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and knowledgeable men, and made them heads over you, leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, leaders of tens, and officers for your tribes. Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, ‘Hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man’s presence, for the judgment is God’s.”* (Deuteronomy 1:15-17) In this passage, Moses is recounting how and why judges and officers were originally appointed among the Israelites in the days following the exodus. (See Exodus 18:13-26. Interestingly, the original idea of “regional” judges was not Yahweh’s but Jethro’s—Moses’ father-in-law. It’s pretty clear that God likes it when we think creatively within the framework of His truth.) The permanent judicial system outlined in #227 is an outgrowth and extension of this system.

All Israelites were to be well versed in the Torah, being steeped in its truths from childhood. So there is a subtle perversion in the rabbinical mitzvot here. Knowledge of God’s Law was never intended to be the domain of the privileged few, the “ruling class” for whom divine knowledge brought power, wealth, and prestige. Granted, certain men are naturally more gifted in wisdom and discernment (the ability to perceive the truth of a judicial case) than others, and it was these who were to be

selected as judges. But *everyone* was supposed to know the Torah backward and forward. I can't honestly say I disagree with Maimonides' mitzvah, because it's patently good advice. But it's man's wisdom, not God's instruction: Yahweh never actually said this.

- (229) *Adjudicate cases of purchase and sale.* **"In this Year of Jubilee, each of you shall return to his possession. And if you sell anything to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor's hand, you shall not oppress one another. According to the number of years after the Jubilee you shall buy from your neighbor, and according to the number of years of crops he shall sell to you. According to the multitude of years you shall increase its price, and according to the fewer number of years you shall diminish its price; for he sells to you according to the number of the years of the crops. Therefore you shall not oppress one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am Yahweh your God."** (Leviticus 25:13-17) "Adjudicate" is not a word we use much anymore. It means: "to sit in judgment; to give a judicial decision." The context of the supporting passage for this mitzvah, however, doesn't even suggest a judicial party or arbitrating authority who's supposed to be in charge of setting prices. Am I reading too much into this, or do we have another rabbinical power grab going on here?

I'm sure you'll recognize this as part of the Law of Jubilee. All Yahweh is saying is that the value of the piece of land being "sold" should be based on the number of years left (or more to the point, the number of crops it will yield) until Jubilee, for at that time it will revert back to its original owner. The passage refers only to land, not to other items or commodities that might be purchased, and Yahweh makes it quite clear that there is no such thing as a land "purchase" or "sale" in theocratic Israel—there are only leases. No "adjudication" is called for; this is a matter of private agreement between the lessee and the lessor. See Mitzvot #210-226 for a more complete discussion of the Laws of the Sabbatical Year and Jubilee.

- (230) *Judge cases of liability of a paid depositary.* **"If a man delivers to his neighbor money or articles to keep, and it is stolen out of the man's house, if the thief is found, he shall pay double. If the thief is not found, then the master of the house shall be brought to the judges to see whether he has put his hand into his neighbor's goods. For any kind of trespass, whether it concerns an ox, a donkey, a sheep, or clothing, or for any kind of lost thing which another claims to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whomever the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor. If a man delivers to his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep, and it dies, is hurt, or driven away, no one seeing it, then an oath of Yahweh shall be between them both, that he has not put his hand into his neighbor's goods; and the owner of it shall accept that, and he shall not make it good. But if, in fact, it is stolen from him, he shall make**

restitution to the owner of it. If it is torn to pieces by a beast, then he shall bring it as evidence, and he shall not make good what was torn.” (Exodus 22:7-13)

First, let us note that the supporting passage says nothing about the depositary (the one to whom the goods were entrusted for safe keeping) necessarily being *paid*, although he could be. The issue here is trustworthiness, whether in a professional capacity or not.

Here’s the scenario. Party A needs someone to look after his valuables, so he entrusts them to Party B (who in modern terms could be a banker, a house-sitter, a pet-groomer, a friend who has a little extra space in his garage or pasture—any number of things). Alternately, Party B temporarily needs something Party A has, so Mr. A either loans or rents the necessities to Mr. B. But then Party A’s belongings get stolen or damaged while they were in Party B’s custody. Who’s responsible? Who makes up the loss? It depends.

In cases of theft, the thief must repay the owner double (see #275). The rub is, the thief isn’t always apprehended. There’s also a possibility that the theft is an “inside job,” that Party B himself has stolen it. It becomes a matter for the impartial judge to decide who is guilty. In cases of lost livestock (which was a primary concern to Moses’ immediate audience because livestock constituted most of the wealth), the evidence of the case had to speak for itself—if there was any. In the absence of any clear cut evidence, the trustee was required to swear an oath before Yahweh attesting to his innocence in the matter. It was presumed in this society that no one would perjure himself before God Almighty merely to steal a sheep. Too bad we can’t presume things like this any more.

The rules are pretty self-explanatory, and they’re the epitome of fairness. Revenge is not part of the formula, nor is the “rehabilitation” of the guilty party, but restitution is. It’s an eye opener to compare the Law of God to the alternative. In America, we throw an embezzler in prison, leaving the wronged party high and dry and costing the taxpayers a fortune. In Islam, he’d get his hand chopped off, a cruel and pointless waste of life. Yahweh’s instructions are practical, fair, and, in comparison with the alternative, merciful to both victim and perpetrator.

- (231) *Adjudicate cases of loss for which a gratuitous borrower is liable. “...But if, in fact, it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to the owner of it. If it is torn to pieces by a beast, then he shall bring it as evidence, and he shall not make good what was torn. And if a man borrows anything from his neighbor, and it becomes injured or dies, the owner of it not being with it, he shall surely make it good. If its owner was with it, he shall not make it good; if it was hired, it came for its hire.”* (Exodus 22:12-15) This is a continuation of the previous mitzvah. At its

heart, the principle is that a man shall be held responsible for things that are entrusted to his care, but not for events that are entirely outside his control. Negligence is penalized; misfortune is not. Dishonesty is punished; bad luck is forgiven. And there's another principle: with profit comes risk. A man who rents out his team of oxen is less likely to be entitled to restitution if one gets hurt than a man who loans his neighbor his team with no thought of profit. In the end, though, each case had to be weighed on its own merit. That's why it was so important to choose wise judges.

- (232) *Adjudicate cases of inheritances.* **“If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father’s brothers. And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the relative closest to him in his family, and he shall possess it. And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, just as Yahweh commanded Moses.”** (Numbers 27:8-11) As we will see in so many of the mitzvot in this section, no judge is necessary to “adjudicate” what is being instructed here. The customs concerning inheritance were well established: the estate was normally to be divided among the sons, with the firstborn receiving a double portion—even if the firstborn was the son of an unloved wife (remember Leah?). See Deuteronomy 21:17. The Numbers passage describes the order of succession in those rare cases where the father had no sons. The main idea was to keep the land in the family, so it would go to the nearest relative—starting with the man’s daughter. (Daughters were not second-class citizens in Israel. Yahweh took care of them. But normally, they would marry men who had received inheritances of their own.)

Why was all this so important to Yahweh? The law of inheritance was designed to keep the land in one family generation after generation, and we've already seen in the law of Jubilee that lands could not permanently change hands. The Land, one's inheritance, is symbolic of our salvation, our eternal life. It is a gift from God. But the children do not take possession of the inheritance until the father dies. Thus the inheritance of the land is a metaphor for Yahshua's death enabling us to come into our inheritance of everlasting life—a legacy that's guaranteed. Just as the Land belongs to Yahweh and He gave it to Israel as a permanent possession, life itself is Yahweh's as well, and He gives it as a permanent possession to those who choose to abide in Him.

- (233) *Judge cases of damage caused by an uncovered pit.* **“And if a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls in it, the owner of the pit shall make it good; he shall give money to their owner, but the**

dead animal shall be his.” (Exodus 21:33-34) In another example of Yahweh’s practical fairness in all things, here is God’s take on negligence. “You break it, you bought it,” or words to that effect. Looking on the bright side, though, the negligent landowner got to keep the carcass. He couldn’t eat it, however, even if it was kosher (oxen were, donkeys weren’t). As we saw in Mitzvah #156, animals that died by accident could be sold to gentiles, but they weren’t to be consumed by Jews. Bottom line: don’t create conditions that are potentially hazardous.

There is a spiritual application as well, if only we’ll bother to look for it. We should be careful not to place “stumbling blocks” before our brothers. If what we do in the name of “Christian liberty” creates a pitfall for him, a crisis of conscience, we just might find ourselves with his spiritual carcass on our hands.

- (234) *Judge cases of injuries caused by beasts.* **“If one man’s ox hurts another’s, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide the money from it; and the dead ox they shall also divide. Or if it was known that the ox tended to thrust in time past, and its owner has not kept it confined, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead animal shall be his own.”** (Exodus 21:35-36) Here is another facet to the law of negligence, this time requiring a judgment call: was the offending ox a *repeat* offender? And if so, did its owner make any provision for keeping it where it couldn’t cause any damage? Responsibility is based upon what the owner knew (or should have known) and what he did with that knowledge. Every parole board member should have these words engraved in his mind. For they are responsible for the “dumb brute beasts” they release upon an unsuspecting society. Beyond that, there are a myriad of modern practical applications. Has your pet dog shown aggressive tendencies? Are you driving a car with bad brakes or worn tires? Do you send your children to school *knowing* that they’re coming down with a cold? Your knowledge of potential problems makes you responsible to prevent them from becoming real ones. Yahweh is not impressed with what you consider convenient or easy; He’s only concerned with what’s right.
- (235) *Adjudicate cases of damage caused by trespass of cattle.* **“If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed, and lets loose his animal, and it feeds in another man’s field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard.”** (Exodus 22:5) You are responsible for the actions of the things you own. Israel, of course, was an agrarian society, so the principle was couched in agricultural terms—cattle, sheep, and goats getting out and eating the neighbors’ crops. Note that Yahweh said that the offending animal’s owner was to repay his neighbor with the *best* of his produce.

Our neighbor must never be allowed to suffer loss because of our negligence.

- (236) *Adjudicate cases of damage caused by fire.* **“If fire breaks out and catches in thorns, so that stacked grain, standing grain, or the field is consumed, he who kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.”** (Exodus 22:6) Another corollary to the law of responsibility is seen here. Fire is inherently dangerous and prone to accidental spreading. True, there are perfectly legitimate reasons for starting them, but the one who does so is responsible for keeping it under control. Negligence can cause sweeping destruction and even loss of life. Yahweh makes it clear that accidental or not, losses caused by runaway fires must be paid by the one who set the fire in the first place. Restitution is not to be borne by the victim of a negligent act, and certainly not by the victim of arson.

It is not without cause that the tongue is compared in scripture to a flame. A word once spoken is as hard to contain as a prairie fire in a stiff breeze. A rumor whispered in the ear can ruin lives and destroy homes. And make no mistake, Yahweh holds us responsible for what we say: **“He who kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.”**

- (237) *Adjudicate cases of damage caused by a gratuitous depositary.* **“If a man delivers to his neighbor money or articles to keep, and it is stolen out of the man’s house, if the thief is found, he shall pay double. If the thief is not found, then the master of the house shall be brought to the judges to see whether he has put his hand into his neighbor’s goods.”** (Exodus 22:7-8) We’ve already looked at this concept (see Mitzvah #230). The rabbis are trying to draw a distinction between determining liability and assessing damage—a distinction that isn’t really there in scripture. As before, we see that the guilty party is to make reparations over and above (double in this case, as many as four or five-fold in certain others) what was taken; the victim is not to be left holding the bag. This is one of the cases where the judges (see Mitzvah #227) would be called upon to weigh the evidence and render a verdict as to the guilt or innocence of the trustee.
- (238) *Adjudicate other cases between a plaintiff and a defendant.* **“For any kind of trespass, whether it concerns an ox, a donkey, a sheep, or clothing, or for any kind of lost thing which another claims to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whomever the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor.”** (Exodus 22:9) This is the kind of thing that caused the whole judicial system to be set up in the first place (Exodus 18:13-26)—minor disputes between individuals that the people were bringing before Moses to decide upon. The judges that he appointed (a body which eventually morphed into the Sanhedrin) were tasked with deciding who was innocent,

and who was lying. Frivolous lawsuits were probably kept to a minimum by the provision that the losing party—plaintiff or defendant—would have to pay double the value of the “bone of contention” to his neighbor.

It’s worth noting (again) that many of the provisions of the Law did not require the “adjudication” indicated in Maimonides’ version of things. They were cut and dried: *Your goat ate my grapes, so you’ll have to make good my losses*. Honesty and fair play were to be the normal state of affairs in Yahweh’s nation. Only in cases of honest dispute (*It wasn’t my goat—I think it was Yakob’s*) would the judges need to be called. It was never Yahweh’s intention to foster a litigious society forced to rely on an increasingly powerful judicial (read: rabbinical) class for esoteric interpretations of arcane points of law that only they were qualified to pontificate upon. It was supposed to be simple: *Love Me; love your neighbor*.

- (239) *Don’t curse a judge. “You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.”* (Exodus 22:28) That seems simple enough, but it’s not. Maimonides and his fellow rabbis were, of course, stressing the idea that *they*, being the self appointed “rulers of the people,” were not to be cursed. Their mitzvah is a self-serving expedient. But the supporting verse leads us to other conclusions, if we’re willing to look at what the words actually mean. *Who* is not to be cursed? The word translated “ruler” here is *nasi*, from a root meaning “to lift up.” It means “an exalted one, a king or sheik.” It’s usually translated “prince” in the KJV. The judges of Israel were never characterized as kings or exalted ones, however; they were supposed to judge the “small matters” (Exodus 18:22) that arose between the people. In contrast, the *nasi* was to (in the words of Jethro to Moses) “**stand before God for the people, so that you [i.e., Moses, the de facto *nasi*] may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do.**” (Exodus 18:19-20) That is the proper work of princes and presidents.

We saw way back in Mitzvah #3 that we aren’t to revile God—that is, to take Him lightly, bring Him into contempt, curse, or despise Him (Hebrew: *qalal*). The concept is obvious and ubiquitous throughout scripture. But perhaps we should take a closer look at the word “God” here. It’s the usual word for God, *Elohim*—the plural of a word (*Eloah* or *El*) that means god in a general sense, whether true or false. *Elohim* is translated as “God” 2,346 times in the Old Testament (the King James Version translates it “the gods” here, clearly an error). Four times, however, it’s translated “judges.” Significantly, all four are in this very passage, and they all clearly mean *human* judges, not Yahweh. For

example, a verse we looked at in the previous mitzvah says, “...the cause of both parties shall come before the judges [elohim]; and whomever the judges [elohim] condemn shall pay double to his neighbor.” (Exodus 22:9) Thus it’s possible, though I can’t be dogmatic, that there is a secondary meaning to “You shall not revile God” here: *You shall not take lightly, bring into contempt, curse, or despise a judge in Israel doing the work Yahweh appointed for Him.* Maybe the rabbis were right after all. *Maybe.*

- (240) *One who possesses evidence shall testify in court.* “If a person sins in hearing the utterance of an oath, and is a witness, whether he has seen or known of the matter—if he does not tell it, he bears guilt.” (Leviticus 5:1) There is apparently some object/subject confusion here. It’s a bit clearer in the NLT: “If any of the people are called to testify about something [i.e., a sin. Hebrew: *chata*] they have witnessed, but they refuse to testify, they will be held responsible and be subject to punishment.” The rabbis got the heart of this one right. Remember the Ninth Commandment, the one about bearing false witness? Yahweh is pointing out here that to withhold pertinent evidence is tantamount to lying under oath. Justice is perverted; the truth is compromised. In other words, when giving testimony, a truth suppressed is the same as a lie proclaimed. We are to give “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”
- (241) *Do not testify falsely.* “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:16) As I mentioned in the previous mitzvah, the Ninth Commandment points out Yahweh’s heart for justice. As stated in Micah 6:8, “He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does Yahweh require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” These three things—mercy, justice, and humility—are all interrelated. One who perverts justice by perjuring himself in order to condemn someone he hates has not only displayed a lack of mercy but has also proved his arrogance. He has in effect put himself in the place of God, who alone is qualified to judge us. In this world, Yahweh would rather let the guilty go free than see the innocent punished. (He’s promised to sort things out in the next, anyway.) Justice is tempered by mercy; it is perverted by pride.
- (242) *A witness who has testified in a capital case shall not lay down the law in that particular case.* “Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses; but one witness is not sufficient testimony against a person for the death penalty.” (Numbers 35:30) I’m not quite sure what Maimonides meant to say, but fortunately Moses is crystal clear. He makes a couple of points. First, murderers are to receive the death penalty. That’s not terribly politically correct in certain circles these days. Deal with it. If you’re against the death penalty for murderers, you disagree

with God. I don't know how *you* feel about knowingly contradicting Yahweh, but it would make *me* very uncomfortable.

On the other hand, nobody is to be found guilty of murder on the basis of only one person's testimony. Yahweh has thus built in safeguards against the abuse and misuse of the death penalty. Let's face it: perjury is easy. That's why Yahweh had to go out of His way to condemn it (see Mitzvah #241). Perjury in a murder case could *itself* lead to murder if only one witness was required in order to get a conviction. And as easy as perjury is, mistakes are even easier. Eyewitnesses, even honest ones, are not infallible. Evidence is preferable. But there was no such thing as forensic science until the last century or so. Yahweh made the maintenance of a just society as simple and foolproof as possible.

- (243) *A transgressor shall not testify.* **"You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice."** (Exodus 23:1-2) It seems like a pretty good idea—not requiring "a transgressor to testify." In fact, something very close to this thought is built into the American Bill of Rights, in Article V: "[No person] shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself." But the scripture cited to support the mitzvah says nothing of the sort. The rabbis have missed the point entirely.

Yahweh here is instructing us about "mob mentality." Having designed us, He knows that we are susceptible to suggestion and pressure. That's why He wanted us to keep His words before us at all times (see Mitzvah #21) Our emotions can be cleverly manipulated to turn us aside from the truth; and the same thing can be done at the group level—with disastrous results. Everything from the French Revolution to the latest South American soccer riot can be attributed to this destructive phenomenon. If you think about it, Yahweh is declaring that He's opposed to democracy. He's saying that the rule of the majority is not necessarily a good thing. He wants us to think for ourselves, to exercise the right of choice that He gave us, to come to our own conclusions based on evidence and logic. Following the crowd is the last thing He wants us to do. Well, maybe the *next-to-last* thing. The *last* thing would be to incite the crowd ourselves, circulating lies or offering testimony that's calculated to win us popularity or favor with the ruling elite. Tell the truth, He says, even if it's unpopular. We are to act like Elijah, not the prophets of Ba'al (see I Kings 17).

- (244) *The court shall not accept the testimony of a close relative of the defendant in matters of capital punishment.* **"Fathers shall not be put to death**

for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin." (Deuteronomy 24:16) Once again, the rabbis have extrapolated God's instruction until it no longer bears any resemblance to what Yahweh actually said. Even philosophically, the rabbinical mitzvah is in opposition to the general tenor of the Torah: they're saying, *don't give these "hostile witnesses" a chance to defend someone in whom they have a vested interest in acquitting.* God's rule is justice tempered with mercy, which would translate to: *give the defendant every opportunity to clear his name. He is to be considered innocent until proved guilty.* Sound familiar?

The supporting passage makes an entirely different point. No one is to be punished for the sins of others. This would have been crystal clear to the original audience—Israelites whose parents had all perished in the wilderness over the last 40 years because of their unbelief. This generation had not been a party to their fathers' rejection of Yahweh, so they had been preserved alive to enter and possess the Land. They would make their own choices, for better or worse.

The lessons extend into eternity. Adam's sin made us mortal, but each and every one of us has proved his own guilt by committing his own sins. Adam can't take the fall for us, nor can we through piety or prayer make good choices for our children. But wait a minute. Does this mean that our heavenly Father (in His human manifestation, Yahshua) couldn't have received the just punishment for *our* sins? No, for one very simple reason. Each of us, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, is guilty of our own crimes. We don't even have enough righteousness to help ourselves, never mind our parents and children. Only One who is sinless could be **"put to death for [His] children."** And that One is Yahshua.

- (245) *Do not hear one of the parties to a suit in the absence of the other party. "You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice."* (Exodus 23:1-2) As we saw in #243, and will again in #248, 249, and 250, Maimonides and his buddies have built an elaborate and reasonable-sounding list of rules out of a totally unrelated passage in the Torah. It's no doubt a fine thing to ensure that testimony is not delivered in secret, making it impossible to rebut. We should be able to face our accusers. That's why this very precept shows up in American jurisprudence. But it's not what Yahweh said. I've got no problem with making up rules and laws and instructions. But when the rabbis make their own rules and attribute them to God, I draw the line.

- (246) *Examine witnesses thoroughly.* “If you hear someone in one of your cities, which Yahweh your God gives you to dwell in, saying, ‘Corrupt men have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, “Let us go and serve other gods”’—which you have not known—then you shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock—with the edge of the sword.” (Deuteronomy 13:12-15) I’ll grant you, it’s never a bad idea to “inquire, search out, and ask diligently” when trying to determine the facts of a matter. But how could the rabbis see this and nothing more from the passage at hand? Moses is describing the most serious of matters—a city in Israel that has reportedly gone over to the wholesale worship of false gods (e.g. Laish, renamed Dan—see Judges 18). If that happened, their own countrymen were instructed to utterly destroy the place—buildings, livestock, valuables, the whole shebang. Nothing was to be taken, nothing kept. The cancer of false worship was to be cut out and eliminated. Needless to say, you didn’t want to make a mistake about something this drastic. *Oops, my bad. It was just some guy burning trash out in his field. Sorry we tore down your city and killed everybody. Won’t happen again, I promise.*

The lessons for us are a two-edged sword. First, don’t condemn a fellow believer of wrongdoing (as in I Corinthians 5) without rock-solid evidence. But conversely, don’t tolerate, accept, or compromise with any kind of false doctrine, even if it looks attractive and reasonable (like some of these phony-baloney mitzvot). Of course, you’ve got to be familiar with the real thing if you hope to be able to spot the counterfeits.

- (247) *Don’t decide a case on the evidence of a single witness.* “**One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.**” (Deuteronomy 19:15) The rabbis were right, as far as they went. The testimony of one witness is not enough to convict a man under Mosaic Law: two, or better, three are needed to establish the truth of eyewitness accounts. I get the feeling from Yahshua’s discussion of this principle (e.g. John 8:18) that the subsequent witnesses can be solid evidence, either documentary or forensic. For instance, He called on His detractors to search the Scriptures, for the Law and the Prophets offered testimony about Him.

But there was more to it. Eyewitnesses are not only prone to error, they have also been known to lie in order to gain an advantage. The passage goes on to describe the procedure to follow if conflicting testimony is given. “**If a false witness rises against any man to testify against**

him of wrongdoing, then both men in the controversy shall stand before Yahweh, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you. **Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.**" (Deuteronomy 19:16-21) In a very real sense, the witnesses are on trial, for they have the power, potentially, to punish a man unjustly. There is therefore more to the judges' job than merely ascertaining the truth. They must also determine whether the conflicting testimony was purposefully fraudulent—a "false witness"—or if it was the result of honest error (*He said the fleeing man was wearing a black coat, but the subject's was actually navy blue*). If the witness is found to have given dishonest testimony in order to intentionally shift blame to the defendant, the witness himself will receive the punishment he had sought to inflict upon his neighbor. It's a purposeful deterrent against perjury: **"Those who remain shall hear and fear."** I can't help but wonder if the guys who were recruited to testify against Yahshua (Matthew 26:59-62) thought about getting crucified?

- (248) *Give the decision according to the majority when there is a difference of opinion among the members of the Sanhedrin as to matters of law. "You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice."* (Exodus 23:1-2) This is one of those instances (thankfully rare—they usually just miss the point) where the rabbis' mitzvah is diametrically opposed to the scripture they've cited to support it. They're saying, *The majority opinion among us, the ruling elite of Israel, will become law*. It's the same system America uses, subject to the same abuses. And by the way, it's the same system the Sanhedrin used to condemn Yahweh's Anointed One to death—proving that it's an anathema to God. Yahweh is saying something completely different: *Don't follow the crowd, and don't lead them into falsehood, either. Seek truth, mercy, and justice, even if you're a lone voice crying in the wilderness*. Yahweh could care less about the majority opinion. In fact, He flatly stated that the majority is lost: **"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."** (Matthew 7:13-14)
- (249) *In capital cases, do not decide according to the view of the majority when those who are for condemnation exceed those who are for acquittal by*

only one. **“You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice.”** (Exodus 23:1-2) They’re saying a simple majority isn’t enough to condemn a man to death—you need at least two tie breakers. Sorry, guys. Wrong again. This is merely man’s flawed wisdom. In the case of the most significant trial in history, we know of only two dissenting (or was it *abstaining*) voices out of the seventy, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Clearly, the idea of majority rule has some holes in it. How many in that assembly were swayed by the vituperative attitude of Annas and Caiaphas? How many were nudged over the line by the false witnesses who were brought in to testify against Yahshua? How many were cowed into silence by the weight of peer pressure?

- (250) *In capital cases, one who had argued for acquittal shall not later on argue for condemnation.* **“You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice.”** (Exodus 23:1-2) This mitzvah is not only unscriptural, it’s stupid. The facts of criminal cases are not necessarily all apparent at the outset. Witnesses come forward, clues develop, and evidence surfaces. With each new development, an honest judge must reevaluate his position. He must critically evaluate each piece of evidence and each word of testimony, without being swayed by public opinion. As written, this mitzvah would tend to favor the accused (which is not in itself a bad thing); it shelters him from late-appearing evidence. But that is not the same thing as mercy—and it’s a long, long way from justice. I think in this world God would rather see a guilty man set free than an innocent man punished. However, the ideal is still justice tempered by mercy—a man being held responsible for his own crimes, but ultimately relying on Yahweh for his eternal redemption.
- (251) *Treat parties in a litigation with equal impartiality.* **“You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.”** (Leviticus 19:15) This is the first of three mitzvot the rabbis wrung out of this verse. Impartiality is a key to rendering justice, but exercising it is easier said than done. Prejudice (in the positive sense) comes in two basic flavors, unwarranted favoritism toward the underdog, or obsequious fawning over the rich, famous, or powerful. The first, especially in our liberal American society, follows some really convoluted logic: *the defendant is a poor, under-educated member of a minority group, so we should consider “society” as being at fault for any crimes he’s committed.* Dumb. The second is every

bit as twisted: *the defendant is famous, so “they” are trying to railroad him out of spite and jealousy.* “Stars” like O.J. Simpson, Kobe Bryant, and Michael Jackson seldom go to prison, no matter how much trouble they get into. Of course, there are negative counterparts to these two types of prejudice as well. Sometimes it’s *Hang the nigger on general principles* (excuse the epithet, but that’s how these people think) or *Wouldn’t you just love to see Martha Stewart get her comeuppance?* It’s all *wrong*, and God said so. **“In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.”** Let the evidence and testimony speak for itself, and don’t even consider the social status of the person being tried.

- (252) *Do not render iniquitous decisions.* **“You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.”** (Leviticus 19:15) This mitzvah is awfully broad and slam-dunk obvious, but okay. Don’t sin (commit iniquity) when making judicial decisions. That would imply warnings against partiality, against assumptions of guilt or innocence (rushing to judgment), and against failure or refusal to take pertinent evidence (whether positive or negative) into account. In America, we have a real problem with rules. Unless evidence was discovered, gathered, and transmitted in precisely the proper manner, a lawyer can easily get it thrown out of court—and in the process pervert justice. A word to the wise: Yahweh knows what’s going on, even if our courts refuse to see it. It’s a real shame the lady in the toga with the scales has a blindfold on. What we need is a system of justice that recognizes the truth when it sees it.
- (253) *Don’t favor a great man when trying a case.* **“You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.”** (Leviticus 19:15) Once again, a person’s social status, fame, prestige in the community, wealth, or good looks should not become a factor in determining their guilt or innocence. Let the facts of the case speak for themselves. The same principle holds true in sentencing: if an inner city gang member and a Wall Street millionaire commit the same crime, they should receive the same punishment.
- (254) *Do not take a bribe.* **“You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute. Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked. And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous.”** (Exodus 23:6-8) In a dispute between a rich man and a poor man, it’s obvious that only the rich man is in a position to offer a bribe to the judge in an attempt to swing the decision his way. So at its heart, this mitzvah is a practical corollary to

the previous one. Yahweh here relates conflicts of interest and the perversion of justice to *killing* the innocent—it's more serious in God's eyes than the mere theft of their meager resources. He reminds us that even if the bribe-taking judge lets the guilty man go free, He will not.

- (255) *Do not be afraid of a bad man when trying a case. "You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's."* (Deuteronomy 1:17)

This one has become a significant factor in American courtrooms. The gangster (whether crime boss, gang banger, wealthy industrialist, or powerful politician) goes on trial, only to let it be known in manners subtle or overt that whoever testifies against him is as good as dead. Witnesses, jurors, prosecutors, and judges all fall prey to this kind of pressure. Yahweh is calling for courage here—for the character to stand up for truth in the face of death threats.

I might add that the principle applies to the court of public opinion as well. We need to be willing to stand up and speak out against evil in the world wherever we find it. I'm not talking about cramming our personal opinions down everybody's throats, but refusing to tolerate real evil. The most blatant bully on the planet right now is Islam, a satanic religion whose scriptures demand that they kill or enslave every non-Muslim on earth as they gain the strength to do so—starting with Jews and Christians. Oil money is now giving them the power to do what they could only dream of in times past, and not just militarily. They have intimidated the media, hoodwinked the politicians, and bribed the universities until the truth about their deadly agenda is smothered under a mountain of fear and ignorance. But Yahweh says, **"You shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's."**

- (256) *Do not be moved in trying a case by the poverty of one of the parties. "You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute." (Exodus 23:3); "You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor." (Leviticus 19:15)* In the same way we should not show partiality to a man because of his wealth or fame, we are to be impartial toward everyone—even if they're poor and downtrodden. A person's wealth or poverty, fame or obscurity, power or insignificance has nothing at all to do with their guilt or innocence. There is no correlation. Poverty doesn't cause crime any more than wealth cures it, and *vice versa*.
- (257) *Do not pervert the judgment of strangers or orphans. "You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow's garment as a pledge. But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and Yahweh your God*

redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this thing.”

(Deuteronomy 24:17-18) Along the same lines we’ve seen in the past few mitzvot, those with no social standing or influence in the community are not to be denied justice because of their helplessness. They are not to be taken advantage of simply because they *can be*. In this case, Yahweh gave the Israelites a reason, though He certainly didn’t owe them one: He reminded them of their former status as exploited and oppressed slaves in Egypt, where the most “exalted” of them was a fourth-class citizen. There is no place for the pride of position in God’s economy. That, if you think about it, also forbids “religious” pride—the holier than thou attitude some are tempted to assume when confronted with the failures of others. Yahweh is reminding us that without His grace, we’re all slaves to sin.

It’s worth noting that this egalitarian system of justice Yahweh instituted was absolutely unique among nations at this time. Yes, there were degrees of wealth, power, and influence in Israel, but God’s instructions mandated that no one’s social condition was to have any bearing on the judgment of disputes that arose among them—either positively or negatively. Any semblance of this type of even-handed justice we enjoy today can be traced directly back to our Judeo-Christian heritage.

- (258) *Do not pervert the judgment of a sinner (a person poor in fulfillment of commandments). “You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute. Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked.”* (Exodus 23:6-7) As you can see, making sure sinners get the punishment that’s coming to them is *not* what Yahweh was talking about here. Boy, you’ve gotta watch these rabbis like a hawk. We’ve seen this passage before (and will again). It merely says that the poor are to receive justice like everybody else. The following verse (see #254) warns judges against taking bribes from the rich so they’ll rule against their poor adversaries in spite of testimony and evidence to the contrary.
- (259) *Do not render a decision on one’s personal opinion, but only on the evidence of two witnesses who saw what actually occurred. “Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked.”* (Exodus 23:7) I can’t imagine why this passage was quoted to support the mitzvah at hand. The rabbis are not incorrect but they could have picked better supporting evidence: **“One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.”** (Deuteronomy 19:15) Or how about **“Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two**

or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness.”

(Deuteronomy 17:6) Opinions are like chins: everybody’s got at least one. In themselves, they’re worthless in establishing the truth of a matter. *He strikes me as an unprincipled scalawag; he must be guilty of something.* Refraining from condemning someone on the basis of personal opinion (as opposed to hard evidence and multiple-eyewitness testimony) is an underlying tenet of this entire discussion.

- (260) *Do not execute one guilty of a capital offense before he has stood his trial. “You shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there. They shall be cities of refuge for you from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation in judgment.”* (Numbers 35:11-12) Numbers 35 describes the mechanism for dealing with murder in Israel. The guilty one was to be slain (yes, retribution: a life for a life) by an appointed “avenger” from the victim’s family. But to protect the “suspect” in cases of accidental manslaughter, cities of refuge were set up throughout the country. The killer would flee to the city of refuge, and he would then be tried to determine whether he was guilty or merely unfortunate: **“Anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there”** (verse 15). If found guilty, the killer was to be slain by the avenger (verses 16-21); the city would offer no protection. If not—that is, if he were responsible for a fatal accident or “wrongful death” but *not of murder*—then he had to stay and live in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest, after which time he was free to return to his home. This was as close to “jail” as the Hebrews got. It was more like house arrest. If the manslayer, however, left the city of refuge early, the avenger could legally take his life.

The point of the mitzvah is that the avenger could not slay the killer until his guilt had been established by the word of at least two witnesses at a legal trial held before the congregation—in other words, publicly. As usual, we see the instructions of God being fair, practical, and relatively simple—erring in practice on the side of mercy rather than retribution. It’s pretty obvious that Yahweh had a lesson for us in mind when he structured things this way. We—all of us—are the “defendants,” the manslaughterers. Yahshua is the one who was slain—by us, through our sins. Whether by accident or purposely remains to be seen. There were six cities of refuge, three in the Land of Promise, and three on the other side of the Jordan. If I’m reading the symbols correctly, I’d take that to mean these cities, these places of temporary refuge, are our mortal lives, six being the number of man. They are found on both sides of the Jordan, i.e., whether we’re Jews or gentiles, and whether we’re saved or lost.

Since we're all guilty of *something*, there are three ways this can end for us. First, if we have purposely “murdered” the Messiah through our blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, there is no safe place for us; our eternal doom at the hands of the Avenger (Yahweh) is assured. The “witnesses” against us, by the way, are Yahshua, His works, Yahweh, and His Word (see John 5:31-38). Second, if we are Son-of-Man-slayers, having slain the Messiah in our ignorance, but we leave the city of refuge (our mortal life) without being immunized from the Avenger’s wrath by the death of the High Priest (Yahshua), then we are similarly subject to destruction: we have voluntarily left our place of safety, for the pardon His death affords us is available to anyone. Third, if our sins have been removed from us by the death of our High Priest, then we may safely leave the city of refuge (this life) in the assurance that we can and will legally enter our inheritance—eternal life.

Somehow, I get the feeling Maimonides didn’t comprehend much of this.

- (261) *Accept the rulings of every Supreme Court in Israel. “If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which Yahweh your God chooses. And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment. You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which Yahweh chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you. According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you.”* (Deuteronomy 17:8-11) Although the error is subtle, this mitzvah is in reality just another unauthorized power grab on the part of the rabbis. Moses is describing what to do if an issue proves too difficult for the judges in the local community to decide. Wherever the Tabernacle and Ark of the Covenant were at the time, priests and Levites were there, tasked to attending to the liturgical needs of Israel, offering up their sacrifices, and so forth. As in any community, there were judges as well. (The “place which Yahweh chooses” moved about occasionally until David brought the Ark to Jerusalem and his son Solomon built the first Temple on Mount Moriah.) Yahweh, through Moses, is telling the people to bring their issues *directly to Him* to decide: the priests, Levites, and judges were not to decide these matters based on human wisdom, but were to enquire of Yahweh. That’s why their answers were binding on the participants in the dispute.

The Sanhedrin, or Supreme Court, of which Maimonides spoke did not come into existence until well into the second temple period. Consisting of seventy-one influential Jews, it was spoken of often in the New Covenant scriptures, where it was dominated by the Sadducees and chief priests. Indeed, it was this group that “tried” and convicted Yahshua of blasphemy—couching their verdict in terms of sedition for Roman ears so they could engineer His execution. Though the rabbis claimed that the line of *semicha* (the transmission of authority) descended in an unbroken line from Moses down to them, there is no scriptural evidence that this authority extended beyond Joshua. Maimonides and other medieval Jewish commentators asserted that although the line of *semicha* had been broken when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, the sages of Israel could promote *their own* candidate as the new *Nasi* (leader, literally: prince). *No need to bother “He-who-must-not-be-named” with these mundane details, right?* Further, they said, the one they picked would have *semicha*, and could pass it on to others—thus re-establishing the Sanhedrin. Like I said, this mitzvah is a naked power grab on the part of the rabbis.

But according to the Deuteronomy passage, the difficult issues needed to be decided not by politicians and religious teachers but by “**the priests, the Levites, and...the judge there...in that place which Yahweh chooses.**” You can’t just appoint yourself, or even train and prepare for the job; you have to be appointed by God—in the case of priests and Levites, you have to be *born* into it. And it’s not a position of power anyway—it’s a place of responsibility and service.

(262) *Do not rebel against the orders of the Court. “According to the sentence of the law in which they [the priests, Levites, and judges] instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you.”*

(Deuteronomy 17:11) This is merely the negative restatement of affirmative Mitzvah #261. I would only reiterate that Yahweh’s definition of “the court” and Maimonides’ description would differ somewhat. And that’s understandable. Israel made a fatal judgment error in 33 AD, and they haven’t understood a word Yahweh said ever since that time.

It’s fascinating, however, to note what Yahshua did with this passage when confronted with the judgment of the “Court” of his day. Without quibbling over the legality of the judicial assembly, He did precisely what is commanded here: He submitted to the decision of the Sanhedrin. They determined that He must die, so rather than defending Himself (which was well within His power, both verbally and angelically), He opened not His

mouth, but willingly picked up His cross and gave up His life so that we could live. He Himself had said that not the smallest letter of the Law would pass away until all of it was fulfilled. That had to include the parts that were “inconvenient” for Him. Like death.

INJURIES AND DAMAGES

- (263) *Make a parapet for your roof.* **“When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your household if anyone falls from it.”** (Deuteronomy 22:8) Because we are given a reason for the precept “make a parapet” in the Torah, we may safely extrapolate this principle to a general prohibition against creating unnecessary hazards that might endanger innocent bystanders. Yahweh is not advocating the idiotic American pipedream of creating a risk-free society, but merely of taking reasonable steps to ensure the safety of people in your sphere of influence. The definition of “reasonable,” of course, shifts with the available technology. There was a time when it was unheard of to put a taillight or a rear-view mirror on an automobile. Now seat belts (excuse me: technologically advanced passive occupant restraint systems), ABS brakes, and air bags are ubiquitous, and GPS navigation and infrared reverse-gear warning systems are making inroads. “Reasonable” is in the eye of the beholder.

Beyond controlling our environmental risks, however, we should also be on guard against bringing “guilt of bloodshed” upon ourselves through our *spiritual* negligence. In Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8, for example, Paul talks at length about how to avoid putting pitfalls and stumbling blocks in the way of our less mature believing brothers and sisters. Inevitably what is called for is some small personal sacrifice on our part—building a parapet, so to speak—designed to prevent our neighbors from falling down and hurting themselves. It’s not merely good manners; it’s the law.

- (264) *Do not leave something that might cause hurt.* **“When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your household if anyone falls from it.”** (Deuteronomy 22:8) Again, by making a separate negative mitzvah corresponding to a previous affirmative one, Maimonides has reminded us of the contrived nature of his Laws list—the self-conceived system of finding so many “do-this” precepts and so many “don’t-do-this” instructions, when a simple perusal of the Torah reveals literally *hundreds* of things he missed. So if you’re looking for commentary on Deuteronomy 22:8, see Mitzvah #263. If

you'll forgive me, I'm going to take off on a tangent. The subject: redundancy.

Any thoughtful person will admit that we've lost something of the meaning of our scriptures through the process of translation and the morphing of language over time. Cultural nuances have been lost; word meanings in the target languages have shifted; and translators have made (gasp!) mistakes. The classic biblical blunder is the consistent mistranslation of the divine name: Yahweh. Every popular English translation renders יהוה (YHWH) as "the LORD," not just once or twice, but 6,868 times in the Old Covenant scriptures! (Actually, there is evidence that Yahweh told us His name an even 7,000 times—the other 132 instances are places where Jewish scribes removed YHWH from the texts and replaced it with *adonay*, meaning lord.) *Words* should be translated. *Names*, however, should be merely transmitted (if the target language will accommodate them) or at worst, transliterated—making small phonetic adjustments to fit a new alphabet. But changing "Yahweh" (which literally means "I Am") to "the LORD" is neither—it is a blatant and misleading substitution of one thing for something completely unrelated. It is, to put it charitably, a mistake.

Systematic sabotage like that is rare, however. Usually, we get ourselves in doctrinal trouble by merely taking a sentence or a phrase out of context and mis-applying it. But the LORD—just kidding: *Yahweh*—built a failsafe system into His scriptures, the same one NASA uses when they design a Space Shuttle: redundancy. Every important truth in the Bible is explained twenty different ways in twenty different places. God will use different words to describe something, or He will employ a different symbol, metaphor, or prophetic dress rehearsal. If we are familiar with and receptive to the whole of scripture, we can't miss what Yahweh wanted us to know. There isn't a single essential doctrine in the New Testament that wasn't introduced and explained in the Old. That's why it's possible to come to a saving knowledge of the Messiah through nothing more than a tiny scrap of scripture from John or Paul's writings, and yet one can spend a lifetime studying the Scriptures and never really get to the bottom of it.

This type of back-up system redundancy is not what Maimonides and his fellow rabbis employed, however. Theirs was nothing but an annoying repetition of the same basic facts (or fables) restated as affirmative and negative propositions in order to arrive at a predetermined number of rules. *Oy vey.*

- (265) *Save the pursued even at the cost of the life of the pursuer. “If two men fight together, and the wife of one draws near to rescue her husband from the hand of the one attacking him, and puts out her hand and seizes him by the genitals, then you shall cut off her hand; your eye shall not pity her.”* (Deuteronomy 25:11-12)

The rabbis are on another planet here, but I’ll admit that the supporting passage for this mitzvah (and the next one) isn’t exactly easy. Most commentaries just skip over it. At first glance, it looks uncharacteristically harsh. As a matter of fact, this is the *only* instance in the Torah where physical mutilation was prescribed as punishment for an offense, though Yahweh’s law was unique in its restraint on the subject. (For example, Assyrian law said a man who kissed a woman who wasn’t his wife was supposed to get his lips cut off.)

Note that the Israelite wife wasn’t prohibited from defending her husband in general. There was no problem (in theory) against smashing hubby’s attacker over the head with a chair. Nor was this a thinly veiled euphemism for adultery (which carried its own penalty); it clearly describes something drastic done in the heat of a disagreement in order to gain the upper hand. A little word study might help us get to the heart of matter. The original Hebrew text includes the word *’ach* (brother or countryman), making it clear that the husband’s adversary is a fellow Israelite—thus potentially metaphorical for a fellow believer. The word translated “seize” (*chazaq*) doesn’t so much mean “to take or grab an object” as it is a denotation of seizing power. It means: “be strong, strengthen, conquer, become powerful, harden one’s defenses.” We need to realize that the precise scenario that’s pictured in this precept is extremely unlikely. In fact, not a single occurrence is recorded in the Bible. So to me at least, it’s pretty clear that Yahweh was using this hypothetical sequence of events to illustrate something that *does* happen on a fairly regular basis. Yahweh seems to be saying, “Don’t emasculate (metaphorically or otherwise) a fellow believer, even in the well-intentioned defense of what you hold dear. If you destroy his ability to have a fruitful ministry in the future merely to gain a temporary advantage now in some dispute, I will in turn remove your ability to manipulate and control your world. I have provided ways (see Mitzvot #227-252) to settle your disputes—you are not to take matters into your own hands.” At least, that’s what I think it means.

- (266) *Do not spare a pursuer; he is to be slain before he reaches the pursued and slays the latter, or uncovers his nakedness. “If two men fight together, and the wife of one draws near to rescue her husband from the hand of the one attacking him, and puts out her hand and seizes him by the genitals, then you shall cut off her hand; your eye shall not pity her.”* (Deuteronomy 25:11-12) *Huh?*

The rabbis have clearly taken the ball and run with it—out into left field. This mitzvah is merely the negative permutation of the one we just saw; in other words, it's very existence is pointless. See #265.

PROPERTY AND PROPERTY RIGHTS

- (267) *Do not sell a field in the land of Israel in perpetuity. “The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me.”* (Leviticus 25:23) As we saw in Chapter 6, this is part of the Law of Jubilee. Although the land was “given” to Israel, both in general terms (Genesis 12:7) and specific (Numbers 26-27 and Joshua 13-21), *ownership* of the land remained Yahweh's. Tribes were assigned their regions and individuals had custody of individual tracts of land, but they couldn't “sell” them in perpetuity, since they belonged to God. Rather, they could only “lease” them out to their neighbors, and then only for a limited period of time: until Jubilee. Automatic release of encumbered inheritances came once every fifty years—once in a lifetime, for all intents and purposes.

The symbols, in light of the rest of scripture, are patently obvious. Our inheritance is eternal life, but through our sin, we have fallen into spiritual poverty, “selling” our souls to Satan. But Yahweh has pre-arranged the opportunity for us to recover our inheritance, because after all, our lives (like the lands of the Israelites) are not really our own; we were redeemed with a price—the precious blood of Yahshua. So what happens when Jubilee comes? Some will accept the gift of Jubilee and retake possession of their inheritance, eternal life. But others will despise this once-in-a-lifetime chance and sell their souls back to Satan.

It is not without significance (nor is it a coincidence) that the crucifixion of Yahshua occurred in a Jubilee year, 33 AD. If my observations are correct, the day marking the fortieth Jubilee since His resurrection will coincide with His return in glory: the Day of Atonement, October 3, 2033. See my Appendix to *Future History* called “No Man Knows...” if you're interested in why I think so.

- (268) *Do not change the character of the open land about the cities of the Levites or of their fields. Do not sell it in perpetuity; it may be redeemed at any time. “If a man purchases a house from the Levites, then the house that was sold in the city of his possession shall be released in the Jubilee; for the houses in the cities of the Levites are their possession among the children of Israel. But the field of the common-land of their cities may not be sold, for it is their perpetual possession.”* (Leviticus 25:33-34) There were slightly different rules for the Levites (compared to the other tribes of Israel) which help us understand the bigger picture. Levites (that is, the tribe of Moses and

Aaron) were characterized as those whose inheritance was Yahweh Himself. Thus they were assigned no personal, temporal lands, but rather were given cities throughout Israel in which to live, in which they could “own” homes, and they had communal lands (not individual family plots) they could farm. Here we see that their homes could be leased to other Israelites, just like any property (again signifying their spiritual poverty through sin, and again redeemed at Jubilee), but their community fields could not be disposed of because they did not belong to any one individual, but to the tribe.

Levi as a tribe symbolically represents the true believers among God’s chosen people—either among Israel or the gentile *Ekklesia*, the wheat among the tares as it were. It’s not that the Levites were all “saved” while the others were not; they as a group are simply a picture, a symbol, of those who are. Thus though individual believers have an inheritance that needs to be redeemed, the “perpetual possession” of the inheritance (eternal life) of the saints *as a group* is secure.

(269) *Houses sold within a walled city may be redeemed within a year. “If a man sells a house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year he may redeem it. But if it is not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house in the walled city shall belong permanently to him who bought it, throughout his generations. It shall not be released in the Jubilee.”* (Leviticus 25:29-30) The rabbis missed the entire point here. *Any* piece of property could be redeemed—not only during the first year but *anytime*. Its redemption value would be determined by how much time had elapsed between one Jubilee and the next. The point here is that houses within walled cities weren’t really considered part of one’s inheritance. Thus there was a “grace period” of one year during which the original owner could exercise “seller’s remorse” and buy his house back for its full purchase price, but after that, the sale was finalized: permanent ownership passed to the buyer. The only exception to this rule was houses owned by Levites; theirs could be redeemed anytime and reverted automatically to their possession at Jubilee, because for them, their homes were their only temporal inheritance.

We should ask ourselves: what is the significance of a home’s location within or outside of a walled city? After all, houses *outside*, even if they were in established villages, were subject to the same Jubilee rules as any other property. Remember, this is all being addressed to an agrarian society: the distinction seems to be that houses in villages or in the countryside were assumed to be associated with plots of land upon which crops could be grown—fields, orchards, or vineyards. City houses were

not. Thus the issue is fruitfulness: the only meaningful inheritance is one that can be expected to bear fruit. Our inheritance as believers is the Spirit of Yahweh living within us, and its fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see Galatians 5:22-23). If we aren't enjoying this harvest, maybe it's because we've sold our inheritance.

- (270) *Do not remove landmarks (property boundaries). “You shall not remove your neighbor’s landmark which the men of old have set, in your inheritance which you will inherit in the land that Yahweh your God is giving you to possess.”*

(Deuteronomy 19:14) Landmarks delineated the boundaries of a family’s property—their inheritance. The Hebrew word for “remove” in this passage is *nasag*, which is indicative of retreat, not removal. So if a sneaky person (a *ganab*: see #274) wanted to reap a few more bushels of barley, he could conceivably move the boundary marker a few yards onto his neighbor’s side of the line—effectively stealing his land, his inheritance.

Therefore, it is equally incumbent on us not to encroach upon our neighbor’s spiritual inheritance—his eternal life. How could we do that? By retreating from the truth, by tolerating false and errant doctrines, by moving the landmarks of our faith: things like the deity of Yahshua, the unity of the godhead, the concept of salvation by grace alone. God’s scriptures determine the correct position of our doctrinal inheritance, but alas, much of today’s religious establishment (both Jewish and Christian) has gone into the business of “landmark removal,” the subtle shifting of what is presented as “God’s truth.” By the way, the rabbis can take no comfort in the idea that “men of old” have set the landmarks—a term they would be tempted to apply to themselves in a doctrinal sense. The word is *ri’shon* in Hebrew: it means “first in place, time, or rank.” (S) In other words, *Yahweh Himself* set up the landmarks of truth at the very beginning of our existence.

- (271) *Do not swear falsely in denial of another’s property rights. “You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.”* (Leviticus 19:11) Although the rabbis are certainly justified in condemning perjury, the verse supporting their mitzvah is far broader in scope. It is not restricted to property rights but is applicable to every facet of life among God’s people. In fact, this is but one example of how to fulfill the overall summary commandment of the passage, stated in verse 1: **“You shall be holy, for I, Yahweh your God, am holy.”** Holy (*qadosh* or *qodesh*) means set apart, consecrated, sacred; in other words, not common or profane. Thus one facet of being holy as Yahweh is holy is abstaining from theft, deception, and falsehood. Lest

you think that this is so obvious no one could possibly miss it, I hasten to point out that all three of these things were expressly authorized—even encouraged—in the Islamic scriptures.

Maimonides assigned separate mitzvot to each of these three things (see also #272 and #274), so it behooves us to look at the Hebrew roots for each of the prohibited activities. This is apparently the second of the list, translated “deal falsely” in the NKJV. The Hebrew word is *kahas* or *kachash*, a verb meaning: “to lie, to cringe, to deny. It means to deal falsely about something or with someone, the opposite of being truthful, honest. It is used of denying or disavowing something, of deceiving or lying to a person with respect to something. It naturally takes on the meaning of concealing something.... It takes on the meaning of cringing of fawning before the Lord.” (B&C) That’s right, folks, Yahweh *hates* the obsequious obeisance that so often passes for religious observance—He calls it a lie, and pointedly instructs us not to do it.

- (272) *Do not deny falsely another’s property rights.* **“You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.”** (Leviticus 19:11) Same precept, different mitzvah. This time Maimonides is focusing on: “lie to one another.” The Hebrew word is *saqar*—“a verb meaning to engage in deceit, to deal falsely. The notion of a treacherous or deceptive activity forms the fundamental meaning of this word. It is used to describe an agreement entered into with deceitful intentions; outright lying; and the violation of a covenant.” (B&C) A major part of “being holy as God is holy” is being forthright and truthful with people. Yahshua was described as a man in whom there was no guile.
- (273) *Never settle in the land of Egypt.* **“When you come to the land which Yahweh your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom Yahweh your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for Yahweh has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’”** (Deuteronomy 17:14-16) The rabbis have concocted a rule that isn’t really there in scripture (except in a metaphorical sense). In a delicious bit of irony, Maimonides himself, a Spaniard by birth, eventually settled in Cairo. What was he thinkin’? Anyway, the context shows that he wasn’t paying attention to the main point. Moses here is giving the people instruction concerning their future kings—instructions most Israelite monarchs blatantly ignored: don’t rely on your own military might (symbolized by horses bought from Egypt), and don’t make marriage

alliances (symbolizing compromise—see v.17) with the surrounding pagan nations.

We'll search the scriptures in vain for a prior prohibition against Jews ever re-settling in Egypt. What we do find is, **“According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do.”** (Leviticus 18:3) Egypt, as we have observed, is a consistent biblical metaphor for the world and its values. Israel was brought out of Egypt—they were set apart from the other nations, consecrated as Yahweh's holy people. So yes, they were not to “go back” to Egypt in the sense that they were not to return to the world's ways. But that one went right over Maimonides' head. One wonders if the twisting of God's precept here is an attempt to discredit Yahshua—who did indeed (as an infant) “settle” in Egypt for a short time. Hosea prophesied it, sort of: **“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.”** (Hosea 11:1) Not the most definitive of prophecies, but then again, prophecy seldom drops truth into your lap like ripe fruit—you have to climb the tree to get it.

Speaking of prophecy, one of the most indicting prophetic passages in the entire Bible speaks of “going back to Egypt.” If Israel did not keep Yahweh's precepts, He said, they would be warned, then chastised, then punished, and finally, if they did not repent, they would suffer unspeakable deprivations, all of which were totally avoidable. The very last thing on the list—the worst thing that could possibly happen, was, **“And Yahweh will take you back to Egypt in ships, by the way of which I said to you, ‘You shall never see it again.’ And there you shall be offered for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you.”** (Deuteronomy 28:68) It is my sad duty to report that this very thing happened to the Jews within a generation of the rejection and crucifixion of Yahshua—and as a direct result. Titus' Roman legions sacked Jerusalem in 70 AD. A million Jews died during the siege—600,000 of them from starvation. Josephus reports that 97,000 were shipped off to Egypt to be sold as slaves, creating such a glut in the market that their value fell to almost nothing. God had done *precisely* what He'd warned them He'd do if they rebelled, but the rabbis of Israel refused to see the connection between their crime and the punishment they received.

- (274) *Do not steal personal property.* **“You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.”** (Leviticus 19:11) This is the last of the series of three mitzvot wrung out of this one verse (also see #271 and #272). The first two had very similar meanings (don't lie or deal falsely), and as we'll see, this prohibition is far closer to the first two than the English translation “steal” would imply. The *Dictionary of Bible Languages with Semantic Domains* defines the verb *ganab* as to: “(1) steal, be a thief, i.e., take items without

permission by the owner, but usually by stealth and not force; (2) kidnap, i.e., seize a person for sale or servitude; (3) do secretly, i.e., act in a manner that is not publicly known; secretly steal into an area; (4) blow away, sweep away, i.e., a motion of the wind to make linear motion of an object; or (5) deceive, i.e., cause another to hold a mistaken view, and so wrongly evaluate a situation.” It’s clear, then, that the word’s emphasis is not on the taking, but on the sneaky manner in which the thief works. (*Ganab* can also be used as a noun: a sneaky thief.) Again, part of “being holy” is being straightforward, open, and honest with your neighbors.

- (275) *Restore that which one took by robbery.* “If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep. If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed. If the sun has risen on him, there shall be guilt for his bloodshed. He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double.” (Exodus 22:1-4) The verse that was cited by Judaism 101 to support this mitzvah (Leviticus 5:23) doesn’t exist, so I’ve taken the liberty of choosing an appropriate substitute. As we’ve seen before, restoration, not incarceration or mutilation, is Yahweh’s primary strategy for dealing with property crimes in Israel. The rabbis got that part right. But it’s not a simple case of *Okay, you caught me, so I’ll give back what I stole*. There are penalties, appropriate and in kind. If you still have the evidence in your possession, you must return it, plus another one just like it. In God’s economy, crime doesn’t pay—it doesn’t even break even.

But what if you’ve already sold the bleating booty, or eaten it? If you stole a sheep, you’d have to return *four* of them. And if you stole an ox, you’d give back *five*. The difference, apparently, is that in addition to stealing property, when you take a man’s ox, you’ve also stolen the victim’s ability to cultivate his land—you’ve taken his tractor as well as next month’s barbecue. Moreover, the government doesn’t receive the “fine.” It’s the victim who’s reimbursed for his trouble. Then there’s the question of what to do if the thief is as broke as he is stupid. If he doesn’t have enough to pay the victim double or four or five times the value of what was stolen (depending on the circumstances we’ve outlined) then he himself is sold into slavery. There’s no such thing as having nothing left to lose. If only American jurisprudence worked this logically.

Further, we’re given instructions on what to do if the thief is caught in the act. He is presumed to be armed and/or dangerous; therefore, the victim is not held to blame if he kills the thief while protecting his

property. But there are limits: the victim can't come back murder him in cold blood the day after the crime has been committed. Yahweh demands restoration, not retribution.

- (276) *Return lost property.* **“You shall not see your brother’s ox or his sheep going astray, and hide yourself from them; you shall certainly bring them back to your brother. And if your brother is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it to your own house, and it shall remain with you until your brother seeks it; then you shall restore it to him. You shall do the same with his donkey, and so shall you do with his garment; with any lost thing of your brother’s, which he has lost and you have found, you shall do likewise; you must not hide yourself.”** (Deuteronomy 22:1-3) *Finders keepers, losers weepers* doesn’t cut it with Yahweh. *Love your neighbor* is more His style. In an agrarian society, one’s most valuable possessions can tend to wander off all by themselves. Yahweh’s instructions, if you should happen across somebody’s lost fuzzy four-hoofed Rolex, are to return it immediately if you know who it belongs to. If you don’t, you’re to keep it safe, alert the neighborhood, try to find the rightful owner, and give it food and water as if it were your own. It’s the golden rule all over again: handle lost property you’ve found just as you’d want done to something of yours that got lost.

- (277) *Do not pretend not to have seen lost property, to avoid the obligation to return it.* **“...You shall do the same with his donkey, and so shall you do with his garment; with any lost thing of your brother’s, which he has lost and you have found, you shall do likewise; you must not hide yourself.”** (Deuteronomy 22:3) The temptation for the *ganab*, of course, is to try to convince yourself that whatever your neighbor lost is actually yours—or more to the point, that given enough time, no one will remember whose it really is. That’s nothing but theft in slow motion, and like any theft, it betrays a lack of trust in Yahweh’s provision. As we’ve seen, there was to be no theft, deception, or falsehood among Yahweh’s people. We are to be holy, for our God is holy.

Chapter 8

Crimes and Misdemeanors

We began the previous chapter by continuing our exploration of Paul's commentary on the Torah in his letter to the Romans. We're still not through with it. If you'll recall, we had just observed that the Law couldn't save us, but that was okay because it wasn't designed to. Let's now pick up the conversation where we left it. If the Law was never meant to save us, what's it for?

"Well then, am I suggesting that the law of God is evil? Of course not! The law is not sinful, but it was the law that showed me my sin. I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.'" There it is: the Law was given to us to show us our sin—to demonstrate to us in no uncertain terms that we are sinners. In that respect it serves the same function as our consciences, but of course, the Law is far more specific in its instructions. "But sin took advantage of this law and aroused all kinds of forbidden desires within me! If there were no law, sin would not have that power...." We sin because we're sinners. It's in our nature.

Here's how it works: Our consciences tell us to "drive safely." But put us behind the wheel of a fast car or make us a little late for our meeting, and we tend to drive faster than we "know" we should. Whether we're indulging our thirst for adventure or just trying to make up for lost time, we still find ourselves going faster than our consciences tell us is safe. But it's a judgment call, and we're great at justifying our motives, aren't we? Now, however, post a speed limit on the road. It says, "The highway department engineered this road to be perfectly safe for the average (or below-average) car (or driver) to travel on at 55 miles per hour." It doesn't care that it's a beautiful day and you've got a new Porsche that could easily hold the curves at 85. It doesn't care that if you don't get across town in twelve minutes you'll blow the big contract. All it cares about is that you drive no faster than 55 miles per hour. If you drive 85, you've sinned; it doesn't matter why. As a matter of fact, even if you "only" go 56, you've sinned as well. The Law is inflexible, unreasonable, and stern. But that doesn't mean it's bad. On the contrary, it's there for our safety: the law in itself is good.

Paul understood this difference between conscience and Law: **"I felt fine when I did not understand what the law demanded. But when I learned the truth, I realized I had broken the law and was a sinner, doomed to die. So the good law, which was supposed to show me the way of life, instead gave me the death penalty. Sin took advantage of the law and fooled me; it took the good law and used it to make me guilty of death. But still, the law itself is holy and right and good. But how can that be? Did the law, which is good, cause my doom?"** Or put in terms of our illustration, did the "Speed Limit-55" sign cause us to exceed the traffic laws? **"Of course not! Sin used what was good to bring**

about my condemnation. So we can see how terrible sin really is. It uses God's good commandment for its own evil purposes." (Romans 7:7-13 NLT) The problem is that there are only two kinds of people: "law-abiding citizens" and "lawbreakers." Once we've broken the law—any law, whether it be a Torah prescription, a federal, state, or county statute, or merely some little thing we did for which we had to suppress our conscience for a moment, we become "lawbreakers" by definition. It's a line we've all crossed, and there's no way to retrace our steps. This "line" is the law. It is not the "line's" fault if we step over it.

"The law is good, then. The trouble is not with the law but with me, because I am sold into slavery, with sin as my master. I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. But I can't help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these evil things."

This is where it gets frustrating. The reason we all sin is that we're all born with a sin nature—an inbred propensity to step over the line. Once we're born, it's only a matter of time until we fulfill our destiny. Dogs bark, birds fly, we sin. It's what we do. Remember, Paul noted that "sin took advantage of this law and aroused all kinds of forbidden desires within me." We don't sin only by accident. When we see that "55 MPH" sign, our rebellious natures beg us to hit the gas. **"I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can't make myself do right. I want to, but I can't. When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. But if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it...."** That fact may make us feel better about blowing by the "55 MPH" sign at 78. But it doesn't change the fact that we're law-breakers.

"It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind." This other "law" is the sin nature we inherited from Adam. It too demands our allegiance. **"This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am!"** We are all pitiable spiritual schizophrenics. We all have Jekyll and Hyde-like dual personalities. Part of us wants to reach God, and the other part wants to run amok. Is there no cure? Or as Paul puts it, **"Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin."** (Romans 7:14-25 NLT)

There *is* a cure for this debilitating spiritual illness. More fully translated, the cure is in *Yahshua* (meaning "Yahweh is salvation") the *Messiah* (Yahweh's anointed representative, His human manifestation) who is *our Lord* (*Kurios*: Master, Owner, Ruler, the One who rightfully exercises authority in our lives).

There are *two* contradictory natures, then, warring within us believers. One, the sin nature, seeks to dominate us, to enslave us. The other, the Spirit of

Yahweh, seeks to free us. But because we *do* sin, God's law serves only to remind us of our bonds, to confirm our status as slaves. The only way for us to avoid being condemned by the Law, as we saw in the previous chapter, is to "die" to it, for dead people are no longer required to keep the Law. Corpses don't get speeding tickets. But death is inconvenient—all that rotting, stinking, and lack of any kind of social life. What we need is a way to enjoy the "benefits" of death without all the unpleasant side effects. And that's precisely what Yahshua has provided for us: **"So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses could not save us, because of our sinful nature. But God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent his own Son in a human body like ours, except that ours are sinful. God destroyed sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the requirement of the law would be fully accomplished for us who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit..."**

The mechanism is in place, then, for those of us who want to be free from the sin nature to loosen its grip upon us. Yes, both "laws" reside within us, fighting each other like a couple of junkyard dogs. But we don't have to *feed* them both. If we starve our sin nature, it will grow frail. **"Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God."** (Romans 8:1-8 NLT)

Paul then gives us the good news and/or the bad news: we don't have to fight off the influence of the sin nature in our own strength. The Spirit of God dwelling within us gives us the power we need to get the job done. Of course the converse is also true: if God's Spirit *doesn't* live within you—if you're a counterfeit believer—then there's no way to prevail against your sin nature. **"But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them are not His at all.) Since Christ lives within you, even though your body will die because of sin, your spirit is alive because you have been made right with God. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as he raised Christ from the dead, he will give life to your mortal body by this same Spirit living within you..."** In other words, just as we benefit through identifying with Yahshua's death (since dead people no longer have to obey these laws—rules they could never keep in life anyway), we will also share in the benefits provided by His resurrection, since life has distinct advantages over death.

"So, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation whatsoever to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you keep on following it, you will perish. But if through the power of the Holy Spirit you turn from it and its evil deeds, you will live. For all who are

led by the Spirit of God are children of God.” He’s not saying that if you’re Christ’s your life will be sinless. He’s already clarified that point (in 7:19). Rather, he’s saying that only Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit living within us, can give us the ability to successfully turn away from sin. **“So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God’s very own children, adopted into his family—calling him ‘Father, dear Father.’ For his Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God’s children. And since we are his children, we will share his treasures—for everything God gives to his Son, Christ, is ours, too. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.”** (Romans 8:8-17 NLT) There’s the bottom line: if we’re children of God, we’ll behave like we’re part of the family, through good times and bad. I know how this works. My wife and I adopted nine of our eleven children. No matter what we were going through, our kids always knew where we stood. I was charged with “showing” Yahweh to them, being the family’s provider and authority figure. Mom stood in for the Holy Spirit, comforting, sustaining, and getting “inside” the lives of our kids. Sometimes they “honored” us and sometimes they didn’t, but deep down, they always knew they were loved. And although we seldom had to “lay down the law,” the “law” was always there—our standards and Yahweh’s—telling our kids, even if we didn’t, whether or not they were acting like part of the family. They knew. They always knew.

The rabbis (because they weren’t God’s children) didn’t have—or didn’t want to have—a “feel” for Yahweh’s instructions. They didn’t want to “remember the Sabbath day to keep it set apart”—taking time out to rest the body and reflect upon the goodness of Yahweh. Rather, they redefined the Sabbath day by hedging it in with rules of their own invention. *You may not walk more than two thousand cubits from home on the Sabbath. You must fast and wear uncomfortable shoes on the Day of Atonement.* They were into loopholes, strategies, ways to *appear* righteous and enhance their status while treading the law of love underfoot.

Not surprisingly, Yahshua was not taken in by their pretensions. He had some insightful things to say about outwardly observing the letter of the law while scoffing at its spirit: **“You have heard that the law of Moses says, ‘Do not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’ But I say, if you are angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the high council. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.”** In other words, it’s the attitude of your heart—love or hate, respect or contempt, humility or arrogance—that counts. He then offers some practical advice. **“So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and you**

suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God. Come to terms quickly with your enemy before it is too late and you are dragged into court, handed over to an officer, and thrown in jail. I assure you that you won't be free again until you have paid the last penny." (Matthew 5:21-26 NLT) If you refuse to live in harmony with your brother, don't insult Yahweh by offering pious sacrifices to Him. He is impressed not with burnt offerings, but with a love, mercy, and justice. Go back and read Micah 6:6-8.

The lesson continues: **"You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'If an eye is injured, injure the eye of the person who did it. If a tooth gets knocked out, knock out the tooth of the person who did it.'** Again, this is the letter of the law—the limit of the rabbis' experience. **"But I say, don't resist an evil person! If you are slapped on the right cheek, turn the other, too. If you are ordered to court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow."** (Matthew 5:38-42 NLT) Yahshua addresses four "legal realities" here, and says that the law of love supersedes them all. First, the rule of violence. Love does not retaliate, does not get even. That's Yahweh's job. This doesn't mean we are to tolerate false teaching or practices that separate men from God's truth. But personal affronts are to be ignored, brushed off. "Turning the other cheek" is not a sign of weakness. It's an indication that our priorities are in line with Christ's.

Second, the civil laws of man are addressed. It's true that we should endeavor to live our lives and conduct our businesses in such a way that no one should ever have a legitimate grievance against us. But if we are taken to court, remember Who provides for us. Don't grasp at material things. Whatever it is, be willing to let it go—even life itself. In the end, Yahweh is judge.

Third, Yahshua speaks of political reality. Roman soldiers could legally conscript people at random to carry their gear for one mile. Love says, "Why stop at what the law demands? Go the extra mile." Today this might translate into, "Pay your taxes (and your bills) *before* the deadline and without complaint—even if you perceive that your government is evil (as Rome certainly was). If you're being paid to work an eight-hour day, be willing to give your employer even more. Again, it's recognition of where our blessings come from in the first place. Time? Money? Effort? In the heavenly scheme of things, there's more where that came from. A lot more.

The fourth example is right out of the Torah. (See Mitzvah #51 in Chapter 2 of this volume, or review Deuteronomy 15:7-10). But the Law of Moses (it could be argued) was speaking of not circumventing the law of Jubilee. Yahshua—whose very mission was providing the freedom symbolized by the Jubilee year—was

simply saying, “Meet needs. Be generous. God provides for you so that you can provide for your brother.”

So as we move back into our discussion of Maimonides’ 613 Mitzvot, let us be cognizant of the fact that there is far more to the Torah than the letter of the law, the literal observance of the recorded precepts. But it’s not “more” in the sense of adding layer upon layer of rabbinical minutiae, as in the Talmud, but rather “more” as in adopting the heart attitude Yahweh seeks, making the “laws” themselves almost beside the point—automatic slam-dunk obvious.

CRIMINAL LAW

(278) *Do not slay an innocent person. “You shall not murder.”* (Exodus 20:13)

Here we go again. You wouldn’t think the rabbis could screw up anything as simple as the Sixth Commandment, but they did. There is *no such thing* as an “innocent person.” Yes, there are people who have done nothing to merit a death sentence. (On the other hand, read the list below—I could be wrong about that.) But that isn’t what Maimonides said. A harmless mistake? No. This mitzvah was purposely designed to confuse the issue of innocence versus guilt (obfuscating the need for a Redeemer) and to elevate the self-appointed arbiters of holiness, the rabbis, in the eyes of their victims—excuse me, their followers. As Solomon put it, **“For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

Yahweh had written with His own finger, “You shall not *murder*.” That is, you are not to take the life of a fellow human being without just cause—a cause defined by Yahweh in the Torah. These causes include murder, adultery, incest, bestiality, homosexuality, extra-marital sex (usually), the rape of a betrothed virgin (the rape of a *non*-betrothed virgin was punishable by marriage without the possibility of parole; see #301), kidnapping, witchcraft, offering human sacrifice, striking or cursing a parent, blasphemy, Sabbath desecration, prophesying falsely, propagating false doctrines, sacrificing to false gods, refusing to abide by the decision of the court, treason, and sedition. Warfare in a just cause (such as clearing the Land of Ba’al-worshipping Canaanites) was not considered murder. Clearly, the Sixth Commandment *doesn’t* mean “Thou shalt not kill,” as it reads in the King James Bible.

Murder, however, also has an underlying, metaphorical meaning, pointing out a deeper truth. Yahshua makes it clear in His tirade against the Pharisees: **“If God were your Father [as you claim], you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My**

word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." (John 8:42-47) A "murderer" in this sense is someone who *prevents* a person from having life through a relationship with Yahweh. Yahshua here is saying that the Pharisees (read: rabbis) are children of the devil because of their false teaching. Their lies are "murdering" people in a spiritual sense, defining the Pharisees as the offspring of the original murderer, Satan. This explains why prophesying falsely and propagating false doctrines were offenses punishable by death in theocratic Israel. In fact, each of the "death penalty" crimes listed above has a similar symbolic counterpart in the spiritual realm. As Moses discovered at Kadesh (Numbers 20:11-12), it's not a good idea to mess with Yahweh's metaphors.

- (279) *Do not kidnap any person of Israel. "He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death."* (Exodus 21:16) Judaism 101 refers the Eighth Commandment ("You shall not steal") but notes: "According to the Talmud, this verse refers to stealing a person, distinguished from Leviticus 19:11, regarding the taking of property." The Hebrew text begs to differ. The word for "steal" or "kidnap" is the same in all three passages: *ganab*, meaning to steal, kidnap, or deceive. The emphasis of the word is on being sneaky or secretive. The Exodus 21 passage I've quoted specifically prohibits stealing a man (Hebrew *ish*: a human being, male or female), so kidnapping is clearly meant there.

The passage does not specify the nationality or race of the prohibited kidnapping. *No one* was to be kidnapped, for any reason. It didn't apply exclusively to Israelites. It's ironic, though, that Muhammad financed his rise to power through the kidnapping for ransom, rape, and the slave trade of Jews living in the Arabian city of Yathrib. In fact, it's hard to find a precept in the Torah whose violation isn't extolled by command and example in the Islamic scriptures.

- (280) *Do not rob by violence. "You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him."* (Leviticus 19:13) A corollary to the Sixth Commandment is stated here. Where *ganab* there is a broad term whose emphasis is on sneaky theft, this verse uses two other words to get the point across. "Cheat" is the Hebrew word *ashaq*, meaning "to oppress, violate, defraud, obtain through violence or deceit, to wrong, or extort." (S) "Rob," on the other hand, is

gazal: to tear away, seize, plunder, rob, or take by force. Yahweh isn't leaving the potential thief any wiggle room here. We aren't to take (or even *covet*—see Exodus 20:17, Mitzvah #282) what doesn't belong to us. One's neighbor, as Yahshua pointed out, is anyone who falls within our sphere of acquaintance. If he's close enough to steal from, he's your neighbor.

- (281) *Do not defraud.* **“You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.”** (Leviticus 19:13) Moses goes on to give an example of *ashaq* and *gazal*—one that the ordinary Israelite might not have considered to be such a heinous crime: keeping a hired man's wages beyond the customary deadline. In that world, if a man went and labored in your field or vineyard, he expected to be paid at the end of the workday. He counted on it. Yahweh says that to withhold his wages—even just overnight—was tantamount to stealing from him. Even if you eventually paid him the money he was owed, you had still robbed him of his peace of mind.

This of course has applications in today's world. Pay your bills when they're due (or even before they're due—see our discussion on Matthew 5:38-42 above). If you're a merchant, don't “price-gouge.” If you're an employer, pay your employees and vendors on time. Pay your taxes. Don't take—even temporarily—what isn't yours, whether by stealth, dishonesty, force, or extortion. If God is truly Yahweh Yireh (our provider), then trust Him to provide for your needs—all of them.

- (282) *Do not covet what belongs to another.* **“You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.”** (Exodus 20:17) The Tenth Commandment is a biggie for us Americans. We have a multi-billion dollar advertising industry designed to *promote* covetousness. Yahweh is telling us to be satisfied with what we have—with what He has provided—and to rely on Him to take care of us in the future. He designed us; He knows we have needs. Covetousness, however, goes beyond the meeting of needs. It is looking at the world around us and wishing other people's possessions were ours—and that's wrong.

The word translated “covet” is the Hebrew *chamad*. Literally, it means to desire, to take pleasure in, to delight in, to covet, or to lust after. There is a fine line between appreciating something for its intrinsic worth or beauty and desiring to own it. I could admire a shiny, sleek, chrome-encrusted custom motorcycle all day long. But I don't want to own one. Especially *yours*. Covetousness is like sheol—there's no bottom to it. Somebody's wife (or husband) will always be prettier than yours; there

will always be someone with a better car, job, house, or whatever. Learn to appreciate and be thankful for what Yahweh has already given you. Remember, he who is faithful with little will be entrusted with more.

- (283) *Do not crave something that belongs to another. “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor’s house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”* (Deuteronomy 5:21) Maimonides has been caught padding the list again. This is merely the restatement of the Tenth Commandment (#282) for a new generation of Israelites—the Deuteronomy restatement of the Exodus 20 list. Moses used the very same word for covet: *chamad*. There is nothing new here. Although I must admit that the warning bears repeating.
- (284) *Do not indulge in evil thoughts and sights. “Again Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of Yahweh and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God.’”* (Numbers 15:37-40) Yahweh knew what temptations the Israelites were going to be faced with as they entered Canaan. He *knew* their hearts and eyes would be inclined toward the harlotry of the Land. So rather than merely commanding them to avert their eyes and don’t think evil thoughts, He gave them a means by which they would be constantly reminded of who they were—and Whose they were: Yahweh’s set-apart people. He instructed them to sew tassels on the corners of their garments, and to put a single blue thread within the tassel representing their ultimate salvation through the Messiah (see #18 for a full discussion of these *tsitzit*). Since *everybody* in Israel was to wear the *tsitzit* with the blue thread, it was a system designed to make it hard for God’s precepts to slip your mind.

God’s provision for our needs is thus demonstrated—even our need to avoid temptation. It reminds us of what Paul wrote: **“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.”** (I Corinthians 10:12-14)

PUNISHMENT AND RESTITUTION

In the matter of punishment and restitution, I would like to offer the following New Testament vignette to illustrate the concept of restitution. I do so because

Maimonides barely mentions it. That's a shame, because restitution—not punishment—is at the heart of Yahweh's system of civil jurisprudence. Punishment was reserved for those cases where a spiritual principal was at stake, whether metaphorically or literally. At any rate, pay close attention to what Zacchaeus did, and what Yahshua's reaction was.

“Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was one of the most influential Jews in the Roman tax-collecting business, and he had become very rich. He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowds. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree beside the road, so he could watch from there. When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. ‘Zacchaeus!’ he said. ‘Quick, come down! For I must be a guest in your home today.’ Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the crowds were displeased. ‘He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,’ they grumbled.”

Here's the punchline: **“Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, ‘I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have overcharged people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!’”** The Roman system of tax collection in Judea employed Jewish tax-gatherers in the exaction of a dizzying variety of levies, duties, customs, and fees. They were authorized to collect a fraction in excess of the proper tax, which was their commission, their profit—an amount they frequently padded—adding to the already considerable ire they had earned among their countrymen. These men are called *telones* in Greek. Zacchaeus was an *architelones*, a chief among or supervisor of a number of *telones*. Confronted and convicted by Yahshua's holiness, he did two things. Knowing he had personally defrauded people, he promised to repay them as if he had stolen their sheep (see Exodus 22:1)—fourfold. But also knowing that much of his wealth had been derived from underlings who had extorted money from people in transactions he could neither trace nor set right, he did what he could to rectify the situation: he gave half of his wealth to the poor. In other words, Zacchaeus repented, changed his mind and changed his ways. And recognizing his guilt before God, he did what the Torah prescribed. He made restitution.

Here's Yahshua's reaction: **“Jesus responded, ‘Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a son of Abraham. And I, the Son of Man, have come to seek and save those like him who are lost.’”** (Luke 19:1-10) Zacchaeus wasn't saved because he gave the money back. He was saved because he “showed himself to be a son of Abraham,” that is, he believed Yahweh and his faith was accounted unto him to be righteousness. Punishment was the last thing on Yahshua's mind as he called to the diminutive tax collector. He wanted to save Zack from that. Restitution does what can be done to undo a crime. Punishment in the Torah is invariably an earthly picture of what can happen in the eternal state—a warning to those who would rebel against Yahweh's sovereignty.

Early in the first century, Israel's Roman overlords caused the "scepter to depart from Judah," that is, they took away from the Jewish ruling council the legal right to impose the death sentence. This, of course, was a fulfillment of the prophecy that Shiloh, "He to whom the scepter belongs," had come (see Genesis 49:10). It is therefore sad and ironic that Maimonides' list of "Restitutions and Punishments" is fixated on the minutiae surrounding capital punishment, to the exclusion of the victim-centric body of law concerning restitution.

(285) *The Court shall pass sentence of death by decapitation with the sword. "If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe."* (Exodus 21:22-25) Also, "And if by these things [previously listed plagues sent upon a disobedient Israel] you are not reformed by Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins. And I will bring a sword against you that will execute the vengeance of the covenant; when you are gathered together within your cities I will send pestilence among you; and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy." (Leviticus 26:23-25) Huh? The "proof texts" offered do not under any circumstances authorize "the Court to pass a sentence of death by decapitation with the sword." It's another bald-faced rabbinical power grab—all the worse because the only wielding of the sword (and even there it is evidently symbolic of any weapon) in these verses is to be done by Yahweh. The Court, a.k.a. the Sanhedrin, has no such authority.

The circumstances under which the "Court" was to make decisions concerning retaliatory punishment are very clearly defined in the Exodus passage. Frankly, the circumstances described are so unlikely as to be laughable. (Two guys get into a fight; somehow a woman who happens to be late in her pregnancy gets in the way and gets hurt, resulting in her baby being born prematurely—c'mon: did that *ever* happen?) Yet the whole world latches onto the phrase "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" and jumps to the erroneous conclusion that since God is just *itching* for vengeance and retribution, we can feel free to dish it out as well, never mind what the Torah actually said.

As far as bringing a "sword" to bear on a situation, that is Yahweh's prerogative, not the Sanhedrin's. In fact, the very tampering with scripture evidenced in the mitzvah at hand would qualify as reason enough for the sword of Yahweh to be applied to Israel—and especially its rabbis. Rewriting God's instructions is nothing if not "walking contrary to" Him.

However, there is one instance (recorded in Exodus 32:27-28) where the swords of men were used to punish Israelites. The occasion? The golden calf debacle at the foot of Mount Sinai. But it wasn't an execution; it was a small-scale civil war—the faithful men of Levi against the idolaters of Israel. The “Court” had nothing to do with it. In fact, since the Babylonian captivity, the *Sanhedrin* have been the ones promoting the bull.

- (286) *The Court shall pass sentence of death by strangulation. “The man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death.”* (Leviticus 20:10) Again, the “Court” isn’t part of the picture. It’s another blatant power grab on the part of the rabbis. Nor is strangulation. The Torah has nothing to say about the mode of execution in this particular case, though a few verses back, it specifies death by *stoning* for a worshiper of Molech: “**The people of the land shall stone him with stones.**” (Leviticus 20:2) But here, no method of execution is specified. The word for “put to death” is the Hebrew *mut*, a generic word meaning kill, slay, put to death, even assassinate.

From the New Covenant scriptures, however, it is clear that stoning *was* the accepted method of execution for this offense. John records (in Chapter 8) a scene where the religious leaders wanted to stone a woman caught in adultery. (It was the scribes and Pharisees who specified the method of execution, claiming Mosaic authority, but as we have seen, Moses had said nothing about it. Even here, they were making up their own rules, just as Maimonides would a thousand years later.) What I want to know is, where was the adulterer? If *she* was “caught in the act,” they should have caught *him* as well, ’cause it’s real hard to commit adultery by yourself. Selective justice is injustice.

Lest we gloss over the underlying truth, remember that adultery is a violation of the God-ordained family structure. This is more significant than it appears at first glance. We are to be organized in family units—father, mother, and children—because that’s the way Yahweh reveals *Himself* to us. He’s our heavenly Father: Creator, Provider, and ultimate Authority. His Holy Spirit is our spiritual Mother: Comforter, Teacher, Conscience and Guide. And His “Son” is Yahshua our Messiah: Yahweh’s human manifestation, His representative among men, our Master and Savior. Adultery, then, being a perversion of the God-ordained family structure, is a picture of false belief—of unfruitful and destructive spiritual relationships. At the very least, it messes up Yahweh’s metaphor.

- (287) *The Court shall pass sentence of death by burning with fire. “If a man marries a woman and her mother, it is wickedness. They shall be burned with fire,*

both he and they, that there may be no wickedness among you.” (Leviticus 20:14) Only the rabbis could look at this verse and see nothing but an opportunity for the Sanhedrin to flex their muscles by imposing a particular form of capital punishment—in this case, burning at the stake. The whole passage is a litany of various sexual sins and the consequences Yahweh has ordained. It has nothing to do with rabbinical authority.

That being said, death by burning is authorized twice in the Torah, here and in Leviticus 21:9, where the daughter of a priest who has turned to harlotry must be executed by fire. The ubiquitous connection (metaphorical and otherwise) between sexual sin and the worship of false gods should not be overlooked. Every single mention of execution by fire in the entire Bible (whether advocated by Yahweh or not) is associated in some way with either sexual sin, the worship of false gods, or both. In God’s economy, one is a picture of the other.

- (288) *The Court shall pass sentence of death by stoning. “If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor’s wife; so you shall put away the evil from among you.* (Deuteronomy 22:23-24) As usual, this has virtually nothing to do with the authority of the Sanhedrin. This is one of several places, however, where death by stoning was the divinely prescribed punishment. Other instances include the overt worship (or merely the *advocating* of such worship) of false gods like Molech or Ba’al, and “cursing” Yahweh (which in one instance literally manifested itself in simply ignoring His Sabbath rest instructions—demonstrating the guilty party’s flippant attitude toward God). In the present case, the punishment is, once again, in response to adultery, since a “betrothed virgin” was legally married, even though the union had not yet been consummated.

In a fascinating display of wisdom, Yahweh built in a safeguard against a virgin being unfairly executed for being the victim of a rapist. If she were “in the city” when the sexual attack/encounter occurred, she would have been obligated to cry out for help. If she did not, it was to be presumed that she was a willing participant—hence an adulteress. (This system wouldn’t work in New York, you understand. It was designed for “cities” like bronze-age Beersheba or Shechem, close-knit communities where if you cried out for help, half a dozen guys would instantly come to your aid.) But what if the attack/encounter took place where no one was likely to hear her cries? Yahweh gave the virgin a get-out-of-stoning-free card: **“But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall**

die. [Note that rapists get the death penalty.] **But you shall do nothing to the young woman; there is in the young woman no sin deserving of death, for just as when a man rises against his neighbor and kills him, even so is this matter. For he found her in the countryside, and the betrothed young woman cried out, [it is presumed] but there was no one to save her.**" (Deuteronomy 22:25-27) As far as Yahweh's metaphor of adultery/fornication equating to the worship of false gods is concerned, it is clear that it isn't the sexual contact *per se* that condemns someone (because that can be forced), but rather the willing offering of one's affection to an illicit lover. To me, this just screams that it's not so much one's mode of religious observance (or lack of it) that God is looking at, but the attitude of the heart. Note further that Yahweh's justice, when administered by men, is supposed to err on the side of mercy if it errs at all. One wonders why Maimonides was so fixated on the Court's legal authorization to impose the death penalty.

- (289) *Hang the dead body of one who has incurred [the death] penalty. "If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God."* (Deuteronomy 21:22-23) Yahweh is not saying the Jews *must* hang the body of an executed criminal on a tree, but is rather giving instructions as to what to do, and why, if they do so. He is looking forward to an event that wouldn't take place for another fifteen hundred years or so—the crucifixion of His Son, the Messiah. Although crucifixions in first-century Judea were common enough, it was rare indeed for "you (that is, an Israelite) to hang him on a tree," since the authority to impose the death penalty had been taken away from the Sanhedrin by the Romans, and besides, the preferred method of execution for them was stoning. It was the Romans who crucified their victims. But in the case of Yahshua, it *was* the Jewish leadership who caused Him to be "hanged on a tree," making Him (as they well knew) "accursed of God." What the Jews didn't realize (and still don't) is that Yahshua endured this curse for *our* sins, so that we might have life. **"Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace [i.e., in our covenant relationship with Yahweh. *Shalom* also means welfare, health, prosperity, or soundness] was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."** (Isaiah 53:4-5)
- (290) *The dead body of an executed criminal shall not remain hanging on the tree over night. "If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the*

tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God. (Deuteronomy 21:22-23) The second lesson Maimonides gleaned from these verses is that you couldn't leave the "criminal's" corpse hanging on the tree overnight. The majority of the Sanhedrin in Yahshua's day, of course, would have gladly let this one slide. The only reason they wanted Yahshua and his two crucified companions off their crosses before sundown was that the Feast of Unleavened Bread was starting. They weren't worried about "defiling the land." They were only concerned about observing their traditions and maintaining the status quo that kept them in positions of power and prestige.

- (291) *Inter the executed on the day of execution.* **"If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God."** (Deuteronomy 21:22-23) Milking the passage for all it's worth, Maimonides squeezed a separate mitzvah out of the burial of the criminal's corpse. History informs us that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, both members of the Sanhedrin and both believers, stuck their necks out with the Roman authorities and arranged for Christ's body to be removed from the pole of execution so they could properly inter Him before the sundown deadline. (The corpses of the two thieves crucified with Him were most likely unceremoniously dumped in the Valley of Hinnom as buzzard bait.) It seems that even in death, Yahshua observed the Torah flawlessly. Again, we turn to Isaiah for illumination: **"For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth."** (Isaiah 53:8-9)
- (292) *Do not accept ransom from a murderer.* **"Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. And you shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the priest. So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I Yahweh dwell among the children of Israel."** (Numbers 35:31-34) We dealt in detail with the "city of refuge" concept in the previous chapter (Mitzvah #260). The principle stressed here is that there is no substitute for the life of a murderer. His blood *must* be shed, for until it is, the land of promise remains defiled by his guilt. In the ultimate sense, of course, the "land" is the whole world, and our sin is what defiles it. But it's the *nature* of our

sin that determines whether or not a remedy is available for us. We all have blood on our hands. But was it unintentional manslaughter, or was it cold-blooded murder? In other words, have we merely fallen short of God's standard of perfection, or have we willfully and maliciously prevented our brothers and sisters from forming a relationship with Yahweh?

Here's what I'm getting at: John writes, **"He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."** (I John 3:14-15) The Greek word for "murderer" here (*anthropoktonos*) is found only one other time in scripture, in a passage we reviewed earlier in this chapter. In Mitzvah #278, we read, **"You [Pharisees] are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer [*anthropoktonos*] from the beginning..."** (John 8:44) How was Satan a murderer from the beginning? He deceived Adam and Chavvah (a.k.a. Eve), leading to their fall from innocence. He didn't kill them physically (separating body from soul). Rather, he *murdered* them, spiritually. After the fall, their *neshamah*—that uniquely human capacity for spiritual indwelling (see Genesis 2:7) was emptied of life. And Adam and his bride remained spiritually lifeless until blood was shed on their behalf, and they accepted Yahweh's sacrifice by wearing the animal-skin garments He had made to cover their nakedness. God still provides a garment—one of light—to cover the sins of all who wish to have a relationship with Him based on the sacrifice of His Son. But those who would prevent this relationship from being formed—those who block the doorway to the Kingdom of Heaven—are characterized as *murderers*. John notes their hatred for their brothers and says that they therefore "live in death."

So, getting back to our mitzvah, we see that ransom for "murderers" is impossible. And common "manslayers" (that's everybody else) can be redeemed from the curse of our sin *only* by the "death of the [high] priest." Who? **"Having been perfected, [Yahshua] became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest 'according to the order of Melchizedek.'" (Hebrews 5:9-10)**

- (293) *Exile one who committed accidental homicide.* **"The congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood according to these judgments. So the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall return him to the city of refuge where he had fled, and he shall remain there until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil."** (Numbers 35:24-25) The tone of Maimonides' mitzvah is all wrong. This is not characterized as a lesser form of punishment for a lesser

crime—exile in place of execution. In context, I'd rephrase it, "*Protect* the one who committed accidental homicide." Most of Numbers 35 is concerned with the establishment of the six cities of refuge and with the precise definition of what constitutes murder as opposed to accidental homicide. It's all pretty straightforward. The upshot here is that if a man has accidentally killed someone, the congregation of Israel is to *protect* the manslayer from the designated "avenger of blood" until he can be brought safely to the nearest city of refuge, where he must live until the death of the High Priest if he wishes to be sheltered from retribution.

When you work out the prophetic metaphor here, a remarkable truth emerges. Ultimately, we through our sin are the manslaughterers. The slain party, then, is Yahshua. And the "avenger of blood" can be none other than Yahweh Himself. Judgment—even wrath—properly belongs to Him alone. But the "congregation" is instructed to safely convey the guilty party to the city of refuge so the "avenger" won't harm him before he has had a chance to avail himself of the redemption afforded by the "death of the High Priest (who, as we have seen, represents Yahshua again—note the reference to his being anointed)."

Who, then, is the congregation? It's the believers, the "saints," the family of God—indeed, the family of the very "avenger of blood" from whose wrath we are trying to shelter the manslaughterer! Yahweh is saying that He is counting on *us* to shelter the lost, guilty soul from *His* wrath. (We're not to shelter the *murderer*, you understand—the malicious child of Satan who's trying to lead souls astray—but only the accidental manslaughterer, a description that fits every one of us until we're redeemed through the "death of the High Priest.") What we have here is the Great Commission! We are to love the lost, show compassion on them, draw them in to a place of safety, and show them how they can be saved from wrath. After that, it's up to them to either stay in the city of refuge or take their chances with the Avenger outside.

- (294) *Establish six cities of refuge (for those who committed accidental homicide).* "When Yahweh your God has cut off the nations whose land Yahweh your God is giving you, and you dispossess them and dwell in their cities and in their houses, you shall separate three cities for yourself in the midst of your land which Yahweh your God is giving you to possess. You shall prepare roads for yourself, and divide into three parts the territory of your land which Yahweh your God is giving you to inherit, that any manslaughterer may flee there." (Deuteronomy 19:3) We covered the subject of the six cities of refuge under Mitzvot #260, #292, and #293, based on Numbers 35. Here we see the inevitable restatement in Deuteronomy—speaking specifically of the three cities that

were to be established in the actual Promised Land. (The other three were on the east side of the Jordan, territory that was never given to Israel by Yahweh.) Since Maimonides wrote in the tenth century A.D., it's clear that this mitzvah is an anachronism (at least as far as he was concerned). It no longer applies (except in a prophetic and metaphorical sense) because Israel already conquered the Land, set up the requisite cities of refuge, and then got their sorry assets kicked out—twice. In a literal sense, this mitzvah has no more relevance to keeping “God’s Law” today than the Torah’s instructions on building the wilderness Tabernacle do (though the spiritual implications are as significant as ever). Since Maimonides didn’t appreciate the spiritual application of any of these instructions, why did he include this one in his list? He had to know that literal compliance was impossible. What was he thinking?

- (295) *Do not accept ransom from an accidental homicide, so as to relieve him from exile. “And you shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the priest.”* (Numbers 35:32) Once again, for the learning impaired: it *wasn’t* exile—it was protection from the “avenger of blood.” That being said, the manslayer couldn’t buy his way out of his predicament, for though he wasn’t guilty of murder, he *was* guilty of something. There was to be no pardon for him until the High Priest died. Yahweh is telling us that we can’t earn or buy our own salvation. No amount of good works or alms will change the fact that we’re guilty. Only the death of the High Priest, Yahshua the Messiah—accepted as a sacrifice made on our behalf and received as a gift from God—can buy us our freedom.
- (296) *Decapitate the heifer in the manner prescribed (in expiation of a murder on the road, the perpetrator of which remained undiscovered). “If anyone is found slain, lying in the field in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you to possess, and it is not known who killed him, then your elders and your judges shall go out and measure the distance from the slain man to the surrounding cities. And it shall be that the elders of the city nearest to the slain man will take a heifer which has not been worked and which has not pulled with a yoke. The elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with flowing water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and they shall break the heifer’s neck there in the valley.”* (Deuteronomy 21:1-4) A murderer’s blood must be shed in order to cleanse the land of the blood of his victim. For as we read, **“Blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.”** (Numbers 35:33) That’s all fine in theory, as any homicide detective will tell you. But what if you can’t find the perp? What if the case goes cold? Yahweh knew this would happen

from time to time, so He provided an object lesson to serve in lieu of justice.

The odds were that the murderer lived somewhere nearby. So the “elders and judges” were to determine what city, town, or village was closest to the scene of the crime. That town was to provide a heifer—a cow-calf, that is, an *eglah*, an adolescent but mature female bovine—taking it down to a nearby creek, where its life would serve as a substitute for the murderer’s. There its neck was to be broken (or it was to be decapitated—the Hebrew word *araph* can mean either thing) in atonement for the murder.

Why a heifer, one that has never pulled a plow? And why a valley that has not been cultivated? I believe that Yahweh is telling us how He feels about murder: it is above all a terrible waste of potential. The victim has been cut off prior to contributing to society what might have been the fruit of a great life. Even the valley has yet to show its potential. We were created to love and live with Yahweh. If we choose not to, it’s a shame. But if someone *prevents* us from doing so, it’s a *crime*—one Yahweh takes as a personal affront.

- (297) *Do not plow nor sow the rough valley (in which a heifer’s neck was broken).* **“The elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with flowing water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and they shall break the heifer’s neck there in the valley. Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near, for Yahweh your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to bless in the name of Yahweh; by their word every controversy and every assault shall be settled. And all the elders of that city nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley. Then they shall answer and say, ‘Our hands have not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen it. Provide atonement, O Yahweh, for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, and do not lay innocent blood to the charge of Your people Israel.’ And atonement shall be provided on their behalf for the blood. So you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you when you do what is right in the sight of Yahweh.** (Deuteronomy 21:4-9) The lesson of Mitzvah #296 continues. On behalf of their citizens, the elders of the town nearest the unsolved murder, in addition to providing the heifer, are to swear that they had nothing to do with the crime (presuming, of course, that this was actually true. If they knew who was responsible, this would have been the time to come forward, or be guilty of “bearing false witness”). The whole process is supervised *not* by the Sanhedrin, but by the priests and Levites—whose positions were strictly hereditary (so one could not aspire to a position of power in this context). The whole point of the exercise was to “put away the guilt of innocent blood from among

you.” In the same way, our sins can only be “put away” from us through the shedding of innocent blood—that of Yahshua.

- (298) *Adjudge a thief to pay compensation or (in certain cases) suffer death. “If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep.... He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double.”* (Exodus 22:1, 3-4) *“He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death.”* (Exodus 21:16) Contrast should be drawn between God’s system of criminal justice and man’s. If you’re a thief, western nations generally send you to prison, which takes you out of polite society for a while, but does no practical good for your victim. Prisons are expensive—a wasteful and inefficient use of public funds. Worse, they often serve as trade schools for criminals. But other systems are even worse: Islamic sharia law says that the thief’s hand is to be chopped off. This might be an effective deterrent, I suppose (though it never kept Muhammad from stealing anything). But it hardly fits the crime, and again, it’s a punishment that does nothing to relieve the victim’s plight.

Only Yahweh’s law makes sense for everybody concerned—thief, victim, and tax-paying bystander. If you steal something and it’s found in your possession, you are to give it back to your victim, plus another just like it. But if you’ve already disposed of it, you must repay him *four* times its value. And that’s if it’s value is only intrinsic (money or jewelry, for example). If the stolen item also has functional value—if its owner used it to earn his livelihood or function in society (today that would be one’s car, tools, or computer) you’d have to repay *five* times the booty’s value. Repayment begins by selling what you own—your own home, car, or possessions. But what if you don’t have enough to pay the victim back? Obviously, you’re not allowed to steal to make restitution. Under the Mosaic Law, you yourself would be sold into slavery, the proceeds going to the victim. I guess in today’s world that might translate into prison time, but with a twist on our flawed system. We allow inmates to work in prison industries and earn themselves a small income, because we’re fixated on rehabilitation for criminals, not restitution for their victims. Under God’s economy, whatever the thief earned would be returned to his victim, until the entire debt was paid. If you’ve stolen a \$50,000 Mercedes Benz, you’re on the hook for a cool quarter mil. *Let’s see. At six bucks an hour....* Gee, looks like crime really *doesn’t* pay.

Not all crimes are financial, of course. We should point out that if you steal a person, there *is* no restitution—whether or not your abductee is ever released unharmed. In God’s consistent metaphor of what kidnapping

and murder really mean, it is your *intention* to prevent people from having a relationship with Yahweh that determines your guilt, not your success in pulling it off. Try it and your life is forfeit. Under the Torah, Muhammad would have gotten stoned more often than Timothy Leary.

- (299) *He who inflicts a bodily injury shall pay monetary compensation. “If men contend with each other, and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist, and he does not die but is confined to his bed, if he rises again and walks about outside with his staff, then he who struck him shall be acquitted. He shall only pay for the loss of his time, and shall provide for him to be thoroughly healed.* (Exodus 21:18-19) Again, the spirit of restitution—as opposed to punishment—drives this precept. It’s a little misleading to translate this as saying the attacker shall be “acquitted.” The Hebrew word *naqah* doesn’t so much mean “found to be innocent” as it does “pardoned,” or “left unpunished.” There are still consequences. The “winner” of the fight has to see to it that his adversary is not financially disadvantaged. He must pay the “loser’s” salary and medical expenses until the man is fully recovered. The worse you hurt him, the more expensive it’s going to be.

Yahweh doesn’t seem to care who started it, or why. He wants us to love each other, not get into fistfights. So He arranged it so that even if you win, you lose. This is not a call for mindless pacifism, however. There are times when fighting is necessary and appropriate. (For example, see Exodus 32:26-28.) But don’t get into it with your brother-in-law over who’s the best shortstop in the National League. Just smile, turn the other cheek, and remember Psalm 116:6—“**Yahweh preserves the simple.**”

- (300) *Impose a penalty of fifty shekels upon the seducer of an unbetrothed virgin and enforce the other rules in connection with the case. “If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins.* (Exodus 22:16-17) The case of pre-marital sex between a man and an unbetrothed virgin is covered here and in the next two mitzvot. There doesn’t seem to be much of a distinction drawn between seduction and statutory rape in this case, presumably because the Inventor of hormones *knows* how it all works. As far as Yahweh is concerned, sex consummates a marriage; the physical union completes the spiritual union that betrothal initiates. So in the case described, though the beautiful picture a wedding presents has been goofed up, life goes on.

Though Maimonides calls it a “penalty,” the fifty shekels (specified in Deuteronomy 22) is actually a “bride-price,” in other words, a dowry. Any prospective husband would pay this sum to his father-in-law-to-be.

However, in this case, the girl's father has the option of forbidding the marriage, while keeping the dowry. This provision allows him to save his daughter from marriage to a total loser, or, of course, to an actual rapist. But normally, he would be prone to let mere sexual imprudence between his infatuated daughter and her amorous boyfriend—a rash and impulsive love match—proceed into marriage, for finding a mate for a daughter who wasn't a virgin was difficult in that culture.

- (301) *The violator of an unbetrothed virgin shall marry her. "If a man finds a young woman who is a virgin, who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out, then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her."* (Deuteronomy 22:28-29) There was no option on the part of the young man, however. If the girl's father allowed it to proceed, he would have to marry the young woman—it's the prototypical shotgun wedding. This provision would have tended to keep casual or experimental sex to a minimum. Under the Torah, there was no such thing as *I'm not ready to make a commitment, but you're pretty hot, so let's get it on*. No, it's either chastity or marriage (or *stoning*, if either lover were already betrothed).

We should note the radically different consequences Yahweh delineated for what to some might seem almost identical offenses—the case of sexual contact (whether presumed rape or consensual) with a betrothed virgin (as in Mitzvah #288) as opposed to with an unbetrothed virgin—death versus marriage. This makes it clear to me that it isn't sex *per se* that Yahweh objects to, but rather betrayal. Sex within marriage is right and good; outside of marriage, it is treachery, treason, and deceit.

- (302) *One who has raped a damsel and has then, in accordance with the law, married her, may not divorce her. "...and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days."* (Deuteronomy 22:28-29) It gets even better, in a divine retribution sort of way. Not only must the young man pay the dowry and marry the young lady he has slept with, it's what you might call a no-cut contract. If it "doesn't work out," tough toenails. There's no divorce for you—*ever*. As one who has been married for going on forty years, I can vouch for the concept of choosing your mate carefully.

Beyond the obvious practical implications of this precept, there is a far more serious side to this. There is a reason the Church, the Ekklesia, is called the "Bride of Christ," and Israel was once characterized as Yahweh's unfaithful wife. It is God's pattern that a husband and wife are to be "one flesh"—they are not to be "put asunder." When we become betrothed to Yahweh, we are His forever. But in the same way, those who

foolishly jump into bed with Satan are doomed to share his fate forever—you can't change your mind and divorce him. Like I said, choose your mate carefully.

- (303) *Do not inflict punishment on Shabbat (because some punishments were inflicted by fire).* **“Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of rest to Yahweh. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day.”** (Exodus 35:2-3) In Mitzvah #109 (in Chapter 4) we discussed the Sabbath at length. It is a Torah-mandated rest from our labors, indicative of the fact that we cannot, in the end, work for our salvation. We must, rather, accept Yahweh's provision. So no one's regular work was to be done on the seventh day of the week. That, of course, included food preparation, which was admittedly a much more laborious endeavor in Moses' time than it is today. We have also seen (in #287 above) how punishment inflicted by fire was (in rare and extreme instances) authorized in the Torah. Can you see where Maimonides is going with this? It's legalism gone stark raving haywire: he's saying that you can't burn people at the stake on the Sabbath day—*because it's cooking!* I honestly don't know whether to laugh or cry.
- (304) *Punish the wicked by the infliction of stripes.* **“If there is a dispute between men, and they come to court, that the judges may judge them, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked, then it shall be, if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, that the judge will cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence, according to his guilt, with a certain number of blows.”** (Deuteronomy 25:1-2) This is the only passage in the Torah where a beating is an authorized mode of punishment. And there is only one place in the Bible where it matters: the trial of Yahshua. The record of His beating at the hands of the High Priest (in Matthew 26:67, Mark 14:65, and Luke 22:63) clearly shows that the Torah's guidelines weren't being remotely followed: (1) Yahshua wasn't involved in a dispute between two men, (2) Caiaphas the High Priest was not successful in proving Yahshua to be “wicked,” and (3) He was beaten standing up, not lying down. Apparently, Maimonides' annoying practice of playing fast and loose with the requirements of scripture had a long and illustrious history.
- (305) *Do not exceed the statutory number of stripes laid on one who has incurred that punishment.* **“Forty blows he may give him and no more, lest he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight.”** (Deuteronomy 25:3) The Torah's use of beating was designed to correct and reprove a man from his “wickedness.” But the beating and mocking endured by Christ at the hands of Caiaphas was *intended* to do what the Law had expressly forbidden: humiliate Him. It is

not recorded how many blows they dealt Him, though they doubtless held it down to forty (being the legalistic sticklers they were). The actual practice was to limit their beatings to one less than that, just to be on the safe side—see II Corinthians 11:24.

We should not gloss over the significance of the number forty. When we see it in scripture, it is invariably connected with testing, trial, or proving. Forty years of wilderness wandering, forty days and nights receiving the Law on Sinai, forty days of Yahshua's temptation, forty days between His resurrection and ascension—you get the picture. The one that raises my eyebrows is sort of under the Biblical radar: there were forty Jubilee periods (i.e. fifty years) between Adam's fall into sin and Abraham's prophetic sacrifice of Isaac, another forty until the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (in 33 AD), and it will be *another* forty (unless I miss my guess) until the beginning of Yahshua's earthly reign. That's *three* two-thousand-year periods of time, followed by one final Millennium—the “day” of rest—seven millennia in all to work out Yahweh's complete plan for the redemption of mankind. (And in case you didn't notice, we're rapidly approaching the end of the last Jubilee period in this epoch. 2033 is right around the corner.)

- (306) *Do not spare the offender in imposing the prescribed penalties on one who has caused damage. “If anyone hates his neighbor, lies in wait for him, rises against him and strikes him mortally, so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities [of refuge], then the elders of his city shall send and bring him from there, and deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with you.”* (Deuteronomy 19:11-13) Whereas Maimonides would gleefully make withholding mercy an across-the-board mandate, Yahweh applied it (here, at least) to only one crime: murder. The city of refuge wasn't to be a “free zone” where criminals could go to escape justice. Rather, it was more like a safe-house or temporary protective custody: your court-appointed executioner couldn't reach you there until (and unless) you were brought to trial and found guilty of murder.

As we have seen, however, murder is a scriptural euphemism for preventing someone from having a personal relationship with Yahweh. The prototypical “murderers” were the scribes and Pharisees (read: rabbis). They were characterized (by Yahshua Himself) as murderers because of their relationship with “their father,” Satan. And what did the Pharisees do that was so bad? They “kept” the law, didn't they? No, they didn't. They merely kept their version of it, designed not to keep them in tune with Yahweh's will, but to elevate their status and prestige among their

countrymen by keeping them in chains, under submission, unaware of Yahweh's forgiveness, and subservient to *them*. Two millennia later, things haven't changed much.

- (307) *Do unto false witnesses as they had purposed to do to the accused.* **“And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.”** (Deuteronomy 19:18-20) This puts teeth in the Ninth Commandment. Yes, we aren't to “bear false witness against our neighbor,” but what happens if someone does? For the umpteenth time, we see a perfectly fair (not to mention stunningly sagacious) solution to a human foible that God *knew* would happen from time to time. We're not talking about innocent inaccuracies in eyewitness testimony here. We're talking about perjury—giving false testimony with the express purpose of seeing an innocent person convicted of a crime. This is sort of the converse of “You shall love your neighbor as you do yourself.” It says, “Your hatred for your neighbor will come back upon your own head.”

The precept requires wisdom and diligence on the part of the judges. I realize that this is a tough requirement on judges today who must work within flawed systems of human jurisprudence—hamstrung by rules of evidence, procedural foolishness, and having cases presented by people who aren't necessarily seeking the truth, but are being paid to deliver a conviction or acquittal—in other words, lawyers who lie for a living. We must remind ourselves that in the end, justice *will* be done. One Judge, perfect in wisdom and unfettered by human inadequacy, will decide who stands guilty before Him, and who is to be set free.

This mitzvah should serve as a dire warning to those today who would “crucify Christ” anew by denying (as the Sanhedrin did two thousand years ago) that He is who He claimed to be: the “Son” of God, Immanuel—“God with us”—Yahweh Himself manifested in flesh and blood. If we bear false witness against Him we will bring upon ourselves the fate we intended for Him—crucifixion in the physical sense, or in the spiritual, the bearing of our own sins to sheol. Not a pleasant prospect.

- (308) *Do not punish any one who has committed an offense under duress.* **“But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman; there is in the young woman no sin deserving of death.”** (Deuteronomy 22:25-26) Maimonides is way out on a limb here. The mitzvah the way he worded it may or may not be correct, depending

on the circumstances. This example in Deuteronomy, of course, is clear cut: the victim of a rape is not guilty of anything. Our esteemed rabbi is thus out of line by characterizing it as “an offense.” Concerning a rape victim’s culpability, it’s nothing of the sort. Maimonides’ patronizing platitude isn’t doing her any favors.

The wording of the mitzvah indicates a broader application than the Torah’s example—one that puts Maimonides on thin ice. The rabbi is saying that *any* “offense” committed under duress should go unpunished. Are you sure? How do you define “duress”? If a robber is threatening to shoot your family if you don’t open your employer’s safe, I suppose I’d be inclined to agree with Rambam. On the other hand, if it’s, “I was so broke I couldn’t pay my cable TV bill, so I went out and knocked over a 7-Eleven,” the *circumstantial* duress the criminal felt clearly isn’t going to cut it. Maimonides is flirting with the concept of the avoidance of personal responsibility through creative justification. Next thing you know, we’ll be hearing him say “The devil made me do it!”

Chapter 9

A Holy People

The mitzvot in this chapter cover a wide variety of topics: prophecy, idolatry, agriculture, clothing, and the firstborn. It would seem to be a bit of a potpourri, but there is a unifying theme—the setting apart of God’s people from the world. Though we must live *in* the world, we don’t have to be *of* it. Maintaining a separateness, a pilgrim mentality, is what we’re called to do. If we’re willing to look past the surface, these instructions will give us a glimpse at Yahweh’s heart.

So in our continuing effort to sort out what we’re supposed to be doing with the Torah during the Church age, let us first turn to Paul’s letter to the Galatians. **“When I saw that they [i.e., the Jewish contingent among the believers at Antioch, including Peter] were not following the truth of the Good News, I said to Peter in front of all the others, “Since you, a Jew by birth, have discarded the Jewish laws and are living like a Gentile, why are you trying to make these Gentiles obey the Jewish laws you abandoned? You and I are Jews by birth, not ‘sinners’ like the Gentiles. And yet we Jewish Christians know that we become right with God, not by doing what the law commands, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be accepted by God because of our faith in Christ—and not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be saved by obeying the law....”** Here’s what had happened. After Peter had had his eye-opening encounter with Cornelius the Centurion (a faithful gentile), he had dropped his inbred Jewish snobbishness—something demanded by rabbinical tradition—and had begun to treat all men as equals under Yahweh. He finally recognized the truth that salvation was intended for all people, not just the Jews.

The New Living Translation has added an explanatory phrase that could easily be misconstrued. The phrase “have discarded the Jewish laws” doesn’t appear in the original text. But technically, this is precisely what Peter had done. Don’t misunderstand: he still observed the Torah as best he could, but he had dropped the *Jewish traditions* that had been added onto God’s instructions by the rabbis. Verse 12 of Galatians 2 gives an example: Peter had taken to openly fellowshiping with gentile believers, even eating meals with them, something he never would have done before the Cornelius episode. He hadn’t for a moment forsaken the Mosaic dietary laws (see chapter 5 of this volume), but he *had* discarded the rabbinical prejudices against keeping gentile company or sharing supper with them.

But then some guys from the church at Jerusalem showed up, fellows whom Peter knew would be shocked at his newfound tolerance for goyim companionship. And Peter waffled. Paul saw right through it, of course, and called him on his lapse—something hilariously ironic in its own right, since Paul

had been a “Pharisee of Pharisees,” a qualified expert in (and a rabid proponent of) the Torah *and* the rabbinical traditions, not necessarily in that order. At one point he had been willing to kill to keep the rabbinical view from being pushed aside by this new sect, the “followers of the Way.” But Paul now pointed out that by giving lip service to the “oral law,” the rabbinical perversion, excuse me—*interpretation*—of the Torah, Peter was leaving the false impression that salvation depended on keeping the law. (Maimonides’ system of mitzvot, of course, didn’t exist yet, but the oral traditions that his 613 “laws” were based upon were firmly entrenched by this time.) Peter and Paul, though, both understood that salvation came only through faith in Yahshua.

Paul continues: **“But what if we seek to be made right with God through faith in Christ and then find out that we are still sinners? Has Christ led us into sin? Of course not! Rather, I make myself guilty if I rebuild the old system I already tore down. For when I tried to keep the law, I realized I could never earn God’s approval. So I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ. I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not one of those who treats the grace of God as meaningless. For if we could be saved by keeping the law, then there was no need for Christ to die.”** (Galatians 2:14-21, NLT) We’ve seen these truths before. The only way we can escape the requirements—and the condemnation—of the Law is to die to it. But the only way to “die” without suffering all sorts of unpleasant side effects, like turning back into dust, is to “hitch a ride,” that is, spiritually associate ourselves with someone who has fought death on our behalf and won, someone who has died for our sins and risen from the grave under His own power, someone who has proved with a faultless life that He is a worthy sacrifice, acceptable to God. There is only one candidate: either we stand justified through Christ, or we fall, condemned under the Law.

The Galatian Christians had begun well enough, receiving their redemption through grace alone. And they had, quite reasonably, looked at the Torah and said, “This is part of God’s word. We should pay heed to these instructions.” But from there it was an easy jump to, “We *must* do this if we are truly Christ’s,” and then to, “Our salvation *depends* on following the letter of the law as interpreted by the rabbis.” So Paul points out the disconnect: “Yes, the Law is good and should be followed, but it never had the power to save anyone, only the power to point out our need for a Savior.” **“Oh, foolish Galatians! What magician has cast an evil spell on you? For you used to see the meaning of Jesus Christ’s death as clearly as though I had shown you a signboard with a picture of Christ dying on the cross. Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by keeping the law? Of course not, for the Holy Spirit came upon you only after you believed the message you heard about Christ. Have you lost your senses? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort? You have suffered so much for the Good News.**

Surely it was not in vain, was it? Are you now going to just throw it all away? I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law of Moses? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ.” (Galatians 3:1-5 NLT)

What we often miss here is what Paul *didn't* say. He didn't declare that the Torah was obsolete, useless, or of no value. That's an erroneous attitude we inherited from Constantine's clerics. It all began like this: In an ecclesiastical power grab worthy of the most ambitious rabbi, Constantine's bishops, at the Council of Nicea in 325, voted to replace Yahweh's "Jewish" Passover with the pagan Easter (a name derived from the Babylonian goddess Ishtar), because it was (as Constantine later wrote) "declared improper to follow the custom of the Jews in the celebration of this holy festival, because, their hands having been stained with crime, the minds of these wretched men are necessarily blinded." In the same way and for the same reasons, the Council of Laodicea, later in the fourth century, declared that God's ordained Sabbath must be replaced with Sunday worship. In fact, Sabbath religious meetings were declared to be illegal. *If the Jews do it, it must be bad!* In their heated headlong rush to persecute Jews (in turn, an attempt to steal for themselves the promises of future glory Yahweh had made to Israel) the Roman Catholic Church was willing to throw out the Word of God itself if it bore any resemblance to the way the hated Jews practiced their religion. We've been struggling with this legacy of ignorance and deceit ever since.

But I digress. Paul was correcting our mistaken attitudes on what the Law was designed to do: not to save us, but to remind us we need saving. **"But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, 'Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all these commands that are written in God's Book of the Law.'" Anybody can keep a little of the Torah perfectly, I suppose. (I'm pretty sure I've never eaten a mouse.) But nobody born with Adam's sin nature can—or has—kept "all these commandments." "Consequently, it is clear that no one can ever be right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, 'It is through faith that a righteous person has life.' How different from this way of faith is the way of law, which says, 'If you wish to find life by obeying the law, you must obey all of its commands.' All is a tall order. The prime example of receiving righteousness through faith is Abraham, who didn't follow the Law (because he didn't have it) but was nevertheless accounted as a righteous man because of his faith in Yahweh's promise. "But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.' Through the work of Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, and we Christians receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith." (Galatians 3:10-14 NLT)**

Since Yahweh promised to bless Abraham on the basis of his faith over four centuries before Moses received the Torah, these promises obviously could not have been predicated on Abe's keeping of the Law. As Paul puts it, **"For if the inheritance could be received only by keeping the law, then it would not be the result of accepting God's promise. But God gave it to Abraham as a promise."** Which begs the question: **"Well then, why was the law given? It was given to show people how guilty they are. But this system of law was to last only until the coming of the child to whom God's promise was made."** (Galatians 3:18-19 NLT) This child of promise, of course, is Yahshua. But wait a minute! Is Paul saying that the Torah has outlived it's usefulness? Has God's Word been rendered obsolete? No, because the Law's "usefulness" *never* consisted of the power to save from sin, any more than a speed limit sign on the highway has the power to keep us from driving too fast.

Perhaps we can use our highway metaphor to illustrate how God's Law and His Promise interact with each other. Picture a bridge across a deep gorge. The Designer has said, "The bridge I've provided is the only way to cross the gorge. It will hold you. I promise. Trust Me." At the same time, He's posted a sign: Bridge speed limit—40 MPH. Now we, mankind, are all standing around contemplating how to get across the gorge. And we find ourselves gathering in groups reflecting our varying "solutions." The first group (whose leader is Abraham) says, "I trust the Designer to get me across the gorge, but since my car doesn't have a speedometer, I'll just keep my eyes fixed on Him as I cross the bridge." The next group, led by Moses, says, "We too trust the Designer," and they cross the bridge with their eyes glued to the speedometer: 40 MPH—that's the law. David's group not only trusts the Designer, they're enthusiastic fans. However, though they know there's a speed limit on the bridge, they often forget to observe it—and subsequently they crash their cars repeatedly into the guard rails as they cross the chasm. All three of these groups believe the Designer's promise and make it to the other side of the gorge because of that belief. The Law has played its part in how smooth (or bumpy) the journey was, but it hasn't affected the destination or their certainty of reaching it. These three groups represent the world's believers.

There are, however, other groups of which we need to be aware. Herod's group doesn't want to cross the gorge at all. They'd rather try to build paradise on this side. The bridge seems to them to be beside the point. Jezebel's people swear they know of a fast, smooth road that will easily get you across the river, just downstream a few miles. "You don't always have to do what the Designer wants," they say. "Trust us instead. C'mon. It'll be fun!" Those who follow Rabbi Akiba don't trust the bridge to hold their weight. They say there's a better path *upstream*, but to use it you've got to be disciplined and keep the letter of the Law—as we interpret it: "The 40 MPH speed limit must apply to all roads, everywhere, even though we reject the bridge that the law was written to instruct us about in the first place." They say, "Crossing the gorge with us will be an

impressive achievement you can be justifiably proud of. But the bridge is just too easy—it's only there to deceive the gullible.” And finally, there's Constantine's group, who actually do venture out onto the Designer's bridge, but not to cross it. Their idea is to encrust it with gold and jewels, restrict access to it, and erect a toll booth at the entrance. The bottom line: nobody in these last four groups crosses the bridge at all, and consequently, none of them make it across the gorge. It really doesn't matter whether they keep the law or not, because they don't believe the Designer's assurance: “My bridge will get you to the other side.”

There are other groups as well, outside the experience of Judeo-Christianity, that neither trust the bridge nor respect the speed limits. One is represented by Muhammad. They provide an inclined ramp and a promise that if you drive fast enough, you'll make it to the other side, where big-eyed virgins await you with come-hither looks and goblets of wine. Buddha's group says the gorge is an illusion, and if you just walk up to the edge and step in, all your troubles will be over. Hitler's group, meanwhile, insists that fate has decreed victory over the gorge and that the *lebensraum* that lies beyond it must fall to his irresistible military might. Need I go on?

In case you still don't know what I'm talking about, here is the key to the metaphor. The “bridge” is Yahshua, the one and only way that the “Designer,” Yahweh, has provided for us to reach Him. The near side of the gorge is our mortal life, the far side is heaven, and the gorge itself is death. The speed limit is the Torah, God's instructions for a safe and productive journey. The “vehicles” in our story are our physical bodies. If we don't heed the “speed limit,” our bodies can be expected to suffer some damage along the way. But if we try to reach the other side by any means other than the Designer's bridge, we will fail altogether.

We have taken this round-about journey to illustrate what Paul was talking about: **“Well then, is there a conflict between God's law and God's promises? Absolutely not! If the law could have given us new life, we could have been made right with God by obeying it. But the Scriptures have declared that we are all prisoners of sin, so the only way to receive God's promise is to believe in Jesus Christ.”** (Galatians 3:21-22 NLT)
Obeying the speed limit won't help you reach your destination if you're not on the right road. As we return to Maimonides' list of 613 laws, let us remember that.

PROPHECY

(309) *Heed the call of every prophet in each generation, provided that he neither adds to, nor takes away from, the Torah. “Yahweh your God will raise*

up for you a Prophet like me [Moses] from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of Yahweh your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of Yahweh my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’” (Deuteronomy 18:15-16) After the Exodus, Yahweh had told Moses to gather the elders of Israel together at Mount Sinai (a.k.a. Horeb), and there, He gave them a tiny peek at His awesome power, enveloping the entire mountain in smoke and fire, with lightning, thunder, the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of God (see Exodus 19). Showing His *full* glory, of course, would have turned the whole planet into a charcoal briquette, but even “dialed down,” the effect was more than they could bear. The people were so afraid, they begged to be spared from such terrifying displays in the future. Yahweh agreed, and made them the promise we read above—the promise of a coming Israelite “prophet” who would do what they had “desired of Yahweh your God in Horeb,” namely, to be God in their midst, to show them how to live as men before Yahweh.

Maimonides’ mitzvah, though a fine sentiment in its own right, is a pale, twisted mischaracterization of what Moses had actually said. Moses spoke of *a* Prophet, not many, one who would speak with the very “**voice of Yahweh my God,**” a factor that makes rabbinical pontifications about whether or not he was maintaining the Torah totally superfluous. This Prophet would be a man, one born of the house of Israel—“your brethren.” Moses was referring, as we can see now, to the Messiah, Yahshua. When Moses had said, “**Him you shall hear,**” it was both a command and a prophecy. Many Jews in the days following the resurrection *did* “hear” and follow Him—though their voice was brutally and treacherously silenced by the Jewish ruling elite. But the day is coming when the nation of Israel *will* hear the voice of Yahshua. The definitive Day of Atonement (October 3, 2033, if my observations are correct—see Mitzvot #112 and #133-136 in Chapter 4) will see the fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy.

The thinly veiled reason that Maimonides added the stipulation that “*he neither adds to, nor takes away from, the Torah*” was the widely held assertion among Jews that Yahshua had violated the Torah by doing such things as healing sick people on the Sabbath. In point of fact, He had *not* violated the Torah—He had merely violated their *interpretations*, their traditions. It takes a lot of nerve to tell Bach how to play his own fugue.

- (310) *Do not prophesy falsely.* “**But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.**” (Deuteronomy 18:20) I wonder if Maimonides blushed when he got to this point. As we have seen, he played so fast and loose with the actual requirements of the Torah, and his

agenda is so transparent, it's a wonder he could put quill to parchment. There are two types of "false prophecy" delineated here. The first is making up what you'd like people to believe Yahweh said. It's the kind of thing Maimonides and other rabbis did all day long. Of course, the Jews don't have a monopoly on this tactic. Roman Catholics and quite a few Protestants routinely preach doctrines derived in this very way. Before we glibly say, "God said..." we need to be very sure of our facts.

The second category of false prophet is those who "speak in the name of other gods," like the 450 priests of Ba'al that Elijah dealt with in I Kings 18. Don't take comfort in the idea that there aren't all that many "Ba'al worshippers" around these days. Any religious system that purports to have answers for this life and beyond, outside of Yahweh's truth, is guilty. Islam's Allah is currently the world's number one "other god," with over a billion souls in bondage. But there are thousands of other ones, both obvious and covert, for whom false prophets put in their two bits' worth. And take note: "other gods" needn't be "gods" at all in the traditional sense. Communism and secular humanism are "religions" in every sense of the word, with their own prophets and doctrines.

- (311) *Do not refrain from putting a false prophet to death nor be in fear of him. "And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which Yahweh has not spoken?'—when a prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which Yahweh has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.*

(Deuteronomy 18:21-22) The penalty for false prophecy is death. But who is to administer the punishment? In Theocratic Israel, the *people* were to execute the offender (see Deuteronomy 13). Does that mean that we today should be going around killing everyone who voices a religious philosophy divergent from our own? (The Islamic scriptures demand this very thing, though Muslims don't always comprehend this.) It's pretty clear that the answer is "no," for during His first-century advent, Yahshua didn't advocate holy war against Rome (as some did), even though the Romans practiced the worship of many gods (none of whom answered to the name Yahweh) and the emperor himself demanded to be worshiped as a deity. So outside of a theocratic Israel that no longer exists, all we can say for sure is, "**That prophet shall die.**" How? Yahweh will apparently use His *enemies* to do most of the wet work. Read my book on prophecy, *Future History*, to find out how and when.

The rub here is that most prophets in the Bible predicted things that *didn't* take place during their lifetimes. In fact, so many prophecies *still* haven't been completely fulfilled, even today, it took me almost 900 pages

to explain them all in *Future History*. I suppose that's why the Old Covenant prophets often uttered prophecies with near and far fulfillments. Warnings about Assyria and Babylon often morph into warnings about Last-Days enemies like Islam and the Antichrist. The near-term fulfillments were a down payment on the *real* prophetic bottom line.

The translation of the phrase “**you shall not be afraid of him**” is a bit misleading. The word for “be afraid” is *guwr*. Its primary meaning is “to sojourn, abide, dwell in or with, to seek hospitality with.” (S) Moses is actually telling us that if a prophet says things in the name of God that don't come to pass, we aren't to have anything to do with him—we're not to “enter his house.” So when Muhammad tells you that the “day of doom” will take place in 1110 AD (i.e., half a prophetic “day,” or 500 years, after his coronation as Allah's last messenger) that's the signal to drop him and his religion like a hot rock. When the TV preacher promises you that God will bless you financially or cure your cancer if you send him enough money, it's time to tune him out. Remember, “**That prophet shall die.**”

IDOLATRY AND IDOLATORS

- (312) *Do not make a graven image; neither make it yourself nor have it made by others. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God.”* (Exodus 20:4-5) This, of course, is the second of the “Ten Commandments.” The point is not who makes the “graven image” or for whom, but rather its intended use. Images of created things are not to be employed as objects of worship. Things that would immediately pop into the minds of the Israelites hearing these words include the sun-god and moon-god symbols of their former Egyptian hosts, the golden calf they had merrily constructed while Mo was up on the mountain receiving this very Law (oops), and the fish-god images of the Dagon worshippers they were soon to encounter in the Land of Canaan.

The word translated “jealous” is *qana*, from a root which means “zeal.” The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* says, “It may prove helpful to think of ‘zeal’ as the original sense from which derived the notions ‘zeal for another's property’ equals ‘envy,’ and ‘zeal for one's own property’ equals ‘jealousy.’” Thus Yahweh was reminding the Israelites that they were His own set-apart people. They belonged to Him. And if we today are His children, He is similarly “jealous” over us.

- (313) *Do not make any figures for ornament, even if they are not worshipped.* “You shall not make anything to be with Me—gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves. An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it.” (Exodus 20:23-25) Maimonides has taken the “no graven images” ball and run with it, forbidding (as the Muslims do) any image of anything for any purpose. Yes, representations of any object of worship—even of Yahweh Himself, if that were possible—were strictly and specifically forbidden. And it’s clear from the passage that Yahweh doesn’t want us to try to impress Him with our skill and workmanship, the best of which—let’s face it—is pathetically anemic when compared with the glories of His creation.

That being said, only a few chapters after the Ten Commandments, Yahweh is seen selecting a man (named Bezaleel—meaning “in the shadow of God”) because of, among other things, his “filling with the Spirit of God...in all manner of workmanship to design artistic works.” And He is heard *instructing* Israel to place specific decorative “images” on the mercy seat: “**And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat.**” (Exodus 25:18-20) Further, the instructions on the construction of the Tabernacle are peppered with references to “graven images” the Israelites are *supposed* to make—bowls shaped like “almond blossoms” on the golden lampstand; pictures of cherubim (what *does* a cherub look like, anyway?) woven into the curtains; golden bells and pomegranates sewn onto the hem of Aaron’s robe, etc.

So Yahweh clearly isn’t prohibiting all graphic or three-dimensional representations, but rather the *worship* of them. The Jews, to their credit, seem to have this one down pat, though as usual, they’re more restrictive than God Himself, which is pretty scary. It’s the Catholics who have it all wrong. The late pope John Paul II declared, “A mysterious ‘presence’ of the transcendent Prototype seems as it were to be transferred to the sacred image.... The devout contemplation of such an image thus appears as a real and concrete path of purification of the soul of the believer...because the image itself, blessed by the priest...can in a certain sense, by analogy with the sacraments, actually be a channel of divine grace.” (Quoted by

Dave Hunt in *A Woman Rides the Beast*.) In other words (in case you couldn't follow the slippery religious gobbledygook), "A picture of Jesus—if a Catholic priest blesses it—is as good as the real thing." Not according to Exodus, big guy.

- (314) *Do not make idols even for others.* **"You shall make no molded gods for yourselves."** (Exodus 34:17); **"Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods: I am Yahweh your God."** (Leviticus 19:4) Again, Yahweh doesn't particularly care who makes the image or who intends to worship it: the instruction is, "Don't do it." Notice also that Yahweh is saying that the worship of idols would entail "turning" from Him. He began this relationship with Israel right in front of them—in their midst. When they parted company, He did not leave them. They left Him.
- (315) *Do not use the ornament of any object of idolatrous worship.* **"You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it is an abomination to Yahweh your God. Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing."** (Deuteronomy 7:25-26) The context here is the impending conquest of Canaan. Because the inhabitants of the Land were idolaters, it could reasonably be assumed that the victorious Israelites would find idols, graven images of false gods, left behind by the defeated foe. Yahweh is saying to completely destroy them: burn them with fire. Don't adopt them as objects of worship (duh), don't put them in museums as historical artifacts, don't even recycle the intrinsically valuable or useful components of them—the gold or silver they're made of. Lesson: we need to adjust our view of what's valuable (and what isn't) to align with Yahweh's way of thinking. He values love, faith, fellowship, and truth. *Gold* He uses as paving material.
- (316) *Do not make use of an idol or its accessory objects, offerings, or libations.* **"You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it is an abomination to Yahweh your God. Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing."** (Deuteronomy 7:25-26) Our supporting text is the same as for the previous mitzvah. Once again, the rabbis are more restrictive than Yahweh. His ban was limited to idols—the rabbis extended it to the objects that became associated with them through errant worship, which, if you think about it, is giving far more credit than is due to a dumb, lifeless hunk of wood, rock, or metal.

Paul addressed this very issue. He wrote, **“Concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.”** (I Corinthians 8:4) The rabbinical view was that meat that had been offered to idols in the pagan temples and subsequently offered for sale in the marketplace was tainted, and thus forbidden. Paul says, “Hey, it’s just meat, the same as any other. Since the idol is nothing, it has no power to accept, consecrate, or defile a sacrifice that’s offered to it. Believe me, the cow doesn’t know the difference.” However, Paul went on to say that there *are* circumstances that would make it improper to eat “things offered to idols.” But they have nothing at all to do with the meat itself, but rather to the damage one could do to the weak conscience of a less mature believer. **“Food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.”** (I Corinthians 8:8-9) In the real world, Yahweh’s law of love trumps everything else.

- (317) *Do not drink the wine of idolaters.* **“For Yahweh will judge His people and have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is no one remaining, bond or free. He will say: ‘Where are their gods, the rock in which they sought refuge, who ate the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise and help you, and be your refuge.’”** (Deuteronomy 32:36-38) Maimonides has completely missed the point—again. Yahweh is looking forward to a time when He will have to judge His people Israel because of their idolatry—the very thing He incessantly warned them about. Eventually, Moses relates, it will get so bad that He has to evict them from their Land until no Jew is left there (can you spell Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Vespasian, or Hadrian?). They will have to live out their generations in exile, wondering why the false gods they worshipped with their burnt sacrifices and to whom they poured out their drink offerings never answered them or came to their rescue. Did Maimonides not realize that he was penning his prevarications in Cairo, not Jerusalem? Was he so comfortable in exile that he didn’t notice that Yahweh had divorced his people?

Don’t skip over the line, **“Yahweh...will have compassion on His servants.”** Daniel predicts (in 12:7) that during the last three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation, the power of Yahweh’s people Israel will once again be “completely shattered”—one last time they will be driven from the Land (by the Antichrist’s “abomination of desolation”). This time, however, their exile will teach them to trust in Yahweh and His Messiah. The result will be the final and permanent restoration of Israel. (See *Future History*,

Chapter 19: “Visions of Grandeur,” through Chapter 21: “The Great Awakening,” for the whole story.)

How incredibly sad it is to see that even today, the Jews take this Torah passage and torture it until they’ve derived a complicated system of what *grape products* are okay and which ones aren’t. The Judaism 101 website reports that because of idolatrous *gentile* practices, “The use of wines and other grape products made by non-Jews was prohibited. (Whole grapes are not a problem, nor are whole grapes in fruit cocktail). For the most part, this rule only affects wine and grape juice. This becomes a concern with many fruit drinks or fruit-flavored drinks, which are often sweetened with grape juice. You may also notice that some baking powders are not kosher, because baking powder is sometimes made with cream of tartar, a by-product of wine making.” I mourn for the blindness of my Jewish brothers, and long for the day when Yahshua will restore their sight.

- (318) *Do not worship an idol in the way in which it is usually worshipped. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.”* (Exodus 20:4-5) We discussed the Second Commandment in Mitzvot #312 and following. There the rabbinical emphasis was on making idols; here it’s on worshipping them. What Maimonides is missing is that an “idol” can be anything that we “serve” in place of God. It doesn’t have to be a statue that we physically bow before. It can be our career, our leisure-time activities, religion, sex, power, money, drugs, or any of a thousand other things that may or may not be “bad” in themselves. It can even be our interpretation of the Torah! If it takes the place of Yahweh in our affections, it is a “graven image” that needs to be removed from our lives.
- (319) *Do not bow down to an idol, even if that is not its mode of worship. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.”* (Exodus 20:4-5) Here’s the Second Commandment again. All these nuances that Maimonides has been listing for the last few entries are beside the point if we understand that we are to revere Yahweh alone.

The interesting thing to note is that under normal circumstances, Yahweh doesn’t even want us “bowing down” to *Him!* Yes, we are to recognize His suzerainty, but He would much prefer to see us walking upright with Him, being as comfortably conversant with Him as Adam was before he fell into sin. Genesis 17:1 describes the relationship

Yahweh wants to share with us. He said to Abraham, **“I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.”** Without losing sight of His majesty and power, we are to interact with our Maker confidently, honestly, face-to-face. But *blamelessly*? How is that possible? Strong’s defines *tamiym* as “Complete, whole, entire, sound, healthful, wholesome, unimpaired, innocent, having integrity—entirely in accord with truth and fact.” If we’re honest with ourselves, we realize that we’re sinful creatures: we are *not* blameless. But as with Abraham, Yahweh is willing to count our faith as righteousness. If we trust Him, we are *tamiym* before Him.

- (320) *Do not prophesy in the name of an idol.* **“And in all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.”** (Exodus 23:13); **“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.”** (Deuteronomy 18:20) There are two related concepts here, both important. First, because Yahweh wants His word before us at all times, there is no room for talk of “other gods.” If we think of Him as one among a pantheon, we will not comprehend His uniqueness, His holiness.

Second, if we speak of “other gods” as if they were real like Yahweh is, we are lying; and worse, we are attempting to prevent our audience from having a relationship with Yahweh—a very bad thing, worthy of the death penalty. “Speaking in the name” of something is not some esoteric religious formula, by the way. “Name” is the Hebrew word *shem*, meaning either one’s name, reputation, character, or renown. When one says, “So-and-so says this (or does this, or thinks this),” we are “speaking in his name.” When a Muslim shouts “Allahu akbar” (“Allah is greater”) as he fires his Kalashnikov into the air, he is “speaking in the name of another god.” Yahweh says, “That prophet shall die.”

- (321) *Do not hearken to one who prophesies in the name of an idol.* **“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for Yahweh your God is testing you to know whether you love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after Yahweh your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.”** (Deuteronomy 13:1-4) Maimonides got this one right, though his summary misses the impact of the Torah. This is where systematically removing Yahweh’s name from the Bible really becomes a problem—which is why I’ve restored Yahweh’s name in place of the title

that has been systematically substituted for it, “the LORD.” If you don’t know who your God is—by name—then you’re going to be more vulnerable when somebody comes along and does some really cool signs and wonders, attributing them to “God.” Remember how Pharaoh was led astray by the “miracles” performed by his court magicians, replicating the signs Yahweh had given Moses and Aaron to do to validate their mission? Miracles can be faked. Especially today.

There’s not a lot of this sort of thing recorded in scripture, however. Most advocates of false gods are pathetically ineffectual in presenting evidence to back their claims. But in our not-so-distant future, a false prophet will arise, performing signs that will *seem* to prove the deity of his counterpart, a man we’ve come to know as “the Antichrist.” John explains: **“Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.”** (Revelation 13:11-15) There it is: deceptive signs designed to make people worship one who is not god—the very scenario about which we were warned back in Deuteronomy. The Antichrist (the “first beast”) will try to pass himself off as the Messiah. Remarkably, the lie will work on much of the world. But for the first time in three thousand years, I’m happy to report, the Jews won’t fall for it. They will have finally learned to **“walk after Yahweh their God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice... serve Him and hold fast to Him.”** Better late than never.

- (322) *Do not lead the children of Israel astray to idolatry.* **“In all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.”** (Exodus 23:13) Nice thought. Too bad the rabbis never paid attention to their own mitzvah, leading Israel into the idolatry of pride, intellect, and pointless works designed to impress a god they don’t know and whose name they won’t utter. What the NKJV renders “be circumspect” is the Hebrew word *shamar*, which means keep, guard, watch, preserve, attend, observe, protect, etc. And “make no mention of” isn’t a particularly good translation either. *Zakar* basically means to remember, to proclaim what has been remembered, to commemorate. Moses, then, is telling his audience to carefully observe the Torah just the

way Yahweh delivered it, and not to honor and memorialize a counterfeit system of “laws.” The religion of Judaism today, far from being the key to the mind of God as the rabbis contend, is the very antithesis of this mitzvah and the Torah from which it was wrested.

- (323) *Do not entice an Israelite to idolatry.* **“If you hear someone in one of your cities, which Yahweh your God gives you to dwell in, saying, ‘Corrupt men have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, “Let us go and serve other gods”’—which you have not known—then you shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock—with the edge of the sword.”** (Deuteronomy 13:12-15) This passage doesn’t only apply to apostate cities, but to individuals as well, as witnessed in the preceding verses (6-11). Yahweh, in His warnings to theocratic Israel designed to keep the nation pure and set apart for His purpose, was really serious about dealing with idolatry among His people. Yahweh’s Messiah would be delivered to the world through this nation. If they fell into total idolatry (like the Canaanites they were instructed to displace in the Land), the very existence of Israel would have been jeopardized. Without abridging individual choice, Yahweh *had* to keep His people set apart from the nations.
- (324) *Destroy idolatry and its appurtenances.* **“You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship Yahweh your God with such things.”** (Deuteronomy 12:2-4) Without instruction, the Israelite conquerors of Canaan might have been tempted to simply use whatever worship facilities they found, change the name of the deity from Ba’al (or Chemosh, Astarte, Molech, Dagon, or any of a dozen others) to Yahweh, and call it a day. But Yahweh (being the *real* God) had specified a different form of worship for His people—a system of sacrifices, holidays, and “appurtenances” that told the unfolding story of mankind’s salvation in its every detail. Every nuance of the Levitical ritual prescribed in the Torah was prophetic of the coming Messiah.

The sad history of Israel from the Conquest to their final exile can be traced back to their refusal to do what Moses instructed here. Sadder still is the adoption and assimilation of pagan practices into the liturgy of the Church—a process begun in earnest at the time of Constantine. Having

seen what had happened to Israel, we should have known better. What part of “**You shall not worship Yahweh your God with such things**” didn’t they understand? And don’t think you’re immune to the legacy of pagan infiltration just because you’re a “Protestant.” As long as we celebrate Easter and Christmas in place of Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, we remain under the indictment of this mitzvah.

- (325) *Do not love the enticer to idolatry.* “**If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you.**” (Deuteronomy 13:6-11) Maimonides is going to wring the next five mitzvot out of this passage, so I figured I’d better quote the whole thing. The first thing we should notice is that Yahweh did *not* tell us not to love someone—even an idolater. What He is telling us to do is make the hard choices if we must: to put away the evil influences from among us, even if it means rejecting a member of our own family or turning our back on our best friend. The greater good must be considered. We are not being told *not* to love the enticer to idolatry—rather, we are being told to do something far more difficult: to slay someone we *do* love in order to protect the community from falling into idolatry.

The instruction to stone those who would entice us to idolatry was obviously meant to apply only within theocratic Israel. If we tried to keep this law today, we’d have to kill every politician, advertising writer, and rock star in the country, along with half the clergy. The principle, however, still applies to all of us. We are to “kill” the influence of those who would divert our affections from Yahweh to something else—*anything* else.

- (326) *Do not give up hating the enticer to idolatry.* “**If [someone] entices you, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ ...you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him.**” (Deuteronomy 13:6-9) This is merely the negative restatement of the previous mitzvah. Again, hatred is not part of Yahweh’s instruction—but the merciless rejection of false teaching and false teachers *is*. Tolerance is not a godly virtue, as strange as that may seem.

God wants us to know His word and unequivocally denounce the teachings that contradict it. The sort of lowest-common-denominator ecumenical spirit that passes for “Christian unity” today makes God want to puke—and those are His words, not mine—see Revelation 3:16.

- (327) *Do not save the enticer from capital punishment, but stand by at his execution.* “...**You shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you.**” (Deuteronomy 13:9-11) No, Maimonides, you pathetic wimp! It says that *you*—the one who has been enticed to follow strange gods—are to cast the first stone. Don’t “stand by” and let the mob do your “wet work” for you. *You* do it! Be personally involved in defending the faith.

I should interject here that “enticement away from Yahweh your God” is not remotely the same thing as rejecting the burden of religion that men have laid upon your shoulders in an attempt to subjugate you. First-century Pharisees were guilty of this, but they were pikers compared to the Roman Catholic Church, who killed millions of Christians over the centuries who merely wished to serve God and study His Word—Hussites, Albigensians, Waldensians, Huguenots, and others. Torquemada and his ilk were defending the Roman religious system, not the Word of God.

I should also note (because Maimonides doesn’t) that the reason the enticer was to be executed was not only to “put away the evil from your midst” (Deuteronomy 13:5), but also as a deterrent, “**So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you.**” Political liberals today contend that the death penalty has no deterrent value. Yahweh begs to differ, but it has to be applied even-handedly, consistently, and without prejudice if we want it to serve as a disincentive. Otherwise, it’s just punishment.

- (328) *A person whom he attempted to entice into idolatry shall not urge pleas for the acquittal of the enticer.* “...**You shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him.**” (Deuteronomy 13:8-9) Remember, the “enticer” in these verses is characterized in a worst-case scenario: one’s brother, child, spouse, or friend—someone near and dear to you. The natural inclination is to hide the crime, to go into a state of denial. Yahweh says, “Be honest with yourself, and be honest with Me. You know what you heard. Deal with it.” If a cancerous tumor is growing, you must cut it out, remove it,

throw it away. I know it will be painful, but if you don't do what's necessary, the patient will die.

- (329) *A person whom he attempted to entice shall not refrain from giving evidence of the enticer's guilt, if he has such evidence. "...You shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him."* (Deuteronomy 13:8-9) We must be very careful to define the circumstances under which one is not to listen to, pity, spare, or conceal the faults of the offender. This passage (quoted fully in Mitzvah #325) deals *only* with him who entices someone to false worship—in other words, a false or misleading prophet, someone who advocates serving something or someone other than Yahweh. It is *not* speaking of human retribution for ordinary sins—places where we all fall short of Yahweh's perfect standard of conduct. In fact, our response to those foibles is precisely the opposite: "[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (I Corinthians 13:7) "Above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.'" (I Peter 4:8, quoting Proverbs 10:12) The point is, Yahweh knows we're sinners. Because He loves us, He has provided a means by which our sins can be eliminated, so we can be restored to fellowship. Therefore, the only *real* evil is preventing people from availing themselves of God's mercy.
- (330) *Do not swear by an idol to its worshipers, nor cause them to swear by it. "In all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth."* (Exodus 23:13) We saw this same text back in Mitzvot #320 and #322. On the face of it, Maimonides has betrayed a total lack of understanding of the Torah's teaching concerning idolatry. Here he is describing the fine points of how God's people are to relate to the idol worshippers among them: "Don't try to gain their allegiance by giving lip service to their gods." But the Israelites weren't to *relate* with them at all—they were supposed to *kill* them—to rid the Land of their presence and memory. And although we no longer live in theocratic Israel (the only place physical death is prescribed), the principle still applies. We are to remain watchful, being careful not to commemorate the name or character of any entity that might vie with Yahweh for a place in our affections.
- (331) *Do not turn one's attention to idolatry. "Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods: I am Yahweh your God."* (Leviticus 19:4) That's pretty clear. Of special interest here is that "gods" and "God" are the same word in the Hebrew text—*elohim*, the plural form of *'el* or *eloah*, the generic name for "deity" or "mighty one." Things that are worshiped or revered are referred to as *elohim*. But Yahweh is One. How can "He" be plural?

The answer lies in His willingness to manifest Himself in less-than-infinite forms we humans can relate to and fellowship with—Yahshua: Immanuel, God existing as a man, characterized as the “Son” of God; and the Holy Spirit (*Ruach Qodesh*): the maternal manifestation of Yahweh dwelling within each believer, comforting, guiding, and admonishing us. These are real. But idols we’ve manufactured (even if only in our minds) are none of those things. They are totally unworthy of our attention and devotion.

- (332) *Do not adopt the institutions of idolaters nor their customs.* **“I am Yahweh your God. According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am Yahweh your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 18:2-5) **“And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am casting out before you; for they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them.”** (Leviticus 20:23) Maimonides is correct here: the Israelites were to reject the practices, laws, and customs of the world from which they were escaping, as well as those of the Land they were being given. The key to *why* is in the phrase repeated three times in the Leviticus 18 passage: “I am Yahweh your God.” Yahweh’s character changed everything.

We need to recognize that not everything the Egyptians and Canaanites did was evil. They too had consciences, and some of their practices no doubt aligned with God’s Law—I’m sure they considered murder a bad thing, for example. But Yahweh had an entirely new paradigm planned for the Israelites. They were to be holy—that is, set apart from the surrounding peoples for God’s purposes. That meant that every detail of their law and custom would have to be re-invented and re-defined according to Yahweh’s plan. They couldn’t just keep the “good” parts of the previous societies and try to fix what had obviously gone wrong. That’s why Moses delivered instruction concerning everything from what you should eat, to who you could marry, to when to give your donkey a rest, to how to honor God. And even when the laws themselves bore some resemblance to the existing customs of the land, the *reasons* for the laws were brand new. One way or another, they all pointed toward the coming Messiah and toward Yahweh’s master plan for the redemption of the human race.

In application to our generation, we should not merely say, “Okay, I won’t do what Egyptians and Canaanites did,” and call it a day. We too are to be holy, set apart, insulated, and isolated from the influences of the

world. We have to live here, but we don't have to be *of* here. The land in which we sojourn has laws and customs, but we need to bear in mind that there is a Law that takes precedence—Yahweh's law of love.

- (333) *Do not pass a child through the fire to Molech.* **“You shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 18:21) Molech (or Moloch) was a permutation of Ba'al. Fair warning: this gets pretty sick. Heathen worshippers in Canaan were required to avail themselves of the temple prostitutes. The children born of these unions were unwanted baggage, so the satanic priesthood came up with a perfect way to deal with the little bastards. A bronze statue of Molech was brought to red heat and the hapless children were placed in its outstretched arms to die. No one was allowed to grieve or mourn, for the fire, it was said, was a purifying instrument through which the people's sins were purged. One of the places that this horrendous rite was practiced was the Valley of Hinnom, or Gehenna, just south of the old city of Jerusalem—earning it the dubious distinction of being Yahshua's chosen metaphor for hell.

So here we see Yahweh warning His people not to do this evil thing, decades before they even entered the Promised Land. Did they listen? No. Jeremiah reports, **“They built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin. Now therefore, thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, concerning this city... It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.”** (Jeremiah 32:35-56)

If you think this abominable practice died out with the Canaanites, I've got some bad news. It was resurrected—in a less gruesome form—in the medieval holiday bonfires of European Catholicism. And it lives on today in the myth of purgatory, which the Roman church insists (contrary to the plain teaching of scripture) is necessary for the purging of individual sin. Vatican II states: “the doctrine of purgatory clearly demonstrates that even when the guilt of sin has been taken away, punishment for it or the consequences of it may remain to be expiated or cleansed.... In purgatory the souls of those who died in the charity of God and were truly repentant but who had not made satisfaction with adequate penance for their sins and omissions [making the Catholic church stinking rich, I might add] are cleansed after death with punishments designed to purge away their debt.” Gee, and I thought Yahshua's sacrifice on Calvary took care of all that.

What was I *thinkin'*? Apparently Molech has moved out of Canaan and rented a condo in Rome.

- (334) *Do not allow anyone practicing witchcraft to live. “You shall not permit a sorceress to live.”* (Exodus 22:18) The Hebrew word translated “sorceress” is actually a verb, *kasap*, meaning to practice magic or sorcery, to use supernatural (i.e., demonic) powers. Listed among King Manasseh’s many sins was *kasap*: **“he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists.”** (II Chronicles 33:6) Notice God’s instruction here: it’s not to disavow the use of sorcery. That’s taken care of elsewhere. Rather, it’s to make sure that no one who practices such things survives. Manasseh reigned for fifty-five years in Jerusalem and yet no one bothered to invoke Exodus 22:18. This means all of Judah was guilty under the law for not dealing with Manasseh’s sin.

It is also instructive to see the kind of things Yahweh promises to lump in with practicing sorcery when it comes time for judgment: **“And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers (*kasap*), against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien—because they do not fear Me, says Yahweh of hosts.”** (Malachi 3:5) One way or another, he’s just touched on Commandments 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, and 10. Sorcery is not only placing “another god” before Yahweh, it’s also the very essence of what it is to regard the name of Yahweh as worthlessness—which is what the Third Commandment is all about.

- (335) *Do not practice onein (observing times or seasons as favorable or unfavorable, using astrology). “You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying.”* (Leviticus 19:26) The word translated “soothsaying” is the Hebrew *anan*, which shows up in Maimonides’ mitzvot as *onein*. *Strong’s* defines it as: “to practice soothsaying, to conjure, to observe times [i.e., as an occult practice], practice soothsaying or spiritism or magic or augury or witchcraft.” As a noun, it means, “soothsayer, enchanter, sorceress, diviner, fortuneteller, or barbarian.” It also means “to bring clouds,” and is used in reference to such things as the “pillar of cloud” that accompanied the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings, clouds of incense representing the prayers of the saints, or in the ubiquitous eschatological mention of the clouds (see for example Zephaniah 1:15 or Daniel 7:13) that will announce Yahweh’s judgment in the last days. The “cloud” angle brings the word into focus: it’s saying that we are not to do, or even simulate, the works God has reserved for Himself. Some deeds remain Yahweh’s prerogative alone; some knowledge remains His exclusive purview.

- (336) *Do not practice nachesh (doing things based on signs and portents; using charms and incantations).* **“You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying.”** (Leviticus 19:26) “Divination” is the rendering of the Hebrew *nachash*, meaning to practice divination, to observe occult or astrological signs, practice fortunetelling, or to take something as an omen. It includes interpreting omens or signs as a way to discern the will or plan of God (or the gods). The point is that when Yahweh wants us to know something *specific* about the future, he instructs His prophets to write it down. And as I’ve noted previously, there are still thousands of prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled—so many, in fact, that it took me almost nine hundred pages to cover them in my book *Future History*. It is our responsibility to read the Scriptures and use them to discern what Yahweh has revealed about our future. We post-Pentecost believers also have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us to guide us toward the truth. But we are *not* to do the kind of thing Constantine did. He saw a cross in the sky and “heard” a voice saying, “In this sign conquer,” and proceeded to act upon the omen, slaughtering his enemies to attain temporal power and then using that power to subjugate millions in the name of religion. He was not listening to the voice of God, no matter what the omen said; he was merely practicing *nachash*.

Yahshua Himself addressed the problem, for the religious elite of His day—who, having the Torah, should have known better—demanded a sign, an omen, that would prove His credentials. **“When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had arrived, they came to argue with him. Testing him to see if he was from God, they demanded, ‘Give us a miraculous sign from heaven to prove yourself.’ When he heard this, he sighed deeply and said, ‘Why do you people keep demanding a miraculous sign? I assure you, I will not give this generation any such sign.’ So he got back into the boat and left them, and he crossed to the other side of the lake.”** (Mark 8:11-13 NLT) They had the Law, the prophets, and the Psalms, and all of it spoke of the Messiah, one way or another. The Pharisees didn’t want to believe any of that, but they were all too willing to accept an occult “sign” if it would demonstrate His standing with God. Yahshua, knowing the Torah, wouldn’t play their game.

- (337) *Do not consult ovoth (ghosts).* **“Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am Yahweh your God.”** (Leviticus 19:31) The Hebrew word translated “medium” here is *’owb*, which according to the *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* means either a “medium, i.e., a spiritist or necromancer that conjures and communicates with ghosts,” or the ghost itself, a “spirit of the dead, i.e., a spirit which can communicate with human mediums, called from the underworld of the dead.” The word is derived from its primary meaning: a

wineskin—something that holds, contains, or dispenses something else. The point is not that ghosts don't exist, but rather that information about the future is not to be sought from anything or anyone but Yahweh Himself.

The definitive anecdote on this subject is, of course, King Saul's consultation with the witch of En Dor, recorded in I Samuel 28:7-25. Samuel the seer had died, and the disobedient king's prayers for guidance were bouncing off the ceiling, as it were. So he consulted an *'owb* to bring Samuel back from the dead for a little chat. In a hilarious scene, the medium, more used to channeling demons (or merely faking her séances) to hoodwink her gullible clientele, actually *did* call up Samuel's ghost. Oops. The prophet, annoyed at having been disturbed from his well-deserved rest, bluntly informed Saul that the Philistines were going to defeat Israel in battle, and that Saul and his sons would be killed. The moral of the story: don't cut off communication with Yahweh, and if you do, don't expect any good news you hear from another source to be true.

- (338) *Do not consult yid'onim (wizards)*. **“Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am Yahweh your God.”** (Leviticus 19:31) A *yidoni* is similar to an *'owb*. In fact, the two words always appear in parallel in scripture. *Yidoni* is alternately translated wizard, familiar spirit, fortune teller, magician, or sorcerer. As with *'owb*, there is some ambiguity as to whether the word refers to the spirit or the one who conjures it up. Yahweh is very clear on this issue: do not regard them; do not seek them—they will defile you. He ends His warning with the ubiquitous *raison d'être* for following His instructions: He is Yahweh our God. As always, that is reason enough for doing what He says.
- (339) *Do not practice kisuf (magic using herbs, stones and objects)*. **“There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh, and because of these abominations Yahweh your God drives them [the Canaanites] out from before you.** (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) Mitzvot #339 through #344 are all taken from the same couple of verses. Yahweh is denouncing the practice of seeking esoteric knowledge in as many ways as the Hebrew language will allow. He wants us rather to rely on Him for revelation. His Word is a lens through which we can discern the truth or falsehood of a matter, while everything listed here is an attempt to circumvent our reliance on Him. Bear in mind that the anglicized spelling of these Hebrew words varies widely from source to source. This first word is *kashaph*,

translated “sorcerer” here. It is a verb meaning to engage in witchcraft, be a sorcerer, or to practice the black magic arts.

- (340) *Do not practice kessem (a general term for magical practices).* **“There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh.”** (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) The phrase “practices witchcraft” is rendered from the Hebrew *qasam qesem*. It means “to practice divination, to seek an omen, or to state or determine the future (or hidden knowledge) through signs, omens, or supernatural power.” (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*) There are “four broad classes of divination: (1) the position of stars; (2) speaking with dead spirits; (3) examining animal parts or potsherds [reading palms or tea leaves would fall into this category]; (4) casting lots for a yes or no answer. A ‘lot’ is a specially marked small stick, pebble, or shard thrown down for making decisions based on pagan views of chance, or believers using the lot perceived as quasi-chance, but believed to be guided by God.” In other words, *qasam qesem* is arranging your life according to astrology, necromancy, voodoo, or even just flipping a coin. All these things are an abomination to Yahweh. We are to be guided by His Word and Spirit, not by chance or self-deception.
- (341) *Do not practice the art of a chover chaver (casting spells over snakes and scorpions).* **“There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh.”** (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) The phrase “conjures spells” is *chabar cheber*, another related verb-noun combination like *qasam qesem*. *Chabar* means “to unite, join, bind together, be coupled, be in league with, heap up, or have fellowship with.” (S) Likewise, the noun *cheber* connotes association, co-habitation, a banding together. The phrase therefore suggests casting magic spells uniting the object with demonic forces via incantations. This type of illicit religious charm would be used to invoke satanic power. The incantation could be made either verbally or through actions like tying magic knots. Thus a *chabar cheber* is an enchanter, one who makes and invokes unlawful incantations of various kinds. The Islamic Hadith makes it clear that Muhammad was a *chabar cheber*.
- (342) *Do not enquire of an ob (a ghost).* **“There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one**

who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh.” (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) We’ve seen this warning before (in Mitzvah #337). If you’ll recall, an *’owb* is either a “medium, i.e., a spiritist or necromancer that conjures and communicates with ghosts,” or the ghost itself, a “spirit of the dead, i.e., a spirit which can communicate with human mediums, called from the underworld of the dead.” Once again, the instruction is to rely on Yahweh alone for information concerning future or hidden events. And even if He hasn’t told you specifically what to expect tomorrow, He has at least told you what to do today: Love God, and love your neighbor.

- (343) *Do not seek the maytim (dead).* **“There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh.”** (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) To *darash muwth* is to “call up the dead.” The phrase fully amplified means to resort to, seek, enquire of, consult, investigate, or worship the dead. This, of course, is precisely what Saul did in I Samuel 28. But it also warns against the kind of ancestor worship we see in Eastern religions. And closer to home, it is a stern indictment of the Catholic-style “veneration” of saints, praying not to Yahweh through His “Son” Yahshua, but to an unnamed and misunderstood deity through the good graces of “saints,” dead people to whom has been attributed some sort of magical power. Mary, for example, was a good and faithful woman, but she has no power to help you—and *if she came back from the dead like Samuel did, she would tell you as much!* Yahweh has spoken: You shall not call up the dead.
- (344) *Do not enquire of a yid’oni (wizard).* **“There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh.”** (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) We’ve run into the *yidoni* before, back in Mitzvah #338, which is practically identical to this one, though based on a different Torah passage. A *yidoni*, you’ll recall, is a wizard, familiar spirit, fortune teller, magician, or sorcerer, and the word can apply to either the spirit or the guy who conjures him up.

There are a few words in Moses’ list here in Deuteronomy 18 that Maimonides covered elsewhere, so I’ll take this opportunity to reprise them. The word translated “soothsayer” here is *’anan*, which we covered in Mitzvah #335. It’s a verb meaning: “to practice soothsaying, to conjure, to observe times [i.e., as an occult practice], practice soothsaying,

spiritism, magic, augury, or witchcraft.” (S) Its noun form denotes a “soothsayer, enchanter, sorceress, diviner, or fortuneteller.” We’ve also seen “one who conjures spells” or “interprets omens” (as it’s worded in the NASB) elsewhere. Mitzvah #336 prohibited *nachash*, a verb meaning “to practice divination, to observe occult or astrological signs, practice fortunetelling, or to take something as an omen, including interpreting omens or signs.” The bottom line: Yahweh is crystal clear about His hatred of occult practices. Consult Him alone.

- (345) *Do not remove the entire beard, like the idolaters. “You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard.”* (Leviticus 19:27) Maimonides is correct in connecting the practice of “disfiguring” the beard with the style that had been practiced by the idolaters of Canaan. The connection is clear in the larger context in Leviticus. I get the feeling that Yahweh isn’t so much interested in condemning a particular fashion statement as He is in warning us not to emulate the world. This principle is particularly timely today, when we are bombarded with images of wannabe “idols.” I remember back in the mid-60s when the Beatles hit the scene. Almost overnight, everyone was wearing his hair a little longer than before. God may not have objected to slightly longer hair *per se*, but to grow it out in imitation of a group of musicians was wrong.

The fashions we adopt say a lot about us. The more extreme our personal styles—the more they differ from the societal norm—the stronger our statements become. For example, in Israel, groups of “Hasidic” style ultra-orthodox Jews (popularly known as “black-hats”) compete with each other in modes of dress. The goofier the outfit, the more fundamental and strict the doctrine—or at least that’s what they’d like you to believe. The mode of dress is based not on what the typical Israeli would wear, but rather on what would have been worn by the average Jewish guy in an Eastern European ghetto two or three hundred years ago. In short, the black-hats are showing off—displaying their religious pride by flouting convention.

We’re left with a quandary. Fashions shift with time and place. Are believers to follow style trends, or are we to petrify our fashion sense in some bygone century? I believe the answer is: *neither*. As usual, the key is motive. Going out of our way to look like one thing or another is probably not such a hot idea. But if everybody in your community—regardless of their political, religious, or economic persuasion—is dressing one way, there’s no reason to buck the trend. There is no such thing as “Christian fashion” (provided, of course, that men look like men, women look like

women, and your wardrobe isn't *designed* to engender lust in the opposite sex—see Mizvot #365-367). There is nothing particularly “holy” about fashion that’s thirty years out of date.

- (346) *Do not round the corners of the head, as the idolatrous priests do. “You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard.”* (Leviticus 19:27) Same song, second verse. Again, Moses was warning his people not to adopt the fashion statements of idolaters *because they’re idolaters*. It’s all a question of motivation. Don’t cut your hair (or grow it out) *because* some rock star does it. Don’t wear baggy pants *because* you want to look tough like a gang banger. Don’t wear a daisy in your lapel *because* your favorite news anchor does.
- (347) *Do not cut oneself or make incisions in one’s flesh in grief, like the idolaters. “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 19:28) **“You are the children of Yahweh your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead. For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God, and Yahweh has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”** (Deuteronomy 14:1-2) God is not talking about fashion here—earrings and the like. He’s warning against self mutilation done in the name of religion. The classic Biblical illustration is in I Kings 18, where Elijah challenged the priests of Ba’al to a “prophets’ duel” to demonstrate once and for all whose god was really God. **“And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.’ So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.”** (I Kings 18:27-29) Satan loves to see us bleeding and in pain, and if it’s self-inflicted, so much the better.

Yahweh, though—the inventor of life—tells us that our “life is in the blood.” And pain was something He built into our bodies to warn us when something’s wrong. The last thing He wants to see is for us to suffer pain and shed our blood in a misguided attempt to placate Him. So why do tens of thousands of Muslims cut their flesh in Ramadan rites at the Kaaba every year trying to gain the blessing of Allah—a false god who’s never blessed anybody? Why do twenty million pilgrims a year visit the shrine of the “Virgin of Guadalupe” in Mexico City, many walking for days and then crawling on bloodied knees the last few hundred meters of the

journey to show their devotion to an apparition some guy named Juan says he saw back in 1531? Yahweh plainly said not to do such things.

- (348) *Do not tattoo the body like the idolaters. “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 19:28) Tattoos have grown quite popular of late. I have no idea why. I even have Christian friends who advertise their faith with Christian tattoos. The passage at hand, as Maimonides notes, is primarily a warning against emulating the idolaters in our midst. Does it apply to “faith-neutral” tattoos or Christian body art? I don’t know, but I’d be inclined to take Yahweh’s word for it and call it a day. Yahweh has issued these instructions for our benefit—we can either heed them or not—it’s our skin that’s at risk. Maybe it’s like eating pork and shellfish: if there are consequences, He didn’t enumerate them. He just said, “Don’t.”
- (349) *Do not make a bald spot for the dead. “You are the children of Yahweh your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead.”* (Deuteronomy 14:1) Here is one more example of something that might have been done in imitation of the idolatrous people of Canaan. Although there’s not much of this going on today (quite the opposite, in fact, with baldness-remedy sales going through the roof) the principle still applies: we are God’s people. We are not to pattern our lives, beliefs, or even fashions, after the godless world we see around us.

My personal “favorite” contemporary example of this sort of thing is the “baggy pants” look favored by inner city youth. Why in the world do they prefer ill-fitting trousers? It turns out that the “fashion” got started in jail, where such things as belts and shoe laces were taken away from the inmates so they couldn’t be used as weapons or implements for suicide. Without belts to hold them up, the offenders’ pants tended to droop a bit. In time, this droop became an indicator of prison experience, and kids wanting to look as tough as these convicts affected the same falling-pants style. *My pants are falling off—That means I’m a bad dude—don’t mess with me or my crew....* I know it sounds stupid—as stupid as shaving a bald spot on your forehead so you’ll look like a bigwig with Ba’al. That’s the kind of foolishness Yahweh is warning against here.

- (350) *Do not plant a tree for worship. “You shall not plant for yourself any tree as a wooden image, near the altar which you build for yourself to Yahweh your God.”* (Deuteronomy 16:21) I like trees. I’ve planted scores of them—and *I live in the middle of a forest!* Does that mean I’ve run afoul of the Torah here? No. Moses is referring to a particular pagan practice: planting a tree (*’ets*, the ordinary Hebrew word for a tree or wood—any kind of relatively large woody plant) *as an image*. That’s *asherah* in the Hebrew—one of many

names of the female component of the prototypical false Babylonian trinity of Nimrod, Semiramis, and Tammuz. Semiramis' self-deified character would show up as Astarte among the Assyrians; she was known as Inanna by the Sumerians, Asthoreth by the Caananites, Ishtar by the Akkadians, Isis by the Egyptians, and Diana by the Greeks—among others. Her name is commemorated in “Christian” tradition, I’m sad to say, in the spring festival of Easter—which was supposed to be celebrated as Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Firstfruits, the first three “holy convocations” on the annual festival calendar instituted by Yahweh. These days are prophetic of the death, burial, and resurrection of Yahshua our Messiah—and they center on the removal of our sins. Ishtar is a blatant counterfeit. I explain the whole sick mess in *Future History*: Chapter 14—“Mystery Babylon.”

Anyway, the Canaanite practice was to plant a tree (or a whole grove) near the altars where Asherah was to be worshipped—usually in a “high place” or hilltop. Yahweh’s warning notwithstanding, Israel fell (or perhaps jumped) into the same sort of idolatrous practices. For example: **“They also built for themselves high places, sacred pillars, and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree.”** (I Kings 14:23) Yahweh wanted His people to be holy—set apart from the nations around them. The last thing He wanted was for the rites He instituted—which were all prophetic in some way of His plan of redemption for mankind—to be blended with and corrupted by the religions of the clueless idolaters.

- (351) *Do not set up a pillar (for worship).* **“You shall not set up a sacred pillar, which Yahweh your God hates.”** (Deuteronomy 16:22) This, of course, is a continuation and expansion of the previous thought. A pillar (Hebrew: *matstsebah*) could either be a stone obelisk (like the Washington Monument—oops) or a wooden stump. They were invariably placed in groves or under trees, and used as focal points of pagan worship. It’s no big surprise that Yahweh hates them.
- (352) *Do not show favor to idolaters.* **“When Yahweh your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when Yahweh your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them.”** (Deuteronomy 7:1-2) That’s a strange way of putting it, Maimonides. As the Israelites entered the Land of Canaan, they were to “conquer” and “utterly destroy” the idolaters they found there. Yahweh didn’t even *hint* at the idea of peacefully coexisting with them, tolerating

their presence but “showing no favor” to them. Israel was to totally displace the nations of the Land in order to remain set apart for Yahweh’s purposes. They failed to do so, and the result is scrawled in their blood across the intervening centuries.

- (353) *Do not make a covenant with the seven (Canaanite, idolatrous) nations. “I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”* (Exodus 23:31-33) *“When Yahweh your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when Yahweh your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them.”* (Deuteronomy 7:1-2) Israel can’t say they weren’t warned. If they did not drive out the idolaters, they would be “snared” into serving their false gods. They didn’t, so they were.

Lest we conclude, however, that this is an open-ended call to slaughter or displace all who don’t happen to toe our particular theological line, note that the list of nations to be thrown out of the Land was very precise and very limited: seven people groups whose depravity had reached its “fullness.” The Amorites in particular had been given four generations to get their spiritual act together (see Genesis 15:16) and had not done so. The Torah is very precise here. If we are (1) Israelites who (2) are moving into the Land of Promise, we are to throw out any idolaters we find who (3) are Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, or Jebusites. Yahweh has even promised to do all the heavy lifting. All we have to do is follow His lead.

Haven’t run across any Girgashites lately? Me neither. But its safe to say that the bottom line still applies: we are not to make covenants with idolaters. On a national level, that would mean that a nation of believers should not support or defend nations that are not. The problem, of course, is that there’s no such thing as a “nation of believers.” America, if it ever was, left that place long ago. It would seem prudent, at the very least, to avoid supporting people who have sworn to kill us (that’s any Qur’an-following Muslim, in case you didn’t notice) but we can’t even get *that* right.

- (354) *Do not settle idolaters in our land. “You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”* (Exodus 23:32-33)

When Israel declared statehood on April 14, 1948, Jews had been a majority in Jerusalem for as long as anyone had been keeping records—well over a century. They had never stolen or “annexed” Arab lands, but rather had *purchased* large tracts of land in Palestine from Arab Muslims who considered it worthless. Yet on Israel’s independence day, Azzam Pasha, Secretary General of the Arab League, declared jihad, a “holy war” against the infant nation. He stated: “This will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre.” He ordered all Muslim Arab civilians to leave, in order to make it easier for the Islamic forces to drive the detested Jews into the sea. Those who followed the order became the “Palestinian refugees” we hear about so often. For her part, Israel offered full citizenship to any Arab who wanted to stay, and some did. After Israel won the war (at a horrendous price in terms of percentage of her population) those Arabs, mostly Islamic, became the freest, most prosperous Muslims in the region. And they remained so until they turned on their benefactor in the first *intifada*—biting the hand that had fed them. These are the “Palestinians” (though no such people actually exist—the moniker is merely a useful media prevarication) who trouble Israel today.

Now, what would have happened if Israel had followed the Torah on this point? If, in 1948, they had said, “Alright, if the Muslims as a group are going to attack us, the Muslims as a group must leave,” they would have an entirely different kind of enemy today. The Islamic threat would still exist, to be sure, but the adversary would be *outside* the nation, not distributed throughout Israel like a cancer.

- (355) *Slay the inhabitants of a city that has become idolatrous and burn that city.* “If you hear someone in one of your cities, which Yahweh your God gives you to dwell in, saying, ‘Corrupt men have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods’—which you have not known—then you shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock—with the edge of the sword. And you shall gather all its plunder into the middle of the street, and completely burn with fire the city and all its plunder, for Yahweh your God. It shall be a heap forever; it shall not be built again. So none of the accursed things shall remain in your hand, that Yahweh may turn from the fierceness of His anger and show you mercy, have compassion on you and multiply you, just as He swore to your fathers, because you have listened to the voice of Yahweh your God, to keep all His commandments which I command you today, to do what is right in the eyes of Yahweh your God.” (Deuteronomy 13:12-18) The politically correct liberals among us are

horrified at this sort of thing. Don't people have a God-given right to worship any god they choose, in any way they want? Not in theocratic Israel, they don't. Israel was called out of the nations to be "a holy people," set apart for Yahweh's plan and purpose. Granted, the "burn-the-city-and-kill-the-idolaters" rule no longer literally applies. The theocratic society for which this was written has been gone for some time. But the underlying principle is still germane: Believers in Yahweh are not to tolerate the inroads of false gods and false teachings into their assemblies. And at this late date, it bears mentioning that "false teachings" are those things that contradict Scripture—not the things that challenge our religious traditions.

- (356) *Do not rebuild a city that has been led astray to idolatry. "...It shall be a heap forever; it shall not be built again."* (Deuteronomy 13:16) The idolatrous city is a metaphor for false teaching here. God's point, I believe, is that you can't build something of lasting value on a faulty foundation. If the premise is wrong, the conclusion will be wrong as well. I'll offer a provocative example to make my point. We Americans usually assume that democracy is a good thing, where in reality, it only "works" for the benefit of mankind when the majority revere Yahweh. So when we expend blood and coin in an attempt to impose democracy on places like Afghanistan or Iraq, we learn (or at least we ought to) the horrible truth about democracy: it's nothing but mob rule in a three-piece suit. If the *majority* are convinced that Islamic law must be implemented because their god, Allah, said so, then democracy will inevitably enslave the populace and consign them to a life of misery and seething hatred for all mankind. Without Yahweh, dumping a brutal dictator for a democratically elected *sharia*-friendly government is simply trading a bellyache for an upset stomach.
- (357) *Do not make use of the property of a city that has been so led astray. "...You shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock—with the edge of the sword. And you shall gather all its plunder into the middle of the street, and completely burn with fire the city and all its plunder...So none of the accursed things shall remain in your hand, that Yahweh may turn from the fierceness of His anger."* (Deuteronomy 13:15-17) With the exception of the original Israelite conquest of Canaan (for which this mitzvah was written), every "religious" war in history has been little more than an elaborate snatch-and-run. Islam, truth be known, is far less a religion than it is an acquisitive political doctrine—amply proved by their long and bloody history. And the Roman Catholic Church has grown obscenely rich plundering everyone from "heretics" to Jews to New World indigenous tribes in the name of religion. But Yahweh—who

knows the greed of the human heart—insisted that the eradication of false worship from theocratic Israel would not bring any financial rewards with it. Idolatry was to be destroyed because it was evil, not because there might be a buck in it.

AGRICULTURE AND ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

- (358) *Do not cross-breed cattle of different species. “You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind.”* (Leviticus 19:19) Neither Moses nor Maimonides knew anything about Linnaean taxonomy. But they did know the difference between a sheep and a goat, or between an ox and an ass. These animal “kinds” are not cross-fertile. This mitzvah and the next one are an obvious metaphor for the ubiquitous scriptural injunction against mixing reverence for Yahweh with pagan idolatrous practice. His point: “Nothing good can possibly come from this. My people are to be holy, set apart, pure and undefiled.”
- (359) *Do not sow different kinds of seed together in one field. “You shall not sow your field with mixed seed.”* (Leviticus 19:19) A variation on the “purity” theme, here we are (once again) being warned against mixing idolatrous practice with true faith. This very contingency was used by Yahshua to teach what the course of the kingdom of heaven would be like this side of Judgment Day. In Matthew 13:24-30, we read the parable of the wheat and tares, which, in a nutshell, says that although Yahweh planted good, fruitful “seed” (His believers) in His field, Satan came in afterward and planted look-alike weeds—people who may look “religious” but, being weeds, bear no fruit—they’re just taking up space and resources—choking out the truth. Yahweh has decided to let them both grow together side by side in His field (the world) until the “harvest” at the end of the age, at which time He will “gather” to Himself the believing “wheat,” but burn the tares.
- (360) *Do not eat the fruit of a tree for three years from the time it was planted. “When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to Yahweh. And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: I am Yahweh your God.”* (Leviticus 19:23-25) Beyond the plain obedience of the command, this is a hard one to figure out. Why did Yahweh declare the fruit of a newly planted tree ceremonially forbidden for the first three years? As an enthusiastic arborist, I can tell you that it takes that long for a tree’s root structure to become established. The “tree maxim” is: the first year they sleep, the second year they creep,

and the third year they leap. Perhaps Yahweh is teaching us about patience—not to expect a new believer to bear edifying fruit for a few years, no matter how promising he or she might appear. If ever there was a “convert” who might have wanted to jump immediately into the fray, it was Paul. But as he testifies in his preface to the Galatians (1:18), he waited for a full three years before he even conferred with the leaders of the Ekklesia at Jerusalem. *Three years*. Paul was an acknowledged expert in the Torah. Perhaps he realized that he was a newly planted tree and none of his fruit would be usable for the first three years. So he sidelined himself until, as he himself put it (v. 15), “it pleased God....”

- (361) *The fruit of fruit-bearing trees in the fourth year of their planting shall be sacred like the second tithe and eaten in Jerusalem. “When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to Yahweh. And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: I am Yahweh your God.”* (Leviticus 19:23-25) Orthodox Jews today have, as usual, turned what they don’t understand into a maze of mindless rules. They even have a special “New Year’s day” for trees—not the first day of Nisan, as Yahweh decreed, nor the first of Tishri (erroneously called *Rosh Hashanah*—head of the year—a phony New Year they picked up in Babylon), but *Tu B’Shevat*, or the fifteenth day of the month of Shevat, which falls in January or February. So presumably, if you get that peach tree into the ground by the middle of January, you can cut the better part of a year off the “three-year” rule. Good grief.

What’s really going on is that the fourth-year fruit is set apart to Yahweh. It is “a praise to Yahweh,” *hilulim*—offerings of praise similar to the Firstfruits offering. *Hilulim* is linguistically related to the usual word for praise, *halal*, which actually means to radiate light (Yahweh’s, in this case). I take all this to mean that the first thing a new believer should do upon getting himself grounded and rooted in the Word is to praise Yahweh.

- (362) *Do not sow grain or herbs in a vineyard. “You shall not sow your vineyard with different kinds of seed, lest the yield of the seed which you have sown and the fruit of your vineyard be defiled.”* (Deuteronomy 22:9) Again, “different kinds of seed” represent different approaches to God. Yahweh has ordained one way to reach Him: grace through faith in Yahshua—literally meaning “Yahweh is salvation.” Since the “vineyard” here is metaphorical of the world we live in, mixing our “seed,” is indicative of blending paganism with true reverence for Yahweh. In a word it is unholiness.

- (363) *Do not eat the produce of diverse seeds sown in a vineyard.* **“You shall not sow your vineyard with different kinds of seed, lest the yield of the seed which you have sown and the fruit of your vineyard be defiled.”** (Deuteronomy 22:9) A continuation of the thought of the previous mitzvah: holiness requires us to be set apart from the world, set apart to God for His purposes, for that is what the word means. Yahweh was instructing the Israelites not to mix the worship of Ba’al with that of Himself. In our age the names have changed, but the principle hasn’t. The early church was warned against the inroads of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6, 15), a group who advocated compromise between Yahshua’s Ekklesia and the pagan religions of the surrounding peoples. But Yahweh had spoken: “You shall not sow your vineyard with different kinds of seed.”
- (364) *Do not work with beasts of different species yoked together.* **“You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.”** (Deuteronomy 22:10) The lesson here is exactly the same as the previous two mitzvot, though Maimonides refuses to see beyond the agricultural ramifications. It’s a plea for holiness, separateness. Not surprisingly, Paul saw exactly what was going on. He wrote: **“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate,’ says Yahweh. ‘Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,’ says Yahweh Almighty.”** (II Corinthians 6:14-18) If you yoke Yahweh’s ox with Satan’s ass, you’ll be plowing in circles.

CLOTHING

- (365) *A man shall not wear women’s clothing.* **“A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to Yahweh your God.”** (Deuteronomy 22:5) Now you know why Satan works so hard trying to blur the gender lines in our society: its because Yahweh, who created the sexes, likes to keep them separate and distinct. The question we should be asking ourselves is *“Why?”* Why is Yahweh so intent on preserving the family? Why does He want men to look like men, women to look like women, and marriages between them to last for a lifetime, fruitful and secure? It’s because the human family is designed to be a picture of Yahweh and how He relates to

us. Yahweh our “Father” is our provider, our strong protector, the ultimate authority. The more intimate, tender, and personal side of God’s revelation to us comes through the Holy Spirit—*Ruach Qodesh* in Hebrew, a feminine term in that language. Yes, God’s Spirit is quite literally our Heavenly *Mother*. And as anyone who grew up close to a brother or sister can attest, there is a special bond between siblings—a oneness that can’t be achieved with a parent, no matter how warm the relationship. So Yahweh also manifested Himself as the “Son,” God existing in the form of a man—whose brothers and sisters we are if we have been adopted into the family of God. The family, then, is a metaphor for Yahweh’s self-expression on our behalf. He created us, in fact, to reflect that expression in who and what we were: men and women whose lifelong love brings children into being—families.

So from Satan’s point of view, one of the best ways to destroy this picture is to confuse the roles of the family members. He encourages men to be effeminate, women authoritative, and children rebellious. Step number one in achieving his goal of the breakdown of the family is to make men and women look the same, and the easiest way to achieve that is with clothing.

- (366) *A woman should not wear men’s clothing.* **“A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to Yahweh your God.”** (Deuteronomy 22:5) What, exactly, are “women’s clothes” or “men’s clothes”? Since modes of dress are regional, and since fashion norms shift with time, the answers defy any hard and fast definition (which is probably why Yahweh worded His Torah so carefully). I’ve got no problem with ladies in pants, for the simple reason that most women still look unmistakably like women dressed that way. As with so many of these instructions, I’d have to say that *intent* is the key. We shouldn’t be *trying* to look like the opposite sex, or trying to disguise what we are by adopting an androgynous look. Men should look like men, and women, women, in the context of their own regional customs.
- (367) *Do not wear garments made of wool and linen mixed together.* **“You shall not wear a garment of different sorts, such as wool and linen mixed together.”** (Deuteronomy 22:11) Remember, Israel was to be the keeper of Yahweh’s signs. What they did in their observance of the Torah was meant to be a witness to the world of Yahweh’s plan of redemption—whether they understood the metaphor or not. Clean, white, linen garments are a common scriptural metaphor for holiness. For instance, we read of the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19:7-8, **“Let us be glad and**

rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” Our righteousness is a gift from God, thus these “righteous acts of the saints” with which we are clothed are *imputed* virtue—the sinlessness of Yahshua covering our transgressions. So this mixture of wool and linen that’s prohibited in the Torah is symbolic of one’s dependence upon *both* grace and good works. Good works, symbolized here by wool, are fine in their own context, so Yahweh doesn’t prohibit its use. But good works are not germane to the subject of one’s vindication—they aren’t something to be “worn” in addition to the “fine linen, clean and bright” of God’s grace. Yahweh is admonishing us to rely upon Him alone.

THE FIRSTBORN

- (368) *Redeem the firstborn human male.* “All the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is this?’ that you shall say to him, ‘By strength of hand Yahweh brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that Yahweh killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to Yahweh all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’” (Exodus 13:13-15) “Everything that first opens the womb of all flesh, which they bring to Yahweh, whether man or beast, shall be yours; nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. And those redeemed of the devoted things you shall redeem when one month old, according to your valuation, for five shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs.” (Numbers 18:15-16) Yahweh declared that all the males in Israel who were first-born, either of people or animals, belonged to Him. The rabbis, careful to avoid any subject that might have Messianic overtones, studiously stuck to the letter of the law on this one: if a male child opens the womb, he is to be “bought back from God”—redeemed—for five silver shekels (about \$20). Elsewhere (Leviticus 3:40-51), Yahweh explains that the males of the tribe of Levi are to serve as the substitution for the firstborn males of Israel, and the five shekels are just to cover those for whom there are insufficient numbers of Levites (273 of them when Moses first counted them up).

Redemption is deliverance from some evil circumstance by payment of a price. This evil could be debt, guilt of some crime, slavery, or some other predicament. Since we have all fallen short of Yahweh’s perfect standard, we are all in need of redemption. By paying the token “ransom”

for their firstborn male children, Israelites under the Torah were acting out Yahweh's redemption of the whole human race—the offering up of His perfect “Lamb of God,” Yahshua the Messiah.

- (369) *Redeem the firstling of an ass.* **“You shall set apart to Yahweh all that open the womb, that is, every firstborn that comes from an animal which you have; the males shall be Yahweh’s. But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck.”** (Exodus 13:12-13) A donkey was a ceremonially “unclean” animal. A firstborn male donkey, being useful as a beast of burden, was allowed to be redeemed instead of being sacrificed and eaten as a clean animal would have been. The animal specified to take his place? A lamb. Yahweh’s point is that the price of redemption must be innocent, clean, perfect. Sacrificing a clean lamb in place of an unclean donkey is a perfect picture of what Yahshua did for us on Calvary.
- (370) *Break the neck of the firstling of an ass if it is not redeemed.* **“But the firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb. And if you will not redeem him, then you shall break his neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed.”** (Exodus 34:20) There is choice involved, however. The donkey doesn’t *have* to be rescued by the lamb. But if he isn’t, his life is forfeit, and no benefit is derived from his life or his death. He provides no nourishment; he does no labor benefiting mankind; he’s of no use to anyone, not even himself. He has brought pain to his mother and inconvenience to everyone else. This is a picture of our sorry position if the sacrifice of Lamb of God is not invoked on our behalf.
- (371) *Do not redeem the firstling of a clean beast.* **“Everything that first opens the womb of all flesh, which they bring to Yahweh, whether man or beast, shall be yours; nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. And those redeemed of the devoted things you shall redeem when one month old, according to your valuation, for five shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. But the firstborn of a cow, the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat you shall not redeem; they are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar, and burn their fat as an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to Yahweh. And their flesh shall be yours, just as the wave breast and the right thigh are yours.”** (Numbers 18:15-18) This subject is so important to Yahweh, it’s discussed in detail three separate times in the Torah (as we have seen), and other facets are covered in Leviticus 3:40-51 and 27:26. This mitzvah covers the “clean” animal. It is to be sacrificed when it has reached the requisite age, with its blood (representing its life) being sprinkled on the altar, and its inedible fat parts burned as an offering to Yahweh. The meat, however, remains the property of the animal’s owner.

Several things are going on here. The symbols are rich and varied. First, the animal's owner has shown faith in Yahweh's promises of future provision. He has killed an animal that showed promise, whether for breeding purposes, wool, or labor. The "bean-counter" in us may decry the "waste," but Yahweh says, "If you trust Me, I'll take care of you."

Second, Yahweh is using the occasion as an excuse for a party. It's a pot-luck barbeque: He gets the blood and fat, and the family gets the edible parts. Over and over again in scripture, we get the distinct impression that Yahweh loves nothing more than to get together with His children and have a feast. And by the way, there's a big one coming soon—it's going to last a thousand years.

Third, that which is already "clean" needs no redemption. As Moses says, if we are "clean," we have been made holy, set apart for Yahweh's purposes. Yes, death of the mortal body is part of the process, but we who are clean are only dying in emulation of our Savior—dying to sin so that we might live through Him.

And fourth, look at which clean animals were singled out as examples. The bullock or ox represents quiet service—one of the recurring metaphors of Messiah's character. The male lamb, of course, represents Christ in His role as substitutionary sacrifice. As John put it, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And the goat is symbolic of the sin Yahshua *became* for us as he bore our shame to the grave.

Chapter 10

Priests and Levites

If you consult the Tanach (the Old Covenant scriptures) you'll read about priests, Levites, judges, kings, and prophets being ordained by Yahweh to lead and serve His people. But if you look at Judaism today, who's in charge? *Rabbis*—literally, “masters”—self-appointed teachers and interpreters of the Torah. This unbiblical state of affairs has existed for a couple of thousand years now. We need to examine why the shift was made, how, and by whom.

This study, as you know, is organizationally based on the work of Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, a.k.a. Maimonides, a.k.a. the Rambam (1135-1204 AD). But far from being the one who *invented* rabbinic Judaism, Maimonides merely collected and codified the opinions of influential rabbis spanning the previous millennium. So what had happened to the Levitical priesthood? From the gospel narratives, we know that during the time of Yahshua's earthly ministry (30 to 33 AD) the priesthood was still in business—dominated at the time by a liberal, “politically correct” sect called the Sadducees. They were countered by the strict and conservative Pharisee sect (who were far more influential among the people, according to Josephus) from whom arose the rabbis. Since the chief priests didn't really believe the word of God they had been tasked to preserve and defend, it fell to these enthusiastic usurpers, the Pharisees, to pick up the slack. Or so they believed.

The key to the rise of rabbinism is the notion that in addition to the written Torah, there was also an “oral Torah”—without which one supposedly couldn't understand or perform the written version. Passed on by word of mouth from teacher to student without ever being written down (though no one could explain why anyone would want to do this), this “oral law” was, in the eyes of its adherents, of equal weight to the written Torah—the “Mosaic Law.” But the oral law is never mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures, never alluded to, never even hinted at. Why? Because in point of fact, it didn't exist—not until well after the close of the Old Covenant canon, around 400 BC. Another evidence that an “oral Torah” that had been passed down intact from generation to generation didn't actually exist was that by the time of Christ, there was a raging controversy about what it supposedly said. The two dominant schools of thought were led by Rabbis Hillel and Shammai—and they agreed on very little. The oral law apparently wasn't worth the paper it was printed on.

The final defeat of priestly authority was brought about a century or so later, when Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph gained the upper hand, systematized the oral law according to his own views, and precipitated through his disciples the Mishnah

(the previously forbidden *written* form of the oral law) and an impenetrable web of supporting works, including Greek and Aramaic translations of the Tanach that supported his own unique position on the halakah. Akiba instituted a whole new system of eisegesis (that is, *reading into* a text what you want to see, as opposed to exegesis—drawing out of the passage what is there). Judaic thought has been thoroughly permeated by Akiba’s views ever since, including, of course, the writings of Maimonides that we’ve been reviewing.

If you’re interested in the whole story, read *Rabbi Akiba’s Messiah: The Origins of Rabbinic Authority*, by Daniel Gruber (Elijah Publishing, 1999). The crowning “achievement” of Rabbi Akiba’s grab for power was his backing of Simeon ben Kosiba—a.k.a. Bar Kochba—as Israel’s messiah. The Jews’ anti-Roman revolt under this arrogant and brutal warlord was what ultimately persuaded Emperor Hadrian (in 135 AD) to evict every Israelite from the land, salt its farmland to make it barren and worthless, and change its name from Judea to Palestina (after the long-extinct Philistines) in an effort to break the Jews’ emotional ties to the land. Remarkably however, Bar Kochba is still regarded as the ideal messianic “type” among orthodox Jews, and Akiba’s disastrously errant theologies are the very foundation of Orthodox Jewish religious thought to this day.

That is why Judaism is a dry well when it comes to insight about God’s word. It’s foundation is a man-made construct. Only Yahweh’s word—His *written* word—can be trusted. **“For the word of God is full of living power. It is sharper than the sharpest knife, cutting deep into our innermost thoughts and desires. It exposes us for what we really are. Nothing in all creation can hide from him. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes. This is the God to whom we must explain all that we have done.”** Neither the “oral Torah” nor any of Akiba’s prevarications can do any of that. And though the rabbis would have you believe that they alone stand between God and man serving as the gatekeepers of truth, Yahweh has something entirely different in mind: a Priesthood of One. **“That is why we have a great High Priest who has gone to heaven, Jesus the Son of God. Let us cling to him and never stop trusting him. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it.”** (Hebrews 4:11-16 NLT)

God’s first gift to mankind was choice—the ability to choose whether or not to reciprocate His love through trusting Him. But the assignment our place of service and responsibility remains Yahweh’s prerogative. It is not up to us to choose to be prophets, priests, or kings—or rabbis, for that matter. Rather, God chooses us for these tasks, based upon the wisdom or foolishness we’ve shown—our stewardship—in more fundamental matters. In the matter of the priesthood of

Israel, God chose one family from one specific tribe to be priests: the family of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi. **“Now a high priest is a man chosen to represent other human beings in their dealings with God. He presents their gifts to God and offers their sacrifices for sins. And because he is human, he is able to deal gently with the people, though they are ignorant and wayward. For he is subject to the same weaknesses they have. That is why he has to offer sacrifices, both for their sins and for his own sins. And no one can become a high priest simply because he wants such an honor. He has to be called by God for this work, just as Aaron was....”** Service to God and man is a calling, not a career path.

In Israel, kings were to come from Judah, and priests from Levi. But Yahweh ordained Yahshua to be both king and priest. His was a unique calling. **“That is why Christ did not exalt himself to become High Priest. No, he was chosen by God, who said to him, ‘You are my Son. Today I have become your Father.’ And in another passage God said to him, ‘You are a priest forever in the line of Melchizedek.”** Melchizedek, if you’ll recall, was the priest-king of Salem whom Abram met after the defeat of the “kings” who had raided Sodom and kidnapped his nephew Lot (Genesis 14). This incident predated the ordination of Aaron by half a millennium. **“While Jesus was here on earth, he offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to the one who could deliver him out of death. And God heard his prayers because of his reverence for God. So even though Jesus was God’s Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him. And God designated him to be a High Priest in the line of Melchizedek.”** (Hebrews 5:1-10 NLT)

The writer goes on to describe Mel’s credentials. **“This Melchizedek was king of the city of Salem and also a priest of God Most High. When Abraham was returning home after winning a great battle against many kings, Melchizedek met him and blessed him. Then Abraham took a tenth of all he had won in the battle and gave it to Melchizedek. His name means ‘king of justice.’ He is also ‘king of peace’ because Salem means ‘peace.’ There is no record of his father or mother or any of his ancestors—no beginning or end to his life. He remains a priest forever, resembling the Son of God....”** It’s possible that Melchizedek was a theophany; at the very least, he was a messianic metaphor.

Remember, Hebrews is a book of comparisons, ultimately comparing the Law of Moses with the finished work of Yahshua the Messiah as a path to salvation—and finding the Law wanting. Here the Aaronic priesthood is compared to that of Melchizedek. **“Consider then how great this Melchizedek was. Even Abraham, the great patriarch of Israel, recognized how great Melchizedek was by giving him a tenth of what he had taken in battle. Now the priests, who are descendants of Levi, are commanded in the law of Moses to collect a tithe from all the people, even though they are their own relatives. But Melchizedek, who was not even related to Levi, collected a tenth from Abraham. And Melchizedek placed a blessing upon Abraham, the one who had already received the promises of God. And without question, the person who has the power to bless is always**

greater than the person who is blessed....” In other words, the priesthood represented by Melchizedek is superior to that of Aaron.

Here’s how. **“In the case of Jewish priests, tithes are paid to men who will die. But Melchizedek is greater than they are, because we are told that he lives on. In addition, we might even say that Levi’s descendants, the ones who collect the tithe, paid a tithe to Melchizedek through their ancestor Abraham. For although Levi wasn’t born yet, the seed from which he came was in Abraham’s loins when Melchizedek collected the tithe from him.”** All of which is stated to make a point, which is: **“And finally, if the priesthood of Levi could have achieved God’s purposes—and it was that priesthood on which the law was based—why did God need to send a different priest from the line of Melchizedek, instead of from the line of Levi and Aaron?...”** The answer, so obvious the writer of Hebrews didn’t bother saying it, is that the priesthood of Aaron could *not* have achieved God’s purposes—it was never intended to. **“And when the priesthood is changed, the law must also be changed to permit it. For the one we are talking about belongs to a different tribe, whose members do not serve at the altar. What I mean is, our Lord came from the tribe of Judah, and Moses never mentioned Judah in connection with the priesthood.”** (Hebrews 7:1-14 NLT) Unlike His claims to the throne of Israel through His ancestor King David, Yahshua’s priesthood—His intercessory role between mankind and Yahweh—did not depend on His physical lineage, but on a spiritual lineage going back to Melchizedek. The law hasn’t so much been “changed,” as it has been *fulfilled*—the metaphor of Aaron’s priesthood has been replaced by the reality of Melchizedek’s.

“The change in God’s law is even more evident from the fact that a different priest, who is like Melchizedek, has now come. He became a priest, not by meeting the old requirement of belonging to the tribe of Levi, but by the power of a life that cannot be destroyed.” Under the Torah, a priest served simply because he was a male born of a certain family who had reached a certain age. But the order of Melchizedek held a slightly stiffer standard: one must have “a life that cannot be destroyed.” **“And the psalmist pointed this out when he said of Christ, ‘You are a priest forever in the line of Melchizedek.’ Yes, the old requirement about the priesthood was set aside because it was weak and useless. For the law made nothing perfect, and now a better hope has taken its place. And that is how we draw near to God.”** (Hebrews 7:15-19 NLT) Lest there be any confusion, let me reiterate for the umpteenth time: the Torah is not without value, for it speaks eloquently of the coming Messiah and His mission. But it is not in itself Yahweh’s plan for our salvation. It never was.

“God took an oath that Christ would always be a priest, but he never did this for any other priest. Only to Jesus did he say, ‘Yahweh has taken an oath and will not break his vow: You are a priest forever.’ Because of God’s oath, it is Jesus who guarantees the effectiveness of this better covenant....” That makes sense, for if a priest of the order of Melchizedek must have “a life that cannot be destroyed,” it follows that His

life would continue “forever.” **“Another difference is that there were many priests under the old system. When one priest died, another had to take his place. But Jesus remains a priest forever; his priesthood will never end. Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save everyone who comes to God through him. He lives forever to plead with God on their behalf.”** Yahshua, then, is the only high priest we will ever need. Moreover, He is the right *kind* of intercessor. **“He is the kind of high priest we need because he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin. He has now been set apart from sinners, and he has been given the highest place of honor in heaven. He does not need to offer sacrifices every day like the other high priests. They did this for their own sins first and then for the sins of the people. But Jesus did this once for all when he sacrificed himself on the cross. Those who were high priests under the law of Moses were limited by human weakness. But after the law was given, God appointed his Son with an oath, and his Son has been made perfect forever.”** (Hebrews 7:20-28)

We began this chapter by noting that the rabbis had appointed themselves the keepers of the Torah in place of the priests. After all, the Romans had torn down the temple and scattered the populace, and the duly appointed priesthood had been corrupt and unbelieving anyway. So the Aaronic priesthood was dead three times over. But the rabbis—especially Akiba—failed to factor in that Yahweh wasn’t exactly asleep at the wheel. He knew what had happened to the priesthood. He Himself had replaced the order of Aaron—a shadow of the Messiah’s priestly role—with the order of Melchizedek, the reality that casts the shadow—a priesthood that would never perish. That makes the rabbis nothing but pathetic wannabe usurpers of the Messiah’s mandate. **“Here is the main point: Our High Priest sat down in the place of highest honor in heaven, at God’s right hand. There he ministers in the sacred tent, the true place of worship that was built by the Lord and not by human hands....”**

Yes, the earthly Temple was gone, but even this had been nothing but a reflection of the true Temple in heaven. The real High Priest was presiding in the real temple. **“And since every high priest is required to offer gifts and sacrifices, our High Priest must make an offering, too. If he were here on earth, he would not even be a priest, since there already are priests who offer the gifts required by the law of Moses. They serve in a place of worship that is only a copy, a shadow of the real one in heaven. For when Moses was getting ready to build the Tabernacle, God gave him this warning: ‘Be sure that you make everything according to the design I have shown you here on the mountain.’ But our High Priest has been given a ministry that is far superior to the ministry of those who serve under the old laws, for he is the one who guarantees for us a better covenant with God, based on better promises.”** (Hebrews 8:1-6 NLT) No more shadows, no more reflections. The Reality is here. All of which appears to make the mitzvot that follow somewhat beside the point. The Aaronic priesthood they describe no longer exists in the role the Torah specifies, and the Levites alive today don’t perceive who they are. But we can still learn something of the Reality by studying

the image, and we can still glean valuable insight from God's metaphors. As I said, the Torah may have been fulfilled, but that doesn't mean it's obsolete.

PRIESTS AND LEVITES

(372) *The kohanim shall put on priestly vestments for the service.* **“Now take Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister to Me as priest, Aaron and Aaron's sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. So you shall speak to all who are gifted artisans, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments, to consecrate him, that he may minister to Me as priest. And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a skillfully woven tunic, a turban, and a sash. So they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister to Me as priest. (Exodus 28:1-4)** The clothing worn by the priests, and especially the High Priest, set them apart in appearance from the ordinary Israelite. Each article mentioned was subsequently described in detail in Exodus 28, and all of it speaks of the coming Messiah.

The breastplate (verses 15-29) was adorned with twelve gemstones, correlated to the twelve tribes of Israel. The picture is that each individual tribe was always near the heart of the High Priest (v.29). In the book of Revelation, John describes the foundations of the New Jerusalem as being adorned with twelve precious stones, correlated this time to the twelve apostles (Revelation 21:14). I believe the stones are the same. Each stone points out a different facet of Messiah's character. I've explained their meaning in detail in *Future History*, Chapter 30: “Heaven, Hell, and Eternity.”

The High Priest's ephod (verses 6-14) was like a skirt that covered the hips and thighs (worn in addition to the thigh-length trousers mentioned in verse 42). It was attached beneath the breastplate with golden rings and a blue cord. It was also equipped with straps that suspended it from the shoulders. Upon the shoulders, like epaulets, were two onyx stones set in gold, each engraved with the names of six of the sons of Israel. Thus the High Priest symbolically bore the weight of Israel upon his shoulders—a picture of service and intercession.

The “robe of the ephod” was apparently built sort of like a poncho, with a single hole for the head, reinforced so it wouldn't tear (see #373). This robe would have been quite expensive, for it was entirely dyed blue (see Mitzvah #18), the color of the royalty whose sacrifice would someday

redeem them—the same color specified for one thread of each Israelite’s tsitzit, or tassel of remembrance.

The tunic (or outer garment), trousers, turban, and sash, were all made of fine white linen, representing (if other hints spread throughout scripture are germane) righteousness, and specifically, *imputed* righteousness—that which is not maintained through a faultless life, but rather is bestowed upon us through God’s grace. The turban was adorned with a gold plate engraved with the words “Holiness to Yahweh.” Thus the spiritual state of God’s people would *literally* be on the mind of the High Priest.

- (373) *Do not tear the High Kohein’s robe.* “**You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. There shall be an opening for his head in the middle of it; it shall have a woven binding all around its opening, like the opening in a coat of mail, so that it does not tear.**” (Exodus 28:31-32) “**He who is the high priest among his brethren, on whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes.**” (Leviticus 21:10) When Ezra the priest saw that some returning exiles had intermarried with gentiles, he tore his robe in dismay. But though he was a leader in Israel, he wasn’t the *High Priest* at the time, Jeshua was. The only instance recorded in scripture of a High Priest rending his garments was Caiaphas, the High Priest during Christ’s ministry. He tore his clothes in rage when Yahshua—commanded by the priest to reveal whether or not He was the Messiah—answered truthfully in the affirmative. If nothing else, it demonstrates that his observation of the Torah was strictly selective: he was perfectly willing to throw its precepts to the wind if it suited his political purposes.
- (374) *The kohein shall not enter the Sanctuary at all times (i.e., at times when he is not performing service).* “**Yahweh said to Moses: ‘Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.’**” (Leviticus 16:2) The High Priest was to enter the Most Holy Place only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the day when the blood of the sacrifice would be sprinkled on the mercy seat to cover the sins of the people until the next Yom Kippur. This ritual, of course, was prophetic of the sacrifice the Messiah would eventually make on Calvary, this time *removing* the sins of God’s people. The reason given that the High Priest could only enter once a year was that Yahweh’s very presence was to appear in the cloud above the mercy seat. One doesn’t waltz into the presence of Almighty God uninvited. To do so is fatal.

So how do you suppose the Babylonians were able to tear Solomon’s temple apart stone by stone? How did Herod remodel the second temple

from the ground up, and how did the Romans dismantle that one without fatally encountering Yahweh's shekinah? There is only one possible answer: Yahweh was no longer there. Ezekiel even records His departure, in Chapters 10 and 11. The Ark of the Covenant wasn't there either. The last Biblical mention of the Ark is in II Chronicles 35, during the reign of Josiah (about 621 B.C.). The temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's troops thirty five years later. But we read in II Maccabees 2:4-8 that the prophet Jeremiah removed the Ark and hid it away "until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy."

My point is that without Christ's fulfillment of the Passover sacrifice, this mitzvah and many others are pointless and impossible. There's no priesthood, no temple, and no Ark of the Covenant to sprinkle the blood upon. Therefore, if someone tells you that he keeps the Torah (or that the Torah must be kept) in order to secure salvation, he's lying to you and deceiving himself.

- (375) *The ordinary kohein shall not defile himself by contact with any dead, other than immediate relatives. "Yahweh said to Moses, 'Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: "None shall defile himself for the dead among his people, except for his relatives who are nearest to him: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, and his brother; also his virgin sister who is near to him, who has had no husband, for her he may defile himself."'"* (Leviticus 21:1-3) The word translated "defile" (Hebrew *tame*) means to be unclean, to be ritually impure. There was no shortage of ways an Israelite could "defile" himself or herself, some of which were unavoidable in any practical sense: contact with animals not on the "clean" list, giving birth, having sexual relations, menstruation, bodily emissions, leprosy, and being in the presence of a corpse. Thus being "defiled" didn't mean you were evil, but it did mean you were temporarily disqualified from participation in certain facets of the life of the community. Yahweh is seen here tempering law with compassion: under normal circumstances, a priest was to remain as ritually pure as he could, for it was his job to attend to the spiritual needs of the people, at least in a ceremonial sense (that is, metaphorically acting out the Messiah's role as intercessor). But if a close family member had died, all bets were off. Compassion trumps correctness.
- (376) *The kohanim shall defile themselves only for their deceased relatives (by attending their burial), and mourn for them like other Israelites, who are commanded to mourn for their relatives. "Yahweh said to Moses, 'Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: "None shall defile himself for the dead among his people, except for his relatives who are nearest to him: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, and his brother; also his virgin sister who*

is near to him, who has had no husband, for her he may defile himself.””

(Leviticus 21:1-3) As is so often true, the rabbis have added detail and definition to the Torah that simply isn't there. This is nothing but an artificial expansion of Mitzvah #375. Of course, after Akiba redefined Judaism in his own image early in the second century, it didn't really matter what was required of the priesthood—it had no further role to play. The rabbis had put themselves in the place of honor. The Shekinah had departed and the temple was no more. The rabbis could have demanded that the *kohanim* must perform summersaults as they enter the Holy Place, and it wouldn't have made any practical difference.

- (377) *A kohein who had an immersion during the day (to cleanse him from his uncleanness) shall not serve in the Sanctuary until after sunset. “Whatever man of the descendants of Aaron, who is a leper or has a discharge, shall not eat the holy offerings until he is clean. And whoever touches anything made unclean by a corpse, or a man who has had an emission of semen, or whoever touches any creeping thing by which he would be made unclean, or any person by whom he would become unclean, whatever his uncleanness may be—the person who has touched any such thing shall be unclean until evening, and shall not eat the holy offerings unless he washes his body with water. And when the sun goes down he shall be clean; and afterward he may eat the holy offerings, because it is his food.”* (Leviticus 22:4-7) Maimonides has apparently confused emissions with immersions. An emission of semen was one of many things that would render a priest ceremonially unclean—temporarily unauthorized to participate in the temple service or partake of the offerings that would have normally been his sustenance during his course of service. The remedy for being rendered ritually unclean was to wash one's body with water and wait until sunset—in Hebrew reckoning, the start of a new day. It was not (as Maimonides implies) the washing that disqualified the priest, but rather the contact with the unclean thing.

The whole subject is a lesson on forgiveness. We all sin—that is, fall short of Yahweh's perfect standard. But **“if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** (I John 1:9) The washing of the priest's body is thus a picture of the confession—the admission of our faults—to a God who wants to maintain fellowship with us. However, there is more to it. The priest also had to wait until the sun had set. This tells us that there are consequences to our sins that follow us throughout our earthly lives. We may have been forgiven by God for robbing the convenience store, but we still have to do the jail time.

- (378) *A kohein shall not marry a divorced woman.* **“They [priests] shall not take a wife who is a harlot or a defiled woman, nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband; for the priest is holy to his God.”** (Leviticus 21:7) The next three mitzvot prohibit priests from marrying certain classes of women, each of which defines them as—at the very least—not being virgins. Here, a divorced woman is specified. We will note shortly that the restrictions for the High Priest are even more stringent: a regular priest may marry a widow, while the High Priest may not (see Mitzvah #385). The reasons for the marriage restriction are purely symbolic, of course. The women described here represent relationships with the world, with other lovers, with other gods. The priests of Yahweh are to be set apart for His work in every way: they are “holy.” Thus a relationship with the world, even by proxy, is forbidden. God is *not* saying that divorced women are necessarily evil people. The *symbol* is what’s important, and they symbolize broken relationships.
- (379) *A kohein shall not marry a harlot.* **“They [priests] shall not take a wife who is a harlot or a defiled woman, nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband; for the priest is holy to his God.”** (Leviticus 21:7) A harlot, or prostitute, is not only someone who has multiple sexual relationships out of wedlock. In the context of the times, she was often associated with the worship of false gods like Ba’al or Astarte. The Mosaic metaphor is quite plain. Those who minister before Yahweh are not to have relationships with false gods. That may *sound* obvious, but I must reiterate that both Judaism and Christianity were—and are—permeated with vestiges of pagan worship practices. The letters to the seven Asian churches in Revelation 2 and 3 warn against this very thing. In particular, Thyatira was found to be up to her neck in it. Yahshua, then as now, warns us to repent.
- (380) *A kohein shall not marry a profaned woman.* **“They [priests] shall not take a wife who is a harlot or a defiled woman, nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband; for the priest is holy to his God.”** (Leviticus 21:7) We’re going to have to go back to our Hebrew dictionaries for insight into this last category—the defiled or profaned woman. The word is *chalal*, which literally means: the dead, one who has been slain or fatally wounded, a casualty that has died—contact with which, of course, brings a state of ritual defilement. Is God telling us not to marry *dead people*? Sort of. As John 3:18 reminds us, **“He who does not believe is condemned already...”** The “dead” are those who have no relationship with Yahweh. So the priest—the one who serves before God—is warned not to be related in marriage to one who has no such desire to serve. As we saw in Mitzvah #364, it’s a question of being unequally yoked together with an unbeliever.

- (381) *Show honor to a kohein, and to give him precedence in all things that are holy.* **“The priest is holy to his God. Therefore you shall consecrate him, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I Yahweh, who sanctify you, am holy.”** (Leviticus 21:7-8) Although it’s a fine sentiment to show honor to those whom God has appointed for a special purpose, that’s not really what the verse says. The Hebrew verb translated both “consecrate” and “sanctify” (*qadas*) is from the same root as the word translated “holy” (*qados*). The consonant root *qds* literally means “to cut” or “to separate.” The point is that the priests of Israel were to be set apart from ordinary Israelites, dedicated to the service of Yahweh, because He Himself was unique—set apart from all others—in terms of purity, power, and purpose.
- (382) *A High Kohein shall not defile himself with any dead, even if they are relatives.* **“...Nor shall he [the High Priest] go near any dead body, nor defile himself for his father or his mother.”** (Leviticus 21:11) A distinction has been made between ordinary priests and the High Priest. The rules were stricter for the High Priest: he could not approach the corpses of even the closest of relatives. His position as symbolic intercessor for the people was too important to them; thus personal sacrifices, as in this mitzvah, were required on his account. We should not be surprised to find that the High Priesthood was not a position of power (as Caiaphas saw it), but one of responsibility. It was the High Priest who was required to risk his life on the Day of Atonement by entering the Most Holy Place, approaching the Ark of the Covenant, and sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice upon it. People had *died* by touching the Ark. The Levitical High Priest’s responsibilities mirror those of the ultimate High Priest, Yahshua, whose own blood was shed for the remission of our sins, and whose death rent the curtain blocking access to the Most Holy Place. From that moment on, we—His followers—became priests in our own right, with direct access to the Father through prayer. We have thus become holy through the sacrifice of our High Priest. But more than that, He has *made us alive* by giving us His Spirit, because after all, the High Priest may not go near the dead.
- (383) *A High Kohein shall not go (under the same roof) with a dead body.* **“...Nor shall he go near any dead body, nor defile himself for his father or his mother; nor shall he go out of the sanctuary, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is upon him: I am Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 21:11-12) Maimonides is giving lip service to rabbinic tradition here, but as you can see, the Torah says nothing about it. But as long as we’re here, let’s look at the prohibition against departing from or profaning the sanctuary. The sanctuary is the Hebrew *miqdas*, which is linguistically derived from the same root as *qodesh*—holy, or set-apart. *Miqdas* can refer to any holy place or thing, the most obvious and

prominent of which in the life of Israel being the temple. The Hebrew word for “go out” is *yatsa*, parallel to the noun *yowtse’ t* which connotes (according to the *Dictionary of Bible Languages with Semantic Domains*): “captive, i.e., one going out of the land into captivity and exile, so changing one’s place of habitation.” What Yahweh is saying here is *not* that the High Priest can’t ever leave the sanctuary—in Moses’ day, the Tabernacle. He’s saying that he is not to switch affiliations, allowing himself to be “taken captive” by false gods. The reason given is that the “anointing oil” of God is upon him. The word “anointing,” of course, (*mishchah*) is related to the word we transliterate Messiah—Yahweh’s anointed One. Further, the oil with which he is anointed is a common Biblical metaphor for the Holy Spirit. All of this adds up to one thing: Israel’s High Priest is a stand-in, a metaphor, for Yahshua our High Priest.

- (384) *The High Kohein shall marry a virgin. “And he shall take a wife in her virginity. A widow or a divorced woman or a defiled woman or a harlot—these he shall not marry; but he shall take a virgin of his own people as wife.”* (Leviticus 21:13-14) Dan Brown had lots of satanic help with his best-selling novel, *The Da Vinci Code*. Now you know why Satan loves (and promotes) the odd idea that Yahshua married Mary Magdalene (who had once been “defiled,” even if she wasn’t a harlot). It would (if true) disqualify Yahshua as High Priest material, leaving us without an Intercessor, and without a Savior. No, Yahshua our High Priest would wed a pure virgin—*us*—even if He had to die to attain our chastity for us. Paul wrote, “**For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.**” (II Corinthians 11:2) And John saw in a vision the wedding of this virgin to the Lamb of God: “**And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.**” (Revelation 19:6-8)
- (385) *The High Kohein shall not marry a widow. “...A widow or a divorced woman or a defiled woman or a harlot—these he shall not marry; but he shall take a virgin of his own people as wife.”* (Leviticus 21:13-14) The death of a woman’s husband made her legally and morally eligible for remarriage. Thus regular priests, though they couldn’t marry divorcees, weren’t prohibited from marrying widows (see Mitzvot #378-380). But not so for the High Priest. He was to marry a virgin, and only a virgin. This difference points out something significant concerning our relationship with Yahshua. He, being our High Priest, may be joined only to one who is pure and undefiled, for He is holy. (Of course, He alone has the power to make us

pure.) But we (who have been made priests through our faith in Him—see Revelation 1:5-6) may have things in our lives that were once joined to other gods. As long as those other gods are dead and gone, we can still be of service. If they are alive to us, however, we may not serve—which explains why priests could not be married to harlots or profaned women.

- (386) *The High Kohein shall not cohabit with a widow, even without marriage, because he profanes her. “...Nor shall he [the High Priest] profane his posterity among his people, for I, Yahweh, sanctify him.”* (Leviticus 21:15) Fornication and adultery are specifically forbidden elsewhere, so this is not a loophole that Yahweh is attempting to close. Rather, it is a restatement (a common literary device in Hebrew speech) confirming and explaining what had just been said, that the High Priest was not to marry a widow, harlot, or divorced woman. To do so would *chalal*—defile, profane, or treat with contempt his *zera*’—his seed, semen, children, offspring, or posterity.
- (387) *A person with a physical blemish shall not serve (in the Sanctuary).* “**And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to Aaron, saying: “No man of your descendants in succeeding generations, who has any defect, may approach to offer the bread of his God. For any man who has a defect shall not approach: a man blind or lame, who has a marred face or any limb too long, a man who has a broken foot or broken hand, or is a hunchback or a dwarf, or a man who has a defect in his eye, or eczema or scab, or is a eunuch. No man of the descendants of Aaron the priest, who has a defect, shall come near to offer the offerings made by fire to Yahweh. He has a defect; he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God. He may eat the bread of his God, both the most holy and the holy; only he shall not go near the veil or approach the altar, because he has a defect, lest he profane My sanctuaries; for I Yahweh sanctify them.”’**” (Leviticus 21:16-23) It’s not that God doesn’t like short people with acne. The lesson here is that just as the sacrifice must be perfect, without spot or blemish, so also must the one offering the sacrifice be spotless. The reason (we can see in hindsight) is that Yahshua was not only *making* the sacrifice, but also *being* the sacrifice—the ultimate High Priest *was* the Lamb of God.

Note that though the man with the defect was disqualified from serving in his hereditary role as a priest, he was not prohibited from eating his share of the sacrifices that were brought before God—as was the privilege of all the priests. Yahweh, as always, is fair and merciful. But we need to remember, the priesthood—whether under Moses or under Yahshua—is not a job; it’s a calling.

- (388) *A kohein with a temporary blemish shall not serve there.* “**No man of the descendants of Aaron the priest, who has a defect, shall come near to offer the offerings made by fire to Yahweh. He has a defect; he shall not come near to offer**

the bread of his God.” (Leviticus 21:21) This isn’t rocket science. The persistence or duration of the blemish has absolutely nothing to do with it. A priest with a defect doesn’t serve. Period. If the defect or blemish is no longer there, there is nothing to keep the priest from serving. If we come to terms with the fact that the defect is a metaphor for sin—and that the sin must be removed before the priest can minister—it will all make sense. But if we refuse to look beyond the letter of the law, we will spend our lives looking for loopholes.

- (389) *A person with a physical blemish shall not enter the Sanctuary further than the altar. “...Only he shall not go near the veil or approach the altar, because he has a defect, lest he profane My sanctuaries; for I Yahweh sanctify them.”* (Leviticus 21:23) The altar was a big barbeque that stood outside the entrance to the tent of meeting, and later the temple. The only reason a priest would approach the altar was to participate or assist in the offering of a sacrifice. Maimonides would have you believe that geographical limitations were being placed on priests with blemishes. Seems that even when he’s right, he’s wrong. The point (again) is that sin precludes service. If we haven’t been cleansed of our sins—our shortcomings—by the blood of Yahweh’s Lamb, then the best things we can do are worse than worthless in God’s sight, as we are reminded in Isaiah 64:6.
- (390) *A kohein who is unclean shall not serve (in the Sanctuary). “Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to Aaron and his sons, that they separate themselves from the holy things of the children of Israel, and that they do not profane My holy name by what they dedicate to Me: I am Yahweh. Say to them: “Whoever of all your descendants throughout your generations, who goes near the holy things which the children of Israel dedicate to Yahweh, while he has uncleanness upon him, that person shall be cut off from My presence: I am Yahweh.”’* (Leviticus 22:1-3) There were quite a few things that could make a priest or Levite ceremoniously unclean (not so much “dirty” as disqualified). Some of them are listed in the following verses, things like having a discharge of some sort, being a leper, touching something that had been touched by a corpse, or coming into contact with something that was defined as unclean. Some of these things were avoidable, and some were not. For example, if a bug landed on you, you were unclean as far as the temple service was concerned, and the condition would persist until the sun went down and you washed yourself with water. Worse, you couldn’t really be sure what had touched you without your knowledge—you might be unclean and not even know it.

If this had no application beyond the raw letter of the law, one could easily get the impression that Yahweh was some sort of heavenly

hypochondriac. *Keep your grubby germs away from Me!* But the obvious truth, once again, is that Yahweh is stressing His unique nature, because of which we are to be set apart from the world around us. We can't be immersed in the world's system of values and expect to be of any use to God or His people. No, it's worse than that: if we are not "clean" as we stumble about in the temple trying to assume the role of God's priesthood, then we will be "cut off from His presence." This is an admonition to the false teachers the New Testament writers warned us about: having a form of godliness without God's power (see II Timothy 3:5). Paul told Timothy to turn away from such people, for Yahweh certainly has.

- (391) *Send the unclean out of the Camp of the Shechinah, that is, out of the Sanctuary.* **"And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a corpse. You shall put out both male and female; you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell.'"** (Numbers 5:1-3) Maimonides is trying to shift the playing field to his advantage here, saying the "camp" is actually the "Sanctuary." Sorry, rabbi. *Machaneh* really does mean camp, a settling of nomadic people, a temporary dwelling place with several tents in close proximity. The Shekinah, the cloud of Yahweh's glory, isn't mentioned here—because His presence actually *was* in the Tent of Meeting. Maimonides' agenda here is transparent. He's saying it's okay to make the tabernacle/temple/sanctuary a holy place with godly standards. (After all, the Romans tore the temple down half a century before the rabbis under Akiba grabbed the reins of power for themselves, so who cares what has to be done *there*? It's a moot point.) But the "camp" is the whole community of Israel. If the "unclean" can't stay within the camp, then the false teachers like Maimonides and the other rabbis (symbolized by unclean priests—see #390) are in big trouble.

It's interesting, though, how the rabbis' obvious twisting of the Torah reveals their mindset. They pride themselves not on truth, but on being able to prove anything they want from scripture. Theirs is a god of power, pride, and intellectual prowess—not Yahweh.

- (392) *A kohein who is unclean shall not enter the courtyard. (This refers to the Camp of the Shechinah.)* **"And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a corpse. You shall put out both male and female; you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell.'"** (Numbers 5:1-3) This is merely the negative statement of the affirmative mitzvah discussed above. Note that

Yahweh includes all Israelites in His injunction, while Maimonides speaks only of priests (Kohein). Since the sons of Aaron couldn't be identified with written genealogical records after the sack of the temple in 70 A.D., this was one more factor helping to mitigate the holiness required of Israel by Yahweh in the eyes of the rabbis. They looked at this as sort of a "get out of jail free" card, comprehending neither the extent nor the reality of the prison they had built for themselves.

- (393) *The kohanim shall bless Israel.* **"And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: "Yahweh bless you and keep you; Yahweh make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; Yahweh lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace." So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.'**" (Numbers 6:22-27) Webster's Dictionary defines "bless" as: "To invoke the divine favor upon; to express a wish for the good fortune or happiness of; to bestow happiness, prosperity, or good things of any kind upon." How surprising it is then to discover that the Hebrew word for bless here (*barak*) literally means: to kneel, or to cause to kneel. It is derived from the word for "knee," *berek*. What's going on?

It turns out that the Hebrew word incorporates within its meaning the relationship between the blessing and the blessed. As one would normally kneel before a potentate when receiving a grant or blessing, so also were the priests to come in humility and thankfulness before Yahweh. The word *barak* implies an admission that "blessings" are not given between equals, but rather by the greater to the lesser (see Hebrews 7:7 above). But note: even though it may look something like the fawning submission required of their worshippers by false gods from Ba'al to Allah, this is fundamentally different. We are being told that Yahweh wishes to give us good things (something false gods never do), but arrogance on our part can impede those blessings. If we approach God in a spirit of realistic humility, however, Yahweh will be gracious to us, bless us, and give us peace. All we have to do is ask.

- (394) *Set apart a portion of the dough for the kohein.* **"When you come into the land to which I bring you, then it will be, when you eat of the bread of the land, that you shall offer up a heave offering to Yahweh. You shall offer up a cake of the first of your ground meal as a heave offering; as a heave offering of the threshing floor, so shall you offer it up. Of the first of your ground meal you shall give to Yahweh a heave offering throughout your generations."** (Numbers 15:18-21) Let's get something straight here. The "heave" or "wave" offering was not *for* the priests, although they were the ones who would eat of it. The offering was made to Yahweh. It was an acknowledgment that His blessing and

provision has enabled the Israelites to put food on their tables. This offering is distinguished from the wave offerings made at the beginning of the barley and wheat harvests, celebrated at the Feast of Firstfruits and at the Feast of Weeks. This time, “the first of your ground meal” was being offered, in other words, the processed product of the barley or wheat that had already been harvested.

The heave offering (called the *t'rumah*) was a part of the tithe. We'll discuss tithes in detail in the next chapter. But perhaps this would be a good place to lay out the basic structure of how it all works. **“Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting.”** A “tithe” (*ma'aser*) simply means one tenth—derived from *asarah*, meaning ten. A tenth of the produce of the Land was to be given to the Levites. **“Hereafter the children of Israel shall not come near the tabernacle of meeting, lest they bear sin and die. But the Levites shall perform the work of the tabernacle of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a statute forever, throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.”** That is, the Levites would be given no tribal lands like the other eleven tribes. Their jobs were not to be agricultural (that is, “normal”), like everyone else, but would be, rather, concerned with the operation of the sanctuary, the tabernacle or temple. The tithes of Israel paid for all that. **“For the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up as a heave offering to Yahweh, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, ‘Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance....’”** It was a trade-off, then. The non-Levites all got more land, but what was grown on that extra land (more or less) was to go back to the Levites, freeing them to work directly in the service of Yahweh on their behalf. Not a bad deal for anybody.

So much for instructions to the non-Levites. **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak thus to the Levites, and say to them: “When you take from the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to Yahweh, a tenth of the tithe. And your heave offering shall be reckoned to you as though it were the grain of the threshing floor and as the fullness of the winepress.”** In other words, though the Levites didn't have fields, vineyards and pastures of their own, the tithes they received from the other eleven tribes were to be considered as if they had been produced on “Levite” lands. Therefore, a tithe of the tithe was given, this time to support the Levitical sub-tribe of Aaron—the priesthood (see Mitzvah #412). This was presented as the *t'rumah*, or heave offering. **“Thus you shall also offer a heave offering to Yahweh from all your tithes which you receive from the children of Israel, and you shall give**

Yahweh's heave offering from it to Aaron the priest. Of all your gifts you shall offer up every heave offering due to Yahweh, from all the best of them, the consecrated part of them.' Therefore you shall say to them: 'When you have lifted up the best of it, then the rest shall be accounted to the Levites as the produce of the threshing floor and as the produce of the winepress. You may eat it in any place, you and your households, for it is your reward for your work in the tabernacle of meeting. And you shall bear no sin because of it, when you have lifted up the best of it. But you shall not profane the holy gifts of the children of Israel, lest you die.'"

(Numbers 18:21-32)

The question, then, is: "Are we to tithe today?" After all, there is no temple; there are no Levites to maintain it, or priests to intercede there for us. Or are there? Paul points out that our bodies are now the temple of the Holy Spirit (II Corinthians 6:19). And John relates that we have been made both kings and priests to Yahweh through the cleansing blood of Yahshua (Revelation 1:5-6). Does this mean we are to pay the tithe to ourselves? Perhaps, if we are devoting one hundred percent of our energies and resources toward the furtherance of Yahweh's kingdom (and let's be honest, now—how many of us do that?). But remember, even the *t'rumah* first went through the hands of the Levites. Who are they in the context of Yahweh's order of things? In practical terms, they were (1) specifically set apart by Yahweh to (2) do a particular service for God and man and (3) had been denied *by their divine calling* the capacity to earn a living in the normal way. I'll leave it to you to figure out who the "Levites" in your world are. But I'll offer a word of caution: not everyone who stands behind a pulpit is called of God.

- (395) *The Levites shall not occupy themselves with the service that belongs to the kohanim, nor the kohanim with that belonging to the Levites. "Then Yahweh said to Aaron: 'You and your sons and your father's house with you shall bear the iniquity related to the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity associated with your priesthood. Also bring with you your brethren of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may be joined with you and serve you while you and your sons are with you before the tabernacle of witness. They shall attend to your needs and all the needs of the tabernacle; but they shall not come near the articles of the sanctuary and the altar, lest they die—they and you also. They shall be joined with you and attend to the needs of the tabernacle of meeting, for all the work of the tabernacle; but an outsider shall not come near you.'"* (Numbers 18:1-4) The work of the priests (Aaron and his sons) was to *nasa*—lift, bear, carry, or take away—the *avon*—sin, wickedness, iniquity, and wrongdoing—and the punishment that falls as its consequence—from the people of Israel. They were to do this through the performance of symbolic prophetic rituals and the offering of sacrifices

brought by the people. The ordinary Levites, on the other hand, were to assist them and “attend to their needs,” but not to actually serve as priests themselves.

That seems straightforward enough, but we should be aware of two instances where Yahweh expanded or contracted the roles of priests and Levites. When King Hezekiah restored the worship of Yahweh to Jerusalem, there were too few consecrated priests to do what was needed, so the Levites, who “were more diligent in sanctifying themselves than the priests,” took up the slack. See II Chronicles 29:34. And in Ezekiel 44:15, in the prophet’s description of the future Millennial temple service, the Aaronic priesthood has been reduced to one priestly sub-family—that of Zadok. Yahweh reserves the right to fine-tune His own commandments, based upon our faithfulness (or lack of it).

- (396) *One not a descendant of Aaron in the male line shall not serve (in the Sanctuary).* **“And you shall attend to the duties of the sanctuary and the duties of the altar, that there may be no more wrath on the children of Israel. Behold, I Myself have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel; they are a gift to you, given by Yahweh, to do the work of the tabernacle of meeting. Therefore you and your sons with you shall attend to your priesthood for everything at the altar and behind the veil; and you shall serve. I give your priesthood to you as a gift for service, but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death.”**

(Numbers 18:5-7) A continuation of the previous mitzvah, this one also stresses the division of labor between the Aaronic priesthood and the ordinary Levites. The males of Aaron’s line were first set apart for the priesthood in Exodus 28:1, 41 and 43. It is abundantly clear that “priesthood,” that is, the privilege of interceding between God and man, is something Yahweh ordains, not something we aspire to.

- (397) *The Levite shall serve in the Sanctuary.* **“Hereafter the children of Israel shall not come near the tabernacle of meeting, lest they bear sin and die. But the Levites shall perform the work of the tabernacle of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a statute forever, throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.”** (Numbers 18:22-23) As we have seen, the priests (a subset of the Levites) were to attend the altar itself and do what was needed within the sanctuary—especially behind the veil. The remainder of the Levites, though they got closer to the action than the other Israelites, did not perform the work of the priests, but served as porters, scribes, musicians, and custodians of the tithes of Israel. They supervised weights and measures and served as builders and maintenance staff in the temple environs.

(398) *Give the Levites cities to dwell in, these to serve also as cities of refuge.* “Command the children of Israel that they give the Levites cities to dwell in from the inheritance of their possession, and you shall also give the Levites common-land around the cities. They shall have the cities to dwell in; and their common-land shall be for their cattle, for their herds, and for all their animals. The common-land of the cities which you will give the Levites shall extend from the wall of the city outward a thousand cubits all around. And you shall measure outside the city on the east side two thousand cubits, on the south side two thousand cubits, on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits. The city shall be in the middle. This shall belong to them as common-land for the cities. Now among the cities which you will give to the Levites you shall appoint six cities of refuge, to which a manslayer may flee. And to these you shall add forty-two cities. So all the cities you will give to the Levites shall be forty-eight; these you shall give with their common-land. And the cities which you will give shall be from the possession of the children of Israel; from the larger tribe you shall give many, from the smaller you shall give few. Each shall give some of its cities to the Levites, in proportion to the inheritance that each receives.” (Numbers 35:2-8) The Levites weren’t to have their own tribal territory in the promised land, but they had to live somewhere. So Yahweh instructed that the other tribes each provide them with cities to live in (presumably captured from the Canaanites)—48 in all. Maimonides has oversimplified a bit here. Not all of them were to be cities of refuge (see Mitzvah #260), only six of them. (And only three of those were in territory actually deeded to the Israelites, land west of the Jordan River.) These had to be real cities—that is, big enough to have a wall around them. And because livestock was essential to the Bronze Age society to which the law was first given, a green belt of common grazing land over half a mile wide surrounding the entire city was to be included. The Levites could own homes within the cities.

This, of course, was all a big anachronism to Maimonides. There were no Levites he could identify through genealogical records, and besides, the Israelites had been kicked out of the Land a thousand years before his time. What instruction, then, does this mitzvah hold for us? As I hypothesized above, if the “Levites” metaphorically represent today’s servants of Yahweh—those who have made personal sacrifices in order to further His kingdom, then these cities are indications that Yahweh has not forgotten their selflessness. **“For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”** (Hebrews 6:10) We may not all have vast worldly resources, but we have Yahweh’s love, and that’s plenty.

(399) *None of the tribe of Levi shall take any portion of territory in the land (of Israel).* “The priests, the Levites—all the tribe of Levi—shall have no part nor

inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the offerings of Yahweh made by fire, and His portion. Therefore they shall have no inheritance among their brethren; Yahweh is their inheritance, as He said to them.” (Deuteronomy 18:1-2) Yahweh compensated for the Levi’s lack of a tribal “homeland” with the provision of the tithe from the other eleven tribes (actually, twelve, since Joseph was split into Manasseh and Ephraim). The priests’ portion, you’ll recall, was a tithe of that tithe. This points out some very interesting facts of life for both the givers and receivers of the tithe. Levi obviously *depended* on the tithe. They were forced to live by faith that the other tribes would do as Yahweh had instructed, for they had no productive land of their own.

What is not so obvious is the other tribes’ dependence on the blessing and provision of Yahweh. Remember, the tithe wasn’t characterized as a tax paid to the Levites, even though that’s how it ended up being used. Rather, it was seen as remuneration given back to Yahweh Himself—a return of one tenth of what He had *already* provided: it was based on *past* blessings. So if an Israelite “shaved” his tithe, he was in effect robbing God. The prophet Malachi points out this very thing: **“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this, says Yahweh of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field, says Yahweh of hosts.”** (Malachi 3:8-11) Yahweh usually says, “I am Almighty God: trust Me.” Rare indeed are the times when God says, “Go ahead, *test Me* on this issue. I dare you.” This is one of those times.

- (400) *None of the tribe of Levi shall take any share of the spoil (at the conquest of the Promised Land). “The priests, the Levites—all the tribe of Levi—shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the offerings of Yahweh made by fire, and His portion. Therefore they shall have no inheritance among their brethren; Yahweh is their inheritance, as He said to them.”* (Deuteronomy 18:1-2) Because of what we saw in Mitzvah #398, Maimonides’ oversimplification of Yahweh’s instruction is wrong. Forty-eight cities in Canaan—“spoil,” by definition—*were* to be given to the Levites to live in. However, we have reason to believe (though we aren’t told in so many words) that the Levites were not part of the regular Israelite armies. The book of Numbers is full of census tallies. We read in Numbers 1:46-47 that **“All who were numbered [that is, males ‘twenty years and older who were able to go to war’] were 603,560. But the Levites were not numbered among them by their father’s tribe...”** But in Chapters 3 and 4, we see an excruciatingly

detailed census of the tribe of Levi, broken down by family, listing what each family's role was to be—things like dismantling and transporting the Tabernacle (Gershon) or taking care of the sacred furnishings such as the Ark of the Covenant (Kohath). Making war was not listed among their duties.

In light of what we've seen, it's probably not too much of a stretch to suggest that those who are called into Yahweh's service—and who faithfully serve Him and His people—should be exempted from “military service,” that is, earning a living in the workforce, in addition to their “Levitical” duties. “Don't muzzle the ox that treads out the grain,” and all that. But I reiterate: the calling must be real, and the service must be in line with Yahweh's direction. There are any number of “white-shoe preachers” today whose “ministries” are little more than bunko schemes. If you feel you have to beg God's people for your support, then I'd question your status as a “neo-Levite.” In the Torah's pattern, Yahweh's provision for the Levites was arranged up front. It was not something to be extorted or wheedled out of the congregation. Being called as a “Levite” is the antithesis of donning the exalted mantle of the rabbi.

- (401) *The kohanim shall serve in the Sanctuary in divisions, but on festivals, they all serve together. “Yahweh your God has chosen [Levi] out of all your tribes to stand to minister in the name of Yahweh, him and his sons forever. So if a Levite comes from any of your gates, from where he dwells among all Israel, and comes with all the desire of his mind to the place which Yahweh chooses, then he may serve in the name of Yahweh his God as all his brethren the Levites do, who stand there before Yahweh. They shall have equal portions to eat, besides what comes from the sale of his inheritance.”* (Deuteronomy 18:5-8) Maimonides' point comes not from the Torah, but from later tradition. David was the first to divide the priests into 24 courses, each of which officiated in the temple for one week, from Sabbath to Sabbath, twice a year. (As an interesting aside, it is these 24 courses that allow us to pin down the birth date of Yahshua the Messiah to the fall of 2 B.C.—almost surely on the Feast of Tabernacles. See the “Chronology” Appendix to *Future History*.) And every Jewish male was required to gather at the central place of worship (which David established at Jerusalem after centuries of moving about) three times a year—which included all of the “holy convocations”—the seven Feasts of Yahweh—except for the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement. So Maimonides has made a factual statement, but it's not based on anything handed down by Moses.

The Deuteronomy passage, however, points out something we need to know about Levitical service. The *calling* (as we have seen) was

Yahweh's prerogative: He chose the entire tribe of Levi to minister before Him forever. But their *service* was strictly voluntary. *If* he **"comes with all the desire of his mind to the place which Yahweh chooses,"** then the privilege of service—of fulfilling the call Yahweh had made upon His life—was his to exercise. That's a big "if." And notice several other things: first, as we saw in the previous mitzvah, God—not the Levite—chooses the place or type of service. Of course, since He made us, He knows us. If we are in the center of His will, the desires of our hearts will be in perfect alignment with His.

Second, the "Levites" who desire to serve will see their needs met. They may not (no, let me rephrase that—they *will* not) get rich, but they will **"have equal portions to eat."** It's my experience that God provides resources in direct proportion to what we're going to need to serve Him and His children. And as often as not, He provides these resources up front—before we think we need them. Case in point: as a young couple (a few centuries ago) my wife and I found ourselves in possession of a house that was far larger than we really needed for our little family. But over the next dozen years, we adopted nine more children. Yep, filled that big 'ol house right up. If God gives you a hammer, my friend, go looking for a nail. If He gives you a key, look for the lock it fits. And if He gives you a big satchel full of money, it's a safe bet there's something big and expensive on your spiritual horizon.

Chapter 11

Holy Things

In this chapter, as in the last, we are going to see quite a few things required by Yahweh in the Torah that are impossible to do at the present time. They require a Sanctuary, a priesthood, and a functioning Levitical order, none of which exist today. And once again, we are forced to consider the ramifications of what this all means. There are several “possibilities.” (1) God is a cruel sadist who enjoys dangling the hope of our salvation just out of reach, so we can see it but not attain it. (2) He expects us to do the best we can with an absurd situation, like playing soccer without a ball or practicing archery without arrows. If this is the case, we’re deluding ourselves, for there’s no way to know if we’ve “scored,” or even how close we’re getting to the goal. Or (3—the only *real* possibility) the Torah was never intended to save anybody; there’s some other reason for it, some other purpose, some other function.

It is axiomatic that, since it was handed down by Yahweh Himself, the Torah’s real purpose has not become obsolete (as some Christians would have you believe). It is still worthy of our attention, even if we can’t literally *do* some of it anymore. For that matter, some of us were never told to do it. Time after time in the Pentateuch, we read the words, “Now Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of *Israel*...’” There are millions of followers of Yahweh in the world today who are not biological descendents of Israel. As far as I know, I’m one of them. The Torah, the “instructions,” were given to Israel to perform—but not to the rest of us. Did God forget about us? No. We *goyim* were still part of the equation. We were to watch, learn, and benefit from Israel’s performance of the Torah. If the Law had been intended to be *in itself* the means to achieve salvation from our sins, then not only were the Jews in big trouble the minute they failed to keep it to perfection—and damned forever when they lost the temple—but worse, the rest of us never had a chance.

But that was never the purpose of the Law. Paul explained it to a group of gentile believers in the province of Galatia: “**Until faith in Christ was shown to us as the way of becoming right with God, we were guarded by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until we could put our faith in the coming Savior....**” The Greek word for “guarded” (*phroueo*) works both ways: it can either mean “protected by a military guard to prevent hostile invasion,” or “to keep the inhabitants of a besieged city from flight.” This duality is the essence of holiness: keeping that which is outside—profane, corrupt, and evil—separated from that which is inside—pure, undefiled, and good, either by preventing the bad from entering, or by keeping the good from wandering off and getting lost. The Law

did that for Israel (or at least it would have if they'd followed it) until the *real* means of salvation—Yahshua the Messiah—could fulfill His mission.

“Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian and teacher to lead us until Christ came. So now, through faith in Christ, we are made right with God. But now that faith in Christ has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.” That’s right. The Law is no longer needed *as our guardian*. But it shouldn’t be a total stranger, either. It is now our friend, companion, and counselor. **“So you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have been made like him.”** That is to say, we, like Him, now have the Spirit of God residing within us—we are immersed in Her. **“There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all Christians—you are one in Christ Jesus. And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and now all the promises God gave to him belong to you.”** (Galatians 3:23-29 NLT) Don’t take the ball and run with it here: Paul is speaking rhetorically. *Of course* there are still men and women, slaves and free men—and Jews and gentiles. But as far as the Torah is concerned (which is still the subject), Yahshua’s fulfillment of its prophetic requirements has made its role as guardian more or less obsolete. There’s not much point in rehearsing your lines *after* the play has closed.

I’m afraid the New Living Translation has rather overstepped its mandate here when it says, **“You are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and now all the promises God gave to him belong to you.”** The New King James, not so influenced by the myth of replacement theology, merely says, **“If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”** In the original Greek, there isn’t even a hint of Israel being *replaced* by the gentile church. In fact, the most oft-repeated prophecy in the Old Covenant scriptures is that of *biological* Israel’s eventual repentance and restoration. Paul is not denying that at all. He’s just saying that the promise (singular) that blessed Abraham and his heirs also includes the gentile Ekklesia, for we too are his heirs. We would do well to review that particular pledge: **“I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”** (Genesis 12:2-3) *That’s* the promise the gentile believers share with Israel.

But I digress. Paul was explaining our freedom from the requirements of the Law: **“Think of it this way. If a father dies and leaves great wealth for his young children, those children are not much better off than slaves until they grow up, even though they actually own everything their father had. They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set....”** The salient question is: what spiritual age have we attained? Paul’s point, as we shall see in a moment, is that positionally, we have already moved from slavery to freedom through Christ’s finished work. True enough, but few if any of us in this life reach the level of spiritual maturity that

would allow us to honestly say, “My old guardian, the Torah, is of no further use to me. I am at one with the mind and will of Yahweh.” I submit to you that we would be unwise to throw out this baby with the bath water—to jettison the Torah simply because it has already been fulfilled in Yahshua. Even though its authority as guardian no longer exists, it still has much to teach us, if only we’ll listen. It’s no longer our master. Now it’s our mentor.

“And that’s the way it was with us before Christ came. We were slaves to the spiritual powers of this world. But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because you Gentiles have become his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, and now you can call God your dear Father. Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, everything he has belongs to you.” (Galatians 4:1-7 NLT) Note that Yahshua made Himself “subject to the law.” Since the Torah reveals the mindset of God, only One who was “from” God could live His life in perfect harmony with it. Had Yahshua broken the least statute of the Law, He would have been rendered unworthy to “buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law.” Rather, His death would have been required for His own shortcomings. But because He *was* Immanuel—God with us—His sinless life and sacrificial death bought freedom for those who choose to be free, and adoption into the family of God for those who wish to belong to it.

There is no shortage of things that would enslave us—and *did*. **“Before you Gentiles knew God, you were slaves to so-called gods that do not even exist. And now that you have found God (or should I say, now that God has found you), why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual powers of this world?”** The gentile Christians, having been freed from pagan practice, were being seduced by certain Jewish believers into a pointless and counterproductive reliance on the Law—something Paul characterizes as spiritually weak and useless—following its rules without understanding their significance. They were, in effect, following the shadow rather than the One casting it. **“You are trying to find favor with God by what you do or don’t do on certain days or months or seasons or years. I fear for you. I am afraid that all my hard work for you was worth nothing. Dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to live as I do in freedom from these things, for I have become like you Gentiles were—free from the law.”** (Galatians 4:8-12 NLT)

Does a child earn his parents’ love by doing what they say? No. He is loved because of the relationship that exists between them. Of course, parents are pleased when their children obey, but only because obedience brings safety, harmony, and tranquility to the family. Who wants danger, division, and strife? Paul now uses this dichotomy (natural love versus obedience) to explain the difference between living under grace and living under the Law. **“Listen to me, you**

who want to live under the law. Do you know what the law really says?" The Galatian gentiles, having been given off-center instruction by the Judaizers, had some idea of what the Torah said. Paul's question was meant to be rhetorical: "Yes, we think we do." Not to be picky, Paul, but the answer these days is *no*. Christians today don't have a clue "what the law really says," neither the literal precepts themselves nor the underlying symbolic truth that you're about to point out. **"The Scriptures say that Abraham had two sons, one from his slave-wife and one from his freeborn wife. The son of the slave-wife was born in a human attempt to bring about the fulfillment of God's promise. But the son of the freeborn wife was born as God's own fulfillment of his promise. Now these two women serve as an illustration of God's two covenants...."** The two "branches" of Abraham's family, Hagar's and Sarah's, represent two competing approaches to God's promise: law and grace.

But just when we're starting to get a handle on this, Paul throws in another metaphor or two. Or three. **"Hagar, the slave-wife, represents Mount Sinai where people first became enslaved to the law. And now Jerusalem is just like Mount Sinai in Arabia, because she and her children live in slavery. But Sarah, the free woman, represents the heavenly Jerusalem. And she is our mother. That is what Isaiah meant when he prophesied, 'Rejoice, O childless woman! Break forth into loud and joyful song, even though you never gave birth to a child. For the woman who could bear no children now has more than all the other women!' And you, dear brothers and sisters, are children of the promise, just like Isaac. And we who are born of the Holy Spirit are persecuted by those who want us to keep the law, just as Isaac, the child of promise, was persecuted by Ishmael, the son of the slave-wife...."** Oy! This is becoming quite a mental juggling act. But basically, Paul is just using several different symbols, like layers in a parfait, to compare freedom under grace with slavery under the Law:

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Freedom: coming of age in Christ | Guardianship under the law |
| New Covenant under grace | Old Covenant under the Torah |
| Isaac, son of relationship | Ishmael, son of slavery |
| Promised one | Persecutor |
| Sarah, free and legal wife | Hagar, slave and illegal mate |
| God-ordained union | Human-devised scheme |
| Once barren, now blessed | Usurped blessing becomes a curse |
| Heaven, heavenly Jerusalem | Mt. Sinai, earthly Jerusalem |
| Holy Spirit | Spirit of submission |

There *is* a bottom line to all of this, thank goodness: **“But what do the Scriptures say about that? ‘Get rid of the slave and her son, for the son of the slave woman will not share the family inheritance with the free woman’s son.’”** This disinheritance is in direct contrast to what we saw above, that those who are Christ’s *do* share the inheritance. **“So, dear brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, obligated to the law. We are children of the free woman, acceptable to God because of our faith. So Christ has really set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don’t get tied up again in slavery to the law.”** (Galatians 4:21-31, 5:1 NLT) The comparisons continue:

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Remains in the place of blessing | Sent away into the wilderness |
| Inheritance secure | Cut off from inheritance |
| Acceptable to God through faith | Unacceptable and faithless |
| Constrained by grace | Obligated by Law |
| Free | Enslaved |

At this late date, I find myself fighting a different battle from the one Paul fought. He was concerned about folks buying into the myth that says keeping the Mosaic Law is necessary for salvation—about trading the freedom that had been attained for us through Christ’s atoning sacrifice for the code of conduct that was designed to keep Israel set apart from evil, pure and undefiled, until Yahweh was ready to bring His Messiah into the world through them. (The guys pushing that fable are still around, by the way, nibbling away at the fringes of the “Messianic movement.”) I, on the other hand, am more concerned by the fact that Paul’s admonitions have been hijacked by the vast majority of today’s “Christians” and driven to a place he never intended. The “church” today seems to think that the Torah has somehow been abrogated by grace and is therefore of no value. They think that the Old Testament is mere “Jewish stuff” that has no relevance in today’s world. I would beg to differ. It is not irrelevant. It is not obsolete. Though its observance is not required for salvation (and never was) the Torah is still of inestimable value, for it reveals the very mind of God.

T’RUMAH, TITHES, AND TAXES

(402) *An uncircumcised person shall not eat of the t’rumah (heave offering) or other holy things.* **“And Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, ‘This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it. But every man’s servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it. A**

sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat it.” (Exodus 12:43-45); **“No outsider shall eat the holy offering; one who dwells with the priest, or a hired servant, shall not eat the holy thing. But if the priest buys a person with his money, he may eat it; and one who is born in his house may eat his food.”** (Leviticus 22:10-11)

Judaism 101 notes: “This rule is inferred from the law of the Paschal offering, by similarity of phrase, but it is not explicitly set forth in the Torah.” You see a lot of that sort of thing going on in rabbinical writings: stating as “law” things that Yahweh didn’t “explicitly set forth.” The Exodus passage speaks specifically of the Passover sacrifice (see Mitzvah #112), while in Leviticus, the word “offering” is implied—it literally says, “No stranger shall eat the holiness” (that is, that which is set apart), a phrase that would include the Passover sacrifice, the *t’rumah*, and a whole lot more.

The restrictions, however, seem to be consistent and significant. The offerings spoken of here were all things that had been sacrificed to Yahweh and were subsequently to be shared with, and enjoyed by, either God’s people in general or His priesthood. These offerings were “holy,” set apart for Yahweh’s glory. Therefore, they were not to be eaten by the “foreigner,” the outsider who had no relationship with the God of Israel, even though he may live in close proximity to Israelites and be on good terms with them. For the same reason, the “hired servant,” someone intimate with God’s people but whose only bond with them was financial, was not qualified to partake. But the “slave,” one who had been bought with a price, who had been circumcised according to the Law, was allowed to participate. If you’ll recall from Mitzvah #17, circumcision “signified that the barrier of sin that separated us from Yahweh had been removed, cut off, destroyed—a process that involved blood and pain, but one that made us available for God’s use.” It’s not too much of a stretch to view these “circumcised servants” as gentile believers.

So what is Yahweh trying to tell us here? First, remember that all of the sacrifices spoke, one way or another, of Yahshua the Messiah. (Rabbinical Judaism denies this, of course. Tracey Rich writes: “Were sacrifices a symbol of the savior to come? Not according to Judaism. That is a Christian teaching that has no basis in Jewish thought. Jews don’t believe in a savior, and don’t believe that sacrifice has anything to do with a savior or messiah.” *Really?* Think about it: if that were the case, the Torah they claim to revere would be pointless and cruel. Worse, *it always has been*, for nobody was ever able to keep it. If there’s no savior, and if they can’t—and don’t—keep the Law to perfection, the Jews are truly without hope. Why can’t they see that?) The Passover addressed the issue of innocent blood being shed so that we who trusted in its efficacy would

live—a transparent metaphor for Yahshua’s crucifixion. Who, then, is able to benefit from these sacrifices? Not the stranger who merely rubs shoulders with God’s chosen. And not the outsider who does business with them, even if that business is mutually beneficial. No, it is only those who have a personal relationship with Yahweh, marked by the “permanent removal of their sin through a process involving blood and pain.”

- (403) *Do not alter the order of separating the t’rumah and the tithes; the separation must be in the order first—fruits at the beginning, then the t’rumah, then the first tithe, and last the second tithe. “You shall not delay to offer the first of your ripe produce and your juices. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me. Likewise you shall do with your oxen and your sheep.”* (Exodus 22:29-30) This is more rabbinical meddling with scripture. The *order* of giving and tithing is never specified in the Torah (except as implied for offerings associated with the seven feasts of Yahweh, which are tied to successive calendar dates). Since the rabbis under Akiba usurped the roles of the priests and Levites early in the second century, shifting the nation’s authority to themselves, this is merely a thinly disguised ploy calculated to maximize the “take.” Later in this chapter, we’ll see all kinds of rules concerning the “second tithe.” Sorry, Maimonides, it doesn’t exist. The rabbis aren’t confused, just greedy. I’ll have more to say about this later. But speaking of procrastination, that’s the real point of this mitzvah: *don’t*. If something is due to Yahweh, don’t delay its offering. Do it now.
- (404) *Give half a shekel every year (to the Sanctuary for provision of the public sacrifices). “Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a ransom for himself to Yahweh, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them. This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (a shekel is twenty gerahs).”* This would make the half-shekel tax a little over two dollars—it’s 0.182 troy ounces of silver. *“The half-shekel shall be an offering to Yahweh. Everyone included among those who are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering to Yahweh. The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when you give an offering to Yahweh, to make atonement for yourselves. And you shall take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the children of Israel before Yahweh, to make atonement for yourselves.”* (Exodus 30:11-16) The census counted males twenty years old and above, in other words, those old enough for military service. Rabbinic greed notwithstanding, the census was not taken every year, but only periodically—quite rarely, actually. And at the risk of sounding nit-picky, the half-shekel was “an offering to

Yahweh,” not to the sanctuary, a fact stated *four times* in the passage. It is an atonement levy which is *to be used* for the service of the sanctuary. (The point is that Yahweh has no use for money, or any other sacrificial commodity: it’s our obedience in faith that’s valuable to Him. I suppose that’s why the “dollar value” of the tax was so insignificant.)

It’s worth going through the mental gymnastics of trying to figure out what “atonement” means in this context—after all, it’s mentioned three times—four, if you include the related word “ransom.” *Kapar*, translated “atonement” here, has the exact same consonant root as *koper*—ransom. (Remember, the Masoretic vowel pointing wasn’t done until 2,500 years after these words were written.) The root means “pitch,” as in, “to cover over something with pitch.” From there, its linguistic application jumps to “to cover, purge, make an atonement, make reconciliation, pacify, propitiate, or atone for sin.” (S) And how do we get “ransom” out of that? The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* explains: “From the meaning of *kōper*, ‘ransom,’ the meaning of *kāpar* can be better understood. It means ‘to atone by offering a substitute.’ The great majority of the usages concern the priestly ritual of sprinkling of the sacrificial blood thus ‘making an atonement’ for the worshipper. . . . It seems clear that this word aptly illustrates the theology of reconciliation in the OT. The life of the sacrificial animal specifically symbolized by its blood was required in exchange for the life of the worshipper. Sacrifice of animals in OT theology was not merely an expression of thanks to the deity by a cattle raising people. It was the symbolic expression of innocent life given for guilty life.”

How does all of this shed light on the atoning-ransoming aspects of a half-shekel census tax? The key is substitution. It’s a lesson we see popping up dozens of ways in the Torah. Levites are substituted for first-born males; the scapegoat lives because he has been substituted by his buddy, the sin-offering goat, etc. In this case, Yahweh is emphasizing that Israel is His nation—all of it. They were purchased out of Egypt with shed blood. They have value in God’s eyes. So for each individual to pay a token “ransom” on the occasion of their numbering for battle is a national acknowledgment of Yahweh’s sovereignty—especially in the matter of doing battle with the world. No man is worth more than another. They are ransomed because they are God’s.

- (405) *A kohein who is unclean shall not eat of the t’rumah. “Whatever man of the descendants of Aaron, who is a leper or has a discharge, shall not eat the holy offerings until he is clean.”* (Leviticus 22:4) Maimonides is perfectly correct here. Of course, by the time he wrote, there had been no priesthood or

t'rumah for a thousand years. (The *t'rumah*, you'll recall, was the tithe the Levites paid to the Aaronic priesthood from the tithes *they* had received from the people of Israel.) Without an understanding of what the Levitical symbols mean, this mitzvah, like so many others, is a pointless waste of paper.

In the light of Yahshua's finished work, however, God's timeless truth emerges. A *kohein*, or Priest, is one who is called to intercede between men and Yahweh. Since the curtain separating the holy of holies from the world was torn in two at Christ's crucifixion, all people—not just the sons of Aaron—are now potential priests. But in order to enjoy the benefits Yahweh has provided for them—seen here as eating of the *t'rumah*—these priests must be made clean. The cleansing process in the Torah involved washing in water, and this is precisely what we see in the New Covenant: **“Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.”** (Ephesians 5:25-26)

- (406) *A person who is not a kohein or the wife or unmarried daughter of a kohein shall not eat of the t'rumah. “No outsider shall eat the holy offering; one who dwells with the priest, or a hired servant, shall not eat the holy thing. But if the priest buys a person with his money, he may eat it; and one who is born in his house may eat his food. If the priest's daughter is married to an outsider, she may not eat of the holy offerings. But if the priest's daughter is a widow or divorced, and has no child, and has returned to her father's house as in her youth, she may eat her father's food; but no outsider shall eat it.”* (Leviticus 22:10-13) This mitzvah is a continuation of what we covered in #402. At issue here is who (if anyone), within the priest's own household, would be prohibited from partaking in the bounty of the *t'rumah*. We've already established that an outsider may not participate. But the priest's wife is qualified, by virtue of her relationship with her husband. The priest's daughter may or may not, depending on *her* relationship. (A priest's son, in case you missed it, is by definition a priest himself.) It's fascinating to see the forgiveness of Yahweh here: even if the priest's daughter has made some poor choices in the past—even if she has been divorced from her husband (as long as there are no children from that union) she is welcomed back into her father's home as his child, still qualified to partake of the *t'rumah* with him. In other words, it's not about behavior. It's about relationships.

The Ephesians passage quoted in the previous mitzvah actually demonstrates this, though to keep things simple I extricated it from its context (for which I apologize). But the context confirms what we've just been talking about. It's the marriage relationship (as between the *kohein* and his wife), and how Yahshua's bride, the *ekklesia*—the called-out assembly of believers, has been cleansed and presented to Himself as

spotless and undefiled. And because she has been cleansed, she may lawfully enjoy the benefits of the relationship. Beyond that, the passage may also shed some light on the disposition of children who die (or who will be raptured) without reaching the level of maturity needed to choose or reject a personal relationship with Yahweh and His Messiah, Yahshua. The determining factor seems to be the attitude of the parents, and especially of the father. How's *that* for pressure, guys?

- (407) *A sojourner with a kohein or his hired servant shall not eat of the t'rumah. "No outsider shall eat the holy offering; one who dwells with the priest, or a hired servant, shall not eat the holy thing."* (Leviticus 22:10) Is there an echo in here? I thought we already covered this. Maimonides is making an artificial distinction between an "outsider" and a "sojourner." The word in Hebrew is *zur*, a verb meaning "to be a stranger, estranged, or alienated." The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes, "The basic thought is of non-acquaintance or non-relatedness." The word can carry the connotation of deserting or abandoning an association or relationship, or going astray—being in a state of apostasy and rebellion. By application, it is even used to describe a prostitute, a woman who is "strange" to you. The point is that no one who is a stranger to Yahweh will benefit from His bountiful provision.
- (408) *Do not eat tevel (something from which the t'rumah and tithe have not yet been separated). "They shall not profane the holy offerings of the children of Israel, which they offer to Yahweh."* (Leviticus 22:15) Although Maimonides' mitzvah is probably wise counsel in general terms, the verse chosen as a proof text doesn't support his thesis. To "profane" something (Hebrew *chahal*) is to defile, pollute, treat as common, or dishonor it. Though tithes were clearly a part of the structure of Israelite life (for reasons we've already discussed), Yahweh hates the litigious and unmerciful spirit that precipitated this kind of rule—one that would see a man's family starve for lack of a precise accounting of every wheat stalk, mint leaf and cumin seed.

Yahshua put all of this in perspective. He told the religious leaders of the day, "**How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest part of your income, but you ignore the important things of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but you should not leave undone the more important things. Blind guides! You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat; then you swallow a camel!**" (Matthew 23:23-24 NLT) Tithing, He says, is right and good: we should be doing it. But justice, mercy, and faith are far more significant

evidences of your “keeping of the law.” If these things are lacking, you have “profaned the holy offerings,” no matter how strictly you tithe.

- (409) *Set apart the tithe of the produce (one tenth of the produce after taking out t'rumah) for the Levites. “And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is Yahweh’s. It is holy to Yahweh. (Leviticus 27:30) “The Levites shall perform the work of the tabernacle of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a statute forever, throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance. For the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up as a heave offering to Yahweh, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, ‘Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.’” (Numbers 18:23-24) Let’s get one thing perfectly clear: the tithe is not primarily “for” the Levites—it is set apart to *Yahweh*, who assigns it to the Levites so they can “perform the work of the tabernacle.” As we noted in Mitzvah #394, though there is no tabernacle or temple today and no Levites performing service there, the principle still applies. To recap: Levites were specifically set apart by Yahweh to do a service for God and man. In addition, they had been denied *by their divine calling* the capacity to earn a living in the normal way.*

Though pastors *can* fulfill this role, I’m thinking more in terms of the lady I know who was in Bolivia adopting a child a few years back, saw a dire need for a free medical clinic for the poor, and single-handedly, through prayer and persistence, made it happen. Or the friend of mine who heard the call of God on his life and now spends all his waking hours—and maybe a hundred grand a year out of his own pocket—shedding badly needed light on Yahweh’s Word and the things that war against it. These two, and many like them, are to my mind the “Levites” of the church age, working for man’s benefit and God’s glory in the tabernacle we call earth.

It’s worth mentioning, however, that the biological Levites and priests of Israel are not permanently extinct. They will once again fulfill their appointed roles in Yahshua’s Millennial kingdom. Who are they? I have no idea, but their genealogical records are written in their DNA, and their future role is prophesied in scripture—most notably in the closing chapters of the book of Ezekiel. See my book on prophecy, *Future History*, Chapter 27: “The Millennial Temple,” for the whole story.

- (410) *Tithe cattle. “Concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to Yahweh.” (Leviticus 27:32) Every tenth clean animal born among the flocks and herds of Israel was to be set apart to Yahweh and therefore given to the tribe of Levi for their services. In this, they were just like the grain harvest, vintage, or fruits of the*

orchard. One tenth was set aside for Yahweh, and given to the Levites. In the matter of livestock, however, there was another factor. The firstborn—each animal that “opened the womb”—was *already* set apart to Yahweh, so it wouldn’t count as being among the ten from which the tithe was drawn. In practical terms, this meant that far more than ten percent of the livestock would be dedicated to Yahweh. (Of course, we need to bear in mind that what was “given” to God was actually consumed by His people.) In observing the Torah in this matter, the Israelites were trusting God to bless their herds and make them fruitful. As usual, we find that Yahweh’s math and ours don’t match. For those who are willing to trust Him, His sums come out larger.

- (411) *Do not sell the tithe of the herd.* **“Concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to Yahweh. He shall not inquire whether it is good or bad, nor shall he exchange it; and if he exchanges it at all, then both it and the one exchanged for it shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed.”** (Leviticus 27:32-33) Maimonides has missed the point entirely. It wasn’t that you weren’t allowed to sell an animal and present the money to the Levites instead. That was specifically allowed (see Deuteronomy 14:24-26). What we see here is a prohibition against the purposeful selection of one animal over another for the purpose of the tithe. Notice how it’s worded: “whatever passes under the rod.” The herdsman would notice that his cows or ewes had given birth in the fields. But the newborns wouldn’t be *counted* until they reentered the fold, when they “passed under the rod.” (This is the short stick he used to keep them in line, moving as he directed. The word for rod—*shebet*—is the same word used for a king’s scepter. It speaks of authority, control, direction, even punishment. Compare Psalm 23:4 to Isaiah 30:31.) If the tenth lamb or calf was perfect and spotless, while the ninth had two heads and was covered with purple polka dots, it didn’t matter. You couldn’t substitute one for the other. The tenth one was taken for the tithe.
- (412) *The Levites shall set apart a tenth of the tithes, which they had received from the Israelites, and give it to the kohanim. (This is called the t’rumah of the tithe.)* **“When you take from the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to Yahweh, a tenth of the tithe. And your heave offering shall be reckoned to you as though it were the grain of the threshing floor and as the fullness of the winepress.”** (Numbers 18:26-27) We looked at this principle in Mitzvah #394. Remember, the priests were a subset of the Levites. A tenth of what was produced in Israel was set apart to Yahweh for the use of the tribe of Levi, which had been given no tribal lands of its own. One tenth of *that* tithe was set aside for the priests, the Levite family of the sons of Aaron.

This one percent was lifted up (“waved” or “heaved”) in symbolic recognition that it was dedicated to Yahweh. The tithes received by the Levites were taken from the increase Yahweh had provided in livestock and crops. But since the Levites had no tribal land upon which to pasture flocks and grow grain, their tithes to the priests, the *t’rumah*, didn’t actually represent any further increase. Yahweh, however, is telling them to count what they’ve received from the other tribes as if they had grown or raised the bounty themselves, and tithes from it accordingly.

- (413) *Do not eat the second tithe of cereals outside Jerusalem. “You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand. But you must eat them before Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh your God chooses, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before Yahweh your God in all to which you put your hands.”* (Deuteronomy 12:17-18) The next three mitzvot are describing exactly the same principle; Maimonides has broken them down by the type of offering—grain, new wine, or olive oil (though he sort of skipped over livestock for some reason)—but they’re really all talking about the same thing. Note first that there’s no such thing as a “second tithe.” One might presume that this is another description of the *t’rumah*, the tithe of the tithe that the priests were to receive out of what had been tithed to the Levites in general, except for the fact that Maimonides listed them separately in Mitzvah #403 (where he called for this bogus “second tithe” to be paid *after* the *t’rumah*). Nowhere in the Torah is a “second tithe” mentioned or commanded. For that matter, it doesn’t even show up in the rabbinical literature before the time of Flavius Josephus—late in the first century A.D.

Thinking of this passage only in terms of tithing will throw you off immediately. Moses has given a short descriptive round-up of *all* the offerings Israel would contribute—not just tithes, but everything from vows to thank-, peace-, and sin-offerings, as well as sacrifices made at the feasts of Yahweh. The point here is that they were not to be offered up just anywhere. There would be a “place which Yahweh your God chooses,” where the tabernacle and Ark of the Covenant would be, a central location within Israel’s land where the people would gather for worship and celebration. Under the Judges, the tabernacle was at Shiloh. During Saul’s time it was located at Nob, and later at Gibeon. But its final stop was to be Jerusalem, the stronghold wrested from the Jebusites by David, whose son Solomon was given the privilege of replacing the tabernacle with a “permanent” temple.

All of the offerings were to be made here, all the tithes brought here, all the sacrifices to be slain here. Part of being holy—set apart to Yahweh—was that Israel would not be allowed to practice their rites without divine supervision. There was to be no do-it-yourself religion going on. Everything that even resembled a ritual was to be fraught with meaning and significance—and performed by God’s chosen priesthood, assisted by their brothers the Levites.

So all the sacrifices, tithes, and offerings were to be brought to the chosen place of worship to be consumed, a fact that made this place barbeque central—the location the whole country visited three times a year to party with God. But wait! The Levites were supposed to live on the tithes, but their homes were in cities scattered all over Israel. Does this mean that they couldn’t eat unless they came to Jerusalem (or Shiloh, or wherever the tabernacle was)? No, it doesn’t, but allow me to defer discussion of why to Mitzvah #417.

- (414) *Do not consume the second tithe of the vintage outside of Jerusalem. “You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine....”* (Deuteronomy 12:17) See the previous mitzvah, #413.
- (415) *Do not consume the second tithe of the oil outside of Jerusalem. “You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil....”* (Deuteronomy 12:17) Ditto.
- (416) *Do not forsake the Levites. What is due them should be given to them, so that they might rejoice therewith on each and every festival. “Take heed to yourself that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land.”* (Deuteronomy 12:19) This verse is the bottom-line conclusion to the whole discussion about taking the offerings to Jerusalem. God says, “Don’t forget about the Levites, for they are working for Me. I have blessed you in order that you may bless them in turn. If you forsake them, there’s not much point in Me letting you live in My Land any more, is there?” Or words to that effect.
- (417) *Set apart the second tithe in the first, second, fourth and fifth years of the sabbatical cycle to be eaten by its owner in Jerusalem. “At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that Yahweh your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.”* (Deuteronomy 14:28-29) In Mitzvah #413, we learned that the tithes were supposed to be brought to Jerusalem (or wherever the tabernacle was at the time) in order to keep Israelite worship focused on Yahweh alone. But the Levites lived all over the place—48

cities within Israelite territory had been set aside for their use (see Mitzvah #398). Further complicating matters, here we see that the tithe was collected only rarely—at the end of every third year—and it apparently didn't all go to Shiloh or Jerusalem, but was stored locally, “in your gates,” near to where it would be used by the Levites and the poor.

We see the same apparent contradiction in a parallel passage: **“When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase in the third year—the year of tithing—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your gates and be filled, then you shall say before Yahweh your God: ‘I have removed the holy tithe from my house, and also have given them to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have I forgotten them.’”** (Deuteronomy 26:12-13) Here the Israelite is seen storing up his tithe, and at the end of the third year (specifically called the “year of tithing”) taking it out of his own house and distributing it to whom it belongs—right in his own community. So where does **“You must eat them before Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh your God chooses”** (Deuteronomy 12:18) come in? The answer is in Deuteronomy 26:13: **“Then you shall say before Yahweh your God....”** Where was Yahweh? Okay, He’s omnipresent, but for the purpose of the mitzvah, He was **“in the place which Yahweh your God chooses,”** that is, Shiloh, or Jerusalem—wherever the tabernacle/temple was. The tither, having stored the bulk of the produce locally, was to take a token of his tithe to Jerusalem and present it to Yahweh there, apparently partaking in a symbolic meal there, where he shared in his own tithe.

When was the “end of the year?” The Jewish year began in the spring, on the first day of Nisan, so it could have been just before this. But it makes more sense that the “end of the year” is meant to signify the last in the series of annual feasts of Yahweh, the Feast of Tabernacles, in the autumn, falling on the fifteenth day of Tishri. Every male in Israel was to come to “the place where Yahweh your God chooses” for this holiday anyway—it was a celebration that went on for an entire week (see Mitzvah #112). As far as God’s ritual-prophetic calendar is concerned, it *is* the end of the year. And what better time to thankfully present your tithes to Yahweh than at harvest time—when you *know* how big the harvest was?

You’ll notice that the rabbis tie the “every third year” requirement to the sabbatical cycle, making the third *and* sixth years of each cycle “years of tithing.” While this could have been true, there is nothing to support it in the Torah. It seems to me that as precise as Yahweh invariably is with

His wording, if He'd wanted third and sixth year tithes, He would have *said* third and sixth.

- (418) *Set apart the second tithe in the third and sixth year of the sabbatical cycle for the poor.* **“At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that Yahweh your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.”** (Deuteronomy 14:28-29) In a sad but telling commentary, Judaism 101 notes: “Today, it must be separated out but need not be given to the poor.” I think Yahweh may beg to differ on that point. At any rate, this mitzvah points out that the Levites weren't the only beneficiaries of the tithe. It was also used (under their supervision) to care for the widows, orphans, and exiles living in Israel. Yahweh is constantly seen reminding the Israelites that they were once strangers living in the land of Egypt, and to remember that fact through generosity to the poor and unfortunate among them. It's remarkable that He chose to care for the disadvantaged through the disenfranchised, not the rich. The Levites had no inheritance of their own—by God's own design. It's a recipe for empathy. The challenges that come into our lives are there to help us help others.

Again, we see the rabbis errantly trying to tie this to the sabbatical cycle (which would effectively let them off the hook in paying their tithes one year out of seven). And note once again that the “second tithe” is a man-made construct—it doesn't exist in the Torah.

- (419) *Give the kohein the due portions of the carcass of cattle.* **“This shall be the priest's due from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice, whether it is bull or sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach.”** (Deuteronomy 18:3) Oblivious to the real problem here, Judaism 101 notes, “According to the Talmud, this is not mandatory in the present outside of Israel, but it is permissible, and some observant people do so.” This precept concerns sacrifices that were shared by the priests and the people—they could *only* be made at the tabernacle or temple. The problem today is that because Israel has turned its back on Yahweh, there *are* no priests. There is no temple. Sacrifices can't be made, and atonement can't be made for their sins as the Torah prescribes. “Observant” Jews are just going through the motions, not comprehending why. But most Jews see this sort of thing as completely pointless, so they drop any pretense of Torah observance.

But it's not pointless—at least, not if you understand the symbols. First, the priesthood is a metaphor for the Messiah—the One who stands

as intercessor between God and man—and His people. Second, when the sacrificial animal was portioned out, what parts were allocated to the priests? The shoulder is indicative of the fact that the work of salvation was done by our High Priest, Yahshua. The cheeks (Hebrew *lachi*y: cheek, jaw, or jowl) seem to be symbolic of speech—the Word of God is an oft-repeated image of Christ. And the stomach reminds us that Yahweh provides our sustenance—without His blessings, we don’t eat. Of course, if you’ve replaced God’s law with your own, replaced His priests with self-appointed rabbis, and replaced the temple with the synagogue, you shouldn’t be too surprised to find that you’ve also replaced a beautiful picture of God’s grace and provision with utter pointlessness.

- (420) *Give the first of the fleece to the Kohein.* **“The firstfruits of your grain and your new wine and your oil, and the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him [i.e., the priest]. For Yahweh your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand to minister in the name of Yahweh, him and his sons forever.”** (Deuteronomy 18:4-5) Again, Maimonides’ mitzvah is impossible to keep because there is no priesthood in Israel. And substituting rabbis for priests doesn’t help his cause. It is only when you realize that the High Priest is ultimately Yahshua the Messiah that any of this makes a lick of sense. He is the One who “ministers in the name of Yahweh,” and we, his children, get to share in that privilege by virtue of our relationship with Him. Forever.

The firstfruits offering represents our faith in the future provision of Yahweh. It is given when the first harbingers of His bounty present themselves—in this case, the first fleece from the flocks of sheep. Whether acknowledging Yahweh’s provision before the harvest (as here) or afterward, note that we’re never asked to give something He hasn’t already provided. The timing is merely a question of whether we’re exercising faith or expressing thankfulness—neither of which makes any sense if your God isn’t real. As usual, the offering is made *to* Yahweh (as symbolized by the waving of the tithe toward the heavens—see Mitzvah #412), but it is utilized by the priests or Levites.

- (421) *Set apart t’rumah g’dolah (the great heave-offering, that is, a small portion of the grain, wine and oil) for the Kohein.* **“The firstfruits of your grain and your new wine and your oil, and the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him [i.e., the priest]. For Yahweh your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand to minister in the name of Yahweh, him and his sons forever.”** (Deuteronomy 18:4-5) Supported by the same passage as the previous mitzvah, this one focuses on the grain, wine, and oil produced in Israel. The principles involved, though, are identical. (See Mitzvot #112 and 420 for the significance of Firstfruits.) The *t’rumah* is not associated with

Firstfruits. Rather, it is the tenth of the tithe passed from the Levites to the priests, making the Talmud's "*t'rumah g'dolah*" a bogus concept. The "heave-offering" associated with the *t'rumah* isn't mentioned in this passage, though it is in the Leviticus 23:11 description of the Feast of Firstfruits. The point is that this passage is talking about Firstfruits offerings, not tithes. I may seem to be nitpicking, but there's a good reason. If you don't have a good foundation, you can't build a proper house. The rabbis' reconstruction of the Torah is nothing but a house of cards because it doesn't rest on anything solid. Like the Word of Yahweh.

- (422) *Do not expend the proceeds of the second tithe on anything but food and drink. "I have not eaten any of it when in mourning, nor have I removed any of it for an unclean use, nor given any of it for the dead. I have obeyed the voice of Yahweh my God, and have done according to all that You have commanded me. Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the land which You have given us, just as You swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey."* (Deuteronomy 26:14-15) In Mitzvah #417, we discussed how the Israelite was to distribute his tithes to (and through) the Levites in his own community at the end of every third year, and then go to Jerusalem (or wherever the sanctuary was at the time) with a sample of the tithe and "**say before Yahweh your God**" that you have done as the Torah instructed. This passage enumerates what they were to "say." We'll discuss "mourning" and "unclean use" in subsequent mitzvot. Maimonides' injunction here stems from the view that anything not necessary for human sustenance falls within the phrase "given for the dead." I believe it goes much deeper than that.

"Given" is the Hebrew *nathan*, meaning to bestow, grant, permit, give, ascribe, employ, devote, consecrate, dedicate, commit, or entrust, among other things. And "dead" is *mut*, a verb meaning to die, kill, perish, or be put to death. *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* says of *mut*, "This is a universally used Semitic root for dying and death.... The physical corruption of the human body and the consequent suffering and pain brought about by the Fall were only the obvious symptoms of death. Death is the consequence and the punishment of sin. It originated with sin. A grand theme of the OT is God's holiness, which separates Him from all that is not in harmony with His character. Death, then, in the OT means ultimate separation from God due to sin." Therefore, I'd say that the enigmatic phrase, "**I have not...given any of it for the dead**" really means "I haven't devoted or employed any of what this tithe is a part of to a life leading to death—a life devoid of holiness to Yahweh." How many of us could say *that* today? God's point is clear: He's not concerned with

revenues—only relationships. He’s not interested in your money—He wants your *life*.

Notice that the Israelites were to conclude their “tithe statement” with a prayer. The tither was *instructed* to ask for Yahweh’s blessing in light of his obedience in this matter. One gets the feeling that if they had been able to *honestly* say what was required, God would have delighted in blessing them within the Promised Land through all their generations.

- (423) *Do not eat the second tithe, even in Jerusalem, in a state of uncleanness, until the tithe has been redeemed. “I have not eaten any of it when in mourning, nor have I removed any of it for an unclean use....”* (Deuteronomy 26:14) We are still discussing the presentation of the tithe in the place of central worship within Israel. (Not the *second* tithe, by the way. There’s only one.) The translation of *ba’ar* as “removed” is questionable (though possible). It’s more likely the meaning is “burnt,” as in a burnt offering. *Tame’* is a Hebrew adjective meaning unclean, defiled, ceremonially impure. As we’ve seen, there was no shortage of ways one could inadvertently become temporarily unclean in a ritual sense under the Mosaic Law. One was not to partake of the sacrifices in a defiled state—he who did would be “cut off” from his people. The normal remedy involved washing with water and waiting until the sun had set—beginning the new day. This, of course, is prophetic of the cleansing we experience through Yahshua’s Spirit—the “washing of water by the Word” Paul wrote about in Ephesians 5. The point, for those living outside of theocratic Israel, is that our tithes and offerings are unacceptable if we who bring them are not ourselves clean. You can’t bribe God or buy your way into heaven. The tithe is an indicator of trust, not a down payment on eternal life.
- (424) *Do not eat the second tithe when mourning. “I have not eaten any of it when in mourning, nor have I removed any of it for an unclean use....”* (Deuteronomy 26:14) “Mourning” is another unfortunate translation. The word *’awen* really means evil, wickedness, iniquity—something morally corrupt and damaging to one’s relationship with God and man. It can also mean calamity, trouble, misfortune, or suffering. An “*ish ’awen*” is a scoundrel, a villain—not a mourner. Again, we see that the tithe is not to be presented by one who is wicked or evil, unclean or defiled. It can only be brought by one whose sins have been atoned for by God’s perfect and acceptable sacrifice—the One predicted by the rites of the Torah.
- (425) *Make the declaration when bringing the second tithe to the Sanctuary. “When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase in the third year—the year of tithing—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your gates and be filled,*

then you shall say before Yahweh your God: ‘I have removed the holy tithe from my house, and also have given them to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have I forgotten them. I have not eaten any of it when in mourning, nor have I removed any of it for an unclean use, nor given any of it for the dead. I have obeyed the voice of Yahweh my God, and have done according to all that You have commanded me. Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the land which You have given us, just as You swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ (Deuteronomy 26:12-15) We’ve been looking at this passage piecemeal for the past several mitzvot. Here it is all together in context. I just have one question: who could say all of this—or *any* of this—with a straight face? The unbending standard of righteousness required of anyone bringing a tithe into the house of Yahweh is impossible to meet in our own power. I mean, what kind of arrogance would it take to look God in the eye and say, “**I have obeyed the voice of Yahweh my God, and have done according to all that You have commanded me**”? None of us have done that, no matter how much we wanted to. Without the imputed righteousness with which Yahweh has covered us through the sacrifice of His Messiah—the clean, white linen “garments of light” He alone provides—this would all be impossible.

Did Maimonides really think any of this out? Did he think he was off the hook because there was no more temple? Or did he think that we could get away with mindlessly chanting words we knew were lies just because *ha-shem* told him to—keep the letter of the law while quenching the Spirit in an ocean of self-delusion? I look at my own sins and tremble at the requirements of the law. I honestly don’t know what the Rambam was thinkin’.

THE TEMPLE, SANCTUARY, AND SACRED OBJECTS

- (426) *Do not build an altar of hewn stone.* “Then Yahweh said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make anything to be with Me—gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves. An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it.’” (Exodus 20:22-25) This is one of those places where not paying attention to the context will lead you completely astray. The altar being spoken of here is not the altar that was

to stand outside the tabernacle of meeting—a portable affair to be made of bronze and acacia wood (see Exodus 27:1-8). Here in Exodus 20, Moses has just received the Ten Commandments, and Yahweh *knows* the Israelites are going to be in awe that their leader has been talking directly with God—they’re going to want to make sacrifices and peace offerings. And sure enough, we read about this very thing in Exodus 24:1-8.

What, then, is the significance of the instructions that Moses was given here? Yahweh begins with a quick reminder of the Second Commandment—the one that prohibits making images of *anything* for the purpose of worship. And then He uses the subject of altars to reinforce the Fourth Commandment (keeping the Sabbath), that is, the thing we all-too-often miss about it: in the end, we are not to work for our salvation—we must take it as Yahweh provides it, or not at all.

Right now, you’re probably scratching your head trying to figure out what I’m talking about. I’ll admit, it isn’t immediately obvious. Think about the concept of an altar for a moment. It was a place that was specifically set apart for worship. In that respect, an altar is not unlike a believer, for he too is set apart to honor Yahweh. There are two authorized options for making the altar (you might say there were two “alternatives”). You could use either earth (dirt, soil, or clay) or unhewn stones. Yahweh specified here that the materials used to build the altar were not to be “improved” by man in order to make them more worthy. They were to be utilized just the way God made them. The tip-off is the Hebrew word for “earth” or “soil.” It’s *adamah*, which is linguistically related to *adam*, or man—the one who was made from the *adamah*/earth in his unfallen state. We, then, as humans, do not have to be improved upon by man’s effort to make us useful to God. We need only be dedicated to his purpose, set apart for His use. Religion is thus forbidden; relationship is encouraged.

- (427) *Do not mount the altar by steps. “Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.”* (Exodus 20:26) This seems self-explanatory, and its primary meaning certainly lines up with Yahweh’s consistent sense of decency, modesty, and propriety. But in hindsight, there may be a secondary, underlying (and even more important) lesson. Pagan religions from Babel onward employed a system of initiation by degrees into the deeper mysteries of the cult. One would start with innocuous rites and rituals, quite harmless and innocent in themselves. But then, by small steps, the pagan worshipper would move toward a dark world that society would never have tolerated had they seen it blatantly presented. You’d start by attending some polite social functions at the temple of the local deity, but the next thing you know you’d find yourself

burning infants alive in the arms of a red-hot statue of Molech. Today's Freemasons begin innocently with secret handshakes and funny hats, but by the time they've reached the thirty-first degree, they're offering blood-curdling secret oaths honoring false gods like Allah, Shiva, Osiris, and Lucifer himself. (See *Future History*, Chapter 14: "Mystery Babylon.")

I believe Yahweh is telling us that we aren't to approach Him by degrees. We *can't*. We're either His children, or we're not—there are no halfway believers, no novices or initiates. Like all children, we grow from infancy to maturity, but we are *never* only partially in Yahweh's family.

(428) *Build the Sanctuary*. **"Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them."** (Exodus 25:8) Okay, let's see a show of hands: how many of you have ever built the sanctuary as prescribed in Exodus? You haven't? Then according to Maimonides, you're a lawbreaker, a heinous sinner, and your sin can only be atoned by a priest killing a goat on the Day of Atonement and sprinkling his blood on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant that sits in the sanctuary you didn't build. But *wait a minute*, you say: there *are* no priests, and the Ark has been lost for two and a half millennia. Gee, I guess you're in trouble. We're *all* in trouble.

We're in trouble, that is, if—as some insist—keeping the letter of the Torah is necessary for our redemption. We're in trouble if the rabbinical take on the law of Moses has any validity at all (which it doesn't). Here's what's really going on. The sanctuary was an exquisite and detailed picture of the coming Messiah. And now that His Spirit lives within us as believers, we *are* the temple, for we are the body of Christ: He has "built the sanctuary" in our lives. As Paul explained it to the Corinthians, **"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are."** (I Corinthians 3:17-17) **"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?"** (I Corinthians 6:19) **"For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.... Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually."** (I Corinthians 12:12, 27)

And although it's a foreign concept to Maimonides, let us not gloss over that final phrase: **"...that I may dwell among them."** That was the whole point of the Messiah's advent, that God could dwell among us humans. It's why Yahshua was called Immanuel—God with us. Even if the temple were to be rebuilt, if it weren't built for this purpose (that God may dwell among men) then the whole thing would be a pointless exercise, a mockery of the Torah. (By the way, the prophets predict that there are *two*

“temples” yet in Israel’s future: the first will be built and usurped by the Antichrist during the Tribulation; the second—the Millennial temple—will be built by the returning King, the Messiah, “...that I [Yahweh] may dwell among them.” See *Future History* for the whole story.)

- (429) *Do not remove the staves from the Ark.* “**And you shall make poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, that the ark may be carried by them. The poles shall be in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it.**” (Exodus 25:13-15) The Ark was basically a wooden box covered with gold, about 45 inches in length, with rings at the corners. Two staves or poles were placed through the rings so the ark could be carried from place to place by four Levites. Here we see that the poles were to remain in place—they were not to be removed from the rings, even though the ends of the poles would stick out through the curtain separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, where the Ark rested (see I Kings 8:8).

This injunction is kind of like saying, “Don’t paint the toenails on a triceratops.” Since the Ark is lost, we couldn’t remove the staves from its rings if we wanted to. Though I’m pleased to find yet another Mosaic precept I’ve never broken, I’m also curious: why were the unwieldy poles to be left in place?

To get to the bottom of this, we need to consider the function of the Ark. It was the base for the “mercy seat,” its solid gold lid, upon which was sprinkled the blood of the sacrificial animals each Day of Atonement. Thus as far as the symbols of the sanctuary were concerned, it was a necessary appurtenance for the temporary covering of the sins of Israel—no mercy seat, no atonement. It was to be carried only by Levites of the family of Kohath, but even they were not allowed to touch it. “**And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These are the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.**” (Numbers 4:15) David forgot this when he first tried to move the Ark to Jerusalem, and the result was that Uzzah, son of Aminadab, was killed trying to keep it from falling to the ground. Ignorance of God’s instructions does not excuse us from their consequences.

It is instructive to examine the word translated “poles” or “staves.” The Hebrew term *bad* actually means alone, by oneself, isolated, the only entity in a class. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes: “Positively, the word is used of the Lord’s incomparability and uniqueness in his exclusive claim to deity as seen in his extraordinary works.... The

word also has a negative connotation when a man is abandoned by his community or by God. Thus the unclean leper must suffer alone, apart from human fellowship.” So the word is in some ways akin to the familiar *qodesh*—holy, or set apart—but it also points out the loneliness associated with being abandoned. Does the quote, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” ring any bells? In the humanity of his sacrifice, Yahshua found Himself *bad*—utterly alone. So how do we get “poles” out of that? The plural of the word, *baddim*, picks up the connotation of being *extended* from something that stands alone, so it’s properly used of members, limbs, branches, or poles.

The reason the poles are left attached, then, is that they are extensions of that which is unique and alone—Yahweh’s Messiah. And who are these “extensions” who are not to be separated from Him? *Us*, that’s who. We believers are the means by which Yahshua the Messiah is “carried” to the world. We are never removed from His presence.

- (430) *Set the showbread and the frankincense before the Lord every Sabbath. “You shall set the showbread on the table before Me always.” (Exodus 25:30)*
“You shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it. Two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake. You shall set them in two rows, six in a row, on the pure gold table before Yahweh. And you shall put pure frankincense on each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, an offering made by fire to Yahweh. Every Sabbath he shall set it in order before Yahweh continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the offerings of Yahweh made by fire, by a perpetual statute.” (Leviticus 24:5-9) The symbolism surrounding the showbread is as rich as it is profuse. Twelve cakes or loaves (obviously a reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, and later to the twelve apostles of Yahshua—in other words, the whole household of faith) were to be baked with fine flour (*solet*) as opposed to meal (*qemah*). The difference was that the fine flour had been crushed and sifted to remove the bran, indicative of worthlessness or sin. Why two rows of six, side by side? Perhaps to inform us that the household of faith would be comprised of two parallel groups—Israel and the *Ekklesia*. (Six, of course, is the number of man.) Notice that the frankincense was to be sprinkled upon each *row* as a separate unit—God’s plan for Israel is distinct from that for His Church. The pure gold of the table speaks of the purity we must rest upon if we are to come “before Yahweh.”

Frankincense is a resin from the bark of a tree from the genus *Boswellia*. As the amber droplets of resin dry, a white dust forms, which explains the name: “Frankincense” is *lebona*, derived from the Hebrew

word for “white,” *laban*. The related verb *laben* (to be white) indicates moral purity, the cleansing of God which makes the sinner “as white as snow.” This “whiteness” is sprinkled onto the loaves “for a memorial, an offering made by fire,” telling us that we are to remember the judgment Christ endured in our stead, for it made us pure in God’s sight. The setting out of the loaves on the Sabbath reminds us that we cannot work to attain this imputed purity. The showbread was to be eaten by “Aaron and his sons,” in other words, the priesthood—those who minister in God’s very presence, interceding between God and man. This today includes all people of faith in Yahweh, for the veil blocking access to the holy of holies has been torn in two—we believers may now boldly enter His presence in prayer. It’s no wonder Yahshua described Himself as being “the bread of life.”

- (431) *Kindle lights in the Sanctuary.* **“You shall command the children of Israel that they bring you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to cause the lamp to burn continually. In the tabernacle of meeting, outside the veil which is before the Testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening until morning before Yahweh. It shall be a statute forever to their generations on behalf of the children of Israel.”** (Exodus 27:20-21) Just as Yahshua is the bread of life, He is also the “Light of the world.” It is significant that Yahweh saw to it that there would always be light in the sanctuary after the sun went down and the world grew dark. What dispelled the light? Oil, resulting from the crushing of olives. This reminds us that Yahshua’s body had to be broken before His Holy Spirit could indwell us (see John 15:26; the symbolic connection between the Spirit of God and olive oil can be seen in Zechariah 4). It also points out that we who have God’s Spirit within us are the only light the world will see in these dark times. Again, it is Aaron and his sons who tend the lamps—that is, the priesthood of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The lampstand itself (described in Exodus 25:31-37 and 37:17-24) was a visual representation of Yahweh’s ubiquitous six-plus-one pattern. A central lamp was flanked by three “branches” on one side and three on the other, each bearing a lamp fashioned like an almond blossom with an ornamental knob and flower. The whole seven-branched menorah was made out of a single piece of pure gold weighing in at over 90 pounds. Like God’s “six days of creation” plus one of rest, or the six days of the work week followed by the Sabbath rest, I believe the six branches of the lampstand plus the center lamp are a timeline, an indication of God’s plan for mankind’s redemption from the Fall of Adam to the Millennial reign of Christ—six thousand years for us to work followed by one thousand to rest from our labors in Yahweh’s perfect world (and by the way, we are

rapidly approaching the end of that sixth millennium). A complete explanation is available in the Chronology Appendix to *Future History*.

- (432) *The breastplate shall not be loosened from the ephod.* **“They shall bind the breastplate by means of its rings to the rings of the ephod, using a blue cord, so that it is above the intricately woven band of the ephod, and so that the breastplate does not come loose from the ephod.”** (Exodus 28:28) In the previous chapter (Mitzvah #372) we reviewed the High Priest’s garments. The breastplate, you’ll recall, was adorned with twelve gemstones, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. His ephod was a skirt-like garment that covered the hips and thighs (worn in addition to the thigh-length trousers mentioned in verse 42). The ephod, affixed to the breastplate with golden rings and a blue cord, also had straps going over the shoulders. Two onyx stones set in gold rested upon the shoulders. Each bore the names of six of the sons of Israel. Thus the High Priest symbolically bore the weight of Israel upon his shoulders, as well as having them near his heart. It’s a picture of service and intercession. The reason the ephod and breastplate were to remain attached was that service without love is worthless, just as love without service is impossible.
- (433) *Offer up incense twice daily.* **“You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make it of acacia wood. A cubit shall be its length and a cubit its width—it shall be square—and two cubits shall be its height. Its horns shall be of one piece with it. And you shall overlay its top, its sides all around, and its horns with pure gold; and you shall make for it a molding of gold all around. Two gold rings you shall make for it, under the molding on both its sides. You shall place them on its two sides, and they will be holders for the poles with which to bear it. You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. And you shall put it before the veil that is before the ark of the Testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the Testimony, where I will meet with you. Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before Yahweh throughout your generations.”** (Exodus 30:1-8) The altar of incense was a small wooden table, about 18 inches square and three feet tall, covered with gold. Like the ark of the covenant, it was equipped with golden rings through which poles would be placed when it had to be moved. (Unlike with the Ark of the Covenant, there was no specific instruction to leave the staves in place.) It was not to be touched, for it was set apart for Yahweh’s purposes. The High Priest (prophetic of the Messiah) was the only one authorized to burn incense upon it.

Notice that each time the High Priest was to burn incense, he was also to tend to the lamps (see Mitzvah #431). The priest was to replenish the oil

(representing the Holy Spirit who provides the light in our lives) when he burned the incense—a metaphor for prayer. One should not be done without the other—prayer is intimately associated with the filling of the Holy Spirit. The lampstand and the altar of incense were in the same room in the sanctuary, normally called “the holy place.” As you entered from the outer door (at the east end of the room) you’d see the table of showbread on your right, the golden lampstand on your left. Straight ahead—right in front of the veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (where the Ark of the Covenant sat) was the altar of incense. You had to pass the altar of incense to get to the mercy seat. The lesson: atonement for sin could not be made without first communicating with Yahweh—it’s the place “where I will meet with you.”

Why was incense burned twice a day? In their own way, both specified hours speak of a new day. Every morning heralds a new opportunity to walk in God’s light. On the other hand, Yahweh specifically stated that sunset (not midnight, as we reckon it) would begin each calendar day. I’m admittedly guessing here, but I believe the two new beginnings indicated by the burning of the incense may be prophetic of two messianic advents of Yahshua—one in which we were introduced to the Light of the World, and the other in which will dawn a whole new era of righteousness. Or perhaps we are being given a preview of Yahshua’s instruction on prayer: “Our Father...may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

- (434) *Do not offer strange incense nor any sacrifice upon the golden altar. “You shall not offer strange incense on [the altar of incense], or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it.”* (Exodus 30:9) The primary function of the altar of incense was to symbolize the prayers of Israel rising to Yahweh (whose Shekinah glory was to abide in the most holy place before which the altar stood). As David wrote, “**Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.**” (Psalm 141:2) The only other function it had was stated in the next verse: “**And Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonement; once a year he shall make atonement upon it throughout your generations. It is most holy to Yahweh.**” (Exodus 30:10) On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would apply some of the blood of the sacrifice on the horns of this altar, once again linking prayer—communication with Yahweh—to atonement, the covering of our sins.

As we shall see (Mitzvah #439), the formula for the incense to be burned on this altar was very specific and very exclusive. This, I believe, speaks to the principle that for our prayers to be efficacious, they must be aligned with God’s will. It’s not that Yahweh wants to hear the mindless

repetition of pre-approved formula prayers, like a minyan of Black Hats teetering at the Wailing Wall. Rather, He wants us to be sensitive to His will and purpose, and conversing with Him along those lines. If we ignore what Yahweh has already told us about His plans and preferences, or talk to God as if He's some sort of celestial Santa Claus, I'd say He perceives that as "strange incense." And it stinks.

- (435) *The kohein shall wash his hands and feet at the time of service. "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to Yahweh, they shall wash with water, lest they die. So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die. And it shall be a statute forever to them—to him and his descendants throughout their generations."* (Exodus 30:18-21) The whole tabernacle layout is designed to teach us how to approach God. We've already discussed the furnishings found within the tent of meeting: the table of showbread, the lampstand, and the altar of incense within the Holy Place, and then, behind the veil in the Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant with its integral mercy seat—redemption's ground zero. But outside the tabernacle there were two items one had to pass before he even reached the front door. First was the altar upon which the sacrifices were slain and roasted. Then, standing between the altar and the tabernacle was the bronze laver described here.

It's one thing for the proper sacrifice to be made to atone for your sin—the function of the altar. It's quite another to be "clean" enough to stand before Yahweh. The altar denotes the sacrifice made; the laver symbolizes the sacrifice accepted. Note that the priest's whole body wasn't to be cleansed at the laver, but only his hands and feet, indicative of his work and his walk before God. We are reminded of the foot-washing scene between Yahshua and Peter in the upper room. Peter was questioning the appropriateness of the Lord of Creation stooping to wash his dirty feet, but Yahshua told him, "**He who is already bathed needs only to wash his feet to make him completely clean.**" (John 13:10) So it is with the laver: the sacrifice has been made at the altar, making us clean. All that's left to do is admit that our feet are still dirty from walking through this world, and that they need to be bathed in Christ's ongoing forgiveness. "**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**" (I John 1:9)

- (436) *Prepare the oil of anointment and anoint high kohanim and kings with it. "Moreover Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: Also take for yourself quality spices—*

five hundred shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much sweet-smelling cinnamon (two hundred and fifty shekels), two hundred and fifty shekels of sweet-smelling cane, five hundred shekels of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and a hin of olive oil. And you shall make from these a holy anointing oil, an ointment compounded according to the art of the perfumer. It shall be a holy anointing oil. With it you shall anoint the tabernacle of meeting and the ark of the Testimony; the table and all its utensils, the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense; the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base. You shall consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them must be holy. And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister to Me as priests.” (Exodus 30:22-30) Yahweh provided a very specific recipe for the oil that was to be used for anointing the priests and the consecrated tabernacle furnishings—all of which prophesied the Messiah in one way or another. (It was *not* specified for kings, as Maimonides asserts, nor is there any Biblical suggestion that Israelite kings were ever anointed with anything other than ordinary olive oil.)

The formula began with a *hin* (about a gallon) of olive oil, which as we have seen is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, the source of light in our lives. And what were these other ingredients? Myrrh is a resinous gum or oil from balsam or other trees with an oily bark. It is fragrant and slightly bitter, hence the name, *mor*, from a Hebrew root meaning bitterness—a reminder of the Messiah’s sorrows endured on our behalf. (A shekel, by the way, was a little over a third of an ounce, so five hundred shekels would be about ten pounds.) Cinnamon (Hebrew *qinamown*) is the familiar fragrant bark we still use as a spice to this day. Its use as an aphrodisiac (along with myrrh) is suggested in Proverbs 7:17. The “sweet-smelling cane” is *qaneh*, an aromatic reed, but one also used as a standard of measure, normally six cubits. Yahshua’s human moral perfection is the standard by which we are all measured—and fall short. The last ingredient was cassia (*qidah*), a fragrant plant ingredient used in perfumes and oils, the “fragrant oil” spoken of in Matthew 26:12 and Luke 23:56—something used to prepare the Messiah for His burial—both before and after He gave Himself up to be crucified. The mixture, then, describes the Messiah, Yahshua, whose Spirit-filled life was the epitome of love, the standard of holiness, and sweet salvation achieved through bitter suffering.

We believers are said to be “crucified with Christ.” How interesting it is, then, to read in Solomon’s love poem (an unblushing declaration of our Savior’s visceral love toward us, His betrothed) this description: **“A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard, spikenard and saffron, calamus [*qidah*] and cinnamon, with all trees**

of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices—a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.” (Song of Solomon 4:12-15) It appears that we are not only crucified with Him (freeing us from the condemnation of the law), we are anointed with Him as well. As the bride of Christ, we will reign with Him as kings and priests. That’s why it was illegal to counterfeit the formula or use it on “strangers.” Read on...

- (437) *Do not compound oil for lay use after the formula of the anointing oil.* **“And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. It shall not be poured on man’s flesh; nor shall you make any other like it, according to its composition. It is holy, and it shall be holy to you. Whoever compounds any like it, or whoever puts any of it on an outsider, shall be cut off from his people.’”** (Exodus 30:31-33) For an anointing oil to be “holy,” its use and formula would have been strictly exclusive to the purposes Yahweh had outlined in His Word. First, the recipe for the anointing oil itself was not to be duplicated or simulated. Because the oil spoke of the true Messiah and His mission, anything made to be “like it” would by definition describe a “false Messiah,” another path to God—all the more deadly because of its similarity to the real thing. The better the counterfeit, the more damage it can do. Satan’s most destructive fakes blend ninety percent truth with ten percent lies. His most deceptive counterfeit? *Religion*. Search the scriptures: Yahweh *never* speaks of religion in a positive light. He’s after a personal relationship with us, but religion is an unholy anointing oil—a deceptive substitute for the genuine familial relationship God seeks to have with us.
- (438) *Do not anoint a stranger with the anointing oil.* **“This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. It shall not be poured on man’s flesh.... Whoever puts any of it on an outsider shall be cut off from his people.”** (Exodus 30:31-33) By the same token, the real Messiah cannot be comprehended by an “outsider,” someone who has no relationship with Yahweh. Well meaning “strangers” can talk about “the historical Jesus” all they want, but they won’t begin to understand what He’s really about, because they don’t have His Spirit living within them. That last phrase, **“Whoever puts any of it on an outsider shall be cut off from his people,”** should give us pause. Yahweh is warning us against suggesting secular solutions for problems only God can solve—anointing “outsiders” with Messianic status. Don’t follow men; don’t trust in programs; don’t rely on law, tradition, or religion. Yahshua alone is the Messiah, the anointed one.
- (439) *Do not compound anything after the formula of the incense.* **“And Yahweh said to Moses: ‘Take sweet spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, and pure frankincense with these sweet spices; there shall be equal amounts of each. You**

shall make of these an incense, a compound according to the art of the perfumer, salted, pure, and holy. And you shall beat some of it very fine, and put some of it before the Testimony in the tabernacle of meeting where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. But as for the incense which you shall make, you shall not make any for yourselves, according to its composition. It shall be to you holy for Yahweh. Whoever makes any like it, to smell it, he shall be cut off from his people.” (Exodus 30:34-38) The prescribed incense was much like the anointing oil in that a specific formula was to be followed, one used exclusively by the priesthood in the sanctuary service. In Mitzvot #433 and 434, we examined the altar on which this incense was to be burned, and the significance of the incense—primarily a metaphor for prayer. Here we see the recipe for the incense itself.

Stacte is a resin or gum, but the Hebrew word (*natap*) stresses the form: a *drop* of this ingredient. We should be immediately reminded of Dr. Luke’s account of Yahshua’s intense prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. He reports, **“And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”** (Luke 22:44) Stacte, then, implores us to pray passionately. Galbanum is an aromatic bitter gum resin from the *Ferula* plant family. We are thus reminded to take our bitterness and sorrow to God, for He understands our grief. Frankincense we have seen before (Mitzvah #430): its name is related to being white—in other words, moral purity or imputed righteousness. As James reminds, **“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”** (James 5:16) Salt added flavor and acted as a preservative, which is why Yahshua called believers “the salt of the earth.”

And finally, the most surprising ingredient (to my mind) is “onycha,” the Hebrew *shacheleth*. This is the “processed claw-shaped closing flap of certain types of mollusks (such as strombus) of the genus *Mollusca* with a pungent odor when burned.” (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*) This ingredient is not only fauna—not flora—in origin, the animal from which it comes is *unclean*. It’s as if Yahweh is telling us, “I know you’re not perfect. I know you’re defiled. Let’s talk anyway. My Spirit, living within you, knows what to say.” Paul informs us, **“The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”** (Romans 8:26)

- (440) *He who, in error, makes unlawful use of sacred things, shall make restitution of the value of his trespass and add a fifth. “If a person commits a trespass, and sins unintentionally in regard to the holy things of Yahweh, then he shall bring to Yahweh as his trespass offering a ram without blemish from the*

flocks, with your valuation in shekels of silver according to the shekel of the sanctuary, as a trespass offering. And he shall make restitution for the harm that he has done in regard to the holy thing, and shall add one-fifth to it and give it to the priest. So the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him.” (Leviticus 5:15-16) This whole passage is about making atonement for unintentional sins—mistakes, lapses, or omissions—things we all do every day. When Moses talks about “doing harm to the holy things,” he probably wasn’t thinking about things like backing your chariot into the altar and putting a big dent in it. The word “things” isn’t really there in the original. I believe the thought is more like, “inadvertently treating as common what has been set apart to Yahweh.”

Let’s cut to the chase, shall we? That means you and me. We have been bought with a price. We have been made holy—sanctified and set apart to Yahweh—by the sacrifice of our Messiah. Why then do we treat our bodies as profane things? Why do we ignore the Spirit dwelling within us six days a week; and when we *do* pay attention to God’s word, why do we set aside a different day of the week from the one He declared holy? We mean no harm, it’s true. But an unintentional sin is still sin.

- (441) *Remove the ashes from the altar.* “**This is the law of the burnt offering: The burnt offering shall be on the hearth upon the altar all night until morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it. And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen trousers he shall put on his body, and take up the ashes of the burnt offering which the fire has consumed on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar. Then he shall take off his garments, put on other garments, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place. And the fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not be put out. And the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order on it; and he shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out.**” (Leviticus 6:9-13) It’s obvious that the ashes would have to be cleaned out of the altar periodically. We need to be asking ourselves why the procedure was to be done as outlined here. This had to be a dirty job: why was the priest instructed to put on his special priestly garments for taking the ashes out of the altar, and then don ordinary clothes for transporting them out of the camp?

Once again, it’s a prophetic insight into the role of the Messiah. The ashes weren’t just burned wood. They also contained the remains of the previous day’s sacrifices. Thus although consumed, they were still holy and significant to Yahweh. That’s the reason for the linen garments, symbolizing the imputed righteousness of the saints, righteousness that had been made possible by the sacrifice, now reduced to ash.

But what happens next is where we should all sit up and take notice. The priest isn't just taking out the trash, for the ashes are holy. Now he puts on "profane" garments and removes the ashes from the altar to a "clean" place outside the camp. ("Clean" is the Hebrew word *tahowr*, meaning ritually or physically clean, pure (as in "pure gold"), or flawless—free from defect or impurity.) For the Messiah's sacrifice to be complete, He had to endure separation from the Father; He had to be sent "outside the camp," and this at the hands of profane and defiled men. Sacrifice goes beyond the pain of Passover—the Feast of Unleavened Bread is also necessary—the separation of us from our sin as Yahshua was parted from the Father.

- (442) *Keep fire always burning on the altar of the burnt-offering.* **"The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not be put out. And the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order on it; and he shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out."** (Leviticus 6:12-13) If the temple sacrifices were mere rituals designed to appease an angry God, then it wouldn't matter if the fire was put out and then started up again when we figured He needed some more appeasing. But they're nothing of the sort. They're symbols of Yahweh's plan for our redemption. The fire is not to go out because it symbolizes Yahweh's eternal presence, purity, and power. Fire speaks of judgment—not so much wrath as separation: It is fire that removes the dross from gold and fire that will separate the blessed from the cursed (see Matthew 25:41). This is very important to Yahweh. In these five verses, He tells us to keep the altar's fire going no fewer than six different times.
- (443) *Do not extinguish the fire on the altar.* **"The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not be put out. And the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order on it; and he shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out."** (Leviticus 6:12-13) The priests were not only cautioned not to let the fire die from neglect, but they were also specifically warned not to put it out intentionally. As far as Maimonides was concerned, this was merely a negative re-statement of the previous affirmative mitzvah—padding the list to come up with the requisite 613 laws. But it's worth noting Paul's parallel admonition in I Thessalonians 5:19: **"Do not quench the Spirit."** How do we do that? He goes on to explain: **"Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast to what is good. Abstain from every form of evil."** By scoffing at or ignoring prophetic scripture, by being too lazy or apathetic to check the truth of what we're being told by the media, our politicians, and even our preachers against the standard of the Word of God, by letting go of what is good, pure, and right, and compromising instead with the world's evil

agenda, we quench the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives—we extinguish the fire on the altar.

- (444) *A kohein shall not enter the Sanctuary with disheveled hair.* **“Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people.”** (Leviticus 10:6) I’m not going to bother addressing the issue of whether the original Hebrew text is talking about disheveled hair or merely an uncovered head. There is a far greater scriptural crisis here—one the rabbis habitually employ with reckless abandon: taking God’s Word out of context. Leviticus 10 is the record of the sin of Aaron’s two sons, Nadab and Abihu, who showed their contempt for Yahweh’s instructions by trying to invent a look-alike religion. **“Each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before Yahweh, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from Yahweh and devoured them, and they died before Yahweh. And Moses said to Aaron, ‘This is what Yahweh spoke, saying: “By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.””**” (Leviticus 10:1-3) Moses then informed his brother of the hard reality: because he was the High Priest, it would be improper for Aaron to publicly mourn for his two sons (the crux of verse 6), for to do so would be to characterize Yahweh as evil for requiring holiness of His priests. Remember, the High Priest is symbolic of the Messiah, who would someday rule the earth with a scepter of iron. The people, however, were encouraged to lament the passing of Nadab and Abihu—presumably while bewailing the stupidity of their sin—knowing that they too were flawed and foolish. The bottom line: Maimonides was totally clueless in identifying this as a general precept governing priestly grooming.
- (445) *A kohein shall not enter the Sanctuary with torn garments.* **“Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people.”** (Leviticus 10:6) Same verse, same story. The application for today’s believers should not be overlooked, of course. Yahshua our High Priest will not mourn our passing if our contempt for the Word of God is what got us killed. Yahweh’s judgments are always just. Although instances of His personal wrath (as with Nadab and Abihu) have been rare of late, don’t get complacent: all of that is about to change. The Day of Yahweh’s wrath is approaching like a freight train. If we characterize Yahweh’s justice as unfair, we will be walking into a politically correct death trap: **“...lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people.”**
- (446) *The kohein shall not leave the Courtyard of the Sanctuary during service.* **“You shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of Yahweh is upon you.”** (Leviticus 10:7) We haven’t changed

subjects. We're still talking about the priests' proper reaction to God's wrath upon those who would usurp His authority through the practice of religion. One upon whom is the oil of anointing—metaphorical of Christ and the Holy Spirit (see Mitzvah #436)—must not (indeed, *cannot*) leave the tabernacle, which illustrates Yahweh's plan of redemption. That's why it's called the “tabernacle of *meeting*”—it's where we meet God.

Is it just me, or do you too hear echoes of the rapture and subsequent Tribulation here? God's anointed (that's us) are to be kept out of the coming wrath by remaining at the tabernacle of meeting (where Christ is). And we will not mourn the fate of those who have chosen to be God's enemies. But do you remember what I said about the “people” mourning for the blasphemous Nadab and Abihu? In this sense, those left behind—those not standing at the sanctuary—will surely weep bitterly when God's wrath falls upon those whose plan was to lead them astray.

- (447) *An intoxicated person shall not enter the Sanctuary nor give decisions in matters of the Law. “Then Yahweh spoke to Aaron, saying: Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which Yahweh has spoken to them by the hand of Moses.”* (Leviticus 10:8-11) People do stupid things when they're drunk, and the more responsibility they hold, the more important it is that they have all their faculties intact. The priests had the most important jobs in Israel, whether they knew it or not: acting out Yahweh's plan of redemption through the rituals they were told to perform. Every detail of those rites pointed in some way to the sacrifice Yahweh had determined to make to atone for the sins of mankind.

Beyond that, it's a question of who's in charge—under whose influence are we operating? Paul admonishes us: “**Do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.**” (Ephesians 5:17-21) The alternative to a chemically impaired state is described here, and it's a pretty good definition of a “priest's” duties, parallel in many ways to Moses' reasons for priestly sobriety given in Leviticus.

- (448) *Revere the Sanctuary. “You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary: I am Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 19:30) Since there's no temple anymore, today's Jews apply this precept to their synagogues instead. But as we have seen,

it was the *sanctuary*—the precise layout, function, and order of the tabernacle and the temple that was modeled upon it—that reflected the plan of God. The synagogue (or church) today is just a building. Plain or fancy, it holds no significance beyond what’s in the hearts of the people who meet there. In fact, “reverence” for the synagogue is dangerously close to being a violation of the Second Commandment. In showing reverence for the sanctuary/tabernacle/temple, however, we are (or should be) showing respect for the God whose plan of salvation it represents. By the same token, a refusal to recognize what the sanctuary actually signifies is surely indicative of a distinct *lack* of reverence for it.

(449) *When the Ark is carried, it should be carried on the shoulder. “But to the sons of Kohath [Moses gave no carts and oxen], because theirs was the service of the holy things, which they carried on their shoulders.”* (Numbers 7:9) After the tabernacle and its appurtenances had been constructed, the people of Israel brought offerings to Yahweh—six oxcarts full. Moses gave four of these carts to the Merari Levites to help them perform their duties (Numbers 4:31-32), and two to the Levite family of Gershon (Numbers 4:25-26). However, the third family of Levites, the Kohathites, were not given carts or oxen because it was their job to carry the holy objects that were within the sanctuary, notably the Ark of the Covenant, the golden lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table of showbread, but also the little stuff—the bowls, wick trimmers, trays, and other implements and utensils.

These were all to be carried, not carted: **“Then they shall take all the utensils of service with which they minister in the sanctuary, put them in a blue cloth, cover them with a covering of badger skins, and put them on a carrying beam.”** (Numbers 4:12) A “carrying beam” (Hebrew: *mowt*) was a pole or yoke used to suspend objects for carrying—like the huge grape clusters the twelve spies brought back from Canaan. It is derived from a verb meaning “to shake,” for the carrying pole would shake as the bearers walked. Why were the tabernacle’s holy things—the objects symbolic of the Messiah—carried on a pole like this? Because the Messiah would Himself carry our sins on Calvary’s pole. He would be “shaken” on our behalf. The word “cross” in the New Testament is a mistranslation of the Greek *stauros*, meaning upright pole. Yahshua would be nailed to this *stauros* and its crosspiece (called the *patibulum* in Latin) in a direct parallel to the serpent in the wilderness being lifted on a pole (this time the Hebrew word is *nes*—a standard, banner, or signal pole) to save the snake-bitten Israelites. (Compare Numbers 21:9 to John 3:14.) The “cross” is a pre-Christian symbol that obfuscates what God was trying to teach us.

Why would God trouble himself with such elaborate word-pictures? The Psalmist explains: **“Cast your burden on Yahweh, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved [i.e., shaken—*mowl*].”** (Psalm 55:22) The Kohathite Levites carried the Messianic symbols on a pole because the Messiah would bear our sins on a pole, all so that we would not have to carry the burden ourselves. That’s love, pure and simple. Somehow I get the feeling that Maimonides didn’t understand much of this.

- (450) *Observe the second Passover.* **“If anyone of you or your posterity is unclean because of a corpse, or is far away on a journey, he may still keep Yahweh’s Passover. On the fourteenth day of the second month, at twilight, they may keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break one of its bones. According to all the ordinances of the Passover they shall keep it. But the man who is clean and is not on a journey, and ceases to keep the Passover, that same person shall be cut off from among his people, because he did not bring the offering of Yahweh at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin.”** (Numbers 9:10-13) The next four mitzvot concern the “second Passover.” Very specific conditions were specified for one to be able to “make up” a missed Passover: he must either be on a journey—too far away from Israel to come to the central meeting place (as was required of every Israelite male); or be ceremonially unclean because he has been near a corpse (presumably because someone in his immediate family has died). Both of these contingencies were considered unavoidable but temporary, so Yahweh made provision for the Passover miqra (including Passover, the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Firstfruits) to be held precisely one month later than usual. Being lazy or apathetic (or rebellious) did not make one eligible to participate in the second Passover.

Yahweh rarely stresses that a precept is particularly applicable to future generations, but here He does. It behooves us, then, to enquire as to why. To me, the answer is obvious and unavoidable, though I’m sure I’d get an argument from Maimonides: the unavoidable corpse which has rendered today’s Jews unclean is *Israel itself*—and the “journey” is her exile among the nations. Consider this: **“If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, Yahweh your God, then Yahweh will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues...until you are destroyed. You shall be left few in number...because you would not obey the voice of Yahweh your God. And it shall be, that just as Yahweh rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so Yahweh will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess. Then Yahweh will scatter you**

among all peoples... You shall find no rest...but there Yahweh will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul.” (Deuteronomy 28:58-65, abridged) Israel has been in exile, defiled by the corpse of her own nation, slain for her idolatry and unbelief.

But it’s not over for Israel. There will be a second chance to celebrate the redemption, cleansing, and resurrection of Passover. **“Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am Yahweh, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves.”** (Ezekiel 37:12-13) God in His mercy will provide a second chance for Israel (and indeed, for all mankind). That’s the good news. The bad news is that the participants missed—through uncleanness and exile—their primary opportunity to become reconciled to Yahweh. (And note that if a man *consciously* chose not to participate in Passover when it was scheduled, the second Passover was not available to him.) The second chance will come during the Great Tribulation—the time of Jacob’s trouble—when Yahweh will literally have to open the graves of Israel to reach them. But make no mistake: there will be no third chance. God’s once-in-a-lifetime opportunity only comes twice.

- (451) *Eat the flesh of the Paschal lamb on the second Passover with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.* **“...They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.”** (Numbers 9:11) Except for the late date, the celebration of the “second Passover” is identical to the first. It’s not something new; it’s merely a case of “better late than never.” The unleavened bread symbolizes the removal of sin from our lives, and it’s no coincidence that it is chronologically associated with the sacrifice of the paschal lamb. The bitter herbs are a metaphor for the bitter life we left behind in “Egypt,” a.k.a. the world, when we participated in God’s Passover. Even the night sky is the same: the fourteenth of the month marks the full moon, when the sun’s glory is most fully reflected. Yahweh’s symbols leave very little to the imagination, if only we’ll take the time to look.
- (452) *Do not leave any flesh of the Paschal lamb brought on the second Passover until the morning.* **“...They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break one of its bones. According to all the ordinances of the Passover they shall keep it.”** (Numbers 9:12) Those “ordinances” are first listed in Exodus 15. Verse 10 says, **“You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire.”** Fire is the important element here: the lamb was to be roasted with fire, not boiled or eaten raw, and now we see that any leftovers were to be completely consumed by fire. Why? Because fire represents judgment, and specifically the separation that judgment

entails, as gold tried in the fire separates the metal from the dross. Yahshua was separated from the Father for our sakes, bearing our sins to hell itself. Remember the timing here. The Passover lamb was killed and roasted on the afternoon of the fourteenth day of the month. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, the paschal feast, began as soon as the sun had set. Thus the roasting/judgment of the lamb and the removal of our sins are inextricably joined in Yahweh's miqra.

- (453) *Do not break a bone of the Paschal lamb brought on the second Passover. "...They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break one of its bones. According to all the ordinances of the Passover they shall keep it."* (Numbers 9:12)

Maimonides doesn't want to hear it, but the prophecy here is obvious (in hindsight). As Yahweh's Passover Lamb, Yahshua suffered no broken bones during his passion, though the breaking of bones to hurry things along (or just for the fun of it) was standard operating procedure for His Roman executioners. God painted a detailed picture of what was going to happen, but the rabbis to this day can't seem to get past the brushstrokes.

- (454) *Sound the trumpets at the offering of sacrifices and in times of trouble. "When you go to war in your land against the enemy who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you will be remembered before Yahweh your God, and you will be saved from your enemies. Also in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be a memorial for you before your God: I am Yahweh your God."* (Numbers 10:9-10) The trumpets here (Hebrew: *'hasoserah*, the subject of discussion from the beginning of the chapter) are not the usual ram's horns, or *shofar*, seen so often in the Torah. These were two silver trumpets of "hammered work" used for ceremonial purposes and to give audible signals to the tribes of Israel (much as bugles were used in later times). Josephus describes them in the *Antiquities*: "In length a little short of a cubit, it is a narrow tube, slightly thicker than a flute." Most scriptural mention of these trumpets is in Chronicles—the history of Israel from the priestly point of view. II Chronicles 5:12, for example, reports that by the time of Solomon, there were not two, but 120 priests playing the *'hasoserah*.

As defined here in Numbers, the blowing of the silver trumpets was a form of prayer. Whether appealing to Yahweh for aid in battle or thanking Him for past provision and deliverance, sounding the *'hasoserah* would cause Yahweh to "remember" or pay heed to the condition of His people. Perhaps it would be instructive to contrast the *'hasoserah* with the *shofar*. The silver *'hasoserah* was man-made, and it was used to communicate

man's petitions and thanks to Yahweh. The ram's horn *shofar*, on the other hand, was created by God (though utilized by man), and was used to signal things that Yahweh had ordained for man—notably the Sabbath-rest of the Feast of Trumpets (prophetic of the coming rapture of the Church), and the year of Jubilee (symbolic of Yahweh's forgiveness and redemption). Together, they speak of our two-way communication with Yahweh—our petitions and His provision; His greatness and our gratitude. Significantly, both types of “trumpet” are mentioned together no fewer than four times in scripture. One example: **“With trumpets and the sound of a horn, shout joyfully before Yahweh, the King.”** (Psalm 98:6)

- (455) *Watch over the edifice continually.* **“Then Yahweh said to Aaron, ‘You and your sons and your father’s house with you shall bear the iniquity related to the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity associated with your priesthood. Also bring with you your brethren of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may be joined with you and serve you while you and your sons are with you before the tabernacle of witness. They shall attend to your needs and all the needs of the tabernacle.’** (Numbers 18:1-3) This whole chapter is concerned with the setting apart of the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron for the service of the sanctuary—their role and remuneration. Maimonides’ precept is nowhere to be found, though when you factor in such details as Mitzvah #442 (keeping the altar’s fire going) I suppose it’s implied in there somewhere. But I have a real problem with people who imply, “God said *this*,” when He did nothing of the sort.

We need to look again at a phrase that popped up earlier, one that could easily be misconstrued or misunderstood: “bear the iniquity...” has an ominous, threatening ring to it, but that’s not what it means at all. “Bear” is the Hebrew *nasa*, meaning to lift up, to carry away, or to pick up and move. And the word translated “iniquity” here (*awon*) connotes guilt or the punishment due as a consequence of sin or wrongdoing. So **“You shall bear the iniquity associated with your priesthood”** doesn’t mean “You shall be weighed down with sin because you’re a priest,” but rather, “In your capacity as a priest you shall carry away the guilt from your people.” That is a *very* good thing.

- (456) *Do not allow the Sanctuary to remain unwatched.* **“And you shall attend to the duties of the sanctuary and the duties of the altar, that there may be no more wrath on the children of Israel.”** (Numbers 18:5) Maimonides intended this to merely be the negative permutation of the previous mitzvah, but as you can see, the text doesn’t support his precept here, either. It does, however, reinforce what I pointed out above, that the priests’ role would be instrumental in removing the curse of sin from Israel. Of course, ever

since priestly apostasy and rabbinical covetousness resulted in the rejection and execution of Yahweh's Messiah and the subsequent destruction of the temple and priesthood back in the first century, the Israelites have pretty much been living on a steady diet of wrath. Today, if you don't count the finished work of Christ, there is no sanctuary to watch. What was Maimonides thinkin'?

- (457) *An offering shall be brought by one who has in error committed a trespass against sacred things, or robbed, or lain carnally with a bond-maid betrothed to a man, or denied what was deposited with him and swore falsely to support his denial. This is called a guilt-offering for a known trespass. "...And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing; and he shall bring his trespass offering to Yahweh for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin."* (Leviticus 5:5-6). The "trespass offering" or "guilt offering" was to be made when someone realized after the fact that he had goofed. The particular sins listed in Maimonides' mitzvah have particular remedies and/or punishments specified in the Torah that are distinct from making offerings to Yahweh. For example, having sex with a betrothed slave girl earns a man an unspecified "punishment" (Hebrew: *biqqoreth*) after a judicial inquiry (Leviticus 19:20)—*after which* the man is to "bring his trespass offering to Yahweh, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, a ram as a trespass offering." (verse 21)

The point is that restitution was to be made to the wronged party before things could be smoothed over with God. Our sins have consequences in this world. Victims have a God-given right to redress or reparation. In the case of theft, one fifth was added to whatever had been stolen—crime could not "pay" in Yahweh's economy. Yahshua reiterated this principle: "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5:23-24) In order to live in peace with God, we must—for our part—be at peace with our fellow man.

- (458) *Do not destroy anything of the Sanctuary, of synagogues, or of houses of study, nor erase the holy names (of G-d); nor may sacred scriptures be destroyed. Do not destroy objects bearing or associated with His Name. "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their*

gods and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship Yahweh your God with such things.” (Deuteronomy 12:2-4) The rabbis have made two critical errors here, both of which negate their mitzvah. The first is an error of basic logic. They’re saying, “If Y demands that action A must be done to object X, then the converse of action A must be done to Y. *Huh?* One example: it’s like saying that since the mayor says the fire chief’s car should be painted red, then the mayor’s car must be painted green. This kind of logic is known in theological circles as “idiotic.” The two premises aren’t remotely related. I realize that this is the same convoluted reasoning process the rabbis routinely used from the days of Akiba forward, but that doesn’t make it right. Remember, the mark of a great rabbi was that he could “prove” from scripture that reptiles were clean animals—in other words, they had to be clever enough to defend any position they wanted to, right or wrong.

The second error is taking the passage out of context. Moses delivered this precept as the children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land, a place whose “iniquity was full” with idolatrous practices. Knowing human nature, Yahweh didn’t want His people exposed to the hellish worship practices of the Canaanites—to Ba’al, Ishtar, Molech, Chemosh, Dagon, or anybody else. Failing to clean out the Land would have been like trying to set up a Sunday school class in a barroom or a pornographic book store: an uphill battle—one no one should have to fight. The Land was, rather, to be set apart to Yahweh for the benefit of His chosen people *exclusively*. God had told them a generation before this, **“You shall have no other gods before me... I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God.”** (Exodus 20:3, 5)

Tracey Rich of Judaism 101 writes, “Judaism does not prohibit writing the Name of God *per se*; it prohibits only erasing or defacing a Name of God. However, observant Jews avoid writing any Name of God casually because of the risk that the written Name might later be defaced, obliterated or destroyed accidentally or by one who does not know better.” Their hearts may be in the right place, but their brains have slipped out of gear. They’ve failed to notice that the entire Torah fairly *screams* the name of Yahweh. From the grand sweep of the service, furnishings, and layout of the tabernacle to tiny little details like the single blue thread in the tzeit, every facet of Israelite life was to be a memorial of Yahweh or a prophecy of His Messiah. When He allowed His temple to be torn down by heathens, Yahweh was in fact making His name unavailable to the people who had already refused to use it. And when Akiba’s blasphemous backing of Bar Kochba got Israel thrown out of Judea entirely, the process was completed, for Jerusalem was literally the **“place where Yahweh your God**

chooses to make His name abide.” (Deuteronomy 12:11) Proof? The map of the valleys of old Jerusalem forms a Paleo-Hebrew letter, a *yod*, the initial letter of Yahweh’s self revealed name!

By legalistically refraining from writing Yahweh’s name for fear of misusing it (and systematically substituting a title—“the Lord”—for it in speech), the Jews ran afoul of the warning of Jeremiah 23:26-27. **“How long will this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal.”** For *who*? Ba’al means “Lord.” The children of Israel forgot the *name* of Yahweh because they started called Him “the Lord” instead. And we Christians have followed these lying prophets by perpetuating the error in virtually every English translation of the scriptures on the market today.

Chapter 12

Sacrifices and Offerings

This chapter and the next will zero in on the one issue that most fundamentally separates Orthodox Judaism from Christianity: the sacrifices. As we shall see (and indeed, have already seen) the Torah is chock full of rules and regulations about precisely how to perform sacrificial rites to Yahweh—not just one kind of offering, but dozens, each with its own unique characteristics and requirements. Either Yahweh was totally fixated on sacrifices and offerings, or He was trying to teach us something very important.

Nobody performs these sacrifices today—*nobody*. Even Jews who claim to be “Torah observant” are total failures at keeping the mitzvot listed in this chapter. Why? First, they can’t be performed without a sanctuary in Israel—a tabernacle or temple in the “place where Yahweh chooses,” which we now know to be Jerusalem. Second, there are no qualified priests to administer them. The Jews haven’t made systematic sacrifices as described in the Torah since the Romans tore down Herod’s temple in 70 A.D. Bar Kochba—Rabbi Akiba’s false Messiah—attempted to reinstitute them, but his rebellion was crushed in 135 and both men were slain. In point of fact, the most significant Levitical sacrifice of all, that made on the Day of Atonement, has not been properly performed since before the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar tore down Solomon’s temple in 586 B.C. That’s when the Ark of the Covenant—essential for the rite—disappeared from the Holy of Holies. (It was probably secreted away by the Prophet Jeremiah. See *Future History*, Chapter 13: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem” for the whole incredible story.)

The Jews aren’t stupid, of course. They know there’s a whole body of Law that can’t be kept. How do they deal with it? Some (very few) “hold their breath,” waiting expectantly for the day when the temple and its service can be restored. Judaism 101 reports: “Do Jews want to resume sacrifices? Orthodox Jews do. There are several places in our daily prayer services where we pray for the restoration of the Temple and the resumption of its rituals, including the rituals of sacrifice.” So there is an undercurrent of frustration among Orthodox Jews who *know* that the way things are is not really the way they’re supposed to be. Something’s wrong; they just don’t know what it is. Again, Judaism 101 explains how they deal with it: “How do Jews obtain forgiveness without sacrifices? Forgiveness is obtained through repentance, prayer and good deeds. In Jewish practice, prayer has taken the place of sacrifices.... But isn’t a blood sacrifice required in order to obtain forgiveness? No. Although animal sacrifice is one means of obtaining forgiveness, there are non-animal offerings as well, and there

are other means for obtaining forgiveness that do not involve sacrifices at all.” Tracey Rich is confused here. Yes, there are non-animal offerings, but none of them are designed to atone for sin, even temporarily. They express thankfulness and accompany petitions. For the remission of sin, however, anything less than the shedding of innocent blood is smoke and mirrors, wishful thinking—and more to the point, contrary to what Yahweh ordained. Atonement requires innocent blood, which in turn requires a temple and a priesthood, which do not exist today. Orthodox Jews today are between a rock and a hard place.

They are counting on Malachi 3:1. **“Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord [*adown*: ruler or master], whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming, says Yahweh of hosts...”** Yes, they know that Messiah is coming, and that Elijah (see Malachi 4:5) will precede Him, and that the temple will stand during His reign (though they don’t see the significance in the fact that all these things defined Yahshua’s first-century advent). What I can’t figure out is how devout Jews can be so excited about verse 1, and be in such denial concerning verse 2: **“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap.”** In other words, He will separate the good from the worthless, making everything pure and clean (because as of now, it’s corrupt and filthy). It won’t be a pleasant experience. The coming purification process will shake Israel to her very foundations. Yahweh gave us so much data on this, it took me half a dozen chapters in *Future History* to describe what will happen. **“He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to Yahweh an offering in righteousness.”** The reason (one of them) that the privilege of sacrifice and offering has been taken away from Israel is that the “sons of Levi,” i.e., the priests, are in need of cleansing and purification. God is blatantly stating that the present Jewish method for dealing with the Torah—trying to obtain forgiveness through “repentance, prayer and good deeds”—is skewed and corrupted. But it won’t be this way forever. The Messiah will “purify the sons of Levi.” **“Then [and only then] the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to Yahweh, as in the days of old, as in former years.”** (Malachi 3:1-4) The last nine chapters of the Book of Ezekiel describe the “purified” Israel, its renewed temple and priesthood. It bears no resemblance to what goes on in Judaism today.

And what about Christians? We tend to make totally different blunders. Christians all too often assume that since Yahshua fulfilled the Law, it has nothing to teach them. *The Torah’s precepts need not be followed, so we can ignore it with impunity.* At first glance, passages like this one from Hebrews seem

to support that view, but what's really being said is quite different. **"If the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need for a second covenant to replace it."** This is all the further some of us get: *the Old Covenant is faulty*. **"But God himself found fault with the old one when he said: 'The day will come, says Yahweh, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt. They did not remain faithful to my covenant, so I turned my back on them, says Yahweh....'"** We need to ask ourselves, was God surprised, shocked, and dismayed by this development, or is it more likely that He knew precisely what He was doing, unfolding His plan of redemption in stages—like asking Israel to master arithmetic before tackling calculus?

"But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day, says Yahweh: I will put my laws in their minds so they will understand them, and I will write them on their hearts so they will obey them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their family, saying, 'You should know Yahweh.' For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will already know me. And I will forgive their wrongdoings, and I will never again remember their sins...." This is the heart of the issue, the definition of the New Covenant: coming to really *understand* the mind of God, to be one with it, to be so familiar with what our Father thinks that doing His will becomes second nature. A schoolchild learns his A-B-Cs. A young musician practices his scales until he's blue in the face. Why? So they can utilize these tools without having to think about them. Did Shakespeare agonize over how to form an "A" with his pen? Did Bach have to calculate how many sharps there are in the key of A? Actually, at one time, they did, but we remember their subsequent works because they got beyond these "laws." Their words and music reflect their "understanding" and "knowledge," that is, their utter and complete familiarity with the "laws" of their craft. So don't misapply the word "obsolete" in the next verse: **"When God speaks of a new covenant, it means he has made the first one obsolete. It is now out of date and ready to be put aside."** (Hebrews 8:7-13 NLT) The word translated "obsolete" (Greek *palaios*) means: "pertaining to a point of time preceding another point of time, with an interval of considerable length—'of long ago.'" (Louw & Nida) The Old Covenant is only "obsolete" as musical notes became obsolete to Bach and the English alphabet became so to Shakespeare—something that was learned long ago, now moved to the background of the subconscious, as natural as breathing.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews (I assume it's Paul, though I can't be dogmatic) now uses the symbols latent in the Old Covenant to illuminate Christ's role as revealed in the New Covenant. **"Now in that first covenant between God and Israel, there were regulations for worship and a sacred tent here on earth. There were two rooms in this tent...."** He goes on to describe what was found in the Holy Place and beyond the veil in the Most Holy Place. **"When these things were all in place, the**

priests went in and out of the first room regularly as they performed their religious duties. But only the high priest goes into the Most Holy Place, and only once a year [on the Day of Atonement], and always with blood, which he offers to God to cover his own sins and the sins the people have committed in ignorance....” Paul has pointed out the fatal flaw in Orthodox Judaism: our sins *cannot* be covered by “repentance, prayer or good deeds” (though these are all good things, efficacious in maintaining open lines of communication with our God). Atonement can only be achieved through the shedding of innocent blood. Yahweh was very clear about this.

“By these regulations the Holy Spirit revealed that the Most Holy Place was not open to the people as long as the first room and the entire system it represents were still in use.”

(Hebrews 9:1-2, 6-8 NLT) In the previous chapter, we discussed the temple furnishings, and how each piece instructed us how to approach the Almighty. Here we see that the “first room,” the Holy Place, represents the Law. The things done there had to be repeated over and over again throughout the year. The Holy Place—the Law—was a passageway through which one had to pass to reach the heart of the sanctuary. But in the Most Holy Place, the sacrifice was “permanent,” that is, it was done only once during the year. (Note that this demonstrates the progressive nature of the seven feast of Yahweh: the annual cycle, beginning in the spring, is a calendar marking the seven most significant events in God’s plan of redemption, just as the Temple’s layout, furnishings, and service symbolized His plan in non-chronological terms.) The inner room, the Most Holy Place, represents the grace of the New Covenant—God’s permanent, once-and-for-all-time provision of atonement for our sin. It is the place where we can commune directly with Yahweh—it’s no longer off-limits since the veil forbidding access was torn into two pieces at Christ’s crucifixion. The Law (the Holy Place) was never the final destination, though until Yahshua finished His work, it was as far as we could go. The High Priest alone was authorized to proceed further.

And He did. **“So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that great, perfect sanctuary in heaven, not made by human hands and not part of this created world. Once for all time he took blood into that Most Holy Place, but not the blood of goats and calves. He took his own blood, and with it he secured our salvation forever....** How did Yahshua enter the Most Holy Place? By serving as our great High Priest in the *heavenly* Temple—after His crucifixion and after His ascension. Christ’s excursion into the heavenly Temple’s Most Holy Place was an exercise in the realization of Yahweh’s Old-Covenant symbols. Note first that He had to pass through the Holy Place to get there—that is, the Law had to be fulfilled in all its detail. All of its symbols and metaphors had to come to fruition in the life and work of the Messiah.

Second, innocent blood had to be shed and sprinkled upon the mercy seat. **“Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow could**

cleanse people's bodies from ritual defilement. Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our hearts from deeds that lead to death so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered Himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins." Annual atonement was a metaphor involving an annual sacrifice—the blood of an innocent, flawless animal. But the reality—perfect, permanent atonement—would require a perfect, eternal Sacrifice: Immanuel Himself. **"That is why He is the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, so that all who are invited can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant."** (Hebrews 9:11-15 NLT)

The Greek word translated "covenant" above, and "will" in the paragraph below, is *diatheke*, meaning: "a disposition or arrangement, of any sort, which one wishes to be valid; the last disposition which one makes of his earthly possessions after his death, a testament or will—a compact or covenant." (S) It is an agreement between two parties, one that has legal standing. It promises certain things, and may in turn impose certain conditions. The first "arrangement" between Yahweh and Israel—the Law—was defined by the blessings and cursings of Deuteronomy 28 (and elsewhere): if Israel would keep Yahweh's commandments, all these good things would happen to them; but if they did not, all these bad things would happen to them instead. The history of Israel proves that either they did not keep Yahweh's covenant or God is a liar, for the curses of Deuteronomy 28 have followed them like a shadow for three millennia. People who contend that they are keeping the Law are deceiving themselves. Man has proven himself to be unable or unwilling to keep the conditions of the first covenant. So Yahweh changed the requirements of His covenant the second time around: this time, the "conditions" of the covenant would be met by His Messiah alone, not by us. Bear in mind that the two-room layout of the sanctuary demonstrates that both these covenants, Law and Grace, were part of Yahweh's plan from the very beginning. Grace is *not* a desperate attempt on God's part to salvage a failed covenant of Law.

"Now when someone dies and leaves a will, no one gets anything until it is proved that the person who wrote the will is dead. The will goes into effect only after the death of the person who wrote it. While the person is still alive, no one can use the will to get any of the things promised to them. That is why blood was required under the first covenant as a proof of death." The "estate" of the animal being sacrificed wasn't the one going through "probate" under the Law. The sacrifice of innocent beasts was only done to demonstrate that the One leaving the will would *Himself* have to die in order for us to benefit from His will. The deaths of sacrificial animals merely confirmed the covenant: **"For after Moses had given the people all of God's laws, he took the blood of calves and goats, along with water, and sprinkled both the book of God's laws and all the people, using branches of hyssop bushes and scarlet wool. Then he said, 'This blood**

confirms the covenant God has made with you.' And in the same way, he sprinkled blood on the sacred tent and on everything used for worship. In fact, we can say that according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified by sprinkling with blood. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins." The reason everything in the Tabernacle was sprinkled with sacrificial blood was that everything in the Tabernacle was symbolic of the Messiah: His life, His mission, and His identity. "That is why the earthly tent and everything in it—which were copies of things in heaven—had to be purified by the blood of animals. But the real things in heaven had to be purified with far better sacrifices than the blood of animals." (Hebrews 9:16-23 NLT)

"For Christ has entered into heaven itself to appear now before God as our Advocate. He did not go into the earthly place of worship, for that was merely a copy of the real Temple in heaven." (Hebrews 9:24) Not to mention the fact that because Yahshua was born of the kingly tribe of Judah (not the priestly tribe of Levi), He would have been violating the Torah if He had ventured inside the earthly Temple, thus disqualifying Himself as our sinless Savior. The Babylonian Talmud, seeing the possibilities inherent in this fictitious scenario (and needing a plausible alternative explanation for the miraculous life of Yahshua) would have you believe this fanciful prevarication: *"Now, there was in the Temple a stone on which was engraved the Tetragrammaton [YHWH] or Schem Hamphorasch, that is to say, the Ineffable Name of God; this stone had been found by King David when the foundations of the Temple were being prepared and was deposited by him in the Holy of Holies. Jeschu [Yahshua], knowing this, came from Galilee and, penetrating into the Holy of Holies, read the Ineffable name, which he transcribed on to a piece of parchment and concealed in an incision under his skin. By this means he was able to work miracles and to persuade the people that he was the son of God foretold by Isaiah. With the aid of Judas, the Sages of the Synagogue succeeding in capturing Jeschu, who was then led before the Great and Little Sanhedrim, by whom he was condemned to be stoned to death and finally hanged. Such is the story of Christ according to the Jewish Kabbalists (treatise Sabbath, folio 104, treatise Sanhedrim, folio 107, and Sota, folio 47)."* Oh really? All He had to do to see the "Ineffable Name of God" was to write His own name: Yahshua means "Yahweh is salvation." Rabbinic fables notwithstanding, there is no possibility that Yahshua ever "penetrated into the Holy of Holies" of Herod's Temple, or used Yahweh's name as some sort of magic charm.

"Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the earthly high priest who enters the Most Holy Place year after year to offer the blood of an animal. If that had been necessary, He would have had to die again and again, ever since the world began. But no! He came once for all time, at the end of the age, to remove the power of sin forever by His sacrificial death for us." Because of the repetitive nature of the temple sacrifices, it would be easy to misconstrue them as the appeasement of a bloodthirsty God. They are nothing of the sort, but without the fulfillment of their "types" by the

Messiah, we might never have been clear on that point. Here we are seeing the fundamental difference between appeasement and redemption. Christ didn't so much atone for our "sins" (*plural*, like paying the fines for a stack of parking tickets) as He atoned for our "sin"—our systemic falling short of God's standard, the prodigal experience of our race. His death makes possible our reconciliation with a holy God, if only we'll turn around and go home. It doesn't matter whether we've fallen only once in our lifetime or a billion times—one perfect sacrifice is sufficient. **"And just as it is destined that each person dies only once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ died only once as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again but not to deal with our sins again. This time he will bring salvation to all those who are eagerly waiting for Him.** (Hebrews 9:25-28 NLT) Yahshua did what can be done to atone for our sins when last He walked the earth. By the time He returns, every human being on the planet will have chosen whether to accept His grace or reject it. Those who are "eagerly waiting for Him," as I am, have nothing to fear from the coming judgment.

THE FIRSTBORN

(459) *Sanctify the firstling of clean cattle and offer it up.* **"Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine.'"** (Exodus 13:1-2); **"All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to Yahweh your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock. You and your household shall eat it before Yahweh your God year by year in the place which Yahweh chooses."**

(Deuteronomy 15:19-20) Why was Yahweh so preoccupied with the firstborn—and especially firstborn males? At first, this seems rather odd, since when choosing men for special anointing, He almost never selected the firstborn of a family—Moses and David are typical examples of *last-born* leaders. In God's economy, the firstborn signified sacrifice, not service. But culturally, the firstborn son would normally become the head of the family, inheriting authority and a double portion of the father's estate. This explains why the firstborn of Egypt, from Pharaoh's eldest son on down, were the objects of the tenth and ultimate plague—the Passover. Authority belongs to Yahweh alone.

When the firstborn is first *born*, he or she is necessarily an "only begotten" child—the most precious thing in the world to the parents (or at least that's God's pattern—in these Last Days, natural love is becoming increasingly rare). The child is Yahweh's object lesson at this point. Full of promise and potential, the firstborn is the focus of the parents' devotion, attention, and love. This precept, then, was designed to teach us about the

nature of the sacrifice Yahweh was planning to make on our behalf—sending His own “firstborn” son, Yahshua, to a sacrificial death so that we might live. It’s the ultimate expression of love.

The object lesson continues. Yahweh is not a bloodthirsty God: although firstborn Israelite children were to be considered His property (because *His* firstborn would be sacrificed on their behalf), they were to be redeemed—bought back—not sacrificed. Clean animals, however, were to be slain; no “benefit” was to be derived from them (work, fleece, etc.) other than life itself. The owner of the animal and his family were to eat the meat of the sacrifice. That is why Yahshua **“took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.’”** (Matthew 26:26-28) The death of Yahweh’s Firstborn is life for us, if only we will “take, eat.”

PASSOVER

- (460) *Slay the Paschal lamb.* **“On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man’s need you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.”** (Exodus 12:3-6) Forget the fact that Jews today don’t do this, but substitute an alternate ritual—one with an entirely different meaning—for their Passover observance. In reality, this is a detailed prophecy of the coming of their Messiah. On Nisan 10, 33 A.D. (March 28, that year) Yahshua entered the “household” of Israel. This was the date of His “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem, Palm *Monday* as it turns out. (This event also fulfills the exacting requirements of the Daniel 9:26 prophecy—the culmination of precisely 173,880 days called for by the prophet—sixty-nine 360-day septades.) “On the fourteenth day of the same month,” Friday, April 1, 33, the “Lamb of God” (as John the Baptist had identified Yahshua) was slain. His death came “at twilight,” just as required by the prophecy, and the “whole assembly” was responsible. And note one more thing: the Paschal lamb was to be “just enough” for those partaking of it: Christ’s sacrifice is precisely sufficient. No works need be added to make it satisfactory, nor is it too big to

comprehend and assimilate. It is perfectly sufficient for “each man’s need.”

- (461) *Eat the flesh of the Paschal sacrifice on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan. “Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.”* (Exodus 12:8) The “fifteenth of Nisan,” which was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, began at sundown on the “day” of Passover. That is, the lamb that had been killed at “twilight” (see Mitzvah #460) had to be prepared and be roasting over the fire by the time three stars could be seen in the night sky—only a few hours later. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a designated Sabbath, so all the work had to be finished before the sun went down. This is a continuation of the Passover prophecy. The Lamb of God, Yahshua, had been slain on the afternoon of the Passover. By sundown, His body had been laid in a tomb, and His soul was enduring judgment (symbolized by roasting the Paschal lamb in fire) on our behalf. The bitter agony suffered by the incarnate God as He endured our punishment is reflected in the bitter herbs accompanying the meal. The unleavened bread speaks of the result of His ordeal: all of our sin (represented by leaven, or yeast) has been removed from our lives. And the Sabbath designation tells us that we can’t work for that which Yahshua was accomplishing through all of this. All we can do is accept it—“eat the flesh on that night,” assimilate Christ into our lives. In light of the historical facts, it seems to me that today’s Jews have to work really hard to miss the meaning of these things. Every facet of Passover Law has seen Messianic fulfillment.
- (462) *Do not eat the flesh of the Paschal lamb raw or sodden. “Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire—its head with its legs and its entrails.”* (Exodus 12:9) The Passover Lamb—the whole thing—was to be “roasted in fire,” not prepared in any other manner. Fire represents judgment. The heart of the symbolism is separation: fire is used to purify or “prove” metals. Heated to its melting temperature, gold separates from the dross that contaminates it, leaving only pure and valuable metal. Thus the judgment Yahshua endured for our sakes makes us pure and undefiled, able to stand guiltless before our God.

It seems to me that the instruction to roast the *whole* lamb—“its head with its legs and its entrails”—is there to prophesy what would really happen to Yahshua: His whole being—body, soul and spirit—was separated from the Father as He bore our sins to sheol. Yahweh knew that heresies would arise that denied this. Docetism, for example, claimed that Yahshua only *appeared* to have a body—that He wasn’t really God *incarnate*, and therefore didn’t really suffer on the cross, nor was His

bodily resurrection real. Arianism, on the other hand, claimed that Yahshua was really a created being, hence His Spirit could not have undergone judgment on our behalf. Yahweh begs to differ: the entire lamb was roasted.

- (463) *Do not leave any portion of the flesh of the Paschal sacrifice until the morning unconsumed. “You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire.”* (Exodus 12:10) There are no “left-overs” with the Passover meal. Whatever isn’t utilized during the allotted time is to be consumed by fire. That is to say, we have a limited window of opportunity to receive the benefit of Christ’s sacrifice. The Passover meal *is* the Feast of Unleavened Bread—that is, it represents the removal of sin from our lives. If we choose not to partake of God’s grace when it’s available, we are wasting the sacrifice of the Son of God, saying, in effect, *“Your sacrifice and gracious provision are insignificant trash to me—worthy only to be consigned to the flames.”* Paul quoted the prophet Isaiah: *“In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”* (II Corinthians 6:2) The Passover meal—the opportunity to partake of God’s grace—won’t last forever.
- (464) *Do not give the flesh of the Paschal lamb to an Israelite who had become an apostate. “This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it. But every man’s servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it. A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat it....All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to Yahweh, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you.”* (Exodus 12:43-45, 47-49) Maimonides’ ban on apostate Jews isn’t even hinted at in the actual text. In fact, Yahweh insists that *“all the congregation of Israel shall keep it,”* and I’ll guarantee that there were a few closet rebels among God’s chosen. If the symbolism of the Torah is not taken into account, the actual precept makes very little sense: *Any male who hasn’t had the foreskin of his penis removed may not eat lamb with flat bread and bitter herbs on the fifteenth day of the month of Nisan.* Huh? Like most everything in the Torah, the symbols must be worked out to understand what Yahweh was trying to teach us. We’ve been discussing Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread for the past few mitzvot. The sacrifice of the Messiah and the subsequent removal of our sins are the only possible meaning. But what does circumcision mean? If you’ll recall, we discussed this at length back in the first chapter (Mitzvah #17). There, I defined the term: “Circumcision signified that the

barrier of sin that separated us from Yahweh had been removed, cut off, destroyed—a process that involved blood and pain, but one that made us available for God’s use.”

Putting the symbols together then, we see that in order for us to be reconciled to God (and spared an encounter with the destroyer—cf. Exodus 12:23), we must partake of the sacrifice Yahweh Himself provided, one whose blood has been smeared on the doorpost and lintel of our dwelling place—the cross of Calvary. We must do this during the window of opportunity God has specified—“*Now* is the day of salvation,” for we never know how much longer our mortal lives will last. No one whose sin has not been “removed, cut off, and destroyed” will benefit from the sacrifice of Yahweh’s Messiah, though one need not be born an Israelite to be reconciled to God through His death, burial, and resurrection.

- (465) *Do not give flesh of the Paschal lamb to a stranger who lives among you to eat. “This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it.... A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat it.”* (Exodus 12:43, 45) All of the congregation of Israel were to partake in the Passover/Unleavened Bread feast. But no one who didn’t share in Israel’s calling or destiny was eligible. Mere proximity wasn’t enough. One had to be an active participant in the life of Yahweh’s chosen people.

As we saw above, the universal criteria was what circumcision symbolized. “Strangers” who had been circumcised had said with their actions that they desired to share in the set-apart life of Israel, to worship their God, and to forsake Egypt for the hope of a Promised Land beyond the wilderness. We read that a “mixed multitude” accompanied Israel out of Egypt at the exodus. Some of these were merely taking advantage of the situation—fleeing from the harsh rule of Pharaoh. But others were truly devoted to the God of Israel. A notable example is the mighty Caleb, the son of a Kenizzite—from a Canaanite tribe whose land was promised to Abraham in Genesis 15:19. Caleb was circumcised and absorbed into the tribe of Judah—chosen as one of the twelve men to spy out the land, and one of only two in his entire generation who had the faith to believe Yahweh’s promises.

- (466) *Do not take any of the flesh of the Paschal lamb from the company’s place of assembly. “In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house.”* (Exodus 12:46) In the context of the original observance of this *miqra*, it was easy to see why you weren’t to leave the house during the Passover meal: Yahweh had purposed to slay the firstborn of everyone and everything in Egypt who wasn’t sheltered by the blood of the Paschal lamb, smeared on the doorposts and lintel of the houses. If you wanted to

live, you stayed indoors, protected by the blood. It's no different today, but the "doorpost" is the cross, the blood is Yahshua's, and the life you save is eternal.

- (467) *Do not break a bone of the Paschal lamb. "...nor shall you break one of its bones.* (Exodus 12:46) It's details like this one that fairly scream: *No, you're not just imagining the connection between the Torah's requirements and the life and mission of Yahshua of Nazareth.* The Passover lamb's bones were not to be broken because the Messiah's bones would not be broken—even though it was common for the victims of crucifixion to suffer broken limbs, even as Christ's two unfortunate companions did. I'll leave it to you to figure out what God meant by this if He wasn't referring to the Messiah's death.
- (468) *The uncircumcised shall not eat of the flesh of the Paschal lamb. "When a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to Yahweh, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it."* (Exodus 12:48) To me, the remarkable thing isn't that Yahweh requires males to be circumcised in order to partake of Passover, but that He provides a means for "strangers," non-Israelite believers, to approach Him in worship. Circumcision was only a symbol, however. The New Covenant writers, especially Paul, make it clear that now that the Reality has come, the shadow it casts is no longer essential—the rite of circumcision, like the rest of the Torah, has been fulfilled in the work of Yahshua the Messiah. He has removed our sin from us, permanently and completely. We gentiles may therefore benefit from the Passover sacrifice—if we want to.
- (469) *Do not slaughter the Paschal lamb while there is chametz in the home. "You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning.* (Exodus 23:18) *"So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to Yahweh throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For*

seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.” (Exodus 12:14-20)

Removing the *chametz* (leaven or yeast) from the household for seven days means roughly the same thing circumcision does: that sin has been permanently and totally eliminated from our lives in Yahweh’s reckoning. Maimonides’ mitzvah cannot be found in the Scriptural instructions, for it misses the point, the order of things: the removal of our sin is the *result* of Yahweh’s Paschal Lamb being slain—even though as a practical matter Jewish households did not wait until the last minute on Passover to go hunting for yeast to get rid of.

- (470) *Do not leave the part of the Paschal lamb that should be burnt on the altar until the morning, when it will no longer be fit to be burnt. “You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning. (Exodus 23:18) “You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire.” (Exodus 12:10)* Maimonides has once again missed the point, which is: the Passover sacrifice was to be consumed all at once, in the narrow timeframe Yahweh had provided. The grace it represents is a limited-time offer. It’s only extended while we as individuals are alive in our mortal bodies. If we don’t take the opportunity to partake of the Passover Lamb while we can, we are consigning God’s Son to the fire of judgment. There is no “get-out-of-hell-free” card in this game after we die. We have to move when it’s our turn.

SACRIFICES AND THE SANCTUARY

- (471) *Do not go up to the Sanctuary for the festival without bringing an offering. “Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field.” (Exodus 23:14-16)* Phrasing this as a negative mitzvah is an attempt to skirt the sensitive issue of there being *no sanctuary to go to*. Like so many precepts in this chapter and the next, this one is impossible to keep in any literal way, and it has been since 70 A.D. If you’re not willing to look at the symbolic aspects of these feasts, you’re left with a horrific conundrum—God requiring you to perform that which cannot be done.

The Israelites were to gather in Jerusalem three times a year. The spring feasts (Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits) were prophetic of the death, burial, and resurrection of the coming Messiah. In early summer, the Feast of Weeks (called here the “Feast of Harvest,” and later known as Pentecost) foreshadowed the permanent indwelling of Yahweh’s Spirit within His followers. The next two *miqra’ey*, oddly enough, didn’t require a journey to the central place of meeting in Israel. The Feast of Trumpets signals the gathering of God’s elect—who over the last two millennia have been primarily gentiles. And the Day of Atonement isn’t a feast at all, but a prediction of the bittersweet day when Israel, as a nation, recognizes her disastrous first-century miscalculation and finally recognizes Yahshua as the Messiah. The last *miqra* of the year, the Feast of Tabernacles (here referred to as the Feast of Ingathering) again required a central gathering within Israel, for this Feast was prophetic of God’s coming to “tabernacle” or camp out among men on the earth.

Maimonides’ *mitzvah* points out, quite rightly, that when people came to the sanctuary for these three annual celebrations, they were not to come empty handed, but were to bring the prescribed sacrifices with them. Does this indicate that we must in some way purchase our redemption? No, but to understand why, we must once again study the symbols. What did the sacrifices mean? They aren’t a means of appeasement, and they aren’t bribes. Rather, they are symbolic of key elements of Yahweh’s plan of redemption, concepts that must be addressed if we are to be reconciled to God. Although the feasts varied somewhat, several categories of sacrifice came up time and again.

1. Lambs (unblemished, usually a year old, male)—symbolic of the Messiah, Yahshua, the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”
2. Bulls—a metaphor for human power and pride leading to false doctrine, teaching, and worship.
3. Goats—symbolic of sin, missing the mark set by Yahweh.
4. Rams (male adult sheep with horns)—to atone for sin. Like lambs, rams must be unblemished, for they are symbolic of Christ.
5. Grain (fine flour, with no chaff or bran)—indicative of Yahweh’s provision for our temporal needs through our separation from the world.
6. Unleavened bread or wafers—Bread (usually fine wheat flour) baked without leaven or yeast (so it would be flat, like pita bread). The

deletion of leaven symbolizes the absence of sin, and bread is reminiscent of the body of Yahshua (John 6:35).

7. Oil (i.e., olive oil, usually mixed with the fine flour)—symbolic of the Holy Spirit: the source of light, available only through the crushing of the olive, again a picture of the Messiah’s sacrifice. (see Zechariah 4:1-6)
8. Frankincense—a symbol of the attainment of purity through sacrifice.
9. Drink offerings (libations of wine, poured out upon the ground)—predictive of the blood of Christ that would be shed for our sins.

Each of these things was offered up as an acknowledgment that Yahweh was the undisputed sovereign of Israel. Whether or not the worshippers understood their significance (and until the Messiah came, how could they?) the Law was to be followed simply because Yahweh said so. That was reason enough.

- (472) *Bring the first fruits to the Sanctuary.* **“The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of Yahweh your God.”** (Exodus 23:19) Each of the three annual gatherings came at a time of agricultural significance. At the Feast of Firstfruits in the spring, the barley harvest was just beginning. Seven weeks later, the same thing was true of the wheat harvest, celebrated at the Feast of Weeks. And the Feast of Tabernacles (a.k.a. Ingathering) came at the end of the growing season, when the harvests of field, orchard, and vineyard were complete. In arranging things this way, Yahweh was encouraging His people to acknowledge His bountiful provision—both before and after they received it. It’s easy enough to be thankful when the harvest is already in the barn, but God’s precepts emphasize showing gratitude *before* the crop has come in—Firstfruits. Thankfulness before the fact is evidence of faith.

Fruits and vegetables aren’t the only crop on God’s mind, of course. People are the fruit of God’s field. Yahshua Himself was the “firstfruits” of the harvest of mankind, proving it by His resurrection on the Feast of Firstfruits and His subsequent ascension to the “house of Yahweh our God” in Heaven. Today, Yahweh is looking for evidence of our faith, manifested in thankfulness for our secure eternal destinies—now, while we’re still growing in the field, rooted in these mortal bodies. We will join our Messiah at the harvest—coming soon to a world near you.

- (473) *The flesh of a sin-offering and guilt-offering shall be eaten.* **“Then Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram, and the bread that is in the basket, by the door of the tabernacle of meeting. They shall eat those things with which the atonement was made, to consecrate and to sanctify them....”** (Exodus 29:32-33)

The sin offering (*chata't*) and guilt offering (*asham*) are not in view here. (We'll discuss both of these in detail later in this chapter.) Rather, the entire 29th chapter of Exodus describes how the priests, beginning with Aaron and his sons, were to be consecrated, or set-apart, for Yahweh's service. The chapter begins, **"This is what you shall do to them to hallow them for ministering to Me as priests."** *Eating* the flesh of a sacrifice is the least of it—it's like saying the recipe for baking a cake consisted of licking the spatula you used to apply the frosting.

The symbolism is so rich, I could ramble on for pages describing the process in detail, but let's confine ourselves to the high points. The consecration of the priests involved several elements: **"one young bull and two rams without blemish, and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil,"** (verse 2) as well as clean water, the priestly garments (see Mitzvah 372), special anointing oil (see Mitzvah #436), and the big altar that stood outside the door of the Tabernacle of Meeting. See Mitzvah #471 for the symbolic significance of the various sacrificial items. First the priests were ceremonially washed and clothed, a picture of receiving imputed righteousness. The first thing sacrificed was the bull—specifically called a "sin offering," and indicative of the forsaking of worldly power and pride and the false beliefs that inevitably spring from them. Next was one of the two rams, said to be a "burnt offering," indicative of judgment (which is essentially the separation of good from evil, the valuable from the worthless, or the living from the dead). Both the bull and first ram were completely consumed in the flames.

The second ram (the "ram of consecration") was then slain. A bit of its blood was applied to the priests' right earlobe, thumb, and big toe, signifying that whatever the priest heard (which would, of course, include what he said), what he did, and where he walked, were all consecrated to Yahweh. The entrails and fatty parts were "waved" before Yahweh and then burnt, along with the bread and oil part of the rite. Only then were the edible parts of the second ram waved before Yahweh in consecration. Surprisingly (perhaps), this meat was not to be roasted with fire, but was to be *boiled* instead—no judgment was implied here; duly consecrated priests (a group ultimately including all believers) were not "appointed unto wrath," nor are we if we are Yahweh's children.

There is a great deal more to the process of consecrating the priests for Yahweh's service than my quick survey covers. As I read Exodus 29, I can't help but conclude that either God is skillfully weaving an intricate tapestry of symbol and metaphor fraught with redemptive significance for all mankind, or He is an obsessive-compulsive micromanaging control

freak who enjoys watching people struggle under a mountain of pointless minutiae. There is no middle ground. The problem for “observant” Jews is that because they have rejected the Object of Yahweh’s symbolism, they are stuck with the unlikely and unattractive alternative. One thing is absolutely certain: *no one* performs this precept today—*no one* is Torah observant.

- (474) *One not of the seed of Aaron shall not eat the flesh of the holy sacrifices. “...But an outsider shall not eat them, because they are holy.”* (Exodus 29:33) In the immediate context, one could easily come to the same conclusion Maimonides did. But the word translated “outsider” here (or worse, “layman” in the NASB) is actually the verb *zur*, meaning to be alienated, to turn aside, to be a stranger, a foreigner, or an enemy. The implications are eye-opening, if only we’ll accept the Messianic symbolism discussed in the previous mitzvah. Christ has made it possible for *all of us* to be “consecrated priests” of Yahweh, to talk face to face with God Almighty and intercede on behalf of our fellow believers—and thus be eligible to “eat the flesh of the holy sacrifice,” that is, benefit from Yahshua’s atoning sacrifice. As He Himself explained (without really explaining), **“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”** (John 6:53-58) “Outsiders,” on the other hand, have no such life in them: they are alienated from Yahweh.

LEVITICAL OFFERINGS: FIVE CATEGORIES

The first seven chapters of Leviticus describe in detail five types of offerings: the burnt offering or *olah* (Mitzvah #475), the grain offering or *minha* (#476), the peace offering or *selem* (#494), the sin offering or *chata’t* (#491), and the trespass or guilt offering, the *asham* (#493). I’ll provide a summary of all five sacrificial types at the end of this chapter. They are similar, but not identical, and described but not explained, making them all but incomprehensible to the average layman. And since they can’t be literally performed today (for lack of a priesthood and temple), they present one of the greatest temptations in the entire Bible: *to skip over them as quickly as possible*. But hopefully, with a little prayerful analysis, we will begin to see them as five distinct facets on the brilliant diamond of God’s grace.

(475) *Observe the procedure of the burnt-offering.* “When any one of you brings an offering to Yahweh, you shall bring your offering of the livestock—of the herd and of the flock. If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before Yahweh.” (Leviticus 1:2-3) The burnt offering (Hebrew: *olah*) was a subset of the larger concept of an “offering” (Hebrew: *qorban*), denoting a gift made to deity. The *olah* was completely voluntary, and, depending on the wealth of the giver, could be a bull, ram, goat, young pigeons, or turtledoves. The quadrupeds had to be males, and unblemished—a clear indication that the Messiah’s sacrifice is in view. (Young birds are notoriously hard to differentiate by sex, so Yahweh didn’t require it.) The giver “identified” with the animal by placing his hand on its head. The killing of the sacrificial animal was then done, but not by the priest (as was the usual practice)—it was done by the worshipper, who then skinned it, cut it up, and washed the parts in water. The priest sprinkled the blood all around the altar, placed the sacrifice on the altar, and burned it completely—no meat was eaten by priest or worshipper.

The Torah does not overtly explain why the *olah* would be offered up. It is not meant as atonement for sin, for other types of *qorban* accomplished that. Although sometimes offered when a petition was made for Yahweh’s intervention (as in Judges 21:4), that was more properly the role of the peace offering. The burnt offering was, rather, a pure expression of homage to Yahweh, often given in an overflowing of joyful celebration. (A good example is in I Samuel 6:14, when the relieved Israelites got the Ark of the Covenant back from the pesky Philistines who had captured it.) This translates today into the spiritual sacrifice of *ourselves* to Yahweh, as Paul points out: “**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove [i.e., test, examine, recognize as genuine] what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**” (Romans 12:1-2) Remember, the *worshipper* prepared the *olah*. If we are to “die” to the world in homage to Yahweh, it must be by our own hand.

(476) *Observe the procedure of the meal-offering.* “When anyone offers a grain offering to Yahweh, his offering shall be of fine flour. And he shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it. He shall bring it to Aaron’s sons, the priests, one of whom shall take from it his handful of fine flour and oil with all the frankincense. And the priest shall burn it as a memorial on the altar, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to Yahweh.” (Leviticus 2:1-2) The grain offering, or *mincha*

(from the Hebrew consonant root *mnh*, meaning “to give”) was part of the daily life of Israel. It was offered at many of the Feasts of Yahweh and as part of the tithe. “Fine” flour was specified, meaning that no chaff or bran was to be present, a reference to the separation of the valuable from the worthless in our lives—the essence of judgment. The grain could presumably be either wheat or barley—whatever was growing at the time. It could be presented to the priests as raw grain or as cakes or wafers, baked or fried in a pan or oven. But in every case, the *minha* had frankincense sprinkled upon it, and it was prepared with oil, either mixed in or poured over it. The frankincense, you’ll recall, indicates purity through sacrifice (see Mitzvah #430), and the oil represents the Holy Spirit (see Zechariah 4). Neither leaven nor honey were to be used (see Mitzvah #477), but the *minha* was to be salted (see Mitzvah #478). After a token amount of grain was burned upon the altar as an offering to Yahweh, the rest of the *minha* was to serve as food for the priests.

Grain speaks of God’s provision for us—blessings that just “pop up out of the ground” on our behalf. Atonement is not in view with this offering, because no blood is being shed. But judgment is, not only in the burning of a handful of the grain, but also in the fact that the chaff is separated out from the flour. I can only deduce that the judgment being spoken of is that of our works: what did we do with the opportunities and resources Yahweh provided, and what was our motivation for performing these works? Three times in the second chapter of Leviticus, the portion of the *minha* to be burned on the altar was called “a memorial.” Since *all* of the frankincense was to be sprinkled on this portion, it is clear that the object of the “memorial” was to be the Messiah, whose death provided “purity through sacrifice” to us. One gets the distinct impression, however, that Yahshua’s sacrificial death on the altar of Calvary is only a “sweet aroma to Yahweh” if we avail ourselves of the redemption it provides—if it has become a memorial to us of God’s undying love. It is only under that condition that our works have any potential value to Yahweh, any basis for qualitative judgment. The works of the unredeemed, even the “best” of them, are nothing but filthy rags to Yahweh.

- (477) *Do not offer up leaven or honey.* “**No grain offering which you bring to Yahweh shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey in any offering to Yahweh made by fire.**” (Leviticus 2:11) Then as now, bread was usually baked with leaven, or yeast, to make it rise and soften its texture. There was no prohibition against this in the Torah’s dietary laws (see Chapter 5). Nor was there any dietary problem with honey, recognized as a familiar and healthful natural sweetener since the days of the Patriarchs (e.g. Genesis 43:11), and probably back to Adam. It’s easy enough to see

why leaven was prohibited from inclusion with grain offerings: it was a fermenting agent made from soured barley bran or vetch. Not only was it “rotten” (in the technical sense), but a little bit would spread throughout the dough, affecting the entire loaf. Thus it was a natural metaphor for sin and its effect on the lives of men.

But honey is another matter. It is never spoken of as a negative thing in Scripture, but always as something sweet, healthful, and good. In an extreme contrast to the connotation of our mitzvah, honey is even used as a metaphor for the sweetness of the Word of God: **“How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding. Therefore I hate every false way.”** (Psalm 119:103-104) Why then was it prohibited from being offered up by fire to Yahweh? We must remind ourselves that good things were not offered up *because* they were good. The Levitical offerings were not a means of appeasement. Even though the things sacrificed necessarily had some intrinsic value, they were not offered to placate or “buy off” an angry God, nor were they a bribe to induce Him to grant our wishes. Rather, they were primarily a picture of the sacrifice *He* would make on *our* behalf—a rehearsal (on some level) of the death of the Messiah for our transgressions. Each sacrifice in the Torah reflected that prophetic fact in some way. His blood would be shed, so bulls and rams were slain in anticipation of that event. There would be no sin in the Sacrifice, so leaven was ruled out. And honey? Honey is pleasant and sweet, a delight to the taste. Christ’s sacrifice, by contrast, was marked by sorrow and bitterness, pain and suffering. Honey was not descriptive of Messiah’s first-century mission, so it was not to be offered.

- (478) *Every sacrifice is to be salted.* **“Every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt.”** (Leviticus 2:13) Salt (Hebrew: *melach*) is another of the substances common to man that took on symbolic significance in the Torah. We know it best as a flavor enhancer and preservative, which is primarily why Yahshua described his followers as “the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13), rhetorically asking, “What good are you if you don’t do what salt does—making the world a better place?” But salt also has negative, destructive uses. It has the ability to make land barren and infertile—worthless for any productive purpose (cf. Judges 9:45). Indeed, Israel’s fields were sowed with salt by Hadrian in 135 A.D. in his effort to permanently sever the Jews’ ties to the Land in the wake of Rabbi Akiba’s disastrous endorsement of Bar Kochba as Israel’s Messiah. Preservation or destruction—the choice is ours to make, and we are reminded of this by

adding salt to every grain sacrifice. (Salt is not specifically mentioned in reference to sacrifices other than the *minha*.)

This dual potential was (perhaps) the origin of yet another metaphorical use for salt. A “covenant of salt” (the *brit melach*—mentioned in Numbers 18:19 and II Chronicles 13:5) confirmed a relationship using salt as a symbol of its permanence and binding nature—and the damage that would result if the covenant was broken. A covenant of salt was characterized as perpetual, irrevocable, and serious. One type of salt covenant bound a subject to his king. The phrase *melach hekal melachna*’ meant “to be under obligation,” literally, to “eat salt of the palace.” This implied the subject’s solemn oath of loyalty to the interests of the king, since he was in the king’s debt. So when Yahweh commanded that “with all of your offerings you shall offer salt,” He was telling us that because every Levitical grain sacrifice was a reflection of His own commitment to His provision of redemption of mankind, the addition of salt duly demonstrated our obligation to be loyal and thankful.

- (479) *Do not offer up any offering unsalted.* **“Every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt.”** (Leviticus 2:13) This is merely the negative restatement of the previous affirmative mitzvah. Maimonides is padding the list.
- (480) *The Court of Judgment shall offer up a sacrifice if they have erred in a judicial pronouncement.* **“Now if the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally, and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done something against any of the commandments of Yahweh in anything which should not be done, and are guilty; when the sin which they have committed becomes known, then the assembly shall offer a young bull for the sin, and bring it before the tabernacle of meeting.”** (Leviticus 4:13-14) The passage goes on to describe precisely how the sacrifice (in this case, the *chata’t*, or sin offering) was to be done. Maimonides has erred in his identification of the object of this mitzvah. It is not addressed to the Sanhedrin—the ruling council or “Court of Judgment”—but rather the “whole congregation of Israel.” (Similar unintentional sins for individuals are covered later in the same chapter. See Mitzvah #481.) The really big “unintentional sin” for Israel, of course, is their long-standing national rejection of grace under the Messiah Yahshua in favor of the pointless and convoluted system of rules so forcefully promulgated by the rabbis. To this day, this sin is still “hidden from the eyes of the assembly,” but God’s word reveals that it won’t be like this forever. See Zechariah 12:10 for a description of their future national epiphany.

In *Future History*, I covered the service of the Millennial Temple as it's described in the last chapters of Ezekiel. There I made the following observation about the use of bulls as sacrifices: "Bulls were the sacred sacrificial animal of choice for virtually every ancient culture; thus I perceive that they are a symbol in God's economy of falsehood and apostasy, of institutionalized evil on a national, as well as a personal, level. Case in point: Aaron's golden calf debacle. Cattle symbolized several things: in agrarian societies, cattle represented temporal wealth; the more cattle you owned, the wealthier you were. Indeed, a "fatted calf" was the symbol for luxurious living—killing a fatted calf in order to entertain a guest was considered a mark of great honor. But cattle or oxen were also beasts of burden—a metaphor for doing work. There is a fine line between service and servitude, between working in grateful response to Yahshua's grace and working in order to obtain it. Every religion in the world focuses on work as a means to achieve "heaven," whatever they conceive that to be. But our works are as pointless in establishing a relationship with Yahweh as they would be in any family. A child can't earn his way into the family—he must be invited into it, either by physical birth or by adoption—accepting the invitation. Thus the bull represents the wrong way to approach God—you can't buy or work your way to Him. It's an insult to Him to even try."

- (481) *An individual shall bring a sin-offering if he has sinned in error by committing a transgression, the conscious violation of which is punished with excision. "If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally by doing something against any of the commandments of Yahweh in anything which ought not to be done, and is guilty, or if his sin which he has committed comes to his knowledge, then he shall bring as his offering a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. (Leviticus 4:27-28)* This concerns the *chata't*, or sin offering. My first impression upon reading the text was, "We're gonna need more goats." This condition applies to all of us, virtually all the time. Paul expressed the frustration of the child of God who wants to do right, but constantly finds himself falling short: "**For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.... Oh, wretched man that I am.**" (Romans 7:19, 24) There *is* good news, however. First, Yahweh is well aware of our fallen condition, and has made provision for us to return to fellowship with Him. Our shortcomings don't shock or anger Him, though they may disappoint and sadden Him.

Second, look carefully at the description of the sacrificial animal: it's a goat (which tells us it's a sin offering), without blemish (which is the key that Yahweh's sacrifice is in view, for He alone is perfect). But the goat is *female*. There's something unusual going on here. God is making a point. I

think the reason for the distinction is the difference between “sin” and “sins,” that is, between the systemic condition of our separation from God and our individual acts of imperfect behavior. The “Lamb of God,” the unblemished male of the flock symbolizing Christ, died to reconcile us with Yahweh—to remove the *sin* (singular) that had estranged us from Him. But once the blood of the Lamb has been spilled, once we have placed our trust in its atoning power, must the Lamb of God be slain again every time we screw up? No. As we saw earlier in this chapter, “[Yahshua did not] enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the earthly high priest who enters the Most Holy Place year after year to offer the blood of an animal. If that had been necessary, He would have had to die again and again, ever since the world began. But no! He came once for all time, at the end of the age, to remove the power of sin forever by His sacrificial death for us. And just as it is destined that each person dies only once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ died only once as a sacrifice to take away the sins [i.e., the *condition* of sin] of many people.” (Hebrews 9:25-28 NLT) Why, then, is the goat a female?

Remember that in Hebrew, the word *ruach*, meaning spirit, is a feminine noun. The role of the Holy Spirit—not the Messiah—is the symbol in view for this sacrifice. When we as mortal believers goof up and fall short of perfection, we have not necessitated the re-sacrifice of Christ. He has already paid for our sin. What we have done, however, is to diminish the influence of God’s Spirit—our *Heavenly Mother*, if you will—in our lives. We have grieved or quenched the Holy Spirit. (See Ephesians 4:30-32 and I Thessalonians 5:19.) That, I believe, is the reason the goat is female.

- (482) *Offer a sacrifice of varying value in accordance with one’s means. “If he is not able to bring a lamb, then he shall bring to Yahweh, for his trespass which he has committed, two turtledoves or two young pigeons: one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering.... But if he is not able to bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons, then he who sinned shall bring for his offering one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a sin offering.”* (Leviticus 5:7) The context here is that of the trespass, or “guilt” offering (Hebrew: *asham*, see Mitzvah #493), but the principle is repeated elsewhere (e.g., with the burnt offering; see Mitzvah #475). Proving that these offerings have nothing to do with appeasement, we see that there is no correlation between the sin and its remedy: it could be a lamb if the sinner is able to afford it, but if he is not, then a couple of turtledoves or pigeons will do. (In the case of the birds, only one of the pair is really a “trespass” offering—the other one is a “burnt” offering, which as we have seen, is voluntary and indicates homage or reverence for God.) And if he can’t even afford that, he is to bring a couple of quarts of flour. This is like saying the fine for driving 50

in a 25 zone is a hundred bucks if you're driving a Mercedes, but only pocket change if you're driving a Hyundai. The punishment doesn't fit the crime—it fits the criminal! Since we tend to like the idea of justice (at least for other people), this may seem unfair to us. And it is. Yes, God is unfair. If He *were* fair, we'd all have been sent to hell a long time ago. Yahweh dispenses justice only to those who choose it over mercy. For those of us who have chosen to receive God's mercy, however, it is the attitude of our hearts that counts—not the girth of our wallets. Both the expensive lamb and the cheap birds symbolize Yahshua's atoning sacrifice, and the flour speaks of His provision. It's our recognition of these facts that Yahweh values.

- (483) *Do not sever completely the head of a fowl brought as a sin-offering. “And he shall bring them to the priest, who shall offer that which is for the sin offering first, and wring off its head from its neck, but shall not divide it completely.”*

(Leviticus 5:8) A continuation of the previous mitzvah, this precept instructs what is to be done with the birds brought as a trespass offering (*asham*). As with the larger animals (where achieving this was presumably easier, and thus not a matter for special instruction), the birds were to be slain and bled, but their heads were not to be separated from their bodies. Since all animal sacrifices in the Torah ultimately point toward the Messiah, the lesson seems to be that both God's head *and* heart played their parts in His self-sacrifice—that is, His knowledge of our condition (and what it would take to fix it) and His unfathomable, inexplicable love for us were both essential components of His plan of redemption. God's master plan is neither a cold intellectual exercise, nor is it driven purely by passion and emotion. His whole being is involved. You'd think the Creator of the universe could find something better to do with His time and energy, but no, all He thinks and dreams about is saving us. The very thought gives me goose-bumps.

- (484) *Do not put olive oil in a sin-offering made of flour. “But if he is not able to bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons, then he who sinned shall bring for his offering one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a sin offering. He shall put no oil on it, nor shall he put frankincense on it, for it is a sin offering.”* (Leviticus 5:11)

Still in the context of the *asham*, or “trespass offering,” we see some special instructions for the poorest supplicants—those who can't even afford a pair of turtledoves. No olive oil is to be mixed in or poured over the offering (as was the case with the burnt offering and the grain offering). Why? Oil, as we have seen, is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. But the type of “sin” being addressed in the trespass offering is inadvertent goofs (see Mitzvah #493), things we do that we're often not even aware of when we do them. They are not the result of ignoring the Spirit, of quenching her

counsel with cynicism or apathy. They are just mistakes, and you can't effectively repent from making mistakes—they're part of the human condition. That being said, they *are* mistakes: they're not part of God's perfect will for our lives, and are therefore still "sin" in a manner of speaking—a falling short of His perfect standard.

- (485) *Do not put frankincense on a sin-offering made of flour. "But if he is not able to bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons, then he who sinned shall bring for his offering one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a sin offering. He shall put no oil on it, nor shall he put frankincense on it, for it is a sin offering."* (Leviticus 5:11) Same song, second verse. Frankincense, as you'll recall, represents purity through sacrifice—specifically, the imputed righteousness we enjoy through Yahshua's sacrifice. The trespass offering, however, is there for us to acknowledge our mistakes, our unintentional trespasses against God's perfect standard. As long as we inhabit these mortal bodies, we will continue to inadvertently stumble into sin. We will never attain purity in these corrupt vessels—which explains why God is planning to replace our bodies with new, incorruptible ones (see I Corinthians 15:35-58). So frankincense is inappropriate for addressing our unintentional sins as long as we remain mortals.
- (486) *An individual shall bring an offering if he is in doubt as to whether he has committed a sin for which one has to bring a sin-offering. This is called a guilt-offering for doubtful sins. "If a person sins, and commits any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of Yahweh, though he does not know it, yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity. And he shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish from the flock, with your valuation, as a trespass offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him regarding his ignorance in which he erred and did not know it, and it shall be forgiven him. It is a trespass offering; he has certainly trespassed against Yahweh."* (Leviticus 5:17-19) This is the bottom line to the Torah's discussion of the *asham*, or trespass offering. It's kind of depressing, if you think about it: we're all guilty, even if we don't realize how—even if we're totally serious about being "Torah observant." We've all inadvertently done things that violated Yahweh's standards of behavior or holiness (note: they're not the same thing). It's a measure of His love that He provided even for these sins—the places where we fall short, even if we *never* become aware of them. Yahshua came to fulfill the Law—all of it, including this one.
- (487) *The remainder of the meal offerings shall be eaten. "This is the law of the grain offering: The sons of Aaron shall offer it on the altar before Yahweh. He shall take from it his handful of the fine flour of the grain offering, with its oil, and all the frankincense which is on the grain offering, and shall burn it on the altar for a*

sweet aroma, as a memorial to Yahweh. And the remainder of it Aaron and his sons shall eat; with unleavened bread it shall be eaten in a holy place; in the court of the tabernacle of meeting they shall eat it.” (Leviticus 6:14-16) In Mitzvah #476, we discussed the grain, or meal, offering (the *minha*) as covered in Leviticus 2. The next few entries will continue that discussion. (I would apologize for the helter-skelter organization of the subject matter, but the numbering system for these mitzvot, as I explained earlier, isn’t mine.) A small portion of the grain that was brought to the priests was to be burned—with *all* of the frankincense provided—“as a memorial to Yahweh.” The rest was to be used as food by the priests tending to their sacrificial duties at the Tabernacle or Temple. If I’m right about the meaning of the *minha*—that it represents our thankful acknowledgment of the resources and opportunities Yahweh provides for us, then it is clear that He expects us to tangibly advance the cause of His kingdom by meeting the needs of those who are functioning as priests in the world today—interceding between God and man. Since Calvary, of course, that description should fit every believer. That’s why Yahshua commanded us to “love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12)

- (488) *Do not allow the remainder of the meal offerings to become leavened.* “...With unleavened bread it shall be eaten in a holy place; in the court of the tabernacle of meeting they shall eat it. It shall not be baked with leaven. I have given it as their portion of My offerings made by fire; it is most holy, like the sin offering and the trespass offering. (Leviticus 6:16-17) I honestly don’t know where Maimonides gets some of this stuff. Yahweh merely said to prepare the *minha* without leaven. The reason, as we have seen, is that leaven, or yeast, is a symbol for sin—it is something that tends to grow until it permeates the whole loaf—or the whole *life*. In the context of the grain offering, our thankfulness for God’s provision must be expressed in purity. Even Caiaphas understood that blood money could not honor God (see Matthew 27:6). It is blasphemous to thank God for what we have stolen.
- (489) *The High Kohein shall offer a meal offering daily.* “And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘This is the offering of Aaron and his sons, which they shall offer to Yahweh, beginning on the day when he is anointed: one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a daily grain offering, half of it in the morning and half of it at night. It shall be made in a pan with oil. When it is mixed, you shall bring it in. The baked pieces of the grain offering you shall offer for a sweet aroma to Yahweh. The priest from among his sons, who is anointed in his place, shall offer it. It is a statute forever to Yahweh. It shall be wholly burned. For every grain offering for the priest shall be wholly burned. It shall not be eaten.’ (Leviticus 6:19-23) This is a corollary to the law of the *minha*, or grain offering, that we first saw in Mitzvah #476. There we saw that when the grain was presented to the priests by the

worshipper, a handful of it was to be burned on the altar as a memorial to Yahweh. The remainder was set aside as food for the priests. Maimonides erroneously states that what is being described here is a daily offering. Though the NKJV version adds the word “beginning” in verse 19, it’s not actually there in the text—it should read, “. . . which they shall offer to Yahweh on the day when he is anointed.” And the word translated “daily” (tamiyd) actually means “perpetually” or “continually.” The passage is *not* speaking of a daily offering at all but an oft-recurring special occasion: days when male descendants of Aaron are anointed to serve as priests in the sanctuary. On these special days, one tenth of an ephah (which comes out to a little over two liters) of fine flour is baked with oil in a pan or griddle into cakes, which are then completely burned on the altar, half in the morning, and the rest that evening. The fledgling priest is to perform this ritual himself, making it his very first official act.

The symbols involved should be quite familiar by now. From the beginning to the end (reflected in the morning and evening rites) of the priest’s ministry, he is to thankfully acknowledge Yahweh’s provision (the grain offering). His priestly acts are to be guided by the Holy Spirit (the oil), for they’re a rehearsal of the Messiah’s redeeming sacrifice (the burning of the offering upon the altar). Thus the faithful ministry of the priest (the believer) brings pleasure to Yahweh.

- (490) *Do not eat of the meal offering brought by the kohanim.* **“For every grain offering for the priest shall be wholly burned. It shall not be eaten.”** (Leviticus 6:23) If you don’t pay attention to the context, you’ll get hopelessly lost. Back in Leviticus 2:10, we read, **“And what is left of the grain offering shall be Aaron’s and his sons’.”** But here we’re instructed that **“It shall not be eaten.”** Chapter 2 described the grain offering in general. Here in Chapter 6, we’re receiving instruction concerning the grain offering to be presented upon the anointing of new priests. The key is in the phrasing: “Every grain offering *for the priest* . . .,” i.e., for the inauguration of his ministry, as we saw in Mitzvah #489.
- (491) *Observe the procedure of the sin-offering.* **“This is the law of the sin offering: In the place where the burnt offering is killed, the sin offering shall be killed before Yahweh. It is most holy. The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. In a holy place it shall be eaten, in the court of the tabernacle of meeting.”** (Leviticus 6:25-26) The entire fourth chapter of Leviticus is descriptive of the *chata’t*, or “sin offering,” and the instructions are summarized here in Chapter 6. The details vary, depending on whose sin is being atoned for: **“If an anointed priest sins, bringing guilt upon the people”** (4:2), or **“If the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally, and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly”**

(4:13), the sacrifice required is a young bull, symbolic of repentance from false doctrine. Third, if the sinner was a ruler of the people (4:22-26), the proper *chata't* sacrifice was a young male goat, indicating his repentance from the sin as one in authority, yet under God's authority. A fourth case was an ordinary Israelite individual: **"If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally by doing something against any of the commandments of Yahweh in anything which ought not to be done, and is guilty"** (4:27), then the sacrifice was a young *female* goat, an acknowledgment that the transgression is a failure to heed the leading of the Holy Spirit of God.

As we shall see, the sin offering (the *chata't*—see also Mitzvot #480, #481 and #492) and the trespass (or guilt) offering (the *asham*—see Mitzvot #482, #483, #484, #486, and #493) are quite similar. Both covered unintentional sins. Indeed, we read that **"The trespass offering is like the sin offering; there is one law for them both"** (Leviticus 7:7), specifically in that the offering is to be eaten by the priests who perform the ritual. The principal difference between them seems to be that the *chata't* was concerned with sins **"against any of the commandments of Yahweh in anything which ought not to be done"** (4:13), while the *asham* is a **"trespass...in regard to the holy things of Yahweh"** (5:15) including that which would require restitution to be made (see verse 16). The distinction is apparently that the *chata't* covered shortcomings in behavior, while the *asham* dealt with lapses in holiness or ritual purity.

- (492) *Do not eat of the flesh of sin offerings, the blood of which is brought within the Sanctuary and sprinkled towards the Veil. "...Everyone who touches its flesh must be holy. And when its blood is sprinkled on any garment, you shall wash that on which it was sprinkled, in a holy place. But the earthen vessel in which it is boiled shall be broken. And if it is boiled in a bronze pot, it shall be both scoured and rinsed in water. All the males among the priests may eat it. It is most holy. But no sin offering from which any of the blood is brought into the tabernacle of meeting, to make atonement in the holy place, shall be eaten. It shall be burned in the fire."* (Leviticus 6:29-30) Some of the blood from the *chata't* sacrifices for the unintentional sins of the priesthood or the whole congregation was to be brought inside the Sanctuary—into the first room, the Holy Place—and there the priest would dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it seven times "before Yahweh," after which he would **"put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of sweet incense before Yahweh, which is in the tabernacle of meeting"** (4:7, also 4:18). The remaining blood was to be poured out at the base of the big altar of burnt offering, outside the door of the Sanctuary, and the sacrifice was not to be eaten, but rather, **"He shall carry the bull outside the camp, and burn it."** (4:21)

To eat, or not to eat: that is the question. I realize this is potentially all quite confusing. First we read, “All the males among the priests may eat it.” (6:29) But in the next breath, we hear, “But no sin offering from which any of the blood is brought into the tabernacle of meeting...shall be eaten.” (6:30) The sacrificial bulls atoning for the sins of the priesthood and the whole congregation are *not* to be eaten—these are the *chata’t* offerings whose blood has been brought into the sanctuary and sprinkled before the veil. But there is no such application of blood required for the goat sacrifices made by rulers or individual Israelites, so their *chata’t* sacrifices *are* to be eaten by the priests. The principle here is that the priests are not to benefit from their own sin or error. Further, it is presumed that if *everybody* has fallen into sin, the priesthood is to blame, for it is their job to lead the people in matters of faith and sound doctrine. This is a stern warning for us today: “religious leaders” trying to get rich by “tickling the ears” of a gullible world with trendy lies and half-truths are the objects of Yahweh’s displeasure. *Priests must not profit from their own sin.*

- (493) *Observe the procedure of the guilt-offering.* “Likewise this is the law of the trespass offering (it is most holy): In the place where they kill the burnt offering they shall kill the trespass offering. And its blood he shall sprinkle all around on the altar. And he shall offer from it all its fat. The fat tail and the fat that covers the entrails, the two kidneys and the fat that is on them by the flanks, and the fatty lobe attached to the liver above the kidneys, he shall remove; and the priest shall burn them on the altar as an offering made by fire to Yahweh. It is a trespass offering. Every male among the priests may eat it. It shall be eaten in a holy place. It is most holy. (Leviticus 7:1-6) The guilt or trespass offering, the *asham*, is also covered in Leviticus 5:14-19, and we have discussed it in Mitzvot #482, #483, #484, #485, #486, and #491. The offenses for which it is offered are described in Chapter 5: concealing the nature of an oath someone has taken, touching the carcass of an unclean animal, touching “human uncleanness,” or making flippant oaths, whether for good or evil.

A separate category of “trespass” seems to be, “If a person commits a trespass, and sins unintentionally in regard to the holy things of Yahweh....” Precisely what these sins might be is not spelled out, but they have to do with the “holy things,” that is, the sanctuary, its dedicated furnishings, appurtenances, and utensils about which Yahweh gave such detailed instructions in the book of Exodus. Each item had symbolic significance, and all of it, one way or another, pointed toward our redemption through the atoning sacrifice of the coming Messiah. “Then he shall bring to Yahweh as his trespass offering a ram without blemish from the flocks, with your valuation in shekels of silver according to the shekel of the sanctuary, as a trespass offering. And he shall make restitution for the harm that he has done in regard to the holy

thing, and shall add one-fifth to it and give it to the priest. So the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him.” (Leviticus 5:15-16) The requisite sacrifice is an unblemished ram—a male sheep—in contrast to the bulls or goats specified for the sin offering (the *chata't*). Whereas goats speak of sin and bulls are symbolic of false doctrine, the ram is a picture of God’s Messiah and His atoning sacrifice. What does it all mean? I think Yahweh is telling us that even our ignorant offenses against Him are atoned for through the blood of Christ. The 120% restitution, however, tells us that our carelessness concerning the things of God can be costly to us. Notice that unlike the *chata't* sacrifices for the sins of the priests and the congregation, the priests—representing all believers—can and do “profit” from the *asham*. They are to eat the *asham* sacrifices—not the fatty portions, which Yahweh instructs must be burned in His honor, but the meat itself. The lessons we learn through the repentance of our trespasses may be expensive, but in the end, they nourish our souls.

- (494) *Observe the procedure of the peace-offering. “This is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings which he shall offer to Yahweh....”* (Leviticus 7:11) The next six mitzvot will explore the “peace offering,” or *selem*, the last of the five distinct types of sacrifices discussed in the first seven chapters of Leviticus. (We have already seen the *olah*, *minha*, *chata't*, and *asham*.) The peace offering is further explained in Leviticus 3 and 22:18-30. The *selem* (which is invariably used in the plural: *selamim*—peace offerings) was used for several different purposes: as a spontaneous expression of praise to Yahweh, to show one’s thanksgiving for answered prayer (e.g. I Samuel 1:24), to accompany a vow, or as a freewill offering to demonstrate one’s devotion. Both animal and grain offerings were made, and because the *selamim* were strictly voluntary, the rules were quite relaxed. Cattle, goats, or lambs could be brought, always unblemished but either male or female. As usual, the fatty portions were to be burned on the altar as a “sweet aroma to Yahweh.” The sacrifice itself was eaten by the worshipper and his family, with a portion—the right thigh and breast—going to the priest (7:32-33). Basically, the peace offering was a party, one whose guest of honor was Yahweh Himself.

Besides the animal sacrifices, grain was also offered up. **“If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer, with the sacrifice of thanksgiving, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, or cakes of blended flour mixed with oil.”** No surprise there, but wait: **“Besides the cakes, as his offering he shall offer leavened bread with the sacrifice of thanksgiving of his peace offering. And from it he shall offer one cake from each offering as a heave offering to Yahweh. It shall belong to the priest who sprinkles**

the blood of the peace offering.” (Leviticus 7:12-14) *Leavened* bread? Doesn't that indicate the presence of sin? Yes, and it makes perfect sense here, because Yahweh doesn't want us to feel that we have to have achieved a state of sinlessness before we can offer our gratitude and thanksgiving. He knows our condition. That's why He provided for our redemption. But notice something: the worshipper doesn't eat the unleavened bread; the priest does. Once again, we see that we are not to benefit or profit from our own sin. The leavened bread is “heaved” in symbolic dedication to Yahweh, as if to say, “I acknowledge my sin before You, and I thank You for rescuing me from it's inevitable consequences.”

- (495) *Burn meat of the holy sacrifice that has remained over.* **“The flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering for thanksgiving shall be eaten the same day it is offered. He shall not leave any of it until morning. But if the sacrifice of his offering is a vow [Hebrew *neder*: see Mitzvah #496] or a voluntary offering, it shall be eaten the same day that he offers his sacrifice; but on the next day the remainder of it also may be eaten; the remainder of the flesh of the sacrifice on the third day must be burned with fire.”** (Leviticus 7:15-17) What's God's policy on leftovers? It depends on the nature or purpose of the *selem* being offered. If it's a thank offering, then He values spontaneity and promptness. In other words, if we have something for which we owe Yahweh thanksgiving, we should communicate our gratitude immediately. That's why Paul told us to “Pray without ceasing,” I imagine. However, if the *selem* is being offered to show our earnestness in a vow we are making to Yahweh, then our own future actions are in view, not just what's happening now in the realm of our best-laid intentions. So we partake of the sacrifice today, to celebrate our vow, and tomorrow, to commemorate the keeping of our promise. And the third day? No, if there's anything still left over, it must be burned with fire. This tells us that if we procrastinate in fulfilling our vows, if we don't take them as seriously as Yahweh does, then there is judgment in our future. We aren't required to make promises to God, but if we do, we are expected to keep them.
- (496) *Do not eat of sacrifices that are eaten beyond the appointed time for eating them.* **“And if any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering is eaten at all on the third day, it shall not be accepted, nor shall it be imputed to him; it shall be an abomination to him who offers it, and the person who eats of it shall bear guilt.”** (Leviticus 7:18) Continuing the thought of the previous mitzvah, we see God using even stronger language as a warning to those who would eat the *selem* on the third day or beyond, symbolic of taking their vows lightly. Maimonides seems to be thinking of the dangers of eating rancid meat, but Yahweh has bigger fish to fry. Allow me to extrapolate a

bit. Psalm 22 described the horrors of the Messiah's crucifixion—a thousand years before it took place. But in the context of the Messianic sacrifice, David sees this remarkable promise: **“My praise shall be of You in the great congregation; I will pay my vows before those who fear Him.”** (Psalm 22:25) The word translated “vows” here is *neder*, the very same word used in Leviticus 7:16 above to describe the “vow” under which the *selem* “shall not be accepted” if eaten on the third day. If the Messiah's sacrifice on Golgotha had not taken place as God had vowed (on Passover, publicly before the congregation of Israel), we would still be lost in our sins. By the third day, His mission had already been fulfilled. The only reason any of us can even begin to contemplate the meaning of Yahweh's magnificent Torah is that His Messiah *paid His vows*. He did what He promised to do, when He promised to do it, and because He did, we live.

- (497) *Do not eat of holy things that have become unclean.* **“The flesh that touches any unclean thing shall not be eaten. It shall be burned with fire. And as for the clean flesh, all who are clean may eat of it.”** (Leviticus 7:19) Our context is still the “peace offerings,” the *selamim*. Since these were strictly voluntary, it follows that they are a good metaphor for God's primary gift to mankind: choice. That is, we have been given the opportunity to choose Yahweh as our God, or not to. But make no mistake, *how* we may approach God remains His decision to make. Yahweh is a holy God—there is none beside Him. Therefore it is His right to insist that we are holy as well—clean, purified, and set apart for His purposes—if we are to enjoy a relationship with Him. Here He is reminding us that the world will be judged, and anything that has been “touched” by the world's evil will be purged. On the other hand, we whom Yahweh has made pure and clean are thereby qualified to walk freely in the presence of our God. What Yahweh has cleansed is clean indeed.
- (498) *Burn meat of the holy sacrifice that has become unclean.* **“The flesh that touches any unclean thing shall not be eaten. It shall be burned with fire. And as for the clean flesh, all who are clean may eat of it.”** (Leviticus 7:19) This is merely the usual negative rewording of the foregoing affirmative mitzvah. The point is clear enough: that which is unclean (by Yahweh's definition) will be burned. That which is not set apart *to* Yahweh will be set apart *from* Him.
- (499) *A person who is unclean shall not eat of things that are holy.* **“But the person who eats the flesh of the sacrifice of the peace offering that belongs to Yahweh while he is unclean, that person shall be cut off from his people. Moreover the person who touches any unclean thing, such as human uncleanness, an unclean animal, or any abominable unclean thing, and who eats the flesh of the**

sacrifice of the peace offering that belongs to Yahweh, that person shall be cut off from his people.” (Leviticus 7:20-21) Continuing and explaining the previous thought, these verses detail what might make one “unclean” in the context of the *selamim*. Note first that the things mentioned are not “sins,” in the sense of being trespasses against Yahweh’s perfect moral standard. Rather, they are sources of ceremonial defilement—touching things that have been *defined* as being unclean. Again, we are reminded that it’s God’s prerogative to make the rules. A mouse (on the outside, anyway) may not be any less sanitary than a sheep, but it has been declared unclean by God’s law, whereas the sheep has not. We may think that we’re pretty good. In comparison with our average fellow man, we (in our imagination) are A-Okay. But Yahweh is reminding us here that His standard is *perfection*. We approach Him on His terms or not at all.

Under normal circumstances, of course, that should mean that “not at all” is our only option, for all of us have “fallen short of the glory of God.” But we were created for no other purpose than to have fellowship with Yahweh—to communicate with Him and reciprocate His love. The sin that separates us is no surprise to Him. He is quite aware of our fallen condition. But His agenda hasn’t changed. If we imperfect creatures desire to fulfill creation’s mandate, Yahweh has provided a way for us to do that—not by relaxing His standards, but instead by making us perfect. Hence the lesson of the peace offering. If God has *defined* us as being clean, then we are clean indeed, free to talk and walk with Yahweh unimpeded by our sin. But if we insist on defining “goodness” ourselves, we remain unclean, cut off from His people.

A side-by-side comparison of these five types of Levitical offerings may help to clarify their individual significance:

Type 1: **Burnt Offering** (*olah*) Leviticus 1:1-17; 6:8-13

Mitzvah #475

What: Bulls, sheep, or goats—males without blemish—were specified.
Turtledoves or young pigeons were also acceptable.

Who: The worshipper was to kill the *olah* and skin it (quadrupeds only—birds were killed by the priests.) The priests handled the blood, washing, the

complete burning of the sacrifice (the *olah* was not eaten), and the removal of the ashes.

How: The worshipper brought his sacrifice to the sanctuary: bulls to the door, i.e., on the west side of the altar, and sheep to the north side of the altar. He was to place his hand on its head, symbolically transferring guilt, before he slew and skinned it. The priest was then to sprinkle the blood around the altar, wash the entrails and legs with water, and completely burn the whole animal upon the altar. Birds were slain by wringing their necks. The priests drained their blood near the altar, removed the crop and feathers (these were placed on the east side of the altar, where the ashes were gathered), split the bird into two connected halves, and burnt it on the altar.

Why: The *olah* was a voluntary sacrifice made for atonement, homage to Yahweh, and celebration before Him. Total dedication is implied, for the offering was to be completely consumed by fire. Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah was called an *olah*, making the messianic message evident. Through it we are reminded that Yahshua's self sacrifice for our redemption was not something He *had* to do, but was something He *wanted* to do, because He loved us. **"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire...Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require."** (Psalm 40:6)

Type 2: **Grain Offering (*minha*)** Leviticus 2:1-16; 6:14-23

Mitzvot #476-479, 487-490

What: Fine flour was specified (that is, grain that has been crushed to powder and sifted or winnowed to remove the hulls or chaff—as distinct from “meal,” or whole grain). Olive oil, frankincense, and salt were incorporated in the *minha*. Leaven, or yeast, was specifically excluded, as was honey. The flour could be raw in bulk, or prepared as cakes, loaves, or wafers (in other words, cooked either in an oven, a covered pot, or a flat pan or griddle).

Who: The worshipper was to bring the offering to the priest at the sanctuary. It was he who poured the olive oil and added the frankincense and salt. The priest was to bring the *minha* to the altar, and was to eat what remained.

How: All of the frankincense was to be applied to the portion of the *minha* that was to be burned upon the altar. Only a handful was to be burned as a “memorial portion.” The rest was to serve as food for the priests. It was to be eaten in the court of the Tabernacle. Two special cases are

mentioned for subsets of the grain offering: (1) the firstfruits offering was not to be burned, but was to be simply waved before Yahweh by the priests. (2) Conversely, on the occasion of the anointing of a new priest, the neophyte was to personally offer about two quarts of baked fine flour, half in the morning and the other half that evening—and this *minha* was to be completely burned on the altar.

Why: The *minha* was a memorial of the provision of all our needs by Yahweh. It began with grain, the bounty of the earth—that which sustains us in this world. The addition of oil symbolized the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and the sprinkling of frankincense onto the portion of the offering that was to be burned on the altar spoke of the purity that God would provide through the sacrifice of Yahshua. Because no blood was shed, atonement was not in view; but the judgment of our works—the separation of the valuable from the worthless—was indicated by the removal of the chaff of the grain.

Type 3: **Peace Offering** (*selem*) Leviticus 3:1-17; 7:11-34

Mitzvot #494-499

What: The *selem* was an animal sacrifice, either from the herd (cattle) or the flock (sheep or goats). It could be either male or female, but it had to be without blemish or defect. Also, if the reason for the *selem* was thanksgiving, unleavened cakes and leavened bread were to be included. The grain portion was to be prepared with oil.

Who: The worshipper and his family were to share the sacrifice with the priests, the latter receiving the breast and the right thigh. The fatty portions were to be removed and burned on the altar in honor of Yahweh by the priest.

How: The unusual thing about the *selem* was that the rules for eating “leftovers” varied depending on the purpose of the peace offering. If it was brought as an expression of thanksgiving, then the meat had to be eaten on the day of the sacrifice—spontaneity and immediacy were required. However, if the *selem* accompanied a vow, the sacrifice could also be eaten on the second day, an indication that both the vow and its fulfillment were taken seriously. But in no case was the meat to be eaten after the second day—three-day-old leftovers were to be completely burned with fire, a picture of judgment.

Why: The *selem* was always voluntary. It was offered as a spontaneous expression of praise to Yahweh, as a way to express one’s thanksgiving

for answered prayer, to underscore the seriousness of a vow the worshipper was taking, or as a freewill offering to show one's devotion.

Type 4: **Sin Offering** (*chata't*) Leviticus 4:1-35; 6:24-30

Mitzvot #480, 481, 491, 492

What: If a priest's sin or that of the whole congregation is in view, a young bull was sacrificed. For a ruler of the people, a male goat was slain. For an individual, a female goat or lamb was specified.

Who: The *chata't* was brought by the guilty party, when he became aware of his transgression, to the priest to be sacrificed.

How: A sin offering was to be eaten only by the priests, and then only if they themselves were not culpable in the sin for which the *chata't* was being offered. The meat belonged to the individual priest who performed the offering. The fatty parts were removed and burned on the altar in homage to Yahweh, but the carcass was taken out of the camp and burned there. Blood from the sacrifice was to be sprinkled seven times before the veil (that is, outside the door of the sanctuary), or applied with the priest's finger to the horns of the altar.

Why: Blood sacrifices like the *chata't* speak of atonement for sin, for the life is in the blood. Ultimately, Christ's sacrifice is in view, but the specific animals to be brought by the different classes of Israelites are instructive of how our position in this world relates to our sin and its consequences. Bulls (brought by the priests or by the congregation at large) indicate false doctrines that lead to sin and death. Male goats represent the sins of those in positions of temporal authority—who exercise human governance in this world—surrogates for the coming King. And female goats or sheep (brought by ordinary citizens) speak of failure to heed the counsel of the Holy Spirit.

Type 5: **Trespass Offering** (*asham*) Leviticus 5:1-19; 7:1-10

Mitzvot #482-486, 493

What: Depending on the financial status of the worshipper, either a female lamb or goat, two turtledoves, or two young pigeons were to be offered. And if he was too poor even for that, he was to bring a tenth of an ephah (about two quarts) of fine flour, but unlike the *minha*, no oil or frankincense was to be added.

- Who: The *asham* was to be eaten by the priests. As with the *chata't*, the priest personally officiating was entitled to the meat and hide from the sacrifice (after removing the fatty parts, which, as always, were burned on the altar as Yahweh's portion). Grain offerings, however, were to be shared among all the priests.
- How: The little details concerning the *asham* conspire to teach us about Yahweh's grace and mercy. As with the *olah*, here is sliding scale of sacrifice value based on one's wealth or lack of it. We are specifically instructed not to remove the head of a sacrificed bird from its body. We are told not to add oil or frankincense to a grain *asham*. All these things underscore the fact that even though Yahweh is perfect and holy, requiring absolute perfection of those who would approach Him, His entire agenda is focused on providing that perfection for us—regardless of our station in life—with His whole being, head and heart, and even if we have sinned purely by accident and never even realize our trespass!
- Why: The *asham* is provided for our “mistakes,” our offenses in holiness (as the *chata't* covers our “sins,” our lapses in behavior). As we walk through this world, it is practically impossible to remain perfectly set apart from it (as Israel was supposed to be) or to fulfill our mandate to be called out from within it (as the *Ekklesia*, the Church, is supposed to be.) Yahweh made us. He knows our frailty. He realizes that any perfection we have must be provided by Him, for it is not something we can muster in our fallen state, no matter how hard we try, no matter how much we would like to. That cloak of perfection is freely bestowed upon us through the sacrifice of His Messiah, Yahshua. All we have to do is put it on.

Thus we have seen five types of sacrifices or offerings described in detail in the first seven chapters of Leviticus. But we should be familiar enough with Yahweh's patterns by now to expect not five, but *seven*. I believe the sixth category of offerings is the “drink offering” or *neseq*. This offering was most fully described in this passage: **“When you have come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving to you, and you make an offering by fire to Yahweh, a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or in your appointed feasts, to make a sweet aroma to Yahweh, from the herd or the flock, then he who presents his offering to Yahweh shall bring a grain offering of one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of oil; and one-fourth of a hin [about a quart] of wine as a drink offering you shall prepare with the burnt offering or the sacrifice, for each lamb. Or for a ram you shall prepare as a grain offering two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-third of a hin of oil; and as a drink offering you shall offer one-third of a hin [about one and a half quarts] of wine**

as a sweet aroma to Yahweh. And when you prepare a young bull as a burnt offering, or as a sacrifice to fulfill a vow, or as a peace offering to Yahweh, then shall be offered with the young bull a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with half a hin of oil; and you shall bring as the drink offering half a hin [about half a gallon] of wine as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to Yahweh.” (Numbers 15:2-10)

Type 6: **Drink Offering** (*neseq*) Numbers 15:2-10, 28:7

(Not specifically addressed by Maimonides)

What: Wine was to be offered up in conjunction with any animal sacrifice, whether an *olah*, *asham*, *chata't*, or *selem*. It would accompany the grain component that was mixed with oil, and there was to be the same amount of wine as there was oil. The amount of wine (and oil) varied with the size of the sacrificial animal, about a quart for a lamb or goat, up to twice that amount for a bull.

Who: As with most offerings, the worshipper would supply the wine and the priest would attend to its ritual.

How: The wine was to be poured out at the time of the sacrifice, presumably upon the altar, for the libation was said to be a “sweet aroma to Yahweh.”

Why: Although the Torah says nothing about what the pouring out of wine might mean, all four Gospels tie it directly to the blood of Yahshua that was poured out for us at Calvary. The fact that the same amount of oil and wine were specified ties Yahshua’s blood to the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Torah is full of descriptive terminology for various facets of sacrifice and offering, many of which we haven’t explored. They aren’t necessarily all separate things, however, but may be used to emphasize one feature or another. For example, Moses used several of these terms in giving this instruction to the Israelites about to enter the Land: “**But you shall seek the place where Yahweh your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your [1] burnt offerings, your [2] sacrifices, your [3] tithes, the [4] heave offerings of your hand, your [5] vowed offerings, your [6] freewill offerings, and the [7] firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before Yahweh your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which Yahweh your God has blessed you.**” (Deuteronomy 12:5-7)

(1) *Olah*: a burnt offering, the whole sacrificial animal being completely consumed by fire. This is one of the basic types of Levitical sacrifice we’ve already reviewed.

- (2) *Zebah*: a sacrifice—an offering that is killed as an act of worship, expiation, or propitiation to a deity; meat that is killed for consumption at a feast. *Zebah* is a catch all term for any animal sacrifice.
- (3) *Ma'aser*: the tithe, the tenth part, goods or money given as an offering. This was a special class of offering designed to fund the operation of the temple and feed the poor. See Mitzvot #394, 397, 399, and 402-425.
- (4) *T'rumah*: an offering, a contribution, a heave offering. *T'rumah* was also the word used for the tithe the Levites paid to the Aaronic priesthood from the tithes *they* had received from the people of Israel.
- (5) *Neder*: a vow or the votive offering that consecrates it. This would be a subset of the *selem*, or peace offering.
- (6) *Nedabah*: a freewill offering, that which is voluntary, not compulsory, and is prompted only by the impulse of the donor. This is a descriptive term for the voluntary nature of the peace offering (*selem*) as well as the burnt offering (*olah*).
- (7) *Bekor*: firstborn animals or men, set aside to Yahweh. This, I believe, represents the seventh and final classification of offerings to Yahweh.

Type 7: **Firstborn Offering** (*bekor*) Exodus 13:11-13, Leviticus 27:26, Numbers 3:40

Mitzvot #368-371, 403, 410, 413

What: The firstborn male of every Israelite family belonged to Yahweh, as did every animal owned by an Israelite. Clean animals (sheep, goats, cattle, etc.) were to be sacrificed. Donkeys (and presumably other unclean animals such as horses or camels) were to be substituted with lambs, or their necks were to be broken. But clean animals were to be eaten.

Who: Firstborn male children belonged to Yahweh, but they were to be redeemed by paying the Priestly tribe of Levi five silver shekels. The tribe of Levi thus were Yahweh's designated substitutes for the firstborn of the other eleven tribes.

How: The whole scenario was based on the original Passover, when the firstborn males of all the households that weren't sheltered by the blood of the lamb were slain. According to Exodus 13, the slaying of the firstborn animals was *designed* to elicit questions from Israelite children about the meaning of the rite, giving parents the perfect opportunity to explain Yahweh's deliverance—both past, present, and future.

Why: The slain firstborn son was a metaphor for Yahweh's own "firstborn," who would be slain to save men from the consequences of their own transgressions, just as the Passover lamb's blood was shed to identify those who were under God's protection. The picture couldn't be any clearer if God Himself had painted the blood on the upright wooden post and its crosspiece with His own hands. As a matter of fact that's precisely what He did—on Calvary's cross.

Chapter 13

Sacrifices: Digging Deeper

Time and again in the Tanach we read that Yahweh wasn't really interested in the Israelites' sacrifices and offerings, not for their own sake, anyway. (For example, see Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:6-8, or Amos 5:21-24.) Without the proper heart attitude toward Him, the mechanical keeping of the Law was pointless, and He told them so. So why did He instruct them to do all these things in the first place? The author of the Book of Hebrews explains: **"The old system in the law of Moses was only a shadow of the things to come, not the reality of the good things Christ has done for us."** Just as a schoolchild must learn his A-B-Cs and numbers before written paragraphs and algebraic equations can make any sense to him, the Law was given to teach us about the components of God's love—learned by rote at first (the "shadow"), and only later graduating to meaningful understanding (the "reality"). **"The sacrifices under the old system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared. But just the opposite happened...."** Though the sacrifices were insufficient in themselves, those who trustingly offered them out of obedience to God's Word were cleansed through their faith in what the sacrifices meant—even if they didn't comprehend what that was or what form it would take.

However, the repetitive nature of the sacrificial system was an obvious clue that they were prophetic of something greater, a rehearsal of something perfect. **"Those yearly sacrifices reminded them of their sins year after year. For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. That is why Christ, when he came into the world, said, 'You did not want animal sacrifices and grain offerings. But you have given me a body so that I may obey you. No, you were not pleased with animals burned on the altar or with other offerings for sin. Then I said, "Look, I have come to do your will, O God—just as it is written about me in the Scriptures...."'"** Christ said this when He *came into the world*? Actually, this is a quote from David, from Psalm 40. The writer to the Hebrews is actually saying something quite profound: Christ, through the Holy Spirit, spoke through His prophets (in this case, David) as though He were already here among us. The Messiah, in other words, manifested Himself long before he was "born" in a stable in Bethlehem.

But let us not lose sight of the message while pondering the medium: **"Christ said, 'You did not want animal sacrifices or grain offerings or animals burned on the altar or other offerings for sin, nor were you pleased with them' (though they are required by the law of Moses). Then he added, 'Look, I have come to do your will.' He cancels the first covenant**

in order to establish the second. And what God wants is for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time.” (Hebrews 10:1-10 NLT) That’s pretty clear: we can’t “be made holy” by our own efforts, even in observing the Torah with all our might. It can only be achieved through Yahshua’s sacrifice. And more to the point, God *wants* us to become set apart to Him in this way. In fact, it’s all He wants.

As I said, all of this begs the question: if Yahweh didn’t “want animal sacrifices or grain offerings,” then why on earth did He command the children of Israel to do them? It was for the same reason we educate our small children: so that they might learn the basics, the A-B-Cs of the mind of God. The Law of Moses was never intended to be our whole life, or even our whole education. It was only grammar school. **“Under the old covenant, the priest stands before the altar day after day, offering sacrifices that can never take away sins.”** No, they can’t. But they do teach us that our sins *can* be taken away—important information indeed. **“But our High Priest offered himself to God as one sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down at the place of highest honor at God’s right hand. There he waits until his enemies are humbled as a footstool under his feet. For by that one offering he perfected forever all those whom he is making holy.”** We’ve skipped from kindergarten to graduate school here. Just as attaining the ability to read (or write) an important book makes all the labor expended learning our A-B-Cs worth the effort, the sacrifice of Christ gave the Torah’s sacrifices and offerings meaning and purpose. But remember, there is life after grad school. Yahshua’s sacrifice was, just like the Law, only a means to an end. That end is our eternal life in fellowship with our God and King. Without that, none of the previous sacrifice—Old *or* New Covenant—makes any sense.

“And the Holy Spirit also testifies that this is so. First He says, ‘This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says Yahweh: I will put my laws in their hearts so they will understand them, and I will write them on their minds so they will obey them.’ Then He adds, ‘I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds.’” (quoted from Jeremiah 31:33-34.) There will come a time when the precepts of God will be understood perfectly by His people. The Torah will be seen not as a list of pointless or incomprehensible rules and regulations but rather as the exquisitely detailed “road map to peace” men have been seeking for so long—a road map that points the way to the Messiah and our salvation. We’re not completely there yet—we still see God’s truth “through a glass, darkly.” But the road has been built and the map has been drawn. All we have to do is finish our journey.

The dividing line between the Old Covenant and the New is now clear: **“Now when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.”** (Hebrews 10:11-18 NLT) Now that the Torah has been literally fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Yahshua, now that atonement for our sins has been made

through shedding the blood of the Messiah, the blood of bulls and goats is beside the point. A roadmap isn't needed once your destination is in sight.

“And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven’s Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. This is the new, life-giving way that Christ has opened up for us through the sacred curtain, by means of his death for us.” If you’ll recall, in the previous chapter we discussed how the temple had two rooms. The first, the Holy Place, represented the Law, while the second, the Most Holy Place, represented the grace to which the Law was the passageway. The veil separating the two rooms was torn in two at Yahshua’s crucifixion (Matthew 27:51), a sign that the place that had previously been accessible only on the annual Day of Atonement, and then only to the High Priest, was now “open for business” all day, every day—to anyone who had become a child of God. **“And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God’s people, let us go right into the presence of God, with true hearts fully trusting him. For our evil consciences have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water....”** The imagery being used here is that of the ordination of priests as described in Leviticus 8. The remarkable truth being revealed is that Yahshua—the “great High Priest who rules”—has by his personal sacrifice set us apart as priests in our own right, giving us the ability and right to stand and minister before God.

Priests have duties within the temple of God, of course, and we are no exception. **“Without wavering, let us hold tightly to the hope we say we have, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near....”** Thus these are our priestly duties under the New Covenant: be steadfast, hold onto our hope, trust in Yahweh, and be creative in our expressions of love toward each other. We are further instructed to meet together with other believers in order to encourage them and warn them of spiritual danger, and we are to watch for signs of our Messiah’s return—most of which are evident in abundance today as never before.

The conclusion to all of this sounds at first to be a disastrous loophole in the concept of grace: **“Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received a full knowledge of the truth, there is no other sacrifice that will cover these sins. There will be nothing to look forward to but the terrible expectation of God’s judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies. Anyone who refused to obey the law of Moses was put to death without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Think how much more terrible the punishment will be for those who have trampled on the Son of God and have treated the blood of the covenant as if it were common and unholy. Such people have insulted and enraged the Holy Spirit who brings God’s mercy to his people. (Hebrews 10:19-29 NLT)** Is he saying that once we have received God’s grace we must

never fall short of His perfect standard of behavior again *ever* in our lives, under pain of hell fire? If that's the case, I'm a dead man, for although I have trusted in Yahweh my God for well over half a century now, I can say with all candor that I have indeed sinned against Him in the intervening years—and not just through carelessness or ignorance, either, but also high-handed, deliberate sin: I have been known to yield to temptation with great alacrity (just like you). Sure, I invariably felt terrible afterward, whether or not I repented right away, but the question remains: am I therefore disqualified from participation in my Savior's grace? Should I have waited until I was on my deathbed to accept Yahshua, too old and feeble to backslide?

The vast preponderance of Scripture weighs in against this hypothesis. The judgment spoken of in verse 27 is levied against God's "enemies," or "adversaries." Indeed, a passage very similar to this in II Peter 2 speaks of those who have "*turned from the holy commandment*" that had been given to them. This is far more serious than (and fundamentally different from) yielding to the occasional temptation to behave badly, or falling short of the standard set within the Torah—which as we have seen, *no one* keeps, no matter how hard they try. The people who are in such danger—in both passages—have turned their backs on grace. Not only have they "deliberately continued sinning," they have concluded that God's standard of holiness is not legitimate. They have weighed the evidence, examined the doctrine, and deliberately chosen to become God's antagonists. So the author says, in so many words, "If Yahshua's sacrifice isn't deemed sufficient to cover their sins, then what is? There is nothing else available."

Let us, then, return to our Torah study with a new appreciation of its importance as the foundation of our spiritual education, our "road map to peace."

BLEMISHES, IMPERFECTIONS, and UNCLEANNES

(500) *A kohein's daughter who profaned herself shall not eat of the holy things, neither of the heave offering nor of the breast, nor of the shoulder of peace offerings. "The breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the heave offering you shall eat in a clean place, you, your sons, and your daughters with you; for they are your due and your sons' due, which are given from the sacrifices of peace offerings of the children of Israel." (Leviticus 10:14); "If the priest's daughter is married to an outsider, she may not eat of the holy offerings. But if the priest's daughter is a widow or divorced, and has no child, and has returned to her father's house as in her youth, she may eat her father's food; but no outsider shall eat it." (Leviticus 22:12-13)* Normally, an unmarried daughter of a priest, being under his protection, would be automatically eligible, through her relationship with her father, to benefit from the tithes and offerings that were designated as

his. When she grew up and got married, however, the relationship defining her privileges shifted to that with her husband. If she married another priest, then his portion of the offering would also become hers. But if she married an “outsider,” one who was not a priest, she was no longer eligible to eat of the holy offerings.

The defining characteristic of her eligibility, then, is whose protection she is under. The priest’s daughter here is a metaphor for all of humanity. The offerings are symbolic of salvation by grace. While we are young and immature, we are under our parent’s protection. If they are believers (“priests” in the metaphor), we are afforded the same status under God’s grace. That is, if a child of believing parents dies, Yahweh welcomes them as if they had consciously made a choice to follow Him, even though they were not sufficiently mature to make such a choice. This is not the same thing as the fictional “age of accountability” which purports that *all* children are given the same grace—it only applies to the children of believing parents. (Refer to the *Future History* chapter called “The Three Doors” for a full explanation of how it all works.)

When she reaches maturity, however, the “priest’s daughter” makes her own choices concerning whose protection (if any) she wishes to embrace. She could marry a priest—a metaphor for choosing to be part of the “bride of Christ.” Or she could choose to marry an “outsider.” The word comes from *Zur*, a Hebrew verb meaning to be a stranger, a foreigner, or even an enemy. The basic idea is non-relatedness or non-acquaintance. Marrying an outsider is a picture of spiritual alliance with someone other than Yahweh. The good news is that if she and the “outsider” have divorced, she may return to her father’s house—a picture of repentance.

- (501) *After childbirth, a woman shall bring an offering when she is clean. “When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter, she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then he shall offer it before Yahweh, and make atonement for her. And she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who has borne a male or a female.”* (Leviticus 12:6-7) When an Israelite woman bore a male child, she was considered ritually unclean (that is, as if she were menstruating) for seven days (See Mitzvah #564). She was to have her son circumcised on the eighth day, and then continue in the state of ritual impurity for thirty-three days (a total of forty days, symbolic, I believe, of the trial and testing to be expected in raising a child). For a female child, this time period was doubled, perhaps indicating that girls could be expected to be

twice as trying to their mothers as boys might be. After this period of purification had elapsed, she was to bring an offering to the sanctuary. A lamb was brought for a burnt offering in homage to Yahweh (an *olah*—see Mitzvah #475), which could be substituted with a young pigeon or turtledove if the woman was poor. Also, a sin offering of a pigeon or turtledove was to be presented (a *chata't*—see Mitzvah #481).

The odd Roman Catholic notion of Mary the mother of Yahshua being “immaculate” or “sinless” is specifically debunked by this mitzvah, for Luke 2:24 records that she brought a pair of turtledoves to the Temple—one of which was a *sin* offering, as required by the Law. And although she didn't realize it at the time, she also brought “a lamb of the first year” to offer up in homage to her God—her Son, who would be totally consumed in God's wrath for our sakes thirty-three years later—one year for every day of His mother's symbolic purification period. How's *that* for symbolism? Maimonides seems to treat these precepts as if Moses was making them up as he went along. But I think it's pretty obvious that Mo was getting Help.

- (502) *The leper shall bring a sacrifice after he is cleansed. “And on the eighth day he shall take two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and one log of oil.”* (Leviticus 14:10) Moses rambles on for two entire chapters—116 interminable verses—about how to identify leprosy and what to do when a leper was cleansed in Israel. I'm not going to go there (yet—see Mitzvot #565-568 and #577-580). By now, you have plenty of experience sorting out what the symbols of each sacrificial element might mean. Feel free to dig in and figure it all out. I just want to point out one salient fact: we have no record in the entire Old Testament about anyone being cleansed of leprosy under the rules of the Torah—*ever*. Sure, Miriam was cured of the disease, but that was before the Law was given. And yes, Naaman was cleansed through the ministry of Elisha, but he was a Syrian, not an Israelite. Elisha's covetous servant, Gehazi, “inherited” Naaman's disease for life. Likewise, Judah's King Uzziah was struck with leprosy, but was never cured.

No one in the Bible cured anyone of leprosy—*until* you get to Yahshua, who by all accounts did it all the time. Being a son of the Torah, He naturally instructed those he cleansed to “**Go, show yourself to the priests.**” (Luke 17:14) And what was the result? You can't do miracles like that without making an impression. Following the Day of Pentecost, we're told, “**A great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.**” (Acts 6:7)

Maimonides seems interested only in making sure those pesky ex-lepers coughed up the requisite sacrifices. Yahweh had bigger fish to fry.

- (503) *A man having an issue shall bring a sacrifice after he is cleansed of his issue. “And when he who has a discharge is cleansed of his discharge, then he shall count for himself seven days for his cleansing, wash his clothes, and bathe his body in running water; then he shall be clean. On the eighth day he shall take for himself two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and come before Yahweh, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and give them to the priest. Then the priest shall offer them, the one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him before Yahweh because of his discharge.”*

(Leviticus 15:13-15) Again, this is just the tip of the scriptural iceberg. This entire fifteenth chapter of Leviticus addresses a health problem, just as we saw with leprosy above. Maimonides has made an arbitrary distinction between men’s and women’s discharges (see Mitzvah #504) but the offerings specified are identical. A “discharge” (Hebrew: *zub*) is literally a “flowing.” The context specifically excludes such things as sexual discharges (which are covered separately in verses 16-18), and normal menstruation (verse 25), but anything unusual—from a runny nose, to diarrhea, to pus from an infected wound—would be included.

In a future chapter, we will return to the subject of ritual purity—the practical precepts that would keep the transmission of disease to a minimum in Israel. At the moment, however, we’re primarily focusing on the sacrifices given in response to the cleansing from these things that made people “ritually defiled.” After washing his body and clothing and waiting for a week to be sure the condition had actually abated, the cleansed worshipper was to offer two turtledoves—one as a sin offering (*chata’t*) and the other as a burnt offering (*olah*). Why? One might have expected that a *selem*, a peace offering, would have been more appropriate—a spontaneous outpouring of thankfulness. But of course, a *selem* was voluntary—Yahweh would never command somebody to offer one. With the sin offering and burnt offering, I think Yahweh was trying to remind us of our fallen condition. Why do we get sick? Why do our bodies die? It’s because of our sinful natures—not necessarily the individual sins we commit from day to day (although they can have health consequences), but our definitive human predicament. By requiring a *chata’t*, Yahweh was saying, “Your sinful nature has made your body vulnerable to disease and death.” And by specifying the bringing of an *olah*, He was declaring, “Trust and honor Me, for I am your health, strength, and salvation.”

- (504) *A woman having an issue shall bring a sacrifice after she is cleansed of her issue. “But if she is cleansed of her discharge, then she shall count for herself seven days, and after that she shall be clean. And on the eighth day she shall take for herself two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and bring them to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the priest shall offer the one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, and the priest shall make atonement for her before Yahweh for the discharge of her uncleanness.”* (Leviticus 15:28-30) Special mention (verses 19-33) is given to a woman’s discharge of blood beyond the normal menstruation period. This law comes into play in an encounter (recorded in Matthew 9:20-22) between Yahshua and a woman who had suffered from just such an issue of blood for twelve long years. Her faith in the Messiah led her to surmise that merely touching His tsitzit or the hem of His garment would be enough to heal her. But the law had stated, **“Whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening.”** (Leviticus 15:19) Yahshua was willing to become “unclean” for our benefit, taking our defilement upon Himself in order that we might be healed. The prophet Malachi described the moment: **“To you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings.”** (Malachi 4:2) Our healing ultimately depends on our reverence for Yahweh.
- (505) *Observe on Yom Kippur the service appointed for that day regarding the sacrifice, confessions, sending away of the scapegoat, etc. “And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat. Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with the blood of a young bull as a sin offering, and of a ram as a burnt offering.’”* (Leviticus 16:2-3) Judaism 101 almost always lists just one or two verses to support the rabbinical mitzvah being presented. (I often expand the scope of the passage to include some explanatory context.) Here, however (to their credit), they referenced the entire salient passage, Leviticus 16:3-34. This is no doubt indicative of how seriously observant Jews are about *Yom Kippur*, or the Day of Atonement—considered the “holiest” day on the Jewish calendar. Though you could write an entire book about Leviticus 16, I’m just going to hit the high spots.

Though five of the seven “appointed convocations” (Hebrew: *mow’ed miqra*) had been mentioned before this point in Scripture, this is the first hint we have of a special Day of Atonement. (All seven are listed together for the first time in Leviticus 23, defining the annual cycle of Levitical holidays—three in the spring, one in early summer, and three more in the fall.) A *miqra* is an assembly, group, or convocation of people called out and gathered together for a specific purpose. It’s definition is thus virtually identical to that of the Greek word *ekklesia*, which we mis-translate as

“Church.” A *mow’ed miqra*, then, is an appointed time, place, and circumstance in which this called-out assembly is to come together for a specific purpose. In historical hindsight, we can see that Yahweh intended these seven annual appointed convocations to be prophetic dress rehearsals for the seven most significant events in His plan of redemption for all mankind, for the first four of them have been fulfilled—in detail, on the very dates of their Levitical mandates—in the life of Yahshua. (See Mitzvah #112 and #133-136 for information we’ve previously covered concerning the Day of Atonement.)

The occasion for this teaching was the sin of Aaron’s two sons Nadab and Abihu, who had waltzed into the tabernacle on their own volition and offered “profane fire” before Yahweh—and had paid for their arrogant presumption with their lives. Here God tells the High Priest that he is to come into the Most Holy Place to minister before Yahweh only one day a year, on the tenth day of the seventh month, Tishri (Leviticus 16:29). My studies of prophecy have led me to the conclusion that this is prophetic of the day Israel as a nation will finally realize and accept that Yahshua of Nazareth is their Messiah. That day is yet future, unfortunately. (See *Future History*: “The Great Awakening” for the whole story.)

The High Priest was to atone for three things: himself (vs. 11-14), the Sanctuary (vs. 15-19), and the people (vs. 20-28). He was to prepare by washing himself and putting on the holy priestly garments (see Mitzvah #372). He was then to sacrifice a young bull as a sin offering (*chata’t*) for himself and his household, and a ram as a burnt offering (*olah*). If you’ll recall, bulls indicated the sin of human pride leading to false doctrine or worship, and rams were metaphorical of Christ in authority—the anointed King. The priest was to burn incense (metaphorical of prayer) upon the altar of incense that stood before the veil (see Mitzvot #433, 434, and #439), and he was also to sprinkle the blood of the sin offering in front of the mercy seat and on the east side (that is, the side of the ark nearest the doorway). He was to “sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times” (verse 14). The details are telling: sprinkling the blood with his *finger* meant the High Priest (metaphorical of Yahshua) would be personally occupied with our atonement—a hands-on involvement. Seven applications, of course, signified that perfect, complete atonement was in view—in marked contrast to the need for an annual repetition of the Levitical rite. This is all supported by the sprinkling of the blood on the *east* side of the mercy seat—it looks forward to the coming King, who will enter His Millennial temple via the eastern gate (according to Ezekiel 43:4)

The central event of the Day of Atonement is the offering of two young goats. The High Priest was to cast lots to choose one of them for Yahweh. This one was to be offered up as a *chata't* sin offering to atone for the sins of all the people for one year, but the other goat was set free in the wilderness. One died so that the other might live. This, like every other facet of the Day of Atonement, is so obviously prophetic of the sacrifice of the Messiah, it's hard to see how the rabbis can manage to remain blind to its spiritual significance. And can somebody explain *this* to me? Why do Jews today make such a big deal of *Yom Kippur* when they haven't been able to properly celebrate it since Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem in 586 B.C.—when the ark of the covenant and the integral mercy seat were secreted away? To this day, atonement remains an elusive dream to a stubborn and rebellious Israel. But that's all about to change.

- (506) *Do not slaughter beasts set apart for sacrifices outside the Sanctuary.*
“Whatever man of the house of Israel who kills an ox or lamb or goat in the camp, or who kills it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting to offer an offering to Yahweh before the tabernacle of Yahweh, the guilt of bloodshed shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood; and that man shall be cut off from among his people, to the end that the children of Israel may bring their sacrifices which they offer in the open field, that they may bring them to Yahweh at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to the priest, and offer them as peace offerings to Yahweh.” (Leviticus 17:3-5) The thrust of the rabbinical mitzvah is right on the money, for a change. The admonition is *not* that an animal from one's flocks or herds couldn't be butchered for food, but rather that sacrificial rites were not to be performed in honor of anyone but Yahweh. This is made clear in verse 7: **“They shall no more offer their sacrifices to demons, after whom they have played the harlot. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations.”**

This precept is specifically directed to Israel during their wilderness wanderings, for verse 3 pointedly refers to being in or outside “the camp.” But later, as the children of Israel were about to enter the Land, Moses clarified the issue: **“Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see; but [only] in the place which Yahweh chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.”** That “place” was later identified as Jerusalem. **“However, you may slaughter and eat meat within all your gates, whatever your heart desires, according to the blessing of Yahweh your God which He has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it, of the gazelle and the deer alike.”** (Deuteronomy 12:13-15) There is a fundamental difference between having a barbecue and offering a sacrifice at the Temple, even if what you're eating is identical. One is just food; the other is a picture of

our redemption through the sacrifice of the Messiah. One feeds the body; the other feeds the soul.

- (507) *Do not eat flesh of a sacrifice that has been left over (beyond the time appointed for its consumption).* “It [the peace offering, or *selem*] shall be eaten the same day you offer it, and on the next day. And if any remains until the third day, it shall be burned in the fire. And if it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an abomination. It shall not be accepted. Therefore everyone who eats it shall bear his iniquity, because he has profaned the hallowed offering of Yahweh; and that person shall be cut off from his people.” (Leviticus 19:6-8) We covered this precept from the point of view of what to do with a leftover sacrifice in Mitzvah #495, and Mitzvah #496 is virtually identical to this one, though supported with a different Scripture passage. The reason given here for not eating the *selem* after the second day is that by doing so, one has “profaned” the offering that has been set apart in honor of Yahweh. We’ve seen this word before. It’s *chalal*, meaning to defile, desecrate, dishonor, or pollute something or someone, literally to pierce, bore, or wound. In Mitzvah #5, we reviewed the command not to *chalal* Yahweh’s holy name—it’s the Third Commandment all over again. Eating sacrifices on the proper day is an issue of obedience and trust, for there is nothing intrinsically evil about eating something on one day rather than another. Sure, Yahweh knew about bacterial growth in three-day-old meat, and wished to spare His people the sickness that came with it. But He didn’t explain the science to them. He merely said “Trust Me. Do what I’ve asked. It’s for your own good. If you can’t trust me with something simple like this, how can you trust Me with your soul? Your lack of trust dishonors Me.”
- (508) *Do not sanctify blemished cattle for sacrifice on the altar. “Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it shall not be acceptable on your behalf.”* (Leviticus 22:20) The next seven mitzvot are all based on the same passage, and together define the “law of blemishes.” The word translated “defect” here is *m’um*. “This word usually describes a physical characteristic that is deemed to be bad. A man with any sort of blemish could not be a priest, nor could an animal which had a blemish be sacrificed. The word is also used to describe an injury caused by another. On the other hand, the absence of any blemish was a sign of beauty. In a figurative sense, the word is used to describe the effect of sin.” (B&C) Animals with defects or blemishes were not acceptable for use as sacrifices. This principle, of course, is predictive of the sinlessness of Yahweh’s ultimate sacrifice on our behalf.

(509) *Every animal offered up shall be without blemish. “And whoever offers a sacrifice of a peace offering to Yahweh, to fulfill his vow, or a freewill offering from the cattle or the sheep, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it.”* (Leviticus 22:21) Was there a penalty for offering an imperfect sacrifice? Only that the whole exercise would be rendered pointless—God would not accept the sacrifice. The animal’s death would be a meaningless waste of resources. The lesson is that we imperfect people can’t atone for our own sins before God. Sure, we can make sacrificial gestures, from putting what we consider a “bribe” into the offering plate to crawling over broken glass in penance for our sins. But because we’re blemished, defective, and fallen, these sacrifices are by definition unacceptable to God. You may as well keep your money—and your skin. God is not impressed. Only an unblemished sacrifice—Yahshua—is acceptable. If you think about it, that’s really good news to all of us defective sheep. It means we’re free to live out our lives in peace, for He has taken our place on the altar of sacrifice.

But the news gets even better. Song of Solomon describes the torrid love affair between the King (Yahshua) and His bride (believers, we who reciprocate His love). In 4:7 she is described thus: **“Your are all fair, my love, and there is no spot (*m’um*) in you.”** Yes, that’s right. Though we’re sinful creatures, Yahweh sees us as perfect and spotless when He sees us through the eyes of Yahshua the King. It’s like having your cake and eating it too.

(510) *Do not inflict a blemish on cattle set apart for sacrifice. “And whoever offers a sacrifice of a peace offering to Yahweh, to fulfill his vow, or a freewill offering from the cattle or the sheep, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it.”* (Leviticus 22:21) You’ve got to wonder at the deviousness of the rabbinical mind. The first thing that came to their minds was, *Gee, I’ve got myself an unblemished sheep. If I offer it up in sacrifice to God, I’m going to miss out on the wool or lamb chops that would otherwise be mine. So let’s see—if I stick him with a hot poker, he won’t be “perfect” anymore, and I’ll be able to keep him all for myself.* But in the end, that tactic was too transparent even for the rabbis, so they invented a mitzvah to prohibit it.

They needn’t have bothered. By the time they wrote the Talmud, their sins had long since cost them the temple, the altar, and the priesthood. They couldn’t have made a proper offering to Yahweh if they’d wanted to. Everything they had to say about making sacrifices was a pointless waste of breath.

(511) *Do not slaughter blemished cattle as sacrifices. “Those that are blind or broken or maimed, or have an ulcer or eczema or scabs, you shall not offer to*

Yahweh, nor make an offering by fire of them on the altar to Yahweh.” (Leviticus 22:22) This mitzvah points out the nature of the silly game Maimonides is playing. He’s dividing up the process of making an offering into its component parts, and then individually issuing prohibitions against using blemished animals for any of them: don’t sanctify them (#508), offer them up (#509), slaughter them (#511), burn them (#512), or sprinkle their blood (#513). *Oy vey!* In reality, the passage at hand merely defines what sorts of things constitute “blemishes” for sacrificial purposes. Note that “spots” on an animal’s coat—like the black and white blotches on a Holstein cow—are not considered “blemishes.” *M’um* defects are caused by illness, injury or congenital problems. They have nothing to do with perceived beauty, the “right” style, or monochromatic plainness. Rather, they are flaws, defects, imperfections. They are metaphorical of sin, not misfortune. (See Mitzvah #513 for further clarification.)

- (512) *Do not burn the limbs of blemished cattle upon the altar. “Those that are blind or broken or maimed, or have an ulcer or eczema or scabs, you shall not offer to Yahweh, nor make an offering by fire of them on the altar to Yahweh. Either a bull or a lamb that has any limb too long or too short you may offer as a freewill offering, but for a vow it shall not be accepted.”* (Leviticus 22:22-23) The reference to “limbs” in the text isn’t remotely what Maimonides has made of it. If you’ll recall, a freewill offering (*nedabah*) could be either a *selem*—a peace offering—or an *olah*—a burnt offering. The emphasis of the designation *nedabah* was the voluntary nature of the offering. A vow or votive offering (*neder*) was one of three types of *selem*, one intended to demonstrate the seriousness and sincerity of the worshipper (contrasted to freewill offerings or simple thanksgiving).

Here’s the principle: if you wish to willingly express your devotion with a *selem* or *olah*, you may offer an animal from your flocks or herds that happens to have one limb shorter or longer than the others, but is unblemished in other ways. But if the *selem* is meant to punctuate a vow you’re making before Yahweh, the sacrifice must be perfect in every way. As usual, the Torah doesn’t explain why this is so. But it seems clear to me that any *completely* perfect sacrifice must be metaphorical of God’s self-sacrifice on our behalf. And one way or another, Yahweh “vowed” hundreds of times in scripture to provide a redeemer for us—Yahshua, whose very name means “Yahweh is salvation.” Thus when we make a vow, we are emulating God: we must follow His lead, proving our sincerity by offering up the very best we have. The freewill offering, on the other hand, speaks of our response to Yahweh’s love. Note two things: (1) We don’t *have* to reciprocate His love; it’s strictly voluntary. And (2) we aren’t perfect. Yes, Yahweh has removed our sin—we’re free of *m’um*

“blemishes”—but we still limp through life on uneven legs, tripping over all kinds of things along the way. Yahweh is telling us that He understands our condition, and that He’s willing to accept our homage, devotion, and gratitude even though we’re not “perfect.” *Yet*. He’s still working on us.

- (513) *Do not sprinkle the blood of blemished cattle upon the altar. “You shall not offer to Yahweh what is bruised or crushed, or torn or cut.”* (Leviticus 22:24)

Maimonides is still off on his tangent, making things up as he goes along. While he’s no doubt correct, the supporting text says something completely different. We are not to offer to God that which is of no use or value to us. To do so would be an insult. Thus the only acceptable sacrifice is uninjured—it is fit for work or uncompromised in whatever its function would normally be. The “bruising” spoken of goes beyond injury and includes castration—a metaphor for fruitlessness. As we have seen before, the sacrifice was to be full of promise and potential, just as Yahweh’s Sacrifice would be.

- (514) *Do not offer up a blemished beast that comes from non-Israelites. “Nor shall you make any offering of them in your land, nor from a foreigner’s hand shall you offer any of these as the bread of your God, because their corruption is in them, and defects are in them. They shall not be accepted on your behalf.”*

(Leviticus 22:24-25) It doesn’t matter where the blemished animal comes from: it isn’t acceptable as a sacrifice to Yahweh. At its heart, this precept is an admonition against man-made religion, whether originating in Israel or coming from the gentile nations. Since “defects” are a metaphor for sin, it’s clear that God doesn’t want us to approach Him based on our own merits, for we have none—we are fatally flawed. First, rabbinical Judaism attempted to reach God by outwardly observing His Instructions, or at least a caricature of them, while ignoring their spirit. They failed because the basis of their “obedience” was their own strength, a blemished beast indeed. But then the gentiles came along and replaced the clever Jewish caricature with a crass and blatant counterfeit—rules and regulations from their own imagination, imitation godliness bereft of God’s power, doctrines of demons. These too were defective sacrifices, unacceptable to Yahweh. The *only* sacrifice by which we can approach God is the One He Himself provided—Yahshua, the perfect Lamb of God.

TIMING

- (515) *Sacrifices of cattle may only take place when they are at least eight days old. “When a bull or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall be seven days with its mother; and from the eighth day and thereafter it shall be accepted as an offering made by fire to Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 22:27) Sometimes it’s not what you do,

but when you do it. These next few mitzvot concentrate on scheduling issues found in the Torah. There were practical reasons the sacrificial animals were not to be offered up during the first week of life. It could take that long to determine if the animal was healthy, “without blemish” by Levitical standards. Also, certain biological functions don’t stabilize for a while after birth. (For example, when discussing circumcision in male children in Mitzvah #17, we discovered that the human clotting mechanism isn’t fully developed until the eighth day, hence the timing mandated in Leviticus 12:3.)

But there’s more to it. As we have seen, seven is a key number in Scripture. It indicates perfection, completion, the whole of something. Seven “days” of creation, seven days of the week, seven Feasts of Yahweh—they all point toward the completion of God’s plan for mankind’s redemption. This process will apparently be accomplished within a seven-thousand-year span of time beginning with the fall of Adam and ending at the conclusion of Yahshua’s imminent Millennial reign. But what happens after that? The eternal state commences, populated by those of us who have chosen to honor Yahweh and accept His Spirit—now immortal beings who will dwell forever in the new heaven and new earth. It’s a new beginning, a fresh start in a sinless state. You may think I’ve strayed off the subject, but I haven’t. As the eighth day represents unfolding eternity, the stipulation that the sacrificial animal must live until the eighth day is a reminder that Yahshua’s sacrifice cleanses us not just during this life, but for eternity future.

- (516) *Do not leave any flesh of the thanksgiving offering until the morning. “On the same day it shall be eaten; you shall leave none of it until morning; I am Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 22:30) This is actually a companion mitzvah to #495 and #496. The context is the *selem*, or peace offering—specifically the subset of thanksgiving (Hebrew: *towdah*). Thanksgiving offerings were to be spontaneous and timely, because the Source of all blessings was supposed to be a recognized reality in Israel. So expressions of gratitude were not to be deferred. Of course, because the *towdah* was to be eaten by the worshipper and his family, being thankful benefited the one offering the thanksgiving. It’s like the beatitudes: blessed are the thankful, for they shall be appreciated.
- (517) *Offer up the meal-offering of the Omer on the morrow after the first day of Passover, together with one lamb. “When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before Yahweh, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. And you shall*

offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to Yahweh.” (Leviticus 23:10-12) Because Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Firstfruits fell on successive days (the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth of the month of Nisan) the Jews tended to lump them all into one holiday and call it all Passover. But Yahweh was very specific here in Leviticus 23: there were *three* convocations in the spring, and each miqra was significant in its own right. Passover foretold the death of Yahweh’s Messiah; the Feast of Unleavened Bread predicted the removal of our sin through His sojourn in the tomb; and the Feast of Firstfruits (the subject of this mitzvah) prophesied His resurrection—His victory over death, blazing a trail we can all follow if we choose to. The sheaf of grain (sometimes called an “omer,” which is actually a unit of measure, a little over two quarts) was symbolic of the provision of our salvation through Yahshua’s sacrifice. It was “waved before Yahweh” to demonstrate that this sacrifice was “accepted on our behalf” by Yahweh.

The timing was critical, for it was prophetic of the schedule of Christ’s passion. The sheaf was to be waved “on the day after the Sabbath,” for on the definitive Nisan 16, Sunday, April 3, 33 AD, Yahshua emerged from the tomb, proving that there was such a thing as life after death, and that we could attain it by following Him. The promised Lamb of God had been slain on Passover, to be then consumed in the fires of Yahweh’s wrath to atone for our sins, the smoke ascending to heaven as a pleasant fragrance in the nostrils of God—the sweet smell of salvation for His people. The Messiah’s subsequent resurrection on the Feast of Firstfruits proved that our souls could—and would—be harvested as well.

...Either that, or Yahweh just likes to see people dress up in funny outfits, wave wheat stalks around in the air, and burn poor, innocent sheep to a fare-thee-well. If these mitzvot mean nothing beyond their literal rites and rituals (as Maimonides seems to think, though there’s no way he or anyone else could have literally performed them without a temple and priesthood), we serve a silly God indeed.

- (518) *Do not eat bread made of new grain before the Omer of barley has been offered up on the second day of Passover. “You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.”* (Leviticus 23:14) Maimonides (clever lad that he is) has made three separate mitzvot out of this one precept—dividing it up between the three things not to be eaten before the Feast of Firstfruits offering had been made—bread, raw grain, and roasted or processed grain. Good grief!

At least he's correct in identifying barley as the grain to be offered, for at this time of the year, the barley harvest was just coming in. (Wheat would be the grain *du jour* seven weeks later at *Shavu'ot*, or the Feast of Weeks—see Mitzvah #521.)

The point, of course, was that the children of Israel were to express their thankfulness for the bounty Yahweh had provided as soon as it showed up, recognizing and acknowledging the source of their blessings. Verse 10 (see Mitzvah #517) had pointed out that they wouldn't really be able to do this until they entered the Promised Land, for they would have no crops of any kind to harvest until they arrived. Joshua 5:10-12 records the timing. When they entered the Land, they celebrated Passover as scheduled, making their unleavened bread from the manna that had sustained them during their wilderness wanderings. But the supply of manna ceased the very next day, on the Feast of Firstfruits, when they had sampled the produce of the Land (presumably after the priests had waved the ceremonial sheaf toward heaven). That tended to make them *very* thankful for the barley they found growing in the Land.

- (519) *Do not eat roasted grain of the new produce before that time. "You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings."* (Leviticus 23:14) Thinking more like a lawyer than a Bible commentator, Maimonides is addressing loopholes that only a rabbi would even see. Though Yahweh listed three "forms" the grain might take, these forms are not the point—the timing of the offering and what it represents are the point. Bread or grain is metaphorical of what God has provided for us, and history demonstrates that the specific provision in view in the context of the Feast of Firstfruits is our reconciliation to Yahweh through the resurrection of His Messiah. Therefore, this precept is declaring that until God's provision of salvation is recognized and thankfully acknowledged, we cannot benefit from it in any way. In other words, salvation is not a gift until we receive it.
- (520) *Do not eat fresh ears of the new grain before that time. "You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings."* (Leviticus 23:14) We shouldn't gloss over the parting shot of the passage's discussion of the Feast of Firstfruits: "**It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations.**" This same formula was repeated in reference to Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (in Exodus 12), and, here in Leviticus 23, the Feast of Weeks, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. If nothing symbolic was being

foreshadowed by these *miqra'ey*, if they meant nothing beyond the rites and rituals that defined their observance, this would be an extremely odd thing to say. Note that only one miqra of the seven (the Feast of Trumpets) did not receive this instruction. Why? Because of the seven, only the Feast of Trumpets is to be primarily fulfilled through the gentiles, not Israel, for it is prophetic of the rapture of the *Ekklesia*—Yahweh's called-out assembly of believers in this present age—who are mostly gentiles. In a stunning display of God's perfect foreknowledge, however, the miqra that *began* the "Church" age, the Feast of Weeks (a.k.a. Pentecost), *did* concern Israel, for the original *Ekklesia* was almost exclusively Jewish.

- (521) *On Shavu'ot, bring loaves of bread together with the sacrifices which are then offered up in connection with the loaves. "You shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath [i.e., the Feast of Unleavened Bread], from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to Yahweh. You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to Yahweh. And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams. They shall be as a burnt offering to Yahweh, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to Yahweh. Then you shall sacrifice one kid of the goats as a sin offering, and two male lambs of the first year as a sacrifice of a peace offering. The priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before Yahweh, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to Yahweh for the priest."* (Leviticus 23:15-20) This is instruction concerning *Shavu'ot*, or the Feast of Weeks, known in Greek as "Pentecost." Rabbinical Judaism, clueless as to Yahweh's plan of redemption, identifies *Shavu'ot* with the giving of the Law at Sinai. This is patently ridiculous, for they didn't even arrive at the Wilderness of Sinai until three lunar months (88 days) after they left Egypt (see Exodus 19:1)—that's a thirty-eight days after *Shavu'ot*. Ironically, in Orthodox Judaism, the fifty days between the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Weeks (referred to as "Counting the Omer") has become a period of mourning, in memory of a plague that broke out during the time of Rabbi Akiba. Nobody gets married, throws a party, or gets a haircut between Nisan 15 and Sivan 6. It's so sad. If only they knew: Akiba *was* the plague, as we saw in the introduction to Chapter 10 of this volume.

So much for what the Feast of Weeks is *not*. Its actual significance is recorded in the New Covenant Scriptures: "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they [Yahshua's disciples] were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it

filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1-4) Luke has chronicled the beginning of the *Ekklesia*, the Church, by describing what defines it: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is something that had never happened before on a permanent, class-wide basis, but it was the direct fulfillment of a promise of a coming “Helper” that Yahshua had made in John 15 and 16. His explanation of who the Holy Spirit was had been precipitated by an insightful question posed by Judas the son of James: “Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?” (John 14:22) That’s the rub, isn’t it? We who have Yahweh’s Spirit abiding within us enjoy the help, comfort, and guidance that only an intimate relationship with God Himself can provide. Those without His Spirit think the peace we enjoy is evidence of our own self delusion. It’s something that can’t be explained, only experienced.

Notice how the Feast of Weeks as described in Leviticus 23 is brought to fruition in the Acts 2 experience. First, the date is correct—seven sabbaths plus one day after Yahshua experienced hell on our behalf on the Feast of Unleavened Bread in 33 AD. (That, by the way, puts the definitive Pentecost on a Sunday. Yahweh is declaring in advance that He knows that we gentiles in our ignorance will jettison his ordained Sabbaths in favor of Sunday worship. He’s not overtly authorizing it, mind you, just subtly reminding us of His omniscience.) Second, note that almost every type of offering listed in Leviticus (see Chapter 12 of this volume) is specified: the *minha* (grain offering), the *olah* (burnt offering), the *chata’t* (sin offering), *selem* (peace offering), and *nesek* (drink offering). All of these speak one way or another of Yahshua’s sacrifice, which He Himself said would be necessary in order for the Holy Spirit to dwell within us (see John 16:7).

Conspicuously absent from the list is the *asham*, or trespass offering, because (as we can see in hindsight) the Feast of Weeks is all about the Holy Spirit’s establishment of a permanent, personal relationship with us—not our preoccupation with the inadvertent blunders that only serve to prove we’ve fallen short of Yahweh’s holy standard. Sin is addressed at Pentecost—mistakes are not. Confirming this observation, note something extremely unusual in the instructions for observing the Feast of Weeks: leaven, a metaphor for sin, was to be added to the fine flour of the *minha*. Yahweh was telling us right up front that the *Ekklesia*—His Church—would be full of sinners. *Horrors!* We would be saved by grace, or not at all.

(522) *Offer up an additional sacrifice on Passover. “For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it.”* (Leviticus 23:36) It’s not Passover, Maimonides. The *miqra* referred to in the text is the Feast of Tabernacles, which (like the Feast of Unleavened Bread immediately following Passover) was actually an eight-day feast, commencing on one Sabbath and running through the next one. Nor is it “an additional sacrifice,” as if it was somehow less important than the one given on the first day of the Feast. There were actually sacrifices scheduled throughout the week of the Feast of Tabernacles: (1) a declining number of bulls from 13 on the first day to 1 on the eighth, for a total of 71; (2) two rams each day with one on the eighth, for a total of 15; (3) 14 lambs each day with seven on the eighth day, for a total of 105, and (4) one goat per day, for a total of eight. (See Mitzvah #542 for further discussion of these sacrifices).

Beyond the fact that Tabernacles was a huge annual end-of-summer harvest party that God threw for the whole nation, it is also prophetic of the coming Millennial kingdom of Yahshua, in which He will reign personally upon the throne of earth for a thousand years. Sacrifices aside, its most unique feature was the building of temporary shelters or booths for the worshippers to live in for the week—metaphorical of God (manifested as Yahshua) “camping out” among men. With this in mind, the symbolic significance of the sacrificial animals becomes clear. The bulls stood for false doctrine, the teachings of men that needed to be purged from the life of God’s people. Rams were symbolic of the Messiah in authority, as lambs were of His innocence. And goats were indicative of sin. Thus Yahshua’s authority over the Kingdom of God, purchased by the sacrifice of innocence at Calvary, has dealt forever with our sin—something that will nevertheless be part of our nature as long as we inhabit these mortal bodies. And false doctrine? The declining number of bulls sacrificed over the Festival’s week indicates that it will gradually die out over the course of the Millennium, a casualty of the light of God’s truth.

VOWS: PAYMENTS AND EXCHANGES

(523) *One who vows to the Lord the monetary value of a person shall pay the amount appointed in the Scriptural portion. “When a man consecrates by a vow certain persons to Yahweh, according to your valuation, if your valuation is of a male from twenty years old up to sixty years old, then your valuation shall be fifty shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. If it is a female, then*

your valuation shall be thirty shekels; and if from five years old up to twenty years old, then your valuation for a male shall be twenty shekels, and for a female ten shekels; and if from a month old up to five years old, then your valuation for a male shall be five shekels of silver, and for a female your valuation shall be three shekels of silver; and if from sixty years old and above, if it is a male, then your valuation shall be fifteen shekels, and for a female ten shekels. But if he is too poor to pay your valuation, then he shall present himself before the priest, and the priest shall set a value for him; according to the ability of him who vowed, the priest shall value him.” (Leviticus 27:2-8) Vows of service were never required by Yahweh, but He made provision for those whose devotion overflowed into the dedication of a person (whether oneself or a person under one’s control, such as a child or a bondsman) to the service of the sanctuary. A scriptural example of this principle is when Hannah, the mother of Samuel, dedicated him as a Nazarite to serve Eli the priest (see I Samuel 1).

Hannah had made her vow sincerely and voluntarily, and she followed through as promised. Her son Samuel went on to become one of Israel’s greatest prophets. But Yahweh knows our frailty. Here in Leviticus He made provision for the “conversion” of such a vow to another form of offering: one could “buy back” the person so consecrated. The amount varied, depending upon the relative value of his or her labor. (It’s not that males are “better” than females, but that men generally have greater physical strength than women, and are thus presumed to be capable of more work). Note that God in His mercy allows the whole complicated sliding scale of redemption to be thrown out if the one who made the vow is too poor to pay it. He knows the attitude of the heart; that’s what matters to Him.

- (524) *If a beast is exchanged for one that had been set apart as an offering, both become sacred.* “If it is an animal that men may bring as an offering to Yahweh, all that anyone gives to Yahweh shall be holy. He shall not substitute it or exchange it, good for bad or bad for good; and if he at all exchanges animal for animal, then both it and the one exchanged for it shall be holy.” (Leviticus 27:9-10) We are still on the subject of offerings made to accompany vows, which are one type of the *selem*, or peace offering. The *selem* is completely voluntary. Thus when one selects a clean animal from his flock or herd to offer, the choice is his alone. Yahweh is instructing here that the worshipper is not to “go back on the deal,” or change his mind about which animal to offer. A promise is a promise: it must be kept. If a second animal is selected, that’s fine, but *both of them* will be sacrificed.

Upon reflection, we can see that Yahweh is telling us about His own character: *“I will not go back on My word. I will send My Messiah, Yahshua, to be the sacrifice that seals My vow to reconcile you to Myself.”* History has proven that He has kept His vow. We cannot substitute ourselves as the sacrifices supporting His vow—the Sacrifice Yahweh originally selected will suffice, or nothing will. We can, however, dedicate ourselves to His service, not to replace His sacrifice, but to gratefully acknowledge it. In this case, *both* sacrifices are holy—albeit in different ways.

- (525) *Do not exchange a beast set aside for sacrifice. “If it is an animal that men may bring as an offering to Yahweh, all that anyone gives to Yahweh shall be holy. He shall not substitute it or exchange it, good for bad or bad for good; and if he at all exchanges animal for animal, then both it and the one exchanged for it shall be holy.”* (Leviticus 27:9-10) It’s interesting that the prohibition against exchanging *selem* sacrifices works both ways—**“good for bad or bad for good.”** When it comes to the efficacy of sacrifices, the Messiah’s perfection cannot be replaced by our less-than-perfect lives. We can’t atone for our own sins, so exchanging “good for bad” obviously won’t work. But “bad for good” doesn’t work either. Christ’s sacrifice is not a desperate attempt on Yahweh’s part to salvage a plan that wasn’t working. The Law was *never* intended to save us, and it was *never* God’s intention to accept the sacrifice of sinful men as payment for their own redemption. So He isn’t “exchanging” sacrifices by sending the Messiah. His word, His plan, has remained unchanged from the beginning.
- (526) *One who vows to the Lord the monetary value of an unclean beast shall pay its value. “If it is an unclean animal, which they do not offer as a sacrifice to Yahweh, then he shall present the animal before the priest; and the priest shall set a value for it, whether it is good or bad; as you, the priest, value it, so it shall be. But if he wants at all to redeem it, then he must add one-fifth to your valuation.”* (Leviticus 27:11-13) Maimonides has missed the point entirely. Suppose the worshipper wants to voluntarily contribute something, but all he’s got to offer is an “unclean” animal—for instance, a donkey, horse, or camel. Though not suitable for blood sacrifices, and forbidden as food, these beasts still had value and utility to their owners as pack animals. (Can you imagine trying to carry the entire carcass of a bull, as required in Leviticus 4:11-12, without using a beast of burden?) So Yahweh declares that they can be contributed to the priests and Levites to help them in their work. The priests were to assign a money value to the “gift horse” based on the going rate for an animal of this age and condition. (*Is it a yearling thoroughbred, or is it a sad old nag ready for the glue factory?*) If the

worshipper subsequently wished to buy back His animal, he was to pay 120% of the price the priest had set.

This “add one fifth” rule shows up several places in this passage. I may be overanalyzing this, but it seems to me that Yahweh is saying, “Okay, I know you’re only human, so I’ve provided a way for you to buy your donkey back that will numerically reflect that fact. Your asset is obviously worth five fifths of its value, but the redemption price will be *six* fifths—six being the number of fallen man. I will not allow you to shortchange my priests, for they serve me by serving you.” Or something like that.

- (527) *One who vows the value of his house shall pay according to the appraisal of the Kohein. “And when a man dedicates his house to be holy to Yahweh, then the priest shall set a value for it, whether it is good or bad; as the priest values it, so it shall stand. If he who dedicated it wants to redeem his house, then he must add one-fifth of the money of your valuation to it, and it shall be his.”* (Leviticus 27:14-15) The same sort of principle we saw in the previous mitzvah is in operation here. One could give a house to Yahweh to be used by the priests and Levites. (It didn’t have to be converted to cash first, as Maimonides implies.) If you’ll recall, the rules concerning the transfer of a house depended upon whether or not it was located within a walled city (see Mitzvah #269). Those that were could be sold (or as here, given away) permanently, after a one-year “seller’s remorse” period had passed. Those outside walled cities reverted to their original owners at Jubilee. Thus the price the priest set for a house would be affected by the time remaining until Jubilee and/or by the house’s location, among other things. Once again, if the worshipper later wished to redeem it, he was to pay the priests six fifths of its predetermined value. Yahweh was allowing the alteration of a vow, but not its negation: if someone wished to change his mind about a voluntary offering, it could not be for monetary reasons. After all, **“The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”** (I Timothy 6:10)
- (528) *One who sanctifies to the Lord a portion of his field shall pay according to the estimation appointed in the Scriptural portion. “If a man dedicates to Yahweh part of a field of his possession, then your valuation shall be according to the seed for it. A homer of barley seed shall be valued at fifty shekels of silver. If he dedicates his field from the Year of Jubilee, according to your valuation it shall stand. But if he dedicates his field after the Jubilee, then the priest shall reckon to him the money due according to the years that remain till the Year of Jubilee, and it shall be deducted from your valuation. And if he who dedicates the field ever*

wishes to redeem it, then he must add one-fifth of the money of your valuation to it, and it shall belong to him. But if he does not want to redeem the field, or if he has sold the field to another man, it shall not be redeemed anymore; but the field, when it is released in the Jubilee, shall be holy to Yahweh, as a devoted field; it shall be the possession of the priest. And if a man dedicates to Yahweh a field which he has bought, which is not the field of his possession, then the priest shall reckon to him the worth of your valuation, up to the Year of Jubilee, and he shall give your valuation on that day as a holy offering to Yahweh. In the Year of Jubilee the field shall return to him from whom it was bought, to the one who owned the land as a possession.” (Leviticus 27:16-24) The principle here was that all land in Israel ultimately belonged to Yahweh. He in turn entrusted it to families within Israel, to whom it would “belong” in perpetuity—as long as they didn’t forsake Yahweh and get themselves thrown out of the Land, of course. Just as with an animal or a house, this land could be voluntarily dedicated to Yahweh. That is, the produce that a plot of land yielded year by year could be given to the priests in honor of Yahweh. This was strictly at the discretion of the landowner/worshipper—there was no stigma for *not* doing so.

As we have seen in the rules of Jubilee, however, land in Israel could change hands. It could be “leased” to someone else with the understanding that the landowner or his heirs would get it back at Jubilee—a once in a lifetime (once every fifty years) event. Therefore, two types of land dedication were possible. The land could be dedicated by its actual owner, or it could be dedicated by someone who has leased it from the owner until the next Jubilee. In each case, the field’s value was based on how much produce it yielded, and a formula is provided here in case the owner wished to redeem it—as usual, for six fifths of its actual value. As we have come to expect, a field dedicated by a lessee would revert back to its owner at Jubilee. But here’s the interesting twist: if the owner dedicated his land and did *not* redeem it, it would become the possession of the priesthood in perpetuity—that is, its “ownership” would transfer from the worshipper back to Yahweh (whose land it was anyway, truth be told).

Why was this so? Land is representative of an inheritance, that which one gains by virtue of his relationship with his father—in this case, our heavenly Father. In other words, it is symbolic of eternal life. This life, of course, is the very nature of Yahweh—He exists from eternity past to eternity future. And we can inherit that everlasting life (at least in the forward direction) from Him—but only if our “land,” our inheritance, has been redeemed, and redeemed at a *very* high price, six fifths of its actual value. That’s what Yahweh did for us by sending His human “Son” to die to atone for our sins—He redeemed our inheritance. If we choose not to

avail ourselves of so great a gift, this inheritance will revert to Him. Worse still, the Leviticus passage mentions the case of a man who has dedicated his land to the priesthood, but then has turned around and sold or leased it to a third party, thus making the redemption of his inheritance impossible. Unless I miss my guess, this is a picture of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit Yahshua warned against in Mark 3:29—the “third party” is metaphorical of Satan.

- (529) *Do not transfer a beast set apart for sacrifice from one class of sacrifices to another. “But the firstborn of the animals, which should be Yahweh’s firstborn, no man shall dedicate; whether it is an ox or sheep, it is Yahweh’s.”* (Leviticus 27:26) The point here is that you can’t “give” to Yahweh what already belongs to Him. A *selem* offering was the voluntary sacrifice of something the worshipper owned. On the other hand, a firstborn ox or sheep was *by definition* already the property of Yahweh. The application is obvious: Yahshua plays the role of Yahweh’s “firstborn.” Since He is thus set apart to Yahweh, His is the *only* suitable sacrifice to atone for our sins. If we, then, attempt to approach Yahweh with vows of good behavior or sacrifices of our own invention, we’ve missed the point, for these things are not efficacious in reconciling us to God. Everything we have is a gift from Yahweh, even our lives. And it’s a good thing to dedicate what we’ve been given back to Him. But we can’t purchase His forgiveness. Only the Firstborn can do that. The Firstborn is Yahweh’s because the Firstborn *is* Yahweh.
- (530) *Decide in regard to dedicated property as to which is sacred to the Lord and which belongs to the Kohein. “Nevertheless no devoted offering that a man may devote to Yahweh of all that he has, both man and beast, or the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted offering is most holy to Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 27:28) In the English, this sounds contradictory to the precepts we’ve been studying in the previous few mitzvot, where Yahweh has declared that things dedicated to Him *may* be redeemed—going so far as to set the price of redemption in several cases. But here He says that redemption will not be allowed. What’s up?

The inconsistency is an illusion precipitated by an inadequate translation of the Hebrew verb *haram* and its related noun *herem*, rendered here as “devote” and “devoted offering.” Far from being a mere synonym for “dedicate” (the Hebrew verb *qadash*, related to the noun *qodesh*, meaning something holy or set-apart), *haram* means to ban, prohibit, or dedicate for destruction. For example, the city of Jericho (Joshua 6:17) was “put under the ban,” or “devoted to destruction,” meaning that the Israelites were to kill or destroy whatever they found there, even if it had

intrinsic value. A fellow named Achan got himself in deep dung for disregarding the *herem* concerning Jericho. Likewise, Samuel instructed King Saul to wipe out the nation of Amalek, including all their livestock. But Saul took it upon himself to substitute *haram* with *qadash*, intending (so he said) to sacrifice the captured booty to God—in direct defiance of Leviticus 27:28. Yahweh considered the breach so fundamental, it would cost Saul the throne. Samuel summed it up: **“To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed [better] than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.”** (I Samuel 15:22-23)

Meanwhile, Maimonides, like a guy obsessed with rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, is concerned only with divvying up the loot between Yahweh and the priests. That’s probably because the authority of the priesthood had been usurped by the rabbis during the time of Akiba, and Yahweh hadn’t had much to say since then. Well, *somebody* has to take care of God’s property, right? It would be funny if it weren’t so sad.

- (531) *Do not sell a field devoted to the Lord. “Nevertheless no devoted offering that a man may devote to Yahweh of all that he has, both man and beast, or the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted offering is most holy to Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 27:28) Again, Jericho is the classic example. The fields supporting the city were declared to be “most holy” to Yahweh, and were thus removed from the potential roster of lands to be distributed among the Israelite clans entering Canaan under Joshua. One couldn’t sell (i.e. lease) them to another, since they were the property of Yahweh.
- (532) *Do not redeem a field devoted to the Lord. “Nevertheless no devoted offering that a man may devote to Yahweh of all that he has, both man and beast, or the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted offering is most holy to Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 27:28) This is the third mitzvah Maimonides has wrung from this verse, apparently without having a clue as to what it meant. Obviously, if a man couldn’t “sell” lands under the ban (*herem*), neither could he redeem them. The rules of Jubilee did not apply. In practical terms, the *herem* only had significance to Israel during the years of the conquest of Canaan. There were seven people groups singled out for destruction: the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Giragshites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Not everything they possessed would be placed under the ban, however. Keil and Delitzsch explain: “The owner of cattle and fields was only allowed to put them under the ban when they had been either desecrated by idolatry or abused to unholy purposes. For there can be no doubt that the idea which lay at the foundation of the ban was that of a compulsory dedication of something which resisted or impeded sanctification; so that in all cases in which it was carried into execution by

the community or the magistracy, it was an act of the judicial holiness of God manifesting itself in righteousness and judgment.” Or as Moses put it, **“You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship Yahweh your God with such things.”** (Deuteronomy 12:2-4)

And by the way, this precept is not without significance for us. In these last days, virtually the whole world has become a “place where the nations served their false gods.” The Israelite conquest of Canaan was supposed to be a metaphorical microcosm of Yahweh’s ultimate global housecleaning during the coming Tribulation. The seven dispossessed peoples thus represent the totality of the God-rejecting world. If I’m reading this correctly, I believe Leviticus 27:28 is telling us that the infrastructure used to support Satan’s agenda in this present world—the corridors of power in government, the military, business, finance, education, the media, and even the pulpit, will not simply be retasked to other purposes during the Millennium. Rather they will be considered “most holy” to Yahweh—either used for His glory or obliterated from the earth.

- (533) *Make confession before the Lord of any sin that one has committed, when bringing a sacrifice and at other times. “When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against Yahweh, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give it to the one he has wronged. But if the man has no relative to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution for the wrong must go to Yahweh for the priest.”* (Numbers 5:6-8)
- There is an important principle being voiced here that is all too easy to miss. Moses at first speaks of sins committed against Yahweh, but then proceeds to prescribe how restitution is to be made to *the person* who has been wronged. His point is that a trespass against a man is in reality a sin against the man’s Creator. When a man is wronged, Yahweh considers it “unfaithfulness” against Himself. That’s even worse than it sounds: the word in Hebrew is *ma’al*, meaning treachery, disloyalty, treason—*perfidy* (though that’s a word nobody uses anymore). Would we act the way we do toward our fellow men if we realized that God takes it *personally* when we abuse them? Would we “screw” our neighbor if we knew God considered it adultery against Him when we did?

As we have seen before, God's idea of justice is restitution, not punishment. The wronged party is to be reimbursed for his trouble—and not just made whole, but given six-fifths of the damages. And what if your victim isn't around anymore to receive the overdue restitution? What if he has no heirs? Restitution must still be made, paid to the one who was *really* offended—Yahweh Himself. And how does one reimburse Yahweh? Through the priesthood—those whose role it is to intercede between God and man. These days, that's any and every believer.

- (534) *Do not put olive oil in the meal-offering of a woman suspected of adultery. "If any man's wife goes astray and behaves unfaithfully [ma'al] toward him, and a man lies with her carnally, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and it is concealed that she has defiled herself, and there was no witness against her, nor was she caught—if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, who has defiled herself; or if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, although she has not defiled herself—then the man shall bring his wife to the priest. He shall bring the offering required for her, one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it, because it is a grain offering of jealousy, an offering for remembering, for bringing iniquity to remembrance."* (Numbers 5:13-15) We saw this passage (Numbers 5:11-31) once before, in Mitzvah #74. It derails the he-said-she-said games that stem from marital infidelity, protecting an innocent wife from the suspicions of a jealous and paranoid husband, while forcing a wife who actually is guilty of adultery to either confess or perjure herself before the Almighty, leaving the wronged husband guiltless. As it turns out, there are prophetic ramifications to this, as well (see #535).

Maimonides' current mitzvah and the next one concentrate on relatively minor details in the Levitical truth-resolving process: what two things *not* to put onto the *minha*, or grain offering, that accompanied the inquiry. If you'll recall, the fine flour of the *minha* was ordinarily supposed to have olive oil and frankincense (as well as salt) added to it. The grain offering commemorates the provision we enjoy from Yahweh's hand—the most significant facet of which is His provision of forgiveness, the atonement for our sins. The olive oil that's usually poured onto the *minha* is symbolic of the Holy Spirit's indwelling of the life of the worshipper. But in this case, oil would be inappropriate, because when the inquiry begins, it is unclear whether or not the accused wife is innocent, as she claims. The Holy Spirit is willing to cleanse us of our sins, of course, but only if we confess them and repent. Adultery symbolized the treachery of giving our love and devotion to a "god" other than Yahweh—and was thus punishable by death. If we have been "born from below" instead of "born from above," that is, if we have embraced Satan's eternal spirit

instead of Yahweh's, then no amount of olive oil on our grain offering is going to extricate us from our predicament. It is an "offering for remembering." Our iniquity will be brought to remembrance, forever.

- (535) *Do not put frankincense on it.* **"He shall bring the offering required for her, one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it, because it is a grain offering of jealousy, an offering for remembering, for bringing iniquity to remembrance."** (Numbers 5:13-15) A continuation of the previous mitzvah, here we see that just as oil was not to be applied to a "grain offering of jealousy," neither was frankincense to be sprinkled upon it, as was the usual case for a *minha*. Frankincense, you'll recall, indicated purity through sacrifice, specifically, our purity in God's eyes through the sacrifice of His atoning Lamb, Yahshua. If we have already been made pure, no further sacrifice is needed, but if we have given ourselves to Satan in a spiritually adulterous relationship, Yahshua's sacrifice will do us no good. It's scary and sobering when God says of His Spirit and of His Son's sacrifice, "Don't bother. You can't use them." The very thought should shake us to the core. Or should I say, "*should have shaken us...*"

As I explained in [Chapter 3 of *Future History*](#), God's plan of redemption will take 7,000 years to unfold. Each millennial milestone (spaced at precise thousand-year intervals from the Passion, 33 A.D.) marks a significant landmark: Adam's fall, Noah's flood, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, the building of the temple, the Passion of the Messiah, the year-1033 event I'm about to explain, and finally, the commencement of Yahshua's Millennial reign. What happened in 1033? Yahweh, the jealous Husband of Israel, and Yahshua, the Bridegroom of the Ekklesia, put us to the Numbers 5 test, and we were found unfaithful.

In 1033, you see, Jerusalem suffered a huge earthquake. As a result, the city's sole water source, the Gihon Spring, turned septic, a condition that persisted for the next forty years. It became the "water of bitterness" with which the suspected adulteress was to be tested: **"The priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it into the water."** The Gihon Spring was literally the "holy water in an earthen vessel" that received "the dust on the floor of the tabernacle," for it lies in the very shadow of the temple mount. **"Then the priest shall stand the woman before Yahweh, uncover the woman's head, and put the offering for remembering in her hands, which is the grain offering of jealousy. And the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that brings a curse. And the priest shall put her under oath, and say to the woman, 'If no man has lain with you, and if you have not gone astray to uncleanness while under your husband's authority, be free from this bitter water that brings a curse. But if you have gone**

astray while under your husband's authority, and if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has lain with you'—then the priest shall put the woman under the oath of the curse, and he shall say to the woman—'Yahweh make you a curse and an oath among your people, when Yahweh makes your thigh rot and your belly swell; and may this water that causes the curse go into your stomach, and make your belly swell and your thigh rot.'" (Numbers 5:17-22)

The bitter waters of the Gihon Spring not only drove out the last of the Jews from the region (due to rabbinic superstition and Muslim greed), but also poisoned thousands of Catholic pilgrims. Both Israel and the Church were thus found to have **"gone astray to uncleanness while under [their] husband's authority."** But a glimmer of hope is held out for the faithful remnant. The Church of this period was addressed by the risen Yahshua: **"To the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.'" So much for the encouragement. "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols."** He's talking about spiritual adultery. **"And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works."** It's an individual matter: not everyone in Thyatira failed the test. **"Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations."** (Revelation 2:18-26) It's not too late to repent. But if we have been giving our affections to false gods—of any description—we must turn around and face Yahweh. Now is the day of salvation.

Chapter 14

Sacrifices: Time, Place, and Attitude

There's a fascinating conversation, recorded in all three synoptic Gospels, that sheds valuable light on the distinction between keeping the Law and attaining salvation. **"As he was starting out on a trip, a man came running up to Jesus, knelt down, and asked, 'Good Teacher, what should I do to get eternal life?'"** Good question. One to which the whole world wants an answer.

Allow me to read between the lines a bit, to flesh out the plot a little. Yahshua and His disciples were on their way out of town, and the man (let's call him "Rich," 'cause he *was*), was desperate. He'd been too distracted to visit Yahshua during His stay in that city—running the family business, discussing matters of significance at the city gate with the other influential men of the community, and participating in worship and study at the local synagogue—and now the young rabbi was leaving. Richard's question had been on his mind for some time, bothering him, nagging him, worrying him. For his own peace of mind, he needed an answer, and everybody said this itinerant preacher was the guy to ask. So he ran up to Yahshua and blurted out his question.

Yahshua sized him up. Rich was well dressed, slightly out of breath, and bore an earnest, hopeful expression on his face. Remarkably, he knelt before Yahshua, though he knew Him only by reputation. *A study in contrasts, this one is, Yahshua might have thought. Wealthy, but without the arrogant demeanor so common to rich men. Busy doing good things in this world, but focused on eternity. I like him! But he's relying on observance of the Law to save him—and it can't. I need to show him where he's going wrong.*

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good." Rich didn't know Yahshua from Adam. He was just being polite, figuring a little respect might yield an encouraging answer. So Yahshua began his revelation by gently reminding him that "good" isn't a relative term as far as Yahweh is concerned. You either are or you aren't—and *none of us* are truly good if God's righteousness isn't standing in for ours. Yahshua then set about defining what it would take to be "good" in reality. For starters, **"But as for your question, you know the commandments: 'Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not testify falsely. Do not cheat. Honor your father and mother.'"** The Master was charitable, not willing to let Rich down too abruptly. He didn't mention covetousness, a test He knew Richard couldn't pass. Abstaining from making idols to worship, refraining from taking Yahweh's name lightly, and keeping the Sabbath were all relatively easy to give lip service to in that society (though they're practically impossible in ours). Yahshua listed only those Commandments that, on the literal surface, any morally upright person

(like Richard) could feel reasonably certain they'd never broken—not realizing that in God's eyes, hate was tantamount to murder, lust might as well be adultery, and covetousness is just as bad as actual theft.

“Teacher,” the man replied, **“I’ve obeyed all these commandments since I was a child.”** *Yes, I believe you think you have,* Yahshua thought. *You certainly try to do the right thing, and I love you for that. But I must show you where you’ve broken the Law, because you can’t see it, can you?* **“Jesus felt genuine love for this man as he looked at him. ‘You lack only one thing,’ he told him. ‘Go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’”** (Mark 10:17-21) You missed that one in the Ten Commandments, didn’t you? *Give your wealth away? Is that in there?* Okay, it doesn’t say this in so many words, but for Richard it loomed large, right there at the beginning of the list: **“You shall have no other gods before Me.”** (Exodus 20:3) Yahshua knew, even if Richard hadn’t realized it until now, that the man’s *trust* was in his money, not his Creator. In asking him to sell his possessions, Yahshua was telling him to turn his back on a false and deceitful god—one he wasn’t even aware he was serving. And in telling Rich to “follow Me,” Yahshua was equating Himself to **“Yahweh your God, who brought you...out of the house of bondage,”** (Exodus 20:2) the One before whom we are to have no other gods. He was saying, “Dump your false god and embrace the true One—Me.”

The shock was too much for poor Rich. **“At this, the man’s face fell, and he went sadly away because he had many possessions.”** (Mark 10:22) More to the point, he was sad because he now realized how important—how *vital*—his possessions were to him. Even if eternal life was at stake, he didn’t think this was something he was prepared to do. At this juncture, it is appropriate to ask ourselves, quite seriously, if there is anything in our lives we would be reluctant to give up if God asked us to. Not bad things, necessarily, just *things*. Possessions, attitudes, the security of a job or career, the comfort of our habits or traditions. I’m not saying that God automatically demands that we give up what we enjoy most in this life. I’m saying the same thing David said: **“Delight yourself also in Yahweh, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to Yahweh, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.”** (Psalm 37:4-5) It’s a horse-before-the-cart sort of thing: if our delight is in Yahweh, the desire of our heart will be more “face time” with Yahweh. But this doesn’t occur in a vacuum; we have lives in this world—aptitudes and talents, interests and gifts, duties and responsibilities. God hasn’t called us to retreat from these things, like a monk in a cell. One whose delight is in Yahweh will (in my experience) be given opportunities to use both his gifts and his challenges in Yahweh’s service, just as Rich was challenged to do with his riches.

One example: I know a guy whose “delight is in Yahweh” who happens to be Rich—not “Richard,” but *wealthy* with a capital R. As far as I can tell, however,

he never gives money a second thought. It's just *there*, like the air he breathes. He uses it—sometimes a *lot* of it—in God's service. But his real delight is studying God's Word—getting into the nitty gritty of it, discovering new things he didn't know before. How did God give him the desires of his heart? By removing him, forcibly, even painfully, from the world of business—something he was very, very good at. Does he miss his old life? Not even remotely.

Another example, this time personal: I picked up the guitar when I was a teenager, and never put it down. At one time, I considered “turning pro,” but observed that I didn't really like smoky bars (which is where working musicians most often had to earn their livelihood). Now in case you haven't noticed, my delight is in Yahweh. In the matter of the guitar, even though I haven't earned much of my living with it since I was in my early twenties, I have still been given “the desires of my heart”—I get to play praise and worship music with my friends a couple of times a week, and have counted it a privilege to do so for the past thirty or forty years. Did Yahweh ask me to give up the guitar because I enjoy it so much? No. Just the business end of it—leaving nothing left but the fun part. If it had been an impediment to my faith, however, it might have been a different story.

Using the reaction of poor Richard as an opportunity to teach His disciples (and through them, us) Yahshua noted how easy it was for the things of this world—even good things—to block our path to the Kingdom of Heaven by tempting us to rely on, or merely devote our love to, “other gods.” **“Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it is for rich people to get into the Kingdom of God!’**” I suppose He could have said, “How hard it is for serious guitarists to get into the Kingdom of God,” or filled in the blank with whatever potential object of devotion presses *your* buttons. I suppose wealth is the most universal example of a stealthy “other god.” But even this was surprising to His disciples. **“This amazed them.”** Why? Because they recognized wealth as a blessing, a good thing given to some of us by the hand of God. False gods were supposed to be bad things, weren't they? They fostered cruelty, arrogance, lust, or greed, didn't they? But here was a guy who was to all appearances a good man, an enthusiastic devotee of the Torah, blessed by material possessions and serious about his eternal destiny. And yet Yahshua had demonstrated—*proved*—that his very blessings were blocking the door to eternal life. In other words, the “other gods” we had been warned against in the First Commandment could be *anything*, good, bad, or neutral. Nothing was to come between us and our God. And specifically, this meant that Richard was indeed a “lawbreaker,” even though he had tried his best to keep the Commandments.

It wasn't just rich people, though, who had problems with this concept. **“But Jesus said again, ‘Dear children, it is very hard to get into the Kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of**

God!” There have been attempts to make this saying mean that rich people had to put aside their wealth in order to be saved (based on the erroneous assumption that the “needle” here is one of the narrow gates in a city wall, one that couldn’t be entered by a camel unless the beast had been unloaded). That theory doesn’t hold up to scrutiny, however, because the word for “needle” is the Greek “raphis,” meaning a sewing needle.

Did Yahshua really say “camel”? The Aramaic word that Yahshua probably used—*gamla*—means both “camel” and “rope,” since ropes were often made of camel’s hair. But you can’t get a rope through the eye of a needle any more that you can a whole camel. Either way, the point was just as the disciples interpreted it: *that ain’t happenin’*. **“The disciples were astounded. ‘Then who in the world can be saved?’ they asked. Jesus looked at them intently and said, ‘Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God.’”** (Mark 10:23-27 NLT) Here’s the key to the whole conundrum. Entering the Kingdom of God is *impossible* for men to achieve—especially those who possess something in this life that insulates them from the world’s woes, making the need for reliance on God’s grace that much harder to perceive. We can’t work our way in, buy our way in, or impress Yahweh with our qualifications or devotion. **“It is impossible.”** The only way in is for God to bring us in. In that case, it’s not only *possible* to enter, we have an engraved invitation to do so.

It was not lost on the disciples that they had actually done what “Rich” had been challenged to do. They hadn’t been rich, of course, but they hadn’t been down and out, either. They had had businesses, homes, families—all of which were now taking a back seat to the calling they had embraced. Naturally, it was Peter who blurted out the obvious: **“Then Peter began to mention all that he and the other disciples had left behind. ‘We’ve given up everything to follow you,’ he said.”** Well, they hadn’t given up *everything* yet, but Yahshua knew they eventually would, suffering persecution and martyrdom for His sake. **“And Jesus replied, ‘I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, will receive now in return, a hundred times over, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—with persecutions. And in the world to come they will have eternal life.’”** There’s the item that our friend Richard had been so concerned about—eternal life. Note that once again, Yahshua ties it to our willingness to give up the good things of this life for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven—something He Himself personified. It’s not a barter agreement, however—a hundred-for-one deal: *get ‘em while they’re hot*. Rather, Yahshua is describing the outcome of doing this the way the disciples had—spontaneously, with no thought of reward, simply because it was the right thing to do—simply because their delight was in Yahweh. This brings into focus the reason the rich man’s adherence to the Law couldn’t promise eternal life (beside the fact that he hadn’t really kept the Law): His Torah observance had been done

out of a sense of duty, cultural tradition, and racial pride, not because He honored the God who had issued the Commandments.

Note also that Yahshua promised “persecutions” along with the rewards. He, more than anyone, knew that doing the right thing for the right reason would earn us as many enemies as it would friends. If Richard had overheard Peter’s remark and Yahshua’s reply, how would he have reacted? It would have stung a bit, and people don’t like to get stung.

“But many who seem to be important now will be the least important then, and those who are considered least here will be the greatest then.” (Mark 10:28-31 NLT) In direct contradiction to popular expectations, Yahshua described the hierarchy of heaven, or rather, described what it was *not*: a reflection of our status here in this life. In the Kingdom, your relative importance (indicated by the responsibility you’d be given) was determined by how faithful you were with the gifts and enlightenment you’d received as a mortal man or woman—It wasn’t the gifts you’d received, but what you’d done with them. Richard had been in a unique position to feed the poor, to alleviate suffering. He declined to do so, not trusting Yahweh to keep him from becoming one of the poor himself. His greatness among men in this life would not translate into a similarly privileged position in the next.

The disciples, on the other hand, with no more evidence of Yahshua’s divinity than Rich had received, had given up the lives they’d led in order to follow the man whom they believed to be the promised Messiah. Matthew’s account records that when Peter asked Him flatly what his reward would be, Yahshua gave him a straight, and surprising, answer: **“Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”** (Matthew 19:28) That’s like being suddenly promoted from pauper to prince—not in terms of wealth, but in terms of authority, of responsibility. As Yahshua had said, they would gain precisely the same kinds of things they had relinquished for the sake of the Good News.

As we return to our study of the Torah, we are reminded that the purpose of the sacrificial portion of the Law was to point the way to the Messiah—to illustrate His mission and demonstrate His love. Thus keeping its precepts for their own sake is pointless. And the individual directives we receive from Yahweh’s Spirit (for instance, **“Go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven”**) are meaningless as well if not carried out in emulation of our Messiah’s example.

SCHEDULED SACRIFICES

- (536) *Offer up the regular sacrifices daily (two lambs as burnt offerings).* “My offering, My food for My offerings made by fire as a sweet aroma to Me, you shall be careful to offer to Me at their appointed time.... This is the offering made by fire which you shall offer to Yahweh: two male lambs in their first year without blemish, day by day, as a regular burnt offering. The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, and one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering mixed with one-fourth of a hin of pressed oil. It is a regular burnt offering which was ordained at Mount Sinai for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh. And its drink offering shall be one-fourth of a hin for each lamb; in a holy place you shall pour out the drink to Yahweh as an offering. The other lamb you shall offer in the evening; as the morning grain offering and its drink offering, you shall offer it as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to Yahweh.” (Numbers 28:2-8) Israel was *as a nation* to bring certain offerings to Yahweh at specified times. None of these were to be consumed by the priests or the worshippers. The animal sacrifices were *olah*, or burnt offerings, to be completely consumed on the fires of the altar, as were the *minha* or grain offerings that accompanied them. Likewise, the wine of the *neseq* drink offering was to be poured out upon the ground—no one was to drink it. “Observant” Jews today don’t observe any of this—they *can’t* without a priesthood and a sanctuary. But the symbols presented are palpably obvious to us who believe in the Jewish Messiah, Yahshua: He is the Lamb. The grain is His provision for our salvation, permeated with the “oil” of His Holy Spirit. And the wine poured out upon holy ground is the blood He shed on our behalf at Calvary. You’d have to be blind to call yourself “Torah-observant” and not be able to see these things.

Actually, it’s even worse than it looks at first glance for those in denial concerning these symbols. Not only does Yahweh call the burnt offerings “a sweet aroma” to Him (i.e., something that gives Him pleasure), He says they’re His *food*—that which sustains Him, nourishes Him, and strengthens Him. It isn’t the sacrifice of His Messiah *per se* that does these things—it’s what that sacrifice makes possible: the reconciliation and redemption of people like you and me who choose to reciprocate God’s love. Yes, I know Yahweh is omnipotent and self-existent. That doesn’t mean He doesn’t have needs: He hungers for our love.

- (537) *Offer up an additional sacrifice every Shabbat (two lambs).* “And on the Sabbath day two lambs in their first year, without blemish, and two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, with its drink offering—this is

the burnt offering for every Sabbath, besides the regular burnt offering with its drink offering.” (Numbers 28:9-10) The lambs of the daily sacrifice were offered up one in the morning and the other in the evening, telling us that from beginning to end Yahweh is focused on providing our reconciliation. That principle is doubled on the Sabbath, for this day is symbolic of our rest in Yahweh, the final destination of His plan of redemption. The Sabbath tells us that in the end, we cannot work for our salvation. It is a gift—paid for by the Lamb Himself.

- (538) *Offer up an additional sacrifice every New Moon. “At the beginnings of your months you shall present a burnt offering to Yahweh: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, without blemish; three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, for each bull; two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, for the one ram; and one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour, mixed with oil, as a grain offering for each lamb, as a burnt offering of sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh. Their drink offering shall be half a hin of wine for a bull, one-third of a hin for a ram, and one-fourth of a hin for a lamb; this is the burnt offering for each month throughout the months of the year. Also one kid of the goats as a sin offering to Yahweh shall be offered, besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.”* (Numbers 28:11-15) Genesis 1:14 tells us that the “lights in the expanse of heaven” were to function as signs. The phases of the moon are thus a constant reminder of the renewal that’s possible through Christ’s sacrifice. The first sliver of the new moon was to mark the beginning of each of Israel’s months, and with this sign were to come a group of sacrifices marking the renewal that was at hand.

By now we should be quite familiar with the sacrificial elements and what they represent. The two young bulls stand for human pride, the antithesis of spiritual awareness. The “bulls” of temporal power and intellectual arrogance must be offered up first if the other sacrifices are to hold any significance for us. (I have reason to believe that the reason *two* of them are specified is because these evils exist in both Jewish and gentile camps. See Mitzvah #540 for some illuminating evidence.) The ram symbolizes the reigning Messiah—Yahshua in the authority of His kingdom. Seven Lambs are also reminiscent of the Messiah, but this time the emphasis is on His innocence and the perfection and sufficiency of His sacrifice. Fine flour is metaphorical of God’s provision of our redemption—refined by crushing pressure, with no worthless chaff present. The oil mixed with the fine flour represents the Holy Spirit (see Zechariah 4). The wine for the drink offering is the blood of Christ (see Mark 14:23-24). And finally, a young goat is offered up as a picture of the death of sin in our lives.

All of this was to happen every month. God knows we need constant reminders of our place and His plan. (That’s why He calls us sheep.) One wonders if anyone between Moses and Malachi stopped to ask why these sacrifices had been commanded. It was enough, I suppose, to understand this: **“The law of Yahweh is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of Yahweh is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of Yahweh are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of Yahweh is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of Yahweh is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of Yahweh are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward.”** (Psalm 19:7-11) Still, twenty-twenty hindsight is a wonderful thing.

- (539) *Bring an additional offering on Shavu’ot.* **“Also on the day of the firstfruits, when you bring a new grain offering to Yahweh at your Feast of Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. You shall present a burnt offering as a sweet aroma to Yahweh: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, with their grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for each bull, two-tenths for the one ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; also one kid of the goats, to make atonement for you. Be sure they are without blemish. You shall present them with their drink offerings, besides the regular burnt offering with its grain offering.** (Numbers 28:26-31)
- The next few mitzvot will describe the “extra” national offerings required on the Feasts of Yahweh. Though Moses discusses the Passover-Feast of Unleavened Bread sacrifices in verses 16-25, Maimonides forgot to mention them, sort of. You see, he thought he covered it in Mitzvah #522, but got it wrong—that one’s actually dedicated to the Feast of Tabernacles (see also Mitzvah #542). (Passover, you’ll recall, marked the killing of the family’s personal Lamb, which was to be eaten amid ceremony fraught with portent after sundown—that is, on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This feast as a national holiday lasted from Sabbath through Sabbath, and each day of the feast, national sacrifices were brought, identical to that of the new moon offerings. Neither Moses nor Maimonides specifically mentions the Feast of Firstfruits (see Mitzvah #560, but it fell within the week-long celebration of Unleavened Bread, so the instructions are implicit.)

Here Moses discusses the national sacrifices specified for *Shavu’ot*, or the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost). Notice that they are identical to that commemorating the new moon festivals and the Feast of Unleavened Bread-Firstfruits. Review Mitzvah #538 for a discussion of what the individual sacrificial symbols mean. Once again, we are being told to drop our pride and pretensions, accept and honor Yahshua the Messiah, be

thankful for God's provision of salvation, mourn for the blood He shed on our account, welcome the Holy Spirit into our lives, and die to sin.

- (540) *Offer up an additional sacrifice on Rosh Hashanah.* “And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. For you it is a day of blowing the trumpets. You shall offer a burnt offering as a sweet aroma to Yahweh: one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, without blemish. Their grain offering shall be fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, to make atonement for you; besides the burnt offering with its grain offering for the New Moon, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, as a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh.” (Numbers 29:1-6) First, note that Maimonides’ *Rosh Hashanah* designation is wrong. It means “head of the year,” or “New Year’s Day” in our parlance. The first day of the first month was way back in the spring (Nisan 1), and it wasn’t set apart as a *mow’ed miqra*, one of the seven appointed Feasts of Yahweh, for it had no particular divine significance other than the fact that it was a new moon, the one prior to Passover (Nisan 14). The day Moses is talking about here is *Yom Teruah*, the Feast of Trumpets, the fifth *miqra*, first of the three autumn convocations—and the next one we’ll see fulfilled on God’s prophetic calendar.

At first glance, the list of sacrificial animals appears the same as for the new moon festival, the Feast of Unleavened Bread/Firstfruits, and the Feast of Weeks. But on closer examination, we see one change, and it could turn out to be significant. At issue is the number of bulls to be sacrificed. Up until the Feast of Weeks, there were two. Now, there’s only one. As we have seen, bulls represent human power and pride leading to false doctrine, teaching, and worship. Further, since the bulls are specified as an element of worship among believers (of which Israel is symbolic in the Torah), I believe Yahweh is specifically drawing attention to false teaching *within the assembly of faith*. We are given ample warning that such would be the case within the Church, and history tells us that false teaching within Israel has been its constant curse practically from the beginning. So there are two flavors of “Babylon bouillabaisse,” Jewish, and gentile, and they both smell mighty fishy.

Why, then, are there two bulls until the Feast of Weeks, and only one here at the Feast of Trumpets? It’s because (as we saw in Mitzvah #520) the assembly of believers we call the Church, though entirely Jewish at its inception, has become predominantly gentile today. During these last two

millennia (since 33 AD), Yahweh has not been dealing with Israel separately as a nation, but rather has gathered together an assembly of saints in which functionally “there is neither Jew nor Greek.” That will cease to be the case when the Tribulation begins (on Saturday, November 14, 2026, unless I’ve misread the signs). The last septade of Daniel’s remarkable Chapter 9 prophecy will have begun, and Yahweh will finish the process of Israel’s restoration.

And the Church? We will be caught up (which is what “raptured” means) out of the world on the Feast of Trumpets in some year prior to the commencement of Daniel’s final seven-year period. There will be no more gentile bull (so to speak) within the Church, for the Church will have departed the earth—leaving only the bull of Jewish heresy for God to deal with. If this theory is correct, of course, there should be only one bull specified for the next convocation on Yahweh’s list. Is there? Read on...

- (541) *Offer up an additional sacrifice on Yom Kippur.* **“On the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall afflict your souls; you shall not do any work. You shall present a burnt offering to Yahweh as a sweet aroma: one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year. Be sure they are without blemish. Their grain offering shall be of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the one ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, besides the sin offering for atonement, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings.”** (Numbers 29:7-11) There it is: the same list, but only one bull—representing Israel’s pride-driven false doctrines. *Yom Kippur*, or the Day of Atonement, is predictive of the day when Israel—as a nation—will finally “get it.” They’ll witness the return of King Yahshua to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, and at last they’ll understand the truth: He is Yahweh in the flesh—He is their Messiah, whom their fathers crucified. Zechariah paints the vivid picture in Chapter 12, verses 10-14. It’s the great *oy vey!* There’s no Church-age bull to deal with here, only Israel’s disastrous two-thousand-year-old miscalculation.
- (542) *Offer up an additional sacrifice on Sukkot.* **“On the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work, and you shall keep a feast to Yahweh seven days. You shall present a burnt offering, an offering made by fire as a sweet aroma to Yahweh: thirteen young bulls, two rams, and fourteen lambs in their first year. They shall be without blemish. Their grain offering shall be of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for each of the thirteen bulls, two-tenths for each of the two rams, and one-tenth for each of the fourteen lambs; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering.”**

(Numbers 29:12-16) *Sukkot*, or the Feast of Tabernacles, is prophetic of the Millennial reign of Yahshua the Messiah. Like Unleavened Bread, it's an eight-day feast, from Sabbath to Sabbath inclusive. Note that it begins just five days after Israel's great awakening predicted by *Yom Kippur*. For reasons I explained in *Future History*, I believe they'll both be fulfilled in the same year—2033.

Though the types of sacrificial animals and other offering elements are the same as we saw for the other six *miqra'ey*, the numbers are off the map. Numbers 29:17-38 provides the schematic, as we saw in Mitzvah #522: (1) a declining number of bulls from 13 on the first day to seven on the seventh, down to one on the eighth; (2) two rams each day with one on the eighth; (3) 14 lambs each day with seven on the eighth day; and (4) one goat per day. As usual, we (or is it just me?) need to ask *why*.

The answer, I believe, lies in the nature of the Millennium. Its original population will be the survivors of the Great Tribulation—believers one and all, but theological greenhorns—neophytes in the fine points (or even the broad outlines) of Biblical doctrine. After all, they will have missed the rapture (their numbers won't include pre-rapture believers or their young children. The scriptures will almost certainly be suppressed during the Tribulation, so they'll be operating for the most part on conscience alone, with a little assistance from 144,000 Jewish messengers and a bit of angelic preaching. They'll escape death during the Tribulation by dumb luck for the most part, for multiplied millions of their fellow neo-believers will have been slain for their new faith, and multitudes more will have died in the generalized mayhem of the times. They'll be deemed worthy to enter the Millennial Kingdom as mortal survivors primarily because they stuck out their necks to aid other believers—especially Jews—during the darkest days of earth's history. But it wasn't an altruism calculated to gain them an advantage. They simply did what their consciences told them was the right thing to do. These will repopulate the earth with mortal children, who, like everybody else who's ever lived, will have to be born again—born from above with Yahweh's Spirit—if they are to enjoy the eternal life God wishes to grant us all.

What does all that have to do with sacrificial bulls—a diminishing number of them as the week of the Feast of Tabernacles wears on? As the Millennium begins, knowledge among mortals of King Yahshua's character—and even His identity—will be sketchy. And mistakes will be made, errant doctrines will be put forward concerning who He is. But as time goes on, **“many shall run to and fro, and knowledge will increase.”** (Daniel 12:4) So by the end of the Millennium—by the commencement of the

eternal state—error in spiritual matters will have been greatly reduced. On the other hand, the rest of the sacrifices all continue unabated until the final Sabbath (see #543)—notably including the goat for the sin offering. As long as mortals populate the earth, sin will have to be dealt with, and the salvation story of Yahshua’s atoning sacrifice will have to be taught to each succeeding generation.

- (543) *Offer up an additional offering on Shemini Atzeret, which is a festival by itself.* **“On the eighth day you shall have a sacred assembly. You shall do no customary work. You shall present a burnt offering, an offering made by fire as a sweet aroma to Yahweh: one bull, one ram, seven lambs in their first year without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bull, for the ram, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; also one goat as a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering.”** (Numbers 29:35-38) *Shemini Atzeret* means “the eighth (day) of assembly,” referring to the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. One question looms large here: why does the number of lambs and rams get halved on the last day? The eighth day—the last Sabbath—represents the commencement of the eternal state following the Millennium. Since the Levitical sacrifices representing the Messiah were to be split up between the morning and evening (see Mitzvot #536 and #537), it’s clear what is being prophesied: we will never reach the time of the evening sacrifice; the eternal “day” will never end.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

- (544) *Bring all offerings, whether obligatory or freewill, on the first festival after these were incurred.* **“But you shall seek the place where Yahweh your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before Yahweh your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which Yahweh your God has blessed you.”** (Deuteronomy 12:5-7) Maimonides has made an extrapolation here, but I think he’s right. All the men of Israel were required to journey to the central place of worship (which of course eventually settled at Jerusalem) three times a year, for the Feasts of Passover/Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and finally the Feast of Tabernacles. (This wasn’t really the hardship it sounds like, for practically everybody in Israel lived within 70 or 80 miles of the central worship location, and the appointed times are all in typically fair-weather months.) Yahweh had said quite clearly that He didn’t want any

do-it-yourself religious practice going on in Israel (see the following few mitzvot). Any formalized rituals were to be done as He said, when He said, and where He said. This would tend to cut down on Satanic and man-made encroachments into their worship practices—something specifically dealt with in the sacrifices themselves as the offering up of bulls. As we realize in retrospect, the sacrifices and offerings specified for Israel all prophesied the coming Messiah, one way or the other—picturing either what He would be, what He would do, or from what He would rescue us.

But there were reasons for worship that didn't naturally fall on the three festivals of gathering. Ewes bore their firstborn lambs. Things happened that made folks thankful to Yahweh. Wealth increased, making tithes an imperative. Were the Israelites to drop everything they were doing and scamper off to Jerusalem every time something came up? No. That would have made life chaotic and unproductive. Instead, Yahweh's system of annual national gatherings brought everyone's focus onto God's blessings at the same time. The result? The three biggest parties you've ever seen: sort of like spring break, summer vacation, and Thanksgiving, on a national scale. The whole country shut down for a couple of weeks three times a year, and a good time was had by all—including Yahweh.

If your religious experience consists of dull, boring, seemingly pointless rituals and traditions, something's wrong. If your idea of "worship" is everybody dressing up in their best clothes and sitting, all prim and proper, in pews designed by the Marquis de Sade while a man in a black suit stands behind a pulpit, shakes a stern finger in your face, and tells you (1) You're going to burn in hell if you don't start living a sinless life, (2) God needs more of your money, (3) Tolerance of other people's beliefs is a virtue because we're all children of the same God, (4) God needs more of your money, (5) Meritorious and charitable deeds are a shortcut to heaven, or (6) There's going to be a bake sale next Saturday ('cause God needs more of your money) then something's *very* wrong. Here in Deuteronomy, Yahweh has told us what worship is supposed to look like: **"You shall eat before Yahweh your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which Yahweh your God has blessed you."** That's God's idea of worship: feasting, celebration, gathering together both as a family and a called-out assembly, and joyfully giving thanks to Yahweh for His blessings.

- (545) *Do not offer up sacrifices outside the Sanctuary. "Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see..."* (Deuteronomy 12:13) Like I said, do-it-yourself religion was forbidden in Israel. Note that Yahweh specifically names the *olah*, or burnt offering. This, if you'll recall, was to be completely burned on the altar in homage to God. Unlike

the *selem*, for example, there was no participatory feasting with the *olah*. In other words, it was unquestionably an act of worship (whether to Yahweh or some false god) and thus could not be mistaken for an innocent backyard barbeque (which was explicitly permitted in verse 15).

Why would a God who purports to be omnipresent object to a sacrifice of homage performed somewhere other than one specific place of His choosing? There is only one possible explanation: the sacrifice—the *olah*—was supposed to be indicative of something besides the devotion of the worshipper. It was the subject as well as the object. It was a prophecy as well as an offering. And the location was a significant component of that prophecy. Yahweh insisted the place had to be Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, for that was where His own Sacrifice—His firstborn son—would be offered up.

- (546) *Offer all sacrifices in the Sanctuary. "...but in the place which Yahweh chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you."* (Deuteronomy 12:14) God gave His servant David the privilege of "choosing" the location for God's capitol city. The fortress of Jebus (Jerusalem) was a perfect spot for the warrior king, situated on high ground a mere five miles from his boyhood home. Within the city, the site of the Temple was determined when a plague upon Israel (precipitated by one of David's rare spiritual lapses) swept through Jerusalem, stopping abruptly at the threshing floor of Arunah (a.k.a. Ornan). The Temple was placed where the plague stopped, or should I say, the plague stopped where the Temple was to be—for as we have seen, the Temple is a picture of God's redemptive covenant with man—first through the Law, and then through the grace personified by the Messiah. Where Yahshua is, the plague of sin ceases. In reality, of course, Yahweh had chosen the site a millennium before this, when He had sent Abraham there to offer up his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. There is nothing accidental (or even incidental) in the Torah. Yahweh had everything planned long before He told any of us about it.

Once again, we are reminded that the Jews are between a rock and a hard place when it comes to trying to keep the Law today. There is no sanctuary, though they know precisely where it belongs (and worse, a Muslim shrine now stands mocking their disbelief right where the temple is supposed to be). There is no priesthood, though they claim to have evidence of an unbroken line of *Kohenim* going back 3,000 years. Today's Jews dare not ask themselves why their God has allowed this horrible state of affairs to stand for so long. If they did, they would be forced to admit one of two devastating propositions: either Yahshua of Nazareth actually

was the Messiah—and when they crucified Him, they precipitated two millennia of exile and persecution upon themselves—or the God they claim to worship isn't capable of keeping His promises. Zechariah 12:10 describes which option Israel will eventually embrace, painful as it will be. It will be the definitive Day of Atonement, the ultimate affliction of the collective national soul of Israel: the long-overdue recognition of their Messiah.

- (547) *Redeem cattle set apart for sacrifices that contracted disqualifying blemishes, after which they may be eaten by anyone.* **“However, you may slaughter and eat meat within all your gates, whatever your heart desires, according to the blessing of Yahweh your God which He has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it, of the gazelle and the deer alike.”** (Deuteronomy 12:15) Maimonides' mitzvah bears no resemblance to what Yahweh actually said here, except for identifying who may eat the meat in question—i.e., anybody. The rabbis have cooked up a little revenue-enhancing twist that isn't even hinted at in the text. Yahweh's point is this: even though Israel was not to offer homage to God (or anybody else) by offering sacrifices (specifically burnt offerings, or *olah*) except in the central place of meeting, it was perfectly okay to slaughter and eat meat wherever you lived in Israel, whether clean domestic animals like cattle or sheep, or wild game like gazelle and deer. And one didn't have to be ceremonially undefiled to eat such meat. In fact, there was no symbolic connotation, no great truth associated with it at all. It was just food. Moses clarified the whole thing a few verses later: **“When Yahweh your God enlarges your border as He has promised you, and you say, ‘Let me eat meat,’ because you long to eat meat, you may eat as much meat as your heart desires.”** There was always lots of this sort of feasting going on at the three annual central gatherings, of course, but one didn't have to travel to Jerusalem or wait for the next miqra to have a barbeque. **“If the place where Yahweh your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, then you may slaughter from your herd and from your flock which Yahweh has given you, just as I have commanded you, and you may eat within your gates as much as your heart desires. Just as the gazelle and the deer are eaten, so you may eat them; the unclean and the clean alike may eat them.”** (Deuteronomy 12:20-22)

As long as we're on the subject, let's address a side issue. Did you notice that wild game was never mentioned in the lists of animals that could be offered up to Yahweh? I believe this may have ramifications beyond the obvious matter of ready availability. First, the animal being offered had to belong to you, or it wouldn't actually be a sacrifice on your part (though it certainly was on the animal's). But also, hunting for wild game involves skill, and maybe a little luck. And I'm certain Yahweh

didn't want to leave the impression that you had to be talented, intelligent, skillful, fortunate, or gifted in any other way in order to be worthy of His grace or thankful for His provision. Yes, you had to be clean and holy, but those are things He provides. All we have to do is accept them.

- (548) *Do not eat of the unblemished firstling outside Jerusalem. "You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand. But you must eat them before Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh your God chooses."* (Deuteronomy 12:17-18) Continuing the train of thought established by the previous few mitzvot, here we see a specific list of the things not to be offered except in the chosen place of central worship—which has been Jerusalem for the past three millennia. Moses has employed many of the generalized terms for sacrifices and offerings we reviewed near the end of Chapter 12: *ma'aser*, the tithe; *bekor*, the offering of firstborn animals or men; *neder*: the votive offering that consecrates a vow; *nedabah*: a voluntary or "freewill" offering; and the *t'rumah*: a contribution or heave offering. As usual, Maimonides has used the presence of a list as an opportunity to generate a whole series of separate mitzvot (#548-552), in this one stressing the *bekor*, or firstborn offering. Yahweh, however, was making but one point: sacrifice happens in Jerusalem. That is where Yahshua would perform His atoning work. He was God's "firstborn," the One Yahweh had vowed would save us from our sins, *and* the One who voluntarily left His heavenly throne, becoming the wave-offering of firstfruits to ensure our eventual harvest.
- (549) *Do not eat the flesh of the burnt-offering. (This is a Prohibition applying to every trespasser, not to enjoy any of the holy things. If he does so, he commits a trespass.) "You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand. But you must eat them before Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh your God chooses."* (Deuteronomy 12:17-18) Somebody's confused. The burnt offering (*olah*) was *never* eaten, by a trespasser or anybody else. But the sacrifices that were to be enjoyed by the worshippers and priests—including tithes (*ma'aser*), firstborn offerings (*bekor*), *selem* offerings (for vows or thanksgiving), or wave offerings (*t'rumah*) were supposed to be eaten in Yahweh's designated place (eventually Jerusalem), and nowhere else. Note that although Yahweh is omnipresent, one must go to "where He is" in order to feast before Him. Since the Day of Pentecost, that location is within every believer, for that is where Yahweh's Holy Spirit abides.

- (550) *The kohanim shall not eat the flesh of the sin-offering or guilt-offering outside the Courtyard of the Sanctuary. “You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand. But you must eat them before Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh your God chooses.”* (Deuteronomy 12:17-18) Moses didn’t specifically mention the sin offering (*chata’t*) or guilt offering (*asham*) in the cited passage. But okay, at least it’s true that the priests, or *kohanim*, were supposed to eat these sacrifices, and then only in the place Yahweh would choose. The point, once again, is that Yahshua’s sacrifice—in Jerusalem—would be the only thing that could adequately and permanently deal with our sin and guilt. The *asham* and *chata’t* were only temporary and only symbolic.
- (551) *Do not eat of the flesh of the sacrifices that are holy in a minor degree, before the blood has been sprinkled on the altar. “You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand. But you must eat them before Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh your God chooses.”* (Deuteronomy 12:17-18) *Holy in a minor degree?* That’s like being a little bit pregnant. Either something is set apart to Yahweh, or it’s not. That being said, the blood is always dealt with in the context of the slaying of the animal (i.e., before it was eaten), for blood was not to be consumed, so logically, Maimonides is right on that point.

Not to be picky, but the blood for different types of sacrifices was handled in slightly different ways. For the burnt offering (*olah*) the blood was sprinkled “all around on the altar.” This was the instruction given for the peace offering (*selem*) as well. Under certain circumstances, the blood of the sin offering (*chata’t*) was to be sprinkled seven times with the priest’s finger in front of the veil before the Most Holy Place, smeared onto the horns of the altar of incense, and the rest was poured out at the base of the altar. (*Chata’t* sacrifices whose blood had been brought into the Tabernacle or Temple were not to be eaten, however. See Leviticus 6:30) For the trespass offering (*asham*), the blood was sprinkled on the side of the altar, and the remainder was drained out at its base. So the nature of the sacrifice determined how and where the blood was to be ceremonially distributed. Issues involving our homage, thanksgiving, vows, or mistakes were associated with the altar, whose fires speak of judgment, of separation of good from evil. Our sins of behavior, however, must be addressed within the sanctuary, where atonement is made and prayer is offered in the context of the ultimate sacrifice of the Messiah.

- (552) *The kohein shall not eat the first-fruits before they are set down in the Courtyard of the Sanctuary.* **“You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand. But you must eat them before Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh your God chooses.”** (Deuteronomy 12:17-18) I don’t really know why this passage was pressed into service to support the last few mitzvot. Maimonides keeps bringing up issues that aren’t raised in the actual text, though they all have something to do with making sacrifices to Yahweh only at the appointed worship location. Here the point of departure is firstfruits, which presumably came to mind because of the text’s mention of the heave offering—i.e., the *t’rumah*. This is a general word meaning “contribution.” The word “*rum*,” upon which it’s based, means “height,” so it’s easy to see where the connotation of “lifting up” an offering, a “wave offering,” or “heave offering” came from.

The passage that most clearly defines the requirements of the Feast of Firstfruits is Leviticus 23:9-14. The salient portion says: **“When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest....You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God.”** There is no mention of setting anything down in any courtyard. Nor are the priests the only ones who are to partake of the feast. Once again, we find we have to watch the rabbis like a hawk. When they say things that purport to be the Law of God, even if they sound authoritative and reasonable, they aren’t necessarily giving us the straight story. *Caveat emptor*.

- (553) *Take trouble to bring sacrifices to the Sanctuary from places outside the land of Israel.* **“The holy things which you have [that is, the thing you have set apart for God’s purpose], and your vowed offerings, you shall take and go to the place which Yahweh chooses. And you shall offer your burnt offerings, the meat and the blood, on the altar of Yahweh your God; and the blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out on the altar of Yahweh your God, and you shall eat the meat.”** (Deuteronomy 12:26-27) The conditions of the passage at hand are defined by the first sentence of the paragraph: **“When Yahweh your God enlarges your border as He has promised you...”** which serves to demonstrate that Maimonides is completely wrong here. The whole Temple service was designed to be a workable community endeavor for a small, agriculturally based nation, one whose borders would be enlarged as they were obedient in driving the Canaanites out of the land (borders, by the way, that were defined in excruciating detail in Numbers 34. See *Future History*, Chapter 6 for more information). Getting scattered to the four

winds *themselves* was not supposed to be part of the plan. Being sent to “places outside the land of Israel” was the result of their continued disobedience and apostasy, as Moses warned them: **“Then Yahweh will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known—wood and stone. And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there Yahweh will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul.”** (Deuteronomy 28:64-65) This is where Israel is today, for the most part. But Yahweh has begun to bring them back. We have witnessed the budding of the fig tree. Summer can’t be far off.

PARSIMONIOUS PRACTICALITY

- (554) *Do not eat the flesh of beasts set apart as sacrifices that have been rendered unfit to be offered up by deliberately inflicting blemishes. “You shall not eat any detestable thing.”* (Deuteronomy 14:3) Mitzvah #510 said something quite similar, and Maimonides was wrong there, too. In context, Moses is merely defining what animals were okay for food. The passage goes on to say, **“These are the animals which you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, the deer, the gazelle, the roe deer, the wild goat, the mountain goat, the antelope, and the mountain sheep. And you may eat every animal with cloven hooves, having the hoof split into two parts, and that chews the cud, among the animals.”** (Deuteronomy 14:4-6) Deliberately inflicting blemishes to render an animal unfit for sacrifice is so devious a tactic, it apparently never even occurred to Yahweh to prohibit it. An observation from human nature: it’s my experience that whatever a self-appointed arbiter of public morality rants against is a kissin’ cousin to what he’s personally guilty of, at least in his heart. People who obsess about being ripped off are usually dishonest themselves. Those who rail against licentiousness are inevitably harboring lustful desires. And there’s nothing quite as vehement as the evangelistic zeal of an ex-smoker who’s in denial about his cravings. So what does it say about Maimonides when he condemns a legal loophole—*twice*—that God didn’t even mention?
- (555) *Do not do work with cattle set apart for sacrifice. “All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to Yahweh your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock.”* (Deuteronomy 15:19) The instructions concerning the firstborn offering (the *bekor*), like all Levitical offerings, were designed to impart vital information about the coming Messiah. All “clean” male domestic animals that opened the womb were to be sacrificed: **“You and your household shall eat it before Yahweh your God year by year in the place which**

Yahweh chooses.” (Deuteronomy 15:20) The *bekor* sacrifice was to be eaten by the worshipper and his family. Although the animal was “sanctified” or dedicated to Yahweh, the advantage—the nourishment, if you will—devolved back upon the one offering the sacrifice. But the firstborn was to benefit the worshipper *only* through his death. He wasn’t to pull a cart, drag a plow, or provide fleece for a loom before his trip to the altar. He had but one purpose—to die so that someone could live. He was to serve as food, nourishment, sustenance—nothing more. Furthermore, the *bekor* was to be eaten before Yahweh in the place of His choosing, at a time of His appointing—a time of feasting and celebration, one of the three annual national gatherings. In addition, it was specifically designed to be a reminder of the redemption of Israel through the death of the firstborn of Egypt (see Exodus 13).

The question, as usual, is *why*. Why was the firstborn to provide no service other than dying? I believe it was to teach us not to look upon the Messiah as a supplier of our petty temporal desires. I won’t deny that He looks after us as a shepherd tends his sheep, giving us rest in green pastures, leading us beside still waters and restoring our soul (among other things). And yes, if we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, He promises to meet our needs in this earth. But in the narrower focus of the Messiah’s primary role, we must remember that the job of the Good Shepherd is to *lay down His life for His sheep!* (John 10:11-18) Yahshua didn’t come to make His followers prosperous or powerful in this earth. He didn’t come to be the founder of a great religion, to be a respected teacher of morals and doctrine, or to show us the way to paradise. He was God’s firstborn: He came to die.

- (556) *Do not shear beasts set apart for sacrifice. “All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to Yahweh your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock.”* (Deuteronomy 15:19) As usual, Maimonides has taken a precept in which Moses has offered two related illustrative examples and made two separate mitzvot out of them. There is only one “law” here, one the Rambam doesn’t remotely comprehend. See Mitzvah #555.
- (557) *Do not leave any portion of the festival offering brought on the fourteenth of Nissan until the third day. “...nor shall any of the meat which you sacrifice the first day at twilight remain overnight until morning.”* (Deuteronomy 16:4) I like lamb as much as the next guy, but this is just plain wrong. Maimonides, ignorant of Whom the Passover Lamb represents, has expanded his definition of “leftovers” well beyond the Torah’s explicit instructions. This is a restatement of the Passover instructions originally

given in Exodus: **“You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire.”** (Exodus 12:10) The Passover Lamb was to be killed and roasted whole on the afternoon of the fourteenth day of Nisan, and eaten after sundown (now technically the fifteenth—the Feast of Unleavened Bread) “with unleavened bread and bitter herbs...with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand...in haste.” The Israelites didn’t have the whole day of Nisan 15 to munch leisurely on lamb sandwiches. By morning, they were on their way out of Egypt (see Exodus 12:29-36), the anguished wails of the lost world ringing in their ears.

I don’t know—maybe Maimonides *did* realize Who the Passover Lamb represented, and just didn’t want his audience to make the connection. Yahshua of Nazareth had been slain on the afternoon of Passover, 33AD, His blood smeared on the upright post (Greek *stauros*, errantly translated “cross”) keeping the angel of death at bay for all mankind, if only we’ll embrace the protection it provides. On the Feast of Unleavened Bread—beginning at sundown—His body lay in the tomb while His soul endured the fires of judgment for us, removing all of the leaven—the sin—from our lives. And now, at the breaking of the new day, we like the Israelites of old are free to leave Egypt—to flee the bondage of the world.

But Maimonides would have you hesitate, enjoy the perks of your slavery for one more day, and prevent the Lamb of God from enduring the consuming fire of judgment on your behalf. After all, Pharaoh has given you his solemn word. You’re free to go, he says. He wouldn’t change his mind, would he?

- (558) *Do not offer up a beast that has a temporary blemish. “You shall not sacrifice to Yahweh your God a bull or sheep which has any blemish or defect, for that is an abomination to Yahweh your God.”* (Deuteronomy 17:1) There is nothing mentioned in the text about a disqualifying blemish being “temporary.” If anything, the words are stronger than they’ve been translated: “to have a blemish” is literally “to be an evil thing.” “Defect” is derived from the Hebrew *dabar ra*, meaning “a statement, word, or message that is bad, wicked, malignant, or worse than others of its kind.” This all conspires to make Maimonides’ interpretation completely wrong. The idea is that even if the animal *isn’t* visibly marked or blemished in some way but is nevertheless the “bottom of the barrel,” a poor specimen of its breed, then don’t foist it off on Yahweh as an offering as if you’re doing Him some kind of favor. He sent His own Son to die for our sins—a perfect sacrifice if ever there was one. The least we could do is offer up

the very best animal we could find within our flocks and herds in emulation of His provision.

This whole discussion applies to other areas of our life as well (since, let's face it, nobody is making Levitical sacrifices at the temple these days). Do we put in our best effort at work, or just do enough to avoid being fired for laziness and insubordination? Do we study to learn a subject, or merely to pass the quiz? Does our charity consist of giving the needy what they need, or merely what we don't want any more? Forget WWJD (*What Would Jesus Do?*). Think about WDYD (*What Did Yahweh Do?*) He is the God of the Hallmark card (if you'll pardon the stupid expression): He cared enough to send the Very Best.

- (559) *Do not bring sacrifices out of the hire of a harlot or price of a dog. (apparently a euphemism for sodomy). “You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of Yahweh your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to Yahweh your God.”* (Deuteronomy 23:18) There is more to the epithets “harlot” and “dog” than merely sexual sin. Remember the Fifth Commandment? **“Honor your Father and your Mother, that your days may be long upon the land which Yahweh your God is giving you.”** (Exodus 20:12) I've capitalized “Father” and “Mother” because ultimately, our parents are merely a metaphor for God Himself—Yahweh as our Father and His Spirit dwelling within us as our Mother. Their love is what gave us existence and life. Yahweh designed us to function as families in order to teach us what He is like! And that is why Satan works so hard to dismantle families—he doesn't want us to know, for if we did, we would understand what Yahweh has done for us.

Satan's war on the family has many fronts: separating husbands from their wives, separating children from their parents, separating sex from marriage, blurring gender roles, and so forth. At the time of the exodus, Satan was openly worshipped in Canaan as Ba'al, Chemosh, Molech, and Dagon, among others, and in the temples dedicated to these false gods, temple prostitution—both male and female—was an essential rite, a clever attempt by Satan to obfuscate God's pattern of familial love, faithfulness, and purpose. The harlot here was a female temple prostitute whose job it was to destroy the family, and the “dog” her male counterpart, whether homosexual or not. In the precept at hand, Yahweh was warning His people not to adopt the ways of the people they were tasked to dispossess. Their worship practices were the very antithesis of His revealed character—an abomination in His eyes.

- (560) *Read the portion prescribed on bringing the first fruits. “And it shall be, when you come into the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an*

inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground, which you shall bring from your land that Yahweh your God is giving you, and put it in a basket and go to the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide. And you shall go to the one who is priest in those days, and say to him, 'I declare today to Yahweh your God that I have come to the country which Yahweh swore to our fathers to give us.' Then the priest shall take the basket out of your hand and set it down before the altar of Yahweh your God. And you shall answer and say before Yahweh your God: 'My father was a Syrian, about to perish, and he went down to Egypt and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us. Then we cried out to Yahweh, God of our fathers, and Yahweh heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression. So Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land which you, Yahweh, have given me.'" (Deuteronomy 26:1-10) The Israelites were instructed to recount the history of their nation upon the presentation of the firstfruits. This would take place on the Feast of Firstfruits on Nisan 16, the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the sanctuary. The first instance of this is recorded in Joshua 5:10-12.

Yahweh, of course, wasn't interested in "vain repetition," in hearing thousands of Jews mindlessly mumble through a formula recitation once a year. He wanted them to think about what He had done for them—both in temporal and spiritual terms. Let's take the time to explore the prescribed confession. It begins, **"I have come to the country which Yahweh swore to our fathers to give us."** We are to realize that our position of fellowship with God (the "country" in which we live) is the result of Yahweh keeping His promises. **"My father was a Syrian, about to perish, and he went down to Egypt and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous."** There's more to "Syrian, about to perish" than meets the eye. In Hebrew, it's *'abad 'Arammiy*—an Aramean (which in turn means "exalted") who is lost, strayed, vanishing, or dying. ("Abram," by the way, means "exalted father," while "Abraham" means "father of many.") In other words, Abram our father was exalted by Yahweh when he was a lost, perishing soul—which reminds us of what Paul said: "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Egypt represents the world, a place of slavery and sin: **"But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us."**

Recognizing we're in trouble is an essential step in getting help. **"Then we cried out to Yahweh, God of our fathers, and Yahweh heard our voice and**

looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression.” It does no good to appeal to Pharaoh, and even less to cry out to his false gods—they’re the ones who are trying to keep us in affliction, labor, and oppression. Only Yahweh can help us in our plight, for only He both loves us and has the power to save us. **“So Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders.”** We can’t get out of Egypt by our own strength. The word translated “terror” here is *mowra*, an awe-inspiring exhibition of power, an equally appropriate description for the ten plagues of Egypt and the resurrection of the crucified Messiah from the dead. And as I observed in my study of end-times prophecy, *Future History*, these same signs and wonders will be repeated in the last days as Yahweh separates His people from the world that enslaves them. We can expect to see the reprise of all ten plagues as well as the return of the Messiah in glory—another “awe-inspiring exhibition of power” on the part of Yahweh. The objective of this second exodus will be the same as the first: **“He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”** One again, the promised land represents our final destination in the presence and fellowship of God—something only He can achieve for us, and that only through His “mighty hand” and “outstretched arm.”

And how are we to respond to all this? The last words of the recitation tell us: **“And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land which you, Yahweh, have given me.”** If the “land” is our position in the grace of God, then what is the crop? Is it not the peace, the security, the fellowship, and the joy of our salvation? And is it not the temporal gifts we’ve received as well as the spiritual blessings? What are we to do with the firstfruits? Share them, bring them to the priests—your fellow believers—who are to offer them up in homage and thanksgiving to God. Remember, we’re talking about *firstfruits* here: the harvest is yet to come. What we receive in this life is but a small sample of what we can expect to reap in eternity future. But our faithfulness and obedience concerning the things we receive now will be reflected in the magnitude of the harvest.

Chapter 15

Ritual Purity

It's becoming clear that the Law of Moses ranges from the mostly symbolic (circumcision, the burnt offering, and the Sabbath, for instance) to the mostly practical (such as restitution for theft, removing pigs, rats, and carrion birds from the menu, and not marrying your sister). Most of these precepts fall somewhere in between: part practical advice, part metaphors of some greater truth.

The subject of ritual purity falls within this “hybrid” category. The things that are defined as ceremonially defiling often have a basis in hygiene. Thus separating people who are “defiled” or “unclean” from the general population or barring them from certain activities is only prudent from a community health-care perspective. On the other hand, Yahweh has invariably couched the process by which one may return to a “clean” or “undefiled” state in terms of ritualistic law, fraught with symbolic significance. Only through the performance of certain rites may one regain his “undefiled” status in the commonwealth of Israel.

But it has also become increasingly obvious that religion (for its own sake) is something Yahweh detests. He is not the least bit interested in seeing us follow the rules just because there are rules to follow. Rather, He wants us to know Him, to understand what He is doing for us, and why. You can almost hear the agony in His voice as He speaks through the prophet Hosea: **“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me. Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.... I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”** (Hosea 4:6, 6:6) The word translated “knowledge” here is *da'at*, meaning perception, discernment, knowledge, understanding, skill, or wisdom. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* explains that “*da'at* is derived from the root verb *yada*, ‘to know’ [in a relational sense]. The root expresses knowledge gained in various ways by the senses.... *Da'at* is a general term for knowledge, particularly that which is of a personal experiential nature... it is the contemplative perception of the wise man... also used of moral cognition.”

Note that God doesn't say His people are destroyed by bad behavior, failure to keep every nuance of the Law, or even idolatry. These things are merely byproducts of the real problem—a lack of knowledge concerning their God. But it's not as if they hadn't been taught: Israel had *rejected* knowledge, forsaken it, and finally exchanged it for a list of 613 silly rules and pointless regulations. When Yahweh says, **“You have forgotten the law of your God,”** He's pointing out the place from which the knowledge His people lack was supposed to come—the *Law*. I know it sounds like we're going in circles here, but we're not. The only

logical answer to the conundrum is that the “knowledge of God” that Israel was supposed to receive from the Law was latent in the symbols and metaphors that were written between every line of the Torah, the symbols that are becoming so evident in this present study. If the *olah* isn’t symbolic of something important (the sacrifice of the Messiah), all you’ve got is smoke and ash and one less sheep in your flock. If the Sabbath isn’t a metaphor for a greater reality (the conclusion of Yahweh’s 7,000-year plan for the redemption of mankind), all you’ve got is a day off once a week—and God’s irrational promise to destroy you if you don’t take advantage of it. And if circumcision isn’t representative of some significant element in Yahweh’s agenda (the separation of man from his sin), then all you’ve got is the painful, bloody—and pointless—mutilation of the most sensitive part of a guy’s anatomy.

Paul chose circumcision as the issue he’d use to demonstrate the difference between mindlessly performing the outward rituals of the Law in an attempt to impress God and the alternative—coming to a knowledge of Yahweh. His case rests upon the recognition of Yahshua the Messiah as the ultimate object of all those symbols and metaphors that permeate the Torah. **“Listen! I, Paul, tell you this: If you are counting on circumcision to make you right with God, then Christ cannot help you.”** In other words, you must choose between them—you can’t travel on two paths at one time. **“I’ll say it again. If you are trying to find favor with God by being circumcised, you must obey all of the regulations in the whole law of Moses. For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God’s grace....”** We recognize the act of circumcision as symbolic of sin being “cut off” from mankind. But Paul is pointing out something quite significant about the symbol here: if your reliance is on circumcision (and on keeping the rest of the Law), then you’ve identified yourself with the part that’s being cut off and thrown away, not the part God wants to keep! (The NIV words it “alienated from Christ,” and the NASB renders it “severed.”) I’m not sure, but I think Paul just called those who rely on the Law “dickheads.” Pardon my Greek.

“But we who live by the Spirit [in contrast with those who rely on the Law] eagerly wait to receive everything promised to us who are right with God through faith. For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, it makes no difference to God whether we are circumcised or not circumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love.” (Galatians 5:2-6 NLT) If circumcision *means* something, then that which it means—our separation from our sin—is the reality, and the rite itself is but the shadow. And if that reality has been manifested for us through the sacrifice of Yahshua, then the shadow is no longer significant. Put another way, if circumcision is a sign pointing toward our separation from sin, then our arrival at that destination makes the road sign superfluous. The sign was once important. Now it’s redundant.

“You were getting along so well. Who has interfered with you to hold you back from following the truth? It certainly isn’t God, for he is the one who called you to freedom. But it takes only one wrong person among you to infect all the others—a little yeast spreads quickly through the whole batch of dough! I am trusting the Lord to bring you back to believing as I do about these things. God will judge that person, whoever it is, who has been troubling and confusing you.” (Galatians 5:7-10 NLT) I should pause to make something clear. The “Judaizers” whom Paul is castigating here were not rabbis who denied the deity or Messiahship of Yahshua. They were, rather, “Christians” (in the nominal sense of the word) who held that the Torah must still be followed even though Yahshua had fulfilled it to the letter and bought our salvation with His blood. It is my sad duty to report that these guys are still around, camping on the fringes of the “Messianic” movement. Some of them are brilliant scholars; and they’d *have* to be brilliant in order to perform the intense mental juggling act that’s essential to their doctrine. Paul says, literally, that “he who troubles you will bear his judgment.” That word “judgment” is *krima*, meaning a judicial decision, a decree—usually, though not always, implying a negative verdict, a condemnation.

First, they must convince us that the “Law” of which Paul speaks is not the Torah, but rather the “oral law,” a collection of traditions and rulings that have (the rabbis insist) existed side by side with the written Torah since the time of Moses. (In point of fact, the oral law was invented by the Jewish exiles in Babylon, maybe twelve hundred years later.) The Talmud and Mishnah were later developments, *written* versions of the *oral* law (confused yet?) upon which our friend Maimonides based his work. In other words, the 613 mitzvot we’ve been reviewing are in reality based not on the Torah but on the Talmud, a fact that explains some of the Rambam’s confusion. (My commentary, on the other hand, is based on the written Torah.) The bottom line? Believers (they say) are *still* required to observe the Torah in all its detail, whether or not it’s possible, whether or not anybody has ever succeeded in doing so. They’re just not required to keep the “oral law,” something that in Paul’s day was as nebulous and contradictory as any man-made religion has ever been.

Unfortunately for the neoJudaizers (and fortunately for us), there isn’t a shred of evidence to support their theory. When Paul speaks of circumcision, he’s referring to the rite commanded in the Torah, not a “secondary circumcision” demanded by the rabbis. (Much of the really dumb stuff in Judaism wasn’t invented until after rabbi Akiba made eisegesis—reading doctrine *into* a passage instead of extracting truth out of it—a contact sport in the Jewish religion early in the second century.)

To make their argument sound plausible, the neoJudaizers must toss another ball into the air. Since there is no earthly reason gentile believers would be

inclined to heed Jewish rabbis (especially when they contradicted the written Scriptures), it is hypothesized that all of the Galatian believers were actually members of the “ten lost tribes” of Israel. Further, *every* “gentile” believer ever since is actually a biological descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—a hitherto unidentified member of these lost tribes. This is the basic thrust of the so-called “two-house” movement. Again, it betrays a fundamental lack of understanding as to what the Torah was meant to achieve in God’s plan, and what the role of the Jews (or more correctly, Israel) was supposed to be. Salvation is not *for* the Jews (not exclusively, anyway). It’s *of* the Jews.

Thus it is that a third ball gets tossed into the air. The neoJudaizers insist that because Paul only sought out and taught Israelite expatriates (not actual gentiles), none of the New Covenant Scriptures were composed in Greek, but were written in Aramaic, a close cognate of Hebrew. This leaves them free to re-translate the Greek texts into Aramaic (or use existing Aramaic versions) and then translate those into English, leaving them lots of linguistic wiggle room in which to advance their agenda. I’ll agree that the book of Hebrews and the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John could well have been originally penned in Aramaic or Hebrew. This might explain why the polished Greek of the Gospel of John is somewhat different from the rough language of Revelation: John wrote the latter in his second language, not his mother tongue. But the idea that Paul wasn’t fluent in Greek or didn’t write in Greek to audiences outside of Judea is patently absurd. Paul hailed from Tarsus, in what is now Southern Turkey. He was a Roman citizen. Greek was the *lingua franca* of the day, much as English is today. Outside of Judea, his *only* language options would have been Greek and Latin—even to Jewish audiences.

So Paul makes his case: **“Dear brothers and sisters, if I were still preaching that you must be circumcised—as some say I do—why would the Jews persecute me? The fact that I am still being persecuted proves that I am still preaching salvation through the cross of Christ alone. I only wish that those troublemakers who want to mutilate you by circumcision would mutilate themselves.”** (Galatians 5:11-12 NLT) Paul sounds miffed, doesn’t he? I guess he’s got good reason. The advocates of “Law plus Grace” would never have persecuted Paul to the extent they did if he had spoken only against the oral law while upholding the necessity of flawlessly keeping the Instructions of Moses. The word translated “mutilate” (*apokopto*) generally means “to cut off, to amputate.” Many commentators feel that Paul actually intends to suggest emasculation, castration, sort of a circumcision gone horribly wrong. The point is that he doesn’t wish to see these heresies bear any fruit among the faithful.

He continues: **“For you have been called to live in freedom—not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature, but freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if instead of**

showing love among yourselves you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.” (Galatians 5:13-15 NLT) As Paul and I have both said ’til we’re blue in the face, we’re not suggesting that the Law of Moses has no value and should be discarded as a guidebook to life, our “Owner’s Manual,” to coin a phrase. It has always—and *will* always—have inestimable value in revealing the mind of God to mortal man. And what is Yahweh’s mindset toward us? What does He want us to do? Only to love Him with our whole being and to love our fellow man. If love is what we’re all about, the precepts of the Law will become more or less automatic for us. Of course, **“Love your neighbor as yourself”** is no easier to do in the strength of our flesh than is any other precept in the Torah.

“So I advise you to live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves,” which is: loving yourself at the expense of your neighbor. **“The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict. But when you are directed by the Holy Spirit, you are no longer subject to the law.”** It isn’t that we’re above the Law, but rather that the Holy Spirit directs us to conduct our lives in a manner that’s compatible with it, which makes sense, since Yahweh is the Author of both the Law and the Spirit’s counsel. Our sinful nature struggles against both of these things. Which impulse will prevail, our sinful nature or the direction of the Holy Spirit? Good question, but first note that Paul is talking to believers here, for whom *both* things are a potential influence. Those without God’s Spirit dwelling within them have only their sinful natures to shape their behavior (which goes a long way toward explaining why the Law is impossible to keep). But for us, both things, like a couple of hungry dogs, vie for our favors, fighting among themselves. Which one wins? Which one gets stronger over time? The one we feed.

“When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results: sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5:16-21 NLT) Is Paul saying that if a believer ever has a lustful thought or a twinge of envy he’s not really saved? No. He’s saying that if these things—as a collective profile—describe your life, it’s evidence that you are “following the desires of your sinful nature,” presumably because the Holy Spirit is absent, exerting no influence at all in your life. A key phrase is “anyone living that sort of life,” or as the NKJV puts it, “those who practice such things.” But the word translated “living” or “practice” is *anaprasso*, the very term Paul used to describe

his own frustrating failures in Romans 7. It is therefore clear that it is the totality of one's moral attitude, not the occasional lapse in behavior, that identifies one's spiritual position. But don't let the tail wag the dog here: trying your best to avoid the things on this list won't "save" you any more than trying to keep the Law of Moses will.

If we're really believers, however, we'll have two dogs in this fight (so to speak). **"But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law."** Not in the Torah, anyway. As we have seen, there is a subtle undercurrent of self-centered, joyless, unforgiving harshness in the oral law upon which Maimonides' mitzvot are based. **"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there...."** Note that Paul *didn't* declare that "the Law has been nailed to the cross," as is so often preached these days. What's been crucified is the influence of the flesh with its "passions and desires," *not* the Torah, the part of God's Word that merely points out where we've erred.

Having identified what characterizes a Spirit-led life and how it differs from one dominated by the sin nature, Paul now offers some practical advice. **"If we are living now by the Holy Spirit, let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or irritate one another, or be jealous of one another."** (Galatians 5:22-26 NLT) Once again, it comes down to a choice we've been given. We can choose to follow one influence or the other, the Spirit's leading or our old sinful nature. Paul's admonition identifies certain pitfalls that all too readily entrap Christians: sanctimonious pride, a prickly, provocative, confrontational attitude, and the envy of those who are even more arrogant and irritating (i.e., more "religious") than we are—ecclesiastical ambition. But at least we *have* a choice of how to behave. Those without Christ are never even "tempted" to live godly lives, though they may find that other people like them better if they're kind, patient, gentle, and self-controlled. A far more fundamental choice must be made before real godliness is possible—the choice of whose family to enter.

IMPURITY THROUGH CONTACT

(561) *Eight species of creeping things defile by contact.* **"These also shall be unclean to you among the creeping things that creep on the earth: the mole, the mouse, and the large lizard after its kind; the gecko, the monitor lizard, the sand reptile, the sand lizard, and the chameleon. These are unclean to you among all that creep. Whoever touches them when they are dead shall be unclean until evening."** (Leviticus 11:29-31) No there aren't, and no they don't. Some days you just want to take Maimonides and throttle him. It seems as though every time we turn around he's finding new ways to get it wrong.

Leviticus 11 is all about dietary guidelines. We covered much of it in detail back in Chapter 5 of this book. By the time we get to these few verses, we've learned that (1) it's only okay to eat land animals that have divided hooves *and* chew their cud, (2) only sea creatures that have fins and scales (in other words, true fish) are good for food, (3) "barnyard" birds are okay to eat, but carrion birds and predators are not, (4) the only insects that may be eaten are locusts and related species, and (5) we aren't to eat anything that walks around on its paws. The eight animals listed in the passage at hand merely clarify the list of forbidden foods: rodents and reptiles are out. The list doesn't pretend to be comprehensive, any more than the list of forbidden birds was. These are just familiar examples of the types of animals that we aren't to eat.

And what about "defiling by contact?" As far as the Torah is concerned, this is only true of touching the unclean animal's *carcass*. They don't ceremonially defile anyone if they're alive. You can pet your cat; you just can't eat him. **"By these you shall become unclean; whoever touches the carcass of any of them shall be unclean until evening; whoever carries part of the carcass of any of them shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening; the carcass of any animal which divides the foot, but is not cloven-hoofed or does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. Everyone who touches it shall be unclean. And whatever goes on its paws, among all kinds of animals that go on all fours, those are unclean to you. Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean until evening. Whoever carries any such carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. It is unclean to you."** (Leviticus 11:24-28) Life never defiles. Nor does anything that Yahweh has declared to be clean defile someone on contact, sometimes even if it is no longer alive. (If you're going to eat a steak, it's axiomatic that the cow is kaput.) Only things that are both dead *and* unclean defile you by merely touching them.

Spiritually speaking, the lesson is clear: the world is unclean, but we must walk through it on life's journey. Left to its own devices, it is usually spiritually neutral, neither harmful nor beneficial to us. We are instructed not to "ingest" the things of the world, not to assimilate them into our being, not to love them. But there are things within the world—notably dead religious practice, arrogance, greed, and lust for power—that are not only unclean, they're also dead. That is, they are not spiritually neutral, but are enemies of God and His people, warring actively against them. These are things we are not even to touch!

- (562) *Foods become defiled by contact with unclean things. "Anything on which any of them [i.e., the carcass of an unclean animal] falls when they are dead shall be unclean, whether it is any item of wood or clothing or skin or sack,*

whatever item it is in which any work is done, it must be put in water. And it shall be unclean until evening; then it shall be clean. Any earthen vessel into which any of them falls you shall break; and whatever is in it shall be unclean: in such a vessel, any edible food upon which water falls becomes unclean, and any drink that may be drunk from it becomes unclean. And everything on which a part of any such carcass falls shall be unclean; whether it is an oven or cooking stove, it shall be broken down; for they are unclean, and shall be unclean to you.” (Leviticus 11:32-35) Yes, if a dead fly falls into your lemonade, the lemonade has become defiled, unclean. But so has the glass. Depending upon whether it *can be* properly washed, the contaminated vessel is to be either cleansed in water or destroyed. (I get the feeling that while an unglazed, unfired clay pot would have to be destroyed, one hardened in the fire of the kiln could be washed and reused.) There are obvious hygiene considerations, but the steps that Yahweh specified one must go through to regain the status of being ritually pure have meaning far beyond these practical health reasons.

We need to address what it meant to be “ritually defiled,” or “ceremonially unclean.” The Hebrew adjective *tame* is apparently derived from the noun describing alluvial mud, or the related verb meaning “to flow over,” a graphic description of what happens to us as we walk through this world—without even trying, we get inundated by the filth of our environment from time to time. With its derivatives, *tame* is used in scripture 279 times (two thirds of them in the Torah), making it a concept ubiquitous in God’s Law. While becoming *tame* was obviously supposed to be avoided if possible, it was equally clear that it would be inevitable from time to time. As long as we’re mortals, the risk of “defilement” is always present.

Although *tame* is translated with such evil sounding words as “unclean,” “defiled,” and “impure,” it’s not precisely the same thing as sin, which is technically “missing the mark.” It is a statement of condition, not of behavior. If you’ll recall in our discussion of the Levitical sacrifices (Chapter 12), God drew a distinction between offerings for sin (*chata’t*) and “mistakes” or trespasses (*asham*). But there is no sacrifice to cover becoming *tame*/defiled. Cleansing is available (by washing in water and letting time pass), but forgiveness is deemed unnecessary and inappropriate. There are, however, consequences for having become defiled. It temporarily disqualified a priest or Levite from performing his usual service at the sanctuary, and it separated the ordinary Israelite from fellowship and participation in the life of his community, most notably prohibiting him from approaching Yahweh in worship. That’s why we refer to these things as “ritually” or “ceremonially” defiling, even though the words aren’t there in the Hebrew. In this life, becoming *tame* is a

condition that by definition is (or can be) accidental, unavoidable, inadvertent—even inevitable.

Although *tame* isn't "sin" per se, it can serve as a *picture* of our sin, that is, our fallen state or condition. It points out that in addition to requiring atonement through sacrifice, we also need to be cleansed. Ezekiel in particular uses the metaphor of ritual defilement to describe an idolatrous Israel. That makes the cleansing process—the washing in water and the passage of time—especially significant for Israel. You see, another ubiquitous scriptural metaphor pictures Israel as the "land," while the gentile nations are called the "sea." So it is that an unrepentant Israel has been "immersed" in the gentile nations for the better part of two thousand years, enduring a cleansing process that will only be complete when her Messiah returns to close the book on the times of the gentiles—at the definitive Day of Atonement, coming soon to a world near you.

- (563) *Anyone who touches the carcass of a beast that died of itself shall be unclean. "And if any animal which you may eat dies, he who touches its carcass shall be unclean until evening. He who eats of its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. He also who carries its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening.* (Leviticus 11:39-40) The issue here is how a clean animal has died. If a man butchered a sheep or cow for food, or if it was slaughtered as a sacrifice according to the instructions of the Torah (draining the blood, etc.), then he would not be defiled by handling the carcass. However, if one of his cattle dropped dead and he had to dispose of its corpse, he would be "unclean" under the Law. As we saw in Mitzvah #156, a clean animal who died of its own accord could be sold to the neighboring gentiles as food, but the Israelite, having been set apart to Yahweh, was not to eat of it. Here we see that if he *did* eat some of it, it would ritually defile him.

If we look hard enough for them, we can perceive the life-lessons that are latent here. The death of a clean animal (i.e., one suitable for sacrifice) can be a good thing or not, depending upon how it died. It either provides us with nourishment and satisfaction or it's a meaningless waste of living resources. God, I believe, is trying to make us understand that our intimate contact with the dead things of this world separates us from Him and His people, if only temporarily. It makes us useless in His service and too filthy to be of any benefit to our fellow man. Worse, this condition of uncleanness is exacerbated if we attempt to "nourish" ourselves with the lifeless distractions we see around us. In point of fact, the only "good" death—i.e., the only death from which we can legitimately derive benefit—is that purposely suffered by something "clean," for that death is

a reflection of the sacrifice of the Messiah on our behalf, a death that (like the properly slaughtered cow or sheep) actually brings life in its wake—the innocent meeting the needs of the guilty.

- (564) *A lying-in woman is unclean like a menstruating woman (in terms of uncleanness).* **“If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean. And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. She shall then continue in the blood of her purification thirty-three days. She shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are fulfilled. But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her customary impurity, and she shall continue in the blood of her purification sixty-six days.”** (Leviticus 12:2-5) We discussed this passage under Mitzvah #501, where the subject was what offerings the new mom was to bring. Here we are given the details of her period of ritual impurity—forty days total (seven plus thirty-three) if she had borne a son, and twice that long if the child was a daughter.

Indulge me for a moment while I chase a rabbit. Could it be significant that the number of days of a woman’s purification precisely matches the number of years of King David’s reign? I Kings 2:11 reports that David, “a man after God’s own heart,” reigned in Hebron seven years, and then in Jerusalem for thirty-three. The character of his reign, then, is defined by where he lived. Both the numbers and place names are significant. Hebron means “association” or “alliance,” from the verb *habar*, meaning “to join or unite.” Seven is the ubiquitous number indicating divine completion, so David’s Hebron sojourn—as well as the woman’s first portion of her post-partum cleansing, if my observations have merit—is indicative of a perfect, complete alliance with Yahweh.

Jerusalem is a bit harder to pin down. The name has two components. The first might be *yarah*, a primitive root verb meaning “to throw, shoot, cast, or pour,” leading to two derivative concepts, to teach or instruct, and to “throw water,” i.e. rain. On the other hand, if *yerussa* is the origin of “Jeru...” then “possession” or “inheritance” is meant. If it’s *yira*, it means, “to see.” The second component is *shalam*—restitution, recompense, reward, payment, or amends, and thus by implication, peace). So *Strong’s* says Jerusalem means “teaching of peace.” The Open Bible suggests it’s “Possession of Peace.” Baker and Carpenter and others call it “Foundation of Peace.” I’ve also heard it called the “City of Peace,” “Secure Habitation,” “To See Peace,” and the place from which “Redemption Flows” or from which “Restitution Pours.” I have the feeling that it really means “all of the above,” for all these things describe the city as it is in

God's view. The city of Jerusalem has no earthly significance outside of what Yahshua accomplished there. So what's the importance of *thirty-three*? Not coincidentally, this is precisely the number of years Yahshua walked the earth as the Son of Man (from the fall of 2 B.C. to the spring of 33 A.D.).

This is turning out to be a tangled skein but one worth unraveling. The woman represents the human race (or at least the portion of it indwelt with the Holy Spirit), and her husband is symbolic of Yahweh. The son born to her is figurative of Yahshua—the union of God and humanity. The birth of a woman's son was the direct result of her “association or alliance,” her joining (*habar/Hebron*) with her husband. The first seven days of her purification reflect this perfect unity of God with humanity—the life of Christ. Only after this period is her son circumcised (which, you'll recall, is symbolic of the removal of our sin, which became historical fact after—and as a result of—Yahshua's sacrifice, His being “cut off”). The day of circumcision thus begins her final thirty-three day period of purification, during which (using “Jerusalem” as our key) her son (named “Yahweh is Salvation”) becomes her “inheritance,” her “possession,” (or alternately, her teacher or the One who pours salvation upon her) through whom she would be at peace with God—a peace attained through *shalam*: restitution, recompense, the making of amends. And since the name “David” means “love,” this final purification period, symbolized by Jerusalem, is “the place where Love lives.” Thus the final thirty-three days represent *our* mortal life in Christ, just as the first seven prophesied Christ's mortal life among us. We are to walk through this life in the reality of His atonement and in the light of His love.

Either that, or Moses was just making this stuff up as he went along, and I'm seeing things that aren't really there. I'll let you decide.

THE THINGS THAT DEFILE US

- (565) *A leper is unclean and defiles.* “When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling, a scab, or a bright spot, and it becomes on the skin of his body like a leprous sore, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests. The priest shall examine the sore on the skin of the body; and if the hair on the sore has turned white, and the sore appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous sore. Then the priest shall examine him, and pronounce him unclean.” (Leviticus 13:2-3) Moses goes on for the next forty-plus verses describing the visual criteria the priest was to use for determining whether a blemish that appeared on the skin was “a leprous sore.” From the description, it is clear that far more than clinical leprosy—*Elephantiasis*

graecorum, a.k.a. Hansen’s Disease—is included in the biblical “leprosy.” The Hebrew word *sara’at* refers to a wide range of malignant (and more to the point, potentially contagious) skin diseases, but the catch-all terms “leprosy,” “leprous,” and “leper” serve as convenient designations for all these various conditions.

As we have come to expect, there is more to the “law of leprosy” than merely preventing physical disease from spreading. The picture is that of preventing *spiritual* sickness from proliferating. Let’s begin by identifying the players, in symbolic terms. Aaron plays the role of Yahshua, our ultimate High Priest. His “sons” are believers who have been given access to the throne of grace through Christ’s sacrifice. Israel here represents humanity at large—we who have been created and invited to reciprocate Yahweh’s love. And the “leprous sore” is anything that is not consistent with God’s perfect plan for mankind—estrangement, falsehood, heresy, idolatry, error—of which there are many varieties (no fewer than a dozen different skin maladies are listed in the first 46 verses of Leviticus 13).

If we examine the oft-repeated verbs in this passage that apply to what the priests are supposed to be doing, we discover a stunning truth, one that is very unpopular in today’s politically correct landscape: Believers are to be more than discerning; we are instructed to be judgmental and intolerant of falsehood. We are *not* supposed to be forgiving, broadminded, and lenient where the truth of God’s word is concerned, though we *are* to forgive the moral lapses of our fellow man, graciously pardoning their personal attacks against us. The difference is important. But if a doctrine or principle is wrong—*any kind of wrong*—then it must be identified and dealt with.

The numbers tell the tale. First, at least twenty-five times in this passage the priests are instructed to look, see, examine, or otherwise consider the blemish in question. We are not to close our eyes to the falsehood around us; rather, we are instructed to look for it, recognize it for what it is, and identify it. Whatever the politicians, pundits, and preachers are saying is to be examined and compared with what we know to be true—the Word of God. And that includes the things *I’m* telling you.

Second, we are told seven times to “isolate” the suspected carrier of the disease. The priest was instructed to keep the person (i.e., his suspected sickness) set apart from the general population until it could be determined precisely what the blemish really was—a dangerous malignancy or a harmless freckle. In spiritual terms, we are being warned to exercise caution—to make a thorough examination of any idea or teaching before we accept it as truth or reject it as falsehood. We are to

take time performing the “due diligence” that’s required to get to the truth. (The Berean Ekklesia was commended in Acts 17:11 for doing precisely that—checking what Paul had told them against the authority of the Scriptures.) Our failure to heed this principle has allowed many destructive heresies to creep into the practice of our faith, turning what should have been a simple relationship with our heavenly Father into a tradition-encrusted religion. And conversely, in our haste to condemn anything that doesn’t mesh with our religious traditions (as opposed to what God’s Word actually teaches), our failure to “isolate” and calmly examine less-than-obvious scriptural truths has marginalized them and robbed many of us of their edification and blessing. (Examples: Yahweh’s ubiquitous six-plus-one pattern; the prophetic significance of His seven appointed gatherings, the “Feasts” of Yahweh; the benefits that naturally result from adherence to the Torah’s precepts; and the divergent roles Yahweh has assigned to biological Israel and the *Ekklesia*, the so-called “Church.”)

Third, the believer-priests were told seventeen times in this passage to “pronounce” the subject either clean or unclean, based upon the findings revealed by their “looking” and “isolating.” We are not to keep our mouths shut for fear of offending someone, being impolite, or trampling upon their “rights.” Rather, we are to shine the bright light of God’s truth upon the matter, no matter how out of step with society we are—even if it’s our own “Christian” society. Believers today have been told that it would be somehow “unloving” to confront Muslims or Hindus, atheistic secular humanists, or even apostate “Christians” with the error of their beliefs. But in point of fact, all we’re doing by remaining silent is encouraging them to walk around with a contagious, deadly disease that promises to kill not only them but anyone with which they come in contact. Where’s the love in that? If your child starts to chase a ball into a busy street, you scream and run after them. Why? Because you love them and don’t want them to get hurt. You don’t worry about sounding intolerant, judgmental, or even hysterical. You’re not concerned about unfairly suppressing your child’s “recreational rights.” At that moment, you only know that being intolerant of speeding cars and judgmental about your child’s ability to see them coming can *save his life*. What’s true on the playground is equally true on the rest of the planet.

- (566) *The leper shall be universally recognized as such by the prescribed marks. So too, all other unclean persons should declare themselves as such. “Now the leper on whom the sore is, his clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ He shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore he shall be unclean. He is unclean, and he shall dwell alone;*

his dwelling shall be outside the camp.” (Leviticus 13:45-46) Oh, if only! We just learned that “leprosy” is a metaphor for spiritual sickness. If only those with malignant doctrines to spread were this easy to identify. But these days, instead of sackcloth and ashes, they tend to wear expensive Italian suits. Instead of covering their mouths so their lies can’t be spread, they stand before microphones and cameras and spew their diseases to anyone foolish enough to listen. Instead of being recognized as being unclean and defiled before God, they surround themselves with fawning sycophants.

Or maybe it just *seems* like spiritual leprosy is being ignored today. Maybe the truth is that the whole world has become one big leper colony. “The camp,” the place where Yahweh’s people dwell, has been reduced to tiny pockets of faithfulness in a sea of spiritual sickness. *Most* people today live “outside the camp.” As Paul put it, **“Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. From such people turn away!”** (II Timothy 3:1-5) The Apostle has described precisely the kind of spiritual leprosy we see about us today, for we do indeed live “in the last days.”

(567) *A leprous garment is unclean and defiles. “If a garment has a leprous plague in it, whether it is a woolen garment or a linen garment, whether it is in the warp or woof of linen or wool, whether in leather or in anything made of leather, and if the plague is greenish or reddish in the garment or in the leather, whether in the warp or in the woof, or in anything made of leather, it is a leprous plague and shall be shown to the priest. The priest shall examine the plague and isolate that which has the plague seven days. And he shall examine the plague on the seventh day. If the plague has spread in the garment, either in the warp or in the woof, in the leather or in anything made of leather, the plague is an active leprosy. It is unclean. He shall therefore burn that garment in which is the plague, whether warp or woof, in wool or in linen, or anything of leather, for it is an active leprosy; the garment shall be burned in the fire.”* (Leviticus 12:47-52) Here’s where it becomes obvious that “leprosy” is not just a skin disease, but a symbol for something far more pervasive.

In scripture, our garments are a picture of how we are perceived—especially by Yahweh. As far back as Eden, what we wore (or didn’t wear) was an indication of our spiritual condition. When we were sinless, we needed no clothing whatsoever—our lives were transparent and without guile. The fig leaf ensemble our parents donned after they fell into sin was

little more than an admission of their shame. The animal skins with which God replaced the leaves were our first hint that innocent blood would be required to cover our sins. In the same way, Joseph's coat was a sign that he was loved by his father, as was the "best robe" placed upon the humbled shoulders of the repentant prodigal son. And time and again we are told of God's elect being **"arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."** (Revelation 19:8) This in reality is a garment of light given to believers by Yahweh, through which He does not see our sin. Rather, He chooses to see only the glory and perfection of Yahshua (something that was previewed by Peter, James, and John when they saw Him **"transfigured before them. His face shown like the sun and His clothes became white as the light."** (Matthew 17:2)

Contrast that glorious garment with the disease-ridden rags worn by the spiritually lost. **"But if the priest examines it, and indeed the plague has not spread in the garment, either in the warp or in the woof, or in anything made of leather, then the priest shall command that they wash the thing in which is the plague; and he shall isolate it another seven days."** As with skin ailments, no snap judgments are made. The priest must go out of his way to see that every opportunity is given for the leprous garment to change, for the plague to correct itself. **"Then the priest shall examine the plague after it has been washed; and indeed if the plague has not changed its color, though the plague has not spread, it is unclean, and you shall burn it in the fire; it continues eating away, whether the damage is outside or inside."** (Leviticus 13:53-55) It is not enough for the disease to stop spreading. One way or another, it must be eradicated. In the end, it's a matter of who is doing the washing: we cannot make our covering acceptable—it is beyond our ability. But David knew the answer, praying to Yahweh, **"Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin... Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."** (Psalm 51:2, 7)

"If the priest examines it, and indeed the plague has faded after washing it, then he shall tear it out of the garment, whether out of the warp or out of the woof, or out of the leather. But if it appears again in the garment, either in the warp or in the woof, or in anything made of leather, it is a spreading plague; you shall burn with fire that in which is the plague." Likewise, our cleansing is not always a miraculous, "now you see it, now you don't" sort of thing. Sometimes, even though the outward signs of our spiritual sickness have faded or been suppressed, only time will tell if they're gone for good. **"And if you wash the garment, either warp or woof, or whatever is made of leather, if the plague has disappeared from it, then it shall be washed a second time, and shall be clean."** This is more encouraging than we have a right to expect. Apparently, it *is* possible to be cleansed of our spiritual malignancies. It *is* possible to be

rid of the influence of false doctrine. But note: the cleansing is a two step process. It is not enough to turn your back on Islam or atheism or...*you fill in the blank*. One must subsequently receive the cleansing of sin from the only one who can—Yahshua—through our acceptance of His sacrifice. “**This is the law of the leprous plague in a garment of wool or linen, either in the warp or woof, or in anything made of leather, to pronounce it clean or to pronounce it unclean.**” (Leviticus 13:56-59)

- (568) *A leprous house defiles.* “When you have come into the land of Canaan, which I give you as a possession, and I put the leprous plague in a house in the land of your possession, and he who owns the house comes and tells the priest, saying, ‘It seems to me that there is some plague in the house,’ then the priest shall command that they empty the house, before the priest goes into it to examine the plague, that all that is in the house may not be made unclean; and afterward the priest shall go in to examine the house.” (Leviticus 14:34-36) We’ve moved from skin afflictions and apparel infections to “sick building syndrome,” yet another metaphor for spiritual sickness. For convenience, we’re calling all of this stuff “leprosy,” though there’s obviously a lot more than one physical malady in view. Here we see a new wrinkle: Yahweh Himself is said to be afflicting the house with the leprous plague, and the homeowner is expected to notice it and report it to the priest. This may seem odd, until we factor in Proverbs 3:33. “**The curse of Yahweh is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the just.**” Obviously, a “house” here is a symbol for something larger—where we live, expressed in broad strokes, our whole socio-economic-religio-political world.

Following the symbols to their logical conclusion, we see that the believer is to be cognizant of his surroundings, the society in which he lives. If he sees “a plague in the house,” (and who could miss the signs of spiritual disease in our world today?) he is to report it to the priest. That’s a picture of prayer, for the priest was the divinely appointed link between God and Man. The priest (and remember, *our* High Priest is Yahshua) first “empties the house,” that is, he takes out those within it who remain undefiled. Interestingly, he does this *before* the stones of the house are subjected to examination, to testing or trial. Could this be another subtle indicator of a pre-tribulation rapture? I believe it is. On reflection, it seems this whole passage is eschatological in nature (not that I was sharp enough to catch it when I wrote *Future History*).

Note that the occupant is *not* to (1) tear down the house himself, (2) ignore the problem, (3) become tolerant of it, or (4) defer to the opinion of his neighbors or the government—human wisdom, such as it is. No, he is to go to the priest—that is, to Yahshua. But wait—we’ve already

established that the plague is *Yahweh's* doing, sent in response to our society's wickedness. Are we supposed to appeal to the One who sent the disease in order to be kept out of it? Yes, we are. See Revelation 3:10 if you don't believe me.

The continuing instructions explain (sort of). **“And he shall examine the plague; and indeed if the plague is on the walls of the house with ingrained streaks, greenish or reddish [the colors of Islam and Communism—a coincidence?], which appear to be deep in the wall, then the priest shall go out of the house, to the door of the house, and shut up the house seven days.”** Is what seems like a problem *really* a problem? Only time will tell. The “seven days,” while generally metaphorical of God's perfect timing, might possibly indicate the seven years of trial the earth will experience after the godly inhabitants have departed—a time known as the Tribulation. Note that during this time, the Priest (symbolic of Yahshua) is “out of the house,” a condition that cannot come to pass as long as His people still inhabit the planet. As we saw before, isolation, separation, *holiness*, is part of the formula. The godly inhabitants of the “house” are not to be exposed to the potential threat while its true nature is yet fully undetermined. They are to be set apart from the world.

“And the priest [ultimately, Yahshua] shall come again on the seventh day [yeah, I read about that somewhere: it's the ultimate Sabbath—the Millennial reign of Christ] and look; and indeed if the plague has spread on the walls of the house, then the priest shall command that they take away the stones in which is the plague, and they shall cast them into an unclean place outside the city. And he shall cause the house to be scraped inside, all around, and the dust that they scrape off they shall pour out in an unclean place outside the city. Then they shall take other stones and put them in the place of those stones, and he shall take other mortar and plaster the house.” (Leviticus 14:37-42) Here's the bottom line. If an idea is truly toxic, the Priest (Yahshua) will, after giving it time to show its true colors, remove its presence and consign it to an “unclean place outside the city” (for its practitioners, metaphorical of hell). Thus doctrines like Ba'al worship, rabbinic Judaism, apostate “Christianity,” Islam, and atheistic secular humanism will all appear in turn, poison their respective societies, and be removed from the house on the “seventh day,” unceremoniously scraped off and hauled away. But Yahweh doesn't intend to leave gaping holes in the house of human society. “Other stones”—true believers, even if they weren't originally part of the wall's construction—will be brought in as replacements: it's the Church of Repentant Laodicea. And the “plaster?” I believe this white, opaque coating is analogous to the garments of light God's children will wear in His Kingdom—imputed righteousness.

(569) *A man, having a running issue, defiles.* **“When any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean.”** (Leviticus 15:2) Not to be picky, but it’s not the man that defiles, no matter what shape he’s in. It’s his *discharge*, any abnormal physical condition characterized by an unusual flowing or congestion: **“And this shall be his uncleanness in regard to his discharge—whether his body runs with his discharge, or his body is stopped up by his discharge, it is his uncleanness.”** As we saw in Mitzvah #503 (where we were discussing the sacrifices to be offered upon one’s cleansing), the “issue” could be anything from a runny or stopped-up nose, a bronchial condition where the sufferer is coughing up phlegm, to diarrhea, to pus from an infected wound. All these things are indicators of disease or injury, and more specifically, evidence that the body is trying to heal itself.

Moses goes on to describe the rules and conditions pertaining to this particular type of “uncleanness.” **“Every bed is unclean on which he who has the discharge lies, and everything on which he sits shall be unclean. And whoever touches his bed shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. He who sits on anything on which he who has the discharge sat shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. And he who touches the body of him who has the discharge shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. If he who has the discharge spits on him who is clean, then he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. Any saddle on which he who has the discharge rides shall be unclean. Whoever touches anything that was under him shall be unclean until evening. He who carries any of those things shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. And whomever the one who has the discharge touches, and has not rinsed his hands in water, he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. The vessel of earth that he who has the discharge touches shall be broken, and every vessel of wood shall be rinsed in water.”** As usual, the remedy for coming in contact with the defiling discharge is washing in water and waiting for time to pass. Caregivers of the ill or injured person are likely to become “defiled” as a result of their benevolence, leading us to observe once again that “uncleanness” of this sort is not considered sin, though cleansing is necessary nevertheless. The same thing is true of the sufferer himself: **“And when he who has a discharge is cleansed of his discharge, then he shall count for himself seven days for his cleansing, wash his clothes, and bathe his body in running water; then he shall be clean.”** (Leviticus 15:3-13)

Hygiene, I suppose, would have been enough of a reason for this kind of thing to be codified in the Torah. But I believe the lessons run deeper. Consider again the “carrier” of the defilement—God’s amazing built-in capacity for our bodies to heal themselves, rid themselves of infection, and

isolate and eliminate disease-causing microbes. (Those who insist that these capacities are merely the result of eons of undirected evolution—millions of fortuitous mutations in the human genome, one after the other—are merely demonstrating their inability or unwillingness to do the math.) When our bodies are attacked, God’s defenses rush in to do battle: mucous quickly builds up to deal with dust or mold spores—we sneeze and cough spontaneously to throw off the invaders. Food-borne toxins are eliminated automatically through vomiting or diarrhea. And, perhaps the most amazing defenders of all, white blood cells rush in to deal with all kinds of potential threats: neutrophils deal with bacterial infections; eosinophils attack parasites; basophils work against allergens; lymphocytes manufacture antibodies to protect us from being attacked by the same invaders in the future, and the list goes on. All of these defenders cause the “discharges” that defile us. We might experience pus in a wound or sweat from a fever, but without these “defiling” symptoms, we’d simply die.

The discharges aren’t the problem. They’re merely evidence that there’s a battle raging within our bodies. The real culprits are the viruses, bacteria, allergens, and parasites that attack from without. Put in that light, the spiritual applications are easier to see. Our souls are attacked incessantly. Satan uses a plethora of spiritual viruses to kill us if he can, and if not, make us sick enough to ignore or deny our God. So when we see people around us struggling with spiritual issues, we need to know that there is danger in becoming a caregiver. While meeting their needs, we need to remain set apart from the falsehoods that trouble them.

I’ll offer one example (real-life, not hypothetical) of how this works, but there are too many possible applications to even begin to list them. The virus in this case is Islam, which comes in two basic varieties: a virulent, deadly strain and a milder seemingly benign strain. Robert Spencer (JihadWatch.org), an author, scholar, and self-styled expert on all things Islamic, has set himself up as the care provider to a world infected with Islam—a noble goal. But he (a Roman Catholic) has no immunity against Satan’s wiles. His proposed treatment of the disease consists of supporting and encouraging the mild strain while condemning the obviously evil “terrorist” variety. What Robert doesn’t seem to realize is that the two strains of Islam have virtually identical DNA. Worse, the “peaceful” strain mutates into the virulent, evil variety at the drop of a hat, but the transformation never seems to happen the other way around. Robert therefore finds himself wading knee-deep through Islam-caused diarrhea (I guess you could call it Muhammad’s Revenge), and he can’t smell the stench. He is defiled and he doesn’t even know it.

Meanwhile, a dear friend of mine, Craig Winn, was called by God for a time to be a caregiver to the same Islam-infested world. By examining Islam's "genetic code," its scriptures, he concluded that both strains were deadly (though they presented different symptoms), so he did what he could to make the world safer from all forms of Muslim malevolence. Craig had no choice but to get dirty during the process, finding his studies in Islam's most revered writings to be a spiritually oppressive task. But he got himself "inoculated" daily with heavy doses of Yahweh's Scriptures—the "washing of water by the Word," as Paul calls it—and looked longingly for the hour when the sun would finally set on the job Yahweh had set for him to do. My friend became "defiled" for the world's sake, but he has been thoroughly cleansed. (His insights, by the way, are available free online at ProphetOfDoom.net—four or five thousand pages of irrefutable evidence against Islam.)

The ultimate example of one who willingly became "defiled" for the sake of an infected world, of course, is Yahshua the Messiah. He gave up the "clean room" of heaven to drown in the filth of humanity for our benefit. (Puts the word "Messiah," meaning "anointed," in a whole new light, doesn't it?) I'd say a big "thank-you" is in order. Or are you afraid to get your hands dirty?

- (570) *The seed of copulation defiles.* **"If any man has an emission of semen, then he shall wash all his body in water, and be unclean until evening. And any garment and any leather on which there is semen, it shall be washed with water, and be unclean until evening. Also, when a woman lies with a man, and there is an emission of semen, they shall bathe in water, and be unclean until evening."** (Leviticus 15:16-18) Proving once again that being "unclean" is simply indicative of the human condition (not "sin," but necessitating purification anyway), here we see that an emission of semen defiles both the man and the woman he has lain with. It is significant that God's very first recorded command to mankind was to **"Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth."** (Genesis 1:28) It's axiomatic that without the "emission of semen" and without menstruation (see Mitzvah #572), this fruitfulness would have been impossible. Yahweh, having designed us, knew that. Thus His command *required us* to become "defiled," even before our fall into sin.

This line of reasoning leads us to an important truth: our mortal bodies are not designed to inherit heaven. They were made for this earth—made from the same elements, from "dust." I surmise that without this physical type of construction, our God-given ability to choose between good and evil would have been meaningless. Spirits, even created spirits like angels, cannot die, and Yahweh never gave them the prerogative of choice. Their

assigned role is submission, obedience, and loyalty. But choice is our primary gift. We alone are given the choice of whether to reciprocate God's love or not. In order to choose between life and death then, we must be able to comprehend what it is to die. Paul revealed the ramifications of this to the Corinthians. His bottom line was, **"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption."** (I Corinthians 15:50)

Our bodies in all their attributes, whether physical, emotional, or intellectual, simply cannot stand in the presence of Almighty God, **"from whose face the earth and heaven fled away."** (Revelation 20:11) But Yahweh created us to enjoy fellowship with Him. To make that possible, He has implemented a two-stage solution. First God took upon Himself the image of a man: Yahshua walked among us and gave His life for us some 2,000 years ago, and has promised to come again to reign among us. This explains His title, *Immanuel*: "God with us."

The second phase is just the reverse: it requires *us* to change into the image of *God*. How is this done? Paul goes on to explain, sort of. **"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'" (I Corinthians 15:51-54)** Believers will be changed from mortals into immortal beings, suddenly, permanently, and all at one time. Our old bodies will be transformed, recreated, *translated*, into a new form that, quickened by the indwelling of God's Spirit, will live forever. Apparently, Yahshua walked among his Disciples for forty days after His resurrection in just such a body.

This new immortal, "spiritual," body cannot be defiled or made unclean. In this body, we will experience nothing that requires cleansing, and that includes "emissions of semen." Immortality apparently cannot beget mortality; life cannot father death. Right about now, all you guys are gritting your teeth and mumbling, "Shoot. I kinda *liked* 'emissions of semen.'" Will God replace sex with something you'll find even more rewarding? Count on it.

(571) *Purification from all kinds of defilement shall be effected by immersion in the waters of a mikvah. "If any man has an emission of semen, then he shall wash all his body in water, and be unclean until evening. And any garment and any leather on which there is semen, it shall be washed with water, and be unclean*

until evening. Also, when a woman lies with a man, and there is an emission of semen, they shall bathe in water, and be unclean until evening.” (Leviticus 15:16-18) Judaism 101 defines a “Mikvah” as, “Literally: gathering. A ritual bath used for spiritual purification. It is used primarily in conversion rituals and after the period of sexual separation during a woman’s menstrual cycles, but many Chasidim immerse themselves in the mikvah regularly for general spiritual purification.” Many archeological sites in Israel reveal elaborate waterworks that were designed primarily to provide running water to large mikvah ritual purification pools, deep enough for total immersion. There’s a really nice one, for example, at the Qumran dig (an ancient Essene commune). Typically, they feature two parallel sets of stone steps divided by a wall, one for walking into the community pool and the other for leaving it. It’s clear that Torah-observant Jews of Bible times were serious about ritual purity, for the Torah is quite specific in its instructions.

The instructions, however, did not specify how people and their unclean belongings were to be washed, so it’s highly presumptive of Maimonides to restrict purification efficacy to “the waters of a mikvah.” It’s kind of like baptism in the New Covenant scriptures—God never actually told us how to do it. Why? Because He is more concerned with our hearts’ attitude than our adherence to textual correctness. Yes, *baptizo* means “to immerse” in Greek. But when a persecuted Christian pastor in Communist China, imprisoned for his faith, uses the only water he can find—a trickle from a filthy sink in the prison lavatory—to “baptize” his repentant fellow inmates, does Yahweh cry foul and refuse to accept the act because they weren’t actually *immersed*? I think not.

- (572) *A menstruating woman is unclean and defiles others.* “If a woman has a discharge, and the discharge from her body is blood, she shall be set apart seven days; and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening. Everything that she lies on during her impurity shall be unclean; also everything that she sits on shall be unclean. Whoever touches her bed shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. And whoever touches anything that she sat on shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. If anything is on her bed or on anything on which she sits, when he touches it, he shall be unclean until evening. And if any man lies with her at all, so that her impurity is on him, he shall be unclean seven days; and every bed on which he lies shall be unclean. (Leviticus 15:19-24) Here again we see that “defilement” or “uncleanness” is not sin, but merely part of being human, part of being a physical, flesh-and-blood person walking the earth. The irony gets heavy this time, for a woman’s normal menstruation cycle is in itself a cleansing

process, the body's way of discarding an old, unfertilized eggs to make way for fresh opportunities for pregnancy.

Perhaps that's God's lesson here: we all miss opportunities for fruitfulness (which is all the menstrual cycle really is), but we can't expect to be effective in God's service if we allow the baggage of yesterday's failures to accumulate in our lives. Rather, we need to periodically "clean house," undergo a time of purification and renewal. If we don't, our uncleanness defiles not only ourselves, but also those whose lives touch ours. This periodic renewal entails more than just a conscious effort to cleanse our minds and spirits of the world's influence once in a while. An occasional pause from our labors is also called for, and if Yahweh's design of the female body is any indication, that hiatus should consume as much as one quarter of our time. The Sabbath rest is a major component of that by God's design, but we should also seize other opportunities to "recharge our spiritual batteries." Yahshua, you'll recall, was forever wandering off into the hills to meditate and pray by Himself.

Just because we were instructed to "be fruitful and multiply," it is not expected that *every* egg a woman produces should result in pregnancy. Likewise, though being in God's service is a great privilege, we should never get the idea that everything we "do for Him" must either bear fruit or it's a waste of time. The cleansing process, the break in the schedule, is built into our anatomy. We dishonor the God who made us if we act as if He can't get along without our efforts twenty-four-seven. Sometimes He'd prefer us to play hooky, go fishing, leave the work undone—just as long as we invite Him to come along with us.

(573) *A woman, having a running issue, defiles.* **"If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, other than at the time of her customary impurity, or if it runs beyond her usual time of impurity, all the days of her unclean discharge shall be as the days of her customary impurity. She shall be unclean. Every bed on which she lies all the days of her discharge shall be to her as the bed of her impurity; and whatever she sits on shall be unclean, as the uncleanness of her impurity. Whoever touches those things shall be unclean; he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening."** (Leviticus 15:25-27) In #569 above, we encountered an identically worded mitzvah concerning men. All of our observations there would apply to women as well. Here, Moses speaks specifically of a woman's discharge that runs beyond the time of her ordinary menses, extending the conditions of her ritual impurity as long as the condition persists.

We are immediately reminded, of course, of the woman mentioned in Mark 5 and Luke 8 who had suffered from this condition for twelve long

years. She reached out in faith and touched the border of Yahshua's garment, and immediately both of them knew that she had been healed. Technically, she had "defiled" Yahshua by touching Him—or would have, had she not been instantaneously cleansed. What I'd like to point out is the little drama she interrupted by doing so. Yahshua was on His way to raise someone from the dead—a little girl who had been born precisely when the woman had been afflicted with her malady—twelve years before. Coincidence? I doubt it. Twelve is apparently the number of completion in God's economy—especially when it comes to people (e.g. twelve Israelite tribes; twelve apostles). Thus when we see both the woman with the issue of blood and the daughter of Jairus brought together in the same twelve-year context, we witness the complete failure of the human condition without Christ. We are completely impure and hopelessly mortal—*until* we encounter Yahshua.

- (574) *Carry out the ordinance of the Red Heifer so that its ashes will always be available. "Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring you [Moses and Aaron] a red heifer without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which a yoke has never come. You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, that he may take it outside the camp, and it shall be slaughtered before him."* (Numbers 19:2-3) So begins the so-called "ordinance of the Red Heifer." We've got a big problem right off the bat. The animal specified is *not* a heifer (which, according to Webster, is "a young cow which has not borne a calf"). That would have been an *eglah* in Hebrew, the heifer mentioned in Mitzvot #296 and #297. The word used here is *par*, ordinarily translated "bull," "young bull," "bullock," or occasionally "ox." *Par* denotes an adolescent to fully mature male bovine, usually inferring that the animal has not been castrated. "Red," by the way, is *adam*, meaning blood-red in color. It's related to "Edom," the name by which Esau became known after trading his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of red stew—in effect declaring Jacob the winner of the world's first chili cook-off.

Anyway, the "red bull" was to be taken outside the camp (unlike the typical sacrifice, which was slain at the altar) and slaughtered there for a specific purpose ("purifying from sin"—see verse 9). It should be obvious by now that the "red bull" symbolizes Yahshua Himself, who was slain *outside* the walls of the city in order to purify us from our sins. **"And Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, and sprinkle some of its blood seven times directly in front of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight: its hide, its flesh, its blood, and its offal shall be burned...."** Let's sort out the players here. Aaron was still the High Priest at this time (vs. 1), so his son Eleazar the priest was his follower, his apostle if you will. Thus I believe Eleazar represents the faithful witnesses to

Yahshua's sacrifice. In their sight, Yahshua was subjected to the fires of judgment on our behalf. And as Eleazar's finger sprinkled the blood before the tabernacle, Yahshua's disciples (ultimately including us) are to take a hands-on role in the process of mankind's purification.

“And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet, and cast them into the midst of the fire burning the heifer...” The three elements mentioned here are telling. Cedar, a tall, strong, pest-resistant tree, symbolizes the pride of human strength and splendor—the pinnacle of man's achievement (cf. Ezekiel 31:3, Jeremiah 22:7). Hyssop represents the other side of the coin: our intrinsic insignificance—the concept that we can do great things only when allowing ourselves to be used as an implement in God's hand. A humble shrub of the marjoram or mint family, hyssop was the tool used to apply the blood of the Passover Lamb to the doorposts, and it even played a small part in the crucifixion scene (John 19:29). David, in Psalm 51:7, refers to hyssop as Yahweh's agent of the purging of sin. When Yahshua noted the Pharisees' tithing of “mint,” He was referring to their nitpicking over the smallest, most trivial of matters—hyssop. Scarlet is a metaphor for sin (see Isaiah 1:18) as well as the blood required to atone for it. Physically, scarlet was a red dye made from the dried, crushed carcasses of female cochineal insects (a.k.a. scale), or the textile article dyed with it. Thus by the Torah's definition, it was a substance that defiled on contact. These three substances together represent the irony of the human condition—its irrational pride, its irrelevance apart from Yahweh, and the indelible stain of its defilement. They were all ritually consumed in fire along with the red bull. This tells us that Christ's sacrifice purges us of the negative aspects of our human nature.

“Then the priest shall wash his clothes, he shall bathe in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp; the priest shall be unclean until evening. And the one who burns it shall wash his clothes in water, bathe in water, and shall be unclean until evening.” (Numbers 19:4-7) The witnesses of Yahshua's sacrifice, represented by Eleazar and his Levite assistants, acknowledge their fallen human condition—their uncleanness before God—and allow themselves to be cleansed. Our “clothes” are a scriptural metaphor for our state of acceptability before God. In this life they are “washed,” but ultimately, they are exchanged for garments of light, the very righteousness of Yahshua. Likewise, being “unclean until evening” is a picture of our earthly existence. When the sun sets upon our mortal lives, when we trade our corrupt mortality for incorruptible immortality (through death and/or rapture—see I Corinthians 15), we shall be rendered forever undefiled in God's sight.

“Then a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and store them outside the camp in a clean place; and they shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for the water of purification; it is for purifying from sin.” I’ll explain in a moment what was to be done with the ashes and how they were to be utilized. **“And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. It shall be a statute forever to the children of Israel and to the stranger who dwells among them.”** (Numbers 19:8-10) Like the priest and the Levites who presided over the sacrifice and burning of the red bull, the Levites who gathered and stored the ashes for later use were rendered “unclean” in the process of carrying out their duties. If we are human—even if we are children of Yahweh—we are cursed by the human condition: we are “defiled.” The cure for this, as I explained above, is washing and waiting. Note that Yahweh specifically applied this truth to both Israel and the gentiles—the “strangers”—among them (these days, that’s the Church, we believers who are indebted to Israel for their role in conveying to us the Torah and the Messiah).

I should, however, draw a distinction between the temporary uncleanness of a redeemed individual and the catastrophic condition of one who is not part of Yahweh’s family. It is pointless to “clean” a dead body. You can wash it all you want—it’s still going to rot and stink. No amount of “clothes washing” or “waiting until evening” will make a corpse pure before Yahweh. Worse, we are all spiritually stillborn. We must be quickened—made alive—by God’s Spirit if the cleansing process is to be efficacious. The Torah’s rituals are in themselves only a metaphor for those of us in whom Yahweh’s Spirit dwells. For us, cleanness (symbolized in the Torah by the washing of clothes and waiting until evening) is achieved through a life of prayer: **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** (I John 1:9) Note that as in the Torah, that’s two different things, atonement and purification. We’re in need of both.

- (575) *A corpse defiles.* **“He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean. Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of Yahweh. That person shall be cut off from Israel. He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness is still on him.”** (Numbers 19:11-13) We are still within the context of the so-called “Red Heifer” law. Here we are given our first hint as to what is to be done with the ashes of the red bull, prepared as in Mitzvah #574. The “water of purification” is to be sprinkled on someone who has touched a dead body. If he does not

purify himself as prescribed, he not only remains ritually unclean himself, but he is also said to “defile the Tabernacle of Yahweh” as well. Since the Tabernacle is a symbol-rich presentation of God’s Messiah and His plan of redemption, the one who has violated this principle will be “cut off from Israel,” a thinly veiled euphemism for spiritual death, since the name “Israel” means “God prevails.”

If that sounds a little harsh, consider this. Although the phrase “he who touches a dead body” is a proper translation (and no doubt the correct *primary* meaning) it is not the only thing this connotes. Hebrew is a very economical language. The same word is often used in an active (*Qal*) or passive (*Niphal*) voice or stem. Furthermore, the intensive or intentional active voice (*Piel*) and passive voice (*Pual*) are often the same word, as is the causative voice (*Hiphal*). So *naga*, the verb translated (in the *Qal* stem) “to touch” in our passage, could legitimately be rendered “to reach,” “strike,” “inflict,” or even “to arrive,” and it could also be correctly translated, “to be touched,” “to be stricken,” etc. Therefore when we see “he who touches a dead body” we should also rightly contemplate the meaning, “he who is touched by death,” or “he who has reached (or arrived at) death.”

Okay, so what is the remedy for one who has become so intimately acquainted with death? Good question, since because we are mortal, that description fits any and all of us. He is to be sprinkled with the water of purification (that is, water that has been mixed with the ashes of the red bull) on two separate occasions, the third day and the seventh day. Interesting numbers, considering where the ashes in the water came from—a transparent dress rehearsal of the Messiah’s sacrifice as it had been predicted in the Feasts of Yahweh. The third day of the sacrificial process (we can see in retrospect) fell on the Feast of Firstfruits. In order for the Firstfruits, the “Firstborn of the dead,” to be presented as required before Yahweh, He had to rise under His own power from the dead. That resurrection was the culmination of the Messiah’s sacrifice, the proof that it had been efficacious because the sacrifice had been worthy.

The seventh day also speaks of an event commemorated in one of the seven Feasts of Yahweh. The Feast of Unleavened Bread marked the day that sin, represented by leaven, was removed from our lives as Yahshua’s body lay in the tomb on our behalf. But this was a seven-day feast. (To review, Passover fell on the 14th of Nisan, Unleavened Bread began on the 15th—a mandated Sabbath—and ran through the 21st, and the Feast of Firstfruits was on the 16th.) The Feast of Unleavened Bread concluded on the seventh day and was followed on the eighth day by another Sabbath—

this one metaphorical of eternity—our permanent day of rest. The lesson is therefore clear: our cleansing is not complete until the Feast of Unleavened Bread is fully accomplished. Yes, we are *declared* to be free from sin on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. But our actual purification is a process that continues as long as we inhabit our fallen mortal bodies. **“He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days.”** The bottom line: we have all been touched by death—stricken by the uncleanness of our mortal circumstance. The only cure for this condition is to be washed in the water of purification—the Word of God—which is made efficacious by the sacrifice of Yahweh’s Messiah.

(576) *The waters of separation defile one who is clean, and cleanse the unclean from pollution by a dead body. “And for an unclean person they shall take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, and running water shall be put on them in a vessel. A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, sprinkle it on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave.”* (Numbers 19:17-18) Here we see the instructions for preparing the “water of purification” used in the ordinance of the so-called “Red Heifer” (See also Mitzvot #574 and #575). The ashes of the red bull are put within a container (metaphorical of one’s body) and mixed with running or flowing water—the word *chay* actually means “living” or “alive.” It’s another symbolic reference to Yahshua.

The water-ash mixture was to be sprinkled upon whatever had become defiled by contact with death. Two things bear notice here. First, the person doing the sprinkling had to be “clean.” In the end, there is only One such Person—Yahshua Himself. Second, the implement with which the sprinkling was done was hyssop, the humble shrub that was burned along with the red bull. Hyssop, you’ll recall, was used to smear the blood of the original Passover Lamb (another Messianic symbol) onto the upright doorposts of the believing Israelite’s homes. It was also referred to by a chastised King David after the disastrous Bathsheba affair: **“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.”** (Psalm 51:7-11) David is asking Yahweh to fulfill the promise of the ordinance of the Red Bull. He’s pleading that the sins that have defiled him—sins through which he has touched death—might be washed away through the sprinkling of the waters of purification upon him—“purging him with hyssop.” And his plea tells us the effect the precept of the Red Bull will have upon the

repentant believer: cleanness in God's sight, joy, healing, fellowship with Yahweh, a dismissal of our sins, a renewal of our spirit, and the continued indwelling of Yahweh's Spirit within us. Who could ask for more?

Moses wasn't finished relating the instructions. **"The clean person shall sprinkle the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean. But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of Yahweh. The water of purification has not been sprinkled on him; he is unclean. It shall be a perpetual statute for them."** (Numbers 19:19-21) We are reminded that although He lived a sinless life, Yahshua "became sin" on our behalf. He willingly subjected Himself to the uncleanness of the human condition so that we might have the opportunity to become clean. As we saw in Mitzvah #575, the third-day and seventh-day cleansings were executed by Yahshua Himself in fulfillment of the Feasts of Yahweh, and in so doing, He also fulfilled the requirements of the "clean person" who sprinkles mankind with the waters of purification.

Further, the precept fairly screams that the principle of the Red Bull's cleansing extended beyond Theocratic Israel to all of Man's generations: this is a "perpetual statute." How many different ways has Yahweh told us about His plan for saving us? Scores? Hundreds? When you know what to look for, they're ubiquitous in the Scriptures. I'll bet nobody's ever found them all. The pity is, Maimonides never even found *one*.

Maimonides did, however, point out something that we shouldn't overlook. **"He who sprinkles the water of purification shall wash his clothes; and he who touches the water of purification shall be unclean until evening. Whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean; and the person who touches it shall be unclean until evening."** (Numbers 19:21-22) There is a "catch" with the waters of purification. Though he upon whom it is sprinkled is made clean, he who does the sprinkling is thereby rendered *unclean*. Our analysis in the previous mitzvot should tell us why. Eleazar, not Aaron, is tasked with purifying the lost and defiled world with the waters of purification, the ashes of the red bull dissolved in living water. That is, it is not Christ (our High Priest) directly who administers cleansing in this world, but rather His disciples, His followers—us! In order to have a cleansing effect upon the world, we must be here, being *in* the world but not *of* it. When we rub shoulders with an unclean world, our sleeves sometimes get dirty. That's why the Holy Spirit dwells within us. As Yahshua explained, **"The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."** (John 14:26; see also John 15:26) That is the process that Paul described as the "washing of

water by the Word” (cf. Ephesians 5:26), in other words, the cleansing process we undergo in this life.

I would be remiss in neglecting to mention that the Holy Spirit will not always be here cleansing the world through the agency (the “hyssop,” if you will) of His called-out people. Paul describes it: **“Now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains [He’s referring to the Holy Spirit, restraining evil and cleansing the earth through the presence and purpose of Yahshua’s *Ekklesia*] will do so until He is taken out of the way.”** This will happen at the rapture of the Church, for Yahshua’s promise in John 14:16 assures us that the Holy Spirit will abide with us *forever*. No Spirit, no Church, no cleansing influence upon the earth. **“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”** (II Thessalonians 2:6-12). That’s a graphic but sober assessment of what it will be like when God’s people are no longer here on earth to present Yahshua, to sprinkle the water of purification, the living water imbued with the ashes of the red bull, upon a world that insists on touching death.

(577) *Do not shave off the hair from the scale. And on the seventh day the priest shall examine the sore; and indeed if the scale has not spread, and there is no yellow hair in it, and the scale does not appear deeper than the skin, he shall shave himself, but the scale he shall not shave. And the priest shall isolate the one who has the scale another seven days.* (Leviticus 13:32-33) We’re back in leprosy land, folks, territory we explored in Mitzvot #502 and #565-568, and will continue to do for the rest of this chapter, through #580. Leviticus 13 and 14 are all about the examination, isolation, and declaration of “leprosy,” which as we have seen is a catch-all metaphor for spiritual sickness, heresy, or false teaching.

Though Maimonides’ mitzvah zeroes in on one small detail, the precept is considerably more complicated. The instruction begins, as usual, with the realization that something might be amiss, followed by a close examination of the problem. **“If a man or woman has a sore on the head or the beard, then the priest shall examine the sore; and indeed if it appears deeper than the skin, and there is in it thin yellow hair, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean. It is a scaly leprosy of the head or beard....”** There’s an old saying:

“Beauty is only skin deep, but ugly goes all the way to the bone.” It’s kind of like that with spiritual things. You can manage to *look* spiritually intact some of the time, but what you believe deep down will eventually come to light. If you’re merely practicing religion instead of enjoying a familial relationship with Yahweh, your lack of trust will tend to announce itself at the first sign of adversity. And when things begin to look hopeless, you’ll feel like following the advice of Job’s wife: “Curse God and die.”

And then there’s the converse situation—it may not be “leprosy”—spiritual sickness—but it is a “sore spot,” so to speak, something that doesn’t line up with the commonly accepted view. Maybe it’s heresy, but maybe it’s something true and valuable that everybody missed until now. **“But if the priest examines the scaly sore, and indeed it does not appear deeper than the skin, and there is no black hair in it, then the priest shall isolate the one who has the scale seven days.”** (Leviticus 13:29-31) After examination, the next step is isolation—carefully and lovingly making sure the afflicted soul is not in a position to pass his “disease” on to others until it can be determined if that’s really what it is. In spiritual terms, that means being cautious about what doctrines we embrace. If you don’t know from experience and study that what someone is telling you is compatible with God’s truth, then isolate him until you’ve had a chance to check it out. This precludes the two other possible courses of action—accepting the teaching uncritically (blindly pronouncing it “clean,” in other words) or rejecting it out of hand merely because it’s unfamiliar or not commonly understood (a knee-jerk diagnosis of uncleanness).

I’ll give you a couple of examples of how this works. In the mid 1800s, a fellow named Darby “rediscovered” the doctrine of the rapture. Even today, some reject his findings (’cause they’re *new*, something the Church had ignored for seventeen centuries) and some heartily embrace them without any sort of critical examination. Both paths can lead to error. In this case, the doctrine of the rapture holds up beautifully when tested in the crucible of scriptural truth.

In the second example, I’m the suspected “leper.” When doing research for my book on Biblical prophecy, *Future History*, I noticed that multiple avenues of evidence converged on a single date, to the exclusion of all others, for the commencement of Yahshua’s kingdom on earth, a date from which numerous other last-days events could be calculated. My conclusion wasn’t based on vague feelings, wishful thinking, or speculative estimates, but scriptural data—cold, hard numbers that *had to* have been given to us for a reason. This, of course, flies in the face of generations of Bible expositors who’ve taken half a verse out of context

and made doctrine out of it: *Jesus said “No man knows the day or the hour,” so we can’t know anything about the timing of the last days. Don’t even ask!* Then I come along and point out stuff that all those really smart guys before me never saw. In the parlance of Moses, it’s a “scaly sore that does not appear deeper than the skin.” Now, according to the law of leprosy, you are neither to accept my findings without a second thought, nor flatly reject them just because you’ve never heard of this before. You’re suppose to “isolate” my teachings—compare what I’ve said to scripture, mull it over, pray about it, put my logic to the test, and only then decide whether I’m right or wrong, clean or unclean. (The date, by the way, is revealed and discussed in an appendix to *Future History*, available at www.futuretruth.net/Future_History_Appendix_Chronology.Prophecy.)

At this point, we’re where Maimonides put his toe in the water. Our initial text, Leviticus 13:32-33, takes us to the next step. We’re to take away everything that might be confusing us or obfuscating the issue—our previously held notions, traditions, and the opinions of men—in other words, we must “shave.” Then we’re to continue our contemplation and examination of the “sore.” We’re not to shave the suspected area, however. That is, don’t misquote the presumed heretic, don’t edit what’s been proposed. Judge what he really said, not what you might be inclined to read into it. In the example I’ve used, for instance, don’t go off saying “Ken knows when the rapture is going to occur.” I said no such thing.

Moses’ instructions continue. **“On the seventh day the priest shall examine the scale; and indeed if the scale has not spread over the skin, and does not appear deeper than the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean. He shall wash his clothes and be clean. But if the scale should at all spread over the skin after his cleansing, then the priest shall examine him; and indeed if the scale has spread over the skin, the priest need not seek for yellow hair. He is unclean. But if the scale appears to be at a standstill, and there is black hair grown up in it, the scale has healed. He is clean, and the priest shall pronounce him clean.”**

(Leviticus 13:34-37) The spiritual application: after due consideration and study, the proposed doctrine should be either rejected or accepted, depending solely upon how it holds up in the light of God’s truth. I can’t help reflecting that if this procedure had been followed throughout the church age, we never would have fallen into the error and apathy that plague us today.

- (578) *The procedure of cleansing leprosy, whether of a man or of a house, takes place with cedar-wood, hyssop, scarlet thread, two birds, and running water. “This shall be the law of the leper for the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought to the priest. And the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall*

examine him; and indeed, if the leprosy is healed in the leper, then the priest shall command to take for him who is to be cleansed two living and clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop. And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water. And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose in the open field.” (Leviticus 14:2-7)

It may seem like I’m splitting straws, but there is an important difference between being “healed” and being “cleansed” (as the unfortunate English translation puts it), though they sound like very similar concepts to our ears. The leper in this case has *already* been healed when he is brought to the priest for “cleansing.” “To heal” in Hebrew is *rapha*, a verb meaning “to cause or promote restoration of health or a right state after being sick, diseased, or injured.” (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*) It is Yahweh who does the healing, not the priest. In fact, as I pointed out in Mitzvah #502, the only Biblical record we have of *anyone* being healed of leprosy under the rules of the Torah is when Yahshua—Yahweh in the flesh—did it.

Rapha, the healing that has been accomplished, is contrasted here with the noun *tahara*, translated “cleansing” or the related verb *taher*, meaning to cleanse or purify, whether physically, ceremonially, or morally. Because of its juxtaposition with *rapha* (healing), it is clear that the ceremonial element is being stressed here: the priest *pronounces* the restored leper to be clean; he performs the ceremony that *announces* his cleansing to the community. And if we recall that leprosy is a metaphor for spiritual sickness, the moral purification aspect becomes clear as well.

This pronouncement of cleanness (as opposed to the actual healing) is the subject of our mitzvah. The ritual has details similar to some others we have seen. First, the use of cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop was seen in the ordinance of the so-called “Red Heifer” (See Mitzvah #574), which provided cleansing for one who had been defiled by touching death. To reprise my conclusion, “These three substances together represent the irony of the human condition—its irrational pride, its irrelevance apart from Yahweh, and the indelible stain of its defilement.” There they were burned in the fire that was reducing the Red Bull to ashes; here they are dipped in the blood of the sacrificial bird. This brings to mind a second parallel: one bird was sacrificed while another was dipped in the blood of the first and then released. This is reminiscent of the two goats of the Day of Atonement, one of which was slain while the other was set free in the wilderness. Both the birds and the goats speak of the substitutionary death

of the Messiah—allowing us the freedom to live in God’s grace. A third parallel is the mention of running (or “living” water), which as we have seen (Mitzvot #569 and #576) is symbolic of the cleansing power of Yahshua the Messiah.

It should be noted that there is a completely separate group of sacrifices the cleansed leper was to offer up upon this confirmation of his restoration to health. They’re covered in Leviticus 14:10-32, and include offerings of grain and oil (the *minha*), a trespass offering (*asham*), sin offering (*chata’t*) and a burnt offering (*olah*). There’s a detailed explanation of what these signify toward the end of Chapter 12 of this book. All these sacrifices are offered *in response* to the leper’s cleansing, not given in order to attain it.

The order of events in the law of leprosy (something that applies to all of us on a spiritual level) is: (1) We contract the disease, which I believe is a thinly veiled euphemism for the mortal state we all inherited from Adam; (2) We come to terms with the fact that we are ill, sinful, stricken with a malady that defiles and can ultimately kill us; (3) We are examined, found to be unclean, and isolated from the household of faith; (4) We receive the healing provided by Yahweh through the life of His Son Yahshua; (6) This healing is thankfully recognized as we are pronounced clean, though we still inhabit our formerly leprous bodies, and (7) The state of being clean and whole is brought to fruition on the “eighth day” (verse 10), pointing toward the eternal state in which we will be forever free of the evil that plagues us in this life. (This interpretation, of course—that the law of leprosy is prophetic of Yahweh’s plan of redemption—would have given Maimonides a rash.)

(579) *The leper shall shave all his hair. “He who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean. After that he shall come into the camp, and shall stay outside his tent seven days. But on the seventh day he shall shave all the hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows—all his hair he shall shave off. He shall wash his clothes and wash his body in water, and he shall be clean.”* (Leviticus 14:8-9) It isn’t just *any* leper who is to shave all his hair off—only the one who has been healed of his disease, the one “who is to be cleansed (*taher*—pronounced clean).”

The commentaries typically speak of this shaving (Hebrew: *galah*) as merely part of the purification process, but I think there’s more to it. In Mitzvah #577, we were instructed to shave off the hair of the leper in order to get a better look at the “scaly sore,” but we were not to shave the sore spot itself—where the “thin yellow hair,” if any, was an indicator of the leprosy. There I concluded that “shaving” was a euphemism for

scraping off the things that tend to obfuscate a spiritual issue—our traditions, religious customs, or the opinions of men that our peers have embraced. We are, in other words, to judge a matter on its own merit in the light of scripture, recognizing that sometimes our religious traditions are *themselves* the problem!

Actually, there are *two* “shavings” the ex-leper is to perform, one at the beginning of his week-long cleansing ceremony, and another at the end. If the spiritual ramifications of the seven-step leprosy/redemption timeline I proposed at the end of Mitzvah #578 have any merit, these two “shavings” are significant instructions of how we’re to live as believers in Yahweh. When we first recognize our condition and receive the “cure,” we are to do it without reference to religion, custom, or dogma—our healing is to be shorn of the trappings of religion that tend to obscure the core issues of our redemption. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying that the habits and traditions we adopt in the practice of our faith are necessarily a bad thing (though they can be). We shouldn’t have to reinvent the wheel every time we wish to approach Yahweh in a corporate setting. But they are not in themselves the point, and should never become the point. We are to begin our walk of faith naked before God (for indeed we are), and whatever religious habits we develop over our life as believers should grow naturally into place, not be imposed by others from outside our own personal experience.

The second “shaving” is done on the seventh day. Yahweh’s ubiquitous six-plus-one metaphor—six units of effort and endeavor capped by one unit of God’s grace, followed by an eternity of fellowship and communion—leads us to conclude that man-made religious tradition will be eliminated completely when Yahshua comes to reign among us upon the earth. That’s not to say that our corporate worship will devolve into anarchy during the Millennium, however. The rites of the Torah (which as we have seen all point toward the Messiah) will be revisited for the benefit of the progeny of the Tribulation survivors. (See [Future History, Chapters 26-28](#), for a detailed discussion of the Millennial reign.)

- (580) *Do not pluck out the marks of leprosy. “Take heed in an outbreak of leprosy, that you carefully observe and do according to all that the priests, the Levites, shall teach you; just as I commanded them, so you shall be careful to do. Remember what Yahweh your God did to Miriam on the way when you came out of Egypt!”* (Deuteronomy 24:8) As you can see, the “proof text” for this mitzvah offers no new instruction, but rather is an admonition to pay attention to the law of leprosy. The lesson, it is implied, is contained within the record

of Miriam's curse. We would be remiss, then, if we neglected to check it out. It's in Numbers, Chapter 12....

“Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. So they said, ‘Has Yahweh indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?’ And Yahweh heard it.” Note that their ulterior motive, racial bigotry, led to something totally unrelated, a grab for power disguised in fancy religious clothes. Yahweh knows our hearts, and He understands what we're up to. **“(Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)”** This editorial insertion (probably made by Joshua) tells us that Moses was not of a mind to defend his leadership position against challenges from his brother and sister. Mo would have said, “If God wants me to serve, I'll serve; if He wants me to step aside, that's okay too.”

“Suddenly Yahweh said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, ‘Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!’ So the three came out. Then Yahweh came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward.” Uh-oh. **“Then He said, ‘Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, Yahweh, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of Yahweh. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?’”** When Yahweh defends you, consider yourself *defended*.

“So the anger of Yahweh was aroused against them, and He departed. And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow.” The irony, in light of her issue with Moses' Ethiopian wife, is hilarious. **“Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper. So Aaron said to Moses, ‘Oh, my lord! Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned. Please do not let her be as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb!”** We are left to wonder why Aaron was not stricken as well. It is evident that he knew and acknowledged that he was equally guilty, equally foolish, equally deserving of the same fate. Perhaps it was the responsibility that Yahweh had assigned to him—being the high priest, prophetic of one of the coming Messiah's roles. After all, *somebody* had to plead Miriam's case, and God had just reminded them that Moses was the only one to whom He spoke face to face. Aaron (unlike us, who since Calvary have direct access to the throne of grace) had to appeal to Moses on behalf of Miriam.

“So Moses cried out to Yahweh, saying, ‘Please heal her, O God, I pray!’” No hesitation, no recrimination. This is one of the few times a prayer is quoted in the Torah, though the word for “prayer” (Hebrew: *palal*) isn’t used (See Mitzvah #22). When Moses said, “I pray,” he used the word *’na*, meaning “please, I beg you,” spoken to stress the urgency or intensity of the situation. Aaron used the same word in his entreaty to Moses: *“Please do not let her be as one dead....”*

“Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and afterward she may be received again.’ So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days, and the people did not journey till Miriam was brought in again.” (Numbers 12:1-15) The repentant Miriam bore the marks of her sin in her body, for a while at least. Yahweh is merciful, so in response to Moses’ plea, He didn’t make it permanent (as He would the unrepentant King Uzziah). I should point out, however, that repentant or not, Miriam’s sin affected more than her: it prevented Israel from making any forward progress as long as she was afflicted. Our sins may be done in private, but they can have very public consequences.

Chapter 16

Politics

It is said that in polite conversation, one should never discuss one's views on either religion or politics. In the Torah, however, these two subjects collide with gleeful alacrity. I guess if you're into small talk, Yahweh would make a terrible dinner guest.

Because God told them to remain separate from the nations, the Jews have traditionally viewed politics as a case of “us vs. them”—Israel against the rest of the world. And because a plethora of yet-to-be-fulfilled Bible passages predict their national restoration to greatness, these same Jews (those who still believe there's a God, that is) assume that He's on their side. And He *is*, for the long haul, but that doesn't mean He's blind to their national rebellion—even if they can't see it. Unfortunately, the Jewish sense of political destiny has become inexorably intertwined with the rabbinical view of the Torah: the idea that keeping rules and observing traditions are what binds a people to God and purges their iniquity—and that the Messiah will come to their aid only when they've proved themselves worthy.

On the other hand, the “blessings and cursings” passages in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 clearly indicate that Israel should be able to gauge their spiritual condition—their success at “observing all these commandments”—by taking notice of whether or not they are actually being blessed (and by this, I mean more than merely continuing to exist as a separate people, for God promised *that* to them unconditionally). Judging by the standards of scripture, the Jews are still worlds away from the center of God's will: half of them (at least) are still scattered throughout the world; they serve “gods” other than Yahweh, gods of tradition, intellect, and wealth; they are hounded and persecuted in the nations in which they are scattered, irrationally hated and ostracized; and their very national existence in their own land is threatened daily by enemies both foreign and domestic (cf. Deuteronomy 28:64-66). If the rabbis' approach is right, then why hasn't God kept His promise: **“If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments and perform them...you shall dwell in your land safely...I will give you peace in the land...none shall make you afraid...I will set my tabernacle among you...I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.”** (Leviticus 26:3-12, highlights) Needless to say, none of that is the case today. They *aren't* walking in His statutes, no matter what they think.

The prophet Isaiah describes the epiphany of Israel when they finally realize how wrong they were: **“We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags. We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.**

And there is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You. For You have hidden Your face from us, and have consumed us because of our iniquities...Do not be furious, O Yahweh, nor remember our iniquity forever.” And lest there should be any doubt that Israel is the petitioner here, he goes on to say, **“Indeed, please look—we are your people. Your holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.”** (Isaiah 64:6-7, 9-10)

Yahweh’s reply is like a bucket of cold water in the face. **“I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation that was not called by My name.”** In case you missed it, He’s talking about the gentile believers who (unlike the Jews, for the most part) were “made right with God by faith,” as Paul puts it in his epistle to the Romans, which we’ll visit in a moment. God says that these people—we who were so dumb we didn’t even know we were *looking* for Yahweh—gladly received salvation when it was presented to them, whereas the Jews stubbornly refused to either keep His Law or accept what (and Whom) it signified: **“I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts, a people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face.”** And what are they doing that so arouses Yahweh’s ire? *Religious* things: **“...Who sacrifice in gardens [see Leviticus 17:8-9 for instruction on what they *should* have been doing], and burn incense on altars of brick [Exodus 20:24-25, 30:1-6]; who sit among the graves and spend the night in the tombs [Numbers 19:16]; who eat swine’s flesh and the broth of abominable things is in their vessels [Leviticus 11:7, 41]; who say, ‘Keep to yourself [*especially* you pesky gentiles], do not come near me, for I am holier than you!’ These are smoke in My nostrils, a fire that burns all the day. Behold, it is written before Me: ‘I will not keep silence, but will repay—even repay into their bosom—your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together,’ says Yahweh.”** (Isaiah 65:1-7) Each of the examples listed is a perversion of God’s Torah instructions, one way or another, just as we have seen to be the case with the majority of Maimonides’ mitzvot. The Jews’ true heart has been revealed by their lack of respect for God’s Word. While claiming to be “Torah observant,” these religious rebels actually “walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts.”

Now Paul picks up the thread. **“The Gentiles have been made right with God by faith, even though they were not seeking him [just like Isaiah said]. But the Jews, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law [whether the real thing or their twisted version of it—Paul is willing to give them the benefit of the doubt here], never succeeded. Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law and being good instead of by depending on faith.”** (Romans 9:30-32 NLT)

It’s kind of like illegal aliens in America. Judging by their normal behavior, most of them are basing their hope (in this case, the hope of being able to stay in the country long enough to build a good, prosperous life) on “keeping the law and

being good.” They work hard, obey the laws of the land (excuse the immigration laws), and try to keep their heads down, because they don’t want to make waves. *Waves can get you deported.* Now, not exceeding the speed limit and coming to a full and complete halt at stop signs are good things—the law requires them. But keeping these laws does nothing to legitimize an illegal alien. Even if he’s keeping *all* the traffic rules perfectly while driving a properly registered car, it doesn’t matter—he’s breaking the law just by being here! In fact, until he takes advantage of the country’s “grace through faith” program—taking whatever steps are mandated to become a legal resident—*everything* he does, in a manner of speaking, is a crime against the state. Being “good” doesn’t help him if he isn’t legally entitled to be here in the first place. Likewise, keeping the “Laws” of the Kingdom of Heaven is a relatively pointless exercise if we haven’t become citizens of the realm.

The politically correct view would chastise Paul for being so hard on his fellow Jews. But open-mindedness concerning their errant approach would do them no practical good, and he loved his people so much, he desperately wanted to rescue them from their blunder. If there is such a thing as absolute truth, then tolerance for error is the antithesis of love. **“Dear brothers and sisters, the longing of my heart and my prayer to God is that the Jewish people might be saved. I know what enthusiasm they have for God, but it is misdirected zeal. For they don’t understand God’s way of making people right with Himself. Instead, they are clinging to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law. They won’t go along with God’s way. For Christ has accomplished the whole purpose of the law. That’s because “the whole purpose of the Law” was to demonstrate man’s need for a Savior—and God’s plan to reveal Him. “All who believe in Him are made right with God....”**

“For Moses wrote that the law’s way of making a person right with God requires obedience to all of its commands [something none of us has ever accomplished, making “the law’s way” a dead-end street if you’re depending upon it to save you]. But the way of getting right with God through faith says, ‘You don’t need to go to heaven’ (to find Christ and bring Him down to help you). And it says, ‘You don’t need to go to the place of the dead’ (to bring Christ back to life again). Salvation that comes from trusting Christ—which is the message we preach—is already within easy reach. In fact, the Scriptures say, ‘The message is close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart....’” In a nutshell, Paul is saying that we can’t reach God. He reaches us. And we can’t keep the Law, but the Law—the fulfillment of which is Yahshua—keeps us from death, for “the whole purpose of the Law” is summed up in that one word: *Yahshua*—which literally means “Yahweh is salvation.”

The bottom line, then, is this: **“For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus [i.e., Yahshua] is Lord and believe in your heart that God [i.e., Yahweh] raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us,**

'Anyone who believes in Him will not be disappointed.' Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They all have the same Lord, who generously gives his riches to all who ask for them. For 'Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord [actually, it's *Yahweh* here—Paul is quoting Joel 2:32] will be saved.'" (Romans 10:1-13 NLT) Believing and confessing: it's precisely the same procedure through which Abraham was accounted righteous before God. Some things never change.

THE KING

(581) *Do not curse a ruler, that is, the King or the head of the College in the land of Israel. "You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people."* (Exodus 22:28) Maimonides has removed one admonition and replaced it with another more to his liking. What happened to "You shall not revile God?" The Hebrew word for "revile" is *qalal*, meaning to take lightly, treat with contempt, dishonor, or curse. It seems to me that by tampering with God's Torah like this, that's precisely what the rabbis were doing to Him. *Qalal* is the perfect antonym of the verb we saw in the Fifth Commandment: "*Honor (kabad: literally, make weighty) your father and your mother...*" which goes a long way toward proving my contention that honoring our earthly father and mother is fundamentally a metaphor for taking seriously our Heavenly Father, *Yahweh*, and our Heavenly *Mother* (so to speak), His Holy Spirit.

And what about "to curse?" This is the Hebrew *'arar*, which literally means "to bind (as with a spell), hem in with obstacles, render powerless to resist." Therefore, the meaning is more like, "Do not *be* a curse to a ruler of your people through your resistance or rebellion." And who, precisely is a "ruler of your people?" Though *Yahweh* parallels God and the ruler, implying that the ultimate "ruler" is King *Yahshua*, *nasi*, the word translated "ruler" here, is never used to denote the reigning Christ in the Old Covenant Scriptures. (Ezekiel, describing the Millennial kingdom, says "**My servant David will be their prince (*nasi*) forever,**" (Ezekiel 37:35) and most commentators interpret this as meaning the Messiah, but I am convinced that the *actual resurrected David*, and not King *Yahshua*, is being identified. We are, after all, in a post-rapture world at that point. David will be sporting his new immortal body, just like the rest of the raptured saints. See [Future History, Chapter 27](#) for a more complete exploration of the subject.) *Nasi* denotes a prince, captain, chief, leader, or ruler, without regard to his degree of exaltation or worthiness. Even Gog, leader of the Islamic hordes seen invading Israel in the last days (Ezekiel 38-39), is called a *nasi*. (The similarity between *nasi* and Nazi, though delicious, is purely coincidental).

The Messiah *is* called a ruler in Scripture, of course, but a different word is employed. Daniel 9:25 calls Him “Messiah the prince,” using the same word translated “ruler” in this passage: **“Since the day that I brought My people out of the land of Egypt, I have chosen no city from any tribe of Israel in which to build a house, that My name might be there, nor did I choose any man to be a ruler over My people Israel. Yet I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there; and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel.”** (II Chronicles 6:5-6) The word for “ruler” here is *nagid*, whose root verb means “to tell or make known, to make a matter conspicuous.” The *nagid* is thus a fundamentally different kind of ruler than a *nasi*, whose linguistic root means “to lift, carry, or take.” The *nasi* has *received* his leadership role; the *nagid* rules by virtue of his very nature.

So basically, this precept tells us not to actively sabotage the leader/ruler with whom God has “blessed” us (without regard to whether he’s a saint or a scoundrel). The classic example of how to do this is David’s dealing with King Saul. Though Saul repeatedly tried to kill David in fits of jealous rage, David (whose name means “love,” by the way) refused to harm “God’s anointed,” even when it would have been an easy, justifiable, and arguably prudent thing to do. Yahshua, following the same principle, didn’t trash Herod, Pilate, or Emperor Tiberius (who were doing a fine job of condemning *themselves*); He merely went about doing His divinely appointed job, just as we are all to do.

This is where Maimonides’ take on the whole thing derails. He and his fellow rabbis would have you believe God wants you to refrain from “being a curse” to *them*—a self-appointed religious elite, people who want you to submit to and honor them in obsequious obeisance. Nothing could be further from the truth. Again, Yahshua is our example. While saying nothing against the flawed political rulers that God in His wisdom saw fit to place in positions of power for His own purposes (cf. Romans 13:1-7), Yahshua lost no opportunity to lambaste the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy, ambition, and greed. Therefore, when God says, **“You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people,”** He is indeed saying the same thing two different ways: don’t revile Yahweh, and don’t curse the political rulers He has entrusted with your well being, whether or not they are fulfilling their mandate. The bad news? We tend to get the governments we deserve. Ouch!

- (582) *Appoint a king.* **“When you come to the land which Yahweh your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom Yahweh your God chooses....”** (Deuteronomy 17:14-15) Yahweh is *not* commanding Israel to

appoint a king over themselves. Quite the contrary. Having perfect foreknowledge must be a pain sometimes. God *knew* Israel would someday cast His rule aside in favor of an earthly king (see I Samuel 8:6-9). This is merely instruction about what to do after they make their dumb decision. It's like saying, *If and when you get it into your head to jump out of a perfectly good airplane, wear a parachute, and don't forget to pull the rip cord.* Then the rabbis come along and tell their gullible audience that they all have to take up skydiving. *Oy!*

Of course, Maimonides didn't have much choice in the matter. If he'd properly communicated Yahweh's precept, it would have led Israel straight to the Messiah, God's Anointed—Yahshua—the One “whom Yahweh your God chooses,” a.k.a. “the Stone whom the builders rejected.” And that would have caused him and his fellow rabbis to loosen their grip on power and prestige. Can't have that, now, can we?

(583) *Do not appoint as ruler over Israel one who comes from non-Israelites. “...One from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.”* (Deuteronomy 17:15) History is replete with foreign rulers who have come in and taken over nations not their own—with disastrous results; Napoleon and Hitler come readily to mind. The American Constitution wisely follows the Torah's precept, requiring their presidents to be “home grown.” But as you may expect, there's more to this than a formula for acquiring empathetic temporal leadership. It's a prescription for national holiness.

There are two ways to “set a king over yourself.” You can either choose him—via election, acclamation, or uncontested succession—or your adverse circumstances can place him on the throne without so much as asking your permission: nobody in Judah *wanted* Nebuchadnezzar as their king; he reigned strictly by right of conquest. Yahweh desired to be chosen as Israel's “King,” but as we've seen time and again, He refuses to abridge our right to choose our own destiny. He informed the newly freed Israelites, “**If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**” (Exodus 19:5-6) Later He told them what it would take to lose the privilege of having Him as King (see Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28). Sure enough, over the next millennium Israel did everything they'd been warned not to do. In doing so, they in effect “set foreigners over themselves, who were not their brothers.”

The ultimate reason behind the precept, of course, is that the promised Messiah would be an Israelite: “**I [Yahweh] will raise up for them a Prophet like**

you [Moses] from among their brethren [the nation of Israel], and will put My words in His mouth, and He [Yahshua] shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.” (Deuteronomy 18:18-19) This mitzvah hasn’t run out of gas, either. Israel is about to be confronted with a false messiah the Scriptures identify as “the beast from the sea,” a metaphorical code that tells us he’s a gentile. You may know him by one of his other titles, “the Antichrist.” Israel has been warned, however. They are not to choose a foreigner as their king.

- (584) *The King shall not acquire an excessive number of horses. “...But he [the king] shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for Yahweh has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’”* (Deuteronomy 17:16) In the long run, He’s not really just talking about horses, and He’s not really talking about Egypt. The horse was the quintessential article of military hardware. A king who felt he needed lots of horses was relying on the strength of his own armed forces to defend his realm—not upon Yahweh. “Multiplying horses” is therefore a subtle form of idolatry.

And Egypt? Egypt is a Scriptural metaphor for the world that formerly enslaved us prior to our redemption—the cost of which was the death of the firstborn Son at Passover (I don’t have to spell it out, do I?). The ultimate price has already been paid to extricate us from the “Egyptian predicament.” The *last* thing we should want to consider is going back there—especially if our return to slavery is for no better reason than that we don’t trust Yahweh with our defense.

The lessons are clear and valid on a personal level, but we should be cognizant of the fact that Yahweh is talking about the *king* here—that is, the leadership we choose for ourselves. It speaks to our motivation for choosing whom we want to lead us. Do they *really* trust Yahweh, or are they merely fast talkers who give lip service to God while they implement worldly solutions to their constituents’ problems?

As I write these words, I have just been informed of the death of Pastor Jerry Falwell, who at least *tried* to provide candidates to the American electorate who would honor God. The “Moral Majority” he founded was a start, I guess. But it quickly devolved in the popular mind into the equation of a conservative political viewpoint with Protestant fundamentalist Christianity. While there are laudable points of convergence, I would hasten to point out that they are not remotely the same thing, nor are conservative politicians automatically friends of Yahweh. (“Christians” aren’t either necessarily, but let’s not go there.

How can you be a friend of a deity Whose name you know but refuse to use and Whose instructions you either ignore or malign?) The issue of abortion has become a very slippery slope for Christians on their way to the polls. A candidate who cheats on his wife (or her husband), abuses drugs or alcohol, lies through his teeth for personal advantage, wouldn't be caught dead in a house of worship unless there was political capital to be made, and is generally in favor of "multiplying horses from Egypt" so to speak, can nevertheless count on getting the fundamentalist Christian vote if he comes out publicly against abortion. My friends, it's okay to vote for "none of the above." Yahweh is neither the God of the lowest common denominator nor the God of the lesser of two evils.

(585) *The King shall not take an excessive number of wives. "...Neither shall he [the king] multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away."* (Deuteronomy 17:17) We're still in the passage in which Yahweh defines the proper attitude of the king. In three areas (weaponry, wives, and wealth) the king is instructed to exercise moderation, and in each case the reasons are related: the king is to rely on Yahweh, trust Him alone, and lead his people in worshipping Him. All of the pitfalls against which the Torah warns, of course, tend to go with the territory of being king: he is the *de facto* Commander in Chief for his nation's armed forces, he is on some level the most attractive man in town, and taxes and tribute naturally flow his way. Yahweh is warning him not to let these things turn his head. He is to pursue Yahweh alone.

Way back in Genesis 2, we were told that God provided a wife (singular) for Adam to be "a helper *neged* (comparable to, corresponding to, suited for, or in the presence of) him." Looking at this from the point of view of simple logistics, *one* wife could fulfill this role, but multiple wives could not. The more wives a man had, the less "help" (as defined by *neged*) he would actually receive. So why would a man want ten wives instead of one, even if he were a king and could afford the upkeep on a harem? Well, there's the obvious (*duh*): the prospect of more sex. But even this logic breaks down if you factor in the human psyche: instead of having a close relationship with one woman who's just as sexually fulfilled as he is, the polygamist monarch has *at best* (on any given day) one satisfied woman and nine others who are seething with frustration and resentment. That's not exactly a recipe for contentment—for any of them.

But there's another reason a king might "multiply wives." Royal marriages were a time-honored way of artificially allying one nation's interests to another's. The king of Nation X isn't likely to attack Nation Y if his daughter is married to the king of that country, is he? But once again,

we are reminded here of the unique nature of Israel's political structure as Yahweh intended it: they were to be set apart from the surrounding nations—tasked with being the conduit of God's salvation to the world. They were to be allied with Yahweh and no one else. Marriage alliances with their neighbors could only serve to dilute (or pollute) Israel's relationship with their God.

- (586) *He shall not accumulate an excessive quantity of gold and silver. "...Nor shall he [the king] greatly multiply silver and gold for himself."* (Deuteronomy 17:17) Same song, third verse. Wealth (even though it flows naturally to the king) is not something to be grasped at and hoarded. Rather, it is a means by which the king might bless his people. King David was so successful, he found himself swimming in loot. But the only thing he really wanted to do with it all was to build a temple honoring Yahweh. Don't ignore those last two words in our text: "...for himself." Being blessed materially is not a sin—king or not. But beyond the needs we all experience (of which God is quite aware—see Matthew 6:19-34) the money isn't *meant* for us, for our gratification, pleasure, or pride. It's there so that we might honor God with it, either by meeting the temporal needs of those less fortunate than ourselves or by investing in the spread of the Good News. Yes, David built himself a nice house to live in. But the bulk of his money went toward the temple. That's where his heart was.

In a familiar anecdote, Yahshua demonstrated what our mindset toward money ought to be: **"Watching for their opportunity, the leaders sent secret agents pretending to be honest men. They tried to get Jesus to say something that could be reported to the Roman governor so he would arrest Jesus. They said, 'Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right and are not influenced by what others think. You sincerely teach the ways of God. Now tell us—is it right to pay taxes to the Roman government or not?' He saw through their trickery and said, 'Show me a Roman coin. Whose picture and title are stamped on it?' 'Caesar's,' they replied. 'Well then,' he said, 'give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God.' So they failed to trap him in the presence of the people. Instead, they were amazed by his answer, and they were silenced."** (Luke 20:20-26 NLT) Yahshua wasn't particularly impressed with the might of Rome or the wealth of its emperor. He, after all, was the "only begotten Son" of the God who (as we saw above) said, **"If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine."** (Exodus 19:5) Yahweh owns the whole world, yet what He treasures is *us*—if we treasure Him.

Just for the fun of it, I took a look at a U.S. hundred dollar bill with the same mindset Yahshua did with the Roman coin. The phrase “In God we trust” is still there, which one might think would short-circuit the exercise. But it merely begs the question: who is the God in whom we as a nation put our trust? Our national “gods” are revealed by the other “images and likenesses” printed on the bill. First, of course, there’s Ben Franklin’s half-smiling face. Americans admire him. He was inventive, resourceful, witty, and practical, one who began as a penniless immigrant but through ingenuity and hard work became one of the “great men” of his day. He was also a womanizing politician who reveled in the fawning sycophants of the salons of Paris, someone who could and did hold his grudges for decades. Franklin was not a Christian, but a deist (or at least that’s how he characterized himself). He was disgusted and appalled by the hypocritical religiosity of those he met who called themselves Christians. (Actually, I can’t say I disagree with him there).

Eleven times the bill proclaims that it’s worth one hundred dollars, but I can assure you, it’s not. I can remember a time when a hundred dollars would gas up your car, take your wife out to a nice dinner, pay the babysitter, and leave you with something left over. Now you chose between those options. And why is it like this? That’s printed on the bill as well: it’s not actually *money*, backed with gold or silver in a vault somewhere. No, it’s a “Federal Reserve Note,” a.k.a. funny money conjured up from debt and deceit by a private banking corporation—the Federal Reserve System—to whom our nation foolishly sold its financial soul back in 1913. On the back side of the bill is a picture of what Independence Hall used to look like. We Americans tend to worship our history and heritage, whether it’s real or not. Our independence, too, is more historic illusion than present reality.

And all over the bill, you’ll see counterfeiting countermeasures—intricate engraving, special rag paper, microprinting, watermarks, and other subtleties that defy spurious reproduction—because we Americans are obsessed with the false god called security. If I may tweak a thought from Psalm 127:1, “Unless Yahweh backs the currency, they labor in vain who earn it; unless Yahweh guards the treasury, the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board stays alert in vain.”

- (587) *The King shall write a scroll of the Torah for himself, in addition to the one that every person should write, so that he writes two scrolls. **Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites.*** (Deuteronomy 17:18) The king was to copy for his own use *one*

scroll, not two. Maimonides is compounding an error he made way back in Mitzvah #16. There he said that *every* Israelite was to write a copy of the Torah. However, as the text (Deuteronomy 31:19) shows, it was only Moses and Joshua who were to write down what Moses had been preaching. But yes, the king (when the time came that Israel had one) was instructed to write for himself a copy of the Torah. The priests were to be the keepers of the standard, the original manuscript. Note, by the way, that nothing at all was said about the “oral law” that later rabbis would hypothesize in order to prop up their perversions of the written Torah. The king was given no instruction about it because it didn’t exist.

Maimonides seems fixated on the number of copies the king was to make. Yahweh, in contrast, gives His reasons for requiring this task of the king (something that would normally have been done by a professional *shoter*, or scribe). **“And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear Yahweh his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.”** (Deuteronomy 17:19-20) The king’s Torah scroll was to be his constant companion, an oft-consulted guide, an Owner’s Manual for his life and reign. It would keep the king on the path Yahweh had set for him, benefiting the entire nation, and would prevent him from becoming prideful and arrogant—reminding him that *his* king was Yahweh.

We have no historical evidence that any king of Israel ever kept this precept, though one, Josiah, was so mortified with Judah’s failures when the Law was rediscovered during his reign that he tore his clothes in mourning and led his people in national repentance (see II Chronicles 34:14-33). And King David lived a life that, at least some of the time, suggests his obedience in the matter. Although he is not listed as the author of Psalm 119, the entire chapter speaks of a delight in the Torah that only intimate familiarity could bring. Some highlights: **“Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of Yahweh! ...Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.... I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me.... Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.... The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver.... I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life.... You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me.... Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”** (Psalm 119:1, 11, 30, 54, 72, 93, 98, and 105)

NAZIRITES

- (588) *A Nazirite shall not drink wine, or anything mixed with wine which tastes like wine; and even if the wine or the mixture has turned sour, it is prohibited to him. "When either a man or woman consecrates an offering to take the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to Yahweh, he shall separate himself from wine and similar drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from similar drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins."* (Numbers 6:2-3) The Nazirite vow is the purest form of personal consecration prescribed in the Torah that's available to *any* Israelite—that is, to one who was not born a priest or Levite (whose "consecration" was *assigned* to them by being born into a particular tribe or family in Israel). As we shall see, the Nazirite vow is symbolic of the life of the believer, the child of God—a voluntary, purposeful, meaningful life of separation to Yahweh. Leave it to Maimonides to suck all the life out of it by reducing it to a list of rules. This mitzvah and the next four center on the avoidance of anything grown on a grapevine. There are also prohibitions against cutting one's hair and touching a dead body, which we'll address in due time. But first, we should explore the vow itself, its purpose and significance.

The word we render "Nazirite" is the Hebrew noun *nazir*. It is derived from the verb *nazar*, meaning "to separate." Depending on what preposition it's paired with, it can mean "to keep oneself away from something," "to abstain from something," or "to be separated *to* something." A Nazirite, then, is someone who is separated from the world and consecrated instead to Yahweh, the sign of which being his or her abstinence in several well-defined areas. Except for the abstinence component, it is quite similar to the concept of being *qodesh*, or "holy," (literally, set-apart) a word that was supposed to describe the entire nation of Israel. One normally became a Nazirite by voluntarily taking a vow of consecration to Yahweh for a specific and limited time duration, after which his or her normal mode of life was resumed. But there are at least three instances in Scripture where the Nazirite was consecrated for a lifetime in his mother's womb: Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist.

This was not monasticism. The Nazirite did not retreat from society, cloistered behind locked doors in order to shelter himself from the influence of the world. Nor were the signs of the Nazirite a penance to be performed in an attempt to bring himself closer to God. There was no shame in *not* taking a Nazirite vow, and it was not designed to give the devotee any special religious status or authority in the community (though both Samson and Samuel were Judges of Israel, and John the Baptist was

the last and most privileged prophet of the Old Covenant period). Ordinarily, the Nazirite would continue his or her daily occupation, unless, of course, it conflicted with the vow. (For example, a soldier might be called upon to slay an enemy, and an undertaker prepared corpses for burial, either which would have made it impossible to keep both the vow and the occupation at the same time.)

Notice the contrast in the text: “separate himself *to* Yahweh” as opposed to “separate himself *from* wine....” What’s being pictured is a conscious, purposeful, transfer of affiliation from one thing to another. At first glance, it would seem that the prescribed abstinence from the fruit of the vine is merely a requirement for sobriety. Though that’s included (the phrase rendered “similar drink” is *sekar*—“strong drink” or liquor capable of making somebody drunk), one cannot get inebriated by nibbling raisins. There’s more to it. Read on....

- (589) *He shall not eat fresh grapes.* “Neither shall he...eat fresh grapes.” (Numbers 6:3) I don’t care how many grapes you eat; they won’t make you tipsy. We need to look at this in view of the contrast “separated to” versus “separated from.” What do grapes symbolize? When the twelve spies returned from their excursion into Canaan, they brought back a cluster of grapes so big they had to carry it on a pole between two of them. The vineyard they had raided was obviously well established—it takes many years of hard work to produce a crop like that. And that’s the point of the Nazirite vow: grapes represent being settled in this world, tied to it, invested in it. Now, that’s not necessarily a bad thing in itself. The promised land was a gift from God, a good and bountiful place. But it was not God Himself. The Nazirite was choosing to forsake the good in favor of the perfect, if only symbolically (and temporarily). He was saying, “I am but a pilgrim in this land—my real home is in Yahweh.”
- (590) *He shall not eat dried grapes (raisins).* “Neither shall he...eat raisins.” (Numbers 6:3) Changing the form of the grape didn’t change the fact that partaking of the fruit of the vine implied an investment in the world, an attachment to it. Thus grapes in any form symbolized for the Nazirite a state of peace, even compromise, with the world he lived in. The clearest example I can think of that demonstrates this state of affairs is Lot’s life in Sodom. Though he was “**oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked**” (II Peter 2:7), Lot opted to stay there nevertheless, “tending his vineyard,” so to speak. While his neighbors drank their share of “wine and strong drink,” Lot (if I may stretch the metaphor) used his grapes to make raisins—doing what he could to make his settled life secure and impervious to the ravages of time, even if it did render his spiritual

existence dry and wrinkled. Of course, merely being under a Nazirite vow didn't automatically make you perfect either. The classic example of *that* is Samson, who for the most part ignored his holy calling. We'll have more to say about him (and his hair) when we get to Mitzvah #594.

Nor did one have to take a Nazirite vow to live a life pleasing to God. The ultimate example of this is the life of Yahshua, who though fully consecrated to Yahweh (because He *was* Yahweh) never took *any* vow that we know of. He drank wine (and even made it on occasion), demonstrating a connection with humanity that was essential for Him—as the rightful Lord of Heaven—to possess if He were to have empathy with our plight on earth. And He was witnessed touching a dead body (see Matthew 9:25), though the corpse of the young girl had no choice but to reawaken at his touch. Indeed, anyone who is touched by Yahshua will find it impossible to remain dead.

Perhaps you're wondering, as I was, if there was any connection between the Hebrew root of the word we translate Nazirite (*nazar*, meaning “to separate”) and the name of Yahshua's home town, Nazareth (Greek: *Nazoraios*), especially in light of Matthew's observation: **“And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, ‘He shall be called a Nazarene.’”** (Matthew 2:23) As it turns out, the answer is no—it's a transliteration artifact. Matthew was referring to this Messianic prophecy: **“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch [that's the word] shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of Yahweh shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahweh.”** (Isaiah 11:1-2) The word translated “branch” here is the Hebrew *netser*, which denotes a branch, bough, or limb, and by extension a shoot, scion, or root stock—in other words, one of the same kind of a succeeding generation. The “rod” here is King David, son of Jesse; the Messiah was thus prophesied to be a direct descendent of David.

It is not insignificant that we “Christians” were first called “Nazarenes,” being identified with Yahshua of Nazareth. (See for example Acts 24:5.) We believers are “branches” whose root and stem is Yahshua, whether we grew there naturally (as Jews) or were grafted in (as gentiles). This state was prophesied as well in reference to the restored Israel in Christ's Millennial kingdom: **“Also your people shall all be righteous. They shall inherit the land forever, the branch [*netser*] of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified.”** (Isaiah 60:21) Alas, while all believers in this life are *netserim*—branches of God's Messiah—it seems that few are *nazar*—totally separated from the world and consecrated to Yahweh.

- (591) *He shall not eat the kernels of the grapes. “All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin.”* (Numbers 6:4) Grapes aren’t all juicy sweetness. They’ve got seeds and skin that, though necessary and functional, aren’t something you’d want to eat for their own sake. We’ve already established the principle that a Nazirite’s abstinence from the fruit of the vine is symbolic of not becoming settled in the world—of maintaining a pilgrim mentality. The idea of eating grape seeds reminds us that some people, thoroughly rooted in this world, know nothing of its sweetness, for they know nothing of Yahshua’s love. They experience nothing but its bitterness, frustration, and pain. It’s why so many young Muslims can think of nothing better to do than kill as many people as they can, along with themselves. It’s why devotees of Buddhism long for release from the cycle of life—achieving “nirvana,” a state of nothingness, the extinction of the soul. The Nazirite abstains not only from whatever appealing sweetness the world can offer, but also its bitterness. He is set apart to God.
- (592) *The Nazirite shall not eat of the skins of the grapes. “All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin.”* (Numbers 6:4) In the same way that the seeds of the grape aren’t really what you’re after when you eat one, neither is the skin. If the seeds represent the bitter core of a merely mortal life (I realize I’m stretching the metaphor to its breaking point here) then the skin represents the humdrum functionality, the boring but necessary routine of life in the world—earning a living, getting the job done, being responsible, *holding it all together*. The point is, if that’s all there is to life, it’s not much of a life. If you’re going to be settled in the promised land—a land, after all, to which Yahweh has led you, you should expect to experience the “whole grape,” a little work, a little pain or disappointment at times, but more sweetness and nourishment than anything else. The Nazirite, however, sets himself apart from all that—the good *and* the bad—in favor of a more intense encounter with his God. He is the one of whom Isaiah lamented his absence in the passage with which we opened this chapter: the man “**who stirs himself up to take hold of [Yahweh].**” You’ve heard of extreme sports; this is extreme spirituality. It’s like the difference between taking a walk in the park and climbing Mt. Everest. It’s not something you’d do on a whim.
- (593) *The Nazirite shall permit his hair to grow. “All the days of the vow of his [the Nazirite’s] separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to Yahweh, he shall be holy. He shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.”* (Numbers 6:5) Here Yahweh is using the hair of our head as a symbol of a significant truth. Hair is funny stuff. We can’t cause it to grow (or stop it from growing), though we might like to. We

can't change its rate of growth, texture, or color without tampering with it externally—cutting, curling, coloring it, or whatever. So our hair is a ready metaphor for God's provision, His work in our lives. It comes on God's terms, by His grace, and on His schedule. By abstaining from cutting his hair, the Nazirite is saying, "I will not stand in the way of Yahweh's plan; I will not tamper with what He has provided or alter His *modus operandi* by imposing my will or "style" upon it.

- (594) *The Nazirite shall not cut his hair. "All the days of the vow of his separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to Yahweh, he shall be holy. He shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow."* (Numbers 6:5) This isn't really a separate mitzvah, but merely the negative restatement of the previous affirmative thought. Maimonides is padding the list so he can come up with the magic number 613.

The Nazirite we immediately think of in regard to this precept, of course, is Samson, whose story is told in Judges 13-16. We've all heard how Delilah tricked him into revealing the source of his strength so she could betray him. But it's pretty clear that not even Samson *himself* recognized that his Nazirite vow had anything to do with it. Twice in the record of his life we read, "**Then the Spirit of Yahweh came mightily upon him,**" after which he went out and did something rude to a bunch of Philistines. Nowhere do we read of a connection between his hair and his strength until Delilah called for the barber—*after* she had proved her willingness to betray him *on three separate occasions*. The record plainly says that Samson was surprised to find his strength gone when his hair was cut off.

What had happened? I believe this is one of those rare occasions when Yahweh allowed one of the Torah's many metaphors to get up and walk on all fours—giving substance to the symbol. Samson clearly didn't have as much of a desire to remain as holy—set apart for God's purposes—as his Nazirite status would have indicated. Every time he got in trouble it seems, there was a Philistine—read: *enemy*—woman in the picture. The Nazirite vow required (as we shall see) that he not touch any dead body. But killing a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass pretty much proves that Samson didn't take that part of his Nazirite vow very seriously, even if they needed killin'. Furthermore, as we saw in Mitzvah #589, the Nazirite was not to eat grapes or drink wine, for this was a picture of being "settled in the land" instead of being settled in Yahweh. But Samson was apparently quite comfortable living among the enemies of his people and his God. So Yahweh tied the terms of the vow to the gifts that came with it—if his hair (symbolic of what God had provided) was cut, then his

strength (the actual God-given gift) would be cut off as well. God takes His symbols seriously.

- (595) *He shall not enter any covered structure where there is a dead body. “All the days that he [The Nazirite] separates himself to Yahweh he shall not go near a dead body.”* (Numbers 6:6) Yahweh’s instruction is more general than the rabbis’ because He’s interested in the heart’s attitude, while they’re looking for a loophole. The death of the body is in itself merely a symbol of something far more tragic—the death of the soul. Just as physical death is marked by the final departure of the soul from the body (something every living creature experiences at the end of its life), spiritual death is marked by the departure of the *spirit* from the soul. It is this death that Adam and Eve suffered when they ate the forbidden fruit. When they sinned, God’s living Spirit left them—the *neshamah*, or “breath of life” that had made them “living beings” in the Garden (see Genesis 2:7), departed or was emptied, though their physical bodies did not succumb for quite some time. And it is because of this death that we, their children, must be born anew—born spiritually from above, re-indwelled with the Holy Spirit—if our souls (*nephesh*) are to survive their separation from the body at our physical deaths. (See [Future History, Chapter 29: “The Three Doors”](#) for a full explanation).

The Nazirite’s separation to Yahweh reflects and foreshadows this new birth. By observing this vow, he is proclaiming in effect, “Death cannot touch the one who is consecrated to Yahweh.” In Yahweh’s world, life cannot coexist with death any more than light can coexist with darkness. Whether he knows it or not, that’s what the Nazirite is so eloquently saying by observing this part of his vow.

- (596) *A Nazirite shall not defile himself for any dead person (by being in the presence of the corpse). “All the days that he separates himself to Yahweh he shall not go near a dead body. He shall not make himself unclean even for his father or his mother, for his brother or his sister, when they die, because his separation to God is on his head. All the days of his separation he shall be holy to Yahweh.”* (Numbers 6:6-8) Back in Mitzvah #375, we learned that priests were not to touch dead bodies, for they were set apart for the service of Yahweh and thus must not become defiled. There, however, exceptions were specified: attending to the corpse of the priest’s nearest relatives (mother, father, son, daughter, brother or virgin sister) would not render him unclean, that is, ceremonially unfit to perform his priestly duties at the Sanctuary. Not so with the Nazirite. His (or her) separation was to be complete. And if contact with a dead body was unavoidable, the Nazirite’s vow went back to square one—he had to start all over again, offering both

sin and trespass offerings and cutting his hair as at the inception of the vow (see verses 9-12).

Why the difference? The same symbol (a close encounter with a corpse) symbolized slightly different things for the priest and the Nazirite. For the priest, being defiled like this signified contamination by sin (an inevitable component of the human condition) that rendered one unfit (if only temporarily) for service to God and man. Cleansing through washing in water and the passage of time were required to rectify the situation. But with the Nazirite, contact with a dead body symbolized identification with *spiritual* death—something that was altogether incompatible with being set apart to Yahweh, who personifies life. Contact with death, then, rendered the vow moot.

Maimonides didn't understand any of this fundamental difference between priests (prophetic of the Messiah as mediator between men and God) and Nazirites (symbolic of the redeemed believer). In his massive tome, the *Mishneh Torah*, he intimated that one can make *himself* a priest or Levite (which as we know are callings Yahweh assigned strictly on the basis of ancestry, so no one could logically aspire to a position of religious authority). The Rambam wrote: "Every person who enters this world, whose spirit moves him and his intellect instructs him to separate himself in order to stand before God, to truly serve Him, to be responsible to Him, to know Him, and to walk upright and straight in His paths as God created him; and he has freed himself from the yoke of petty human considerations that other people pursue—such a person has sanctified himself as being holy of holies, and the Lord is his share and inheritance for all time and all worlds, and he will receive in the World to Come his proper and fulfilling reward as God has given such to the Priests and the Levites." The man Maimonides has so eloquently described, however, is not the priest or Levite, bound by Yahweh's symbolic instructions for them; rather, he is defined by the vows of the Nazirite, for whom the Torah's defining symbols mean far more: (1) avoidance of becoming settled in this world, (2) refusal to thwart or alter the plan and provision of Yahweh, and (3) the total reversal of the spiritual death that was brought upon mankind by the fall of Adam—in other words, the second birth into Yahweh's family.

- (597) *The Nazirite shall shave his hair when he brings his offerings at the completion of the period of his Nazariteship, or within that period if he has become defiled. "And if anyone dies very suddenly beside him, and he defiles his consecrated head, then he shall shave his head on the day of his cleansing; on the seventh day he shall shave it."* (Numbers 6:9); "Now this is the

law of the Nazirite: When the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall be brought to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. And he shall present his offering to Yahweh: one male lamb in its first year without blemish as a burnt offering, one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish as a sin offering, one ram without blemish as a peace offering, a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and their grain offering with their drink offerings. Then the priest shall bring them before Yahweh and offer his sin offering and his burnt offering; and he shall offer the ram as a sacrifice of a peace offering to Yahweh, with the basket of unleavened bread; the priest shall also offer its grain offering and its drink offering.” (Numbers 6:13-17) The Nazirite vow wasn’t designed to be a lifelong endeavor. Normally, one would take the vow for a certain specific period of time, after which the devotee would resume his or her normal life spiritually refreshed. Symbols aside, it’s intended to be kind of a mountain-top experience, life-changing, focusing, and renewing.

And what was to happen when the vow had been fulfilled? The Nazirite was to perform a ceremony whose every facet reflected the condition of the redeemed soul. If you’ll recall the various types of sacrifice we discussed in Chapter 12, an *olah* (a burnt offering) of a year-old male lamb prefigured the sacrifice of God’s Messiah on his behalf. The sin offering (or *chata ’t*) of a ewe lamb signified the Nazirite’s indwelling by Yahweh’s Holy Spirit (the “sin” being our failure to heed Her counsel). The *selem*—the peace offering—symbolized the Nazirite/believer’s outpouring of thanks to Yahweh. The appropriate *minha*, or grain offering with oil, was brought as well, a reminder of Yahweh’s provision. And a *nesek*, or drink offering (which would have normally accompanied any of these various types of offerings), stood for the blood of the Messiah Yahshua spilled for us at Calvary. Conspicuously absent from the list of sacrifices the Nazirite was to offer was the *asham*, or trespass offering, which ordinarily covered “mistakes.” It was deemed inappropriate apparently because of the purposeful, thoughtful, and voluntary nature of the Nazirite vow. The Nazirite was to have no “Oops, my bad” moments.

“Then the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offering.” The devotee’s hair, which had been allowed to grow for the entire duration of the vow, was now shorn and burned up with the peace offering—a statement that whatever God had provided was offered back to Him in thankfulness. **“And the priest shall take the boiled shoulder of the ram, one unleavened cake from the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and put them upon the hands of the Nazirite**

after he has shaved his consecrated hair, and the priest shall wave them as a wave offering before Yahweh; they are holy for the priest, together with the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the heave offering. After that the Nazirite may drink wine. This is the law of the Nazirite who vows to Yahweh the offering for his separation, and besides that, whatever else his hand is able to provide; according to the vow which he takes, so he must do according to the law of his separation.”

(Numbers 6:18-21) The conclusion of the vow ends up being a party, a celebration in honor of Yahweh. The priest (again, prophetic of Yahshua in his role as mediator) is an honored guest. Since it is becoming increasingly clear that the Nazirite vow is prophetic of the life of the believer in God’s Messiah, this “post-game party,” unless I miss my guess, is prophetic of the Millennial reign of Christ. Wine is back on the menu at this point, for *this* is the land in which we *should* be settled—our promised rest, our permanent home, the final destination marking the end of all our pilgrim wanderings. It is our final and complete break with the world.

WAR

- (598) *Those engaged in warfare shall not fear their enemies nor be panic-stricken by them during battle. “Your eyes have seen all that Yahweh your God has done to these two kings [the Amorites, Og and Sihon]; so will Yahweh do to all the kingdoms through which you pass. You must not fear them, for Yahweh your God Himself fights for you.”* (Deuteronomy 3:21-22); *“You shall not be terrified of them [the nations of Canaan], for Yahweh your God, the great and awesome God, is among you.”* (Deuteronomy 7:21) It’s one thing to conjure up courage and charge blindly into battle. Any idiot with enough testosterone coursing through his veins can do it—which is why governments draft teenagers, not guys my age. It’s something else entirely to wage war because Yahweh has promised to fight for you. It’s important to keep things in perspective here: this is not everything Yahweh had to say on the matter: we must factor in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, where the same audience was told that if they did “**not obey the voice of Yahweh your God,**” then “**Yahweh will cause you to be defeated before your enemies.**” (Deuteronomy 28:15, 25) Their blessing in battle, then, was conditional. But in the end, it’s all of a piece: if they really knew and trusted Yahweh, they would not hesitate to carry out His directives when it came to warfare, knowing that “where God guides, God provides.”

Bear in mind that Yahweh had given the Israelites who first heard these words a specific military objective: wipe out the seven Canaanite nations from the face of the land (defined geographically in Numbers 34)—leave no trace of them, their customs, or *especially* their modes of

religious observance. Just as there was a caveat based upon their obedience, there were also limits implied to Yahweh's promises: He *only* said that the Israelites were not to be afraid when fighting the Canaanites. This wasn't to be a blanket directive to be applied whenever and wherever a Jew felt like attacking somebody. That being said, since the rebirth of political Israel in 1948, they have indeed shown courage in battle against their Muslim antagonists, and Yahweh has obviously been fighting their wars with them and for them. By any stretch of human military logic, the Israelis should have been wiped off the map in 1948, and if not then, then in 1955, 1967, or 1973. But the God who loves them—the One whom so few Jews know—has other ideas. It was a revelation to me as I did the research for [Future History](#) to discover that Scriptural predictions of the restoration and ascendancy of Israel outnumber any other prophetic subject by a wide margin. They have (at least) one more battle to miraculously win before Yahweh shows them the hard way how to rely on Him. Israel will finally “get it,” but it will take the most drastic of measures for Yahweh to show them who He is and what He's done for them.

- (599) *Anoint a special kohein to speak to the soldiers in a war. “When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for Yahweh your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; for Yahweh your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.’”* (Deuteronomy 20:1-4) Maimonides' mindset is to elevate men to positions of honor and authority (authority that could be—and was—later usurped by the rabbis). Yahweh is coming from a different place. He appointed His priesthood by selecting one family in Israel to perform a specific function: not to rule, but to be intermediaries between God and men in prophetic symbolism of the coming Messiah. “The priest” here is simply the high priest serving at the time the Israelites would commence their offensive against the Canaanites. He was to remind them of what we saw in the previous mitzvah: that Yahweh goes before them into battle—fear, therefore, is not an option. It is the height of folly (or is that arrogance?) to presume you can anoint your own priest. Only Yahweh can do that.

By the way, Joshua, Israel's leader during the conquest of Canaan, was not a priest (i.e., a Levite from Aaron's line)—he was an Ephraimite. But notice the prominent role priests were instructed to take in the “battle” of

Jericho (Joshua 6). The point of having them march around the city blowing trumpets was to announce to Jericho (and us) that this was no mere “military” operation, just one more materialistic enterprise perpetrated by aggressive and acquisitive men. Rather, they were the heralds of Almighty God—it would be Yahweh who conquered the city, and Yahweh who received the glory of victory.

- (600) *In a permissive war (as distinguished from obligatory ones), observe the procedure prescribed in the Torah. “When you go near a city to fight against it, then proclaim an offer of peace to it. And it shall be that if they accept your offer of peace, and open to you, then all the people who are found in it shall be placed under tribute to you, and serve you. Now if the city will not make peace with you, but war against you, then you shall besiege it. And when Yahweh your God delivers it into your hands, you shall strike every male in it with the edge of the sword. But the women, the little ones, the livestock, and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself; and you shall eat the enemies’ plunder which Yahweh your God gives you. Thus you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations. (Deuteronomy 20:10-15) We shall establish in a moment (Mitzvot #601 and #602) that there were seven specific people groups in the Land that were slated for total destruction because of their utter and irredeemable depravity. But Yahweh knew that here and there in and around the Promised Land were settlements of other tribes whose “iniquity was not yet (necessarily) full.” These (described in geographical terms as “very far from you”) would be given the option of surrendering to the Israelites (and their God) and paying tribute, without being utterly wiped out. Indeed, under David and Solomon, the kingdom expanded to include many such groups—notably, the Philistines.*

There is a revealing story recorded in Joshua 9 about a group who took advantage of this precept (though there is no evidence that they actually knew what Yahweh had commanded). The nations slated for destruction were scared spitless when they heard what Joshua and the armies of Israel had done to Jericho and Ai (not to mention Egypt a generation before this), and they all banded together to fight against the invaders. But one good-sized Hivite city called Gibeon had a better idea. By trickery, they convinced Joshua that they were not among the local tribes slated for destruction, but were rather emissaries from a distant land—they had heard of Yahweh’s great victories, they said, and wished to ally themselves with Him and His people. Joshua and his elders bought their story, only to discover later that they were indeed local Hivites with whom they should not have signed any kind of treaty. Israel honored their agreement, but shaped it to fit the precept at hand, making the relieved

Gibeonites wood cutters and water carriers for the congregation of Israel—which they rightly saw as being far better than corpses.

Most commentators see in this only the failure of Israel to follow God’s law. I see in it the incredible mercy of Yahweh. The Hivites of Gibeon—just like you and me—were slated for destruction because of our sin and depravity. Their death sentence was rightly deserved. But faced with the awesome glory of Yahweh, they repented, turned around, forsook their pagan affiliations and idolatrous practices and joined themselves by whatever means they could to God and His people. They wisely decided that it’s better to be a slave in the house of Yahweh than a king in Satan’s domain. And what did Israel’s God do in response to their courageous repentance? He defended them against the attacks of their former allies, achieving for them the great victory recorded in Joshua 10. Will he do anything less for us if we repent? I think not.

- (601) *Do not keep alive any individual of the seven Canaanite nations. “But of the cities of these peoples which Yahweh your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as Yahweh your God has commanded you, lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against Yahweh your God. (Deuteronomy 20:16-18)* Maimonides is not mistaken in saying there were seven Canaanite nations that Israel was tasked with destroying, even though this passage lists only six. All of them are named in Deuteronomy 7:1-2—where they’re called “**seven nations greater and mightier than you.**” (See Mitzvot #352 and #353.) The missing group is the Girgashites, who were named in several similar lists (e.g., Joshua 3:10 and 24:11, Nehemiah 9:8). Interestingly, the territories of several nations not included in the “official” list of seven *were* included in the original promise Yahweh made to Abraham: the Kenites, Kennizites, Kadmonites, and Rephaim.

All these “target” nations had one thing in common: “wickedness.” But they were not unique in that regard. Both the Egypt from which Israel had been so recently delivered and the Assyria and Babylon to which they would eventually be exiled were also wicked. Indeed, even at this very moment in history, Israel itself was far from perfect in God’s eyes, though they had been chosen to be the instrument of Yahweh’s wrath: “**It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that Yahweh your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which Yahweh swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore understand**

that Yahweh your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people.” (Deuteronomy 9:5-6) *So Israel was bad but the Canaanites were even worse*—is that the game God is playing here, judgment based on a sliding scale of morality? No. As usual, there’s more to it.

By now we should be comfortable with the concept that the Torah’s ubiquitous symbols are ultimately there to teach us about God’s plan for our redemption, salvation, and reconciliation with Himself. And although it may not look like it at first glance, the conquest of Canaan is one of those symbols—an important one. Israel was a covenant people—that is, they were the recipient of unilateral promises from Yahweh. As such they metaphorically represent Yahweh’s family—believers, whether Jews or gentiles, of every age of man, recipients of God’s grace. These believers are not perfect in themselves, but they *are* holy, that is, separated from the world and joined instead to God by receiving in faith His gift of imputed righteousness, enabling them to stand in the very presence of God. The Canaanites, on the other hand, represent the world from which the believers have been separated. *Seven* nations tell us that God means for them to represent the complete picture—the whole world. This world (as we all know from experience) has some good things in it and some bad: the Canaanites had a relatively advanced civilization for its day, a robust economy and highly developed technology, arts, and agriculture. But they were, in God’s words, “wicked.” I’ll explain precisely what that means in the following mitzvah.

The point of the symbol is that Yahweh will not allow His people and the world’s to dwell side-by-side forever. Yahweh’s conquest of Canaan (with the Israelites functioning as His arm of retribution) was meant to be a dress rehearsal for the eventual conquest of the whole earth by the returning Messiah (accompanied by His resurrected saints). Remember, God had “given” the Land to Abraham hundreds of years before this time. It belonged to Israel, whether or not they had previously occupied it. They were *returning* to it—just as their Messiah will. It’s not just a nice-sounding expression: “The meek—those who trust in Yahweh—*shall* inherit the earth.” God is in the process of separating His people from those who choose not to know Him. Since “**The earth is Yahweh’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein,**” (Psalm 24:1) it is His prerogative to remove from it those who don’t wish to be His people, who don’t wish to receive His inheritance. So when we read, “**You shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them,**” we are merely getting a preview of what Yahweh is about to do in the world as a

whole—clean it out so His people may live there in perfect peace. His planet, His rules.

- (602) *Exterminate the seven Canaanite nations from the land of Israel.* **“But of the cities of these peoples which Yahweh your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as Yahweh your God has commanded you, lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against Yahweh your God.** (Deuteronomy 20:16-18) Maimonides seems to be drawing a distinction between killing the individual Canaanites and eliminating their national entities. Okay, whatever—they’re both supposed to be “utterly destroyed.” This whole subject is one that today’s shades-of-gray secular humanists really choke on—the idea that a “loving” God would direct one group of people to annihilate another. They complain that it opens the door to *anybody* to engage in genocidal war if they perceive that “God is on their side.” Their observation, moreover, is not without merit: evil men have been doing precisely that since the dawn of history. What makes this any different?

Quite a bit, as it turns out. Note first that Yahweh’s instructions were quite specific: seven nations, all located within the confines of well-defined borders (see Numbers 34, cf. *Future History, Chapter 6: “Ground Zero”*) were slated for “utter destruction” by the generation of Israelites led into the land by Joshua. It wasn’t an open-ended command to kill anybody, anywhere, at any time, who doesn’t believe exactly like you do (which is pretty much what Muhammad told *his* followers to do if they got the chance). Second, a very good reason was given for this attack: **“...lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against Yahweh your God.”** Whether they realized it or not, Israel had been chosen by Yahweh to be the vehicle for the salvation of all mankind—a task that would be that much harder to achieve if they became infected with the very disease for which they were supposed to be delivering the cure. I realize that atheists don’t find this a compelling rationale. Too bad. The heart of the issue (in the historical sense) was the little phrase **“their abominations which they have done for their gods.”** What in the world were the Canaanites doing “for their gods” that was so bad Yahweh would call it an “abomination”? As it turns out, He had a very specific list of behaviors in mind, and He told us what they were (as will I, in a moment). Moreover, He told the Israelites that if they began practicing these same things, He would kick them out of the Land just as He had the Canaanites. This, then, is not a case of punishing the heathen *for* their sins while blessing the Israelites *in spite of* them, but rather of

cleansing the land from an evil that had matured, grown rotten, turned toxic, and begun to stink. The Israelites in this context weren't predators; they were scavengers. They weren't invaders; they were God's biohazard containment team.

Like most ancient civilizations, the Canaanites were a very religious culture. And, perhaps in a more direct lineage than most, their gods were derivatives from, or permutations of, the original Babylonian "mystery" religion of Nimrod, Semiramis and Tammuz. I described this seminal false religion in detail in Future History, Chapter 3, "In a Manner of Speaking," and Chapter 14, "Mystery Babylon." There I described how the original Babylonian religion spread to virtually every corner of the earth, mimicking and replacing Yahweh's intended familial relationship with a counterfeit religion that took on a plethora of forms and spawned scores of "gods," though in reality there was only one—Satan.

In its grossest incarnation, this religion became what was being practiced in Canaan. The behaviors it fostered, and their consequences, were listed in one of the nastiest passages in the Bible, a passage that explicitly told the Israelites not to do what the Canaanites were doing: Adultery. **"You shall not lie carnally with your neighbor's wife, to defile yourself with her."** Human sacrifice—*of one's own children*. **"And you shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech."** Blasphemy. **"Nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am Yahweh."** Homosexuality. **"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination."** Notice that Yahweh calls it an *abomination*—the strongest epithet in Scripture. Finally there's bestiality. **"Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion...."** I can't even believe there's a word for it.

These are all things the Canaanites were doing in the practice of their sick religion, things from which the Israelites were warned to be separated. **"Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled which I am casting out before you. For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you. For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people."** (Leviticus 18:20-29) The Israelites didn't throw the Canaanites out, not exactly—the land itself "vomited out" its evil

inhabitants. Unfortunately, that category later included the very Jews who had been tasked to be the instruments of God's housecleaning project. They, too, eventually began to practice these same abominations, and they too were expelled for doing so. But they, unlike the Canaanites, couldn't say they hadn't been warned. Review Mitzvot #82 through #105.

"Alas, those poor stupid Jews," you may be thinking. "They suffered the consequences of their actions, just like the Canaanites they replaced. What were they *thinkin'?*" Yes, they blew it, but are we (the rest of the world) any better? Do we not deserve to be "vomited out of *our* land"? Look at that last sentence again: Yahweh isn't talking about Israel, necessarily—He's talking about *anybody*. **"Whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people."** *But I'd never do these things*, you protest. Maybe not personally, but nationally? Do we tolerate and foster Canaanite/Babylonian practices in our society? Look at the list again.

(1) Adultery: it's so rampant, it's almost considered acceptable, even semi-inevitable, in our society. But it's a stoning offense in the Torah. God calls it the only legitimate reason for divorce, and He *hates* divorce (see Malachi 2:14-16).

(2) Human sacrifice: *How barbaric!* I agree, but we do it all the time. There are about 1,300,000 reported legal abortions performed in the United States each year, some 22 million worldwide. Add to that the unreported legal abortions and clandestine illegal procedures, and the annual number climbs to somewhere between 36 and 53 million abortions each year. (They're perfectly legal in 54 countries, whose populations represent about 61% of the world's total.) And why are so many babies murdered in the womb? The number one reason given (in America, anyway) is that having the child would interfere with work, school, or other responsibilities. Number two: financial stress. Number three: relationship issues with the child's father. Let me put it bluntly, folks. Every year, 50 million children are sacrificed on the twin altars of convenience and irresponsibility. You tell me: how is that any different from Canaanites placing their infants into the red-hot arms of a bronze statue of Molech or Chemosh in return for a promise of bountiful crops?

(3) Blasphemy: to be guilty of this—profaning the name of Yahweh—all you really have to do is ignore Him, pretend He doesn't exist, live your life as if you're not personally accountable to an Almighty Creator God whose self-revealed name means "I Am," i.e., the One who exists eternally. Of course, you *can* do worse—you can give your allegiance to a "god" of another name, whether it's Ba'al, Allah, or Lucifer himself.

(4) Homosexuality: this is a fundamental and purposeful perversion of the God-instituted family unit. There's more to this than merely wanting to put your sexual apparatus where it wasn't designed to go. Yahweh created our entire mammalian biology to reflect His nature: a Father (representing Yahweh—the ultimate authority figure), a Mother (representing the Holy Spirit—*Ruach Qodesh* in the Hebrew tongue, a *feminine* noun, the nurturing, comforting—and convicting—spirit), and the Child (representing the “Son of God,” Yahshua, who walked among us as a human being, a manifestation of and representative for Yahweh, voluntarily bereft of His heavenly glory as well as several *dimensions* that were His by right of His divinity). Homosexuality destroys this biological picture of a spiritual reality, obfuscating God's plan and purpose. To hear them tell it, “gays” (a misnomer if ever there was one) number ten percent of the population. (In reality, it's between one and two percent, which is scary enough.) But with Satan's help they exert an influence far beyond what their numbers would suggest. Am I a homophobe? You bet I am. I'm scared spitless of being within a hundred miles of anything that Yahweh has promised to “cut off from among His people.” I mean, look what He did to Sodom.

(5) Bestiality: c'mon, does anybody really do this? Whether or not they do physically, they certainly will spiritually. It's not by accident that an evil world leader prophesied to appear in the last days (who's more or less equated with the demon that inhabits him) is called “the Beast,” nor is this prophecy insignificant: **“All the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?’ And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”** (Revelation 13:3-8) There it is—spiritual bestiality, coming soon to a world near you.

Are you starting to get the picture? The Israelite conquest of Canaan was nothing short of a prophetic dress rehearsal for the coming destruction of Satan's kingdom on earth at the hands of the returning Messiah, King Yahshua. It matters not that the Jews failed to achieve their mission parameters. Yahshua most certainly will not fail. If you think the “poor Canaanites” were treated unfairly by God back in Joshua's day, you probably think adultery, abortion, homosexuality and secular humanism

are all acceptable human foibles, even if you don't personally practice these things, and in all likelihood you'll welcome the Antichrist—a.k.a. "the Beast"—as the politician to end all politicians. As mistakes go, that one's about as wrong as you can get.

One final thought: the Hebrew word for "land," *erets*, has a broad range of meanings—no doubt by God's design: "land, earth, the *whole* earth (as opposed to part), earth (as opposed to heaven), the inhabitants of earth, country, territory, district, region, a piece of ground, the land of Canaan (i.e., Israel), the inhabitants of the Promised Land, Sheol (the land without return—the underworld), a city or city-state, ground, the surface of the earth, soil, the land of the living, or the ends of the earth." (S) In other words, the language itself supports my hypothesis that "the land of Canaan vomiting out its inhabitants" because of their evil can rightly be construed as a prophetic microcosm of the coming worldwide judgment. It's Yahweh's *erets*. He wants it back.

(603) *Do not destroy fruit trees (wantonly or in warfare). "When you besiege a city for a long time, while making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them; if you can eat of them, do not cut them down to use in the siege, for the tree of the field is man's food. Only the trees which you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, to build siegeworks against the city that makes war with you, until it is subdued."* (Deuteronomy 20:19-20) The disposition of resources is one key to the mindset of God. Man's agenda (and Satan's) in war is: "defeat the enemy." This may seem to make sense until we compare it to God's agenda in warfare: "Cleanse the land of evil." Killing the bad guys isn't the point—in fact, Yahweh doesn't really want anyone to perish, though He leaves the choice of whether to live or die up to us. During the conquest of Canaan, as with the coming global cleansing, the land (whether Israel or Earth) would have to support a population of the redeemed after the smoke had cleared. God's not done with the planet quite yet. There's the little matter of Christ's Millennial Kingdom to prepare for.

It seems ironic that Muhammad's tactics when besieging the Jewish Beni al-Nadir tribe of Yathrib (Medina) included cutting down their date palms (cf. Qur'an Sura 59:5; Al-Tabari, Volume II:158; Ibn Ishaq:437). This, of course, left his faithful followers no way to make an "honest" living on their newly stolen lands—they had to continue to rely on piracy, kidnapping for profit, the slave trade, and murder. And some things never change: when the "Palestinian" Muslims finally bamboozled the pathetically naïve Sharon/Olmert Israeli government out of the Gaza strip in 2005, the first thing they did was destroy the productive hydroponic

farms the Israeli settlers had no choice but to leave behind. Muslims apparently don't have the sense God gave geese.

- (604) *Deal with a beautiful woman taken captive in war in the manner prescribed in the Torah.* “When you go out to war against your enemies, and Yahweh your God delivers them into your hand, and you take them captive, and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and desire her and would take her for your wife, then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails. She shall put off the clothes of her captivity, remain in your house, and mourn her father and her mother a full month; after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife.” (Deuteronomy 21:10-13) Maimonides may finally be getting it: “Do what the Torah says.” This is a precept that applies to Israelite warfare with pagan nations other than the seven Canaanite tribes who were supposed to be completely destroyed—man, woman, and child, “everything that breathes” (see Mitzvot #601 and #602). God knew there would be cases when an Israelite army took captives, and among them, beautiful women. And on that basis alone, a soldier might “desire to take her for his wife.” Never mind the fact that physical beauty shouldn't rank above tenth or twelfth on the list of things a guy should logically consider when choosing a bride—if a man expects to live a long, happy life with her. Yahweh was dealing with reality here: having designed man's endocrine system, he knows how hormones work. On a practical note, He didn't want the conquest of Canaan devolving into an ongoing enterprise of rape and pillage—the idea was to *cleanse* the land.

God's instructions are a perfect balance between the realities of bronze age warfare and the gruesome task He had set for His holy people. He says to the love-struck soldier, “*You think she's a beauty, and you want to marry her? Okay, but first, you have to see her at her worst for an entire month—shorn of all the trappings of fashion—forget hair style: she's got to shave her head so you can see her as ugly as she ever gets. She'll be in mourning for her lost life and loved ones—expect tears and depression—and she'll be living right in your face under these conditions. You'll have her under your roof for a whole month, so you'll even get to see what she's like with PMS. If you're still smitten with her after all that, go ahead and marry her. At least you'll be going into this with your eyes wide open.*” Okay, that's a paraphrase.

- (605) *Do not sell a beautiful woman (taken captive in war).* “...And it shall be, if you have no delight in her, then you shall set her free, but you certainly shall not sell her for money; you shall not treat her brutally, because you have humbled her.” (Deuteronomy 21:14) This is a continuation of the previous mitzvah. What

if the captured beauty queen doesn't look so hot to the love-struck soldier after her one-month visit to the ugly parlor? What then? Can he sell her as a slave to somebody else? No. It's not her fault she's pretty (or was). And it's not her fault the smitten Israelite soldier has no perseverance, no imagination, and no common sense. She's suffered enough humiliation; she must be set free.

Although the text doesn't spell it out, I believe it is understood that the marriage has not been consummated at this point—i.e., she has not become the soldier's legal wife—when and if he decides not to “keep” her. If she had been married to him, and only after *that* did he decide that he “had no delight in her,” then the ordinary rules of divorce would apply: a man may divorce his wife *only* if “**he has found some uncleanness in her.**” (Deuteronomy 24:1) Yahshua later defined this as meaning adultery and nothing less. Women are not a man's disposable possessions (which is how Islam portrays them). They are his *equal*—though instructed to submit to their husbands primarily because they symbolize the Church's unique role in relationship to her Messiah—she is the Bride of Christ.

- (606) *Do not degrade a beautiful woman (taken captive in war) to the condition of a bondwoman. “And it shall be, if you have no delight in her, then you shall set her free, but you certainly shall not sell her for money; you shall not treat her brutally, because you have humbled her.”* (Deuteronomy 21:14) Part III of the Captive Bride saga.... Suppose our smitten soldier thinks like Muhammad, deciding his beauty-queen captive would make a fine sex slave, married or not. He has no intention of making her his partner, only his plaything. Yahweh's precept has cut this one off at the knees, for a “marriage” of this sort is no marriage at all in His eyes. It's serial rape. The Hebrew word for “treat brutally” is *amar*, meaning “to manipulate, to deal tyrannically with, to treat as a slave.” (S)

The vast majority of Torah instructions dealing with slaves or bondservants deal with Hebrews who have sold themselves into bondage (until the sabbatical year or Jubilee) in return for the payment of their debts, and Yahweh's admonition is invariably to treat them with kindness and respect, for everyone is a slave to sin at some point in their lives. The present precept is one of the very few that deal with what to do with captives of war, and there is a simple reason for that—Yahweh expected this scenario to be very rare. The seven Canaanite nations who populated the Land (see Mitzvot #601 and #602) were to be utterly destroyed—no captives at all were to be taken. But as we saw in Mitzvah #600, there was a proper procedure for dealing with pagan communities who were not of these seven specific nations: they had the option of surrender and

servitude. If they chose instead to fight, the men were to be slain and the women and children enslaved. The “beautiful woman” of which these last three mitzvot have spoken is the rare standout among this already rare category.

We have seen this kind of thing before: God spending inordinate amounts of Torah text on situations that would rarely if ever actually occur in the normal course of Israelite life in the Land, and invariably we have come to the conclusion that some larger issue is being addressed. What, then, is Yahweh trying to tell us here? Let’s examine the scenario. First, the woman is a member (through no fault of her own) of a rebellious pagan society, one whose leaders have chosen to fight against God rather than submit, surrender, and repent. (Sound familiar?) Second, she’s a captive, a slave with no power or privileges of her own. Third, she is naturally attractive to God’s Man, but he is required by God to disregard her beauty. And fourth, God’s people may not abuse or misuse her.

Here’s the lesson (I think). The beautiful woman represents the world—spiritually neutral, but presumably having both positive qualities (obvious to everybody) and negative ones (maybe not so much). She has no intrinsic power over God’s people, but they are attracted to her nevertheless. Yahweh wants to make sure that His people see the unvarnished truth about whatever the world has to offer, the good and the bad alike. Surprisingly, He is not necessarily forbidding a union between His people and the world, for some are called and equipped to make a successful home with her—the occasional believing businessman, pastor, or (extremely rare) politician who is gifted with the ability to work within the world’s corrupt system to advance Yahweh’s cause. But God doesn’t want any of His children to be seduced by her beauty and charm while being blindsided by her less obvious shortcomings. Now here’s the interesting part: even if the believer decides after a while that the world isn’t so attractive after all, and he doesn’t wish to form a union with her (which ought to be the case with most of us), he isn’t to “manipulate her, deal tyrannically with her, or treat her as a slave” (Hebrew: *amar*). In other words, just because “Christians” may find themselves in positions of power or influence (as they did in Europe for over a millennium following Constantine’s 313 AD Edict of Toleration) they have been specifically warned not to abuse the world they find under their control (as the Catholics subsequently did). Rather, they are to “set her free”—in other words, they are to let the world make her own spiritual choices.

(607) *Do not offer peace to the Ammonites and the Moabites before waging war on them, as should be done to other nations. “An Ammonite or Moabite shall*

not enter the assembly of Yahweh; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of Yahweh forever, because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. Nevertheless Yahweh your God would not listen to Balaam, but Yahweh your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because Yahweh your God loves you. You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever.” (Deuteronomy 23:3-6) Maimonides has conjured up a non-existent corollary to the rules concerning going to war with nations other than the Canaanite Seven (see Mitzvah #600). He has conveniently forgotten that Ammon, Moab, and Edom had been specifically declared off-limits to territorial conquest by Yahweh back in Deuteronomy 2. There He says quite plainly, **“Do not harass Moab”** (verse 9), and **“When you come near the people of Ammon, do not harass them or meddle with them”** (verse 19). Of course, refraining from attacking your neighbors is not remotely the same thing as purposely getting chummy with them. Moab and Ammon (today’s Jordan, along with Edom) had proved their undying antagonism to Yahweh and His people through the “Balaam episode,” recorded in Numbers 22:1-25:2, in which the Israelites were *seduced* into Ba’al worship after it became clear that they couldn’t be cursed. That explains why Ammonites and Moabites were not to be admitted to “the assembly of Yahweh,” that is, the fellowship of believers. They had a history of leading people astray into the worship of false gods, which is about the worst thing you can do—a stoning offense in Israel.

At issue here is what believers are to do with people who attempt to entice Yahweh’s children into denial of their God. First, we are to be alert to the danger, and remember the lessons we’ve learned from our past contact with them. At this point, it would be instructive to compare Yahweh’s words concerning Edom with those about Ammon and Moab. Later in the same passage we’re studying, Yahweh says, **“You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land. The children of the third generation born to them may enter the assembly of Yahweh.”** (Deuteronomy 23:7-8) Both the Edomites and the Egyptians had been hindrances to Israel: Egypt had enslaved the Jews for hundreds of years, and Edom had refused them peaceful passage to the Promised Land. But neither nation had attempted to lead them away from Yahweh into the worship of false gods as Ammon and Moab had. God is really serious about this. In fact, as I demonstrated in *Future History* Chapter 29: “The Three Doors,” it is this issue that separates the victims from the perpetrators, the merely “lost,” doomed to destruction, from the damned, destined to eternal torment in hell.

Second, we are instructed not to **“seek their peace nor their prosperity.”** Don’t make treaties with them, trade with them, or have anything to do with them. We are not told to attack them. On the contrary, we are told to avoid contact altogether, as much as possible. (If they attack us, of course, it’s perfectly okay to defend ourselves. But we aren’t to be the aggressors.) The bottom line is the same as that repeated several times in scripture when we are being told how believers are to deal with “Babylon,” the collective influence that seeks to lead us away from Yahweh’s love: **“Flee from the midst of Babylon, and every one save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, for this is the time of Yahweh’s vengeance; He shall recompense her.”** (Jeremiah 51:6) Don’t fight it, don’t negotiate with it, don’t work within the system trying to fix it—just *flee!* Yahweh Himself will deal with Babylon, and you don’t want to be anywhere nearby when that happens.

(608) *Anyone who is unclean shall not enter the Camp of the Levites. “When the army goes out against your enemies, then keep yourself from every wicked thing. If there is any man among you who becomes unclean by some occurrence in the night, then he shall go outside the camp; he shall not come inside the camp. But it shall be, when evening comes, that he shall wash with water; and when the sun sets, he may come into the camp.”* (Deuteronomy 23:9-11) We discussed the issues of “clean” versus “unclean” in detail in Chapter 15 of this book. There we concluded that being “ritually defiled”—the kind of thing being spoken of in our present mitzvah—is not a picture of overt sin, but of the inevitable uncleanness to which we are subjected merely by virtue of being human. Thus no sacrifices are necessary for its atonement, but cleansing is required anyway if we are to dwell within “the camp,” that is, be a useful and effective member of God’s faithful army. When Yahweh speaks of “going out against your enemies,” he’s ultimately talking about living our daily lives in this filthy world: we must endeavor to prevail against it while we “do battle,” while at the same time remaining untouched by “every wicked thing” we find there. It’s a tall order, but contamination by the world can easily render us unclean—unfit for active duty, if only temporarily.

Note that Maimonides has thrown a monkey wrench into the works by calling the assembly “the Camp of the Levites.” Levi, the priestly tribe, has not been mentioned in this context. [Tracey Rich] explains the rabbinical view: “According to the Talmud, in the present day this [“the Camp of the Levites”] means the Temple mount.” That’s something of a tasteless joke these days. The temple mount is controlled by the Muslims (who according to the Torah’s definition aren’t exactly “clean”), and it has been since long before Maimonides began codifying his 613 hallucinations. Incredibly, even when the victorious Israeli armies re-took Jerusalem in

the 1967 Six Day War, their top general, Moshe Dayan, gave the temple mount back to the Muslims (I *still* can't believe he did that) in exchange for a hollow promise of equal access. We all know how well *that's* worked out in the intervening half-century. Needless to say, the Talmud's take on what this precept means is (as they say in theological parlance) *dumb as a bag of hammers*.

- (609) *Have a place outside the camp for sanitary purposes.* **“You shall have a place outside the camp, where you may go out; and you shall have an implement among your equipment, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and turn and cover your refuse.”** (Deuteronomy 23:12-13) Warfare from the dawn of time has been accompanied by disease. As recently as the American Civil War, far more soldiers died of disease (mostly dysentery, diarrhea, typhoid, and malaria) than from wounds sustained on the battlefield (in the Union army alone, 560,000 dying of disease vs. 200,000 from trauma). And yet here we are reading simple instructions written some 3,500 years ago that would go a long way toward keeping disease in any mobile military encampment to a minimum. It seems basic and obvious now, but it wasn't until quite recently: when you set up camp, assign a place some distance from the troops' bivouac to serve as a latrine, and make sure every soldier is equipped (with a shovel or some other means) to cover his excrement, so germs won't easily be spread by insects or get into the local water supply. Was Moses really that smart, or do you think he might have been getting help with this from the One who designed not only the human body but the microbes that could make us sick?
- (610) *Keep that place sanitary.* **“...For Yahweh your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you.** (Deuteronomy 23:14-15) Yahweh didn't have Moses explain the science of the latrine thing, of course. The world wasn't quite ready for *that*. He merely offered a plausible reason for the need to properly dispose of human waste, one a devout bronze age Israelite could easily understand—and no less true just because it's a spiritual explanation for a physical issue. An Israelite soldier didn't have to know his microbiology; he only had to trust Yahweh to know what was in his best interests, and having faith in his God, to act on that trust in obedience to His word.

And is there a lesson here for us who are blessed with indoor plumbing, who must battle the world with words and ideas instead of swords and spears? Yes, I believe there is. We, like the Israelites of old, need to “cover our refuse.” For the sake of a lost world, we need to make sure the evidence of our fallen human condition doesn't pollute our environment.

In practical terms, this translates into modesty, chastity, propriety, sobriety, and responsibility—all those “boring” attributes that are becoming so rare, so out of step with our unclean society as we barrel headlong toward the End of Days. Yes, the lost are going to “step in it” as they walk through the world. Let us at least make sure that what’s defiling them isn’t us.

- (611) *Always remember what Amalek did.* **“Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God.”** (Deuteronomy 25:17-18) The last three mitzvot on Maimonides’ list of 613 have to do with the nation of Amalek—a sub-tribe of Edom. Amalek was a grandson of Esau, listed in Genesis 36:16 as one of Edom’s chiefs. The name is apparently derived from a word (*’amal*) meaning labor, toil, trouble—with an emphasis on the drudgery and grievous frustration of pointless work (as in Ecclesiastes 1:3). It may be instructive to re-read the passage at hand (including verse 19, quoted below), rendering the name “Amalek” as “pointless works.” Interesting, no?

It seems every time we meet Amalek, they’re a thorn in Israel’s side, one way or another. After the Israelites put Yahweh to the test at Horeb (Exodus 17), Amalek attacked them. You remember the story: when Moses held his hands up toward heaven, Israel’s armies prevailed; when he let them fall, Amalek gained ground. It’s an obvious picture of the efficacy of prayer. When it was all over, **“Yahweh said to Moses, “Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.”** (Exodus 17:14) Then the twelve spies (well, *ten* of them) came back from Canaan with tales of “a land that devours its inhabitants.” Israel balked, refusing to trust Yahweh to give them victory, but when they found out what their lack of faith had cost them (a whole generation wandering in the wilderness), they tried to take on Amalek in their own strength—and got soundly trounced. Even in Amalek’s waning hours, as Israel’s armies were finally carrying out God’s directive to wipe them out, they were causing trouble. King Saul (who had been specifically told to **“kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey”**—I Samuel 15:3) couldn’t resist “swooping down on the spoil” (verse 19). His disobedience cost him his throne. Even in defeat, Amalek was bad news.

- (612) *The evil done to us by Amalek shall not be forgotten.* **“...Therefore it shall be, when Yahweh your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.”**

(Deuteronomy 25:19) Notice the contrast: “Remember what Amalek did to you” (verse 17) vs. “Blot out the remembrance of Amalek.” In the literal sense, we are to be forever cognizant of Yahweh’s displeasure with those who attack His people and do not revere Him. On the other hand, the Amalekite people have been history for the past three thousand years—their “remembrance” has been well and truly blotted out.

In the symbolic sense the same contrast is germane. We are to remember what “pointless works” do to us—they obfuscate the grace of God, attacking our faith by suggesting we can work our way into the kingdom of heaven. But the time is coming—and soon—when we will no longer even be able to remember why anyone would buy into such an obviously flawed theory. What will it take to achieve that? The physical presence of King Yahshua among us.

- (613) *Destroy the seed of Amalek.* “...Therefore it shall be, when Yahweh your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.” (Deuteronomy 25:19) If you buy into the error most reference sources try to sell you, the geography and related history of Israel’s brushes with Amalek make little sense. They’ll tell you that the Israelites didn’t *really* traverse the Red Sea, but rather an ankle-deep marsh (the “Reed Sea”) north of the Gulf of Suez. (Drowning Pharaoh’s entire army in *that* insignificant puddle would have taken a *real* miracle.) They subsequently place Mt. Sinai (Horeb) where Emperor Constantine’s mommy decided it should be—in the southern “Sinai” Peninsula. But Paul states quite clearly (see Galatians 4:25) that the Mt. Sinai to which Moses led his people was in Arabia—east of the Gulf of Aqaba (the north-eastern arm of the Red Sea, immediately to the south of Edom—in other words, just south of Amalekite territory). It all starts coming into focus when we realize that the Amalekites hadn’t gone hundreds of miles out of their way to attack the Israelites, but they were merely paranoid about protecting their own turf. The Israelites had asked permission to pass through harmlessly on their way north, but Amalek, not “fearing God,” harassed them at every turn, needlessly earning Yahweh’s wrath. Remember what we learned in Mitzvah #607—All Edomite territory (having been settled by Abraham’s grandson Esau) was off limits to Israelite settlement. Furthermore, Amalek was not listed among the seven Canaanite tribes slated for total destruction (see Mitzvah #601). So what Yahweh is saying is that the Amalekites must eventually be wiped out, but *their land* will not fall to Israel as an inheritance.

In a way, it's ironic that we should finish Maimonides' list of "613 Laws" with a discussion of Yahweh's determination to destroy Amalek. If the linguistic root of the name is what it seems to be—'amal: labor, toil, and sorrow—then God is telling us precisely what the problem is with the rabbinical approach to the Torah. They see it as a list of tasks that must be meticulously performed in order to earn God's favor. But the reality is quite different. Yahweh has in the Torah provided us with The Owner's Manual we need to keep our mortal bodies in good working order—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. If we follow his precepts, we will be—as the Psalmist says—*blessed!* **"Blessed ['esher: happy, joyful, blissful, fortunate] are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of Yahweh! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!"** (Psalm 119:1-2) I pray that this study has blessed you.

The Owner's Manual

*What Every Christian should know about
The Law of Moses*

Volume Two:
What Maimonides Missed

By

Ken Power



What Maimonides Missed

Filling in the gaps

We've reached the end of Maimonides' list of 613 *mitzvot*, or Torah precepts—supposedly the complete picture of God's instructions transmitted to us through Moses in the first five books of the Bible. If you're like me, you're feeling a little disappointed, maybe even a bit angry, that the Rambam and the sages upon which he relied missed so much that's patently obvious to even the casual observer this side of Calvary. In light of what we've discovered by paying close attention to the Torah, a quick survey of Maimonides' list reveals that it contains nowhere near 613 unique points of agreement with Yahweh's instructions. By my count, there are 86 pointless duplicates or corollaries which clearly don't deserve to be listed separately, 70 misstatements, twisted quotes, or outright perversions of the Torah's text, 78 significant omissions, misinterpretations, or unwarranted extrapolations, and 74 blatant instances of missed or ignored significance (and I was extremely generous here—the evidence of rabbinical cluelessness is ubiquitous). In other words, Maimonides dropped the ball in half the precepts he covered.

But by examining the Torah's actual text, we've been able to identify the broad sweep of God's instructions in the areas Maimonides assumed he'd covered. And with the benefit of twenty-twenty hindsight in the light of Yahshua's finished work, we should now have a new appreciation of the Torah's prophetic revelation of His role in achieving our redemption, atonement, and cleansing. The question is, now that we can perceive the rabbis' failure to discern Yahweh's plan and purpose as revealed in the passages they *did* cover, can we trust their claim to have identified all of the issues raised in the Torah? I, for one, doubt it.

And that, my friends, is the *raison d'être* of this present work, *The Owner's Manual, Volume 2: What Maimonides Missed*. Here's my *modus operandi*. First, I scanned the entire Pentateuch for instances where Yahweh was telling somebody—*anybody*—to do something. (This includes the places where Moses is seen issuing instructions that clearly originated with Yahweh, though the text doesn't say "And Yahweh said..."). Next, I reviewed the Torah passages that were quoted previously in the context of Maimonides' 613 Mitzvot, and removed the overlaps from my working list. Repeats of precepts we've already seen were deleted as well. What's left is a compendium of scripture passages to which Maimonides did not refer and that did not arise in the course of our exploration of his list. Some of this is small snippets of scripture that fell between the cracks; some broader subjects Maimonides skipped altogether; whether out of

carelessness or an agenda of obfuscation remains to be seen. I tried to be scrupulous in my perception of God’s instruction, however. I did not restrict myself to passages that begin, “And Yahweh commanded Moses, saying....” However you slice it, the number of Torah prescriptions that were overlooked in Volume I is prodigious. The raw scripture in my working file (before I formatted it and added any commentary) filled 85 pages. That ought to tell us *something*.

What can we expect to see? Having covered so much of the Torah already, we should have a reasonably good feel for the general mindset of Yahweh, and we’re going to see more of that—more instruction about the human condition, our failures and what to do about them, and the connection between a holy God and His people. Maimonides glossed over quite a bit of information about the priesthood, the Levites, and the temple. So we’ll go back and review what he missed in those areas. And there is a whole body of scriptural instruction defining the promised Land—a confusing and seemingly contradictory maze of geographical description that the Rambam, a Spanish Rabbi who settled in Cairo, scrupulously avoided.

Maimonides covered quite a few of the scriptures concerning the offerings and sacrifices described in the Torah, and we will endeavor to finish that job. He skimmed over much of the instruction concerning the symbolic appointments Yahweh scheduled with His people throughout the year—and he missed their significance entirely. So we will revisit the seven *miqra’ey* and other events God set apart for our edification. There are things he missed concerning man’s relationship with his fellow man; we’ll pick up the slack there. And finally, there is a significant amount of warning and admonition, especially in Deuteronomy—promises of blessing or cursing that depend solely upon how seriously God’s people regard His word.

When we’re through, we will have discussed virtually everything God said to do in the first five books of the Bible. As we’ve already established, however, most of Yahweh’s instructions are symbolic: He is telling His people to rehearse, to act out as if on stage, the various elements or details of His plan of redemption. The Sabbath *means* something. Circumcision *means* something. The formula for making the priestly incense *means* something. Practically every facet of the Torah’s beautiful gemstone reflects something external, something beyond the jewel itself. They reflect the light of Yahweh, His love, His glory, His purpose, His plan. If we look no further than the precepts themselves, we rob ourselves of a beautiful, fulfilling experience—the experience of knowing God.

A word about format: you'll recall that in Volume One, I listed the precepts by number (1-613, the order being provided by Judaism 101). A mitzvah summary, based on Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, was then given (set in *italics*), and this was followed by the actual Torah text from which the mitzvah was derived (set in **boldface** type). Only then did I wade in with my commentary.

For this present volume, the format will look similar, but of necessity, some things will have changed. The numbering system is totally without significance this time. It's only there so we can easily reference other precepts. I will begin at #614, not because Maimonides' 613-mitzvah system had any real merit, but simply to avoid confusion. As before, a summary statement in italics for each numbered observation will be provided. But this time, the synopsis is my own, and thus should be taken no more seriously than we did with the Rambam's mitzvah statements. Indeed, I intend to use the summary statements as an opportunity to get to the heart of each precept or principle in a nutshell, not to merely restate the obvious. The *real* information, as before, will be in boldface type—the salient passage from the Torah. And as before, my commentary will follow.

Though my purpose is to provide as comprehensive a survey of the Torah as possible, I am fully aware that I'm going to miss some things. Forgive me; I'm only human, seeing things "through a glass, darkly." I pray that Yahweh's *Ruach Qodesh* will teach you where I've failed, making God's Word "a lamp to your feet and light to your path."

Ken Power



The Human Condition

We'll begin by revisiting Yahweh's instruction concerning the basic human predicament—our mortality, our fallen state, our motivational triggers. From our rocky beginnings in the Garden of Eden, the experiences of Cain and Noah, and the wilderness wanderings of Israel, there are valuable lessons for us to learn—insights for us to discover—even today.

IN THE BEGINNING

(614) *Don't desire the knowledge of evil.* “Then Yahweh, God, took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And Yahweh, God, commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’” (Genesis 2:15-17) Adam and his bride were given an enclosed, protected environment called Eden (from the Hebrew root ‘*adan*, meaning enjoyment or pleasure) in which to live. It was quite literally “paradise”—a word that means “a walled garden.” Here, sheltered and provided for in every way, they were set apart from the animal kingdom (including any proto-hominids Yahweh had introduced into the biosphere) by God's gift of the *neshamah*—the “breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). This made humans unique: in addition to having a soul (*nephesh*) which made our bodies alive (like all animals), the *neshamah* gave us the capacity for *spiritual* life, that is, the ability to be indwelt by and respond to the eternal Spirit of God.

In this perfect environment, Adam and Chavvah (Eve) already had the knowledge of good—it was *all* they knew, for evil was kept at bay by God's provision and presence. Yahweh had provided this paradise for them because of His love: in fact, we were unique among His creatures in having been created for no other purpose than to share a loving relationship with Him. But having created animals and angels, Yahweh knew that love came with a catch: in order for love to be given, it must be possible for it to be withheld. Love requires choice; in order for the concept to have any meaning, it must be possible to choose *not* to love.

Animals have no capacity for real spiritual love. Without a *neshamah*, they operate purely on instinct, emotion, and intellect, no matter how

much devotion, loyalty, or affection they might display. On the other hand, though angels do have the requisite spiritual nature, Yahweh created them without the privilege of choice. They're like soldiers in an army who, though capable of autonomous action, are not given the prerogative of disregarding their commander's instructions. Like any soldier, of course, they have the *capability* to disobey, but not the legal right. If they do, they become rebels, outlaws, *demons* whom Yahweh will incarcerate when it suits His purpose. Without the privilege of choice, the concept of love is meaningless for angels; and for animals without the capacity for spiritual life, it is equally meaningless. Man is the *only* created being with both the capacity and the privilege of choosing to reciprocate God's love. It is what we were made for.

Which brings us back to Eden. Why did Yahweh place the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the center of the garden if He didn't want Adam and Eve to eat from it? Because He wanted to give them a simple, binary way to demonstrate their trust. *If you trust Me to provide for all your needs, then obey My voice in this one small matter. Your choice will reveal your love for Me, for it will reveal your understanding and acceptance of my love for you.* Chavvah thought she was trading innocence for wisdom. In reality, she was exchanging her innocence for mere experience—a bad bargain however you slice it. As we would learn much later, **“The reverence for Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding [binah: discernment, insight].”** (Proverbs 9:10) Experiential knowledge of evil, on the other hand, leads only to death.

We shouldn't gloss over the apparent contradiction of the warning, **“In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”** Adam and Chavvah both went on to live very long lives—Adam lived to be 930 years old! So did God lie? No. Physical death (the separation of the soul/*nephesh* from the body) was only a metaphor for the more serious sort of death about which Yahweh was warning them: spiritual death, the separation of His Spirit from their *nephesh*. That happened immediately, and life could only be restored, it turned out, through the shedding of innocent blood.

- (615) *Recognize your enemy.* **“I will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”** (Genesis 3:15) Prophetic information like this always has instructional value, if only written between the lines. I find it fascinating that Yahweh was addressing the serpent here, not Eve. He was telling Satan what his role was going to be—he would “bruise the heel” of the seed of the woman. (The verb *sup*, to bruise or crush, can also mean to

strike or snap at, and also to envelop, overwhelm, or engulf—B&C.) The woman’s promised “seed” (Hebrew: *zera*, offspring, descendent, child) would ultimately prove to be the Messiah, Yahshua, as prophesied more directly by Isaiah: **“Yahweh Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”** (Isaiah 7:14) The fulfillment was recorded in Luke: **“Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Yahshua. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and Yahweh will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.’”** (Luke 1:3-33)

While not discounting the fact that the heel of Yahshua’s foot was literally bruised in the process of crucifixion, the word “heel” (Hebrew: *aqeb*), gives us insight into a more far-reaching truth. *Aqeb* also carries the derivative connotation of anything in the rear, such as a rear guard or the target of an ambush, as well as one’s footsteps, one’s trail, as it were. Therefore, Satan’s expanded role in this world would be to strike, to snap at, those following in the Messiah’s footsteps—to ambush His rear guard, so to speak. We all bear bruises that show how successful the serpent has been.

But the woman’s Seed also had a role to play: He would strike, bruise, crush, and overwhelm the head of the serpent, Satan—He would inflict the wound that would eventually incapacitate him for all eternity, making the world safe for those who follow in the footsteps of the promised Messiah. (Note: spirits like Satan are immortal beings. Once created, they cannot be killed, only incarcerated.) Meanwhile, however, there would be enmity, hostility, between her seed and the seed of the serpent.

Who? Yahshua explains who “the seed of the serpent” is as He chastises the false religious teachers of His day, calling them the devil’s children: **“If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”** (John 8:42-44) Children do their father’s bidding. Children of the “father of lies” lie to people in order to prevent them from coming to Yahweh, from reciprocating His love. And that’s serious: Yahshua characterizes the blocking of access to God as *murder*. The surprising thing for many is that the people to whom He was speaking so

harshly were the most religious people in town, the elite, the powerful, the influential. Do not be deceived. God has warned us that *religion is our enemy*. Blind submission to the rules and traditions of men will separate us from God, not draw us closer. Yahweh seeks our love and our fellowship, not our mindless obeisance.

- (616) *Know that rebellion has consequences.* **“To the woman [Yahweh] said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception. In pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’”**

(Genesis 3:16) The lessons of the fall continue. Eve, by her sampling of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, had chosen experience over innocence. Here, Yahweh simply gives her what she’d asked for. She had perceived the forbidden fruit as something “desirable to make one wise,” something that would allow her to discern between good and evil. The catch was that first-hand knowledge of evil would separate her from intimate fellowship with Yahweh—it entailed sin: the falling short of His glory. It’s axiomatic that personal knowledge of evil would “multiply her sorrow.” But what does “conception” mean, exactly? The Hebrew word is *herown*, which denotes not only the birth process itself, the pregnancy, gestation period and act of childbirth, but also the sensory pleasure of the sex drive that led to it. The word encompasses all of the pain and pleasure of the experience of reproduction—all these sensations would henceforth be intensified. Eve had craved experiential knowledge; that’s precisely what she would receive. Good *and* evil.

The next sentence describes where the quest for the knowledge of evil would inevitably lead: to frustration. The “desire” Chavvah would feel toward her husband was more than sexual attraction. The Hebrew word *teshuqah* means “desire, urges, longing, i.e., a very strong emotion or feeling to have or do something. Note: this strong desire may refer to sexual urges or desires, or a desire to dominate.” (*Dictionary of Bible Languages with Semantic Domains*) Adam and Eve had been created as partners, as equals. But Eve’s newfound unnatural desire to rule over her husband would be met with utter frustration. The same word, *teshuqah*, is used to describe the insatiable desire a personified “sin” had for the domination of Cain in Genesis 4:7—and we all know where *that* led.

The universal principle we should draw from this vignette is obvious. Do not desire, and most certainly do not grasp at, that which Yahweh in His wisdom has not given to you, even if it looks good, even if it holds the promise of some benefit. What He provides and what He withholds are for our own well being. We are finite in our wisdom, and there *is* such a thing

as “the law of unintended consequences.” His gifts are bestowed at His discretion. In short, be careful what you wish for. You just might get it.

- (617) *Heed God, not people.* **“Then to Adam He [Yahweh] said, ‘Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground for your sake. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”** (Genesis 3:17-19) Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit. And now Adam had a second choice to make, even tougher than the first one (to eat or not to eat). Now he had to choose between abandoning his wife—leaving her alone to face an unknown fate—and disobeying a clear command of God. It was the original lose-lose scenario, as far as Adam could see. He knew Yahweh’s instruction hadn’t been a mere “suggestion.” The verb “commanded” (Hebrew: *tsawah*) means “ordered or decreed with force and authority.” One can’t be sure, but I get the feeling that Adam finally chose to eat the fruit not because he wanted it, but because his beloved wife had asked him to. Thus Yahweh’s primary point in chastising Adam was that he had “heeded” (*shama*—to hear and obey, to consent, to yield to) the voice of his wife instead of the voice of God.

We need to remember that Eve meant no harm. But never having been exposed to the virus of evil, she had no natural defense against it, and was therefore easily deceived. The truth is, our best intentions are of no consequence when compared with the word of Yahweh. Sincerity of opinion, pure motives, and human intellect are of no weight when measured against God’s precepts. Written between the lines here is the Bible’s first warning against practicing religion in lieu of cultivating a relationship with Yahweh. We are not to heed even our most trusted and loving companions if what they’re telling us is contrary to God’s word. (And all the more so with self-serving teachers harboring transparent satanic agendas.) The rub is, in order to follow this precept, we need to actually know what God’s Word says. Yahweh declares, and it bears repeating, **“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”** (Hosea 4:6)

Note also that choosing to heed the word of man (or woman) over God’s instructions carries a penalty. As with Chavvah, the consequence to be endured by Adam was not some evil punishment dreamed up by an angry and vengeful God in order to “get back at him” for screwing up. Rather, it was the natural outcome of choosing to trust something other than Yahweh. In the paradise of Eden, food was provided and predators

(excuse the snake) were kept at bay. But (as we shall see) Yahweh's love for Adam forced Him to evict him from Eden, from the place of provision and protection, to precisely what Adam's choice had ever-so-eloquently declared that he wanted: a world where he could be self-sufficient.

This attitude is still evident today in mankind's insistence on practicing religion instead of following Yahweh. By doing so, we are saying, *We must toil all the days of our life to make ourselves worthy of God's love. Dealing with the thorns and thistles of life are a penance we perform to earn our place in heaven. God will surely be impressed when he sees the sweat of our brow.* Meanwhile, Yahweh is shaking His head and saying (and I paraphrase), "What're you thinkin'? I gave you *Eden* to live in, you morons. If I wanted you to work and suffer to earn my love, I wouldn't have given you all that low-hanging fruit. And let's be honest, guys: when you sweat, you stink."

- (618) *Realize that nothing good comes from evil. "Then Yahweh, God, said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'—therefore Yahweh, God, sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life."* (Genesis 3:22-24) There was another tree of note in the Garden, one called the "tree of life." Though it hadn't been declared off limits like the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it was now, in the wake of Adam's and Eve's sin, deemed a hazard to them, something from which they had to be kept isolated for their own good. (It is pretty obvious that seeing the fallen couple live "forever" in their sinful, mortal bodies wouldn't have done Yahweh any harm at all. This move was made for Adam's benefit.)

This was harder for me to understand when I was in my twenties than it is now, forty years later. Although attaining eternal life is still one of my goals, I can no longer pretend that I'd like to live forever in *this* body. Truth be told, it's falling apart—and it's going to get worse, not better, before I finally die or get raptured. This mortal frame I inherited from my father Adam is not built to last. In I Corinthians 15, Paul describes the solution God has devised: we will leave behind these old, mortal, corruptible bodies and inherit new, immortal bodies—bodies designed and built to endure for eternity in fellowship with our Creator.

The world as we know it is a lame duck—it's on it's way out. But transitioning between this doomed environment and the eternal state, Yahweh speaks of a one-thousand-year long period in which mortal man

will once again be given an Eden-like world in which to live—certainly in Zion (and most likely everywhere else Yahweh is honored). The world will be healed by a “river of life” (actually, Zechariah mentions *two* of them) emanating from beneath the Millennial Temple. There are trees growing alongside this river: **“Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.”** (Ezekiel 47:12) The prophets speak of a time when longevity—as in the days before the flood—will be restored. It is clear that these rivers and the trees that grow on their banks have something to do with that. But it is not said that these are “trees of life,” though they bear a family resemblance. Longevity is not remotely the same thing as eternal life—mortal men will still grow old, for that’s the curse they’ve inherited from Adam. But as the Millennial Kingdom draws to an end, every child of Yahweh will have received his or her immortal body. Death will have been rendered obsolete.

It is only *after* we have received these immortal, “spiritual” bodies that the tree of life could cease being a curse to us. And so it is that it reappears in the last chapter of the Bible as John describes the post-Millennial heavenly state—an eternal “place” called the New Jerusalem. **“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”** (Revelation 22:1-2) In the New Jerusalem, every soul who has chosen to be made alive by the indwelling of Yahweh’s Spirit will discover that the tree of life no longer poses a danger. The sustenance and healing it provides will go on forever. Because of Adam’s sin, mankind was evicted from the Garden: nothing good comes from evil. But the converse is also true. Through Yahshua’s atonement, mankind can regain paradise: nothing evil comes from good.

CAIN AND ABEL

- (619) *Don’t presume that Yahweh doesn’t see your sin.* **“And He [Yahweh] said, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.’”** (Genesis 4:10-12) Yahweh never asks questions because He

doesn't know the answer. He asks them because *we* don't know—or at least we *act* like we don't. After Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, Yahweh asked, “Where are you?” Here he demands of Cain, “What have you done?” He asks those same questions of us today. How we respond to his “questions” has eternal consequences. They are framed to elicit a response leading to repentance. **What have you done?** *We have sinned, and fallen short of Your standard of holiness. Our deeds have cursed us, made us fugitives and vagabonds in the earth. Only Your mercy can remove the curse; only Your grace can bring us back into your presence. Where are you?* *We are hiding from Your glory, naked and ashamed of our sin. Please help us: clothe us in your righteousness, O God.*

Our sins are not hidden from Yahweh, nor can we justify our crimes and shortcomings in the light of His holiness. Snappy comebacks like Cain's famous retort “Am I my brother's keeper?” don't impress God—they only demonstrate our arrogance. We can't work our way back, buy our way in, or talk our way out. All we can do is ask for His forgiveness. All we can do is fall upon His mercy. We should not presume that just because Yahweh doesn't punish our crimes immediately, He never will. We remain alive for one reason only: He wants us to turn back to Him. As Paul put it, asking yet another question to which God already knows the answer: **“Do you despise the riches of [Yahweh's] goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”** (Romans 2:4)

- (620) *Don't exact vengeance (without Yahweh's express authorization).* **“And Cain said to Yahweh, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear! Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me.’ And Yahweh said to him, ‘Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.’ And Yahweh set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him.”** (Genesis 4:13-15) There would come a time when Yahweh's instruction for dealing with murder would be for an “avenger of blood” to be appointed from the victim's family. Upon verification of the facts of the case, the avenger would be authorized to track down and slay the slayer, thus cleansing the land of the sin of murder. To ensure that justice was done (and not mere revenge), Yahweh set aside six “cities of refuge” in Israel, where a manslayer could flee for protection until his case was decided—that is, until it was determined whether the death had been purposeful or accidental, and who, in fact, the guilty party was. (See Mitzvot #260, 292-295.)

This was all an outgrowth of a principle Yahweh laid down right after the great flood: **“Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.”** (Genesis 9:5-6) At that time, human government was authorized by God (**“I will require it”**) to exact capital punishment, a life for a life. But until this instruction was given (if we may extrapolate from the Genesis 4 passage above), the murderer of a murderer was to be considered a *murderer*—not an avenger. If Cain had been slain for his crime, his killer would in turn have been subject to retribution, and so on until no one was left alive. The vendetta has never been Yahweh’s pattern. The law of God has always favored restitution over retribution. But since one’s mortal life cannot be restored (making restitution impossible), payment in kind for the crime of murder is mandated—life for life. Note that the unrepentant Cain knew intuitively that his crime, whether punished in this life or not, had precipitated his demise—not physically, but spiritually: **“I shall be hidden from Your face.”** That, my friends, is a fate worse than death.

NOAH

- (621) *Follow Yahweh’s directions when trying to save the world. “And God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood....’”* (Genesis 6:13-14) The human race has been plagued for thousands of years by people who recognize that the world has problems, but who insist on solving them *their way*, not God’s way. But look at how specific and detailed Yahweh’s instructions were to Noah: **“‘Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch.’** *You couldn’t possibly understand why this is yet, Noah, but this thing is going to have to be completely waterproof. ‘And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits.’ It’s going to have to be huge to get the job done. Naval architects four thousand years from now will confirm that these proportions are the most stable a large vessel can have in high seas. ‘You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above; and set the door of the ark in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks....’* *The design is practical. I’ve calculated the needed capacity and provided for access and ventilation.*

Yahweh also told Noah *why* he was to do all this. **“‘And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in**

which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, of animals after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the earth after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive. And you shall take for yourself of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather it to yourself; and it shall be food for you and for them.' Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did." (Genesis 6:14-22)

I'm not suggesting these instructions to Noah are there for us to perform. I *am* suggesting that we should treat Yahweh's instructions *to us* with the same sense of urgency and obedience that Noah did. He didn't say, "God said to build a boat, but I think I'll just move to higher ground instead. Far more efficient." He didn't waste time rounding up animals, but waited for them to come to him, as Yahweh had promised. He did, however, gather food for himself and his passengers, as instructed. And although he was a "preacher of righteousness" (II Peter 2:5) he didn't force his neighbors to get onboard the ark. In short, he paid attention to what Yahweh had told him to do—and what not to do.

This principle is, if anything, more important today than ever. Yahshua warned us about this *specifically*: "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matthew 24:37-39) God has told us exactly what the days before his return would be like, what events would transpire, and what we were supposed to do about it—or not, as the case may be. He told us in such great detail, in fact, it took me 900 pages to explain it all in Future History. Today, more than ever, we need to be following Yahweh's instructions, not the cultural consensus, not our own moral compass (however well-intentioned), and not our precious religious traditions. Only Yahweh's instructions will guide us to a place of safety.

- (622) *Go where Yahweh tells you to go, when He tells you to go there. "Then Yahweh said to Noah, 'Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation.... For after seven more days I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made.' And Noah did according to all that Yahweh commanded him." (Genesis 7:1, 4-5) We aren't told how long it took Noah and his sons to build the ark. It had to have taken several decades, minimum. But with pinpoint timing, Yahweh is*

now seen calling his servant into the place of safety. Verses 2 and 3 hint that the last seven days before the flood were mostly spent getting the animals situated on board. The point is that Noah didn't have a clue when the flood would come, while Yahweh knew precisely—and not just as the time drew near, but decades before this, when he first told Noah to build the ark, knowing just how long the job would take. The survival of the human race, it turned out, rested on one man's willingness to do what Yahweh told him to do, when He told him to do it.

In 2005, Dallas Abbott, an adjunct research scientist at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory in Palisades, N.Y., determined the date of a massive meteorite strike 900 miles southeast of Madagascar to have occurred within the lifetime of Noah, “around 2800 B.C.” The “Burckle Abysmal Impact Crater” left by this impact measures eighteen miles wide, which is *huge*, considering it's some 12,500 feet beneath the surface of the Indian Ocean (and we all know what water does to muzzle velocity). The mega-tsunami it generated would have easily displaced enough water to account for forty days of rain over much of the earth's surface. Enthusiastically seizing upon a golden opportunity to trash Yahweh's reputation, a scientist featured on the History Channel's treatment of the Burckle Crater remarked, “We no longer need God to explain the multiple flood legends.” No, what this idiot needs God for is to explain how Noah (or any other flood-legend hero—there are at least 175 local versions that parallel the Genesis account) knew to build a big boat twenty or thirty years before a mega-tsunami flooded his world. *Duh!*

When it was all over, Noah was still listening to Yahweh. “**Then God spoke to Noah, saying, ‘Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you: birds and cattle and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.’**” (Genesis 8:15-17) How do you know when it's safe? When Yahweh tells you it's safe. You can't possibly get yourself in trouble by following the instructions of such a God.

- (623) *Be fruitful.* “**So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.’**” (Genesis 9:1) We saw a similar precept once before, in Genesis 1:28 (See Mitzvah #63) That time it was given to Adam and Eve; here Noah and his family are being instructed. In both cases, the future of the entire race of *neshamah*-equipped mankind hung in the balance—one generation of non-fruitfulness at either of these junctures and it would have been all over for the human race. We need to remember that what is true in the physical realm is also true in the spiritual: we *as*

believers are never more than one generation away from extinction. Indeed, it seems we've spent most of our 6,000-year existence on the "Endangered Species List."

The "great commission" restates this precept in spiritual terms: **"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."** (Acts 1:8) Our walk and witness are to transmit God's truth—our spiritual DNA—to the next generation. We are still supposed to be fruitful; we are still commanded to multiply. The Hebrew word translated "fruitful" above is *parah*, which means "to flourish, i.e., produce an offspring or harvest of the same kind in a successive generation, implying an abundance." (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*) As with physical procreation, our spiritual life is reproduced in the next generation not through our rules, rituals, or beliefs, but by our love. That's why Paul reminded us, **"The fruit of the Spirit is love—joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."** (Galatians 5:22-23) This is the fruit we are to bear into successive generations of believers.

- (624) *Eat meat. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs."* (Genesis 9:2-3) Ooh! A *manly* mitzvah. Yahweh never contradicts Himself, but occasionally He must give us new instructions based upon a changing world. This is the second "phase" of His dietary guidelines. The first was given in the Garden of Eden, where Yahweh **"commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.'"** (Genesis 2:16-17) At that point, mankind could live quite nicely on a vegetarian diet. After the flood, however, the world had changed, so the precept at hand was issued, broadening the spectrum of man's dietary choices. Apparently, the nutrition available in a meatless diet would no longer be sufficient to maintain optimum human health, so animals, including birds and fish—a rich source of protein—were added to the menu. About fifteen hundred years later, however, Yahweh again changed man's recommended diet, this time *restricting* the types of land animals, birds, and sea creatures His people could safely eat. Between Noah and Moses, we had gradually lost the ability to process the inherent toxicity of certain meats—pork, for example. These instructions are discussed at length in *The Owner's Manual*, Chapter 5: "Dietary Laws."

Although a definitive answer might prove elusive, it may be instructive to ask ourselves what caused this three-stage shift in dietary instruction. God didn't change: His goal remained to provide sound nutritional health guidelines for mankind. But something changed in man's environment that made these changes necessary for our well-being. Our first clue is in the timing of our precept: it was given right after the great flood. The typical recorded lifespans of men dropped gradually over the next millennium by some ninety percent, eventually settling at about seventy or eighty years (cf. Psalm 90:10). Some environmental factor was inexorably shortening our normal lifetimes, and doing it, apparently, at the molecular level—in our DNA. In other words, our genetic predisposition for longevity was being compromised by mutations in the collective human genome. The most likely culprit? Gamma rays.

There is a persistent theory that in the antediluvian world, a water vapor canopy shielded the earth, moderating global temperatures and filtering out harmful rays—a canopy that collapsed during the flood. Whether it was this or some other atmospheric condition, *something* changed at the time of the flood to (1) allow accelerated degradation of our gene pool, (2) prompt Yahweh to categorically promise that never again would such a flood destroy the earth, (3) allow rainbows to form for the first time, and (4) cause Yahweh to forecast regular and significant seasonal weather cycles that would never cease as long as the earth remained (apparently something Noah was not used to). Whatever it was, it proves that even in times of judgment and wrath, Yahweh never forgets His people. His tender mercies extend even to issuing new instructions, when they're needed, about what to eat.

Funny, though: He never said *anything* about chocolate.

TRYING GOD'S PATIENCE

- (625) *Heed the voice of Yahweh.* “So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” So he cried out to Yahweh, and Yahweh showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet....” (Exodus 15:22-25) I'll never understand why the Israelites complained against *Moses*. They'd seen the plagues of Egypt that had effected their liberation; they'd witnessed the way Yahweh had delivered them at the Red Sea. Oh, sure, Moses had announced the plagues and stuck his rod out over the waters before they'd

divided, but nobody in his right mind thought that *he* was doing the miracles.

Did Yahweh know the waters to which He'd led them were bitter? Of course He did. And after all that sound and fury back in Egypt, was it possible that God was so incompetent He'd let His people die of thirst in the desert? Not likely. So why did Yahweh do this? I think the whole scenario was an elaborate multi-level object lesson for His people. First, "If you'll trust me, I'll provide everything you need." **"There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them, and said, "If you diligently heed the voice of Yahweh your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am Yahweh who heals you."** (Exodus 15:25-26)

Yes, if they would "diligently heed the voice of Yahweh their God," He would heal Israel. And the second lesson? Ask yourself: what did Yahweh have to heal *first* in order to heal Israel? The bitter waters. Note the symbols being employed here. Water, or the sea, is a ubiquitous scriptural metaphor for the nations—the gentiles—just as "the land" is a symbol for Israel. And the tree that made these bitter gentile waters sweet is, in the end, none other than a metaphor for the cross of Christ. The "waters" are us—the mostly gentile *ekklesia*—who have been "sweetened" through Yahshua's atoning work at Calvary, and it is therefore our job it is to sustain Israel until she learns to heed the voice of Yahweh. Makes you wonder if it's possible to be a Christian *and* an anti-Semite. I kind of doubt it.

Moses later explained why the gentiles would have to be "sweetened" before Israel could finally be redeemed. **"Truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh. Because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it."** (Numbers 14:21-23) That's right. Because Israel had not heeded the voice of Yahweh, they would not see the truth until "all the earth" had been filled with the glory of Yahweh. Don't look now, but that time is almost upon us.

- (626) *Keep physical reminders of God's provision.* **"Then Moses said, 'This is the thing which Yahweh has commanded: "Fill an omer with it, to be kept for your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt."' And Moses said to Aaron, 'Take a pot and put an omer of manna in it, and lay it up before Yahweh, to be kept for your**

generations.' As Yahweh commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept. And the children of Israel ate manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan." (Exodus 15:32-35) How quickly we can forget the provision of God. You know how it goes: when times are good, we ignore Him. But when adversity strikes, we complain as if He's not doing His job. We need to remember that if we are Yahweh's children, *everything* He lets into our lives is for our ultimate good—even the "bad" stuff. Poverty teaches us to rely on Him. Sickness reminds us that He is the Great Physician. Stress tells us that Yahshua is the Prince of Peace. Hunger instructs us to assimilate the Bread of Life. Even death has an upside: it reminds those left behind of their mortality, while bringing eternal life in its wake to the deceased—if he has been made alive with God's Spirit.

In this life, however, we tend to forget. So the Torah is peppered with ways to remind ourselves of Yahweh's steadfast goodness. The tsitzit (see Mitzvah #18), with its single blue thread, is a visual reminder of the Messiah. The mezuzah (Mitzvah #21) helps us to keep the Word of God before us at all times. The Israelites treasured Aaron's rod that budded, a testimony of Yahweh's leadership (see Precepts #627-628). And here we see God's instruction for remembering how He miraculously provided food for the rebellious Israelites for forty years in the wilderness.

In our lives, we tend to keep significant mementos of family and friends, photos and the like. I'm thinking it would be a good idea (based on scriptural precedent) to do the same thing with God. I don't mean collecting idols, icons, or relics, you understand—religious talismans we imbue with quasi-magical powers—but rather ordinary things that remind us of Yahweh's provision at critical junctures in our lives. A personal example from my own life: I keep on my desk a small limestone pebble. I picked it up in Jerusalem, a few feet from where Yahshua was crucified (in a vacant lot behind the main bus station, a stone's throw from the Garden Tomb). I can't look at it without being reminded of the Messiah's sacrifice, of course, but it also reminds me of Yahweh's protection. On that trip, you see, my friends and I interviewed a dozen *bona fide* Islamic terrorists—deep in Muslim-controlled territory—only three months after the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001. Very enlightening. And probably a really stupid thing to do. But Yahweh protected us, and gave us some invaluable insight for our book, *Tea With Terrorists*. (It's linked free from this site, by the way. Check out chapter 17 for a fictionalized account of what actually took place there. I kid you not.)

(627) *Accept Yahweh's choice of leaders.* **"Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to the children of Israel, and get from them a rod from each father's house, all their leaders according to their fathers' houses—twelve rods. Write each man's name on his rod. And you shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi. For there shall be one rod for the head of each father's house. Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you. And it shall be that the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you.'"** (Numbers 17:1-5) At this point, folks were coming out of the woodwork claiming to be just as qualified to lead Israel's masses as Moses and Aaron were. While that may have been true if based on strictly human terms (leadership ability, charisma, speaking ability, etc.), Yahweh made the point that only the two Levite brothers had been *called*. And then He proceed to *prove* his point by gathering shepherd's rods (symbols of authority—over sheep at least) from the leaders of each of the twelve tribes. The next morning, Levi's rod, belonging to Aaron, **"had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds."** (Numbers 17:8) You've gotta love Yahweh's sense of humor. *Ripe almonds?*

The point is that Yahweh reserves for Himself the right to call whomever He wishes to whatever task He chooses. And His choices sometimes surprise us in our limited, ill-informed world view. He chose David—the runt of the litter, as it were—to be Israel's mightiest king. He selected Mary—a dirt-poor teenage peasant girl—to be the mother of Yahshua the Messiah, the prophesied King of Kings. He chose Saul of Tarsus—a narrow-minded Pharisaic legalist—to communicate His message of grace to the world. The Messiah's closest earthly companions—by His choice—were rough fishermen, not princes or priests. They, not the royal family or the religious elite, would lead the world into the Kingdom of Heaven.

We cannot choose to be leaders in God's economy. We can merely make ourselves available for whatever task He requires. That being said, it is not smart to refuse such a call. Just ask Jonah.

(628) *Heed and treasure whatever evidence Yahweh provides.* **"And Yahweh said to Moses, 'Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die.' Thus did Moses; just as Yahweh had commanded him, so he did. So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, 'Surely we die, we perish, we all perish! Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of Yahweh must die. Shall we all utterly die?'"** (Numbers 17:10-13) A significant subset of Precept #626 (keeping

mementoes of God's provision) is that when Yahweh goes out of His way to provide evidence for us, we are to retain that evidence and use it to substantiate His claims or doctrine—to “argue his case in court” using the forensic data He has made available.

When Aaron's rod was used by Yahweh to validate and confirm His choice of Israel's leadership, there was no question as to what had been said—there was no doubt, reasonable or otherwise, as to what God had intended to say. Still, the shaken but unrepentant wannabe usurpers whined (and I paraphrase), “All this religious hocus pocus of yours is dangerous, Moses. You're going to get us all killed!” To which Yahweh reiterated (in chapter 18) “Yes, you *will* die, if you keep trying to commandeer the calling I've made upon the tribe of Levi, its priesthood, and the leadership of this generation under Moses” (again, a loose paraphrase). “That's the way I've set things up, and I've given you proof by making Aaron's rod come alive.” The rod, then, was to be “**kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me.**” And why did the rebels need a sign to be kept against them? So Yahweh wouldn't have to slay them (“**lest you die**”) for their complaining, rebellion, and arrogance.

- (629) *Don't grumble. Come to Yahweh with your problems.* “Then Moses spoke to Aaron, ‘Say to all the congregation of the children of Israel, “Come near before Yahweh, for He has heard your complaints.”’ Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of Yahweh appeared in the cloud.” (Exodus 16:9-10) Like I said, problems happen. We need to learn to look at them as challenges or teaching aids—and more to the point, reasons to talk with our Heavenly Father. But usually, our first instinct is to grumble, complain, *whine*. The fact that we hate it when our kids do that to us ought to be our first clue as to how God feels about it.

As far as I can tell, attaining human fellowship was Yahweh's entire reason for becoming The Creator. Seems to me He's gone to an awful lot of trouble for a pitifully insignificant result, numerically, at least. I mean, creating matter and energy in a matrix of space-time so that life might have a place to happen, then creating millions of life forms, narrowing the focus of His attention down to one species (us), only to watch the vast majority of the individuals of that species choose to ignore or reject Him, and then, manifesting Himself as a member of that species in order to save it, setting aside not only His heavenly glory but even *dimensions* in order to do so—well, it all seems awfully, shall we say, *inefficient*. But hey, it's Yahweh's nickel, so He gets to call the tune: He's apparently interested in

quality, not quantity. Anyway, my point is that if the Creator of the universe went to this much trouble to make us and redeem us, the least we could do is talk with Him. It must be terribly frustrating (if that were possible) to watch us ignore Him as we stumble through our lives, moaning and whining when things seem less than ideal. Yes, I realize that our free will necessitates that He refrain from forcing us to reciprocate His love. But we ought to realize that our Maker made us for a reason: He wants us to have a relationship with Him—a two-way association: creation, provision, and perfection on His part, and trust, respect, and reverence on ours, all coming together in a matrix of mutual love. Those of us who choose to have such a relationship with our Creator, He adopts as His own beloved children. Amazing!

Here, then, are the facts: (1) Yahweh, being omniscient, knows our needs. (2) Presuming we're His children, He wants to meet those needs. (3) If we're not His children and have no desire to be, there's no particular reason He should do anything for us. (4) He hears our cries, our pleas, and our complaints, but He'd rather hear our conversation. (5) He wants us to come straight to Him with our problems, not to someone else, and that includes *ourselves*: self-reliance is overrated. (6) There is nothing He can't fix, nothing He can't provide. And (7) if Yahweh withholds something from us, it's either because it will harm us in some way, or because we haven't asked Him, or because we don't even *know* Him. James explains: **"Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."** (James 4:1-4) We have to live here. We don't have to like it.

- (630) *To obtain water, strike the Rock.* **"Yahweh said to Moses, 'Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.'" (Exodus 17:5-6)** There are three things essential to the maintenance of our mortal lives, all of which are pressed into service as metaphors for Yahweh's provision: *air* (i.e., wind, breath—hence spirit); *water* (a newborn baby's body is about 78 percent water, hence the phrase John uses to describe mortal life—"born of water"); and *food* (e.g., the "bread of life"). The rule of thumb is: three minutes without air, three days without water, or three weeks without food, and you're done for.

The Exodus 17 incident, early in Israel's wilderness experience, is clearly a Messianic prophecy—it speaks of Yahshua's crucifixion, which was necessary in order to quench our spiritual thirst. As Peter put it, **“Those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of Yahweh.”** (Acts 3:18-19) And in case you're still in doubt, we have more scripture to interpret scripture, this time from Paul: **“...All drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.”** (I Corinthians 10:4) But does this mean that every time we need to be refreshed with the water of life, the Messiah must be struck again, crucified anew? No, it doesn't: read on...

- (631) *To obtain water, speak to the rock.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.’ So Moses took the rod from before Yahweh as He commanded him.”** (Numbers 20:7-9) It's like *déjà vu* all over again. A bunch of thirsty, complaining Israelites, a frustrated Moses with a shepherd's rod in his hand, and a big rock from which Yahweh was promising water would gush forth. But this time, God didn't tell Mo to strike the rock, but to *speak* to it. As we saw with His dietary instructions, Yahweh reserves the right to change the instruction to fit a new paradigm. The Rock had already been struck once. That's all that would ever be needed. From this point on, all we'd have to do to get the spiritual refreshment we need is *ask for it*.

Alas, by this time, Moses had reached his breaking point. And in his anger and frustration, he forgot for a moment Who was providing the water in the first place. **“And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, ‘Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?’ Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod....”** By doing so, of course, he goofed up the beautiful picture Yahweh was painting, one we can see clearly through the lens of hindsight: after Yahshua our Rock was struck at Calvary, spiritual refreshing could be obtained by merely *asking* Him to provide the living water. Remarkably, Yahweh provided what the Israelites needed, even though Moses had done everything wrong. But that didn't mean there weren't going to be consequences. **“And water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.’”**

(Numbers 20:10-12) Fortunately for us, the recorded instructions of Yahweh are sufficient to explain the object lesson.

- (632) *Take Yahweh's threats seriously.* "When He [Yahweh] had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.... And Yahweh said to Moses, 'Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"' And Yahweh said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them.'" (Exodus 31:18, 32:7-10) When is a command of God *not* a command? When it's a backhanded way of teaching us something—or reminding us of something we knew but might have forgotten. Yahweh is suggesting here that if Moses actually *does* what He says and "lets Him alone," He will toast Israel to a fare-thee-well. They certainly had it coming. Moses (who knew Yahweh pretty well by this time) took His "threat" at face value, and was sufficiently horrified to put his own neck on the line to intercede for his people—technically disobeying Yahweh in the process: Moses did *not* "let Him alone." Quite the contrary: he "pleaded" with Yahweh (32:11), reasoned with Him (v.12), and reminded Him of His previous promises (v.13), all of which required incredible temerity on his part. So how did Yahweh respond to Moses' impudence? "Yahweh [no doubt smiling wryly to Himself] **relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.**" (Exodus 32:14)

What would have happened if Moses had not taken Yahweh's "threat" seriously? Perhaps he would not have bothered interceding for them, leaving God with no logical alternative but to wipe them out and start all over with his eighty-year-old prophet. That would have been something neither Yahweh nor Moses (nor the witless Israelites, for that matter) wanted. Strange as it may seem, Yahweh *wants* us to "get in His face," to remind Him of His character, to challenge Him to do the "impossible" in defense of His own holy name. We must do this in faith and with reverence, of course. But remember what James said a few paragraphs back: "You do not have because you do not ask."

- (633) *Don't bear burdens alone.* "Yahweh said to Moses: 'Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the

people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone.” (Numbers 11:16-17) Yahweh, having created us, knows our frailty. Seems the first thing He noticed about Adam when He put him in the Garden was that he was hopelessly inadequate for the task set before him—he needed a woman to help him. Here we see that although Moses had been the one specifically called and prepared for the job of leading Israel, he was not expected to do everything all by himself—or bear all the responsibility of leadership upon his own shoulders, broad though they might be.

Note, however, that the task of choosing suitable helpers was given to Moses himself. They did not appoint themselves, nor did Yahweh tell him who to pick. Their public reputations and Moses’ personal experience dealing with them were to be the criteria. Therefore, if we find ourselves in a similar situation, we should use the same sort of wisdom: select people who have proven their spiritual maturity (they’re “elders,” after all) and leadership skills. The word translated “officers” (Hebrew: *shoter*) is a general designation for overseers or rulers. Its root means “to write,” implying literacy or education at a level above the norm.

That being said, if you haven’t yet donned the mantle of Yahweh’s servant, if you haven’t begun the work He has given you to do, then don’t expect help to be forthcoming. We don’t have to bear our burdens alone, but we *do* need to bear them. Nor should we jealously covet our own perceived place in Yahweh’s service—if He raised us up, He is perfectly capable of raising up others as well. As Moses chastised young Joshua a few verses later, when some of these designated assistants began showing signs of God’s anointing, **“Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all Yahweh’s people were prophets and that Yahweh would put His Spirit upon them!”**

- (634) *Be careful what you wish for.* **“Then you shall say to the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of Yahweh, saying, “Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt.” Therefore Yahweh will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised Yahweh who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, “Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?”’”** (Numbers 11:18-20) The whole previous precept is inextricably intertwined in the text with a discussion about Israel’s whining about their monochromatic diet (again), and what Yahweh planned to do in response. The manna He had given them to eat (miraculously, I might add) was nutritionally balanced, was completely sufficient for their dietary needs, looked appetizing, and was rather tasty (vs. 7-8). But it lacked variety. I mean, what could you make with it?

Manna bagels, manna patties, manna-cotti, manna pancakes, ba-manna bread? They remembered the perks of the slave life in Egypt—leeks, onions, garlic, fish—and they began to long for something that could make their breath stink.

I'm not saying a little variety is necessarily a bad thing. But the Israelites didn't come to the One who was providing for them and ask for it. Instead, they complained—verse 10 says they stood around and wept. *Oh, for some meat!* You'd think they were spoiled Americans, not former slaves. So after providing Moses with seventy elders to share the "heat" with him, Yahweh sent huge flocks of quail flying through the area about waist-high off the ground—so easy to catch a child could do it. And the inevitable happened: everybody gorged themselves on quail until the very sight of it made them sick.

The moral of the story has nothing to do with low-flying quail. It has everything to do with our recognition and thanksgiving for what Yahweh has provided. I don't care what it is—our spouse, financial circumstances, job opportunities, dwelling, or even diet—whatever it is, God has provided it and we should receive it with grateful acknowledgement of His goodness. If there's room for improvement, then work for it—within the context of Yahweh's provision—and come before Yahweh in reverence with your requests. But don't complain, whine, and weep because somebody, somewhere, is better off than you. Be careful what you wish for—God just might give it to you. Until it comes out your nostrils.

- (635) *Don't question God's motives or ability.* **"Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 'How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me. Say to them, 'As I live,' says Yahweh, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above.'"** (Numbers 14:26-29) In Numbers, it sort of sounds like spying out the Land was Yahweh's idea, but in Moses' recounting of the story in Deuteronomy 1:21-23, it becomes clear that the concept originated with the Israelite tribal leadership, Moses agreed that the plan was sound, and Yahweh allowed it. We all know the disastrous outcome: twelve spies went in. Two, Caleb and Joshua, came back describing "a land of milk and honey," populated by people whom "we are well able to overcome." But the other ten bore horrific tales of "a land that devours its inhabitants," peopled by warriors so big, "we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight." A disgusted Yahweh then threatened to "strike them all with pestilence and disinherit

them,” at which point Moses interceded again (see Precept #632), “persuading” Yahweh to relent, sort of.

God’s final solution for this generation was this: **“Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection. I Yahweh have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.”** (Numbers 14:30-35) What would cause such suicidal disbelief in the minds of a generation who had seen with their own eyes the mighty hand of Yahweh effecting their deliverance from Egypt?

I don’t know, but maybe a better question to ask is: how is that generation any different from our own? We’ve seen with our own eyes (or at least our fathers and grandfathers did) Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel from the clutches of Nazi genocidal tyranny, transforming an unprecedented disaster into a national homeland for His people. We’ve seen Him defend them against blind Islamic rage time and time again—1948, 1955, 1967, 1973—and *still* neither the Jews nor the vast preponderance of the gentile world seem to be able to do the math on this thing. Yahweh’s prophets predict that He will keep upping the ante—allowing stronger and nastier enemies to afflict Israel—until they can no longer ignore or deny His presence, protection, or sovereignty. To this very day, Yahweh’s motives and ability have been called into question by a disbelieving world. But the day is coming when, like it or not, they *will* believe.

- (636) *Do not arrogantly defy God or despise His Word.* **“But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on Yahweh, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of Yahweh, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him.”** (Numbers 15:30-31) There is sin, and then there is *sin*. The whole passage just previous to this dealt with what to do (in a ritual-symbolic sense) when an individual or the whole congregation came to the realization that they had sinned. Such sins (literally, missing the target) are characterized as being “unintentional.” They’re still sins, of course. They must be atoned for,

dealt with, cleansed; but at least there is a remedy. For the fault spoken of in this passage, however, there is no remedy; it therefore behooves us to determine precisely what it is Yahweh is describing.

The keyword is “presumptuously” (translated “defiantly” in the NIV and NASB, and “brazenly” in the NLT). The Hebrew is two words: *ruwm*, a verb meaning “to rise up, exalt, be lofty, or lift up,” and *yad*, meaning “hand”, thus figuratively, “strength or power.” A direct translation would therefore be “high-handedly.” But the connotation is even stronger. The phrase speaks of arrogance, pride, a lifting up of one’s own position of strength in the face of (and in defiance of) Yahweh’s Law. It is saying, “I don’t care what God says; I recognize no authority but my own. I will do as I please, without regard to the Word of Yahweh. And I will never show remorse or entertain a sense of guilt for my actions.” *Ruwm yad* reeks of insolence and rebellion.

A different word is rendered “presumptuously” in this parallel passage, but the message is nearly identical: **“Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before Yahweh your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously.”**

(Deuteronomy 17:12-13) Here “presumptuously” is the Hebrew word *zadown*, a noun (the parallel verb *ziyd* is also used) meaning pride, insolence, presumptuousness, or arrogance. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes, “The basic idea is pride, a sense of self-importance, which often is exaggerated to include defiance and even rebelliousness...having pride in view as opposed to God, which is a major sin. Persons so characterized are paralleled with those who ‘work wickedness’ and ‘tempt God,’ and with ‘all who do wickedly.’ As a result, they will be burned like stubble in the day of God’s impending punishment. Frequently, such people are depicted as opposing those who try to do the will of God.”

Ordinary “sin” is missing the mark in the archery tournament of life—something even the best of us do. But at least we’re aiming at the target. The one who “acts presumptuously” is not aiming at the target at all, but is, rather, lobbing arrows at the tournament’s Judge. As we have seen before, those in Israel responsible for leading their fellow men to their spiritual deaths were to be executed. By tolerating such defiance of Yahweh, Israel was courting a deadly evil indeed.

(637) *Know that your mortal days are numbered.* **“Now the children of Israel, the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor. And Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying:**

'Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up to Mount Hor; and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; for Aaron shall be gathered to his people and die there.'" (Numbers 20:22-26) Only a fool thinks he'll live forever in his mortal body. But it's surprising how many of us live out our lives as if we believed that. The very young don't think about their mortality at all. When we reach our teens, we somehow get the idea we're indestructible, so we take outrageous risks with our bodies. If we're lucky enough to live through puberty, the end looks so far away we'll never have to face it. Then, just when you'd think we ought to start getting serious about our lives and legacies, we get distracted. Raising a family, pursuing our calling, and finding our place in God's creation somehow degenerate into getting the kids to soccer practice, paying the mortgage, and accumulating *stuff* (that is, if we're "lucky" enough to suffer such affluent distractions). By the time the nest is empty, arthritis and hardening arteries are whispering in our ears: "You blew it, didn't you? You spent your whole life chasing an illusion, and now it's almost over. It's too late to fix your life: you can't even read the writing on the wall without bifocals."

Death didn't sneak up on Moses or Aaron. They *knew* they wouldn't be entering the promised land, and they knew why. What's more, they knew it for the better part of forty years. Being confronted with our own mortality can be liberating, if we stop and think about it. If we candidly face the fact that nobody gets out of here alive, we gain the incentive to think beyond the cares and responsibilities of this world, and instead lay up treasure in the next. I personally think it would be a very healthy thing if every believer knew (or lived as if they knew) that they only had two years, eight months, and seventeen days yet to live—long enough to fix some of our mistakes and finish the race we were given to run, but short enough to keep the finish line clearly in sight. No distractions, no detours, no wasted effort. Let us run our leg of the relay with everything we've got, and then pass the baton to the next generation.

- (638) *Don't despise God's provision.* **"Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.' So Yahweh sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died."** (Numbers 21:4-6) Is there an echo in here? We've heard these same complaints before. So had Yahweh. They

moaned, “There is no food or water,” and yet we read of no Israelites—not one—dying of hunger or thirst in the wilderness. Their very next statement demonstrates their propensity for exaggeration: “Our soul loathes this worthless bread.” So the “no food” complaint wasn’t precisely accurate, was it? They had all the manna they could eat. They didn’t lack food; they only lacked *variety*. And since you can’t survive very long without water, it seems that this grievance wasn’t quite true either. Okay, there wasn’t enough to bathe or go fishing in, but there *was* enough to drink.

This time the means Yahweh employed to get their attention was to send a plague of snakes among them. I guess it’s logical, in a metaphorical sort of way: since the sting of sin had entered the world through tempting by a serpent in the Garden, the sin of tempting God would be met with stinging serpents in the wilderness. Thus although nobody died of actual hunger or thirst, lots of folks died because they *complained* about these things. The moral to the story is obvious: don’t grumble to God when His provision doesn’t meet your expectation. Don’t call His gifts “worthless.” If He has allowed tribulation into your life, He’s done so to teach you some valuable lesson about life—even if that lesson is merely to **Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.**” (Philippians 4:6)

- (639) *Trust Yahweh’s cure.* “Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against Yahweh and against you; pray to Yahweh that He take away the serpents from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people. Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.’ So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.” (Numbers 21:7-9) The story of the snake-bitten Israelites doesn’t end with lessons about grumbling. Yahweh used the repentant sinners’ pleas as an occasion to articulate a remarkable prophecy concerning His plan for our ultimate salvation. Moses was directed to make a bronze serpent in the image of the ones that were biting the Israelites, put it on a pole or standard, and direct the people to look upon it if and when they were bitten.

At first glance, it seems Yahweh is telling Moses to violate the second Commandment: “**You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.**” That is, until you read the rest of it: “**You shall not bow down to them nor serve them.**” (Exodus 20:4-5) He was *not* telling Moses to make an idol—something to worship and bow to. Quite the contrary: this was an object lesson, one that wouldn’t be fully understood until the first-

century advent of the Messiah. Yahshua explained it to Nicodemus: **“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:14-15) Yahshua wasn’t comparing Himself to a snake. Rather, He was revealing that by being “lifted up” in crucifixion, He would be taking upon Himself the sins of mankind (represented by the serpent).

We should compare the Hebrew for “look at” with the parallel Greek word translated “believe.” Two Hebrew verbs are used in this passage to denote “look at.” The first, *ra’ah*, means “to see, look, view, i.e., use the perception of sight to view objects and make judgments based on these perceptions.” The second is *nabat*, which carries a very similar connotation: “look at, observe, gaze, i.e., use the perception of sight to see or detect objects, implying interpretation and understanding of what is observed, to consider, have regard—to see, i.e., think about an object, implying an appropriate, caring response.” (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*) In the John 3 passage, the verb “believe” is the Greek word *pisteuo*, meaning, “to think to be true, be persuaded, place confidence in, to entrust something to someone.” (*Strong’s*) Putting these concepts together, our instructions are to observe what Yahshua accomplished on Calvary’s pole (specifically, taking our sins upon Himself), make a well-informed judgment based upon what we have perceived, understand its significance, and respond appropriately to it. Having been convinced by our senses that our observations are true, we are to place our confidence in that fact, entrusting our souls to Him. Note that no “blind leap of faith” is required by Yahweh. Quite the contrary.

By the way, the Greek word we errantly translate “cross” (*stauros*) is actually more correctly rendered “upright stake.” It is thus a poignant parallel to the Hebrew word translated “pole” in our Numbers 21 text. *Nes* means “something lifted up, a standard, signal, signal pole, ensign, banner, sign, or rallying point.” (S) The wilderness “pole” is prophetic of Calvary’s “cross” in its use *and* its effect.

- (640) *Be blameless before Yahweh.* **“You shall be blameless before Yahweh your God. For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, Yahweh your God has not appointed such for you.”** (Deuteronomy 18:13-14) There are echoes of Yahweh’s instructions to Abraham here: **“I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.... Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”** (Genesis 17:1-2, 8) Yahweh has tied walking blamelessly before Him to

with the princes of Balak.” (Numbers 22:35) The story of Balaam (Numbers 22 through 25) is exceedingly strange. The guy functioned as a *bona fide* prophet of God in that he could (and did) deliver messages from Yahweh. But when we first see him, he’s described as a pagan “diviner,” a fortune teller or sorcerer of some local repute. He seems willing enough to do what Yahweh tells him to do, though—at first refusing to go with the envoy of Balak (a Moabite king in league with the Midianites) or accept the fortune he was being offered to curse Israel. Only after Yahweh *reversed* His instructions and added the caveat above did Balaam agree to go. But then, it seems, it was all Yahweh could do to restrain Himself from killing the guy (presumably because of what he *would* do later)—going so far as to give his *donkey* prophetic powers and the gift of human speech to underscore his warning: **“Only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak.”** I *told* you it’s a strange tale.

Twice Balaam sought to use the tools of his trade—sorcery—in order to find a way to curse the Israelite hordes, but Yahweh wouldn’t allow it, turning the cursing for which Balak would have paid so handsomely into blessings upon Israel. The third time, the very Spirit of Yahweh fell upon the wannabe wizard, compelling him to say some really nice things about his would-be victims. Balak was not amused. Balaam’s fourth oracle prophesied Israel’s ascendancy in the latter days over Moab, Edom, Amalek, the Kenites, and Assyria. This passage even includes a very early Messianic prophecy (Numbers 24:17).

In all of this, Balaam seems relatively guiltless. Though he didn’t consider himself a prophet of Yahweh, the God of Israel condescended to speak through him: Balaam did as he was told and spoke as he was instructed by God. I’ll get into what Balaam *did* do to run afoul of Yahweh in the coming precepts. For now, let us take note of a few counter-intuitive phenomena: (1) The message of Yahweh *can* come through people who have no relationship with him. (2) Even if God chooses to use an ass to get His message across, the message remains true. (3) The truth of a matter bears no correlation to the amount of money we are willing to spend to obtain it. I can’t help reflecting on the function and fate of some of the white-shoe televangelists that grace our cable TV channels these days. Some of them are obviously in it for the money (or power, or some other improper motivator). Does that mean God can’t use—can’t speak through—these avaricious preachers? Surprisingly, it does not. (See Philippians 1:15-17.) Yahweh doesn’t penalize honest searchers for their lack of discernment. He does, however, hold the purveyors of doctrine accountable for their motivations. For those who

listen, truth is where you find it. For those who teach, God judges both message and motive.

- (642) *Don't tolerate spiritual harlotry.* “Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of Yahweh was aroused against Israel. Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before Yahweh, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of Yahweh may turn away from Israel.’ So Moses said to the judges of Israel, ‘Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor.’” (Numbers 25:1-5) Balaam the diviner had been offered big bucks to curse Israel for King Balak of Moab, but Yahweh had made it painfully clear that if he did, he’d never live to spend a shekel. But there’s more than one way to skin a cat, as the proverb goes. Balaam apparently decided that he could still earn his fee—not by cursing God’s people himself, but by giving *Yahweh* reason to curse them! How? Since we’re spouting homilies here, we have a saying that goes, “The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.” Balaam knew a more reliable route—a few inches to the south. If the Moabite women could seduce those studly young Israelite warriors—inviting them to participate in the overtly sexual ritual worship of Ba’al (*Hey, when in Moab, do as the Moabites do, right guys? What happens here stays here.*)—then Yahweh would burn their biscuits *Himself*. It’s sheer genius, in a perverse sort of way. Balak wouldn’t have to lift a finger to defeat them. We’re given evidence that the plan was Balaam’s idea in a later chapter: “**These women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against Yahweh.**” (Numbers 31:16)

Amazingly, his ploy almost worked. The men of Israel (some of ’em) scampered after the Moabite temptresses like kittens after catnip. Sex was merely the bait: it was characterized by the locals as one of the many perks of the religion of Ba’al. But it didn’t stop there: the Israelites made sacrifices to the dead (see Psalm 106:28) and “**ate and bowed down to their gods.**” This was a wholesale and purposeful abandonment of Yahweh’s Law—something far more serious than succumbing to a momentary lapse in moral judgment (though even *that* could have gotten you stoned to death). Yahweh’s remedy for this sorry situation was first to hang the ringleaders—not only execute them, but make a public spectacle of their fate as a warning and example to the other Israelites. The individual participants were also to be slain, though not necessarily “out in the sun.” The subsequent record also speaks of a “plague” breaking out because of the incident. It’s my guess this happened because the avenging judges of Israel weren’t moving fast enough to suit Yahweh. The plague was halted

(after killing 24,000 men) only after Aaron's grandson Phinehas personally skewered an unrepentant Israelite man and his Midianite trollop with a javelin.

"C'mon. There's not a lot of Ba'al worship going on these days," you may be protesting. True. So is this a relevant cautionary tale, or is it merely a pointless bit of historical trivia? I believe it's teaching an important principle, still germane for us today. The errant Israelites were using *religious practice* to get something they wanted in this world (in this case, socially acceptable extra-marital sex). How is this materially any different from someone who goes into "the ministry" because he wants the respect of his fellow man and a steady paycheck (instead of having received the calling of God and a burden for lost souls). How is it any different from a business person who attends church primarily to troll for new clientele? Absolution, mindless habit, social contact, peer pressure, or economic opportunity are all tantamount to Ba'al worship if they're our principal motivation for gathering in a religious setting. If we're "worshipping" for some reason other than honoring Yahweh, studying His Word, and edifying each other in the context of God's love, we're in danger of practicing spiritual harlotry.

- (643) *Identify and condemn those who would seduce you into spiritual error.* **"Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'Harass the Midianites, and attack them; for they harassed you with their schemes by which they seduced you.'** (Numbers 25:16-18) Yahweh didn't pussyfoot around with politically correct diplomatic responses. He realized, even if we tend to miss the significance of Balaam's treachery, that the **"schemes by which they seduced you"** were an act of war—a military offensive. The Moabites and Midianites had had every intention of destroying Israel with their sexual sneak attack. Balaam was all the more dangerous because he knew the Israelites couldn't be defeated through conventional warfare. The "error of Balaam," then, is that even though he should have known that Yahweh was all-powerful, he chose instead to honor his own short-term financial interests. Being a successful pagan "diviner," Balaam was conversant with occult powers, demonic forces. His mistake was assuming that Yahweh was just another local god, a demon like Ba'al, Chemosh, or Dagon that could be appeased, and maybe outsmarted. He didn't realize that Yahweh was *qodesh*—holy, set apart, unique, fundamentally different from the cosmos He Himself had created. It was the worst mistake one could possibly have made.

But Yahweh opted not to miraculously dispose of His people's enemies for them. Instead, He directed Israel to go to war with Midian, for it was them, not God, who had been harmed by the pagans' seduction

tactic. “Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Take vengeance on the Midianites for the children of Israel. Afterward you shall be gathered to your people.’ So Moses spoke to the people, saying, ‘Arm some of yourselves for war, and let them go against the Midianites to take vengeance for Yahweh on Midian. A thousand from each tribe of all the tribes of Israel you shall send to the war.’ ...And they warred against the Midianites, just as Yahweh commanded Moses, and they killed all the males...” The Midianites were not on the list of seven Canaanite nations Yahweh had slated for utter destruction. (See Mitzvot #352-353, #601.) Yahweh had no particular bone to pick with them. For that matter, Israel’s leader, Moses, was the son-in-law of a Midianite priest, Reuel, a.k.a. Jethro. Nor was Moab, whose king had begun this whole paranoid process, on God’s hit list. In fact, though he doubtless didn’t know it, Moab’s lands had been specifically declared off limits to the Israelites. The point is, they didn’t have to die—they unnecessarily invited God’s untimely wrath by unilaterally attacking His people.

And what about Balaam, who had counseled spiritual warfare through religious prostitution against Israel when it became clear that military action against them would be of no avail? **“Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword.”** (Numbers 31:1-8) Balaam might have protested (as in the gangster movies) “Nothing personal—it’s just business.” It didn’t matter to Yahweh, for whom business is *always* personal. Balaam didn’t live to spend a penny of his ill-gotten gains.

I should hasten to point out that just because Yahweh instructed bronze-age Israel to go to war against Midian, we should not feel obliged to “attack” and “harass” our own self-perceived spiritual enemies. We have noted how Yahweh’s instructions sometimes shift due to changing conditions. In our present world, where the vast majority are antagonistic to Yahweh’s truth, we are warned not to fight, but to flee: **“Flee from the midst of Babylon, and every one save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, for this is the time of Yahweh’s vengeance; He shall recompense her.”** (Jeremiah 51:6) “Babylon” represents any and all systems of false belief, whether religious or otherwise—the things of this world that seek to seduce us into spiritual error. We still need to identify our enemies and condemn their falsehoods. But where Israel was once instructed to **“take vengeance for Yahweh on Midian,”** we are now informed that the time is coming when Yahweh Himself will exact vengeance on our behalf. The days are growing short.

- (644) *Do not value that which causes you to sin.* **“And the children of Israel took the women of Midian captive, with their little ones, and took as spoil all their cattle, all their flocks, and all their goods. They also burned with fire all the cities where they**

dwelt, and all their forts. And they took all the spoil and all the booty—of man and beast. Then they brought the captives, the booty, and the spoil to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the children of Israel, to the camp in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho. And Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the congregation, went to meet them outside the camp.” (Numbers 31:9-13) At first glance it seems that the Israelites were following Yahweh’s instructions to a tee. But a more careful reading of the passage reveals a fatal flaw in their execution of God’s plan. **“But Moses was angry with the officers of the army, with the captains over thousands and captains over hundreds, who had come from the battle....”** Did you catch it? Why was Moses so upset? After all, they had destroyed the enemy’s ability to wage war against them, hadn’t they?

No, they hadn’t. Think about it. What “weapon” had been brought to bear against Israel in the first place? What tactic had proved so successful in weakening Israel? It *wasn’t* Moab’s or Midian’s military might. **“And Moses said to them: ‘Have you kept all the women alive? Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against Yahweh in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of Yahweh.’”** Oops. **“Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man intimately. But keep alive for yourselves all the young girls who have not known a man intimately. And as for you, remain outside the camp seven days; whoever has killed any person, and whoever has touched any slain, purify yourselves and your captives on the third day and on the seventh day. Purify every garment, everything made of leather, everything woven of goats’ hair, and everything made of wood.”** (Numbers 31:14-20) It wasn’t women *per se*, of course, but the fact that these pagan women had drawn Israelite men into the worship of false gods by offering them ritual sex. The conquering Israelites had conveniently forgotten what had dragged them out of fellowship with their God. They had mentally replaced the real enemy with a straw man.

Satan still puts enemies in our path, things that distract us from our relationship with our God. Defeating them requires honesty and discernment. We must identify our *real* problem, and we must not cherish these things that war against us. The Israelite soldiers thought their enemy was Midian. They had to be forcibly reminded that their real enemy was the thing within Midian to which they had been attracted—sex with pagan women. Remember, Satan’s evil, not stupid. He’ll use things you *like*—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—to ensnare you.

- (645) *The spoil of war must be purified before it can be utilized.* **“Then Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone to the battle, ‘This is the ordinance of**

the law which Yahweh commanded Moses: Only the gold, the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin, and the lead, everything that can endure fire, you shall put through the fire, and it shall be clean; and it shall be purified with the water of purification. But all that cannot endure fire you shall put through water. And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day and be clean, and afterward you may come into the camp.” (Numbers 31:21-24) Before the middle of the twentieth century, it was an unquestioned principle that whoever won a war would keep something as a prize—territory, booty, whatever. Spoils of war were a fact of life, notwithstanding the fact that God had commanded “You shall not covet; you shall not steal.” It was only after Yahweh restored Israel to their homeland in 1948 did the diplomats of the world go numb from the neck up. In the face of mounting Israeli territorial gains (resulting entirely from the aggression of their Muslim neighbors), we read this brain-dead clause in U.N. Security Council Resolution #242 (November 22, 1967): “The Security Council...emphasizing the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war...affirms that the fulfillment of Charter principles requires the...withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict.” The world community started getting all warm and fuzzy toward genocidal aggressors only when God’s chosen people had gained some ground at their expense. I’d wager that after the 1967 Six-Day War, if somebody had given the whole shootin’ match back to the defunct Ottoman Empire (who had lost it to Britain and France by backing the belligerent Germans in World War I), he would have snagged himself a Nobel Peace Prize.

So today, folks steeped in political correctness look at those historic times when Israel was allowed by God to keep some of what they’d won in battle (a contingency that was by no means automatic), and they call Yahweh a barbarian. If we check the record, however, we find that God’s people were never divinely authorized to be the aggressors in any conflict unless the nations they faced had become irretrievably corrupt. And in point of fact, this was only the case for a very short period of time, and against a very limited population—the seven nations polluting the land of Canaan in Moses’ and Joshua’s day. The conflicts that ensued in the wake of Balaam’s treachery were not wars of aggression, but defensive engagements on Israel’s part.

So how did Yahweh view booty and spoils? First, they belonged to Him (like everything else in creation) and were thus subject to His instructions. Sometimes (as in Jericho) He told His people to keep none of it—to destroy it all—and sometimes they were allowed to make use of it, subject to His will. (More on that in the following precept.) Second, as we see here, the booty was considered defiled, unclean. The metals were to be

melted down and recast, and everything else was to be ritually purified in water. Third, those who had “liberated” the spoils from the pagans were defiled by contact with them. They, like the booty they had won, were to go through a ritual cleansing process before they could re-enter the fellowship of their people.

The bottom line is that in God’s view, the wealth of the world is of no particular value in itself. It is only as it is set apart as holy to Yahweh that it gains acceptability and utility. Paul instructed Timothy about how we are to view the wealth of this world: **“Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”** (I Timothy 6:6-10) The “spoils of war,” then, are in Yahweh’s view to be considered a *byproduct* of our righteous struggles in and against this world—they are not supposed to be the point of the struggle, the impetus for waging war. Thus (for example) when Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon threatened to engulf Israel in the 1967 Six Day War, the Jews’ subsequent territorial gains in the Sinai, the West Bank, Southern Lebanon, and the Golan Heights were all legitimate “spoils of war,” since they had been won not through Israeli aggression, but as a byproduct of their own defense. (The universal Muslim hallucination that merely *being a Jew* in “Palestine” is *de facto* an act of aggression is an absurd and self-serving proposition, but absurdities often pass for facts in Islam.)

There is an eschatological facet to booty and spoils that we should examine as well. The time is fast approaching when Yahweh will cleanse the earth in His righteous wrath, ultimately purging it of the vast majority of its rebellious population. He will preserve a comparatively small remnant of believing Jews and gentiles to rebuild a world shattered beyond recognition during the dark days of the Tribulation. The resources they’ll use could be construed as booty, the spoils of war, the rewards of battle. Once again, the battle belongs to Yahweh. And once again, the resources left behind are His to administer, and they (along with His faithful warriors) must be purified in the fires of judgment before they can be useful to mankind in the Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah. In the end, the meek *shall* inherit the earth.

- (646) *Give a portion of the spoils of war to Yahweh, via His priests and Levites.*
“Now Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Count up the plunder that was taken—of

man and beast—you and Eleazar the priest and the chief fathers of the congregation; and divide the plunder into two parts, between those who took part in the war, who went out to battle, and all the congregation. And levy a tribute for Yahweh on the men of war who went out to battle: one of every five hundred of the persons, the cattle, the donkeys, and the sheep; take it from their half, and give it to Eleazar the priest as a heave offering to Yahweh. And from the children of Israel's half you shall take one of every fifty, drawn from the persons, the cattle, the donkeys, and the sheep, from all the livestock, and give them to the Levites who keep charge of the tabernacle of Yahweh.' So Moses and Eleazar the priest did as Yahweh commanded Moses." (Numbers 31:25-31) Here we see how the world's goods which have fallen into the hands of His people through their defense of His Word are to be distributed. If you'll recall, one thousand men from each tribe went out to do battle. That comes out to about two percent of the military manpower Israel had available at that time. These twelve thousand men were to receive half of the total booty, and out of that half, one fifth of one percent was to be given to the priests, who were to offer it up symbolically to Yahweh as a wave offering, and then use it for their own purposes. The other half of the spoils were to be distributed among the Israelites who had not personally participated in the battle, and two percent of that amount was to be set aside for the use of the Levites (who, like the priests, were employed in doing Yahweh's work).

The breakdown by percentage is telling. (1) 12,000 Warriors: 49.9% of the total, or 0.004% each; (2) Three Priests (Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar): 0.1%, or 0.033% each; (3) The Congregation (591,550 strong): 49%, or 0.00008% each; and (4) the Levites (numbering 22,000): 1%, or 0.00005% each. So we note that if the numbers mean anything at all, God values most highly those who stand in His presence in an intercessory role, followed by those who invest life and limb in the battle itself. He also rewards the spectators, but not to remotely the same extent. At first I was puzzled by the fact that the individuals of the congregation would receive more per capita than the Levites did. But then I remembered that the Levites were exempt from warfare: they alone were risking nothing in this venture, and they would be mourning no loved ones fallen in battle. Yet because they were in Yahweh's service, they too received a reward. Note that there was nothing special set aside for the political leaders, neither Moses nor the seventy elders. They were merely counted as members of the congregation of Israel. That ought to tell us something.

BECOMING CLEAN

- (647) *There are limits and exceptions to how the carcass of an unclean animal defiles. “Nevertheless a spring or a cistern, in which there is plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass becomes unclean. And if a part of any such carcass falls on any planting seed which is to be sown, it remains clean. But if water is put on the seed, and if a part of any such carcass falls on it, it becomes unclean to you.”* (Leviticus 11:36-38) As we saw in Mitzvot #561 and #562, contact with the carcass of an unclean animal defiled a person. And if it came in contact with food, both the food and its container were rendered unclean. Beyond the obvious hygiene applications, such defilement is a ready metaphor for the human condition—we become soiled by our walk through the world and find ourselves in need of God’s cleansing. Here, however, we see that as a practical matter, some situations that might have seemed to be candidates for ritual cleansing, but would have been unnecessarily burdensome to the community, are exempted from the normal cleansing procedures. God seems to be saying, “You don’t need to use a cannon to kill a mosquito.”

Case in point: if said mosquito fell into your coffee cup, you’d ordinarily throw your drink out and clean the cup with water. But if the little buggie fell into the cistern where the water for cleaning (and drinking) was kept, you didn’t have to throw the whole thing out and start over. (If a dead elephant fell in there, though, well, you get the picture.) God gave us brains so we could figure out when we had a real problem and when we didn’t. If a mouse got into your seed corn and ate himself to death, you didn’t have to kiss goodbye to next year’s crop. You were going to put the seed in the ground anyway—what you’d end up eating had no possibility of being tainted by contact with the corpse of the corpulent little rodent.

I think perhaps these “loopholes” were pointed out by Yahweh to remind us that we as believers aren’t to cloister ourselves away from the world—adopt a monastic, insular attitude in order to avoid becoming defiled with contact with “sinful” people. Such an attitude is borne of pride and selfishness. We are, rather, to be light and salt to the world—bringing knowledge and preservation in our wake. To do that, we need to be *in* the world but not *of* it. Yahshua is our example; His walk is our goal. Though He knew no sin, He was willing to risk defilement to save us from ours.

- (648) *Male pattern baldness shall not be considered “leprosy.” “As for the man whose hair has fallen from his head, he is bald, but he is clean. He whose hair has fallen from his forehead, he is bald on the forehead, but he is clean. And if there is*

on the bald head or bald forehead a reddish-white sore, it is leprosy breaking out on his bald head or his bald forehead. Then the priest shall examine it; and indeed if the swelling of the sore is reddish-white on his bald head or on his bald forehead, as the appearance of leprosy on the skin of the body, he is a leprous man. He is unclean. The priest shall surely pronounce him unclean; his sore is on his head.” (Leviticus 13:40-44) Perhaps one adult male in three has experienced some degree of hair loss. In light of the extensive instructions Yahweh provided for identifying and isolating leprosy (see Mitzvot #502, #565-568, and #577-580), it is comforting to note that He also covered what it is *not*. He points out here that male pattern baldness is not in itself a sign of leprosy (though it doesn’t rule out the disease, either).

Since we have established that leprosy is a scriptural metaphor for spiritual sickness, we should apply the lessons we’ve already learned to this present revelation. One could characterize our hairs as gifts from God. Some of us are more gifted than others in this respect, but in any case, the hairs on our heads are all numbered (Luke 12:7)—in other words, God knows precisely what He’s given to each of us to work with. My point is that it is no sin to be less gifted than some other person. Yet many look upon an apparent lack of gifts as a sign of spiritual inferiority: leprosy. *He’s a lousy teacher; she couldn’t prophesy her way out of a paper bag; he can’t speak in tongues*. So what? We are all responsible to use the gifts God gave us, not the ones He gave somebody else. Being less spiritually gifted is not a sign of spiritual sickness or apostasy any more than the parable of the talents teaches that the guy who got ten talents to work with was more “saved” than the servant who only got five.

- (649) *The priest shall re-examine a previously infected house for signs of “leprosy.”* “Now if the plague comes back and breaks out in the house, after he has taken away the stones, after he has scraped the house, and after it is plastered, then the priest shall come and look; and indeed if the plague has spread in the house, it is an active leprosy in the house. It is unclean.” (Leviticus 14:43-44) In Mitzvah #568, we looked at the procedure for examining “leprosy” (indicative of a spiritual plague) in a house, which is metaphorical of human society—the place we mortals live. There we learned that the whole “leprosy in the house” thing is a prophecy—that Yahweh will remove the offensive elements of our society during the “seventh day,” that is the Millennial kingdom of Yahshua. Here we have the sequel: what happens if the plague comes back after Yahweh has purged the house of evil?

“And he [the priest, symbolic of Yahshua] shall break down the house, its stones, its timber, and all the plaster of the house, and he shall carry them outside

the city to an unclean place. Moreover he who goes into the house at all while it is shut up shall be unclean until evening. And he who lies down in the house shall wash his clothes, and he who eats in the house shall wash his clothes....” *What? During the Millennium, the perfect reign of the Messiah?* Yes, I’m afraid so. There will still be mortals upon the earth during that time, descendants of Adam and Eve, with the same sin nature. These, the offspring of the blessed “sheep” spoken of in Matthew 25:31-46, will still be faced with the same choice all of us have: to reciprocate God’s love or rebel against Him. Sadly, Revelation 20:7-9 reports that at the end of the Millennium, multitudes of mortals will follow the recently paroled Satan in rebellion against King Yahshua. And at that point, the King will have no recourse but to “break down the house, its stones, its timber, and all the plaster of the house, and carry them outside the city to an unclean place.” That’s the lake of fire, unless I miss my guess.

But at least this time, not the entire world will rebel. “But if the priest comes in and examines it, and indeed the plague has not spread in the house after the house was plastered, then the priest shall pronounce the house clean, because the plague is healed. And he shall take, to cleanse the house, two birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop. Then he shall kill one of the birds in an earthen vessel over running water; and he shall take the cedar wood, the hyssop, the scarlet, and the living bird, and dip them in the blood of the slain bird and in the running water, and sprinkle the house seven times. And he shall cleanse the house with the blood of the bird and the running water and the living bird, with the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the scarlet. Then he shall let the living bird loose outside the city in the open field, and make atonement for the house, and it shall be clean.” (Leviticus 14:45-53) Those Millennial mortals who do not rebel will still need healing, cleansing, and atonement for their sins and trespasses, just as we do today. They, like us, must be cleansed of the world’s filth before they can assume their transformed immortal bodies—bodies that will endure in Yahshua’s presence for eternity. We mortals all become defiled just by walking through the earth—the “leprous house” in the present scriptural metaphor. The prescription for “pronouncing the house clean” is a reprise of passage we discussed in detail under Mitzvah #578, so I won’t go over it again here.

- (650) *Eating a clean animal that died naturally defiles a person.* “Every person who eats what died naturally or what was torn by beasts, whether he is a native of your own country or a stranger, he shall both wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. Then he shall be clean. But if he does not wash them or bathe his body, then he shall bear his guilt.” (Leviticus 17:15-16) In our chapter on the Mosaic dietary laws, we covered these contingencies from the point of view of Exodus 22:30 (Mitzvah #155) and Deuteronomy

14:21 (#156). Those passages, however, did not enumerate the remedy for having run afoul of the Torah in this respect; here in Leviticus, we see what must be done. It's interesting that the cure for this offense is the same sort of cleansing we'd expect to see in the case of ritual defilement (as when a dead body had been touched)—in contrast to being a sin for which atonement had to be made.

On a purely practical level, once a person has eaten meat that died under questionable circumstances (from a microbiological point of view), the damage has been done—the microbes, if any, are already inside his body, and they'll either make him sick or not. When the child of Yahweh realizes he has made such a mistake, he is to demonstrate his faith in the healing/cleansing power of his God by washing his clothes and bathing in water. It is axiomatic that neither of these things will in themselves affect his health in the slightest. Rather, they are in essence a prayer to Yahweh to undo the potential damage that has been done by eating possibly tainted meat. The man who refuses to perform these simple rituals, however, will “bear his guilt.” That is, he can expect to receive no special healing touch or protection from Yahweh, for he has demonstrated his lack of trust by his disobedience.

On the spiritual level, we are reminded of other lessons. The death of the clean animal is of no use to us unless it was *purposefully* slaughtered for our sustenance and nourishment. Death in general does us no good at all, but Yahshua's death on Calvary's pole was purposefully orchestrated so that we might live. But remember: even the intentional death of the “Clean One” will do us no good if we do not “eat His flesh,” that is, derive spiritual sustenance from it by assimilating His life into our own.

- (651) *Contact with death defiles a person.* **“This is the law when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who are in the tent shall be unclean seven days; and every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, is unclean. Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.”** (Numbers 19:14-16) This bit of Torah fell between the cracks in Volume I. It fits between Mitzvot #575 and #576. The context is the so-called “Law of the Red Heifer,” which describes the cleansing process for one who has touched a dead body—or more to the point, has been metaphorically “touched by death” merely by living out his mortal existence. The first symbol introduced here is the “tent.” We (or is it just me?) are immediately reminded of the seventh and final *miqra* of Yahweh, *Succoth*—the Feast of Tabernacles—in which God promises to “camp out” with men. This appointment was prefigured in the first-century life (and purposeful death) of the Messiah, and will be

culminated in His soon-to-be-fulfilled thousand-year reign as King of Kings. We who know this earth is not our permanent home also camp out here, adopting a pilgrim mentality as we dwell within our tents—symbolic of both the world in which we sojourn and our mortal bodies. All of us dwell in “tents” defiled by death—we are all unclean “for seven days,” that is, for the duration of our mortal lives. It is only through being sprinkled with the waters of purification provided through the sacrifice of the Messiah (see Mitzvot #574-#576) that we can be made clean.

And what of the “vessels” spoken of in our text? These too speak of our mortal bodies. The point here is that they are deemed defiled or not depending upon whether they are “covered.” This is a variation on the theme of the garment of righteousness we must wear if we wish to stand in the presence of a Holy God—a covering that, once again, must be provided by Yahshua or not at all.

And the bones and bodies found slain in the open field? Their presence defiles the land, so they must be disposed of—but at the cost of our own temporary defilement as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. We are reminded of the coming Battle of Magog (Ezekiel 38-39) in which the corpses of the slain Muslim hordes will litter the Israeli landscape. Ezekiel 39:11-16 states that the dead will be so numerous it will take the Israelis seven months to bury them. Yahweh is saying that the existence of death within Israel (in this case, personified by the armies of Islam) will cause their complete defilement, but in the end, the Land—and its people—will be cleansed.

NOT QUITE READY FOR PRIME TIME

- (652) *Don't enlist soldiers whose circumstances will distract them from the battle. "Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying: 'What man is there who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it.'" (Deuteronomy 20:5)* According to the world's wisdom, this kind of thinking is crazy. Our first instinct is to push hard with everything we've got to achieve our goals—or the goals we imagine our God to be pursuing. We feel an obligation to fight God's battles with valor and enthusiasm (feigned if necessary), seldom stopping to listen to His instructions, whispered to us in a still, small voice: “Trust Me.” The principle that Yahweh's strength is made complete in our weakness is so counter-intuitive, we all too often “go to battle” with divided loyalties, three steps ahead of our orders, naked and disarmed.

It's not just the "house-dedication" thing, either. There are any number of things that can distract us from whole-hearted service to the God we honor. How strangely comforting it is when we realize that Yahweh understands our human condition, the things of this world that hold our attention, even our natural fears and doubts. **"Also what man is there who has planted a vineyard and has not eaten of it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man eat of it. And what man is there who is betrothed to a woman and has not married her? [See Mitzvah #71] Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her.' The officers shall speak further to the people, and say, 'What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart.' And so it shall be, when the officers have finished speaking to the people, that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people."** (Deuteronomy 20:6-8) When will we get it through our heads that the battle belongs to Yahweh? He doesn't need our help to fight it. Rather, He allows us the privilege of participation, like a doting father letting his four-year old "drive" the family car up the driveway while sitting on His lap. Whether we realize it or not, He never really takes His hands off the wheel.

A Holy God—A Holy People

The relationship that should exist between God and man is laid between every line of the Torah. Maimonides—who approached the Law as a list of rules to be followed or an obstacle course to be run—didn't really comprehend this, I'm afraid. It can be a paradigm-bending epiphany when we finally realize that Yahweh doesn't want to be our opponent in the game of life, but rather our Father, the source of life—on every level. When He instructs us, it's not to impose His will upon us but to keep us out of harm's way, called out from the world and set apart for His pleasure. Knowing God by name, operating under His power, representing Him before the world, and following His directions in faith are all outgrowths of this epiphany.

SETTING GOD'S PEOPLE APART FROM THE WORLD

(653) *Don't fear God.* “**After these things the word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”** (Genesis 15:1) Sorry about that provocative topic summary: I couldn't help myself. While being told hundreds of times in scripture we are to “fear God,” (See Mitzvah #8) here is a verse that clarifies the issue. The same Hebrew word that is employed here, *pare*, is used in the majority of “fear God” passages. So we would be wise to consider its range of meanings. *Pare* means “to fear, revere, be afraid; to stand in awe of, be awed; to reverence, honor, respect; to be fearful, be dreadful, be feared; to cause astonishment and awe, be held in awe; to inspire reverence or godly fear; or to make afraid, terrify.” (*Strong's*) The *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* defines it: “be afraid, be frightened, i.e., be in a state of feeling great distress, and deep concern of pain or unfavorable circumstance; revere, venerate, i.e., show profound respect for one, that borders on fear of the object; be awesome, dreadful; respect, revere, i.e., show high status and honor to one in authority even bordering on fear, without necessarily worshipping as deity.”

The bottom line, in the simplest of terms, is that while we are to revere, honor, respect, and even stand in awe of Yahweh, He does not want us to be afraid of Him, cringing like a whipped dog in His presence. Such obsequious obeisance is no fun—for us *or* for Him. I've used this illustration before, but it bears repeating: the relationship Yahweh wishes

to share with us is like that of a loving father with his small child. Papa is big and strong. He takes care of us, defends us, and teaches us. Even if we kids don't fully understand how he does it, he makes sure there's always food to eat and a roof over our heads. We wouldn't hesitate to jump off the jungle gym into his arms if he called to us, for we know his love, and we trust beyond reason that he is able to keep us from falling. In short, Papa is **"our shield, our exceedingly great reward."** Therefore we respect Him with a whole heart. The only reason we'd ever have to be afraid of Him is our recognition that we've disobeyed Him, but even then, He stands ready to forgive us, if only we'll ask.

- (654) *Remain under God's protection even in times of stress.* **"Now the Angel of Yahweh found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. And He said, 'Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?' She said, 'I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai.' The Angel of Yahweh said to her, 'Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand.' Then the Angel of Yahweh said to her, 'I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude.'"**
(Genesis 16:7-10) Nobody's guiltless in this scene (except for the Angel of Yahweh, of course). First, Sarai gets impatient waiting for the child of promise to appear; so she suggests a manmade alternative to God's revealed plan. Then Abram listens to the bad advice of his wife and sleeps with Hagar. (Anybody remember the lesson of Eden? See Precept #617.) Hagar parlays pregnancy into pride, making everybody's life miserable and bringing out the worst in Sarai. Then Abram wimps out on his leadership responsibilities. Sarai pushes Hagar to the breaking point. Hagar bolts. Abram shrugs. Sarai steams. And God's thinkin' (if I may read between the lines), "If this keeps up, these two will *never* have a kid."

The solution? Everybody needs to go back and remember what they were supposed to be doing in the first place. Hagar needs to humble herself and return to Sarai's service. Sarai needs to stop scheming and learn to wait upon Yahweh. And Abram needs to be responsible for the leadership of his family. He's eighty-five years old, for cryin' out loud; it's time to grow up. This entire domestic tempest can be traced back to one bad idea. But bad ideas are ubiquitous in our world, and their consequences plague all of us. What are we to do when evil surrounds us on every side and there seems to be no way out? Run from reality? No. Though we are to flee from spiritual falsehood—"Babylon," in the scriptural metaphor—we are not to allow temporal adversity to drive us from the place of Yahweh's protection. It's suicidal. We are, rather, to humble ourselves, look to Yahweh instead of man for answers, and remain in (or return to) the place of His provision.

(655) *Restore the Prophet's wife.* “And God said to [Abimelech] in a dream, ‘Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore, restore the man’s wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.’” (Genesis 20:6-7) We tend to read these Bible stories as separate, unrelated incidents, so we often miss the significance of the larger context. The “Abimelech” episode is sandwiched between the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the birth of Isaac. If you’ll recall, Abram (now called Abraham) had been visited by three angelic messengers (one of whom was apparently a theophany), with whom he bargained for the safety of his nephew, Lot. At that time, it was announced to Abraham that during the next year, his wife Sarah would bear a child—the son of promise who would carry on Abraham’s line, through which the Messiah would come. Upon seeing all that smoke on the horizon in the direction of Sodom, Abe prudently packed up and headed south for a while, visiting, among other places, the city of Gerar, where Abimelech was king. And Satan saw a golden opportunity to make God a liar—cutting off the line of the Messiah before it even began.

Years before this, Abram had sojourned in Egypt, and at that time he had suggested that Sarai, a very beautiful woman, tell a half truth about her relationship with Abe—that she was his sister. That was true enough (same father, different mothers), but Abe figured that if they knew he was *also* her husband, they’d kill him to get to her. Now, in late middle age (Sarah was ninety, which is perhaps equivalent to fifty of fifty-five with today’s shortened life expectancies) she was still good looking, and Abraham used the same paranoid prevarication to protect himself: “She’s my sister.” And—big surprise—the same thing happened in Gerar that had happened in Egypt: the king noticed her beauty and promptly added her to his harem. If she had been taken to the king’s bed, God’s promise to Abraham would have been sabotaged, so Yahweh warned Abimelech about Sarah in a dream, giving him the instruction in our text above. Abimelech was obedient, and restored Sarah to her “brother” Abraham. Perhaps absence *does* make the heart grow fonder, for shortly thereafter, Sarah became pregnant with Abraham’s child. And Satan, like a black-caped villain in a melodrama, grumbled, “Curses! Foiled again!” Or words to that effect.

There’s the background. Now we need to figure out if Yahweh’s instructions to Abimelech still apply to us in some way today. I think they do. If I’m right, this is a prophetic dress rehearsal. Abraham plays the part of Yahshua the Messiah: *prophet* (identified as such in the vision), *priest*

(since he was asked to intercede for Abimelech and his people), and *king* (as evidenced by the homage and deference Abimelech showed to him). Sarah plays the role of Yahshua's bride, the called-out assembly of His people, called the *Ekklesia* in Greek—the “Church,” if you're willing to use a term laden with so much errant baggage. And Abimelech and his citizens represent the world and its leaders.

Early in the fourth century, the Roman Emperor Constantine looked at Yahshua's bride and noticed how attractive she was. And as emperors are wont to do, he brought her into his “harem,” a place already populated with the imperial cult, paganism (with more permutations than you can shake a stick at), Greek philosophies, rabbinical Judaism, Zoroastrianism, you name it. Only Yahweh can judge whether Constantine *meant* to usurp Yahshua's role as the Ekklesia's husband, but that was what transpired. And the bride? Not that she had much choice, but the church didn't put up much of a struggle. Did she realize what was going on? Did she comprehend that she was being seduced, or worse, raped? Sadly, the very first assembly in Revelation's prophetic mailing list to the seven Asian congregations was chastised for having “left her first love.”

Remember, the warning instruction is to the “king,” the one in charge. In every generation and every culture, every person who possesses some degree of temporal power crosses the same bridge: Yahweh says, “You're a dead man if you take the woman for yourself, if you don't restore my prophet's bride to him—*without touching her*.” And I'd resist the temptation to apply this only to governments. Popes, priests, and pastors, those directly involved in the leadership of “the Church” must become cognizant of their own guilt or innocence in the matter of her well being: has she been restored to her Messiah under your leadership, or has she been used for your own pleasure and profit? You've made mistakes; we all have. But can God truthfully say of you, “**I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart**”? Think carefully before you answer.

- (656) *Abandon man's plan while embracing God's.* “**But God said to Abraham, “Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called.”** (Genesis 21:12) Fast forward a few years. Isaac, the child of promise, has been born, and he's now old enough to be weaned. Sarah has come to terms with her disastrous plan to use Hagar as her surrogate. Ishmael, Hagar's son, is a teenager, proudly aware that he is in fact Abraham's first-born—and that the old man dotes on him. So when Pop throws a big party for little Isaac, Ishmael can barely contain his contempt for the toddler. Genesis 21:9 reports that Ishmael “scoffed” at

his half-brother, but we get a clearer picture in Galatians 4:29, where Paul uses the Greek word *dioko* to describe what happened. It means: to persecute, to cause to flee, to pursue in a hostile manner, to harass, trouble, or molest. Ishmael, in short, was mistreating the little guy, bullying him. And Sarah—fully aware that her folly had come full circle—knew it was time to separate the child of slavery from the child of promise: Hagar and Ishmael had to go.

The problem was that Abraham had grown quite fond of both Ishmael and his mom, and was reluctant to take such a drastic step. It took a memo from Yahweh to make him see the light. The lesson for us is that we, like Abraham, must be willing to abandon our own flawed plans and solutions—no matter how good they feel, how well they seem to be working, or how long we’ve been pursuing them—in the light of Yahweh’s provision and revelation. A building contractor must get the foundation signed off before he’s allowed to complete the house. The same rule should apply to our spiritual lives.

(657) *Return to the Land of Promise.* **“Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, ‘Jacob.’ And I said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, ‘Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks are streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.”** (Genesis 31:11-13) We all take the occasional detour in our lives, sometimes on our own volition, and sometimes because God ordains it in order to teach us something. But every believer eventually needs to go back to the “Land of Promise,” the center of Yahweh’s will for our lives. Note three facts here: (1) No matter where we are, God is fully aware of our situation and is capable of amending it. (2) Yahweh gives us reminders of Who He is, what He’s done for us, and the relationship we share. And (3) the circumstances and timing of our return are at Yahweh’s discretion, not ours.

The process of “returning to the Land of Promise” is akin to repentance, but there are differences. Return is a physical act; repentance is a spiritual attitude. Returning requires God’s direction, permission, and enabling; repentance can (and should) be done *by us* any time we’ve fallen out of fellowship with our Creator—the sooner the better. Returning entails obedience; repentance requires choice. Return involves our walk through the world; repentance is concerned with our walk with God. Jacob was not free to return to the Land on his own schedule any more than the Israelites could have left slavery in Egypt or walked out of their captivity

in Babylon whenever they felt like it. The timetable, as I said, is strictly in Yahweh's hands.

The subject comes up again a few chapters later: **"Then God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother.' And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.'" (Genesis 35:1-3)** Jacob's response to Yahweh's call was precisely correct. *Before* he returned to Bethel (which means "the house of God"), he instructed his household to repent, separate themselves from the world's false doctrines, and "clean up their act"—live in purity before Yahweh. The changing of garments foreshadows the marriage supper of the Lamb, where the pure and spotless "bride" (that's us!) is seen wearing garments of **"fine linen, clean and bright—the righteous acts of the saints."** (Revelation 19:8)

All of this leads me to one inescapable conclusion: the ultimate "return to the Land of Promise" for today's believers will be the rapture of the church. What did Jacob say? **"Let us arise and go up to the House of God!"** The conditions characteristic of the rapture and its approach are identical to the three points I made above concerning Jacob's return to Bethel.

(658) *Trust Yahweh's detour signs.* **"So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. Then God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, 'Jacob, Jacob!' And he said, 'Here I am.' So He said, 'I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes.'" (Genesis 46:1-3)** Jacob's travels are again being pressed into service to illustrate Yahweh's instructions to us. In the previous Precept, we saw Jacob's obedience in "returning to the Land of Promise." Here, many years later, Yahweh is telling him to take another detour—one that will take his people *430 years* off the main road. This begs the questions: was he not already where God had told him to go? Was Beersheba not in the Land of Promise? Was Yahweh not capable of staving off the famine in the land of Canaan? No, all these things were perfectly true. So why did He tell Jacob/Israel to go to Egypt?

It's because Yahweh was in the process of calling out of the world a holy nation—a people set apart for His name and His glory, a people through whom the entire human race would witness the power and love of God—in dramatic and unmistakable fashion. That much is abundantly

clear in our scriptures. What may not be so clear is that Yahweh uses the same process with us when He's calling us out for His purposes. (The reason it's not quite as clear these days is that we are all too often deaf and blind to His leading: we don't see where the journey was supposed to lead because we never take the first step.) My own life demonstrates the principle, and many believers could cite similar detours that all seem to lead in the same direction.

Like Jacob, I worked for Laban (if you know what I mean) for sixteen years, meanwhile serving Yahweh in whatever small way I could. I then left, under similarly strained circumstances, to work in the Promised Land (running my own small business) for nine more. After seven years of plenty, God sent a famine, so to speak, and with it a detour sign and a promise to take care of my family. But my detour, like Jacob's, ended up looking like an utter disaster in the world's eyes: three years after moving 3,000 miles from my home, the spectacularly successful dot-com I'd helped invent was toes-up, the laughing stock of the commercial world. Was God wrong to lead me here? No. I was right where He wanted me. At fifty-four, I found myself forcibly retired, unemployable, blessed with just enough money to live comfortably (if I was frugal), and burning with a desire to study God's Word as I had never had the opportunity to do before. The result is the book you're now reading, and several that preceded it. (If you'd like to read about the fascinating but ill-fated roller coaster ride I experienced, check out *In the Company of Good and Evil*, co-authored with Craig Winn, linked free from this site. It's a fascinating, horrifying tale of corporate seduction and betrayal.)

RELEASING GOD'S PEOPLE FROM BONDAGE

- (659) *Investigate the Light with reverence.* **“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, ‘I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.’ So when Yahweh saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’ Moreover He said, ‘I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.”** (Exodus 3:1-6) As far as we know, this is only the second time in history Yahweh had ever manifested

Himself before men in a form other than as a human. The first was when God spoke to Job (probably a near contemporary of Abraham) “out of the whirlwind.” But other than this, we are told of no other early face-to-face encounters between man and God in which Yahweh manifested Himself as something other than a man—the pre-incarnate Messiah. We are told that Adam, Enoch, and Noah all “walked with God,” and that **“God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him.”** (Genesis 10:8) Abraham received Yahweh as a house guest in Genesis 18, accompanied by two angels, but all three figures are introduced to us as “men.” God spoke to Abimelech and Jacob in dreams. Audible instructions were given to Abraham, Hagar, and Isaac by an Entity enigmatically identified as “the Angel (Hebrew: *malak*—a messenger, representative, or envoy) of Yahweh.” And Jacob wrestled with a “man” who turned out to be God (compare Genesis 32:28 with 35:10). Theologians refer to these appearances of God to mankind as “theophanies.”

It’s patently obvious why Yahweh uses theophanies when He wishes to manifest Himself to us visually or audibly. If He allowed His full glory to shine through, we’d survive the encounter about as long as a daisy in a nuclear holocaust. God must “dial down” His glory if He wants us to live to tell the tale. That’s the whole point of manifesting Himself as a human being: *He wants us to live*. When Yahweh delivered the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai (a.k.a. Horeb), the folks down below were so terrified by the “thunderings, lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking,” He promised instead to appear to them in a form with whom they could relate without being frightened to death: **“Yahweh your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me [Moses] from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of Yahweh your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of Yahweh my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’”** (Deuteronomy 18:15-16) That “Prophet” would turn out to be the Messiah, Yahshua.

It is no coincidence that Moses’ first encounter with Yahweh had happened at the very same place, Mount Horeb (located in Midian, in today’s northwestern Saudi Arabia). At that time, God manifested Himself as a burning bush—something calculated to draw Moses’ attention, attracting him, intriguing him. Moses investigated the light, and when it became apparent that Yahweh, the God of Creation, was speaking to him through it, he showed appropriate reverence. Men are still attracted to and intrigued by the light of God. Whether they approach Him in reverence or in foolhardy arrogance (or ignore Him altogether) is a matter of personal choice and eternal consequence.

(660) *Relate to God by using His name.* “Then Moses said to God, ‘Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you,” and they say to me, “What is His name?” what shall I say to them?’ And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you.”’” (Exodus 3:13-14) It was not an accidental oversight on Maimonides’ part when he neglected to include this most basic of tenets in his compendium of 613 Mitzvot. He skipped this one on purpose, for it is not in the temporal interest of the rabbis to allow their people to be on a first-name basis with God. So they call Him *Elohim* (denoting deity in a generic sense) or “*Ha Shem*” (which means, “the Name”), or *Adonay*, the Hebrew word for “Lord.” The “Name” itself, however, is considered by the rabbis to be ineffable, unutterable, inexpressible. And that’s just plain weird: Yahweh saw to it that His Name was inscribed in the Tanach 7,000 times (6,868 of which survived scribal tampering, plus 132 instances where textual scholars have determined that YHWH has been *replaced* with ’DN—rendered *adonay*, or lord). If someone tells you their name 7,000 times, you can bet that they want you to know it, remember it, and use it to relate to them. They *don’t* want you to consider it “ineffable.”

Although Hebrew names invariably have meaning and significance, proper names should not be translated, but rather transmitted (and failing that, transliterated) into other languages. True to this principle, the translators here have rendered Yahweh’s words here as *explanations* of what His name means, though they’re not the Name itself. (*That* is something they’ll handle—and botch—in the next verse.) “I AM” is the Hebrew *’ehayah*, derived from the verb *hayah*, meaning to be, to exist. “I AM WHO I AM” is the Hebrew phrase *’ehayah ’asher ’ehayah*. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, this is probably more correctly rendered “I am He who is,” or “I am He who exists.” Being self-existent is an attribute God shares with no one. It is this element of His nature that above all makes Him holy—set apart from His creation.

God’s actual name was given to Moses in the next verse: “Moreover God said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: “Yahweh, God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.”’” This is where it becomes obvious that rendering YHWH (Yahweh) as “The Lord” (as in most English translations) is a colossal blunder, for God then said, “This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.” (Exodus 3:15) “The Lord” is not a name but a title, nor does it have any linguistic link to the “tetragrammaton,” YHWH (יהוה), that appears in the text. It’s a mistake, a lie, a *fraud* perpetrated upon generations of honest searchers in an attempt to obscure God’s name and

character. His “memorial to all generations” is *not* that He is Lord (though our desire to obey His precepts does in fact make Him our lord); rather, His “memorial” is that He is *self-existent*. He is the Source, the Creator, the One from which all things material and immaterial in earth and heaven are derived—a concept infinitely more majestic.

Unfortunately, there isn’t much scholarly consensus as to how God’s name is pronounced. I’ve been writing it “Yahweh” because that is the most commonly recognized form, but most agree that it should be pronounced with three syllables—stretching out the W as a vowel sound: “Yah-oo-weh.” The vowels, however, are also a source of controversy: it could be “Yahuwah” or “Yahoweh.” The ASV’s rendition “Jehovah” might be close *if* you pronounce the J as a Y and the V as a W—both shifts being endemic in the northern European languages from which modern English was derived: “Yehowah.” We need to remember that the letter “J” is a very late innovation—it didn’t even show up in the “Authorized” or King James Version of the Bible until the 1629 edition. “J” was unpronounceable in both Hebrew and Koine Greek. If you think about it, this fact would make the name *Jesus* “ineffable” in the original Biblical languages.

Jesus’ actual name, Yahshua (or Yahushua), contains the contraction of Yahweh found in so many Hebrew names: “Yah.” (It’s a component of Joshua, Elijah, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Obadiah, Zephaniah, and Zechariah, for instance.) Yahshua means “Yah is salvation.” And in an astounding confirmation that Yahshua *is* Yahweh, we read the words of the risen Christ in Revelation 1:8: **“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord** [Greek: *kurios*, a placeholder for Yahweh, a name that can’t be transmitted accurately in Koine Greek], **“who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”** Past, present, and future, the First and the Last: Yahshua has just described Himself as “I am He who exists.” Sound familiar?

At any rate, the name by which Moses was told to represent the true and living God to the world—both to Israel and Egypt—was Yahweh. **“Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, ‘Yahweh, God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me’... Then they will heed your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt; and you shall say to him, ‘Yahweh God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to Yahweh our God.’”** (Exodus 3:16-18) Nothing has changed in that respect: we are still to relate to God—and represent Him before the world—using the name He has revealed to us: Yahweh.

(661) *Know the name of Yahweh.* “And God spoke to Moses and said to him: ‘I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty [Hebrew: *El Shadday*], but by My name Yahweh I was not known to them. I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Therefore say to the children of Israel: “I am Yahweh; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.”’” (Exodus 6:2-6) I find it fascinating that Yahweh did not reveal His name until He purposed to release His covenant people from bondage in the world. Not even Abraham, the one to whom the covenant was delivered, knew Yahweh’s name, although he most certainly acknowledged His deity. Jacob, after his all-night wrestling match, even asked God what his name was, and got stonewalled: “**Why is it that you ask about my name?**” (Genesis 32:29) It is only when we find ourselves in bondage—to the world, to sin, and to our own fallen natures—that knowing God’s self-revealed *shem*, His name, character, and reputation, becomes of critical importance to us.

Once we have come to realize that we are in bondage, however, the significance of the name of Yahweh never diminishes. From this point on, we see the formula “I am Yahweh” punctuating the text of the Torah, incessantly reminding us that our Deliverer is the self-existent Creator, that He is holy—set apart from the worlds he has made—and that we are therefore to be set apart from the world as well. In reality, this setting apart, this calling out, is the essence of His promise, “**I will rescue you from...bondage.**”

(662) *Use whatever tools Yahweh provides.* “Then Moses answered and said, ‘But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, ‘Yahweh has not appeared to you.’” So Yahweh said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ He said, ‘A rod.’ And He said, ‘Cast it on the ground.’ So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Reach out your hand and take it by the tail’ (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), ‘that they may believe that Yahweh God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.’” (Exodus 4:1-5) I’m not suggesting that Yahweh is poised to invest the ordinary appurtenances of our lives with miraculous powers, as He did with Moses. But God used what Moses had handy for His own glory and purpose. Moses had only to make it available for Yahweh’s use: what had once been a shepherd’s rod was transformed into a tool perfectly suited for the job Yahweh had assigned to him. This, I believe, is a

universal principle: God will condescend to use only those things in our lives that we surrender to Him in trusting reliance. He respects our choices: the things we reserve for ourselves will be left untouched and unused by God. That should be a sobering thought.

This principle applies not only to things, objects, but also to our own bodies: Yahweh will employ as tools only what we make available for His glory. **“Furthermore Yahweh said to him, ‘Now put your hand in your bosom.’ And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow. And He said, ‘Put your hand in your bosom again.’ So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his other flesh. ‘Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign....”** If Moses had not trusted Yahweh completely, he never would have performed this sign before Pharaoh. *What if it stays leprous this time? No way! I won’t risk it.*

“And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour it on the dry land. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry land.” (Exodus 4:6-9) Even an ordinary glass of water can be a powerful tool if surrendered to the will of Yahweh.

(663) *Respect God’s schedule.* **“Now Yahweh said to Moses in Midian, ‘Go, return to Egypt; for all the men who sought your life are dead.”** (Exodus 4:19) We tend to forget that God spent *eighty years* preparing Moses for the job He had in mind—forty getting an education in the courts of Pharaoh, and another forty in the desert of Midian tending somebody else’s sheep. Yahweh calls us to do the tasks He’s ordained on *His* schedule, not ours. And as I pointed out before, He reserves the right to be “inefficient” with His use of our time, preparing and training us for years, sometimes, to serve for what seems like only a few moments. But those few moments, if played out on His schedule, can have far-reaching repercussions. I am reminded of the 1956 mission endeavor of Nate Saint, Jim Elliot, and company, who, after training for years in preparation for bringing God’s light to the Auca Indians of Ecuador, were murdered by the very people they had tried to reach—only three months after making their initial contact. The world would call that a dismal failure, but they were precisely on God’s schedule. Because of the incident, the entire tribe eventually came to faith.

Another example from my own life: I have had a burning desire to get a handle on God’s prophetic message for the last thirty-plus years. But having a family to provide for, I never had the time to explore the subject as deeply as I wished to, having to content myself with reading scripture

and other people's opinions about it. But in 2000, after having been prepared professionally for many years to analyze a subject and communicate its core message, I found myself forcibly retired. The final piece of the puzzle fell into place on September 11, 2001. Without the Twin Towers disaster, I never would have fully appreciated Islam's pernicious role in the Last Days—though it's all over the place in prophetic scripture. I was finally ready to write the book Yahweh had been putting on my heart for decades: [Future History—a Comprehensive Guide to Biblical Prophecy](#), linked free from this website.

- (664) *Work miracles and issue personal warnings at Yahweh's discretion. "And Yahweh said to Moses, 'When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says Yahweh: Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn."'"* (Exodus 4:21-23) *I'm going to kill your firstborn son?* That's a really stupid thing to say to a king if you're working in your own strength or upon your own volition. But if Yahweh is calling the shots, then telling the unvarnished truth—warning the world of the coming disaster—is the only logical or merciful thing one can do. As we have seen, Yahweh had given Moses a small repertoire of miraculous signs with which to validate his initial message to Pharaoh. All three signs declared, "Yahweh says, 'Life and death—the power to bless or kill—are in My hand.'" Only after Pharaoh refused to acknowledge the sovereignty of Yahweh would the final deadly sign be brought to bear. Some things never change.

The point is that Moses was working in the power of Yahweh, not the power of the world. His job was not to address injustice or free slaves—it was to implement Yahweh's plan. So human methods that could have been employed were not. The house of Israel numbered about 600,000 able bodied men at this time, plus women and children; they probably totaled around two million souls. Pharaoh's army was vastly outnumbered. But Moses didn't arm and train his people for battle; he didn't call for wildcat strikes and civil disobedience. Nor did he reason with Pharaoh, negotiate with him, lobby him, threaten him, plot against him, or form alliances with his enemies. Moses merely passed along Yahweh's demands and communicated the penalty for noncompliance—ten times in a row, raising the stakes with each round.

The time would come when Israel would be allowed to participate in the battle of life. But their deliverance—the thing that made life worth fighting for—was God's affair alone. The miracles and wonders that

Moses “worked” were not his idea, nor were they done in his power, and he knew it. He was merely the messenger. People are still being held in bondage in this world. They still labor under the lash of cruel taskmasters. And they are still powerless to effect their own release. Freeing them will take a miracle. Can we help? Yes, but only as Yahweh empowers us. “Onward Christian Soldiers” is a dangerous myth. We need to be singing “Onward Christian Servants.”

- (665) *Tell the world that Yahweh demands the release of His people. “I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am Yahweh your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am Yahweh.’ So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel; but they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage. And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the children of Israel go out of his land.’ And Moses spoke before Yahweh, saying, ‘The children of Israel have not heeded me. How then shall Pharaoh heed me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?’ Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them a command for the children of Israel and for Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 6:7-13)* In our natural state, we are so oppressed by our “anguish of spirit and cruel bondage,” we can’t even imagine being set free—much less achieve our liberty through our own efforts. Nor is the world willing to free us from our chains—we are far too valuable as slaves to the system, “bearing the burdens of the Egyptians.” Even our most visionary leaders are impotent to effect our freedom, stopped cold by our inertia and the world’s agenda. Only Yahweh can help us, redeem us, buy our release—and He has.

Blood has been spilled on our account: the price of freedom has been paid. Now the choice of whether to leave our chains behind is up to us. Will lethargy, habit and tradition, misplaced loyalty, or the blandishments of a life of slavery in Egypt—the leeks and onions of our existence—prevent us from receiving our liberty? Yahweh has demanded our release. In the not-too-distant future, the world will be forced to comply. The question remains, will we whose fetters Yahweh has broken choose to linger in Egypt, or will we follow God to the Promised Land?

- (666) *Speak that which Yahweh commands, but don’t expect the world to like it. “So Yahweh said to Moses: ‘See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you. And Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of his land. And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt*

and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.' Then Moses and Aaron did so; just as Yahweh commanded them, so they did." (Exodus 7:1-6) *Oh, swell*, Moses must have thought. It's one thing to deliver God's message with some hope or expectation of its acceptance. But Yahweh flatly told Moses that His words would *not* be heeded, and that He would "harden Pharaoh's heart" because of his rebellious pride. This is where the concept of "I am Yahweh" becomes so vitally important. Yahweh wasn't "trying to free His people" or "negotiating a settlement with Pharaoh." He is self-existent, omniscient, and omnipresent in time. In His purview, the whole story was a *fait accompli*. It had already happened. The whole ten-plagues thing was to be a sign for the spiritual benefit of the children of Israel, not a ploy to achieve some temporal short-term objective. It would tell them in no uncertain terms that Yahweh effortlessly held ascendancy over the most powerful human government of their day, over the "gods" of the Egyptians, and over the very forces of nature itself. The process would supply evidence of Yahweh's character for all who were willing to look. "Now Yahweh said to Moses, 'Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son's son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am Yahweh.'" (Exodus 10:1-2)

Yahweh, of course, has the power to do things "the easy way," to provide instant, comprehensive solutions to our problems. But He almost never does this. Why? Does He derive some perverse pleasure out of making everything difficult? No, the answer is wrapped up in His love for us, and in His primary gift, that of free will. If God made the temporal circumstances of every believer safe, prosperous, fulfilling, and painless, while making those of the world dangerous, ugly, pointless, and brutish, what would happen? People would be coming to Him for all the wrong reasons—choosing not to reciprocate His love but merely to enhance their standard of living. He would, in effect, be *curtailing* their freedom of choice. (Remember, the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden looked as tasty as any, and it wasn't hedged about by thorns or other impediments to procurement or enjoyment. The whole point was free will.) So Yahweh didn't deliver Israel the easy way (by squashing Pharaoh and his army like bugs), or the *really* easy way (by simply preventing the famine from touching Canaan in the days of Joseph in the first place). Rather, He allowed His people to endure hardship for a season in order to teach them

(and ultimately, us) what it really meant to be released from bondage—how difficult, painful, and costly it is.

The world, then and now, doesn't want to hear it. Yahweh is fully aware of this. But we are to tell the truth anyway, popular or not; we are to reiterate God's command to set His people free, even though we suspect the world won't listen, nor will it heed God's warning.

- (667) *Demand spiritual freedom for the people of Yahweh.* **“And Yahweh spoke to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh and say to him, “Thus says Yahweh: Let My people go, that they may serve Me.”’”** (Exodus 8:1) **“Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Go in to Pharaoh and tell him, “Thus says Yahweh, God of the Hebrews: Let My people go, that they may serve Me.”’”** (Exodus 9:1) **“So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, ‘Thus says Yahweh, God of the Hebrews: “How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me.”’”** (Exodus 10:3) Note a few salient facts: first, Yahweh wasn't reluctant to issue His demands over and over again. After each plague, He gave Pharaoh a chance to repent and humble himself before the God of gods, and each time, the king refused (though his resolve was clearly shaken a couple of times).

Second, Yahweh demanded freedom only for *His* people, not the whole Egyptian populace. Nor did He demand to be worshipped by the Egyptians: He respected their prerogative to choose their own gods, poorly or not. He was introduced merely as “the God of the Hebrews.” I find it encouraging that when the Israelites finally left, they didn't leave alone: quite a few Egyptians, having witnessed the power of Yahweh on the Israelites' behalf, decided to join them and their God in their departure from the only world they knew, and they were welcomed. This “mixed multitude” became absorbed into the cultural fabric of Israel, worshipping their newly rediscovered God and joyfully accepting their new Laws.

Third, the reason given for the departure of Israel was that they might “serve Yahweh.” Pharaoh, in his pride, choked on the idea of his slaves “serving” anyone but him. So we see the pointed rebuke in Exodus 10:3, **“How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?”** Good question, one Pharaoh might have sarcastically answered, “Until You dry up the Red Sea,” meaning “never,” or so he thought.

- (668) *Don't take the “safe” route when Yahweh leads elsewhere.* **“Now Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, “They are bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.” Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh**

and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am Yahweh.' And they did so." (Exodus 14:1-4) The popular fiction that the Israelites crossed nothing more formidable than a shallow marsh called the "Reed Sea" is destroyed by the text. Yahweh had Moses lead them down a wadi snaking southeast through the rugged and mountainous eastern Sinai Peninsula that empties out onto a large beach—the alluvial fan of this seasonal river emptying into the Gulf of Aqaba at about the 29th parallel. The beach, easily big enough to accommodate two or three million Israelites and their flocks, is located at the present seaside city of Nuweiba. "*Pi Hahiroth*" describes the egress point: it literally means "mouth of the cave," reflecting the high canyon walls that hem in the wadi. *Migdol* means "tower," referring to an Egyptian fortification, the ancient remains of which lie to the north of the beach, blocking the Israelites' escape in that direction. South of the beach, the mountains reach down to the shoreline, making passage impossible. So basically, the Israelites at this point were stuck between the devil (or at least the Pharaoh) and the deep blue sea. *Baal Zephron*, a Midianite fortress Moses knew well (having tended sheep on the east side of the Gulf of Aqaba for forty years) lay directly across the gulf from the beach—you could see it on a clear day, since the Gulf of Aqaba is only about ten miles wide at this point.

Yahweh, it seemed, had led them into a trap. Short of a miracle, no escape was possible. That's why I just *love* Yahweh's response: **"And Yahweh said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward.'" Oh, and I guess we'd better do something about all that water. "But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea."** Why didn't Yahweh take them on the "safe route," around the northern tip of the Gulf, the way Moses had gone when traveling back and forth between Egypt and Midian? Because He wanted to show these people that He was not a God who was intimidated by "impossible" situations. The Israelites feared Pharaoh—he was the ruling monarch of the most powerful kingdom on earth. Yahweh needed to show His people who held the *real* reins of power: **"And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."** (Exodus 14:15-18)

We naturally seek the "safe route," don't we? We plan, calculate, and scheme in our efforts to escape the world's problems. We go the long way around if we see obstacles in our way. But Yahweh was taking His people back to Mount Horeb, to the place where He had revealed Himself to

Moses, the place where He would soon reveal His instructions to Israel. Yahweh sees no obstacles. Armies and oceans mean nothing to Him. The moral of the story: when approaching the Law of God, one should always take the direct route.

- (669) *Comprehend the difference between faith and presumption.* “Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen.’ And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it [Hebrew: *nus*—taking flight, driving hastily]. So Yahweh overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” (Exodus 14:26-29) The difference between opportunity and temptation lies in who is offering what to whom, and why. Yahweh parted the sea for the fleeing Israelites, and He told Moses to hold out his rod as a sign that this phenomenon was Yahweh’s doing and not merely a freak weather occurrence. Moved by something even more compelling than the terror of Pharaoh’s pursuing armies, Israel proceeded in faithful obedience to God’s word, fully aware that the parting of the waters was not just an oddity of nature, a happy coincidence. The Egyptians, on the other hand, simply presumed it was safe to follow the Israelites across the sea floor—if *they can do it, we can too!* Either they failed to see the hand of God in the obviously miraculous phenomenon, or they were trying to appropriate a gift that had been given to someone else—stealing God’s miracle for themselves, as it were. Either way, their error proved disastrous.

There is a rather obvious object lesson about our salvation here (but it’s not so obvious I won’t bother explaining it). Israel and the mixed multitude fleeing Egypt (a.k.a. the world) were following Yahweh’s direction and were under His protection. Further, they were putting their lives in His hands, knowing intuitively that the laws of gravity and hydrodynamics had only temporarily been suspended—the sea didn’t ordinarily behave like this. However, following Yahweh’s counter-intuitive instructions didn’t require a blind leap of illogical faith, for He had *already* demonstrated His power on their behalf on ten different occasions. Crossing the Red Sea is a picture of our stance as we accept Yahweh’s grace toward us. He provides the miracle of atonement, and we—fully realizing that we did nothing to merit or achieve our salvation—move forward in faith, even if we can’t fully comprehend the means by which God is providing our deliverance.

But what about the pursuing Egyptians? To all appearances, they did precisely the same thing the Israelites had done. They too were trusting unseen forces they didn't fully understand. They too moved forward, suspending reason and ignoring danger. They were brave, obedient, and loyal soldiers who were just trying to do what they thought was right, doing their duty, obeying their king. Why then was their fate so radically different from that of the Israelites? It's because salvation depends not upon *what we do*, but upon *Whom we trust*. The Egyptians had no relationship with Yahweh. It therefore did them no good at all to follow in the footsteps of Yahweh's people—doing the very same things being done by those who walked before them (or as Paul would later put it, “having a form of godliness, but denying its power”). The difference is that of religion versus relationship, of presumption versus faith, of yielding to temptation versus faithfully obeying Yahweh's instructions, and of seizing a temporal opportunity versus accepting God's eternal gift. “Good works,” symbolized by the Egyptians' foray into the Red Sea, are of no value at all unless they're done in the context of one's relationship with Yahweh.

WINNOWING WHEAT FROM CHAFF

- (670) *Honor Yahweh even over your own brother.* “**Now when Moses saw that the people were unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies), then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, ‘Whoever is on Yahweh's side—come to me!’ And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. And he said to them, ‘Thus says Yahweh, God of Israel: Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.’ So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. Then Moses said, ‘Consecrate yourselves today to Yahweh, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother.’**” (Exodus 32:25-29) This was Israel's first civil war. A cynic might deduce that it was a move to consolidate power in the hands of the “ruling” Levite tribe (the one from which Moses and Aaron had come), but it was nothing of the sort. At this point in Israel's history, the tribe of Levi had not yet been set apart for Yahweh's service from the other tribes. (Moses had received instruction concerning the Aaronic priesthood, but he had not yet delivered it to the people—he was on his way down the mountain with God's instructions when this incident—the golden calf debacle—occurred.) The issue, rather, was whether Israel was going to do things as Yahweh directed, or as the world did them. The Levites sided with Yahweh right here at the outset, setting aside the natural ties of blood and

culture and slaying the three thousand ringleaders of the golden calf rebellion (but sparing their clueless pawn, Aaron). One wonders if perhaps Levi's faithfulness in this matter led to Yahweh's subsequent assignment of the tribe as honored keepers of the Tabernacle (Numbers 1:47-54).

Loyalty to family and nation are, in themselves, a good thing. But we must never lose sight of the fact that we as believers have a higher duty, a more pressing calling: to honor Yahweh. The essence of our walk is, in fact, an outworking of the spiritual choice we have made—to side either with Yahweh or the world—for we cannot side with both. As Yahshua Himself said, **“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”** (Matthew 10:34-39, cf. Micah 7:6)

(671) *Prepare something for Yahweh to write upon.* **“And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke. So be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself to Me there on the top of the mountain. And no man shall come up with you, and let no man be seen throughout all the mountain; let neither flocks nor herds feed before that mountain.”** (Exodus 34:1-3) In his anger at seeing the idolatry of the people with their golden calf, Moses (in Exodus 32:19) lost his temper and threw down the tablets of stone upon which Yahweh had written the Ten Commandments, shattering them to smithereens. (I've heard of breaking the law, but this is ridiculous.) Yahweh didn't chastise Moses for this, however. He merely told him to make two new tablets, upon which Yahweh would write the precepts anew—leaving us an object lesson.

We too are to prepare something upon which Yahweh can engrave His Word—not tablets of stone, but our very hearts, the home of our emotions and affections. As Solomon put it, **“Let not mercy and truth forsake you. Bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.”** (Proverbs 3:3-4) And later, **“Keep my commands and live, and my law as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.”** (Proverbs 7:2-3) What is to be written there? Mercy, truth, and the Law of God—each of which defines the other.

And Yahweh wasn't done with the metaphor. In a prophecy yet to be fulfilled, Jeremiah reports Yahweh's incredible promise to the future spiritually restored nation of Israel: **"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know Yahweh,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says Yahweh. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."** (Jeremiah 31:33-34) As this study has shown, the "Law" in the minds of Israel today is but a pale and twisted caricature of the Torah Yahweh actually handed down. They do not "know Yahweh." They won't even say His name. Jeremiah assures us that this is not a permanent condition.

In the same vein, Ezekiel explains the disconnect between the Old Covenant—written on tablets (and hearts) of stone—being replaced (or more precisely, *fulfilled*) with the New Covenant to which Jeremiah alluded—a covenant that can only be written on the soft, receptive hearts of living flesh: **"I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God."** (Ezekiel 11:17-20) That glorious day in Israel's destiny is right around the prophetic corner. Note that the spiritual return of Israel must *follow* the physical return of the people to the Land of Promise—which establishes beyond the shadow of a doubt that the traditional Orthodox Judaism that Israel has practiced since the days of Rabbi Akiba is a "detestable abomination" to Yahweh, written on a "heart of stone." Now that the regathering has begun, a new spiritual dawn for the nation of Israel is about to break. But neither Jews nor gentiles need wait for it. The day of God's grace is here *today*. If we provide receptive hearts, He will write His Word there.

- (672) *Record Yahweh's instructions.* **"Then Yahweh said to Moses, 'Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.' So he was there with Yahweh forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments."** (Exodus 34:27-28) The heart of the rabbinical claim to spiritual authority lies in the myth of an "oral Law" given to Moses to flesh out and explain the Torah. This oral Law was supposedly handed down intact from generation to generation until gathered and codified by the followers of Rabbi Akiba in the second century A.D. (See

the introduction to Chapter 10 of *The Owner's Manual* for a more complete explanation.) On the contrary, Moses was told to *write down* whatever Yahweh told him. The human brain is an amazingly complex and capable organ, a miracle of creation, but it is far more adept at comprehension than rote memorization. Anyone who has ever played the parlor game where a secret sentence is passed from one person to the next around the room knows what can happen with oral transmission. The message invariably becomes hopelessly garbled. That's why God told Moses to create a written record of His instructions. An "oral Law" isn't worth the paper it isn't printed on.

Yahweh chose to communicate His plan of redemption to us using human language, which in itself is an imperfect tool. Languages are like living organisms, bending and shifting over time. They have a life cycle: they grow and mature, spawn children of their own, and eventually die from disuse. Along the way, words can lose their meaning or pick up new connotations. Worse, nuances (or even basic meanings) are lost when texts are translated into other languages. It helps a great deal that every major doctrine is repeated several times in scripture, approached from different angles, stated in different ways. But without the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Who teaches us the truth latent in our flawed texts and half-understood vocabulary, we would be hard-pressed to know who God is or what He wants. But at least we *have* texts—written copies of Yahweh's scripture that we can study and analyze. Oral traditions are nothing but a fleeting vapor, at best paraphrases and at worst prevarications.

But Yahweh is not issuing new instructions to His people today. So is the precept we've gleaned from this passage beside the point? From where I sit, the answer is no. There's still the little matter of testimony to consider, mentoring others, making disciples, bringing the joy of God's Word to a wider audience, and compensating for our own flawed memories. Speaking for myself, I write down what I've discovered because I want to remember what God has said *to me* through His Word. (At my age, I can't remember what I had for breakfast.) If somebody else gets edified along the way, that's a good thing, but I'm primarily recording these things for my own enlightenment.

- (673) *Be set-apart to Yahweh.* "**For I am Yahweh who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.**" (Leviticus 11:45) This is about as basic as it gets. Four facts are being brought to bear to support the precept: (1) The One issuing the instruction is Yahweh, whose self-revealed name indicates that He is the self-existent Creator-God without whom nothing—especially us—would exist. (2) He brings us

“up out of the land of Egypt.” Egypt, as we have seen, is a consistent Biblical metaphor for the world and its values. Thus to be brought out of Egypt implies a spiritual paradigm shift, a new world view, a radically revised value system. (3) He intends to be our God. That is, the reason He has brought us to this new place is so that we might revere Him alone as deity, without competing for our affections with the things of this world. (4) He Himself is “holy,” an adjective (Hebrew *qadosh*) that implies a state of being set apart (its root verb means “to separate”). *The Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* defines *qadosh*, as it refers to Yahweh: “Pertaining to being unique and pure in the sense of superior moral qualities and possessing certain essential divine qualities in contrast with what is human.” Being “holy,” then, is a component of Yahweh’s very nature (being self-existent). He is not part of space/time or matter/energy, but exists beyond them, outside of them, independent of them—unique and pure.

That makes “being holy” for us an extremely tall order, for as we have seen, it is the very antithesis of our natural state as human beings. We tend to think of it as being “well behaved,” but that is a pale and shallow reflection of the word’s true meaning. “Set-apart” is closer to the heart of it: we are brought “out of Egypt” to be set-apart for Yahweh’s pleasure and purpose as we are set-apart from the world. Thus there are connotations of consecration, dedication, sacredness and devotion in the word *qadosh* when applied to us.

There are further hints as to how “being holy” works: **“And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am Yahweh your God. And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I am Yahweh who sanctifies you.”** (Leviticus 20:6-8) “Holy” here is a term related to *qadosh*. It’s *qodesh*, a noun meaning “Apartness, holiness, sacredness, separateness.” (S) The interesting new wrinkle here is how this “apartness” is to be achieved: it is Yahweh’s doing. The word translated “sanctifies” is the Hebrew verb from the same consonant root: *qadash*. It is defined: “To consecrate, sanctify, prepare, dedicate, be hallowed, be holy, be sanctified, be separate; to be set apart.” (S) The point is that we cannot really make ourselves “holy.” But if we honor Yahweh and obey His instructions, *He* will make us holy.

How? I believe that He will in the end *absorb* us who love Him into Himself, in nature if not in physical reality. (I said I *believe* it; I didn’t say I *understand* it.) Remember, the holiness of God consists in His being

“unique and pure.” Listen to the words of John: **“He who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us— eternal life... Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”** (I John 2:23-25, 3:2-3) Becoming “like God,” seeing Him “as He is,” requires a type of perfection we will never attain on our own. But that is not cause for despair; it is cause for hope—a hope that encourages us to “purify *ourselves*” in anticipation of our being made pure by God. In other words, **“Be holy, for I am holy.”**

(674) *Stone a medium to death.* **“A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood shall be upon them.”** (Leviticus 20:27) In Chapter 8 of *The Owner’s Manual*, Maimonides touched on several possible modes of capital punishment in the Torah, focusing not on the offenses that would engender such punishment, but on the erroneous idea that the Council, the Sanhedrin, was to make the call. In our next few precepts, we’ll review some specific instruction from Yahweh on the matter of capital crimes. First we see the case of mediums and those with familiar spirits—necromancers and ghost conjurers. We saw the prohibition against them in Mitzvot #337 and #338. Here we see the penalty for committing this crime: death by stoning.

It’s never explained in scripture, but we should ponder the method of execution and how it relates to the crime. The unifying factor for these crimes seems to be that, one way or another, they are perpetrated against the entire nation; they’re an attempt to undermine and circumvent the authority of Yahweh within Israel. Thus the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes, “This method of capital punishment [*ragam*, stoning] is specified for idolaters, soothsayers, and a blasphemer of the sacred name. The legal act of stoning was a corporate one.... It is the participation of all members of the society which is important; since all persons regardless of sex or age could throw stones, it became the total act of the whole population in obedience to God’s command.” An act against the holiness of the nation demanded the nation’s unified response.

Capital crimes of a sexual nature (see Precept #676) were punished by burning at the stake. So it is with interest that we note that rapists of betrothed or married women (Mitzvah #288) were to be executed not by fire but by stoning. This, to my mind, demonstrates that rape is not really a

sexual crime at all, but rather the brutal imposition of one's domination upon another, forcing their submission. And in the case of a betrothed woman, it is also the usurpation of her husband's role. Since the human family is a picture of our relationship with Yahweh (He is the Husband, and we believers are the "bride" or wife) rape is a symbol of the religions, governments, or societies of man usurping the authority of God. Such "rape" is, in point of fact, a crime against humanity at large. It is not a crime of passion; it is treason.

- (675) *Stone to death one who curses Yahweh.* "Now the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel; and this Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel fought each other in the camp. And the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the name of Yahweh and cursed; and so they brought him to Moses... Then they put him in custody, that the mind of Yahweh might be shown to them. And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. Then you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. And whoever blasphemes the name of Yahweh shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of Yahweh, he shall be put to death.'" (Leviticus 24:10-16) The crime for which the man was condemned had nothing to do with the fight, but rather with his blasphemy against Yahweh—which, being an affront to the nation which was under Yahweh's protection, was punishable by stoning—the whole congregation was to participate. It thus behooves us to review what it means to "blaspheme" and "curse." "Blaspheme" is from the Hebrew word *qabab*. It means "To curse: invoke an oath, i.e., speak a verbal wish of ill-will toward another, with the force of invoking divine retribution of evil upon the object." (*Dictionary of Bible Languages with Semantic Domains*) The word connotes uttering a magical formula designed to do harm to its object, so it is akin to sorcery. The supposedly "divine" retribution in this case was actually an appeal to demonic forces.

The word we see translated "cursed" is one we've seen before: *qalal*: "To be slight, be swift, be trifling, be of little account, be light; to be insignificant; to be lightly esteemed; to make despicable; to curse; to treat with contempt, bring contempt or dishonour." (S) The guilty man had spoken of Yahweh with contempt, while calling upon Satan to be the undoing of his foe. If I may be allowed to extrapolate a bit, the man's genealogy suggests that he had a foot in both worlds—one in Israel and one in Egypt. Unlike the faithful "mixed multitude," gentiles who had left their old life behind to follow Yahweh, this fellow was trying to straddle

the spiritual fence, so to speak. He had not turned his back on Egypt but rather was trying to drag it with him into the Promised Land. Such an attitude is a deadly cancer if allowed to fester and grow among God's people. Thus Yahweh directs us to take it "outside the camp" and kill it. As John reminds us, **"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."** (I John 2:15-17)

- (676) *Burn at the stake a priest's daughter who has become a harlot. "The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, she profanes her father. She shall be burned with fire."* (Leviticus 21:9) We first explored burning at the stake as a mode of punishment in Mitzvah #287. There I noted, "Every single mention of execution by fire in the entire Bible (whether advocated by Yahweh or not) is associated in some way with either sexual sin, the worship of false gods, or both. In God's economy, one is a picture of the other." (It should be noted that the word "burning," the Hebrew: *sarap*, stresses destructive burning, consuming or destroying something by fire, not necessarily the actual execution, though it doesn't preclude it, either.) Here we see an example rich with symbolism—the daughter of a priest becoming a ritual prostitute in one of the pagan temples of Canaan. As usual, Yahweh's metaphor far outweighs the temporal reality. In the end, a "priest" is one who serves Yahweh and who intercedes for His people—and thus is symbolic of a true believer. He in turn represents God the Father in the family structure.

His "daughter," then, is one to whom the close familial relationship of the priest has brought an expectation and responsibility of faithfulness—one in the priest's household and under his protection, yet not a priest. The "priest's daughter" is physically in the household of faith (that is, she purports to be a believer) whether or not her life bears witness of this relationship. At issue here is whether or not she honors her father (and respects herself) or whether she treats their relationship as a common or profane thing. The ultimate evidence of the latter case, of course, would be to join herself—and by extension, her family—to false gods. "She," of course, need not be somebody's *daughter* at all, but could be anyone or anything in this position. Christianity as a religious institution did this wholesale at the time of Constantine (early in the fourth century), though she had been specifically warned to flee such compromise with paganism in Revelation 2 and 3. We are still dealing with the legacy of that betrayal.

We should once again explore what this particular mode of execution had to do with the nature of the crime. Unlike stoning, fire represents judgment, that is, a judicial separation of good from evil, of the valuable from the worthless, of the pure metal from its useless or toxic dross. The precept is teaching us that mere proximity to the household of faith is of no consequence. If one embraces falsehood, judgment—separation from God—awaits.

(677) *Do not tolerate the falsehood of Molech.* “Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given some of his descendants to Molech, to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name. And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives some of his descendants to Molech, and they do not kill him, then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people, and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech.’” (Leviticus 20:1-5) As we saw in Mitzvah #286, the punishment specified for Molech worshippers was death by stoning. And as we have recently learned (Precept #674) stoning implied a crime against the entire nation, and it therefore required a response from the whole congregation. *Who* was to stone the worshipper of Molech? “**The people of the land!**” Thus it is with a great deal of chagrin that I observe that it does very little practical good for a tiny minority to denounce such falsehood. The whole community must rise up in defense of the truth. Note that Yahweh will “set His face against” the defenders of falsehood and idolatry—and *their families*. Theirs is a national—a *universal*—crime; the consequences transcend personal punishment.

So what was Molech? Also known as Chemosh, Ba’al, Milcom, and Kronos, among others, this brutal god of fire was the national god of the Ammonites. His name simply means “king,” just as Ba’al means “lord,” betraying a legacy derived from the first self-deified king, Nimrod. His image was a large, hollow bronze figure with a bull’s head and outstretched arms which were designed to receive its victims when it was heated to a glowing red state. Molech’s human sacrifices—preferably first-born children—were roasted alive in the idol’s outstretched arms in an attempt to appease his insatiable blood lust, inducing him to grant bountiful harvests or victory in battle. The wails of the doomed children were drowned out with drums and flutes, while their parents were forbidden to openly mourn for them.

Yahweh mentioned Molech by name four times in these few verses. But my research indicates that “Molech worship” is actually far broader in scope than the homage a few Semitic tribes paid to one moldy Canaanite deity. A century ago, Alexander Hislop, exploring the unbiblical Roman Catholic doctrine that insisted that “every man must be punished for his own sins, and that God *cannot be satisfied* without groans and sighs, lacerations of the flesh, tortures of the body, and penances without number on the part of the offender, however broken in heart, however contrite the offender might be,” (in other words, justification by works, not grace) ties the origins of this error to, you guessed it: Molech (also spelled Moloch). Hislop goes on to say, “Now, looking simply at the Scripture, this perverse demand for self-torture on the part of those for whom Christ has made a *complete* and *perfect* atonement, might seem exceedingly strange; but looking at the real character of the god whom the Papacy has set up for the worship of its deluded devotees, there is nothing in the least strange about it. That god is Moloch, the god of barbarity and blood. Moloch signifies ‘king,’ and Nimrod was the first after the flood that violated the patriarchal system, and set up as a ‘king’ over his fellows. At first he was worshipped as the ‘revealer of goodness and truth,’ but by-and-by his worship was made to correspond with his dark and forbidding countenance and complexion. The name Moloch originally suggested nothing of cruelty or terror; but now the well-known rites associated with that name [which I have briefly described above] have made it for ages a synonym for all that is most revolting to the heart of humanity, and amply justify the description of Milton: ‘First Moloch, horrid king, besmeared with blood / Of human sacrifice, and parents’ tears, / Though, for the noise of drums and timbrels loud, / Their children’s cries unheard, that passed through fire / To his grim idol.’” (Quoted from *Paradise Lost*, Book I. Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, pp.150-151. Italics his.)

Hislop erred only in that he saw no further than the flawed doctrine of Roman Catholicism in tracing Molech’s legacy. But I detect the echoes of Molech worship in any religion or philosophy that demands self sacrifice as a condition for god’s blessing (and that includes such “religions” as atheistic secular humanism, whose “god” is man). At its core, Molech worship is any system that holds that the grace of Yahweh is insufficient to effect our salvation—that works, preferably painful or costly to us in some way, must be added to the equation. God says of the man who teaches such things—and his family, *and* the people who tolerate his disastrous heresy—“**I will set my face against that man.**” I think we’re in trouble, world.

(678) *Keep Yahweh's statutes.* **"You shall therefore keep all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them, that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out."** (Leviticus 20:22) In a heavy handed hint that tells us the entire Torah is really only about one thing—being set apart from the world as Yahweh's people—Moses here is being told *why* Gods statutes and judgments were to be kept. What is the "therefore" *there* for? The entire passage leading up to this conclusion is a litany of abuses and their corresponding punishments: (1) stoning for Molech worship, (2) the "cutting off" of occultists, (3) death for those who curse Yahweh, and (4) death for certain sexual sins—adultery, homosexuality, bestiality and incest—all of which symbolize, one way or another, man's betrayal of his relationship with Yahweh.

The things Yahweh warned about were the very things that were, in His colorful parlance, causing the Land to "vomit out" its Canaanite inhabitants. His caution to Israel was designed to prevent them from sharing the same fate—a caution that ultimately fell on deaf ears: Israel would be "vomited out" of the Land not once, but twice.

(679) *Distinguish between the clean and the unclean.* **"But I have said to you, 'You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey. I am Yahweh your God, who has separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore distinguish between clean animals and unclean, between unclean birds and clean, and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. And you shall be holy to Me, for I Yahweh am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.'" (Leviticus 20:24-26)** It's so easy to focus on the practical aspects of God's dietary laws (see *The Owner's Manual*, Chapter 5) that we miss the foundational lesson contained there: we, like Yahweh, are to be judgmental about the world in which we live. We are to discern what is "clean" from what is "unclean," distinguishing that which is good for us from that which is harmful. And having identified the difference, we are to avoid the unclean.

It is revealing that Yahweh ties our discernment of good from bad, clean from unclean, with His own purpose of separating His people from the world. One is a picture of the other. His metaphor centers upon what will nourish us, as opposed to what will poison us—thus we may eat cows or sheep, but not pigs or horses. We often miss the significance of the metaphor: God will bring into His "body," that is, His fellowship of believers, only those things that will benefit the body, nourish it, edify it, and strengthen it—not the things that will make it weak, ill, or ineffective. The wisdom of God must be brought to bear here, for just as bacon and

shrimp can be deceptively delicious, so can certain poisonous doctrines (for example, that good works or penance can be efficacious in securing our salvation) seem attractive to our logic, intellect, and ego. Looks can be deceiving, and deceit can be deadly.

The bottom line? We are to be holy—set apart from the world and consecrated instead to our walk with Yahweh. We can't bring the attractive toxins of the world in with us. God is holy: He won't allow it.

ENTERING THE LAND OF PROMISE

- (680) *Respect Yahweh's judgment.* **"No person under the ban, who may become doomed to destruction among men, shall be redeemed, but shall surely be put to death."** (Leviticus 27:29) **"Also you shall destroy all the peoples whom Yahweh your God delivers over to you; your eye shall have no pity on them; nor shall you serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you."** (Deuteronomy 7:16) I don't know where we got the odd idea that a loving God ought to have unlimited and indiscriminating mercy, patience without end, and benign tolerance for all beliefs. (He's *God* already, not some clueless cosmic mushroom.) On the contrary, the Scriptures picture Yahweh as a God of inflexible standards, whose patience is long but not without limits, but whose love *is* unlimited—causing Him to go to incredible lengths to reconcile our fallen race to Himself. Even though He leaves to us the choice of whether to accept His gift of reconciliation and redemption or reject it, this love remains the central fact of His character.

And tolerance? Through no fault of God's, the human race is dying. But "Doctor Yahweh" is offering us the capsule of life, the one and only cure for the human condition. He even paid for it Himself, though it was preposterously expensive. Now, all we have to do is trust Him, accept it, and swallow it (along with our pride). It is not His fault if we refuse to be healed, if we choose to believe either that we're not really sick or that the cure lies elsewhere. Believe it or not, He is perfectly tolerant of that disastrous opinion (which is not to say He'll overrule our choice and force salvation upon us in spite of our foolishness). But Yahweh becomes intolerant—downright angry—when we attempt to prevent *other people* from receiving the cure for our mortal state.

That's where the conquest of Canaan comes into play. The liberal establishment today looks at "politically incorrect" passages like our present precept and says, "How hateful God is; how unloving." They fail to see that Yahweh was perfectly happy to let any number of neighboring nations—Phoenicia, Assyria, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Midian, Amalek, and

Philistia (listed geographically clockwise)—go their own way, make their own mistakes, live with their own choices. But the seven Canaanite nations within the Land of Promise had reached a level of depravity that precluded rational thought and freedom of choice. They had crossed the line. After four hundred years of extending mercy to them in hopes of seeing their repentance, Yahweh reached the end of His patience. He allowed the land to “vomit out its inhabitants”—using the sword of Israel as an emetic. In the larger sense, wiping them out—placing them “under the ban”—was the most merciful, loving thing He could have done for the human race as a whole.

- (681) *Know your own strength—or lack thereof.* **“Now Yahweh spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: ‘Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers’ houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above—all who are able to go to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies. And with you there shall be a man from every tribe, each one the head of his father’s house.’”** (Numbers 1:1-4)

Considering the fact that King David—hundreds of years later—would get in trouble with Yahweh for attempting to take a military census, it may seem a bit odd that Yahweh ordered not one, but two of them, among the just-freed Israelites. The first was shortly after they left Egypt, and the second was just before they entered the promised land forty years later: **“And it came to pass, after the plague, that Yahweh spoke to Moses and Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying: ‘Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel from twenty years old and above, by their fathers’ houses, all who are able to go to war in Israel.’ So Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying: ‘Take a census of the people from twenty years old and above, just as Yahweh commanded Moses and the children of Israel who came out of the land of Egypt.’”** (Numbers 26:1-4)

The stated purpose of both countings was to ascertain the military strength of the nation. In addition, the second census was supposed to be used to equitably distribute the conquered Land among the tribes and families of Israel (vs. 53-56; see Precept #686). Yahweh, of course, already knew how many men Israel had to call upon. The reason He told Israel to number themselves was that He wanted *them* to know how large their army was. Before the first census, He had fought all of their battles for them. But the time was coming when they would be allowed to participate in their own destiny. Yes, Yahweh would still defeat their enemies (if Israel followed His instructions), but now they would be wielding the weapons of war themselves. A military census was thus a

much needed confidence builder. Yahweh wished to wean the infant nation off miracles and put them instead on a diet of providence.

There are some interesting nuggets of truth hidden among the statistics. First, the Israelite army entering the Land was practically the same size as the one that had died off in the wilderness: 603,550 in the first census, vs. 601,730 in the second. And that number is even closer than it looks, for the Levites (who were not numbered among the warriors) had increased by one thousand men (though the census numbers are evidently rounded off) in the interim. Thus the numerical strength of Israel after forty years in the wilderness was virtually identical to that before the wanderings began. So much for **“You have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.... Why is it you have brought us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”** (Exodus 16:8, 17:3)

Second, if you’ll recall, the tribe of Joseph had been promised a double portion, and thus it was divided in two, according to his sons’ families: Ephraim and Manasseh. (So with Levi set apart to Yahweh, there were still twelve tribes comprising Israel’s military force.) By the second census, the ten tribes other than Joseph’s averaged out at 51,650 men each, while Ephraim and Manasseh together added up to 85,200, so “Joseph” was well on his way toward numerically achieving an actual “double portion.” If you take Judah (who was blessed on different grounds) out of the equation, Joseph was very nearly there already. But because the details of David’s unwise census (II Samuel 24, I Chronicles 21) were not recorded, we’ll never know if the reality caught up with the symbol. I don’t suppose it matters. What *does* matter is that David, who had a personal relationship with Yahweh, who knew His provision and providence first hand, had no business assessing the military strength of Israel. He of all people should have known that it’s not the size of the army that counts, but rather whether it is fighting with Yahweh’s help or without it. A handful of men empowered by Yahweh are more powerful than an innumerable horde of His enemies. God’s strength, in point of fact, is made perfect in our *weakness*.

- (682) *Exempt Levites from battle.* **“Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor take a census of them among the children of Israel; but you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its furnishings, and over all things that belong to it; they shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they shall attend to it and camp around the tabernacle.”** (Numbers 1:49-50) There were several levels of “set-apartness” in Israel. First, the entire nation was set apart from the world to be Yahweh’s people, tasked to bear His signs,

His instructions, to the gentiles. But within Israel, one tribe, Levi, was set apart from the others to serve Yahweh personally—attending to the maintenance and conveyance of the Tabernacle. And among the Levites, one family, that of Aaron, was further set apart to intercede directly between God and man as priests within the Tabernacle.

None of the Levites were counted among the warriors of Israel. Their duties were elsewhere: **“And when the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up. The outsider who comes near shall be put to death. The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp, everyone by his own standard, according to their armies; but the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony.”**

(Numbers 1:51-53) Not only were the Levites tasked to be the custodians of the appurtenances of Yahweh, they were to encamp closer than anyone else to the Tabernacle—in the very front yard of God, as it were. They served as a buffer against irreverent trespassing, inadvertent or not, by the other tribes; thus by their very presence they preserved the lives of the greater community.

Was being a Levite a “good thing?” It depends on your point of view, for there were (from a strictly temporal perspective) ups and downs, plusses and minuses, to being a Levite. On the plus side (as our present precept points out), they were exempt from the military service to which *all* other Israelite males were subject. The Levites were recipients of the tithes of Israel (from which they in turn tithed to the priests). And they enjoyed a certain element of respect or deference as the keepers of “God’s stuff,” as it were.

But the perks came with a downside. They, unlike the other tribes, were given no territorial inheritance in the Promised Land, only a few scattered cities in which to live. The lack of land ownership precluded the possibility of earning a living in the traditional agrarian manner. (This explains why Yahweh instituted the tithe, rendered *to Him* through—and for the benefit of—the Levites.) Instead of waging war with the world, they were tasked with the care of God’s house. And although this was a great responsibility, there was no corresponding increase in temporal power or influence. The Levites—and even the priests—were given no authority as political leaders in Israel. Though Moses was a Levite, Joshua his successor was not (he was an Ephraimite), and the royal line—still half a millennium removed—would, as prophecy demanded, come to rest not with Levi, but with Judah.

Since practically everything in the Torah is symbolic of some greater truth, we should pause to reflect on the role of “Levites” in the modern world. Whom do they represent? Remember, the duties of the Levites were assigned by Yahweh—it was a calling, not a vocation. One could not aspire to become a Levite or a priest; he had to be chosen by God—born into the chosen tribe. I see in the Levites echoes of those today whose calling to serve Yahweh and His people precludes them from earning a living (“fighting battles,” as it were) or pursuing a normal gain-oriented career (the land-ownership metaphor). They *might* be pastors, but this is by no means automatic, for many “religious professionals” today are “called” more by the paycheck (or the power or prestige), than by God.

Still, we should not forget that the Israelites were given specific instruction as to what to do (and not to do) concerning Levites: exempt them from battle, and support them with tithes. It is no stretch at all to see in this a call to seek out those who are indeed called by Yahweh for his work and support them by whatever means is at our disposal. I’ll leave it to you to figure out who the “Levites” in your life are.

- (683) *Respect tribal affiliations.* **“And Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: ‘Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard, beside the emblems of his father’s house; they shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting.’”** (Numbers 2:1-2) Judging by His creation, Yahweh enjoys variety. Diversity makes our world a fascinating place, and separation fosters diversity. At the same time, He commands that we love one another, no matter how different we might be physically or culturally. (Loving one another, I hasten to add, is not remotely the same thing as embracing each others’ errant beliefs and false doctrines.) All through the Torah’s historical record, we see Yahweh relating to Israel by their tribes and families. Since (as we’ve observed) nothing Yahweh does or says is accidental or pointless, we should examine why this is so—why would God want to keep separate groups separate, everyone “camping by his own standard?” (Beside the issue of holiness, that is—the twelve tribes were *all* set apart to Yahweh.)

I believe the answer can be seen most clearly when we look at the converse: why do men who are dominated by Satan invariably seek power? The recurring dream of ungodly men is to rule the world—creating a homogeneous universal slave class under their control, existing for their benefit alone. From Nimrod to Caesar to Muhammad to Hitler, with a thousand stops in between, top-down control of as many people as possible has been the aim of despots since the dawn of time. Their agenda and Satan’s is identical: the subjugation, enslavement, and forced

submission of others. Empire building is precisely the opposite of what Yahweh's precept here suggests: political independence.

There is a prophetic component to all of this. The Last Days will at last see realized the twisted dream of fallen man—a one-world government ruled by a single charismatic individual. But as I pointed out in *Future History*, taking over the world one country at a time is like herding cats: just when you get one cornered, another one escapes. What modern megalomaniacs need is a mechanism whereby nations can be convinced to yield their independence, defense, and economies *voluntarily* to a higher power—benign, democratic, and relatively clueless—which can then be taken over from within: world revolution without firing a shot. Thus we've seen the League of Nations and the United Nations, as well as smaller regional super-nations like the E.U. The behind-the-scenes ruling elite have similar confederations on the drawing boards for North America, Asia, and Africa. *Dar al-Islam*, of course, functions in many ways like a single (if not unified) nation already. All of this is leading to a world where the following prophecy can become a black reality: **“And authority was given him [the Antichrist] over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb.”** (Revelation 13:7-8) Mankind will have forsaken the practice of “camping by their own standards,” but in a twisted sort of way, every man will still be encamped **“beside the emblems of his father's house.”**

(684) *Make two silver trumpets.* **“And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Make two silver trumpets for yourself; you shall make them of hammered work; you shall use them for calling the congregation and for directing the movement of the camps.’”** (Numbers 10:1-2) We discussed these silver trumpets under Mitzvah #454, in Chapter 11 of *The Owner's Manual*. Unlike the ram's horn trumpets—the *shofar*—that were indicative of God's call upon our lives, these silver *'hasoserah* trumpets were man-made, and used to communicate between men when going to battle or rejoicing on feast days. They functioned much like bugles would in later times, with one important difference: Yahweh promised to “remember” the children of Israel whenever the *'hasoserah* was blown (verse 9). In a way then, this meant the use of the silver trumpets was a prayer, for Israel was aware that God would be listening when they were blown.

Two lessons come to mind. First, they remind us that Yahweh is privy to our human communication. He listens to what we say to each other—not just to what we say to Him. Would we say the things we do if we really understood that? Do we speak in love, seeking to edify and encourage our brothers, or are we just telling people what to do? Second,

Yahweh's instructions here were to *make* the trumpets: He wants us to initiate conversation, even with Him. Yahweh is not a God who says, *Shut up and do what I tell you*. Rather, He is the God who says, *Come now, let us reason together; ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; pray—converse with Me—without ceasing*.

Specific instructions were issued concerning the use of the silver trumpets: **“When they blow both of them, all the congregation shall gather before you at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. But if they blow only one, then the leaders, the heads of the divisions of Israel, shall gather to you. When you sound the advance, the camps that lie on the east side shall then begin their journey. When you sound the advance the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall begin their journey; they shall sound the call for them to begin their journeys. And when the assembly is to be gathered together, you shall blow, but not sound the advance. The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets; and these shall be to you as an ordinance forever throughout your generations.”** (Numbers 10:3-8) Note that the trumpet blasts (like bugle calls) *meant* something. This was communication, not entertainment. The sound would vary, depending upon the message and its intended audience. And the designated trumpet blowers were priests—those who were by definition and calling tasked with interceding between God and man. The lessons again seem obvious: we should listen for messages delivered by men who are in communication with Yahweh, discerning which instructions are meant for us, and which are meant for our brothers. At the same time, we need to draw a distinction between the world's meaningless noise—music, entertainment, ear-tickling auditory amusements—and what Yahweh might be saying to us through the voices of Spirit-led people. The popular entertainers of our day like to voice their opinions, but they seldom blow the *'hasoserah*.

- (685) *Preview God's blessings.* **“And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.’”** (Numbers 13:1-2) As I pointed out in Precept #635, the pre-invasion foray of the twelve spies into the Land was done with Yahweh's permission, not upon His orders. Nevertheless, He had some instructions for them: **“Spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel.”** This “land” had been defined previously as **“from the river of Egypt [i.e., the Wadi El Arish] to the great river, the River Euphrates”** (Genesis 15:18), and **“from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines [the Mediterranean], and from the desert to the River [Euphrates]”** (Exodus 23:31).

They were starting out in the Wilderness of Paran, which is some distance north of the Gulf of Aqaba, the northeastern “finger” of the Red Sea. Moses told them first to go south (Numbers 13:17), for the Red Sea was supposed to mark their southern boundary. Instead, the twelve began their spy mission in the Wilderness of Zin (13:21), miles *north* of where they’d been encamped. We aren’t told how broad a swath the spies covered, but they didn’t get anywhere near the Euphrates, stopping a hundred miles short of it. Their lack of obedience (or is that faith?) was reflected in Yahweh’s subsequent detailed description of the boundaries of the land they would occupy, delineated in Numbers 34 (see Precepts #699-702). It pares the borders down to pretty much what the spies were actually willing to go and look at. What did they lose? Only a Red Sea port, which would have given them access to Eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean in the south, and in the north, Lebanon—the jewel of the Eastern Mediterranean. All this was theirs, if only they’d go and receive it.

So where does that leave us modern-day explorers of the Torah? What are we to learn from this? I believe that we, too, have been given permission to “spy out the Land of Promise.” No, not Canaan, but rather the place *we* have been promised as believers in Yahweh’s grace: the Kingdom of Heaven. Okay, it’s not exactly a *place*, but a state of being, one in which Yahshua rules supreme, where Satan can’t touch us because he’s been incarcerated in the abyss, where we finally *get it*: we no longer feel like we have to sin against our God. I realize that we can’t live there full time yet, but there’s no reason we can’t go in and “spy out the land.” The only question is: will we, like the ten faithless Israelites of old, merely take a quick peek, make note of the obstacles looming before us, and run back to our comfortably familiar lives in the wilderness with our tails between our legs? Or will we, like Joshua and Caleb, look forward with eager anticipation to settling in this strange, wonderful new world?

- (686) *Divide the Land on the basis of participation in battle.* “Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘To these [those counted in the second census—See Precept #681] the land shall be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names. To a large tribe you shall give a larger inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a smaller inheritance. Each shall be given its inheritance according to those who were numbered of them. But the land shall be divided by lot; they shall inherit according to the names of the tribes of their fathers. According to the lot their inheritance shall be divided between the larger and the smaller.’” (Numbers 26:52-56) At the time of the second census, the smallest tribe, Simeon, numbered 22,200 men, while the largest, Judah, boasted three times that strength, 76,500 warriors. It was the epitome of fair play that the larger the tribal army, the larger the parcel of land that

would be deeded to the tribe. The location of each tribe's parcel would be determined by casting lots (Joshua 18:10), a process in which Joshua, the High Priest Eleazar, and the tribal patriarchs all participated (19:51). But the amount of acreage would depend on the size of the tribe, or more specifically, its army.

The Canaanites, of course, didn't just roll over and play dead. They put up a fight. This posed no problem for the Israelites as long as they trusted in Yahweh rather than their own strength to win their battles for them—He had promised to “go before them.” The reason I bring this up is that the *second* strongest tribe in Israel—Dan, boasting 64,400 valiant warriors—apparently didn't care much for Yahweh's leadership, and as a result found fighting for their allotted inheritance an impossible task. So what did they do—repent and seek Yahweh's assistance? Nope. They picked up the tribe, lock, stock, and barrel, and moved it to the very northern border of the Land. Remember what I said about the twelve spies stopping a hundred miles short of the Euphrates? They only made it as far as Rehob (Numbers 13:21). Judges 18:28-30 reports that Dan took over a town in the same valley as Rehob, named Laish, renamed it Dan, and promptly dropped all pretense of the worship of Yahweh. Needless to say, Dan was the first tribe to go when the Assyrians invaded Israel in 722 B.C.

But the bad news isn't quite over for the apostate tribe of Dan. First, their name is missing from the list of tribes being represented among the prophetic 144,000 witnesses of Revelation 7 and 14. Could it be that Yahweh couldn't find the requisite 12,000 descendants? While you ponder that, note that the tribe of Dan *will* still exist when the Millennial reign of Christ begins a few years later, for Ezekiel records their newly allotted territory—right where they wanted it, at the far northern end of Israel's tribal territory, up at the Entrance of Hamath (Ezekiel 48:1), that is, near Rehob. Yahweh, then, while keeping His word to restore *all* of Israel in the Last Days, also respects Dan's ancient wish to distance themselves from Him as far as possible. So what did Dan give up? Only downtown Tel Aviv, which will certainly be among the most valuable pieces of real estate in the world during the thousand-year reign of Yahshua. Oops.

In a way, our “holdings” in the Kingdom of Heaven will also be predicated upon our participation in battle—the battle of life. When we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ (II Corinthians 5:10), we will be rewarded based upon the things we did in this world. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 should give us all pause.

(687) *Be aware of your insignificance in the light of Yahweh's love. “For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God; Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people*

for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. Yahweh did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because Yahweh loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, Yahweh has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 7:6-8) One gets the distinct impression that the nation of Israel, beginning with its patriarch, Abraham, was chosen by Yahweh as a “worst-case scenario.” God seems to have said to Himself, *If I can take a complete nobody, a stubborn and insecure pagan living in a pagan land, a man so insignificant he’s not even the head of his own household, and build of him a great nation that will come to know and love Me, then there is hope for the whole human race.* The Jews have often had the mistaken impression that because God chose them, they must be special, somehow better or more worthy than the gentiles. Yahweh here states that the opposite is true: “If I can make it here, I can make it *anywhere.*”

Of course, there wasn’t an imperative anywhere in there. That comes in the next sentence: **“Therefore know that Yahweh your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them.”** (Deuteronomy 7:9-11) Did you catch the counterintuitive connection? *Because* Yahweh chose to love us even though we were insignificant—*because* of His own oath and covenant (and not for anything we’ve done)—we are to know, comprehend, and embrace the fact that Yahweh is God. If we know He is God, we must deal with the reality of His deity: faithfulness, love, and mercy for those who reverence Him, and certain destruction—retribution in kind—for those who hate Him, whether they think He’s God or not. The “commandments, statutes, and judgments” that Moses handed down are for our own benefit. We who accept and acknowledge the deity of Yahweh know that and act accordingly.

A Land Set Apart

Yahweh called out Abram from the mass of humanity to create of him a separate people through whom He would reveal His plan for the salvation of the whole world. That part is relatively easy to comprehend. What's less obvious is why God, from the very beginning, set apart a piece of *land*—a tiny piece, as these things go—as a stage upon which to play out this drama. Why did he tell Abram to go to a place he'd never even heard of, and then say, **“All the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.... Arise, walk in the land?”** (Genesis 13:15, 17) Even more puzzling, why did God move Abraham's descendants in and out of the land like chess pieces over the centuries if this place was their permanent possession, their inheritance? Careful reflection leads us to the inescapable conclusion that the Land of Promise is a symbol of something much more fundamental and far reaching than it appears on the surface. It is a metaphor for something universal in mankind's spiritual experience.

The key to understanding what the Promised Land signifies is latent in the story of the exodus. After spending four hundred years in bondage in a land not their own, Israel was led through miraculous means out of that world and toward another. But moving into their new home—the same land originally promised to their father Abraham—wasn't expected to be a picnic. Canaan was populated by seven evil and warlike nations, all of them prepared to defend themselves. The Israelites had been slaves; now they would have to be soldiers. Egypt for Israel had been metaphorical of something we all experience: slavery in the world—living in bondage to sin. But the Promised Land doesn't represent heaven—a place beyond sin's reach. There are giants in the Land, leading armies fierce and innumerable. Yes, it's a land “flowing with milk and honey,” but there are also pitfalls, temptations, and battles to be fought. To one unprepared to trust Yahweh completely, it looks like a “land that devours its inhabitants.” The Promised Land represents the life we face as believers.

And so it is that Yahweh teaches through example and command what we are to do in the “Land,” this new battleground we face as we begin to trust Him. This place is fundamentally different from the world we left. We are no longer slaves here: our chains (and our defeatist mentality) must be left behind. Our Emancipator has made astonishing promises to us, some of which we can envision in our mind's eye and some that are too wonderful for the human imagination. Amazingly, our willingness to believe these promises, to choose to unreservedly trust in Yahweh's ability to bring them to fruition in our lives, is

what He considers virtue—perhaps the only righteous act we are capable of on our own. It is this righteousness, borne of trust, that keeps the lines of communication open between us and our Creator.

This ability to communicate is essential if we are to be successful in the wars we must constantly wage here in the Land of Promise. The enemy is as sneaky as he is strong: we need the best intel we can get. Yahweh is happy to provide it, and happier still when we follow His instructions. Our adversary, of course, would like to confuse us, distract us, or turn us from the truth, and his agents of disinformation can seem attractive and credible if we lose our ability to communicate with our God—our Commander in Chief. His perfect and unobstructed view of the battlefield will be of no use to us if we don't follow His orders, and it makes no difference whether our disobedience is due to lack of clear communication or to rebellion or laziness on our part. The consequences are the same: we'll lose ground on the front line. If we wish to gain ground in this war, we must stay in constant contact with "headquarters," praying without ceasing, studying to show ourselves approved. We must also be very careful to transmit our orders precisely as we received them, neither editing nor embellishing them, for our fellow soldiers' lives depend upon accurate communication just as much as ours do.

It bears repeating: the Promised Land represents the life we face as believers. Strangely enough, this battleground of ours isn't very big. It has well-defined borders, beyond which we have no mandate for waging war: we are neither equipped, trained, nor authorized to fight other peoples' battles for them. Nor is it our job to force our neighbors in the world to obey the orders we've been issued in the Promised Land by our Commander in Chief. We may (and should) invite them to follow our Leader, but only after they've chosen to do so are they to be welcomed as allies and brothers. Our battle, however, lies before us: eliminating the false gods that seek to deceive us, cleansing our lives of the things that defile us, and slaying the forces that would drag us back into bondage.

FAITHFUL PATRIARCHS

(688) *Forsake your old life in favor of Yahweh's new life.* "Now Yahweh had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" (Genesis 12:1-3) God *didn't* tell Abram, "Honor me with sacrifices and offerings and I'll make you the richest man in Ur." No, the promised blessing was predicated upon separation, a total break with his

past. Abram was asked to leave the only world he knew, trusting in a God whose name he didn't even know to keep His end of the bargain. We rightly laud Abraham as a man of faith, but often forget that he dragged his feet for years before he finally did what God had told him to do. He didn't actually "leave his father's house" until papa Terah was toes up, and even then didn't make a complete break: he took his nephew Lot (the son of his deceased brother Haran) along with him. Though Lot was also a worshipper of the true God Abram was following, he never quite left the world behind him. His failure to disengage (as uncle Abe finally did) precipitated one disaster after another throughout his life—and beyond.

We, too, are instructed to disengage from the world, to leave it behind, to separate ourselves from its influence. If separation to Yahweh entails "getting out from our father's house," forsaking our family, then we need to do so. Of course, some (myself included) are fortunate enough to have been born to godly parents who tried to raise me in the nurture and admonition of Yahweh. Abram was not so lucky. But even under the best of circumstances, our love for our earthly families must fade to insignificance in comparison to the brilliance of God's love. As Yahshua put it, **"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."** (Luke 14:26) This "hate" is only in contrast to our overwhelming love for Yahweh, of course. The reality is that in our love for Him, our comparative "hatred" for our families becomes, in fact, the deepest bond of human compassion imaginable.

- (689) *Look at God's promises from where you are. "And Yahweh said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: 'Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.'" (Genesis 13:14-17) It was only after Abram's final break with his old world—his separation from his nephew Lot, who was really more like a son to him—that Yahweh told him, "Okay, *now* you can open up the gift I've got for you." You can sense the eager anticipation in Yahweh's words, like a doting father giving his only child something really wonderful—I think God was more excited about this than Abram was. Yahweh wasn't content to merely give Abe the deed to the land and call it a day. He wanted him to experience the whole thing, to walk through it, to comprehend its scope, to know what his descendants could look forward to.*

At this point, of course, Abram had no children, making the gift of promised Land a good news-bad news story. So in the same breath, Yahweh also promised him that there would indeed be somebody to whom he could leave this wonderful inheritance—and not just a few, but eventually an innumerable multitude.

This is where faith entered the picture. The Land he could see. There it was, laid out before him, as far as the eye could see. It wasn't much of a stretch to envision the scattered peoples living there displaced before the inroads of Abram's ever expanding family tree. No, what took faith was visualizing this family tree itself. Abe and Sarai had been trying to have a child for decades. Now he was getting along in years, and her biological clock was winding down. Yet God said, "Trust Me," and Abram did. His faith consisted in being grateful for what he could see and honestly trusting God for what he could not. His personal reality had less to do with his perceived circumstances than with the Word of his God. And so it should be with us.

(690) *Live in the land of promise.* "There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar. Then Yahweh appeared to him and said: 'Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.'" (Genesis 26:1-5) Fast forward one generation. Not much progress has been made in the "great nation" department. Abraham's son Isaac has fathered twin boys by this time, though his wife Rebekah had been barren for the first twenty years of their marriage. So in language very similar to the promise He had made to Abram, Yahweh repeats the promise to his son Isaac. We have already seen that Yahweh sometimes asks us to take detours (see Precept #658), but these side trips never change the ultimate goal—living in the Land of Promise. And where is that? Somewhere other than Egypt (a.k.a. the world). It's the land of which Yahweh has "told us." The Land of Promise is *being in communication with Him*.

Note something remarkable at the end of this passage. Yahweh tells us why He has made these promises to Isaac: "**because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.**" Wait a minute! Abraham preceded Moses, the "great lawgiver," by half a

millennium. How then could he have kept Gods commandments, statutes, and laws? (And yes, in case you were wondering, the word translated “law” here *is* “torah.”) Abraham never performed ninety-nine percent of the deeds required in the “Torah” (that is, the “Law of Moses”), and the other one percent was mostly kept out of sheer coincidence. Even the rite of circumcision was performed only *after* Abraham had been declared “righteous” by virtue of his faith. Clearly, Yahweh had something else in mind when He said this.

As I’ve said until I’m blue in the face, virtually the entire Torah is an elaborate picture of Yahweh’s plan for our redemption, ultimately to be fulfilled in the sacrifice of His Messiah, Yahshua. That’s why Maimonides and his ilk have so much trouble seeing past the letter of the law, which is inherently un-keepable—they refuse to open their eyes to the larger truth. But what did Abraham do to earn these lofty accolades—being hailed as a keeper of God’s commandments, statutes, and laws? It wasn’t obeying Yahweh’s original instruction, **“Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.”** As we have seen, Abe took half a lifetime doing this, and even then he messed it up by bringing Lot with him. He also botched God’s “child of promise” prediction by taking matters into his own hands with Hagar.

No, it was his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, the very son of promise, at God’s command on Mount Moriah (recorded in Genesis 22). It was his stubborn and unyielding trust in God, his unreasonable, counterintuitive faith that even if he slew Isaac as instructed, Yahweh would somehow restore the boy to life. It was the ultimate dress rehearsal of the crucifixion of the Messiah precisely two thousand years later—at the very same location—and Abraham played his part to perfection. *This* was how Abraham could be said to have “kept the torah” five hundred years before Moses delivered it. In fact, this one statement, that **“Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws,”** *proves* beyond a reasonable doubt that Yahshua is Yahweh’s Anointed One. The Torah, at its core, says exactly the same thing Abraham’s actions did.

CREATING A HOMELAND

- (691) *Heed Yahweh’s messenger.* **“Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the**

Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off.” (Exodus 23:20-23) An “angel” (a word transliterated from the Greek *aggelos*—Hebrew: *malak*) is a messenger sent from Yahweh. These are spirit beings, created to implement Yahweh’s directives on our behalf in the world. We are given rare glimpses of their activities throughout scripture, but I get the feeling their presence is far more prevalent than we realize (e.g. II Kings 6:17). Yahweh assigned one of these messengers (*one* was apparently enough) to lead 600,000 Israelite soldiers into battle against the Canaanite tribes. He makes it quite clear here that angels speak in Yahweh’s name and with His authority—we are to obey them as they obey God. But Yahweh has not directed them to “pardon our transgressions.” That’s not their job; it’s His. Therefore, it’s a really bad idea to “provoke” an angel by willfully flouting the instructions he has been tasked to carry out by Yahweh.

There is a preview here of the famous line, “The enemy of my enemy is my friend” (Sun Tzu: *The Art of War*). This may be quite true when the enemy of your enemy is an angel of Yahweh, but I hasten to point out that there is no universal, causal truth to the maxim. It is altogether possible—even probable—to have two enemies at the same time who also hate each other. American foreign policy is a total shambles because we have systematically pursued this patent prevarication, supporting the lesser of two evils as if they were our friends. We feared Hitler, so we supported Stalin. Then we hated the Soviets, so we supported Osama Bin Laden’s Afghan Mujahideen rebels. We despised Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini, so we supported Iraq’s dictator Saddam Hussein. On a more personal level, we distrust Democrats, so we vote Republican, or *vice versa*. When are we going to learn that we can’t effectively fight evil by supporting an opposing evil? Yahweh calls us to be set-apart from the world—to *flee* from Babylon, not to fight it by throwing in our lot with Nineveh.

(692) *Follow Yahweh while leading His people.* “**And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin.’ So Yahweh plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made.**” (Exodus 32:33-35) I love a parade: Yahweh leads, followed by His angel, followed by Moses, followed by the people. A parade is supposed to follow a route and direction and pace set by the leader. But Moses discovered early in the game that the people don’t always follow the parade plan. They’ve been known to stop dead in their tracks, duck down alleyways, even turn around and go in the wrong direction. Moses told Yahweh that he was willing to

take responsibility for those who refused to follow Him, but God, as always, let each individual choose his own fate—Moses couldn't pay for the sins of the others. His job was to lead in the footsteps of Yahweh, not to force people to follow.

This passage contains the first Biblical mention of a “Book of Life” that contains the names of Yahweh’s redeemed. Note that our names are all apparently written there to begin with; they are only “blotted out” because we sin against Yahweh, that is, we fall short of His standards, we miss the target of perfection. The rub, of course, is that we’ve all done that, we’ve all fallen short of the glory of God. But notice the future tense: “I *will* blot him out; I *will* visit punishment upon them.” They had already sinned, but punishment had not yet fallen and their names had not yet been removed. We have our whole lifetimes (admittedly unpredictable in duration) in which to figure things out. If during that time we elect to receive the garments of righteousness Yahweh freely offers us—garments of light that obliterate our sins—then our names remain in the Book when we die. In the end, one has to *choose* to be taken out of Yahweh’s register of the living. If we elect not to avail ourselves of His grace, or worse, if we align ourselves with the spirit of the adversary, then the end of mortal life also marks the end of the privilege of remaining in the Lamb’s Book of Life, the *Who’s Who* of heaven.

(693) *Don't be a stiff-necked people.* “Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Depart and go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, “To your descendants I will give it.” And I will send My Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.’” (Exodus 33:1-3) Here we see why Yahweh assigned the angel to go before Israel into the Promised Land. It’s because they were stubborn and “stiff-necked,” prone to rebellion and ungratefulness. It was as if Yahweh said to Himself, “If I remain in close proximity to these people, I’m going to lash out at their ridiculous antics until they’re all dead. And that won’t do: they’re my covenant people.” So He assigned to an angel the task of leading them into Canaan. One wonders if angels secretly groan when they get jobs like this.

We should ponder what Israel gave up by their disobedience. Yes, they were still Yahweh’s chosen people, the recipients of the unilateral promises of God, but for their own sakes, He distanced Himself from them. One wonders how different the conquest of Canaan might have been

if the entire nation had approached the task with the enthusiasm of Caleb and the faithfulness of Joshua—following Yahweh directly instead of getting their directions via their angelic middleman.

Ancient Israel had nothing on today's believers in the “stiff-neck” department, I'm afraid. Here we are, with the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, and we *still* stumble our way through life, seemingly powerless to win the slightest skirmish with the world. We can't force the world to love Yahweh as we do, of course, but with all that power available to us, you'd think we could at least stand up to the occasional temptation. Our failures are good for one thing, though: they teach us what we've been saved *from*. Yahshua, who knows what we're up against, wrote these encouraging words to this final generation: **“I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.... Behold, I come quickly (i.e., suddenly). Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”** (Revelation 3:8, 11)

What's the real problem with having a stiff neck? It's the inability to look around us, to see what's going on. If we remain stuck in our traditional religious ruts, eyes forward, neck rigid—if we never look up to see how close we are to the Kingdom of Heaven—we'll never appreciate or utilize the power we possess as Spirit-indwelled believers.

- (694) *When Yahweh promises miracles, expect miracles.* **“And He said: ‘Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of Yahweh. For it is an awesome thing that I will do with you. Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I am driving out from before you the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.’”** (Exodus 34:10-11) Twice here, Yahweh tells us to “Behold!” The Hebrew word *hinneh* is an interjection demanding attention: *look at this, see what I'm showing you, pay attention!* Pay attention to what? To Yahweh's promise to do the impossible for Israel: allow them to defeat seven nations (these six plus the Gergashites) who were all militarily superior to the Israelites and well entrenched in the land (see Mitzvot #601 and #602). He Himself describes this feat as an unprecedented “marvel,” an “awesome thing.” Those familiar with the conquest of Canaan tend to focus on the failures of Israel, their unfaithfulness and compromise that in the end got them thrown out of the Land like their predecessors. While that's true, we often forget that the seven nations disappeared so completely that “scholars” in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries declared for sheer lack of physical evidence that such mighty nations as the Hittites never existed except in the minds of Jewish fictioneers.

Archeology has since proved their foolishness in doubting God's word. Meanwhile Israel, against all odds (if you don't countenance Yahweh's covenant), is back in the Land as a nation. That indeed is an "awesome thing," something we all need to "behold."

The other imperative here is, **"Observe what I command you this day."** We'll take a closer look at the specific commands in the following precept. Note for now that the verb "observe" means more than merely looking at something. The word is *shamar*: "To keep, guard, observe, give heed; have charge of, to watch for, wait for; to retain, treasure up (in memory); to celebrate (sabbath or covenant or commands), or perform (vow), to preserve, protect; to be on one's guard, take heed, take care, beware." (S) This definition makes it a pretty good match for the Greek verb *tereo*, used in a passage referenced in the previous Precept: **"Because you have kept (*tereo*) My command to persevere, I also will keep (*tereo*) you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."** (Revelation 3:10) The ekklesia at Philadelphia is being told that because they have heeded Yahweh's instructions (like the one in Exodus 34, explained below), they will not be required to endure the crucible of the Tribulation.

- (695) *Make no covenants with evil.* **"Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for Yahweh, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods."** (Exodus 34:12-16) As He has so many times in so many ways, Yahweh is telling us to remain separate—Holy—set apart from the world and its influences. Since we today are not mandated to physically make war on Canaan, we can't physically "destroy, break, or cut down" the appurtenances of the false gods that plague our world. But that doesn't mean we should make peace with them, either. The core principle remains: we are to make no covenants with the idolaters where we live. We are not to make deals with the devil.

This can be more complicated than it looks. It entails more than merely refusing to participate in overt idolatry, like sacrificing a goat to Satan in the rotunda of the capitol building. The adversary's inroads are subtle and ubiquitous in our society. They permeate our educational, governmental, commercial, and even religious institutions. Our most basic

cultural traditions are either pagan or secular; they almost never honor Yahweh unless we make a conscious effort to make them do so, and even then we are invariably clumsy and inept in our efforts to honor God in our public institutions. That's because belief is a personal matter. It is as individuals that we must maintain a state of constant vigilance, filtering everything we see and hear through the lens of the knowledge of Yahweh, sifting out the worthless chaff and accepting only the truth.

I'm not calling for a monastic existence, however. We are supposed to be part of the solution, an impossible task if we never face the problem. The Israelites had to go into Canaan in order to deal with its evil, and we in turn are counseled to be "*in* the world but not *of* it." Yahshua's instructions were to "Occupy till I come," and "Feed my sheep." Yes, we are to "flee from Babylon," that is, avoid any compromise with the world's counterfeit schemes promising "salvation." But we are not to retreat from the world until Yahweh Himself takes us out of here. We still have a job to do. The timing is His alone.

(696) *Know that disobedience carries consequences.* "Now Yahweh said to Moses: 'Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel. And when you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered. For in the Wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes.' (These are the waters of Meribah, at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin.)" (Numbers 27:12-14) In Exodus 17, Moses had been instructed to strike the rock to bring forth living water, and he had done so. But later, in similar circumstances (Numbers 20, the incident being referred to here), having been told by Yahweh to *speak* to the rock, Moses instead angrily struck it twice with his rod, ruining the picture God was so patiently painting for us.

The meaning of the metaphor, this side of Calvary, is easy to see: Yahshua the Messiah (the Rock) would be struck down once for our sins, and His death would bring life to a thirsty, dying world. But after that singular sacrifice, further atonement would never be necessary. From that moment on, the waters of life and cleansing would flow from Christ our Rock—and all we'd have to do is *ask for it*. Moses' angry action was, as Yahweh put it, a "rebellion" that left the impression that God was something less than holy—that He, like the false gods of Egypt and Canaan, required constant and repeated appeasement. The truth, which Moses had obscured, was quite the opposite: Yahweh would require *one* perfect sacrifice (one that He Himself would provide), and that sacrifice would thenceforth enable open communication between God and man.

It's true that Yahweh's instructions on the matter are sufficient to tell us what He meant to happen. But (and this is the lesson here) that doesn't let Moses off the hook: his "rebellion" would have personal consequences; in this case, his permission to enter the Promised Land to which He had led the Israelites was rescinded. Bear in mind that he was 120 years old at this point: he couldn't have been a particularly effective warrior—or farmer, for that matter. Even his "young" protégé Joshua was now one of the oldest guys left in the nation. So Moses' death on the east side of the Jordan (instead of the west) was for all intents and purposes symbolic. And that makes perfect sense. That is, if Yahweh had said and done nothing when Moses goofed up the metaphor at Kadesh, we might never have figured out what His picture was supposed to have shown us. For that matter, we might not even have realized that it *was* a picture.

Lest we yawn and conclude that this is all historical and theoretical minutiae, I hasten to point out that we today are still tasked with acting out Yahweh's pictures. For their part, Israel was supposed to keep the precepts and statutes of the Torah for all time, because these things are invariably symbolic of the eternal Messiah and the redemption He provides. Thus we see the introductory formula repeated over and over again: "And Yahweh said to Moses, speak to the children of Israel, and say to them...." And the inevitable conclusion is every bit as significant: "...It shall be a statute forever, throughout your generations." Israel, in other words, was to continue rehearsing the symbols Yahweh instituted in the Torah as long as they walked the earth—symbols that are precise, focused, and detailed snapshots of Yahweh's plan for our salvation. Like Moses, Israel failed in their task, and like Moses, their disobedience has brought symbolically significant consequences—no less real because we can still figure out from the instructions themselves what Yahweh wanted to teach us.

And what about the Ekklesia, the called-out assembly of Yahshua? What pictures are we to reflect in our lives and walks? They are far less detailed or specific, and more fundamental, even visceral, but they exist nevertheless. We, as human beings who honor Yahweh through His "Son," humbly appreciate that we are "made in the image and likeness of God." This is the key to the symbolic role we are to play in His world. God is love; we too are to love—unconditionally, unreservedly. Yahweh is holy; we too are to be set apart, called out from the world. His Spirit dwells within us, comforting, consoling, and convicting; we, then, are to walk the earth as salt and light, preserving and illuminating mankind. Yahshua gave His life for the Church; thus we are to pick up our crosses daily and follow Him.

(697) *Dispossess idolatry.* “Now Yahweh spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places; you shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess.’” (Numbers 33:50-53) “Crossing the Jordan” is often mistakenly seen as a metaphor for “going to heaven.” It is nothing of the sort, but rather a picture of leaving the world’s bondage to enter a new life under Yahweh’s sovereignty. We are no longer slaves: now we are soldiers. We have been freed from oppression, but we still have enemies, adversaries, those who would separate us from God’s love, endeavoring to repeal the holiness to which we have been called.

The appurtenances of spiritual falsehood are no longer obvious, physical artifacts like “engraved stones” or “molded images.” We can no longer attack its “high places” with weapons of war. These days, the inroads of satanic influence are so subtle and pervasive, we won’t even recognize them unless we are firmly grounded in Yahweh, and at the same time mentally set apart from the world. Speaking for Americans, our entire culture is based on what Paul called “having a form of godliness but denying its power.” That is, we are constantly told by our media, politicians, educators, scientists, commercial interests, and even some of our clergy that we can (and will) build a “perfect” society without paying heed to Yahweh.

Our media subtly promotes a philosophy of “if it feels good, it must *be* good,” which quite by accident aligns our actions (if not our motivations) with God’s word occasionally. Our politicians publicly extol “doing the right thing” while carefully avoiding any specific reference to the One who set the standards of righteousness in the first place. Our educators teach our children that we are just animals—highly evolved beings that are only at the top of the food chain because we happen to be more “fit” to be there than other species. Ironically, they get upset when bullies advance their theories on the playground. Our scientists, who witness evidence of an omnipotent Creator in every new discovery, nevertheless refuse to acknowledge Him, whether out of pride, shortsightedness, or fear of losing their funding. Our commercial interests blatantly advertise that life will become wonderful if only we’ll buy their products—drive their cars, use their deodorant, drink their liquor, and clean our impossibly expensive homes with their gadgets, all procured with money we’ve borrowed from them. And our clergy, as often as not, are busy encouraging us to do good works and write large checks instead of introducing us to Yahweh (who

sees our best works and most charitable contributions as pointless rubbish if done without a personal relationship with Him). The myth of “good without God” is as deceptive and damning as any pagan idol.

What will happen to us if we fail to identify and eliminate the influence of these ubiquitous wolves in sheep’s clothing? **“But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell. Moreover it shall be that I will do to you as I thought to do to them.”** (Numbers 33: 55-56) Yeah, that sounds bad. So how can we “drive out the inhabitants of the land” these days? Basically, by doing the same things the Israelites were instructed to do: (1) Honor Yahweh alone, for He alone has freed us from our chains; (2) Worship and serve nothing other than Him; (3) Don’t associate anything worthless or harmful with the name of Yahweh; (4) Celebrate Yahweh’s timeline for the redemption of mankind, revealed as scripture’s ubiquitous six-plus-one pattern; (5) Give Yahweh’s instruction all the weight it deserves, and be receptive to the voice of the Holy Spirit within you; (6) Never prevent another person from establishing a personal relationship with Yahweh; (7) Love Yahweh with all of your heart, soul, and mind, and receive His Messiah, Yahshua; (8) Trust Yahweh to provide for your needs, including providing the means to provide for your own needs; (9) Be truthful; and (10) Be content with what Yahweh has given you, without regard to what others may possess. Does all of that sound vaguely familiar? It should: it’s a paraphrase of the Ten Commandments, fine-tuned for Yahshua’s ekklesia at the end of the age. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying.

- (698) *Divide the Land equitably.* **“And you shall divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families; to the larger you shall give a larger inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give a smaller inheritance; there everyone’s inheritance shall be whatever falls to him by lot. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers.”** (Numbers 33:54) Once we get past the obvious underlying principle that “Yahweh is fair-minded,” we need to figure out what He’s telling us today, since at this late date the division of Canaan under Joshua is but a distant and hazy historical footnote. If, as I have proposed, crossing the Jordan is a metaphor for leaving the world’s servitude to dwell in Yahweh’s kingdom, then our “inheritance” there, our temporal circumstance in this mortal life, is a matter of chance, history, and expended effort in an overall matrix of God’s sovereignty. Whether we happen to come from a big, powerful “tribe” or find ourselves a citizen of a small, weak one—in other words, whether we find ourselves privileged and materially blessed in this life or humbled by our

circumstances—our opportunities for *spiritual* success are fundamentally equal. God is no respecter of persons. Put into modern terms, a poor inner city kid may not have the same temporal advantages as an Ivy League blue blood scion, but their *spiritual* opportunity—their potential for greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven—is identical. That is why we are warned throughout scripture to pay no heed to differences in wealth, influence, or status in this world. Yahweh doesn't measure greatness the way men do. Yahshua admonished us: **“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.... Indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last.”** (Luke 13:24, 30)

How, then, are we to “divide the land equitably” in today's world? By loving people, not things. By using things, not people. By heeding truth, not peer pressure. By rewarding character, not clout. By being fair minded, not calculating. By dispensing mercy, not justice. By loving our neighbors as ourselves. In short, by learning to see things through the eyes of God.

BOUNDARIES AND BORDERS

(699) *Know Israel's boundaries: the southern border.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Command the children of Israel, and say to them: “When you come into the land of Canaan, this is the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance—the land of Canaan to its boundaries. Your southern border shall be from the Wilderness of Zin along the border of Edom; then your southern border shall extend eastward to the end of the Salt Sea; your border shall turn from the southern side of the Ascent of Akrabbim, continue to Zin, and be on the south of Kadesh Barnea; then it shall go on to Hazar Addar, and continue to Azmon; the border shall turn from Azmon to the Brook of Egypt, and it shall end at the Sea.”’”** (Numbers 34:1-5) I can't figure out why the world has such a hard time figuring out where the borders of the Jewish state of Israel ought to be. No less a personage than Almighty God told us where their borders are, with landmarks as precise as if He had given us GPS coordinates. Put another way, if asked where the Palestinian state should be, the answer according to Yahweh is: somewhere outside these borders. I realize nobody wants to hear it, but the Palestinian Arabs already have a state of their own, one in which they are the majority ethnic population. It's called Jordan.

I covered the whole subject of Israel's permanent borders in some detail of Chapter 6 of *Future History*: “Ground Zero.” So I'll just hit the high spots here. Israel's southern border forms a curve dipping about twenty miles south from the southern shore of the Dead Sea, arcing south, then west, then north, and finally ending at the Brook of Egypt (today's

Wadi el-Arish), which empties into the southwestern corner of the Mediterranean Sea. Note that because of the faithlessness of the spies sent into the promised land right after the exodus, the tongue of the southern Negev reaching down to the Gulf of Aqaba (including the port of Eliat—the ancient Ezion Geber) was not included in Israel’s tribal territory (though the original promise extended all the way from the Red Sea to the Euphrates River).

- (700) *Know Israel’s boundaries: the western border.* **“As for the western border, you shall have the Great Sea for a border; this shall be your western border.”** (Numbers 34:6) Nobody seems to dispute this one, except of course for a billion Muslims who would like to see the Mediterranean as Israel’s *eastern* border. For the geographically challenged, this means they’d like to see the Jews pushed into the sea, and they’ve been working toward that goal off and on ever since Israel’s May 1948 declaration of independence. They’ve already negotiated the gullible Israelis out of the Gaza Strip, which according to Numbers 34 should never have been surrendered. Politicians today who would like to carve up Israel into “Jewish” and “Palestinian” states ought to listen more carefully to the Palestinians themselves: their published maps of the Middle East show no Israel at all, only Palestine. They have no intention of “sharing” the land. The Muslims will not be satisfied until they can finish what Adolph Hitler started. (No, that’s not right: they will *never* be satisfied. But ridding the world of Israel is their primary goal.)
- (701) *Know Israel’s boundaries: the northern border.* **“And this shall be your northern border: From the Great Sea you shall mark out your border line to Mount Hor; from Mount Hor you shall mark out your border to the entrance of Hamath; then the direction of the border shall be toward Zedad; the border shall proceed to Ziphron, and it shall end at Hazar Enan. This shall be your northern border.”** (Numbers 34:7-9) Allow me to quote from *Future History*: “This is obviously not the famous Mount Hor on the border of Edom where Aaron was buried. It is rather the mountain known later as Tavros Umanis, mentioned in Song of Solomon 4:8 as Amanah. It is located near the ancient seacoast town of Byblos—slightly north of the 34th parallel, near Lebanon’s northern border, midway between Beirut and Tripoli. The entrance of Hamath is the southern end of the valley between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains that leads north to the present Syrian city of Hama. It’s about forty miles inland from Byblos. Zedad I take to be the town of Sadad, about the latitude of modern Tripoli, perhaps sixty miles inland. Northeast of Damascus lies a mountain called Djebel Sefira, whose name is likely derived from Ziphron. The border then moves west a bit: Hazar Enan is probably the Arab village of Dar Anon (the Arabic *Dar*, or

Hebrew *Hazar*, means “dwelling;” *Anon/Enan* means “spring”), about twenty-five miles northwest of Damascus.”

In other words, almost all of Lebanon belongs to Israel, along with a big chunk of western Syria, north of Damascus. If you don’t like it, don’t blame me; take it up with Yahweh. And note as well that these borders are still over a hundred miles shy of reaching the northern border of the original promise: the Euphrates River.

(702) *Know Israel’s boundaries: the eastern border.* “**You shall mark out your eastern border from Hazar Enan to Shepham; the border shall go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain; the border shall go down and reach to the eastern side of the Sea of Chinnereth; the border shall go down along the Jordan, and it shall end at the Salt Sea. This shall be your land with its surrounding boundaries.**” (Numbers 34:10-12) Quoting again from *Future History*: “The line continues south. Targum Jonathan identifies Shepham with Aphmia, which is Baniyas, about four miles east of Laish, a.k.a. Dan. Ironically, this area was traditionally reckoned as the northern tip of Israel: the idiom ‘from Dan to Beersheba,’ meant the whole country.... Ain is apparently *Ein al Malcha*, or ‘salt spring,’ located between Kedesh and the Sea of Semechonitis, the small body of water upstream from the Sea of Galilee later known as Lake Huleh. Riblah must have been just east of this, i.e., on the northern shore of Lake Huleh. The Sea of Chinnereth, or Galilee, was included in Israel’s territory. The rest of the borderline simply follows the Jordan River south to the Dead Sea.”

The obvious bone of contention here is what’s erroneously known as the “West Bank,” that huge bite of Israel’s backside that was “occupied” by Jordan from the 1948 war until Israel was able to win it back in 1967. Yahweh *didn’t* deed it to Ammon (the northern component of modern Jordan). Every geographical description of the Land in Scripture names the Jordan River as Israel’s eastern border at this latitude. I believe that this territory (along with the disposition of Jerusalem) will be the heart of the issue that’s “settled” with the Antichrist’s “covenant with many,” the confirmation of which is the starting gun for the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, a.k.a. the Tribulation.

Israel’s persistent disobedience for the last couple of millennia has not abrogated Yahweh’s promise of territorial sovereignty over these lands. Note that the lands described in Ezekiel 47:13-20—clearly a prophetic passage describing the boundaries of Israel and how the land is to be distributed between the twelve tribes during Yahshua’s coming Millennial reign—are virtually identical to those given in Numbers 34. I am further convinced that the original promises to the patriarchs, that the Land would

stretch from the Red Sea (perhaps meaning only the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba) to the Euphrates, and from the Great Sea (the Med) to the desert, will become a literal reality during the Kingdom age. The outlying areas—those beyond specific tribal boundaries to the north and south—will apparently be held in common trust, perhaps like our American national parks are to us. This theory is admittedly not spelled out specifically in scripture, but I have never known Yahweh to abrogate His promises, even really old ones that haven't been mentioned for a few millennia.

KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

- (703) *The inheritance of a wife is that of her husband.* **“Now the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near and spoke before Moses and before the leaders, the chief fathers of the children of Israel. And they said: ‘Yahweh commanded my lord Moses to give the land as an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel, and my lord was commanded by Yahweh to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters. Now if they are married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and it will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so it will be taken from the lot of our inheritance. And when the Jubilee of the children of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so their inheritance will be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers.’”** (Numbers 36:1-4) This is in reference to a situation that was discussed in Numbers 27:1-11. Zelophehad had fathered five daughters but no sons, begging the question of what was supposed to happen to the family lands. There Yahweh had declared, **“You shall surely give [the daughters of Zelophehad] a possession of inheritance among their father’s brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them.”** (Numbers 27:7)

So far, so good. The principle has been established that a woman is not a second-class citizen or a possession to be owned by a man in God’s economy (the antithesis of the way things are in Islam). She as a child of her father has property rights. The fact remains, however, that in the normal order of things, the *sons* of a family would inherit the land, not the daughters. Why? Because when a woman married, her husband’s inheritance in effect became hers, since they were now “one.” Thus though the inheritance followed the male line, no one was left high and dry. Hence the concern voiced here in Numbers 36: if a woman who had inherited her father’s estate married outside her tribe, the land would

change hands to her husband's tribe when it was left to the next generation—something Yahweh never intended. I'll have more to say about that in the following precept, but first let's pause and reflect on the issue of whose inheritance goes where, and why.

Practically every facet of normal life, if it's mentioned in the Torah, has some symbolic counterpart in Yahweh's plan for our redemption. Thus we see that men and women were ordinarily expected to marry and raise families, taking upon themselves the roles God assigned them to teach the human race about His own nature: the Father is the authority, protector, and provider. The Mother (corresponding to the Holy Spirit) is the One who comforts, consoles, guides, and convicts. People who grow up in functional households (an increasingly rare circumstance, I'm afraid) know this intuitively. The love within this union produces offspring—humanity, the preeminent “firstborn” of which is Yahshua. We who follow Him into the family have an example, a mentor, One who has gone through everything we will as we grow up—yet without sin against the Father, Yahweh. In one respect, then, He is like our big brother. But in another way, He is like our betrothed husband, and we are His bride. (As if to confirm this symbolic duality, the “Beloved” in the Song of Solomon repeatedly refers to his bride as “my sister, my spouse.”)

This is where the inheritance comes into play. Being the “Son of God,” our beloved Yahshua is heir to, well, *everything*. We, by contrast, are able to bring nothing to the marriage but ourselves. Furthermore, while we can see our own faults well enough, our betrothed sees nothing but beauty in us: love is blind. He has not espoused us in order to gain anything we have or do; on the contrary, upon consummation of our vows, everything He owns—the whole universe—will become ours as well. And there's no “pre-nuptial agreement.” Our marriage, you see, is not a partnership. It is a corporation: we are becoming one entity. (Our “vows,” I surmise, will be consummated at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb described in Revelation 19, apparently taking place in heaven while the Tribulation is raging on earth.)

- (704) *The inheritance must not leave the tribe.* “Then Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of Yahweh, saying: “What the tribe of the sons of Joseph speaks is right. This is what Yahweh commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, ‘Let them marry whom they think best, but they may marry only within the family of their father's tribe.’ So the inheritance of the children of Israel shall not change hands from tribe to tribe, for every one of the children of Israel shall keep the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel shall

be the wife of one of the family of her father's tribe, so that the children of Israel each may possess the inheritance of his fathers. Thus no inheritance shall change hands from one tribe to another, but every tribe of the children of Israel shall keep its own inheritance." (Numbers 36:5-9) Yahweh's solution to the problem was simple: the five daughters of Zelophehad who had inherited their father's land would have to restrict their marriage prospects to the tribe of Joseph—not a big sacrifice, since there were fifty-two thousand able-bodied men in Manasseh (Zelophehad's tribe) and another thirty-two thousand in Ephraim at the time. A target-rich environment, so to speak. Problem solved.

We, however, need to ask a more fundamental question. Why was it so important to keep the inheritance within the tribe? I believe the answer becomes a bit clearer if we think of "the inheritance" as more than just a plot of land or a few sheep. In a larger sense it is the individual destiny of each tribe, their prophetic heritage. On his deathbed, Jacob/Israel called his twelve sons together and gave them his "blessing," telling each of them what, in his words, "**shall befall you in the last days.**" (Genesis 49:1) Each son—through his progeny—had a distinct prophetic destiny.

Reuben was "unstable as water," and would "not excel." Simeon and Levi were grouped together, and both, in different ways, were to be "divided in Jacob" and "scattered in Israel." Judah, in contrast, would have the "praise" of his brothers, ultimately being the tribe from whom the scepter of Israelite royalty would never depart. (Thus keeping Judah set apart was critical to Yahweh's unfolding plan of redemption, for the Anointed King, Yahshua, would descend from this tribe.) Zebulun would become a seafaring people, while Issachar would become "a band of slaves." Dan would be known for its satanic proclivities: "a serpent by the way, a viper by the path." Gad would enjoy military success, Asher would prosper materially, and Naphtali would "give words of beauty." Joseph (since Jacob did not distinguish between Manasseh and Ephraim here) would be blessed of God. (It's therefore significant that the daughters of Zelophehad were told to marry within the tribe of *Joseph*; they were not restricted to their own semi-tribe of Manasseh.) And finally, Benjamin was predicted to become a predator. (Saul of Tarsus, a Benjamite, fairly leaps to mind.) The twelve tribes yielded almost that many utterly diverse prophetic destinies, which, as far as we can tell from the historical record, came to pass just as predicted. No wonder Yahweh desired to keep their inheritances distinct from one another. There was far more to this than a bit of acreage changing hands over time.

(705) *Do not add or subtract from God's Word.* **"Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which Yahweh, God of your fathers, is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of Yahweh your God which I command you."** (Deuteronomy 4:1-2) More than any single precept in the Torah, this one indicts rabbinical Judaism, pinpointing the *modus operandi* whereby it twists scripture into a bloated and misleading caricature of itself. It was no "mistake," no mere oversight, that Maimonides failed to list this among his 613 mitzvot. He purposely avoided this one, for it's a scathing indictment of his own methods.

If you'll recall the "blessings and cursings" passages, the blessings were predicated upon obedience: **"If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them..."** (Leviticus 26:3) or **"If you diligently obey the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all His commandments..."** (Deuteronomy 28:1). Here we discover that the key to being able to **"keep the commandments of Yahweh your God"** is to neither add to nor subtract from them. We make enough inadvertent mistakes without purposely tampering with God's Word. This principle is so important, it was repeated (and given teeth) at the end of the very last book in the Bible: **"For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."** (Revelation 22:18-19) It therefore behooves us to consider carefully what it is to "add to" or "subtract from" scripture.

I, for one, walk on eggshells around passages like this. After all, it is my job to examine the Word and explain what's there—what it means, what its significance is. There's a very fine line between explaining something and embellishing it. Exegesis can, with very little effort, morph into eisegesis. And although I'm careful to put scriptural quotes in a contrasting font so folks can distinguish what Yahweh said from what I said, it's all too easy to equate my ramblings with God's wisdom. Please resist the temptation to do that.

On the other hand, I know for a fact that I miss stuff, even if I'm looking really hard for it. I can't count the number of times I've written about a passage, only to later hear my pastor cover the same territory and come up with a completely different application, no less valid than my own. Have we both therefore "subtracted" from scripture? No, I don't think so, for three simple reasons: (1) We weren't purposely trying to

conceal anything; (2) God's word is an incredibly rich treasury of truth, whose lessons can often be of benefit to us on many different levels; and (3) the Holy Spirit reveals Biblical truths to us as we need them, as we become ready to receive them, and until that happens, they're just words on a page. A classic example: before the signs heralding the end of the age began appearing, the Book of Revelation was a baffling mystery to people (and it still is to many). No less a scholar than Martin Luther was so puzzled by Revelation, he is said to have remarked, "Even if it were a blessed thing to believe what is contained in it, no man knows what that is." The truths of this enigmatic book were opaque in Luther's day. They are becoming more lucid by the minute in ours.

But scriptural subtraction does go on today. Rabbinical Judaism, most significantly, has subtracted the underlying reality that supports and explains the entire Tanach: that Yahweh's Messiah—Yahshua of Nazareth—would fulfill the Torah and become the atonement for our sins, reconciling us to God. But "Christian-dumb" is guilty too. Catholicism subtracts the principle of salvation by grace alone, insisting that works and alms and penance are required as well. Protestants tend to subtract whatever they don't understand, like the Torah's role, God's undying devotion to Israel, scriptural precepts that no longer line up with today's pathetic societal mores, or anything requiring a miracle. There are whole denominations that have subtracted such basic pillars as the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, or His bodily resurrection from their theologies—gutting the Bible in the process. Even Evangelicals can fall prey to the subtraction trap. For them, it's usually in the form of concentrating on one or two narrow doctrines (valid or not) to the purposeful exclusion of everything else in scripture. It could be prophecy, finances and giving, the gifts of the Spirit, praise and worship, or whatever. We need to learn to take the *whole* counsel of God, not just the parts that tickle our fancy.

And what about adding to it? The rabbis have historically made a contact sport out of this. Yahweh says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it set apart." The rabbis say that you can therefore lift only a certain weight or walk a certain distance before you become a lawbreaker. Yahweh says, "Don't boil a kid in its mother's milk." The sages conclude that you can't eat meat and dairy products in the same meal, or you've broken the Law of God. No, you've broken the law *of the rabbis*—which is not at all the same thing. They've added to the instructions that Yahweh gave to Moses, doing precisely what he told them not to do. Christians too add dumb and destructive things to our faith, transforming a personal relationship with Yahweh into a pointless religion. We hold onto our traditions for dear life while clinging to our questionable doctrines out of

sheer institutional stubbornness. And when someone points out where we've erred, we look at him with suspicion and hostility.

As in politics, a revolution in spiritual matters now and then is a healthy thing. We need to shake off the cobwebs of complacency, examine the Word for ourselves, and take action based on what *we* find there—not on what somebody has told us about it (and that “somebody” includes me, folks). We need to be honest with ourselves: does what we find in scripture align perfectly with what we're being taught by men? Does it align with the way we live our lives? If we find that we're doing or believing something that's not supported by the Word, or conversely, if we discover that something we *don't* do or believe is commanded of us in scripture, we need to have the courage to repent, turn around, go the other direction. We need to drop what's been added, and restore what's been taken away from our scriptural experience. Why? So that we **“may live, and go in and possess the land.”**

The Tabernacle of God

A hundred years ago when I was in college, I studied art (much to my father's chagrin). Besides my own narrow field of specialization, the curriculum required classes in a broad range of quasi-related subjects, designed (I presume) to teach us to think conceptually—to look at the broad picture, not just individual pieces of the human puzzle. So I not only studied painting, drawing, illustration, and sculpture. There was also industrial design, materials technology, biology and chemistry. Ceramics, metal-smithing, printmaking, and fabric design courses taught valuable lessons in craftsmanship. Architectural design (without the math), graphics, advertising, interior design, and theater/set design were buttressed by studies in psychology, anthropology, and art history.

I didn't realize until years later that my higher education had done far more than prepare me to hold down a job (which was, truth be told, where it had essentially failed). It had taught me to see the world as something more than the sum of its parts, as a living organism, all of which was connected in some fundamental way. My college professors would have been horrified, of course, to learn that I had further observed that this organism, the cosmos, was so complex and so well balanced that its very existence required a Creator. The craftsmanship, the planning, the aesthetic nuance, the *rightness* of it all demanded that Somebody Really Smart had invented it. The painting required its Artist. The building revealed its Architect. The machine demanded its Engineer. The book presupposed its Author. The thought necessitated its Living Mind. But it was even better than that (or worse, depending on one's viewpoint). The very existence of the cosmos (of which I was a part) told me something stunning and unforeseen about its Creator: it told me He must have had a *reason* for creating it.

I'm a trained designer, yet I've never "designed" anything without having a purpose in mind, a goal to meet, a need to fill. It needn't be weighty and earth-shattering, like "designing" a cure for cancer or a rocket to fly to the moon. It might be as insignificant as wadding up a piece of paper to amuse my cat. But there's *always* a purpose in design—and the grander the design, the more important the purpose (at least in the mind of the designer). The universe we perceive around us is the grandest design of all—immense beyond imagination, infinitely beautiful, perfectly balanced, and deeply mysterious. Though we don't yet know precisely *how* it was designed, we do know roughly *when*: science has pinned down the date of the creation of time, space, matter, and energy to about

13.7 billion years ago—not even *remotely* long enough for life to have been spontaneously generated through mere chance. The more secrets we discover about our universe, the more we ought to be in awe of the One who created it—and the more we should be asking ourselves, *why did He make all this?* How can we look at the stars and refuse to see that there is purpose in their design, in their very existence? How can we look at ourselves and fail to see that we too have been created for a purpose?

Here’s the rub. The Designer who created the universe is the same One who made us. He told us so, and I for one am inclined to take His word for it. (Who’d make up a story like that?) Indeed, from all the evidence He’s provided so far, it appears that His *primary* purpose for creating the universe is so that the elements comprising our physical environment, including our bodies, would be available. He, personally, doesn’t need them; He existed very nicely *forever* without them. It’s no accident that the Designer’s self-revealed name is Yahweh: “I Am,” the self-existent One. Because Yahweh’s purpose for creation (at least as far as He’s told us—there may be more to it) is to share a loving relationship with mankind, we should not be terribly surprised to find that He didn’t restrict His creative impulses to designing “big” things like space/time, matter/energy, or organic life. He also designed things on our scale (mental as well as physical)—His idea of nanotechnology, I imagine.

This chapter and the next describe one such architectural design project, the temple, first revealed as the Tabernacle or the Sanctuary. As with all of Yahweh’s designs, this one is purpose-driven, but unlike some of His “projects,” (such as making a nice galaxy for us to live in), the Tabernacle and its appurtenances are described in excruciating detail in Scripture. The reason, of course, is that a human construction crew (Israel) was tasked to build and operate the place, following the Architect’s blueprints to the letter. We have already seen some of these instructions in *The Owner’s Manual*, notably in Chapters 10 and 11.

The Tabernacle/Temple in its earliest form is just a fancy tent with some portable furnishings, not particularly big or awe-inspiring. It’s a fair question to ask, then: *why?* What did the Creator of the universe wish to accomplish by designing such a structure? What was its intended purpose? It was obviously not calculated to impress us: the thing just wasn’t all that impressive, as manmade structures go. From the outside, the thing just looked like a large gray box with a fence around it sitting out in the middle of the desert. Its purpose is latent in the wealth of detail we were given concerning its construction and function. The tabernacle and its service entail by far God’s most detailed set of instructions about any material entity in the entire Bible. If the sheer volume of instruction is any indication, it was intended to be a meticulous and comprehensive object lesson representing something extremely important to the Architect. The

Sanctuary symbolized some reality He wanted us to discover, ponder, and remember. In short, the purpose of the Tabernacle was to reveal the Plan of God.

And so, like my educational odyssey so many years ago, the plethora of disparate elements comprising the body of instruction concerning the Tabernacle/Temple form a reality far greater than the sum of its parts. It was designed to teach us to think conceptually about the means Yahweh planned to employ to reconcile a fallen human race to Himself, undo the damage we did to ourselves in the Garden of Eden, and restore the Designer's primeval purpose for creating the universe in the first place—fellowship between God and man.

SITE PLANNING AND INITIAL CONCEPT

(706) *Embrace Yahweh's tests.* **"Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then He said, 'Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."** (Genesis 22:1-2) After failing several of Yahweh's tests and getting varying marks on others, Abraham was suddenly faced with his "final exam," the one test that, beyond all others, would either define him as a man of faith or relegate him to the ranks of normal clueless humanity. His faith had been crafted by a series of events over the years, each one proving a little more convincingly than the last that Yahweh was a God who could be trusted to keep His word. The most compelling of these, of course, had been the miraculous birth of the very promised son whom Abraham was now being told to sacrifice as a burnt offering.

There was only one thing that could have compelled Abraham to obey Yahweh in this most difficult of tests: he *believed*, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that God would bring the son of promise back to life—that the promise would be kept somehow even if Isaac died. Yes, the command was counter-intuitive. It didn't matter. Abraham had walked with the God who was delivering these bizarre instructions for a lifetime, and He had never let him down, never led him astray, never lied to him. That's why Abe, when he began the final ascent to the place of sacrifice, could tell the two servants who accompanied them, **"The lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you."** (Genesis 22:5) Abraham truly believed they would both return. And his unshakable belief was demonstrated by his obedience.

Though it's relatively easy for us to see this side of Calvary, I doubt if Abraham could have known he was being asked to perform an elaborate dress rehearsal of the pivotal event in Yahweh's plan for the redemption of

mankind, the sacrifice of *His own Son*, Yahshua. The son of promise was to be sacrificed by a loving father, and he went willingly. A donkey was recruited for transportation. It was a three-day journey. The son would carry the wood needed for the offering on his own back as he approached the place of execution. Even the place was prophetic. Abe was told to go to the “mountains of Moriah.” Moriah is one of several mountains upon which the future city of Jerusalem would eventually be built, though there was nothing there at the time. Significantly, the two servants were asked to stay behind while Abraham and Isaac journeyed on toward the specific spot to which Yahweh directed them. If I may be allowed a bit of plausible speculation, I believe that the servants remained at the place where the Temple would eventually be built—on Mount Moriah, but not at the actual summit. Abraham and Isaac continued on, stopping a few hundred yards further up the hillside at a place that would someday be known to the world as Golgotha.

- (707) *Be alert to God's leading.* “**But the Angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ So he said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.’ Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, Yahweh-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, ‘In the Mount of Yahweh it shall be provided.’**” (Genesis 22:11-14) The parallels between type and antitype continue: a substitute offering was provided by Yahweh. This substitute was a ram (that is, a fully mature male sheep—a grown-up lamb, a clean animal). The “thicket” is prophetic of the crown of thorns fashioned by the Roman soldiers at Yahshua’s mock trial, and the “horns” are symbolic of the authority, the power of Yahshua. Something stunningly significant is being revealed here: it was not through His human vulnerability that Yahshua was bound and delivered into the hands of His executioners, but rather through the very power and authority of the Son of God. He realized that no one other than Himself could serve as the “burnt offering” that would atone for the sins of mankind. If *He* didn’t do it, it wouldn’t get done at all. We would still be dead in our sins.

We can be reasonably certain that Abraham had convinced himself that God would raise his son back to life after he had been slain. He certainly wasn’t counting on being provided a substitute sacrifice. So there is a lesson for us latent in Abraham’s unexpected discovery of the ram. As far as Abe could tell, Yahweh had changed his plan at the last minute—first He’d told him to sacrifice his son, and later He’d told him not to, to

use the ram instead. If Abraham had been like a lot of Christians, he would have said, *“No, my doctrine is sound according to everything I’ve been taught. My religious traditions are inviolable. God (defined by my opinions) doesn’t change. Sparing Isaac now would be too easy, so this must be a trick. I’m just being tempted to ignore my original instructions. After all, it’s only logical: if we’re supposed to be “Christ-like,” then God surely requires sacrifices from us.”* At which point he would have gone ahead and slit Isaac’s throat, ram or no ram.

The lesson is this: Yahweh doesn’t give us all the answers up front. He wants us to learn by experience, study, observation, and interaction with Him. There are surprises in God’s word that aren’t immediately apparent to the casual reader. I’ve been studying it for over half a century, and I still learn new things ’most every day. Maybe I’m just slow, but the Holy Spirit seems to reveal things to me when I’m ready to receive them, and not before. We therefore need to be habitually alert to the leading of Yahweh in our lives. The caveat, of course, is that although Yahweh never contradicts Himself, He often reveals His truth piecemeal. Even in Abraham’s case, the *real* instruction was not, “Go and kill your son Isaac,” but “Be willing to sacrifice him.” That being said, comprehending God’s Word is not remotely the same thing as formulating new doctrine diametrically opposed to the plain reading of scripture based upon one’s dreams, visions, or insights. One can receive some very unscriptural “insights” by eating anchovy-jalapeño pizza at two o’clock in the morning.

FUNDING AND MATERIALS REQUISITION

- (708) *Rely upon Yahweh to fund His own projects. “And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out of here altogether. Speak now in the hearing of the people, and let every man ask from his neighbor and every woman from her neighbor, articles of silver and articles of gold.’”* (Exodus 11:1-2) I’ve never been able to read this passage without blushing. God told His people to go to their Egyptian neighbors and ask them for gold and silver articles. Maybe it’s just that as an American, one too many scams have been foisted upon me and my neighbors—to the point that I never even let my daughters go door-to-door to sell Girl Scout cookies (I always just bought their quotas myself, much to the detriment of my waistline). The tenor of the times was very different back then, of course, as explained in verse 3: **“And Yahweh gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in**

the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people." This was after nine of the ten plagues had been visited upon Egypt. By this time it had been effectively demonstrated that Moses' God (and by extension, the God of the Israelites) had vanquished the gods of the Egyptians, the most recent of which was the top dog in their pantheon, Ra, the sun god, who had been put in his place during the latest plague—darkness. So the request for gold and silver trinkets was couched in these terms: "Yahweh, the God of Israel who has proven His power over your local deities, requires that you honor him by providing us with gold and silver, for in a short time, He intends to free us from our bondage."

The "why" of it isn't too hard to figure out, of course. The Israelites, having been slaves for four centuries, had very little of this world's wealth. Yahweh wanted to give them the means and opportunity to show Him their gratitude for freeing them from their chains. But what does the man who has nothing have to give to God? *Nothing*, unless God Himself provides it first. Some things never change.

What the gold and silver was intended to be used for will become evident in the next precept. For now, I merely wish to point out the truth of the old saying, "Where God guides, God provides." I just cringe at pastors who incessantly hound their congregations for increased contributions, or television evangelists who spend half their air time begging for money. *If we don't receive a generous donation from you, dear listener, we won't be able to continue this ministry.* Oh really? If that's the case, maybe your "ministry" *needs* to be discontinued. In my experience, Yahweh provides whatever resources your ministry is going to need before you even know you need them—in my own personal case, a big house (*before* He asked my wife and I to adopt nine kids), a moderately successful small business (*before* the expense of raising those kids got out of hand), and—counter-intuitively—a bloody and premature end to my professional career as a designer, coupled with an unexpected stock windfall and my wife's modest inheritance (*before* being given the privilege of researching His Word full-time). There's a very good reason for the notice on the home page of TheOwnersManual.net that says, "I have nothing to sell you. Everything on this website is absolutely free...just like God's love."

- (709) *Use whatever Yahweh has provided as He directs.* **"Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering. And this is the offering which you shall take from them: gold, silver, and bronze; blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats' hair; ram skins dyed red, badger**

skins, and acacia wood; oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate.” (Exodus 25:1-7) The very next words out of Yahweh’s mouth explained why He wanted the Israelites to contribute all this stuff: **“And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.”** (Exodus 27:8-9. See Mitzvah #428.) The “pattern” of the tabernacle, its furnishings, and its service, would be a multi-level metaphor for the Plan of God.

Scripture also records Moses’ relaying of Yahweh’s words to the people: **“And Moses spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, ‘This is the thing which Yahweh commanded, saying: Take from among you an offering to Yahweh. Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as an offering to Yahweh: gold, silver, and bronze; blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats’ hair; ram skins dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood; oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate.’”** (Exodus 35:4-9) How refreshing it is to see that Moses didn’t alter Yahweh’s instructions one whit when passing them on to the Israelites. We’ll look at each of these items in turn as they’re discussed in the Tabernacle’s plan. At this point, they were just raw materials, like so much lumber and drywall and concrete. But as we shall see, Yahweh’s plan called for a very specific list of materials because He had a very precise story to tell.

This wasn’t a tax on the people. They weren’t required to bring anything. Nor were the Israelites told to hand over everything they had collected from the Egyptians on their way out of town (see Precept #708), though that’s obviously the source from which much of the funding for the Tabernacle was expected to be derived. God left it up to the individual Israelites to decide what (if anything) to contribute: **“Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it.”** He would have been perfectly justified in wording it a bit differently, of course: *“Whoever is the least bit grateful that I delivered them out of bondage with My mighty hand, signs, and wonders—whoever remembers or cares what I did for them at the Red Sea—let him bring an offering.”* Yahweh never twists our arms or makes our choices for us. But that doesn’t mean He doesn’t have the right to. It occurred to me as well that the Israelites who decided to keep the gold for themselves were doomed to lugging it around the wilderness with them for the next forty years. There was nothing to spend it on and no practical way to protect it from thieves. If not used for God’s glory, the gift-gold became both a pointless burden and a stress-inducing temptation.

- (710) *Don't use a double standard. "All your valuations shall be according to the shekel of the sanctuary: twenty gerahs to the shekel."* (Leviticus 27:25) In Mitzvot #526-528, we saw that the priests were to assign a value to certain things that might be offered to Yahweh to aid the priesthood, specifically, unclean but utilitarian animals like donkeys or horses, and houses or land. These things could later be redeemed, bought back by their former owners, but one fifth of their assigned value was to be added—the point being that redemption (that which Yahweh was doing for mankind) was expensive: God was prepared to pay more than we were worth to secure our release, even though we were “unclean beasts.”

Here we see that the value the priests assigned to the offered donkey (or whatever) was to be measured in the same currency as the redemption price. There was to be no double standard. Taken to its logical conclusion, this tells me that the priests (who, if you'll recall, represent all believers) and the people (the general population) are held to the same standard and are responsible to keep the same Law, whether Torah or Conscience. In other words, we believers cannot insist that the lost “work their way to heaven” by becoming “good people” while excusing ourselves from living holy lives on the basis of having been “saved by grace.” No, the reality is that we have *all* fallen into sin; we have *all* become unclean beasts, offered up in service (or servitude) in this world. There is no “privileged” priesthood who is above the Law. No matter who we are, our Master wishes to redeem us, and He is prepared to pay an inordinately high price for our release from bondage. The only difference between “saved” and “lost” people is which side of the redemption equation we're on.

DETAIL DRAWINGS

- (711) *Follow Yahweh's plan when constructing the Sanctuary. "According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it."* (Exodus 25:9) Not only were the Israelites commanded to build a sanctuary for Yahweh (verse 8; see Mitzvah #428), they were told to make it in a very specific manner, according to a plan Yahweh had shown to Moses up on Mount Sinai. Its plan, dimensions, materials, and furnishings weren't specified for their practicality, style, or function. On the contrary, every detail called for in Yahweh's plan *meant* something. Each piece, one way or another, explained His provision for our redemption, purification, and reconciliation with Him.

We'll examine these details in turn as we reach them in the scriptural narrative. But let us first survey the Tabernacle's overall plot design, the

“site plan.” As you approached the Tabernacle courtyard (Precept #728) from the outside, all you’d see was a white fence made of linen fabric, too tall to see over. You could, however, see the top of the Tabernacle proper. It wasn’t very impressive: just a dull, shapeless gray shroud poking up from the desert floor toward the western end of this modest rectangular enclosure, about the size of a suburban lot. The courtyard had only one entrance, a broad opening in the cloth fence on the eastern side, with an elaborate curtain (Precept #729) for a gate.

Upon entering through the courtyard’s portal, you’d see two prominent items standing between you and the Tabernacle. The first was an altar (Precept #726), a big barbecue—the largest single item in the Tabernacle environs. Considering the buzz of activity centering on the altar, you may reflect that they could use an even larger one, until you remember that everything had to be portable, carried about by groups of Levites whenever Yahweh directed Israel to pick up stakes and move (Precept #747). Beyond the altar, between it and the door of the Tabernacle, was a bronze wash basin or laver (Mitzvah #435) sitting on a bronze pedestal. This was to be used for washing the hands and feet of the priests before they entered the Tabernacle.

We’ll defer our explanation of the layout of the furnishings within the Sanctuary itself. But even before we’ve entered the Tabernacle, we’ve learned some important truths. (1) Yahweh has provided only one way to reach Him. (Though functionally omnipresent, He can symbolically be characterized as dwelling “within” the Most Holy Place, the inner room of the Tabernacle, defining it as the final objective of man seeking God.) As Yahshua explained, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”** (John 14:6) Therefore, the single entrance symbolizes Yahshua the Messiah. (2) One must get past the altar in order to reach God. That is, innocent blood must be shed as atonement for sin. There’s no way around it. The blood of a “clean” animal would suffice as a temporary symbol, but the permanent reality that’s represented by this symbol is Yahshua the Messiah—the only truly Innocent One. (3) Once beyond the altar, the seeker-priest must wash his hands and feet before approaching God. The blood of the innocent sacrifice shed at the altar had atoned for his sin, its true, but his works and walk must be subsequently cleansed—every time he approached his God. As Paul puts it, **“Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.”** (Ephesians 5:25-26) So once again, we see Yahshua our Messiah as the object of the metaphor: the sole agent of reconciliation between man and God. The bronze laver was the only thing within the Tabernacle for which no specific dimensions were given. We

can only conclude that Yahweh meant to imply that there is no limit to the depth of cleansing the laver made possible or to the number of washings it affords.

- (712) *Make the linen covering curtains as directed. “Moreover you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine woven linen and blue, purple, and scarlet thread; with artistic designs of cherubim you shall weave them.”* (Exodus 26:1) The Tabernacle was basically an elaborate tent with rigid walls. Here we see the innermost of four layers comprising the ceiling and roof. This embroidered linen layer is what one would see when he entered the Tabernacle and looked upward. Ten strips of linen cloth were to be laid side by side across the width of the Tabernacle.

The white linen, as we have seen, speaks of righteousness, and specifically, that imputed to us by a holy God. Thus the pure white linen was to be embroidered with “artistic designs of cherubim.” This is a bit puzzling, for the Second Commandment forbids the making of “**any likeness of anything that is in heaven above,**” etc. (Exodus 20:4) Cherubim were winged angelic beings such as those whom Yahweh had stationed at the entrance to Eden after the fall, blocking access to the tree of life. The instruction to weave images of them into the Tabernacle’s linen curtains (not to mention fashioning them into golden statues atop the mercy seat) leaves me no choice but to conclude that the prohibition of the Second Commandment implied making images *for the purpose of worshipping them*. (This is a great comfort to an old ex-graphic-designer like me, whose whole career revolved around “making images” of things, mostly with an eye toward helping consumers make informed purchasing decisions.) Here, the images of cherubim were reminders of Yahweh’s constant watchfulness over Israel. These cherub-angels were His ever-present agents of provision, protection, and—if need be—correction.

Being agents of the Almighty, it was only fitting that the embroidery of the cherubim was to be wrought in the rarest, most costly of materials—thread dyed “blue, purple, and scarlet.” Blue (Hebrew: *tekelet*) and purple (*argaman*) were derived from the same source—the secretions of various Mediterranean mollusks such as *Murex brandaris* and *Murex trunculus*. *Tekelet* ranged from blue, to deep purple or violet, to brilliant red. *Argaman* varied from a deep red-black to violet. If you’ll recall, a single strand of the ubiquitous Hebrew tsitzit (Mitzvah #18) was to be dyed blue (*tekelet*)—a constant reminder of the royalty of the coming Messiah. Scarlet (Hebrew: *sani*) was a costly dye obtained from the eggs of cochineal scale insects which attached themselves to kermes oaks. It was a

deep blood-red in color, making it a ready metaphor for the blood shed by the atonement sacrifice—ultimately, Yahshua.

The passage goes on to explain, **“The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits. And every one of the curtains shall have the same measurements....”** We shall soon learn that the width and height of the Tabernacle were each ten cubits; therefore as the linen curtains draped over the frame (Precept #715) they would have reached to within a cubit (probably about eighteen inches) of the ground, but would not have touched it. The lesson: our imputed righteousness, interwoven with God’s provision and protection, cannot be soiled by contact with the world in which we live. We are separated from it, made holy, called out—kept, quite literally, at arm’s length from it.

“Five curtains shall be coupled to one another, and the other five curtains shall be coupled to one another. And you shall make loops of blue yarn on the edge of the curtain on the selvedge of one set, and likewise you shall do on the outer edge of the other curtain of the second set. Fifty loops you shall make in the one curtain, and fifty loops you shall make on the edge of the curtain that is on the end of the second set, that the loops may be clasped to one another.” The loops of blue yarn once again, like the tsitzit, remind us that Yahshua the Messiah, the coming King, is the One who holds our righteousness together. These loops are used to tie the linen strips into two great “sub-assemblies” of five curtains each. Why? I believe each set of five curtains represents a distinct but equally important piece of Yahweh’s Kingdom: to wit, Israel and the ekklesia—the “Church.” (They can’t signify the divided kingdom of Israel—the ten tribes of Ephraim and the two of Judah—for the simple reason that Yahweh’s Plan sees them as one nation, composed of twelve tribes, who would eventually be restored under Yahweh’s rule. Prophets like Ezekiel described them that way long after the Northern kingdom had been scattered to the four winds. Compare Ezekiel 37 to Chapter 48.)

Although these “sub-assemblies” are distinct entities, they work together side by side. *Both of them* are necessary for the integrity of the Tabernacle. These in turn are to be joined together as one, but not with the usual blue cords (and it’s this crucial difference that tips us off to the metaphor): **“And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains together with the clasps, so that it may be one tabernacle.”** (Exodus 26:2-6) The gold of these clasps that hold Israel and the ekklesia together speaks of a purity achieved through the crucible of judgment, a purity that is indestructible, enduringly beautiful, and exceedingly precious. Again, that can signify only One thing in the final analysis: our Messiah, Yahshua. It

is He alone who can join Israel and the ekklesia into one cohesive unit, sharing a common purpose, woven of the same imputed righteousness, and able to stand together as sinless children before Yahweh, distinct yet united. Of course, this prophecy requires that *both* sides are held by the golden clasps—that *both* sides of the curtain assembly accept Yahshua as their Messiah. Israel isn't quite there yet, so God's Plan, the Tabernacle, isn't completely finished: it "leaks." But the day is not far off when Israel and the Church can and will join hands and rejoice together in the Tabernacle—the Plan—of Yahweh.

- (713) *Make the goats' hair curtains as directed. "You shall also make curtains of goats' hair, to be a tent over the tabernacle. You shall make eleven curtains. The length of each curtain shall be thirty cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; and the eleven curtains shall all have the same measurements."* (Exodus 26:7-8) Same song, but a radically different verse. Taking our cues from the two goats who play their respective parts on the Day of Atonement (see Mitzvot #133-#136), we can surmise that the black goats' hair curtains that rest on top of the linen ones symbolize the atonement for sin. Each individual curtain is the same width as before, but their length is now thirty cubits, that is, long enough to touch the ground when draped over the Tabernacle's framework. Sin is like that: contact with the world defiles us, but *our* shortcomings impact the earth as well. Note that because the goats' hair curtains are longer than the linen curtains they cover, the imputed righteousness that the linen represents cannot be seen by anybody standing outside the Tabernacle. In fact, the *only* way one can see a believer's righteousness is to go into the Tabernacle and look up. There's a lesson there somewhere, one that I think will become apparent as we continue our study.

"And you shall couple five curtains by themselves and six curtains by themselves, and you shall double over the sixth curtain at the forefront of the tent." In this layer, there are eleven curtain sections, one more than the linen layer had. As before, they are grouped in two sub-assemblies (again, indicative of the ekklesia and Israel—both of whom have seen the atonement of their sins). Apparently, the six-curtain unit is positioned in the front, indicating Israel's position. **"You shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain of the second set. And you shall make fifty bronze clasps, put the clasps into the loops, and couple the tent together, that it may be one...."** No golden clasps here. This time they're bronze, indicating judgment. Remember, the clasps (symbolic of Yahshua) are what joins Israel to the Church. In the context of dealing with our sin, the judgment endured by the Messiah on Calvary is our sole point of contact. Yahweh is subtly declaring that the sins of

both Jews and gentiles are atoned in the same manner—the judgment borne by God’s Anointed—or not at all. Rule-keeping or traditional observance by devout Jews cannot provide atonement for sin any more than wishful thinking or philosophical maneuvering can for gentiles.

“The remnant that remains of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remains, shall hang over the back of the tabernacle. And a cubit on one side and a cubit on the other side, of what remains of the length of the curtains of the tent, shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle, on this side and on that side, to cover it.” (Exodus 26:9-13) Here we see that the goats’ hair curtains were to be positioned symmetrically side-to-side atop the linen set, verifying what I hypothesized concerning the fact that these touched the earth on either side of the tabernacle. We’ve already seen how the front half-curtain would have been folded back upon itself. In the back of the Tabernacle, however, the two-cubit half-curtain would extend beyond the final linen panel for the same reason as the goats’ hair curtains were made longer: so that the righteousness of the believer can be seen only from within the Tabernacle. Those outside should never be given the impression that we are saved because we are good. Those on the inside know that the converse is true: we are good because we are saved.

One detail pertaining to the assembly of the curtain sections should not be overlooked. Every time one curtain is attached to another, there are *fifty* attachment points, whether loops of blue yarn or clasps of gold or bronze. Why fifty? The number is immediately reminiscent of the period of Jubilee—fifty years, seven sabbatical phases plus one. Jubilee (see Leviticus 25; Mitzvot #170, #171, #190-193, #199, #216, and #221-226 in Chapter 6 of *The Owner’s Manual*) represents our salvation, a once in a lifetime chance to be released from our bondage, to reclaim our inheritance, and to have our debts removed. In short, it’s a picture of God’s grace. So the lesson of the Tabernacle coverings is that whether we are being linked to other believers within Israel or within the ekklesia, the One who joins us together is Yahshua the Messiah, and *the way* He connects us to each other is through grace. No wonder Yahweh rails against the twin abominations of anti-Semitism among “Christians” and Jews who pervert, distort, and wage war against the good news of Yahshua the Messiah.

- (714) *Make two additional coverings from ram skins and “badger” skins. “You shall also make a covering of ram skins dyed red for the tent, and a covering of badger skins above that.”* (Exodus 26:14) Moses didn’t repeat the details that remained the same from one Tabernacle covering layer to the next. So it appears that the specs for the last two layers remained the same as those

for the goats' hair level: eleven curtains, thirty cubits long, with two sub-assembly sets arranged six in the front and five toward the back, attached with bronze clasps, etc. Thus the last two layers, like the first two, indicate that Israel and the ekklesia are side-by-side beneficiaries of whatever symbols are latent in their respective descriptions.

The third layer consisted of “ram skins dyed red.” It would be hard to miss the reference to the ram caught by its horns in the thicket that had served as the substitute sacrifice in place of Isaac on Mount Moriah (see Precept #707). The ram represents the Messiah in His sacrificial role. In the prototype, the ram's skin had been dyed red by its own blood as Abraham had cut its throat. Unlike the “scarlet” thread used in the linen layer, no particular dye source is implied in the word chosen for “red” in this passage. What we see, rather, is a play on words with a lesson attached. The word is *'adem*, simply meaning red, ruddy, or dyed red. It has the same consonant root as *'adam*, a man (male as opposed to female), or a human being—the same word pressed into service as a given name for our proto-ancestor Adam. Thus in retrospect, the substitutionary sacrifice (ultimately Yahshua) is seen as being dyed red with His own blood, and at the same time is identified as a man—a male human. Further, the symbol this One represents is part of the covering of the Tabernacle, which tells us it's part of the Plan of Yahweh for mankind—but one that won't be obviously apparent to the world, being covered by yet another curtain assembly.

The fourth and last layer was to be made not of “badger” skins, as in the unfortunate King James translation, but of *tahas*, an unspecified aquatic mammal—a porpoise, dolphin, dugong, or seal—indigenous to the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea and Gulf of Aqaba. Yahweh didn't ask the people to contribute anything that wasn't available. Among the 600,000 men who left Egypt, there would have been a fair number of cobblers—shoemakers—who would have brought their stock of materials with them when they departed. Bedouin craftsmen in that part of the world still make sandals from dugong and porpoise hides. It was these hides—enough to make shoes for half a million Israelites for several years—that Yahweh was asking for in Exodus 35:4-9 (see Precept #709). The cobblers of Israel responded with a faithful and willing spirit, though it left them nothing with which to make shoes in the wilderness. So it is with great admiration for Yahweh's grace that we read Moses' observant reminder of God's provision *after* the forty years of wilderness wanderings were behind them: **“Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet.”** (Deuteronomy 29:5) Aside from the practical aspect of providing a tough, weather-resistant protective outer layer for the

Tabernacle, what, then, might the outer layer of porpoise skins represent? I believe it speaks of Yahweh's miraculous provision, protection, and preservation through the trials of life. It is this layer that the world would see, if only it cared to look.

We've been looking at the Tabernacle roof from the inside out, since that's the order in which the instructions were given—the order from God's point of view. But we should really stop and consider what this all means to one on the outside, looking in. What he *sees* is nothing but a dull, gray box with but one way into it. But someone who knows how the Tabernacle (read: the Plan of God) is built can explain its structure: Yahweh is offering to protect us from the storms of this life by providing something that is not readily apparent. His substitutionary sacrificial Ram, dyed red through the shedding of His own blood, will atone for—will *cover*—the sins of all mankind, if only we will choose to avail ourselves of this gift by entering the Tabernacle through its one door: Yahshua. For those who do, He has provided what we need in order to stand in the presence of a Holy God—imputed righteousness.

- (715) *Construct "walls" for the tabernacle. "And for the tabernacle you shall make the boards of acacia wood, standing upright. Ten cubits shall be the length of a board, and a cubit and a half shall be the width of each board."* (Exodus 26:15-16) Though covered with layers of cloth and leather, the Tabernacle wasn't, strictly speaking, a tent—at least not as most of us would understand the term. It was to have walls made of multiple wooden boards standing upright on three sides of the structure. (The fourth side, the portal facing the east, was to consist of a woven screen, or curtain—see Precept #725.) The species of tree to be used was the acacia, also known as Umbrella Thorn or Israeli Babool, the familiar canopy-shaped tree indigenous from the savannahs of Eastern Africa to Egypt and throughout the Middle East. The Hebrew designation is *shittah*, the plural of which is *shittim*, as it's called in the KJV. The acacia can grow as high as sixty feet, though it reaches only a third of that height in extremely arid regions. This was the only wood type specified for the Tabernacle and its furnishings; it was used in the construction of the altar, the table of showbread, the altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant.

The acacia tree yielded a beautiful, dense, close grained wood with an orange color that darkened with age. It was prized for its insect resistance, making it a popular choice for mummy cases in Egypt. Although relatively abundant, the acacia didn't grow remotely big enough to mill single planks of the size required for the Tabernacle walls—ten cubits by one and a half, or about fifteen feet long by twenty-seven inches wide. The boards would

have had to be assembled from many smaller pieces, planed smooth and glued together. A great deal of labor and skill went into making these boards. Each finished board was to be covered in pure gold (see Precept #716, #717). There were a total of forty-eight of them, not including the five gold plated acacia pillars at the front of the Tabernacle. I can't help but reflect that these carefully crafted boards are metaphorical of us believers—all of us together, the whole household of faith which Yahweh has gathered, shaped, and assembled from living wood, and then overlaid with pure gold refined in the crucible of judgment that His Messiah endured for our sakes. **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”** (Ephesians 2:8-10) After all, **“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (I Corinthians 3:16)

How were these wall sections to be held together, upright? **“Two tenons shall be in each board for binding one to another. Thus you shall make for all the boards of the tabernacle. And you shall make the boards for the tabernacle, twenty boards for the south side. You shall make forty sockets of silver under the twenty boards: two sockets under each of the boards for its two tenons....”** The foot of each board had two tenons (for you non-carpenter types, these are posts sticking out that would fit into holes known as mortises). Each of the tenons was made to fit a corresponding silver “socket,” or foundation pedestal. The silver for these sockets had come from the half-shekel “ransom” described in Exodus 30:11-16 (cf. Exodus 38:25; see Mitzvah #404), leading many commentators to observe that silver is a symbol for the blood of Christ, paid as a ransom for our sins. Each socket pedestal weighed in at a hefty one talent (Exodus 38:27), somewhere between 75 and 90 pounds.

Now here's where it gets really interesting. The Hebrew word translated “socket” (*'eden*) has the same consonant root (*'dn*) as the word we render “lord” or “master” (*'adon*). Remember too that vowel pointing wasn't added to the Hebrew text until well into the Christian era, by Masorete scribes who had a vested interest in obfuscating anything that might diminish the influence of the rabbis. Thus while *'eden* (a base, pedestal, or socket—something used to hold something else upright) was no doubt the primary meaning of the word in the immediate context, the linguistics of the thing further suggested that the “Master” (*'adon*) was holding the Tabernacle's boards upright. In other words, the gold-covered boards (which, as we have seen, represent us, the assembly of the faithful) were being upheld by the ransom-blood of *our* Master, the Messiah,

setting us apart from the earth, anchoring us, lifting us up, and enabling us to stand upright.

The instructional narrative continues: **“And for the second side of the tabernacle, the north side, there shall be twenty boards and their forty sockets of silver: two sockets under each of the boards. For the far side of the tabernacle, westward, you shall make six boards. And you shall also make two boards for the two back corners of the tabernacle. They shall be coupled together at the bottom and they shall be coupled together at the top by one ring. Thus it shall be for both of them. They shall be for the two corners. So there shall be eight boards with their sockets of silver—sixteen sockets—two sockets under each of the boards.”**

(Exodus 26:17-25) The numbers, if I’m not hallucinating, are indicative of something significant. We aren’t given totals (i.e., 48 boards) because the *way* they’re specified is what’s important: twenty boards per side, plus six for the back, plus two “corner” planks. Forty, you’ll recall, is the number of trial, or testing. And each side of the Tabernacle is supported by forty solid silver *‘eden* pedestals—representing the blood shed for our ransom by God’s Messiah. This was His trial, one He passed perfectly. But (and I realize I’m going out on a limb here) the two sides of the Tabernacle *together* totaled forty boards. I believe, as with the joined sub-assemblies of the roof, that one side represents Israel, and the other represents the ekklesia. (We haven’t seen the last of this recurring “same-but-separate, side-by-side” illustration, either.) Together, then, these forty boards indicate the trials we believers endure in this world. **“In the world you will have tribulation. Be of good cheer; I [Yahshua] have overcome the world.”** (John 16:33) Notice, however, that *His* trials are double ours. He is doing all the supporting work, keeping us set-apart from the earth.

And the six boards in the back? They represent humanity—the segment of unregenerated humanity that *will* come to faith, but hasn’t yet. (This group would include the saints that will be born during the Millennium.) Why do I say this? Because a portion of the inner linen curtain—the one representing the imputed righteousness that clothes the saints—covers the boards at the back of the Tabernacle. (Do the math: the structure is thirty cubits long, and there are ten linen roof panels, each of which is four cubits wide, for a total of forty cubits. The foremost linen panel is doubled over at the entrance, meaning that the last panel, like the sides, stops short of reaching the ground. Thus, the six boards at the far western end of the Tabernacle are “covered” just like the rest of them.) Who, then, do the two “corner” pieces represent? If my take on this metaphor is at all valid, these may symbolize those within Israel or the ekklesia who reach out to the world with the good news of Yahweh’s plan of redemption. They’re “Moses” and “Paul” if you will, along with those

of us who follow in their footsteps. If we don't reach out to them, the lost will remain lost. Remember: the Tabernacle as a whole represents the Plan of God for *all* humanity. That Plan includes those who have yet to obtain their citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven. **"The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."** (Luke 19:10)

As long as we're scratching this far beneath the surface, allow me to digress a bit. If we add up all the measurements, we find that the Tabernacle was to be thirty cubits long (divided between twenty for the Holy Place and ten for the Most Holy), ten cubits wide, and ten tall. The dimensions of the Most Holy Place (ten by ten by ten cubits, or one thousand cubic cubits) have led not a few commentators to see a reference to the one-thousand-year Millennial reign of Yahshua the Messiah. I agree, but if it's true, they haven't gone far enough. If the dimensions of the Most Holy Place are a chronological metaphor, then the whole Tabernacle complex should present a timeline of what the Tabernacle represents: the Plan of Yahweh. And I believe it does.

Backing up one step, we find that the Holy Place, the room through which the Priest must pass in order to reach the Most Holy, is to be twenty cubits long, ten cubits wide, and ten cubits high, or 2,000 cubic cubits. This room is the home of *God's provision* (the table of showbread), *light* (the seven-branched golden lamp), and *prayer* (the altar of incense). Chronologically, it represents the age of Yahshua's called-out assembly, the ekklesia, comprised of every believer since His resurrection, both Jew and gentile. We are those whose sins have been atoned at the altar and whose works and walk have been cleansed at the bronze laver standing just outside the Tabernacle. (I realize that according to another metaphor, the Holy Place represents the Law through which we must pass to reach the Most Holy Place, signifying grace. But here, we're talking about *chronology*—a very different thing. God's symbols don't necessarily have to mean one thing to the exclusion of all others.) Using the same formula as before, we're led to the conclusion that the Holy Place in this context represents a time duration of precisely 2,000 years, beginning at 33 A.D., the date of the passion. That means that the Millennial Kingdom (indicated by the dimensions of the Most Holy Place) will commence in 2033, only a quarter century away as I write these words. If you've read my previous books, you probably won't find this surprising. I've arrived at the same stunning conclusion from several different lines of inquiry—although I'd never stumbled across this particular one before. There's *so much* evidence, in fact, that I've gotten to the point where I ask myself, "Am I just seeing what I want to see? Am I subliminally manipulating the data to achieve a predetermined result?" Then, as if in answer to these troubling

self doubts, Yahweh provided yet another confirmation of this chronological theory elsewhere in the Tabernacle specifications. If you can't stand the suspense, scan down to Precept #728.

- (716) *Construct bracing bars for the walls.* **“And you shall make bars of acacia wood: five for the boards on one side of the tabernacle, five bars for the boards on the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the boards of the side of the tabernacle, for the far side westward. The middle bar shall pass through the midst of the boards from end to end. You shall overlay the boards with gold, make their rings of gold as holders for the bars, and overlay the bars with gold. And you shall raise up the tabernacle according to its pattern which you were shown on the mountain.”** (Exodus 26:26-30) A “bar” (Hebrew: *beriach*) is the heavy timber that would have been used as a “lock” on a city or castle gate, crossing the grain of the other wooden components at right angles to add strength—far more strength than its added mass would suggest. (It’s the same principle that makes plywood strong.) Each of the three assembled walls of the Tabernacle were to be braced with five such bars—at least one of which (the middle one) was to extend the entire length of the wall. That meant it would have been thirty cubits (about forty-five feet) long in the case of the north and south walls—again, suggesting some sort of “glue-lam” construction, since acacia logs don’t grow that large.

Five seems to be the Biblical number of grace. If this is true, the lesson is that the comprehensive human experience—that of Israel, the ekklesia, and lost humanity as well—is held together through God’s grace, His unmerited favor toward us. **“Surely God will never do wickedly, nor will the Almighty pervert justice. Who gave Him charge over the earth? Or who appointed Him over the whole world? If He should set His heart on it, if He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.”** (Job 34:12-15) Without grace, we would simply fall apart. Without grace, we would be unable to stand upright and function in this world, no matter how good we looked, no matter how firm our foundation.

INTERIOR DESIGN

- (717) *Construct the ark of the covenant.* **“And they shall make an ark of acacia wood; two and a half cubits shall be its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height. And you shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and shall make on it a molding of gold all around. You shall cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in its four corners; two rings shall be on one side, and two rings on the other side.”** (Exodus 25:10-12) The ark would prove to be the very centerpiece of Israel’s ritual worship as directed in the Torah, the only piece of furniture to be placed within the Most Holy Place.

Whereas a man-made religion would no doubt have insisted on something grandiose, like the big statue of Zeus at Olympia or that of Diana/Artemis at Ephesus, Yahweh's focal point is downright modest—only about forty-five inches long and twenty-seven inches tall. It wasn't supposed to awe anybody; for that matter, only one person in the whole nation would even see it under normal circumstances (that is, when the Israelites were not on the move), and then only once a year. This was no idol. Like everything else in the Tabernacle, it was a symbol. The ark of the covenant represents Yahshua the Messiah—the personification of God's covenant with mankind. Thus, as we discovered in Mitzvah #429, the carrying poles (*baddim*: “extensions of the One who stands alone,” i.e., us believers—the limbs or branches of Yahshua) must never be removed from the ark.

The “rings” through which the ark (Yahshua) are carried by the poles (the believers) are described as being arranged in two sets, one on each side of the ark. Once again, we see a subtle indication that Israel and the ekklesia/Church are to function side by side in carrying the good news of Yahshua's salvation through the world. The difference? Israel is positioned “before” the mercy seat (upon which the blood of atonement was sprinkled), and the ekklesia is positioned “after.”

Note too the materials Yahweh specified. The chest is made of acacia wood—living tissue (metaphorical of Yahshua's mortal humanity) cut down in service to man upon God's instructions. But it is then covered inside and out with pure gold, symbolic of the deity—the immutability—of our Savior. This precious, beautiful, and indestructible metal has achieved purity by enduring the fires of judgment. But it is not Christ who is purged of impurities—it is us. *We* are purified through the judgment Yahshua suffered on our behalf. Subsequently, it is the “pure gold” of *our* lives—the evidence of God's Spirit dwelling within us—that the world sees when it seeks salvation. We must not alloy or adulterate the gold of Yahshua's sacrifice with the impurities of this world.

- (718) *Place the tablets of the Law into the ark.* “**And you shall put into the ark the Testimony which I will give you.**” (Exodus 25:16) “**And in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.**” (Exodus 25:21-22) The word “ark” (Hebrew: *'aron*) denotes a chest, box, container, or even a coffin; it's a different word than that used for Noah's “ark” (*teba*). It was to contain (1) the stone tablets upon which Yahweh had inscribed the Ten Commandments (Exodus 10:1-5), (2) a pot of manna (see Precept #626), and (3) Aaron's rod, the one that

had been used to demonstrate Yahweh's power in the sight of Pharaoh, and had later come to life and budded with flowers and ripe almonds (Numbers 17:8; see Precepts #627 and #722), confirming Aaron's divine anointing (and by extension, predicting *our* High Priest's impending resurrection from the dead, which in turn confirmed *His* divine anointing). Analysis of these contents reveals the ark's symbolic antitype: it is the One who embodies the fulfillment of Yahweh's instructions, represents His ultimate provision of life and sustenance, and functions as His anointed implement—Yahshua the Messiah.

But there was a second stated function for the ark. Its "lid," called the "mercy seat" (see Precept #719) would feature images of two cherubim, facing each other. One may rhetorically ask, "What did these two angels find so fascinating—what determined the direction of their unwavering gaze?" They weren't "looking" at each other. They were attending to the Shekinah, the cloud-like manifestation of the glory of Yahweh (see Precept #723, Exodus 40:34) whom He said would "meet with you" from within the Most Holy Place, specifically, *between* these two cherubim atop the mercy seat. If angels (even fake gold ones) pay that much attention to Yahweh, we should do no less, I'm thinking.

- (719) *Construct the mercy seat.* **"You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half cubits shall be its length and a cubit and a half its width."** (Exodus 25:17)

The translation of the Hebrew noun *kapporet* as "mercy seat" is quite a stretch. Its root is the verb *kaphar*, meaning to cover, to purge, to make an atonement or make reconciliation. *Kaphar* is the root of the name of the sixth miqra, *Yom Kippur* (rendered more correctly as the plural, *Yom Kippurim*), the Day of Atonement. Although the *kapporet*, sitting atop the ark of the covenant, was about chair-height, the word "seat" is not remotely implied. A better rendering would be "the place of atonement," or "the site of reconciliation." This, it would transpire, was where the blood of the sacrificial goat was to be sprinkled by the High Priest once a year on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16; see Mitzvah #505), ceremonially covering or purging the sins of Israel temporarily, in anticipation of Yahweh's definitive and permanent sacrifice.

We have already spoken briefly of the two cherubim that graced the "place of atonement." **"And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat..."** If

you're willing to accept his eyewitness testimony on face value (as I am), a devout amateur archaeologist actually discovered the resting place of the ark of the covenant in the early 1980s. I told his story in detail in *Future History*, Chapter 13: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem." Ron Wyatt described the mercy seat's configuration somewhat differently (and more in line with the scriptural instructions) than it's usually pictured. He reported that the two cherubim figures stood, one at either end of the ark of the covenant, facing inward toward each other. Their wings on the "back side" of the ark reached out above the ark, touching in the middle, while the wings facing forward rested at their sides. Thus for all practical purposes, it *did* look like a seat or throne (though the King James translators couldn't have known this).

And although Yahweh didn't physically "sit" upon it, the ark and its solid gold covering *functioned* as God's throne: **"You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you [Moses] in commandment to the children of Israel."** (Exodus 25:17-22) What kind of God condescends to have intimate chats with His people so that they might not go astray—so that they might be able to comprehend the depth of His love? You'd never catch Ba'al or Molech or Allah behaving like this.

(720) *Construct the table of showbread.* **"You shall also make a table of acacia wood; two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its width, and a cubit and a half its height. And you shall overlay it with pure gold, and make a molding of gold all around. You shall make for it a frame of a handbreadth all around, and you shall make a gold molding for the frame all around. And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and put the rings on the four corners that are at its four legs. The rings shall be close to the frame, as holders for the poles to bear the table. And you shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, that the table may be carried with them."** (Exodus 25:23-28) We saw in Mitzvah #430 what the twelve loaves of the "showbread" symbolized. If you'll recall, it's something we've seen several times recently: Israel and the ekklesia side by side. They're both sprinkled with frankincense (indicative of the purity we attain through the sacrifice of the Messiah). Here we see the instructions for building the table upon which they were to be placed every Sabbath day (indicating that Christians are probably ill-advised to choose Sunday instead of the Sabbath as their primary day of corporate worship). As with the ark of the covenant, it was to be made of acacia wood covered completely with pure gold (that is, "mortal" matter overlaid with the immutable glory of God). Also like the ark, it was equipped with gold

rings and carrying poles (see Mitzvah #429), though here we are given no instruction about leaving the poles in place).

The frame of the table was to be a “handbreadth” tall—one sixth of a cubit, three or four inches. Dimensions such as cubits (the distance between the elbow and the fingertips), spans (from the thumb to the outstretched little finger), and handbreadths were, of course, based upon human anatomy. It is noteworthy that King Yahshua’s Millennial Temple, described in Ezekiel 40, used a larger “royal” cubit, defined as “a cubit and a handbreadth.” This is a subtle application of Yahweh’s ubiquitous “six-plus-one” theme: the “six” component is the normal human-based cubit, but with the added handbreadth in the Millennium, we’re given a whole new way to measure things: God’s way.

Both the table of showbread and the ark of the covenant were to have a “gold molding” all around them. When Ron Wyatt discovered the cave in which the ark had been hidden, the first object he found was the table of showbread. He reported that this molding was decorated with a repeating pattern: bells interspersed with pomegranates. Though not called for here, this *was* a specified design feature of the High Priest’s robe (see Exodus 28:33), leading us to the conclusion that Yahweh allowed Bezaleel and his artisans some latitude in executing His instructions. As long as they followed the basic pattern He had shown Moses on Mount Sinai, Yahweh didn’t micromanage the details. Rather, He let us freely exercise the creative nature He’d built into us. If this doesn’t amaze you, you need to get out more: there are 1.4 billion Muslims on this planet whose god Allah won’t let them blow their noses or relieve themselves without following precise (and pointless) guidelines. But Yahweh isn’t particularly interested in our submission (which is what “Islam” means); He’s more concerned with respectful fellowship, communication, and sharing a loving relationship with us. We dare not take that for granted.

- (721) *Construct the utensils to be used with the table of showbread. “You shall make its dishes, its pans, its pitchers, and its bowls for pouring. You shall make them of pure gold.”* (Exodus 25:29) Nothing in the Tabernacle was to be “good enough.” Rather, everything, even the most mundane utilitarian items, were considered special, holy, set apart for God’s service—which in this case was the revelation, in symbolic terms, of what Yahweh’s plan entailed. So all of the utensils needed for making and presenting the ritual loaves—things that would have been cheap pottery, wood, or base metal in the average Israelite household—were made of solid gold within the Tabernacle (and bronze if used outside—see Precept #727).

(722) *Construct the golden lampstand.* **“You shall also make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be of hammered work. Its shaft, its branches, its bowls, its ornamental knobs, and flowers shall be of one piece.”** (Exodus 25:31) The function of the golden lampstand (Hebrew: *menorah*) was discussed in Mitzvah #431. We see here God’s instructions concerning its construction. No dimensions are given (tradition says it was about five feet tall and three feet wide) but otherwise its design is quite specific. The first thing Yahweh emphasizes is its unity: it is to be made of a single piece of beaten gold—the decorative parts as well as those that were functional.

“And six branches shall come out of its sides: three branches of the lampstand out of one side, and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side....” The menorah had a center stalk or trunk, from which “grew” six branches, three on either side—the familiar six-plus-one theme again, which we’ve seen prominently in the creation account, the six-day work week plus Sabbath, and the seven annual “feasts” or convocations (*miqra’ey*) of Yahweh. Besides the prophetic chronological ramifications—fallen man’s tenure of six thousand years to be capped by a final Millennium of perfect Messianic government—the *arrangement* of the lampstand leads us to another, now familiar, observation: three branches on one side represent Israel, and the other three represent the ekklesia or Church—all of which grow from, and are dependent upon, the center trunk: Yahshua the Messiah. Indeed, these three entities together in balanced unity—Christ plus Israel and the ekklesia side by side, grafted and anchored into Him—form a perfect picture of His Millennial Kingdom.

“Three bowls shall be made like almond blossoms on one branch, with an ornamental knob and a flower, and three bowls made like almond blossoms on the other branch, with an ornamental knob and a flower—and so for the six branches that come out of the lampstand. On the lampstand itself four bowls shall be made like almond blossoms, each with its ornamental knob and flower. And there shall be a knob under the first two branches of the same, a knob under the second two branches of the same, and a knob under the third two branches of the same, according to the six branches that extend from the lampstand....”

Almonds. Sound familiar? It should. Aaron’s rod budded with flowers and *ripe almonds*, confirming Yahweh’s power to bestow High Priestly authority—and life itself—on whomever He chose: ultimately, Yahshua, and through Him, us. The word for the almond tree (Hebrew: *saqed*) is derived from the verb *saqad*, meaning to watch, awaken, or be alert. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* explains: “The idea of watchfulness which is basic to the root affords the key to the explanation of the Hebrew name for the almond tree. This tree, which in Israel blooms as early as January and February and is affectionately looked upon as the

harbinger of spring, is appropriately enough called *saged*, ‘the waker.’” All of this makes the almond tree, its blossoms and fruit, a natural metaphor for resurrection.

On the living tree, five-petalled blossoms (five being the number of grace) develop into knob-like bowls where the fruit, the almond, grows and matures. Each of the six branches on the menorah were to have three knob-and-flower decorative devices. In addition, the center stalk was to display four such knob-and flower units, plus three more—one directly beneath the junction of each pair of branches—for a total of seven. The lesson seems to be that among the watchful, alert believers of both Israel and the ekklesia, grace will develop, mature, and bear fruit—a process that’s made perfect and complete in our Messiah, our Center and Support. Six is the number of man, but our understanding of this fact has been fine-tuned somewhat here: three branches represent the redeemed of Israel and the other three the ekklesia. In the end, as far as Yahweh is concerned, we’re *all there is* of mankind. Just as our Messiah was raised from the dead, both the church (in the rapture) and Israel (See Ezekiel 37:1-14) will follow suit: all seven branches of the menorah are defined by the almond tree: the “waker.”

“Their knobs and their branches shall be of one piece; all of it shall be one hammered piece of pure gold.” We are reminded again of our intended unity, having been forged in the image of the pure and immutable God. And lest we forget, there is a function to all of this: **“You shall make seven lamps for it, and they shall arrange its lamps so that they give light in front of it.”** (Exodus 25:32-37) The lampstand (indicative of Yahshua and we who are grafted into Him) is to give its light within the Tabernacle (i.e., the Plan of God). Those outside the Plan cannot see the light. Moreover, it is the *only* light source in the Holy Place (which as we have seen, chronologically represents the Church age). Each of the six branches and the center trunk were to be equipped with an oil lamp, and the light was never to be extinguished or allowed to go dark. The priests (read: believers) were to make sure that olive oil (symbolic of the Holy Spirit) was always available to feed the flame of enlightenment. *What?* It’s up to *us* to ensure the Spirit’s availability to the world? Yep. Remember, the Ruach Qodesh dwells within us. Yahshua told us what we are to be doing: **“You [believers] are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”** (Matthew 6:14-16) But how does Yahshua, the center of all this, fit in? John explains: **“In Him [Yahshua] was life, and the life was the light of men.”** (John 1:4) He was **“the true light**

which gives light to every man who comes into the world.” (John 1:9) If men don’t see the light of God in *our* lives, they won’t see it at all. No pressure or anything.

As with the table of showbread, even the mundane utensils were to be made of pure gold. “And its wick-trimmers and their trays shall be of pure gold. It shall be made of a talent of pure gold, with all these utensils. And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.”

(Exodus 25:38-40) Every detail recorded here was given for our edification. Every facet of this diamond reflects light on Yahweh’s Grand Plan for the salvation of mankind.

(723) *Make a veil to separate the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. “You shall make a veil woven of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen. It shall be woven with an artistic design of cherubim. You shall hang it upon the four pillars of acacia wood overlaid with gold. Their hooks shall be gold, upon four sockets of silver. And you shall hang the veil from the clasps.... The veil shall be a divider for you between the holy place and the Most Holy.”* (Exodus 26:31-34) Here we see how the Tabernacle was to be divided into two “rooms.” Four pillars or columns (Hebrew: *ammud*, from the root verb *amad*, meaning to stand, remain, or endure) were to support a curtain, or veil, that ran the entire ten cubit width and ten cubit height of the Tabernacle interior. Each pillar was supported by an individual solid silver “socket” (*eden*), a foundation, base, or pedestal (See Precept #715). The pillars, like most large items in the Tabernacle, were to be constructed of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. We are not told how they were to be spaced across the room, how thick the columns were to be, or whether the curtain was to be hung in front or behind them, so apparently these details bore no symbolic significance.

The fact that there are to be four of them, however, *is* significant. Since it’s the number of sides in a square and the number of directions on the compass (as in “the four winds”), many commentators have concluded that four denotes totality, or completion. I agree, but with a twist. You see, the number seven *also* implies completion—in terms of the divine plan for mankind. Four connotes completion with a view toward restitution, payment, or giving—the completed transmission of something. If someone stole something, he was to pay back four of them in kind (Exodus 22:2, II Samuel 12:6, Luke 19:8). My take on the four pillars holding the veil, then, is that they represent the complete sufficiency of the Messiah’s atoning sacrifice, his restitution for our sin. Nothing must be (or *can* be) added to it in order to make us worthy to stand before a holy God.

The veil itself may have looked much like the inner layer of the ceiling, for it too was made of fine linen, embroidered or woven with

images of cherubim wrought in blue, purple, and scarlet (see Precept #712). Why was a divider needed between the Holy Place and the Most Holy? It's because of what we learned in Precept #718—the “Glory of Yahweh,” the Shekinah, was to “inhabit” the Most Holy Place, meeting mankind from between the two golden cherubim on the mercy seat atop the ark of the covenant. But Yahweh, even in this diminished form, was not to be approached by sinful men, for He is a holy God. As one prophet put it, **“You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness”** (Habakkuk 1:13)—not without toasting us evildoers extra crispy, is the connotation. Even the High Priest who made atonement for the sins of the people once a year first had to make atonement for his own sins. No one could enter God's presence in the Most Holy Place without the sacrifice of innocent blood. The veil kept us set apart from Yahweh's awesome presence until the ultimate innocent-blood sacrifice could be offered up. Thus the veil is a good news-bad news story, in a way. Though it isolated us from Infinite Good, that was only because *we* were fundamentally incompatible with it. In our sinful state, such contact would have destroyed us. That's why the veil was described as being **“for you.”**

We aren't told how heavy a fabric the Tabernacle's veil was, but we do have some historical insight into the corresponding curtain in the Temple that stood on Mount Moriah in Yahshua's day. Like Solomon's Temple, the floor plan of Herod's remodel of the Second Temple was scaled up double from the original Tabernacle, and its height was doubled again. The veil there was about thirty feet wide, sixty feet tall, and as thick as a man's hand—think not of “curtains” or “tapestry,” but of a huge hanging oriental carpet, thick, heavy, tightly woven and virtually indestructible. And so it is with awe that we read about what happened on the day Yahshua was crucified: **“Yahshua, when He had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”** (Matthew 27:50-51) What kind of force would it take to do that? There was an earthquake at the time, but the Temple survived it unscathed—the quake didn't rend the veil: it was torn by the hand of God.

And why would He do this? Because when Yahshua's sacrifice was complete, the impediment to our access to the throne of Yahweh—our sin—had been atoned, paid for, satisfied. We now had free access into the presence of the Almighty. As the writer to the Hebrews put it, **“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Yahshua, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”** (Hebrews 10:19-22) That's right: the veil represents the torn flesh of Yahshua. Until

His body was “bruised for our iniquity,” we were restricted from standing in the presence of Yahweh. Remember the sequence: to get to the Most Holy Place, you must first faithfully encounter the altar, where the blood of atonement—that which was to be “**sprinkled**” on the mercy seat for our “**evil conscience**”—was shed, and the laver, where “**our bodies [are] washed with pure water,**” that is, the Word of Yahweh. There is only one path to God—and that is through Yahshua the Messiah. You can’t sneak in the side door. There *is* no side door.

- (724) *Arrange the furnishings within the Tabernacle.* “**Then you shall bring the ark of the Testimony in there, behind the veil.... You shall put the mercy seat upon the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy. You shall set the table outside the veil, and the lampstand across from the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south; and you shall put the table on the north side.**” (Exodus 26:33-35) In Precept #711, we got a bird’s eye view of the outer courtyard and what it contained. We now continue our virtual tour of the Tabernacle. If you recall, we’ve entered the gate, passed the altar, and have been washed at the laver. We walk among the five pillars of grace (see Precept #725) on the east side of the structure, pull aside the outer curtain of the Tabernacle, and step inside. We are now within the Holy Place. Only priests (believers) are allowed inside this room. The walls to our right and left are overlaid with gold, making the room magnificent despite its modest dimensions, about thirty feet long, fifteen feet wide, and fifteen high. The far “wall” of the room is another curtain, this one supported by *four* ceiling-height columns (indicating the sufficiency of the sacrifice). This one is a stunningly beautiful tapestry of fine linen, intricately woven to picture winged angelic beings in costly blue, purple, and scarlet thread. As we look up, we see the same theme repeated on each of the six-foot wide ceiling panels.

There are no windows in the Tabernacle. The only light is provided by a menorah standing against the south wall to our left. It has seven olive oil lamps, one each atop the six branches and the center shaft. Being priests, it is our responsibility to replenish the lamps’ reservoirs with pure olive oil, so the lights never go out. We note that the gold covered walls reflect the light back and forth, bathing the entire room in a warm, golden glow. And we smile as we remember that our familiar shout of joy and praise, “Hallelujah,” literally means “radiate the light of Yahweh!”

Against the northern wall, the one to our right, is a small golden table, about three feet wide, with golden rings at its four corners. A solid gold platter rests upon it, and upon it two rows of six loaves of bread each sit side by side. Each row of loaves has been sprinkled with white

frankincense. These twelve loaves are replaced with fresh ones every Sabbath day, and are eaten by the priests.

Our gaze shifts to the back of the room. Another golden table, this one even smaller, stands directly in front of the veil. It too has rings at the corners, for like the table of showbread and the ark of the covenant, it is not to be touched directly, but is carried from place to place by the use of two poles (also acacia wood covered with gold). This little table is used for burning incense—an exclusive recipe used only in the Tabernacle. The sweet smell of the incense fills the room. It represents the prayers of the saints, and Yahweh therefore finds the odor delightful.

Since this is only a *virtual* tour of the Tabernacle, we may go beyond the veil into the Most Holy Place. In practice, however, this privilege was reserved for only one man, and then only one time per year—the High Priest, on the Day of Atonement. There is only one piece of furniture within this room, the ark of the covenant, with its covering, the “mercy seat” or place of atonement. We notice that the wooden staves used to transport the ark are left in place threaded through the golden rings at its four corners, a reminder that as we believers “carry” the good news of our redemption to the world, we are never to be disconnected from our Messiah, whose blood—sprinkled on the mercy seat—purchased that redemption.

The interior walls of the Most Holy Place are gold—left, right, and center. If my interpretation is correct concerning the meaning of the gold-plated boards comprising the outer walls of the Tabernacle (see Precept #715), then a stunning fact becomes self-evident as we stand within the Most Holy Place. If you’ll recall, I concluded that the back “wall,” comprised of six of these boards, represented the portion of humanity that has not yet come to faith (being neither part of believing Israel nor the ekklesia), though Yahweh in His perfect foreknowledge knows that they someday will. From God’s point of view (from here within the Most Holy Place) they’re *already* seen as pure gold: their mortality is already covered with the immutable glory of Yahweh, and their names are already written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

- (725) *Construct the portal of the tabernacle.* **“You shall make a screen for the door of the tabernacle, woven of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, made by a weaver. And you shall make for the screen five pillars of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold; their hooks shall be gold, and you shall cast five sockets of bronze for them.”** (Exodus 26:36-37) The instructions here are quite similar to those given for the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy (see Precept #723), and also reminiscent of what we’ll soon see

concerning the entrance to the Tabernacle courtyard (Precept #729). It's the little differences that are telling. Here we aren't told of any specific imagery that was to be woven into the design. Apparently the cherubim theme was only to be visible upon entering the Tabernacle—on the ceiling and upon the veil at the far end of the Holy Place. The lesson: God's watchful protection is extended only to those who have formed a relationship with Him, those who have entered His household.

Note next that there are five columns at the outer entrance of the Tabernacle, whereas the interior veil restricting access to the Most Holy Place was held by four. Four, if you'll recall, implied the completed act of restitution, symbolized by what happened within the Most Holy Place—the sprinkling of the blood of atonement upon the mercy seat. But *five* columns supported the curtain at the entrance to the Holy Place. Five is the number of grace; thus we are reminded that we may enter the household of faith only through grace. Standing at the Tabernacle entrance, we have encountered the altar and been washed at the laver—we are atoned and cleansed. The five pillars of grace tell us that nothing else is needed: our works, wealth, or penance have no place here.

As if to reinforce this fact, the sockets or bases for these five columns are made of bronze, reminding us that the grace we enjoy rests upon a foundation of judgment. In this court, we haven't been found "not guilty." Quite the contrary: we're as guilty as sin. Our crimes haven't been *pardoned*, exactly, either. Rather, they've been *paid for*. Yahshua the Messiah endured the judgment that was rightfully ours to bear: that's grace. By contrast, the four pillars holding the veil rested upon sockets of silver, emphasizing that a blood-ransom was the price of our restitution and redemption.

- (726) *Construct the altar.* "You shall make an altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide—the altar shall be square—and its height shall be three cubits. You shall make its horns on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it. And you shall overlay it with bronze.... You shall make it hollow with boards; as it was shown you on the mountain, so shall they make it." (Exodus 27:1-2, 8)
- We've been listing these precepts in the order they're presented in Exodus—from God's point of view, from the inside out. Man's point of view, of course, is just the opposite. *We* start from the outside, the wilderness of the world, and move toward the center, the Most Holy Place, where the glory of Yahweh abides. As this point then (since we've already discussed the laver or washbasin—Mitzvah #435, Precept #711), we come to the first thing a worshipper would encounter upon entering the courtyard: the altar.

The altar was a big square barbecue-like affair, its four equal sides denoting the completion of our atonement, and their dimension, five cubits, indicating the grace of God in providing the ultimate and permanent Sacrifice. Its height, three cubits, reminds us of the three primary ways Yahweh manifests Himself to us—as the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son of God—the Messiah. The “horns” protruding from the corners, which speak of the Messiah’s authority, are to be sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifices roasted upon this altar, for just as Yahshua’s acceptability as a Sacrifice is dependent upon His innocence, His right to rule is derived from His obedience to the Father, even unto death.

As usual, the underlying structure of the altar is acacia wood, indicative of mortality, living flesh as it were, that has given its life in order for the Plan of God to come to fruition. It speaks here of the humanity of Yahshua—God’s chosen representative for all mankind. The bronze with which the altar was completely covered is symbolic of the judgment the Messiah would endure in our stead. Because we, as mortal believers in Christ, are protected by this bronze barrier, we will not be consumed in the fires of wrath that burn within the altar.

(727) *Make the accessories for the altar.* **“Also you shall make its pans to receive its ashes, and its shovels and its basins and its forks and its firepans; you shall make all its utensils of bronze. You shall make a grate for it, a network of bronze; and on the network you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. You shall put it under the rim of the altar beneath, that the network may be midway up the altar. And you shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze. The poles shall be put in the rings, and the poles shall be on the two sides of the altar to bear it.”** (Exodus 27:3-7) Whereas the lampstand and the accessories that accompanied the table of showbread and the altar of incense were to be made of pure gold, everything associated with the altar of offering was to be cast in bronze. The difference is a question of order, of timing: the bronze altar of judgment and sacrifice (as well as the bronze laver that follows) must be employed—outside the Tabernacle—*before* the pure gold of God’s illumination, provision, and fellowship may be enjoyed within His house. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin, for Yahweh won’t allow sin in His presence—He is a holy God.

We are told in Leviticus 6:13, **“A perpetual fire shall burn on the altar; it shall never go out.”** The bronze **pans... shovels... basins... forks and firepans** were designed to accommodate this instruction, making it possible to remove the ashes (See Mitzvot #441-#443) without letting the fire go out. A heavy bronze grate suspended within the altar provided a platform that allowed the ashes and drippings to fall through to the pans below—not

unlike a modern charcoal barbecue. When it had to be moved, the altar, like the ark of the covenant, ark of incense, and table of showbread, was not to be touched by the Levites who carried it, but was to be carried with acacia wood poles slipped through rings at the four corners. These, like everything associated with the altar, were to be overlaid with bronze—reinforcing the concept that judgment, sacrifice, and atonement must precede enlightenment, nourishment, and meaningful communication with God.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN

- (728) *Provide an enclosed court.* **“You shall also make the court of the tabernacle. For the south side there shall be hangings for the court made of fine woven linen, one hundred cubits long for one side. And its twenty pillars and their twenty sockets shall be bronze. The hooks of the pillars and their bands shall be silver. Likewise along the length of the north side there shall be hangings one hundred cubits long, with its twenty pillars and their twenty sockets of bronze, and the hooks of the pillars and their bands of silver.... All the pillars around the court shall have bands of silver; their hooks shall be of silver and their sockets of bronze.... All the utensils of the tabernacle for all its service, all its pegs, and all the pegs of the court, shall be of bronze.”** (Exodus 27:9-11, 17, 19) The Tabernacle didn’t just sit there all alone out in the desert. It was to be enclosed within a courtyard formed by erecting pillars of bronze upon bronze foundation pedestals or sockets, and suspending curtains of linen cloth between them with hooks and bands of silver. The well established symbology of the specified materials tells a story in itself. The linen represents righteousness—which is seen as a barrier that stands between the outside world and the plan of God. This righteousness is supported and upheld by judgment—the bronze pillars and sockets. This foundation of judgment is not wrath (necessarily) but rather judicial decision, the separation of the clean from the unclean, of the saved from the lost, of the inside from the outside. Holding the linen of righteousness in place between the bronze columns are hooks and bands of silver, which, you’ll recall, is indicative of the payment of a ransom, the price of blood. I found it fascinating that the word translated “bands” (*hasuq*) is derived from a verb (*hasaq*) meaning “to be attached to, to love.” Lesson: the love of God, demonstrated by the ransom He paid for our liberty, is what holds our righteousness secure in the face of judgment.

The dimensions of the courtyard are significant as well. **“And along the width of the court on the west side shall be hangings of fifty cubits, with their ten pillars and their ten sockets. The width of the court on the east side shall be fifty**

cubits. The hangings on one side of the gate shall be fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and their three sockets. And on the other side shall be hangings of fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and their three sockets.... The length of the court shall be one hundred cubits, the width fifty throughout, and the height five cubits, made of fine woven linen, and its sockets of bronze.” (Exodus 27:12-15, 18) The entire enclosure measured 50 x 100 cubits, or 5,000 square cubits. In Precept #715, we discussed how the dimensions of the Tabernacle had chronological implications—they literally defined the Kingdom age: the volume of the Most Holy Place, 1,000 cubic cubits, indicating 1,000 years for the earthly reign of Yahshua the Messiah; and that of the Holy Place, 2,000 cubic cubits, the two millennia preceding that, defining the age of His called-out assembly of Spirit-indwelled believers. Now we find that the courtyard’s dimensions tell us precisely how long the entire period of Yahweh’s covenant of blood with mankind will last, beginning with Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac and lasting through the end of Yahshua’s Millennial kingdom—5,000 years: grace, a thousand times over.

Note too the dimensions of the linen sections of the outer fence. Since there were to be twenty pillars each on the long sides, north and south, each measuring one hundred cubits, each linen section was to be five cubits wide. Same thing for the back side, on the west: fifty cubits divided by ten pillars—these too were five cubits in width. Then we’re told that the fence was to be five cubits tall. So each linen section measured five cubits by five (about seven and a half feet square). Since the number five connotes grace, here we see that our righteousness (linen) is a matter of *grace multiplied by grace*. Not only was our righteousness *not* achieved through our own efforts or sacrifice, it was imputed to us as a free gift, paid for by Someone else. Grace times grace equals reconciliation with Yahweh, if only we’ll do the math.

- (729) *Make a gate or portal for the court.* **“For the gate of the court there shall be a screen twenty cubits long, woven of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, made by a weaver. It shall have four pillars and four sockets.”** (Exodus 27:16) There was a gap between the two fifteen-cubit-wide sections on the eastern side of the courtyard, in which a twenty-cubit wide portal or entrance was specified. Its four bronze pillars and foundation sockets indicate, if you’ll recall, the totality, the completion, of the redemption to be found within these gates. This is the portal through which one must walk in order to pass from judgment’s wrath into judgment’s vindication. It is the *only* way into the court of God’s mercy.

The sole entrances of both the court and the Tabernacle itself were to be on the eastern side, facing toward the rising sun. So it's worth noting that ancient religious superstitions tended to center on "the sun god" in one permutation or another. The prototypical pagan religion of Babylon was based on the mid-winter birth of Tammuz—marketed as the son of the sun, conqueror of winter's cold, dark barrenness (*gimme a break*). Moreover, the head of the pantheon of Egypt, the land where the Israelites had just spent four hundred years as slaves, was named Amun-Ra, the "sun god." It was this pseudo-deity whose reputation had been so thoroughly discredited by Yahweh's ninth plague—darkness over the land of Egypt. So put yourself in the sandals of the average Israelite as he approached the Tabernacle courtyard. He would have found that to enter into Yahweh's plan, he had to face the west: he had to *turn his back* on the sun god if he were to draw near to the true and living Light of the world. As the worshipper faced his God, Yahweh would have been the One "facing" the east, as if to say, "You just concentrate on meeting with Me; *I'll* deal with the sun."

Yahweh's Team

In the previous chapter, we looked at the Tabernacle with an eye toward discerning the Master Plan that lay behind its design. Just as any company's facilities can be expected to reflect their purpose and mission, the physical Tabernacle reveals what its Designer meant for its function to be—in this case, an elaborate picture of Yahweh's Plan for the redemption of all mankind. And just as it's sometimes hard to figure out what companies do by looking at their buildings or factories from the outside, we discovered that God's Plan and purpose can be perceived only from a vantage point *inside* the Tabernacle.

The lessons continue as we now meet the staff: the priests, leaders, and key personnel of Yahweh's team—Israel. We've already discovered that this is a "family firm." Many of the positions are hereditary—not sinecures, necessarily, but meaningful jobs appointed on the basis of family and clan. Some—like royalty in a constitutional democracy—seem to be little more than figureheads. And yet, like the crown worn by a king or queen, the accoutrements of their position make a statement about their responsibilities, what their people expect of them, the symbolic roles they're required to fill—even though it's the office, not the officer, that's significant. This will be most markedly demonstrated in the clothing Yahweh required to be worn by the High Priest. Each article of clothing he wore had spiritual and prophetic significance, and we will endeavor to find out what the implications are for us.

We don't have to be born into Israel, of course, to benefit from the significance of the priestly symbols. Any one of us can choose to be adopted into the family of God—to become a vital part of this "family business." Israel was chosen by Yahweh to show us the way—to personify the world's "road map to peace" (to coin a phrase). It is sadly ironic that, having been selected to be the custodians of God's instructions, they themselves have largely chosen to ignore them, to wander off following their own path. I can assure you, it's a temporary situation—they *will* find their way again, and Yahweh has told us so to the point of ennui. In the meantime, we who choose to be adopted into a familial relationship with our Father Yahweh can learn all we need to know from what He told our Israelite brothers. What will our position be in the family business of God? That's for Yahweh Himself to decide. But whether assigned to the mailroom or the boardroom, none of us need remain spiritually unemployed for even one more day.

THE STAFF

(730) *Don't hesitate to play a supporting role. "And Yahweh said to Aaron, 'Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.' So he went and met him on the mountain of God."* (Exodus 4:27) We're not all called to be Moses, to lead the flock to the promised land, to hand down the Law of God. Truth be told, we're far more likely to be "chosen" to dig latrines in the wilderness. The differences between Moses and Aaron are a revealing study. Aaron (Moses' *elder* brother, a fact we can deduce from the historical record and from his being listed first in the genealogy of Numbers 26:59) was an ordinary Israelite who was "drafted" to play a supporting role in Yahweh's drama. But Moses was different: it was apparent from his birth onward that he had been chosen by Yahweh for his remarkable destiny. Miraculously spared during a period of genocidal persecution, he was raised and educated in the royal palace of Egypt, making him for all intents and purposes the adopted grandson of the most powerful monarch on the face of the earth. But after spending the first forty years of his life as the scion of privilege, Moses committed murder and fled the land. He found himself tending somebody else's sheep in a foreign country for the next four decades—in retrospect, another and equally valuable phase of his educational experience.

It was apparently Moses' reluctance to accept the mantle of responsibility God had asked him to bear that prompted Yahweh to appoint his brother Aaron as his spokesman before Pharaoh. But it's clear from Exodus 4:14 that Aaron had *already* been told to **"Go into the wilderness to meet Moses"** when Mo dug in his heels at the burning bush. So it is a matter of conjecture whether Aaron's intended role was expanded from merely being "liaison officer" with the elders of Israel at this time to being the prophet's front man in the court of Pharaoh. However, I have a feeling that Aaron's coming position as High Priest was always the heart of Yahweh's anticipated role for him—the High Priest ultimately being symbolic of Yahshua the Messiah. Aaron's metaphorical identity as the firstborn son of Amram (which means "a people exalted") destined him for the job, if nothing else.

The point of this discussion is simply that our roles, responsibilities, and gifts as children of Yahweh, whether great or small, are assigned to us—we do not choose them. Some of us are able to administer ten "talents," others only one. As in Paul's illustration of the "body of Christ," we cannot all be the right hand or the tongue, as glorious as that might be; some of us have to be the liver and kidneys—and some (let's face it) are

the appendix or the tonsils. Though it is up to us to choose whether or not *to be* part of the body, choosing *which part* is Yahweh's prerogative. Let us each endeavor to serve the body well wherever we find ourselves.

- (731) *Prepare to meet God.* **"Then Yahweh said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day Yahweh will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain.'"** (Exodus 19:10-13) Brace yourselves, folks. This is about to get heavy. Although the instructions to the Israelites of the exodus were plain enough, there are ramifications latent in the text that speak to us today.

We'll come back to the "third-day" thing. The imperative here is, **"Do not go up to the mountain or touch its base."** Let us begin by examining what it means to "touch the mountain." A mountain is a symbol of power, of majesty. In this case (Sinai) it represents the authority of the Law. Another mountain (Zion) indicates the potency of grace. A reference to a city on seven mountains in Revelation 17:9 speaks of unchallenged temporal power (while identifying Rome as the seat of the harlot of Babylon). Mount Sinai draws its power from Yahweh. That is, the authority of the Law is derived from the worthiness of the One who spoke it into being. We are therefore being instructed not to usurp Yahweh's authority.

A close look at several of these words in the original language will clarify the matter. To "go up" is the Hebrew word *'alah*, meaning primarily to ascend or climb, but with secondary connotations of exalting oneself, of lifting oneself up, to come up (as before God), or to go up over or extend (as in violating a boundary). To "touch" (Hebrew: *naga*) is to reach, strike, approach or extend to. (The noun with the same consonant root, *nega*, means "a stroke or wound," so it's clear that mere physical contact isn't remotely the whole story.) And "base" is *qatseh*, meaning a "limit, edge, outskirts, extremity, tip, i.e., the distant end of a space or defined area; an end, finish, i.e., a point in time marking the completion of a duration; or a foot, base, or foundation, i.e., the lowest point of an elevated place." (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*). So in addition to the plain meaning of the warning to its original audience, Yahweh is telling us, "Do not lift yourself up to usurp

My authority; do not strike or wound the foundation of the Law I am giving you.”

And who is that “foundation?” It’s none other than Yahshua, the Messiah. I know, you think I’ve stretched this beyond it’s breaking point—you think I’m merely seeing something I *want* to see. Don’t be too sure. The verse immediately preceding this informs us, **“And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever.’”** (Exodus 19:9) This is a description of the Shekinah, a form in which Yahweh would physically dwell within the Tabernacle (see Exodus 40:34-38). But let’s look closely at that phrase “thick cloud.” One of the meanings of the word translated “thick” (Hebrew: *abiy*) is “a casting mold, i.e., a matrix for holding and casting molten metal.” “Cloud” is the Hebrew *'anan*, a cloud of smoke or water vapor dense enough to be clearly visible. We have been given a description of a physical manifestation of God’s Spirit—something with corporeal form (“cast” as in a mold), yet composed of something ephemeral, spiritual. Further, this is an entity through which Yahweh Himself will speak to the people in a voice they can comprehend. That’s a perfect, albeit poetic, description of the Messiah, Yahshua. It’s another way of stating the “coming Prophet” promise recorded in Deuteronomy 18:15-19.

Still think I’ve gone round the bend? Then factor in what He said about the third day: **“Consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes.”** Our washed clothes are a picture of the cleansing made available by the Messiah’s sacrifice. We’re given garments of light that enable us to stand before a holy God. These garments will be available to us “today and tomorrow,” two days (that is, two thousand years, according to II Peter 3:8) *subsequent* to the coming of the “thick cloud” spoken of in the previous paragraph: Yahshua the Christ. **“And let them be ready for the third day.”** Since “today and tomorrow,” the first two days, began in 33 A.D. with the passion of Yahshua, the third day is therefore scheduled to begin precisely two thousand years later, in 2033. (See Hosea 6:2 for a stunning confirmation that Israel *will* “be ready for the third day.”) Further evidence of this timeline is provided through the dimensions of the Tabernacle (Precept #715) and of the courtyard (Precept #728).

“For on the third day Yahweh will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.” The actual site of the Messiah’s future “coming down” will be the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, not Sinai (in northwestern Arabia—see Galatians 4:25). But by doing so, Yahshua will have fulfilled the Torah down to the smallest detail: “Mount Sinai” *will* have been visited by Yahweh in the sight of all the people, once and for all.

An additional, and related, command is given in the same “third-day” context: **“And he said to the people, ‘Be ready for the third day; do not come near your wives.’”** (Exodus 19:15) Under normal circumstances, sexual contact between husbands and their wives is characterized as a good thing, its love and intimacy leading to fruitfulness. So what was different on the “third day?” I believe the lesson here is that for those of us who had been consecrated during the first two days of Yahshua’s ekklesia (the “Church age”), for us who have donned clean clothes (the **“righteous acts of the saints”**—Revelation 19:8), the time for us to bear fruit, i.e., reach lost souls with the Good News, will have come to an end when the “third day” commences. Clothed in our new resurrection bodies during the Millennial Kingdom, our roles, responsibilities, and capabilities will all have changed. For the better, I’m guessing.

(732) *Warn the people not to approach Yahweh in their sinful state.* **“And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at Yahweh, and many of them perish. Also let the priests who come near Yahweh consecrate themselves, lest Yahweh break out against them.’ But Moses said to Yahweh, ‘The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for You warned us, saying, ‘Set bounds around the mountain and consecrate it.’ Then Yahweh said to him, ‘Away! Get down and then come up, you and Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to Yahweh, lest He break out against them.’ So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.”** (Exodus 19:21-25) Yahweh was very concerned about the people “breaking through” to Mount Sinai to “gaze” at Him. But there was more to this than keeping the curious at bay. The Hebrew word translated “break through” (*haras*) also means: “to tear down, break down, overthrow, beat down, break, destroy, pull down, throw down, or ruin.” (S) It’s a much more violent term than a casual reading might suggest.

Remember the context: Moses was about to be given the Law—specifically, the Ten Commandments—on the mountain. I think the warning here is basically the same as what we saw in Precept #731: we are not to usurp Yahweh’s authority; we are not to institute our own Law. The authority in question in this case was God’s right to make the rules, for those “rules” would contain within them the key to attaining life in Yahweh’s presence—not by defining human perfection, but by pointing toward the One whose mortal life would fulfill their promise. This life, death, and resurrection would define Him as our Savior.

Beside the obvious problem of an unconsecrated people coming into the presence of a Holy God—which would cause them to immediately “perish,” there was a more subtle warning. As we have seen, the “bounds” of the mountain—the foundation of Yahweh’s authority as it relates to

mankind—is in reality Yahshua the Messiah. If the people were to “break through” (*haras*: tear down, overthrow, and destroy) Him, Yahweh would have no choice but to “break out against them.” Alas, they did—so He did. This very thing happened in history: the same generation that crucified Yahshua witnessed the destruction of the Jewish state. And ironically, Yahweh used the same demolition tool they had: the Romans.

(733) *Approach Yahweh only as He directs.* “Now He said to Moses, ‘Come up to Yahweh, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. And Moses alone shall come near Yahweh, but they shall not come near; nor shall the people go up with him.’ ...Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them.’” (Exodus 24:1-2, 12) The reaction of the congregation at Moses’ first meeting with Yahweh on Mount Sinai had been sheer terror: “All the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die.” (Exodus 20:18) It was clear that Yahweh was an awesome God; He was not to be approached flippantly, but only with the deepest reverence. But that doesn’t mean He *can’t* be approached. Here in chapter 24, we see Yahweh assuming a less frightening form for the benefit of the leaders of Israel, not only Moses, but also Aaron, his two eldest sons, and seventy of the tribal elders. Now, instead of warning everyone strictly to stay off the mountain, Yahweh is seen inviting the leaders to approach Him. There’s still some distance, but it’s clear that Yahweh doesn’t want to be isolated from His people, speaking to them only through the filter of an exalted prophet, a mortal representative. If He has to lay aside His glory in order to interact with us, then so be it. As strange as it may sound, communion with us is the whole point.

In stark contrast with Yahweh’s previous displays of power, we now read, “Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank.” (Exodus 24:9-11) They *saw God*? Not in His undiminished form, for they lived to tell the tale. But not in the humble humanity of Yahweh’s future Messianic manifestation, Yahshua of Nazareth, either. I imagine that the deity they saw was a bit like what Peter, James, and John saw on the Mount of Transfiguration—Christ in His glorified state, utterly, blindingly majestic but still identifiably “human” in form.

It's clear, then, that this kind of intimate communion with God is an invitation-only affair, but it's equally clear that the invitation has been extended to all mankind. We may approach God, but only as He directs—and there is but one path. Following that path is designed to be a life-altering experience. At first, I was puzzled by the fact that, having seen God, not one of the people invited up onto the mountain survived to enter the Promised Land. Nadab and Abihu are especially perplexing, for they soon showed their contempt for Yahweh's instructions and were subsequently slain for their disrespect (Leviticus 10:1-2). How could anyone have "seen God" only to turn around and treat Him with so little reverence? But then I realized to my shame, and the shame of my race, that we have all "seen God" in the person of Yahshua—and none of us respects His Word as we should, even the best of us. Were it not for His mercy, we would not survive ten minutes.

CORPORATE APPAREL AND GRAPHIC DESIGN

In the next few precepts, we'll explore the "uniform" the High Priest was to wear, an ensemble described in great detail in Exodus 28. This can get a little hard to follow, for we don't dress like this these days. (For me, anything beyond "jeans, sneakers, and a clean sweatshirt" requires research.) We'll follow the order of Yahweh's instructions as related in Exodus, though this passage won't tell us much about how the basic garments were worn. I mean, when's the last time you threw on an ephod? Fortunately, the order of dress was recounted in the record of Aaron's ordination in Leviticus: **"Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons and washed them with water. And he put the tunic on him...."** Well, we're already confused. As it turns out, the *first* article of clothing to be put on was a pair of linen trousers (think: boxer shorts) described in Exodus 28:42 as reaching from the waist to the thighs. But all the priests wore them, so they were not worthy of special note here. The "tunic" was a long, loose, shirt-like affair, sleeved or sleeveless, reaching to the knees. It would ordinarily have been tied at the waist with a sash.

This tunic was the basic common garment everybody would wear. Yahshua's tunic became the prize in a game of dice at His crucifixion (see John 19:23-24), in fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 22:18. And that's not the only sartorial prophecy that was fulfilled at the foot of the cross. The soldiers dividing their victims' garments among them were gambling for the tunic only because they didn't want to tear it. So we read, **"He who is the high priest among his brethren, on whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head or tear his clothes."** (Leviticus 21:10) Yahshua *was* our anointed High Priest—not of the order of Aaron, but of Melchizedek. Between the

crown of thorns He wore and the tunic that remained intact, its clear that Yahshua fulfilled the prophetic requirements of the Torah perfectly, even when matters were “out of His hands.”

Anyway, after Moses “girded him [Aaron] with the sash,” he “clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him and he girded him with the intricately woven band of the ephod, and with it tied the ephod on him....” We’ll discuss each of these garments in turn as they come up in the narrative. The ephod, an apron-like garment with shoulder straps, was worn over the robe and held in place around the waist with an integral decorative “band.” **“Then he put the breastplate on him, and he put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastplate.”** The breast-piece was to be secured to the straps of the ephod with an elaborate and symbolically specific assortment of cords and rings. It was actually a pocket, into which were placed two objects, the Urim and Thummim, that were somehow used to determine the will of Yahweh in certain situations. **“And he put the turban on his head. Also on the turban, on its front, he put the golden plate, the holy crown, as Yahweh had commanded Moses.”** (Leviticus 8:6-9) Lastly, the headgear was donned. We’ll explore each of these garments in turn. No footwear is mentioned in the account of the priestly garments, but that’s probably because the priest’s sandals would have been removed every time he entered the Holy Place, so his feet could be washed at the bronze laver stationed at the Tabernacle entrance.

(734) *Make the High Priest’s ephod.* **“They shall take the gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and the fine linen, and they shall make the ephod of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, artistically worked. It shall have two shoulder straps joined at its two edges, and so it shall be joined together. And the intricately woven band of the ephod, which is on it, shall be of the same workmanship, made of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen.”** (Exodus 28:5-8) In Mitzvah #372 we encountered Yahweh’s general instructions defining what the High Priest was to wear in his official role, including **“a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a skillfully woven tunic, a turban, and a sash.”** (Exodus 28:4) Here we are given more specific directions concerning the ephod, which was like a skirt or apron that covered the hips and thighs. The ephod had two straps or suspenders, which were worn over the shoulders. There were many layers to the ensemble, all telling the same story in slightly different ways (kind of like God’s Word, it’s turning out): the High Priest was to be a divinely appointed intermediary between man and God, an exalted servant. He is a living metaphor for the Messiah, and his wardrobe says a great deal about his divine antitype.

The ephod was, in a way, an echo of the inner curtain of the Tabernacle (see Precept #712) and the veil (Precept #723). It too was to be

made of fine-threaded linen cloth, woven or embroidered with costly blue, purple, and scarlet thread (Precept #712 again), indicating the righteousness, heavenly royalty, and shed blood of the coming Messiah. Remember, these dyes were extracted from sources the Torah defined as “unclean.” Therefore, like the *tsitzit* every Israelite was to wear, with its single thread of *tekelet* blue, they indicated the defilement caused by the human condition, defilement that was to be borne *in profusion* by the High Priest. Even then, it’s only a pale reminder of the actual defilement that would be endured for our sakes by the High Priest’s antitype, the Messiah. That Almighty God condescended to take upon Himself human form and dwell in a fallen world is a sacrifice so vast I have a hard time comprehending it. The crucifixion I can understand. *This*, I can’t.

The shoulder straps indicate that this costly defilement was *purposely* borne on our behalf. Furthermore, the work, the lifting of this burden, was to be shouldered by the Anointed One alone. And what of the “intricately woven band,” made with the same materials but with the addition of gold thread (indicating immutable purity achieved in the crucible of judgment)? The designation is a single Hebrew word: *chesheb*, which denotes “ingenious work” as much as it does “a waistband, girdle, or sash to attach clothing around the waist.” The word is based on the verb *chasab*: to think, plan, make a judgment, imagine, or count. We are being subtly told that the Messiah’s role in our redemption was neither an accident nor an act of desperation, but rather the very plan of God—the ingenious product of His loving imagination—conceived in his mind before we humans had even demonstrated our need for salvation. The *chesheb* is what holds the whole thing together.

- (735) *Engrave two onyx stones for the ephod.* “Then you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: six of their names on one stone and six names on the other stone, in order of their birth. With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall set them in settings of gold. And you shall put the two stones on the shoulders of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. So Aaron shall bear their names before Yahweh on his two shoulders as a memorial. You shall also make settings of gold, and you shall make two chains of pure gold like braided cords, and fasten the braided chains to the settings.” (Exodus 28:9-14) The High Priest, in his role as intercessor, was to “bear” (Hebrew: *nasa*): lift up, carry, support, or exalt, the “names” (Hebrew: *shem*)—more than just the proper designation of someone, but also their character or reputation—of God’s people as a “memorial” before Him. This *zikarown*-memorial is based on the verb (*zakar*) meaning “to think about, meditate upon, pay attention to; remember, recollect;

mention, declare, recite, proclaim, invoke, commemorate, or confess.” (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*) In short, the High Priest was to represent the people before Yahweh, be their advocate, their spokesman, their ambassador. This is precisely the role Yahshua our Messiah fills on our behalf as He sits “at the right hand of God” today. Satan accuses us; He defends us.

This is all a two-way street, however. If you’ll recall, the Third Commandment put the shoe on the other foot: we are not to *nasa* (lift up, bear, or present) the *shem* (the name, character, or reputation) of Yahweh in a manner that is *shav* (empty, worthless, false, or futile). In other words, we are to be *His* advocates, spokespersons, and ambassadors before the world. He’s not asking us to do anything he hasn’t already done for us.

As usual, the material specified for the symbol is significant. Onyx, a stone soft enough to be engraved or carved, would soon be listed among twelve gemstones adorning the High Priest’s breastplate (see Precept #737). I believe they’re the same twelve stones (at least as far as what they signify) that are specified for the foundations of the New Jerusalem, listed in Revelation 21:19-20. In *Future History*, Chapter 30, I discussed each of them in turn. If I may be allowed to quote myself: “Listed fifth in the foundation stones, sardonyx was composed of two layers, sard, or sardius—a translucent deep red or red-orange form of chalcedony—and onyx, a white form of calcium carbonate soft enough to be easily carved. Onyx (Hebrew: *shoham*) was listed in the middle of the fourth row of the ephod. Sardonyx was prized for making cameos and signet rings—the soft onyx carving standing out against the red sardius background. Signet rings, of course, were used for impressing the owner’s seal into hot wax—a means of identification, proof of ownership, and exercise of authority. The sardonyx, then symbolizes our being “sealed” by Yahshua—the red of the sardius represents His blood, while the white onyx speaks of His purity.”

Finally, the two onyx nameplates were to be encased in pure gold settings and secured to the shoulder straps of the ephod with a braided chain of pure gold. It’s as if Yahweh is saying, *My people are precious to Me: I shall protect and honor them with My own character as their case is brought before Me.*

- (736) *Make the High Priest’s breast-piece.* “**You shall make the breastplate of judgment. Artistically woven according to the workmanship of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, you shall make it. It shall be doubled into a square: a span shall be its length, and a span shall be its width.**” (Exodus 28:15-16) When we hear the word

“breastplate,” we (or is it just me?) envision a heavy metal or leather shield-like affair covering the wearer’s entire chest, used to protect his vital organs in a battle, sort of like the Kevlar vests our law-enforcement officers wear for protection today. But that’s not what this is at all. It’s a *hosen*, a pouch, pocket, or envelope about nine inches square, made by folding a piece of cloth over upon itself and stitching up the two sides. In this case, the *hosen* was to hold two items called the Urim and Thummim (see Precept #739), used to discern the will of God in certain matters. That’s why this is called the “breastplate (or breast-piece) of *judgment*.” That’s the Hebrew word *mishpat*, meaning the act of deciding a legal case, the court where justice is rendered, the process of litigation, or the verdict itself. We tend to read “wrath” into judgment, but that’s only because we’re guilty. The word can actually lead either to wrath or vindication.

The same materials, craftsmanship, and design used in the ephod were to be used to make the breast-piece. Its finished shape was to be a square, reminiscent of the altar’s shape, its four equal sides indicating once again the completion of our redemption—this time stressing the comprehensive satisfaction of the legal *mishpat* requirements of the Law.

- (737) *Adorn the breastplate with gemstones.* “**And you shall put settings of stones in it, four rows of stones: The first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald; this shall be the first row; the second row shall be a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; and the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be set in gold settings. And the stones shall have the names of the sons of Israel, twelve according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, each one with its own name; they shall be according to the twelve tribes.**” (Exodus 28:17-21) The breast-piece was to be studded with twelve precious or semi-precious stones, each representing one of the patriarchs of Israel. They were affixed in order of their birth to Jacob, so the list started with Reuben (represented by the sardius) and ended with Benjamin (the jasper). Significantly, the onyx stone—which had been specified to bear the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the epaulets of the ephod—was the eleventh stone: Joseph’s. Of all the sons of Israel, Joseph became a living metaphor for the coming Messiah, his story prefiguring Christ’s in dozens of ways.

Once again, I would refer you to *Future History*, Chapter 30: “Heaven, Hell, and Eternity,” for a thorough analysis of what each of the twelve stones signify. If my take is valid, then they indicate twelve separate facets of Yahweh’s plan for our redemption (listed here in the order they appear in the foundations of the heavenly city): (1) *Jasper*: the blood of God’s perfect sacrifice, Yahshua, sprinkled upon the mercy seat to atone for our

sins. (2) *Sapphire*: heaven, our eternal destiny in Christ. (3) *Chalcedony*: mankind, the object of Yahweh's unfathomable love, and the humanity of Yahshua that enabled Him to rescue us. (4) *Emerald*: our need for the Holy Spirit—God's very presence living within us. (5) *Sardonyx*: our "sealing" by Yahshua. (6) *Sardius*: the blood of Yahshua, shed for our sins. (7) *Chrysolite*: the unfathomable riches of God's love toward us. (8) *Beryl*: Yahweh's loving provision for us—the exquisite balance of the whole created universe. (9) *Topaz*: Yahshua's work in us through the testing of this world, making us more useful, more beautiful, and infinitely more valuable. (10) *Chrysoprase*: the fruit of the Spirit in the believer's life—i.e., love and the things that grow out of it. (11) *Jacinth*: our glorious future in the "dwelling places" Yahshua has prepared for us. And (12) *Amethyst*: divine royalty, Yahshua—and through Him the status of the redeemed, described as a "royal priesthood."

I may not have gotten all of the symbols correct (or *any* of them, for that matter). But it's clear to me that they're each symbolic of *something* in Yahweh's plan for our redemption. Like the ephod's epaulets, the twelve stones of the breast-piece were to be set in gold, signifying (at the very least) that the twelve tribes of Israel were set apart and protected through Yahweh's immutable, imperishable character. They were each to be engraved with their individual tribal names. (Perhaps this was done on their gold settings, for some of these stones were quite hard.) I take this as a reminder that Yahweh knows each of us individually, not just by the group to which we belong, either by choice or genetic serendipity. Beyond that, against what seem like very long odds, each and every tribe of Israel will regain its place in the national heritage during Yahshua's Millennial reign (see Ezekiel 48). Makes perfect sense: **"They shall be set in gold settings."**

Lest we forget, the breast-piece was to be worn by Aaron, the High Priest, in his role as prophetically appointed intercessor for his people. **"So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel on the breastplate of judgment over his heart, when he goes into the holy place, as a memorial before Yahweh continually."** (Exodus 28:29) The twelve tribes of his people were to be literally *on his heart* as he ministered before Yahweh. No less so are all the saints on the heart and mind of Yahshua as he intercedes for us before the Father in heaven.

- (738) *Attach the High Priest's breastplate to his ephod.* **"You shall make chains for the breastplate at the end, like braided cords of pure gold. And you shall make two rings of gold for the breastplate, and put the two rings on the two ends of the breastplate. Then you shall put the two braided chains of gold in the two rings**

which are on the ends of the breastplate; and the other two ends of the two braided chains you shall fasten to the two settings, and put them on the shoulder straps of the ephod in the front.” (Exodus 28:22-25) Here we see how the breast-piece was to be attached to the High Priest’s wardrobe. If you’ll recall, the ephod was like an apron or skirt that was held up with two straps over the High Priest’s shoulders. The breast-piece was to be suspended between these two shoulder straps. Here we see the top attachment points. Golden rings were to be attached to both the “ends” (i.e., the edge, extremity, or selvedge—Hebrew: *qatsah*) of the breast-piece, and also to the two “settings,” that is, the gold frames into which were set the two onyx stones with the names of the sons of Israel, which perched upon the High Priest’s shoulders. These rings were to be joined by two braided cords of pure gold, which I would guess were five or six inches long.

The breast-piece didn’t just hang there loose, however. Its lower edge was attached in a similar way to the straps, just above the ephod’s “intricately woven band,” the *chesheb* we mentioned in Precept #734. **“You shall make two rings of gold, and put them on the two ends of the breastplate, on the edge of it, which is on the inner side of the ephod. And two other rings of gold you shall make, and put them on the two shoulder straps, underneath the ephod toward its front, right at the seam above the intricately woven band of the ephod. They shall bind the breastplate by means of its rings to the rings of the ephod, using a blue cord, so that it is above the intricately woven band of the ephod, and so that the breastplate does not come loose from the ephod.”** (Exodus 28:26-28) We covered this briefly in Mitzvah #432, where I noted, “It’s a picture of service and intercession. The reason the ephod and breastplate were to remain attached was that service without love is worthless, just as love without service is impossible.”

If you’re like me, you’re wondering why we were given such intricate and exacting instructions for the attachment of the breast-piece. Following the principle that Yahweh never tells us anything on a pointless whim, I was compelled to ask myself: why, if the breast-piece was never to be removed from the ephod, was it attached in such a convoluted manner? Why not just sew it on, or for that matter, why not make the whole affair out of a single piece of linen and be done with it? Yahweh’s trying to tell us something here, but He’s making us dig for it.

Let’s review the details. There were four points of attachment. The top two corners of the breast-piece were attached to the gold settings of the onyx epaulets with golden cords. At the bottom, it was attached to the straps near the ephod’s “intricately woven band,” but this time, the

attachment was done with a blue (*tekelet*) cord. In no case, however, was the cord affixed directly to the ephod or the breast-piece. Rather, it was attached to an intermediate ring, made of gold, which was in turn joined to the ephod. We might expect these rings, then, eight of them in all, to have significance beyond their mere attachment capabilities, since they weren't really necessary if all you wanted to do was connect the breast-piece to the ephod. So it's with some interest that we find that the Hebrew word for "ring" (*taba'at*)—a ring or signet ring—has far more to do with "signet" than it does "ring." The root verb *taba* means to sink, to penetrate, as a signet ring would sink into the hot wax of a ruler's seal. The use of the *taba'at* signet ring verified the authority of the one who used it. The round shape that allowed it to stay on his finger when not in use was pretty much beside the point.

What, then, is the symbolic significance of the unusual and counter-intuitive method of attaching the breast-piece to the ephod? Let's look at the individual pieces of the puzzle. (1) The High Priest, the one who wears these items, is metaphorical of Yahshua the Messiah. (2) The ephod speaks of the Messiah's service and sacrifice—His shouldering the burden of Israel's sin (on the one end) and (3) His "intricately woven band," the *chesheb*, signifying His sacrifice and voluntary defilement on behalf of everybody else (on the other). (4) The breast-piece with its twelve stones worn over the High Priest's heart symbolizes Yahweh's love as demonstrated by His multi-faceted plan for our redemption. (5) The gold cords between the breast-piece and the onyx epaulets inscribed with Israel's tribal names signify the precious and immutable promises of Yahweh toward them. (6) The blue cords running between the breast-piece and the ephod's *chesleb* band represent the direct line between the Messiah and His ekklesia (something not enjoyed by Israel as a nation—yet). And (7) the rings that appear at every juncture remind us that God's people—all of us—are sealed through the authority of Almighty Yahweh. In point of fact, then, the High Priest is *wearing* the story of our redemption upon his body.

- (739) *Provide for the Urim and Thummim.* **"And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before Yahweh. So Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel over his heart before Yahweh continually."** (Exodus 28:30) The breast-piece, you'll recall, was a doubled-over piece of cloth, with the "pocket" opening at the top. These two mysterious objects, the *Urim* and *Thummim*, were to be placed within that pocket. They were used exclusively by the High Priest to discern the will of Yahweh in matters of national importance, though the actual method or means he used has been lost to

history (which is probably a good thing). These weren't "divination" devices, like reading tea leaves or throwing dice. Such practices, in fact, were strictly forbidden. Rather, the idea and goal was to elicit guidance from Yahweh in the absence of a Torah precept covering the question, or a prophet like Samuel or Elijah with which to consult. Neither chance nor occult knowledge was in view. It seems the *Urim* and *Thummim* were most often used to elicit a "yes or no" answer from Yahweh (e.g. I Samuel 23:9-12). But unlike "flipping a coin," the question could entail more than a simple binary decision (as in Judges 1:1). And the answer might even be, "I'm not going to give you an answer," (as in I Samuel 28:6).

Both of these words are plural forms. *Urim* is based on *ur*, a verb meaning "to be light, to shine; to give light, cause to shine; or to illumine." Literally, then, *urim* means "lights" or "illumination." *Thummim* (or *Tumim*) is derived from the verb *tamam*: to be complete, as in the related words *tom* (integrity or uprightness) and *tam* (perfect). Thus *thummim*, the plural of *tom*, literally means "perfections." It speaks of truth that is arrived at honestly, in a natural, non-calculating way, with a clear conscience and pure motives. The use of the word to describe the random, un-aimed arrow shot that killed Ahab almost by accident (I Kings 22) gives us a clearer picture of the underlying tone of *tom* and *thummim*.

We needn't get hung up on how the High Priest used the *Urim* and *Thummim* to discern the will of Yahweh. I realize that Josephus reported that the twelve stones of the ephod would shine when the Israelites were to be victorious in battle (Antiquities, 3.8, 9) and that the Talmudic rabbis suggested that the Shekinah would illumine letters within the engraved names of these stones to spell out secret messages (never mind the fact that they were five letters short of an alphabet using that method). These fanciful extrapolations on history and scripture ignore the fact that we never hear of the *Urim* and *Thummim* being used after the reign of David. Ezra and Nehemiah both mention their need, but not their use, at the time of the return of Judah's exiles from Babylon. It's quite possible that there was no physical property associated with them at all, but that their use in faith gave the High Priest prophetic insight into the question at hand.

We, rather, should consider what the *Urim* and *Thummim* mean as metaphors in Yahweh's plan for our lives. Because they are the exclusive province of *our* High Priest, Yahshua, we are blessed with the counsel they provide, for His Spirit dwells within us today. We need only to ask for guidance. We would be fools not to avail ourselves of this priceless resource: lights and perfections—illumination and truth.

(740) *Make the High Priest's robe.* "You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. There shall be an opening for his head in the middle of it; it shall have a woven binding all around its opening, like the opening in a coat of mail, so that it does not tear. And upon its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet, all around its hem, and bells of gold between them all around: a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe all around. And it shall be upon Aaron when he ministers, and its sound will be heard when he goes into the holy place before Yahweh and when he comes out, that he may not die." (Exodus 28:31-35) Worn over the linen tunic, the High Priest's "robe" was more like a sleeved poncho than a coat, in that it wasn't open at the front. Rather, it was slipped on over the head. The "neck" was reinforced so it wouldn't tear. It was customary in these times for one to rend his clothing in order to express profound anguish or deep mourning, but the High Priest was specifically prohibited from doing so (see Mitzvah #373). The reason, I believe, is wrapped up in what the robe represented: since it was made entirely of blue-dyed fabric, the ultimate High Priest's role as King is being stressed here.

Since kings and priests were supposed to come from different tribes (Judah versus Levi), only one candidate for fulfillment exists: Yahshua, both our King and our High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. On the other hand, there *was* one incident where a prophet was instructed to "crown" a High Priest and speak of him as if he were a king: "**Behold, the Man whose name is the branch! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of Yahweh. Yes, He shall build the temple of Yahweh. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne. So He shall be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.**" (Zechariah 6:12-13) This was all prophetic of the coming Messiah, of course. The name of the priest? Joshua (pronounced: Yahshua), son of Jehozadak (which, not coincidentally, means "Yahweh has justified"). You think maybe God was trying to tell us something?

The point of never tearing the royal robe was that although the Messiah in his role as the Lamb of God would be torn—slain to atone for our sins—His position *as King* was unassailable. It made no difference if billions of lost and rebellious people said, "We will not have this Man to rule over us." He *does* rule, whether they like it or not. The role of King of kings cannot be torn away from Yahshua.

And what of the "decorative" elements to be applied to the hem of the robe? Pomegranates embroidered in blue, purple, and scarlet were to ring the hem, interspersed with bells made of pure gold, sewn on in a way that would allow them to ring when the High Priest walked. The reason given

for the bells is a warning: **“Its sound will be heard when he goes into the holy place before Yahweh and when he comes out, that he may not die.”** That he may not *die*? This is apparently more serious than it looks. The key, I think, is once again the metal from which the bells were to be made: gold—precious, immutable, proven pure in the crucible of adversity. The golden bells announce to Yahweh that the High Priest is there in his role as a symbolic representative of the coming Anointed One—he is *not* standing before Yahweh pretending to be “good enough” to intercede for the people on his own. He is, rather, the emissary of the King.

The pomegranates mean something else entirely. But what? Rabbis have tried to make the case that pomegranates represent the Law of Moses, because they contain 613 seeds. Problem is, they don’t. These apple-sized fruits always have lots of seeds, it’s true: that’s what the Anglicized name of the plant means (Latin: *pomum* = “apple,” and *granatus* = “seeded”). But they range from under 200 to over 1,300 in number—hardly the precision you’d expect from a biblical metaphor, if that’s really what it was supposed to mean. And besides, I’ve convincingly demonstrated that there *aren’t* 613 “laws” in the Torah. That’s a Talmudic prevarication, nothing more. But the meaning *is* tied to the seeds, which when crushed yield a sweet-to-sour red juice (the basis of grenadine, for example) that is symbolic of the shed blood of Yahshua the Messiah. (No wonder the rabbis are scrambling for alternative explanations, lame or not.) I suppose you could say that whether the “blood” of the pomegranate is sweet to you or sour depends upon your relationship with the One who did the bleeding.

The “decorative elements” on the hem of the robe, then, are anything but merely decorative. They speak of the two functions of the Messiah, suffering servant and reigning king, repeated over and over again so we wouldn’t lose sight of one or the other.

- (741) *Make a golden plate for display on the High Priest’s turban. “You shall also make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet: HOLINESS TO YAHWEH. And you shall put it on a blue cord, that it may be on the turban; it shall be on the front of the turban. So it shall be on Aaron’s forehead, that Aaron may bear [i.e., carry away] the iniquity of the holy things which the children of Israel hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before Yahweh.”* (Exodus 28:36-38) The symbolism latent in the High Priest’s garments is like buried treasure—it’s exciting and rewarding to dig it out. But sometimes Yahweh just leaves nuggets of truth lying around on the ground for us to pick up—sometimes he literally spells it out for us. Like here. There was to be a golden sign

attached to the turban worn by the High Priest that read “Holiness to Yahweh,” or “Set Apart to Yahweh.” That is precisely the job description of not only the High Priest, but also the Messiah he represents—and indeed, all of us who are “in” him. Maybe if we all walked around with signs on our foreheads stating in no uncertain terms what (and Who) we’re about, we’d be less apt to behave the way we do.

Of course, even here, there are symbolic aspects we should address. The plate is made of gold, speaking of Christ’s precious, immutable purity. It is attached to the linen (read: righteousness) turban with a blue cord, symbolic of the Messiah’s royalty. And where is it placed? On the forehead, i.e., over the frontal lobe. As I pointed out before, the frontal cortex controls our emotions and personality, motor function, problem solving, spontaneity, memory, language, initiation, judgment, impulse control, and social and sexual behavior. If these things—what we do, think, and feel—were “covered” by our consecration to Yahweh, how far wrong could we possibly go?

(742) *Make the High Priest’s tunic, turban, and sash. “You shall skillfully weave the tunic of fine linen thread, you shall make the turban of fine linen, and you shall make the sash of woven work.”* (Exodus 28:39) We’ve mentioned all of these garments one way or another in the past few pages. Perhaps we should pause and reflect on the *verbs* being used here. There are three of them in this verse. “Skillfully weave” is the Hebrew *shabats*: to weave or plait, to interlock threads at right angles to make a fabric. “Make” (used twice) is *’asah*, a generic verb for accomplishing something: do, make, cause, bring about, work (i.e., expend labor or effort in a task or endeavor), behave or conduct oneself in a certain way—even to caress or fondle. Finally, “woven” is actually a verb, *raqam*, meaning to weave variegated cloth, thus to be formed, fashioned, or woven out of a variety of existing materials—including the formation of our own bodies and souls, as in Psalm 136:15: **“My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.”**

What, then, is Yahweh instructing us to do here (besides the obvious manufacture of the High Priest’s clothing)? We are being told to follow the creative instincts He built into us when He created us in His own “image and likeness.” Yahweh gave us the ability to do things, to make stuff, to take raw materials and craft them into something useful, beautiful, valuable, or significant. He gave us brains with which to think, fingers with which to manipulate our world, senses with which to perceive it all, and a spirit with which we can joyfully appreciate the result. We humans have the ability to grow flax, weave it into linen cloth, and sew it into the

High Priest's tunic. We have the ability to harvest wood, metal, and other materials, fashion musical instruments, learn how to play them, and proceed to praise Yahweh with a joyful noise. We have the ability to harness electrons, herd them across microscopic silicon landscapes, and use them to bring enlightenment and truth to literally billions of our fellow creatures. But what do we do? All too often, we squander our creative gifts or allow them to be stolen from us. We work for a paycheck (or worse, for *the weekend*) instead of "as unto our heavenly Father." We slouch in our La-Z-Boys watching mindless Hollywood drivel instead of using the time to sharpen our intellects or serve our fellow man. We take instead of giving, consume instead of creating, medicate instead of meditating, prey on people instead of praying for them, and complain instead of communicating. My friends, we need to get off our butts and "skillfully weave" something.

- (743) *Make tunics, trousers, sashes, and hats for all the priests. "For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics, and you shall make sashes for them. And you shall make hats for them, for glory and beauty. So you shall put them on Aaron your brother and on his sons with him. You shall anoint them, consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister to Me as priests. And you shall make for them linen trousers to cover their nakedness; they shall reach from the waist to the thighs."* (Exodus 28:40-42) The High Priest wasn't the only one who was to wear special clothing identifying his office and symbolizing some larger truth. The regular priests (all the male descendants of Aaron) were to be "uniformed" as well, though not as splendiferously as the High Priest. The thing that most clearly distinguished them was their "hats," or turbans. Different from the High Priest's turban (*mitsnephesh*), the word describing the ordinary priest's headgear (*migba'ah*) stresses its height or rounded summit. The priestly turban was supposed to impart "glory" (Hebrew: *kabowd*—glory, honor, reverence, or dignity) and "beauty" (*tiph'arah*—splendor, beauty, excellence, a mark of rank or renown) to the priests as a class. With such an unexpected twist—glory and splendor being bestowed *upon men* at God's instruction—I can't help but reflect on the "hats" said to be reserved for all believers—people for whom the priests of Israel serve as symbolic types: **"There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."** (II Timothy 4:8)

With the linen tunics (covering the short trousers) and identical sashes, the headgear helped to identify the priests *as* a priests, setting them apart from the average Israelite—even their brother Levites—when they were performing their priestly duties in the Tabernacle: **"They shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they come into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they**

come near the altar to minister in the holy place, that they do not incur iniquity and die. It shall be a statute forever to him and his descendants after him.” (Exodus 28:43) Again, there’s a warning attached: wear the special clothes when you minister within the Holy Place, or die for your disobedience. This is not a pointless tradition (like that observed by some American Christians who feel they *must* wear a coat and tie to church) but rather another of Yahweh’s object lessons. The linen from which the clothing was made was symbolic of righteousness—and *imputed* righteousness at that. Linen was made from flax, which grew up out of the ground—a picture of God’s miraculous provision. It “breathes” (like cotton does), making it not only comfortable to wear, but also an apt metaphor for receiving the Spirit of God, since the Hebrew word for spirit, *ruach*, also means wind or breath.

The corresponding opposite “fabric metaphor” would be wool, which symbolizes sacrifice and labor—and not surprisingly, is said to make the wearer perspire. The comparison is spelled out plainly in Yahweh’s instructions for the priestly wardrobe in the Millennial Temple. **“And it shall be, whenever they [the priests] enter the gates of the inner court, that they shall put on linen garments; no wool shall come upon them while they minister within the gates of the inner court or within the house. They shall have linen turbans on their heads and linen trousers on their bodies; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat.”** (Ezekiel 44:17-18) Since the priests as a class are a metaphor for believers in general, the lesson is clear: we may not approach Yahweh through our works (symbolized by wool). Only what He provides with which to cover our nakedness and shame (metaphorically, linen) is acceptable.

ARTISTS AND CRAFTSMEN

- (744) *Recognize and make use of God’s gifts of talent or ability. “All who are gifted artisans among you shall come and make all that Yahweh has commanded.”* (Exodus 35:10) It bears repeating: our eternal destiny is a choice that Yahweh leaves up to us—each one individually. But choosing our roles within the household of faith—once we have become part of Yahweh’s family—remains the prerogative of the Father. Each of us is given gifts or talents—potential that we are supposed to realize and develop to the best of our ability. But we are not all given the same gifts, the same proclivities and aptitudes, or the same degree of potential. Some servants are given “ten talents” to invest; others get only one. It’s no shame to be less gifted, only to be less willing to use the gift.

The construction of the Tabernacle provided a demonstration of this principle in microcosm. A wide variety of skills were needed to get the job

done, building “the tabernacle, its tent, its covering, its clasps, its boards, its bars, its pillars, and its sockets; the ark and its poles, with the mercy seat, and the veil of the covering; the table and its poles, all its utensils, and the showbread; also the lampstand for the light, its utensils, its lamps, and the oil for the light; the incense altar, its poles, the anointing oil, the sweet incense, and the screen for the door at the entrance of the tabernacle; the altar of burnt offering with its bronze grating, its poles, all its utensils, and the laver and its base; the hangings of the court, its pillars, their sockets, and the screen for the gate of the court; the pegs of the tabernacle, the pegs of the court, and their cords; the garments of ministry, for ministering in the holy place—the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests.” (Exodus 35:11-19) There are a score of different disciplines in there, and the Plan of God—a.k.a. the Tabernacle—required all of them, everybody working in harmony toward a common goal, according to a single master plan. Paul used a different metaphor: the “body of Christ,” to get the same idea across. Though we are united in purpose and destiny, we are quite different in function, one from another.

Yahweh has assigned to each of His children a task. Here in Exodus, one person cuts down acacia trees and mills them into lumber; another crafts those boards into furniture for the Tabernacle; another covers them with gold. One spins flax into linen thread; another weaves the thread into fabric; another fashions the fabric into the High Priest’s trousers. Nobody does it all, not even the master craftsmen Bezaleel and Aholiab, who were assigned the task of “art direction.” I can relate to these guys, for I held a similar position for most of my adult life. And along the way, God taught me a few things. (1) *You aren’t working to please yourself.* There’s always a client whose needs must be met, and he in turn is counting on using your work to meet *his* customer’s needs. Whatever you do has the potential to affect many lives. You aren’t working in a vacuum. (2) *Craftsmanship counts.* People are going to use your work as a resource in their lives. If you’re lazy or sloppy or careless, your mistakes will harm those farther down the line who depend on your part being right. Love demands that you do the best you can. (3) *You’re only one piece of the puzzle.* If you don’t “fit” those who must interact with you (whether above or below you on the food chain), you will leave a gaping hole in the overall picture, and someone is going to have to compensate for your shortcomings. (4) *What you do has value.* Even the smallest, most seemingly insignificant piece of the “big picture” has a reason for being there, a part to play. By doing your job well, you improve everything. But if you shirk your responsibilities, even small ones, you diminish the whole. (5) *You can be replaced.* It doesn’t matter how indispensable you think you are. Your employer or

your client has the right *and the power* to replace you, or simply opt to do without you. If you stop learning, you run the risk of becoming obsolete, of no use to anyone. Pride (in the sense of arrogance) has no place in our lives. (6) *Failure isn't fatal*. We all make mistakes. Learn from them. Anybody can live through success. It's how you handle disaster that defines your character. Accept responsibility; don't shift blame. Keep your word, even if it's painful or expensive to do so. (7) *Small tasks lead to bigger ones*. If we are faithful in the little things, we are more likely to be entrusted with greater responsibilities. Nobody starts at the top, and even those who have reached positions of leadership still have room for growth and improvement.

These things all have applications beyond the workplace, of course. They're true in our personal relationships too, and they have spiritual ramifications as well, for we are designed to be spiritual beings. A worker who doesn't use his gifts or talents finds himself unemployed. In our personal lives, disuse or misuse of our gifts will lead to estrangement and stagnation. It's really no different in our relationship with God. Use it or lose it.

- (745) *Set up the tabernacle on "New Year's Day."* "Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. You shall put in it the ark of the Testimony, and partition off the ark with the veil. You shall bring in the table and arrange the things that are to be set in order on it; and you shall bring in the lampstand and light its lamps. You shall also set the altar of gold for the incense before the ark of the Testimony, and put up the screen for the door of the tabernacle. Then you shall set the altar of the burnt offering before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. And you shall set the laver between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. You shall set up the court all around, and hang up the screen at the court gate.'"

(Exodus 40:1-8) A couple of things bear notice here. First, Yahweh has a schedule. He does things in order, on time, and according to His own plan. The first day of the first month (Abib/Nisan) wasn't one of the seven *mow'ed miqra'ey*, or "appointed convocations" that defined and prophesied the seven most significant milestones in His plan of redemption. Rather, it was about two weeks prior to the first of them. The lesson: Yahweh's plan of salvation was in place *before* He commenced the process of saving us. He's not making this stuff up as He goes along, reacting to unexpected emergencies and putting out fires, but is methodically pursuing a strategy and timeline He established and unveiled long before we—its beneficiaries—even realized what was going on.

And notice something else about the date: the first day of the month (when the Tabernacle was to be erected) coincided with the new moon. It was *dark* at night. But the first three *miqra'ey*—Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Firstfruits—were scheduled for the 14th, 15th and 16th, when the moon was full and everybody could plainly see what was going on, even after the sun had set. His plan, in other words, is designed to be obvious to anybody willing to look. If Yahweh is so obviously on a schedule, and if He's told us so much about that schedule, we would be idiots to disregard it, to take half a verse (**"But of that day and hour no one perceives"**—Matthew 24:36) out of context and conclude that we can't know anything about God's timing, and even that it's somehow a heresy against God's Word to pay attention to what He *did* say on the subject. He said a lot. We in this last generation ignore it at our peril.

Second, this "New Year's Day" came less than one year after the exodus—which got underway about two weeks before this date the previous year. Considering how much had to be done in the construction of the Tabernacle and its appurtenances, I envision this project to be the primary occupation of the entire nation of Israel during that first year. To get the job done, hundreds of thousands of Israelites had to be involved in one way or another. They were starting from scratch, and it was an immense undertaking. It required focus, unity of purpose, and cooperation from every sector of society. What could we achieve if all humanity came together under the banner of King Yahshua? Or perhaps I should ask, what *will* we achieve...?

Third, although it's not stated here, there were specific people assigned to setting up the Tabernacle. As we read in Exodus 40 we get the vague impression that Moses himself set everything up (making him one spry and overworked 81-year old), but we get the particulars in Numbers 3: of the Levite clans, Gershon was to handle the Tabernacle's "soft" components, curtains, veils, etc.; Kohath handled all the furnishings and utensils; and Merari was to take care of the "hard" structural elements like boards, pillars, socket-bases, and so forth. As in the previous precept, we see that our tasks are assigned by Yahweh. We are not to shirk our own duties, nor are we to covet or usurp the roles He has given to others to perform.

When viewed this way, it seems the Tabernacle was like a traveling circus: a thousand disparate pieces, from large swaths of linen and leather, to immense hunks of silver or bronze with mysterious holes in them, to small, solid gold spoons and wick trimmers. Separately, the parts suggest nothing. It is only when they come together under God's direction that

their significance unfolds—beautiful, even stunning, to those of us who dare to look beyond the material entity to discover the Plan of God implied in every detail—put together on the first day of the year to tell us what its Designer would accomplish during the time of mankind upon the earth. Like the circus, everybody has a job to do. But this, my friends, really *is* the Greatest Show on Earth.

(746) *Consecrate the tabernacle and its components with anointing oil. “And you shall take the anointing oil, and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it; and you shall hallow it and all its utensils, and it shall be holy. You shall anoint the altar of the burnt offering and all its utensils, and consecrate the altar. The altar shall be most holy. And you shall anoint the laver and its base, and consecrate it.”*

(Exodus 40:9-10) As we saw in Mitzvah #436, the anointing oil was more than just olive oil—which by now we should all understand to indicate the Holy Spirit. Its special and exclusive recipe also included myrrh, cinnamon, sweet cane, and cassia. These ingredients fine tune our focus: the oil of Yahweh’s *Ruach Qodesh* is the primary ingredient, but the bitter sorrow of myrrh, the attraction of cinnamon, the mortal humanity suggested by the sweet cane (*qaneh*, a six-cubit unit of measure), and fragrant cassia’s role in preparing Christ’s body for burial all conspire to identify the anointing oil with the Anointed One, Yahshua the Messiah.

What, then, was to be consecrated with the Anointed One? *Everything*: “**the Tabernacle and all that is in it.**” And what was the objective of doing this? To “hallow it,” that is, to make it holy, to set it apart from the world for Yahweh’s glory and purpose. The bottom line, then, is that the Plan of God for the redemption of mankind is uniquely efficacious in achieving that goal: our salvation. Why? Because this Plan alone is based on the One who was anointed by God to redeem us. No alternative plan proposed by man—neither works, penance, sacrifice, submission, denial, hedonism, nor blatant ignorance—will suffice. God’s Plan *can* exist within the matrix of religion, but they are not at all the same thing. Indeed, religion is especially dangerous because it masquerades as the Plan itself. Knowing *about* something, even bowing down to it, is not the same thing as *knowing* it. Yahweh seeks children, not subjects—family, not a fan club.

Although the entire Tabernacle, all of its components and contents, were to be sprinkled with the anointing oil, three things are singled out here for special notice. (1) The utensils—spoons, shovels, trays, wick trimmers, and so forth—are the implements used to “get the job done.” Depending on their station, they were either solid gold (speaking of immutable purity) or bronze (indicating a function related to judgment). I believe these anointed implements are us, the believers—willing tools in

the hand of God to achieve His various purposes in this earth. (2) The altar of burnt offering is the focus of the entire Tabernacle compound—the first thing one encounters upon entering the courtyard, the “gatekeeper” of the Plan of God. It represents the sacrifice of Yahshua, of course, but it’s also the epicenter of our homage and thanksgiving. The altar is—pick a preposition: of, for, to, with, from, or about—our Anointed One. (3) The bronze laver is where the hands and feet of the priests—their works and walk—were to be cleansed with water (the Word of God) before they could enter the Tabernacle. Our text specifically mentions “its base.” The laver’s foundation pedestal—that upon which the Word is upheld—is none other than Yahshua (again), and the bronze from which it is made speaks of the judgment He endured in our stead.

THE PACE OF PROGRESS

- (747) *Move or stay put at Yahweh’s leading.* **“At the command of Yahweh they remained encamped, and at the command of Yahweh they journeyed; they kept the charge of Yahweh, at the command of Yahweh by the hand of Moses.”** (Numbers 9:23) The Tabernacle was the center of community life during the wilderness wanderings. The twelve tribes were to camp all around it, three of them toward each direction of the compass, in a particular God-ordained order. But they didn’t stay in one place for the whole forty years; every now and then, they packed up and moved to a new location. Yahweh made it His own prerogative to determine why and when they did this, and where they would go next.

Our text is the conclusion to a lengthy passage telling us how Israel knew where to go, and when: **“Now on the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the Testimony; from evening until morning it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire....”** In context, we learn that this “raising up” of the Tabernacle is the same inaugural event as that spoken of in Exodus 40—Precept #746—the first day of the first month of the second year of the exodus. When the Levites got the structure all put together, the Shekinah, the pillar of cloud and light that had guided Israel across the Red Sea, came and stood over the newly-erected Sanctuary.

This would be the pattern for the next thirty-nine years. **“So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents. At the command of Yahweh the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of Yahweh they would camp; as long as the cloud**

stayed above the tabernacle they remained encamped...." I realize Yahweh had a "captive audience" here, and one composed of former slaves at that. But we have nary a whisper of reluctance on the part of the Israelites to follow Yahweh's leading here. That's so refreshing. Most of the Pentateuch—most of the *Bible*—is a record of one Jewish rebellion after the other. "A stubborn and stiff-necked people," they're called. Why did they obey here? Was it that they got tired or discontented with where they were and were eager to move on? (But if that was the case, why don't we hear of groups striking out on their own before God told them to move?) Was it that they feared for their lives if they didn't follow the cloud as directed? Was it that the manna fell only where the cloud was? Was it merely a case of group dynamics, of "follow the leader?" Or was it that they genuinely desired to be close to their God's visible presence every hour of the day and night—that they felt secure there? Whatever the reason, follow they did, without murmur or complaint, as far as we know. Precisely what we should endeavor to do.

More details are given: **"Even when the cloud continued long, many days above the tabernacle, the children of Israel kept the charge of Yahweh and did not journey. So it was, when the cloud was above the tabernacle a few days: according to the command of Yahweh they would remain encamped, and according to the command of Yahweh they would journey. So it was, when the cloud remained only from evening until morning: when the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they would journey; whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud was taken up, they would journey. Whether it was two days, a month, or a year that the cloud remained above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would remain encamped and not journey; but when it was taken up, they would journey."** (Numbers 9:15-22) I don't know about you, but I find Yahweh's personal direction of my own life awfully hard to discern sometimes. He no longer provides a towering pillar of cloud and fire that we can watch and say, "Oops, the Cloud is on the move—pack up the camel and grab the kids!" Now He's quite a bit more subtle. He speaks not in the whirlwind, but in the still, small voice. We have to listen hard for it. On the other hand, considering (in hindsight) how my life has been blessed, perhaps I developed the knack of listening to Yahweh early in life, and with it the propensity to do what He was telling me without Him having to raise His voice. (I need to include my wife of forty years in that observation: we don't do anything significant unless we're on the same wavelength—as we invariably are. If God announced the rapture was going to be next Saturday, Gayle and I would glance at each other, nod our heads, and say in unison, "Yeah, let's go!")

The point is, we *need* to listen to (and for) Yahweh's personal directions. They aren't written in scripture (e.g., **"Thou, O Ken, shalt forsake**

thy business and journey forth to Virginia in 1996.” Hezekiah 91:6) but the habits and attitudes we need to develop in order to make God’s individual instructions “audible” to us are spelled out clearly in His Word. Things to remember: (1) If you’re not Yahweh’s child, He won’t offer advice (beyond that one thing: “Become My child”). If we aren’t willing to listen to Him on that issue, He won’t waste our precious time. Choice is our prerogative. (2) God won’t cut off communication with us, but strangely enough, He has given us the power to do that very thing: our sin can “quench” the influence of the Holy Spirit living within us. (3) If we don’t trust Yahweh in the little things, He won’t trust us to do the big ones. Remember, the parable’s servant who faithfully administered ten talents was given exactly the same commendation as the one who did a good job taking care of only five. (4) There isn’t a pot of gold lurking beyond every rainbow: occasionally, all that’s there is some poor schlub who needs our help. (5) God runs things on His own perfect schedule, and our impatience (or foolishness) does not constitute an emergency on His part. (6) Yahweh’s idea of “living well” doesn’t necessarily line up with ours. Don’t be surprised to find that a new bass boat or a bigger television aren’t *nearly* as important as love among the brethren and close fellowship with Him. And (7) **“All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.”** (Romans 8:28-29)

APPOINTING THE C.E.O.

- (748) *Ask Yahweh to choose your leaders.* **“Then Moses spoke to Yahweh, saying: ‘Let Yahweh, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of Yahweh may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.’”** (Numbers 27:15-17) In context, Yahweh had just told Moses that his time was about up—that he wouldn’t lead his people into the Promised Land, but would be “gathered to his people” (that is, die). Moses was a hundred and twenty years old by this time—sixty years *older* than any living Israelite except for Joshua and Caleb. Yahweh reminded Moses that his sin at Meribah, where he’d struck the rock instead of speaking to it, was what had disqualified him. I suspect, however, that Mo was thinking, *That’s alright, I understand. Frankly, I’ve been looking forward to this—I could use the rest.* He didn’t whine and pout and beg for more time. Rather, the first thing that came into his mind was, *These, my people, are going to need a good leader when I’m gone. Please select the right man for the job, O God.* Yahweh’s response (see the following precept)

indicates that Moses' concern had already been addressed. God had, in fact, been preparing Moses' successor for the last forty years. He chose one of the twelve original spies—one of only two who had given a good report—the one who had been Moses' right hand man ever since: Joshua.

All of this brings up an interesting question. How are we to select our leaders here on earth? There are three basic systems in operation in our world, though in practice they overlap to some extent. Human leaders come to power either through force, through heredity, or through acclamation. All three methods often involve some level of treachery. Here in America, we like to think democracy (i.e., organized acclamation) is God's gift to civilized man, but if we stopped to think about it for ten minutes, we'd realize that it's nothing but mob rule in a three-piece suit, just as susceptible to treachery as either of the alternatives (which is not to say it's not superior to its two rival methodologies, all things considered). But there's a fourth possibility, one that hardly anybody ever even considers: human leadership chosen by divine fiat.

I have no doubt that Moses, had he been asked, would have chosen Joshua for the job. (His second choice might have been Caleb, but since he was a Kennezeitite—an Edomite gentile who had been "adopted" into the tribe of Judah—that might have been problematical.) But Moses didn't state his preference or his opinion. He didn't exercise what the average man in his position would have considered the least of his prerogatives—selecting his own successor. He didn't choose one of his own blood relatives for the coveted spot. He didn't poll the tribal leaders, asking them to put forth candidates. He didn't take the issue before the people so they could vote on it. He simply asked Yahweh to choose.

Why aren't we smart enough to do that? Before you answer my admittedly rhetorical question with a snappy comeback, remember this: the same God who appointed Moses, Joshua, and David to rule in Israel, also appointed Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar II, and Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Sometimes we need to be hauled off into captivity to purge us of our damnable pride. Sometimes we need to be oppressed within our own borders to teach us to honor the God who gave us this land.

- (749) *Anoint Joshua (Yahshua) as your leader.* **“And Yahweh said to Moses: ‘Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before Yahweh for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he**

and all the children of Israel with him—all the congregation.” (Numbers 27:18-21) In answer to Moses’ request for Yahweh to select a worthy successor to lead Israel, Yahweh chose Joshua. This name, of course, is identical with that of our Savior the Messiah, who would appear some 1,500 years later: Yahshua, commonly known as “Jesus.” I trust that we all know by this time that the name means “Yahweh is Salvation.” In truth, this was a relatively common name in Israelite/Jewish society. Several other “Joshuas” were mentioned in scripture, all, I believe, with subtle (or not so subtle) prophetic implications connected with them: a resident of Bethshemesh on whose land the Ark of the Covenant came to rest after the Philistines released it; the governor of Jerusalem under king Josiah who gave his name to a city gate; and a high priest after the restoration who was crowned by Zechariah in prophetic anticipation of the Messiah’s building of the Temple (see Precept #740). So is Moses’ protégé Joshua a Messianic type as well? Let’s examine the text more closely.

Joshua was “the son of Nun.” *Nun* is a Hebrew verb meaning to continue, or to increase—as in **“His name [the subject here is “the king,” i.e., Yahshua] shall endure forever; His name shall continue (or increase—*nun*) as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him. All nations shall call Him blessed.”** (Psalm 72:17) The idea is perpetuity, but continually increasing in power or rightness. So you might say that “Joshua the son of Nun” embodies the Messianic concept of being the “Son” of the perpetually greater One, Yahweh, who is our salvation.

Joshua is described as **“a man in whom is the Spirit.”** His antitype, Yahshua, told His disciples, **“I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”** (John 14:16-18) He has just equated Himself, on some level, with the Holy Spirit who would indwell us.

Moses was to “lay his hand on him” and “inaugurate” or “commission” him. He was to “give him some of his authority.” Moses is playing the role of God here. Significantly, the laying on of hands was most often used as an indication of transference: the priest, for instance, would lay hands upon the head of a sacrificial offering to symbolically transfer sin and guilt from the people to the animal. Here, God was prophetically transferring authority to His Son, Yahshua. To “inaugurate” (*tsavah*) is to command, give orders to, charge, appoint, or ordain. Without actually using the word, he is describing Yahshua’s anointing.

Joshua was to be “set before Eleazar the High Priest,” and “brought before the congregation.” Eleazar’s name means “God has helped.” Yahshua too would be brought before those who were to be helped by God: we crucified Him. His presentation before the congregation was the commencement of this ordeal. As the Passover Lamb was to be brought before the congregation for inspection—brought into the household—on the tenth day of Nisan, so Yahshua was presented as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world at His “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem on the tenth day of Nisan, 33 A.D. Then, having been found to be without fault, He was offered up as a sacrifice on Passover, the fourteenth, according to the requirements of the Word of God.

Yahweh promised that the Urim (see Precept #739) would authenticate the selection of Joshua, and apparently it did, for Joshua did indeed go on to lead Israel. Though we don’t know precisely how the Urim worked, we have a parallel historical record of Yahshua’s “authentication” in Luke 3:22. **“And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.”** Thus both Joshua and Yahshua received public acclamation from God as their ministries were about to begin.

Although Joshua was an effective political leader and military commander, he is perhaps best known for confronting Israel with a choice: **“Serve Yahweh! And if it seems evil to you to serve Yahweh, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve Yahweh.”** (Joshua 24:14-15) Yahshua presented us with the same choice: **“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’”** (John 3:7) Believers are told incessantly throughout scripture that they are chosen by God. And it’s true. But written between every line is the principle that we must first choose Him—believe in Him, trust Him, rely upon Him. But how does choosing to *serve* Yahweh relate to choosing to *believe* in Him? Paul explains: **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”** (Romans 12:1-2) It would be pointless to “beseech” us if it weren’t our choice to make.

- (750) *Inaugurate “Joshua” when your death is imminent.* **“Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Behold, the days approach when you must die; call Joshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of meeting, that I may inaugurate him.’”**

(Deuteronomy 31:14) This, of course, is the same incident to which we've referred in the last two precepts, recounted here in Deuteronomy. We've been looking at this from the point of view of the congregation. Who would be selected to lead them (us)? But I'd like to look at this again from the point of view of Moses. After all, the instruction is addressed to him.

In a way, we're all like Moses. One way or another, we're all destined to leave our mortal earth-bound bodies behind—most of us through physical death. (Yes, some will be raptured, but the lesson applies to them as well). Yahweh first informs Moses that he's about to die. Few of us get quite such a blunt warning, so allow me to break the news to you: *You're going to die*. Maybe not today, maybe not a week from Tuesday, but you *are* on your way out: you're not going to live forever as a mortal human. Sorry.

With this fact in view, what are God's instructions? Moses was to do two things. First, he was to call Joshua, who, as we have seen, is a prototype of the Messiah of the same name, Yahshua, a.k.a. "Jesus." We, too, are to call upon Yahshua, and do it in recognition of the same fact that confronted Moses: Yahshua is the One chosen by God to finish what we've begun. Moses had accomplished some great things in his life, but he hadn't been perfect. He, like each of us, had fallen short of the glory of God (though truth be told, he came far closer to it than you or I ever did). Just as Joshua bridged the gap between Egypt and the Promised Land, Yahshua bridged the gap between our slavery to sin and the eternal relationship we seek with a Holy God who has created us for no other purpose. Moses was prohibited from crossing the Jordan River; the gap you and I face is more daunting—an unbridgeable chasm. But in both cases, the only way to get to the other side was through the work of Yahshua. Nor would we go as mortal men. It would be a journey in spirit, or not at all.

Secondly, Moses was instructed to present himself (with Joshua) at the Tabernacle of Meeting. If you'll recall from our previous chapter, the Tabernacle represents the Plan of God for the salvation of mankind. That is the "place"—the *only* place—designated by Yahweh for the work of Yahshua to commence. It is not in His teaching, or in a grand religion built around His persona, or in His healing miracles, or even in the promise of his glorious earthly reign as King of kings. No, the Plan of God begins with the altar of sacrifice; it proceeds to the laver where our walk and works are purified by the Word of God. Only then does one enter the Holy Place—set apart for fellowship between mortal man and his God. Here man is illuminated by the Spirit of Yahweh; here he is fed with the bread

of God's provision. And it is here that the sweet communication of prayer rises like incense into the presence of Yahweh. But even then, the Plan is not complete until the blood of the Sacrifice is brought within the Most Holy Place and sprinkled upon the mercy seat—the place of atonement. Only then is the Plan of God finished. Only then has Yahweh inaugurated, consecrated, and commissioned Yahshua to lead His people into the Promised Land.

Consecration and Dedication

People today claiming to be “Torah observant” actually observe so little of the Torah, their declarations of faithful obedience would be laughable if they weren’t so sad. If I told you I was a “law-abiding citizen,” you’d be inclined to believe me, I suppose, since I’m not in prison. But if you then discovered that I haven’t filed an income tax return in a decade, I habitually drive twenty miles an hour over the speed limit, and I steal little old ladies’ Social Security checks out of their mailboxes to feed my drug habit, you’d begin to have reservations about my truthfulness on the matter, wouldn’t you? And *then*, if I were to explain to you that my definition of “law-abiding” means keeping only the rules that I like, the ones that are convenient, that don’t hinder my “pursuit of happiness” or run counter to my personal take on what the law *should* be (since I think Congress is full of idiots), you’d call me a fool as well as a liar. The fact that I’m not an ax murderer wouldn’t necessarily classify me as being “law-abiding.”

The problem with someone who thinks like this is their fundamental lack of respect for the authority behind the law—whether the Torah or the statutes of the land. They’re saying in their hearts, *I follow a higher authority*. The reason most people claiming to be Torah observant *aren’t* is primarily that they’re following not the Authority behind it (i.e., Yahweh) but someone they consider an even higher authority—the rabbis of orthodox Judaism, whose spokesman and figurehead is Maimonides. They would protest, of course, that they *are* obeying Yahweh (or they would, if they were willing to use His name). But facts and simple logic silence their protests: if Yahweh and the rabbis disagree (and they often do), then the one you follow is the one you *de facto* consider the higher authority.

There’s a catch, however. As we’ve observed, the Torah is more instructions than a list of laws or rules. Some precepts, of course, can be easily codified in legal terms easily appreciated by all men everywhere: “Don’t murder people.” “Don’t eat pigs.” “Don’t circulate false reports.” “Don’t marry your sister.” These are blatantly practical; their symbolic components are difficult to see and easy to ignore. Others are admittedly harder to get a handle on because their symbolism shares center stage with their overt practice: “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it set apart.” “Eat no bread made with yeast for a week every spring, starting on the 15th day of the month of Nisan.” These are our first clues that Yahweh is interested in something far deeper than our mere obedience, our submission to His

authority. He's asking His people to act out a scene, like a game of spiritual charades. Why? So that when we finally "get it," we'll never forget it.

Still other precepts—the vast majority—are purely symbolic. That is, though physically acted out in the generations to whom they were first announced, these have no "practical" application in the daily lives of most people today. I'd estimate that eighty to ninety percent of the Torah's precepts—most everything having to do with the Tabernacle, the Priesthood, and the sacrifices—fall into this category. These constitute the primary reason that outward Torah observance is an illusive myth. These symbolic mitzvot *cannot* be performed today, no matter how serious or devoted the worshipper is. The Sanctuary does not exist. The priesthood is scattered, unidentified, and ceremonially unclean. From the Torah's point of view, performing the Levitical sacrifices under these conditions would be just as illegal as *not* performing them.

Would-be observers of the Torah, then, have a serious problem if they're not willing to honestly consider the symbolic component of the "Law," for in truth, this is by far the largest part of it. The heart of the issue is the subject of our present chapter—Yahweh's incessant insistence that certain things be consecrated, dedicated, sanctified, and set apart to Him. If He merely wanted us to obey His rules and behave ourselves, if all He wanted to do was exert top-down control over our lives, then this would all have been quite unnecessary. The Torah, in that case, might have looked more like the Qur'an. And (to play devil's advocate) if this whole thing were actually a ploy by the Hebrew priesthood to grasp wealth and power for themselves (alas, the all-too-common pursuit of "priests" of many persuasions), they would not have begun by stripping themselves of all rights of inheritance in the Promised Land, nor by defining their role as hard-working servants of God rather than as exalted political leaders in Israel. No, all the internal evidence points toward authorship of the Torah by a God who wished to explain in ways both subtle and obvious His love for us, His concern for our well being, His plan for saving us, and His omniscient foreknowledge.

That being said, we should all be "Torah observant." I don't mean we should be looking for loopholes in reality, inventing ways to convince ourselves we're doing what can't be done. Rather, we should *observe* the Torah—look at it with an eye toward discovering what Yahweh actually said to us within its pages. Don't blame me if such a course of action leads you directly and unambiguously to Yahshua the Messiah. Blame Yahweh for that.

CONSECRATING THE PRIESTS

- (751) *Consecrate Aaron and his sons.* “**And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments, the anointing oil, a bull as the sin offering, two rams, and a basket of unleavened bread; and gather all the congregation together at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.’ So Moses did as Yahweh commanded him. And the congregation was gathered together at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. And Moses said to the congregation, ‘This is what Yahweh commanded to be done.’**” (Leviticus 8:1-5) Doing what “Yahweh had commanded to be done” was described in detail in the following verses, but the instructions themselves were given back in Exodus 29. We encountered one small facet of this passage in Mitzvah #473, where I noted that you’d have to “ramble on for pages” to get to the bottom of it all. My mandate for Volume I didn’t allow me to “ramble” then, but the time has come, I’m afraid. Our next thirteen precepts will explore the subject of the priests’ consecration in detail.

We should ask ourselves right up front: why did Yahweh direct that Aaron and his sons should be “hallowed” or “consecrated” with such exacting ritual? This wasn’t a coronation. They weren’t being invested with the trappings of political power. Moses was the current leader of Israel, and his successor would be Joshua, an Ephraimite—neither of them were priests. And kings in Israel were destined to come from the tribe of Judah, not Levi (cf. Genesis 49:10). Since our inherent talents are inconsequential (in the grand scheme of things), it is Yahweh’s prerogative to choose which of His people will be gifted and allowed to serve in which capacity. In this case, the priests were the chosen family (Aaron’s) of the chosen tribe (Levi) of the chosen nation (Israel), none of which were up to the task under their own steam. As we learned with the golden calf debacle and the fatal screw-up of Nadab and Abihu (a “Darwin-award” event if ever there was one), Aaron and his boys weren’t exactly “priest” material on their own. Nor had they asked for the job. Yahweh had simply said, “You’re it.”

So again, why all the fuss? Because Aaron and his sons were assigned to work on behalf of their nation in the very presence of God. They were to act as symbolic intercessors between Israel (a “stubborn and stiff-necked people”) and Yahweh Himself. Their workplace was to be the Tabernacle, where the Shekinah glory of Yahweh would “inhabit” the Most Holy Place. If the job was performed with something less than the proper reverence, it could be fatal. The point was that since Yahweh was “holy,” that is, set apart in all respects from any other entity that might be worshipped by man—unique, separate, and infinitely greater—then those

who ministered in His presence (even in that of the diminished divine manifestation called the Shekinah) must be “holy” as well: set apart from the world for His service, consecrated, dedicated, and totally focused. But Aaron’s family, though divinely selected for the job, was never the point. They were symbolic of something larger, something that pertained to the entire human race. They were to be the prototypes for God’s greatest invention: a way for fallen, sinful man to be reconciled to his Creator.

Here, then, is the summary of what Moses was to do to consecrate Aaron and his sons for the ministry set before them. The particulars will be covered in the precepts to come, found in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8. **“And this is what you shall do to them to hallow them for ministering to Me as priests: Take one young bull [Precept #752] and two rams without blemish [Precepts #753 and #754], and unleavened bread [Precept #758], unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil (you shall make them of wheat flour). You shall put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, with the bull and the two rams. And Aaron and his sons you shall bring to the door of the tabernacle of meeting [Precept #763], and you shall wash them with water. Then you shall take the garments [Precept #759], put the tunic on Aaron, and the robe of the ephod, the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the intricately woven band of the ephod.”** The priestly garments, you’ll recall, were discussed at length in our previous chapter. **“You shall put the turban on his head, and put the holy crown on the turban. And you shall take the anointing oil [Precept #762], pour it on his head, and anoint him. Then you shall bring his sons [Precept #760] and put tunics on them. And you shall gird them with sashes, Aaron and his sons, and put the hats on them. The priesthood shall be theirs for a perpetual statute [Precept #761]. So you shall consecrate Aaron and his sons.”** (Exodus 29:1-9)

As an overview, then, we see that the consecration of the priests involved three animal sacrifices, unleavened bread, cakes, and wafers (all made of wheat flour from which the chaff had been removed), olive oil, water for cleansing, specially prepared garments, specially formulated anointing oil, and the priests themselves—Aaron and his sons. This ceremony was to “hallow them,” that is, make them holy or set apart for “ministering” to Yahweh. That in itself is (or ought to be) astonishing. *Individual men* are being set apart to “minister” to the Creator of the universe? That’s like saying “this family of garden slugs are being consecrated to assist the Master Gardener.” There’s nothing we slugs can do to be worthy of the task set before us. Worse, we’re not even smart enough to know that. Why the Master would condescend to choose and enable us (among all the other backyard vermin) is beyond our ability to comprehend. Our race is so primitive, some of our brother slugs don’t

even believe the Gardener exists. But perhaps that's why He's so profuse and detailed in His instructions, and why they're so esoteric: we slugs aren't capable of inventing anything like this, not if we want it to make perfect sense in some larger context.

(752) *Sacrifice the bull of sin offering.* **“You shall also have the bull brought before the tabernacle of meeting, and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands on the head of the bull. Then you shall kill the bull before Yahweh, by the door of the tabernacle of meeting. You shall take some of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and pour all the blood beside the base of the altar. And you shall take all the fat that covers the entrails, the fatty lobe attached to the liver, and the two kidneys and the fat that is on them, and burn them on the altar. But the flesh of the bull, with its skin and its offal, you shall burn with fire outside the camp. It is a sin offering.”** (Exodus 29:10-14) The sin offering (Hebrew: *chata't*) was normally offered when an Israelite realized he had fallen short of Yahweh's standard in some specific way. Here it is offered preemptively. The bull was the normal sin offering for a priest (as was a male goat for a ruler of the people and a female sheep or goat for an ordinary citizen). Though all Levitical blood sacrifices ultimately point to Yahshua on Calvary, they also indicate specific subsets of our fallen nature for which His sacrifice atones: the bull, as we have seen, represents false doctrine or teaching. Thus this preemptory sin offering is the priest's pledge to renounce and guard against falsehood on his watch. The placing of the priest's hands upon the head of the bull symbolically transfers the sin of the priest to the bull—it is a picture of atonement. The bull is then slain in the Tabernacle courtyard, its proximity to the tent of meeting being an indicator that this is part of the Plan of God: innocent blood is being shed on behalf of the guilty—something that must occur before fellowship between Yahweh and man can be reestablished.

The Leviticus passage explains some of the other details: **“And he brought the bull for the sin offering. Then Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull for the sin offering.”** One bull sufficed for all of the priests. One Messiah would be enough. **“And Moses killed it. Then he took the blood, and put some on the horns of the altar all around with his finger, and purified the altar.”** Note that Moses himself killed the bull. In this scene, Moses is playing the part of Yahweh, Aaron the role of Yahshua our High Priest, and his sons represent us who follow Him in faith—those who are “born” into His Spirit. The altar was “purified” through the symbolic application of the bull's blood to the “horns” that adorned its four corners. This was done with Moses' finger, telling us that Yahweh Himself is doing the work of purification. **“And he poured the blood at the base of the altar, and consecrated it, to make atonement for it.”** The “he” here is still Moses. It's

another reminder that Yahweh voluntarily offered Yahshua up as a sacrifice—we didn't "overpower God" when we slew His Messiah.

As usual, the inedible fatty parts were burned on the altar to honor Yahweh. **"Then he took all the fat that was on the entrails, the fatty lobe attached to the liver, and the two kidneys with their fat, and Moses burned them on the altar. But the bull, its hide, its flesh, and its offal, he burned with fire outside the camp, as Yahweh had commanded Moses."** (Leviticus 8:14-17) The rest of the bull was burned outside the camp. This is an obvious reference to the site of Yahshua's crucifixion—which took place outside Jerusalem's city walls. It's fascinating that atonement was achieved through the shedding of blood at the altar, but the judgment that made the sacrifice efficacious (the "burning with fire") occurred "outside the camp." In the final enactment of this prophetic rehearsal, the "altar" where Yahshua's blood was shed and the place of judgment "outside the camp" were *in the same location*: not at the Temple, but a few hundred yards away, probably the same spot where Abraham's almost-sacrifice of Isaac had taken place two thousand years previously.

It's worth noting that under normal circumstances the priests would have partaken of the meat of a sin offering (one that didn't involve their own sin, that is) and in the case of a trespass offering, they would have been given the hide as well (see Precept #773). But here, the entire offering (with the exception of the fatty parts given to Yahweh) was to be taken outside the camp and burned. The point? We cannot benefit or profit from our own sin.

- (753) *Sacrifice the first ram—of burnt offering.* **"You shall also take one ram, and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands on the head of the ram; and you shall kill the ram, and you shall take its blood and sprinkle it all around on the altar. Then you shall cut the ram in pieces, wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its pieces and with its head. And you shall burn the whole ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to Yahweh; it is a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh."** (Exodus 29:15-18) The second animal offering in the consecration process was an *olah*, or "burnt offering." This time, a ram is used—a preview of the **"Lamb of God"** (as John the Baptist would later phrase it) **"who takes away the sin of the world,"** (John 1:29) but one with horns, symbolizing the authority of the One being sacrificed. This messianic connotation is further confirmed by Yahweh's designation of Abraham's intended sacrifice of his son as an *olah* (cf. Genesis 22:2). Total dedication is implied in the *olah*, for the entire sacrifice was to be consumed by fire upon the altar. Cutting the body in pieces reminds me of what Yahshua said as He prepared to sacrifice Himself: **"The Lord Jesus on the same night in**

which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'" (I Corinthians 11:23-24) The washing of the entrails and legs indicates that the Sacrifice was clean, inside and out.

It's refreshing to see that Moses and Aaron could follow instructions. "Then he brought the ram as the burnt offering. And Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, and Moses killed it. Then he sprinkled the blood all around on the altar. And he cut the ram into pieces; and Moses burned the head, the pieces, and the fat. Then he washed the entrails and the legs in water. And Moses burned the whole ram on the altar. It was a burnt sacrifice for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh, as Yahweh had commanded Moses." (Leviticus 8:18-21) Again, every detail is significant. One ram was sufficient as an *olah* for Aaron and all of his sons, just as one Messiah would be a sufficient sacrifice to atone for the sins of all mankind. The laying of their hands upon the head of the ram again symbolized the transference of guilt from them to the ram. And the sprinkling of the ram's blood around the altar again demonstrated that innocent life had been sacrificed on behalf of the guilty.

Remember, this whole bloody ritual had but one objective—to consecrate Aaron and his sons as priests to minister in the presence of Yahweh on behalf of the people. Their own best behavior would not have been remotely enough to qualify them to perform the task God had called them to do. Righteousness was required, but Yahweh had to provide that righteousness Himself, for it was beyond man's ability to supply. The reason Yahweh found the smoke of the burning ram a "sweet aroma" was that it proved (in this instance, anyway) that these men were obedient and faithful—willing to let Him do whatever it would take to make them holy. What smelled so sweet to Yahweh was the scent of absolute trust.

(754) *Sacrifice the second ram—of consecration.* "You shall also take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands on the head of the ram. Then you shall kill the ram, and take some of its blood and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tip of the right ear of his sons, on the thumb of their right hand and on the big toe of their right foot, and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar." (Exodus 29:19-20) The third and last sacrificial animal was another ram. This one, however, has very different symbolic significance, rounding out the picture of the "Lamb of God with Authority" that the ram represents, for there is more to Yahshua than His substitutionary death to atone for our sins. Much more.

For the third time we see Moses, playing the role of God, slaying the ram in order to consecrate the priests. This time, however, the blood

(metaphorical of life itself) is employed somewhat differently. As before, some is sprinkled at the base of the altar. But Moses was also to take some of it and apply it directly to certain body parts on Aaron and his sons. First, the tip of the ear represents what one hears. Why the *right* ear? Perhaps this indicates truth (while the left would indicate falsehood), the message being: heed only truth, not lies. Note that what one hears automatically includes what one speaks: we are neither to utter nor listen to false reports. This admonition implies a certain amount of discernment, wariness, even skepticism concerning the things of the world, and at the same time requires a depth of understanding in the area of God's revealed Word—our baseline standard of truth.

In the same way, the thumb of the right hand would indicate “doing the right thing,” and the big toe of the right foot would signify “walking in the right path.” It's no coincidence that the word the rabbis use to denote the “Jewish Law,” *halakhah*, actually means “the path one walks,” from the Hebrew verb *halak*—to go, walk, or travel. Again, the “right thing” and the “right path” are defined by the Torah—not by our appetites, desires, or best intentions. And remember what is being applied here. It's not water, which would have signified that our words, deeds, and walk need to be “cleaned up.” No, it's *blood*, telling us rather that in order for our words, deeds, and walk to be consecrated to Yahweh, innocent blood must be shed—a guiltless life must be sacrificed. Our own lives won't suffice, however: we're not innocent. We can't get to God on our own, no matter how hard we work to clean up our act. Only Yahweh can bring us to Yahweh.

And so we read of Moses' further compliance with the requirements of the law of priestly consecration. **“And he brought the second ram, the ram of consecration. Then Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, and Moses killed it. Also he took some of its blood and put it on the tip of Aaron's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. Then he brought Aaron's sons. And Moses put some of the blood on the tips of their right ears, on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet. And Moses sprinkled the blood all around on the altar.”** (Leviticus 8:22-24) Did Moses and Aaron understand the symbolism they were acting out? The ear, thumb, and toe metaphors are pretty obvious. But the blood of the innocent animal? I can pretty much guarantee that that's something *nobody* understood until Yahshua explained what He had accomplished on Golgotha—after His resurrection. When we finally *get it*—when we at last come to terms with Yahweh's grand plan of redemption, epicentered in the innocent life and sacrificial death of His Messiah, we can only echo the sentiments of the two disciples on the Emmaus road: **“Did not our heart burn**

within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32)

- (755) *Anoint the priests and their clothing with oil and blood. And you shall take some of the blood [of the second ram] that is on the altar, and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and on his garments, on his sons and on the garments of his sons with him; and he and his garments shall be hallowed, and his sons and his sons' garments with him.” (Exodus 29:21)* The process of consecration continues, and this time, it’s messy. I wonder what a good CSI could make of this. *Blood spatter—looks like blunt force cast off. This guy was close to whoever got killed. And there’s some kind of oily substance. We ran it through the mass-spec and came up with olive oil, myrrh, cinnamon, sweet cane, and cassia. It’s some kind of bitter-sweet anointing oil. All these priests had the same blood and oil sprinkle patterns on them. What do you think it means? Ritual murder? Human sacrifice?*

Yes, detective, it means all of that, and more. The High Priest and his sons not only wore the story of mankind’s redemption upon their bodies in the symbolic accoutrements of their office (see the previous chapter, Precepts #734-#743), they were also anointed—consecrated by Yahweh—to perform a specific task on behalf of mankind: to intercede between a holy God and sinful men. The ingredients used to make the exclusive anointing oil were discussed under Mitzvah #436. Again (briefly): olive oil is the Holy Spirit—the vehicle for everything else; myrrh is bitterness, the sorrows and suffering of the Messiah on our behalf; cinnamon speaks of the attraction between us and our Savior; cane indicates the measure of a man—the standard of which is Yahshua; and cassia is the sweet spice used to prepare Him for burial. These ingredients define who the Messiah was, what He did, and how He did it.

But there is one more substance with which the priests were “anointed”—the blood of the ram, signifying that innocent life had been sacrificed on their (our) behalf. Without that, the spiritual life of Yahshua, His sorrow on our account, His attractiveness, His moral perfection, and *even His death* would have availed us nothing. That should be a shocking revelation: the fact that He died does us no good if we don’t allow His death to atone for our sin. Our works, alms, and penance have no power to save us. Only Yahshua’s spilled blood and substitutionary death can do that. But its efficacy depends upon our trust.

So Moses did as he was told. **“Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood which was on the altar, and sprinkled it on Aaron, on his garments, on his sons, and on the garments of his sons with him; and he**

consecrated Aaron, his garments, his sons, and the garments of his sons with him.” (Leviticus 8:30) The “religious” component within us wants to scream, *Wait! You’re spoiling all the workmanship and skill that went into making these fancy garments! They’re going to be ruined. How’re we supposed to awe the sheeple if the priestly vestments have big stains all over them? What a waste.* Exactly Yahweh’s point. He was about to send a Perfectly Good Human into a lost world, watch Him be anointed with the spit of jeering Roman soldiers and stand by silently while He was sprinkled with His own blood as His flesh was shredded with a cruel flagellum and pierced with evil spikes. *What a waste*—if you and I reject this sacrifice in favor of some salvation scheme of our own invention.

(756) *Eat the ram of consecration.* **“And you shall take the ram of the consecration and boil its flesh in the holy place. Then Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram, and the bread that is in the basket, by the door of the tabernacle of meeting. They shall eat those things with which the atonement was made, to consecrate and to sanctify them; but an outsider shall not eat them, because they are holy.”** (Exodus 29:31-33) We aren’t quite done with the second ram, the “ram of consecration.” So far, the priests have symbolically transferred their guilt onto his head, he’s been slain, his blood has metaphorically anointed their words, their work, and their walk, and then it has been sprinkled all over them, mingled with the richly significant oil of anointing. Now Aaron and his sons are to “eat the flesh of the ram” and eat the unleavened bread of consecration.

The provocative words of Yahshua still ring in our ears: **“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.... Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.... Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”** (John 6:35, 47-51, 53-58) If the scribes and Pharisees had comprehended the meaning of Exodus 29, they would have understood that Yahshua *was* the ram of consecration; He *was* the life-

giving bread. This was no pointless religious ceremony—it was a dress rehearsal for the redemption of all mankind.

It wasn't enough for Aaron and his sons to know about the ram, to kill him, or even to apply his blood to their appendages and garments. They had to assimilate him—*eat* him—take him within their very being as life-giving spiritual nourishment. The ram and the bread were described as **“those things with which the atonement was made,”** things that would have the effect of “consecrating and sanctifying” them. But physical food wasn't what Yahweh was talking about. Yahshua taught, **“Whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated. But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”** (Matthew 15:17-20) Food can't sanctify people any more than it can defile them. It's what the food *represents* that counts: assimilate Yahshua and you will have gained life. Assimilate nothing and you become nothing. Assimilate *Satan* and you will have attained a living death. You are what you eat.

Two more points need our attention. First, the meat was to be boiled, not roasted. We are being told that as believers, as consecrated “priests,” we will not partake of judgment. Then, Yahweh says, **“An outsider shall not eat them [i.e., the ram and the bread], because they are holy.”** What, precisely, is an “outsider?” In this context, it's obviously meant to primarily denote anyone who is not a priest. But the word itself has a more focused connotation. It's the Hebrew verb *zuhr*, meaning to be a stranger, a foreigner, an enemy, one who is estranged or alienated from you. The broader meaning of our text, then, becomes clear: no one who is estranged from Yahweh, who is foreign to Him or alienated from Him, will find nourishment or sustenance in Yahshua—the Lamb of God, the Living Bread. Why? Because He is holy—set apart for God's glory and purpose. And what is that purpose? It's stated in His name, Yahshua: it means Yahweh is Salvation—our redemption is achieved not through our good works, penance, obeisance, alms, or sacrifice. *Yahweh* is salvation.

- (757) *Burn the left-overs of the consecration offering.* **“And if any of the flesh of the consecration offerings, or of the bread, remains until the morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be eaten, because it is holy.”** (Exodus 29:34) Though the meat of the second ram was to be boiled, that doesn't mean judgment—the application of fire—wasn't part of the picture. Anything left over when the day of consecration had passed—whether meat or bread—was to be consumed in flame upon the altar. We are being

informed that whatever isn't consecrated will be judged. Further, there is a window of opportunity in which we must act, if we are to act at all. The prospect for redemption lasts only for "today"—while we live on this earth as mortal humans. The window of opportunity does not remain open for eternity. As Paul reminds us, **"In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."** (II Corinthians 6:2, cf. Isaiah 49:8)

Both the ram and the bread were symbolic of the Messiah's sacrifice, not man's penance. So Yahweh is *not* saying that if we fail to partake of the sacrifice He has provided, we can later atone for our own sins by enduring judgment ourselves. Quite the contrary: the only acceptable sacrifice is Innocence—and *we aren't innocent*. No, only Yahshua is qualified to suffer judgment in our place. If we do not avail ourselves of the spiritual nourishment He provides while the day of opportunity remains, the wrath He endured on our behalf will (at least on a personal level) have been suffered for nothing. How do you think Yahweh feels about having sent His Son to Calvary only to hear the vast majority of His intended beneficiaries say, "We don't care. We will not have this Man to rule over us!" What would *you* do under those circumstances? I can guarantee that *I* wouldn't have shown the same restraint and patience Yahweh has.

(758) *Perform the first wave offering of consecration.* **"Also you shall take the fat of the ram, the fat tail, the fat that covers the entrails, the fatty lobe attached to the liver, the two kidneys and the fat on them, the right thigh (for it is a ram of consecration), one loaf of bread, one cake made with oil, and one wafer from the basket of the unleavened bread that is before Yahweh; and you shall put all these in the hands of Aaron and in the hands of his sons, and you shall wave them as a wave offering before Yahweh. You shall receive them back from their hands and burn them on the altar as a burnt offering, as a sweet aroma before Yahweh. It is an offering made by fire to Yahweh."** (Exodus 29:22-25) The next two entries are instructions further explaining what's entailed in Precept #756—"Eat the ram of consecration." As usual in offerings to be eaten by the priests, the fat portions were to be set aside in homage to Yahweh. For whatever reason, these fatty pieces were culturally considered the "best" parts of the animal. Moses (whom, you'll recall, was playing the role of God in the priests' consecration process) was doing the butchering of the ram. He was to cut out the fat portions and hand them to Aaron and his sons, who were in turn to "wave" or "heave" them before Yahweh, that is, lift them into the air as a sign of their dedication to Him. They were then to be handed back to Moses, who would place them on the bronze altar, where they would be completely burned. The symbolic meaning of all this is evident:

Yahweh would deliver to mankind the best He had to offer—His own “Son”—who would be lifted up by those He had been sent to save in an act of atoning sacrifice (see John 3:14). But it wouldn’t be Man who slew the Sacrifice or subjected Him to judgment. You can’t steal something that is freely given. No, Yahweh provided the sacrifice—He provided *Himself*.

The fatty pieces of the ram weren’t the only items to be waved before Yahweh. The ram’s right thigh was His as well. Although we aren’t told why, we can guess easily enough. As with the priests’ earlobe, thumb, and big toe (see Precept #754), the *right side* was specified. The thigh was the biggest, strongest muscle the ram had for propelling itself. The meaning, then, seems to be that the “ram of consecration” (ultimately predictive of the Messiah) would be motivated by goodness, propelled forward by righteousness.

There was also an offering of grain products. Three different forms of “bread” were specified, so it behooves us to investigate what distinguishes them. First, the “loaf of bread” (unleavened, according to Leviticus 8:26) was *kikkar lechem*, literally, “round food.” This is a reminder that **“Man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of Yahweh.”** (Deuteronomy 8:3)

Second, the “cake” (the *chalah lechem*—literally “pierced food”) was a cake made of finely ground flour that bore characteristic perforations. The root of the word *chalah* is *chalal*, as in **“He was wounded (*chalal*: pierced, fatally wounded, bored through) for our transgressions.”** (Isaiah 53:5) The word also has psychological connotations—to defile, pollute, or profane. Thus Leviticus 22:31-32 instructs us, **“I am Yahweh. You shall not profane (*chalal*) my holy name.”** Also, this cake was made with oil, indicative of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Messianic ramifications of all this are hard to miss.

Third, the unleavened wafer (Hebrew: *raqiq*) was derived from the word for “thin” (*raq*) which also (and far more often in scripture) means “only.” The *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* defines it: “only, exclusively, i.e., pertaining to that which is unique and distinctive...implying a restrictiveness of kind, singleness of fact or instance.” Once again, if you know what you’re looking at, the Messianic implications are blatantly obvious: Yahshua is the way, the truth, and the life—He is the *only* way to the Father.

Moses again did as he was instructed. **“Then he took the fat and the fat tail, all the fat that was on the entrails, the fatty lobe attached to the liver, the two kidneys and their fat, and the right thigh; and from the basket of unleavened bread that was before Yahweh he took one unleavened cake, a cake of bread anointed**

with oil, and one wafer, and put them on the fat and on the right thigh; and he put all these in Aaron's hands and in his sons' hands, and waved them as a wave offering before Yahweh. Then Moses took them from their hands and burned them on the altar, on the burnt offering. They were consecration offerings for a sweet aroma. That was an offering made by fire to Yahweh." (Leviticus 8:25-28) At the risk of pointing out the obvious, Yahweh considers it a "sweet aroma" when we follow His instructions, even if we don't quite understand all that they mean. It is said that predators can "smell fear." Our loving God, on the other hand, "smells *trust*," and He really enjoys it.

- (759) *Perform the second wave offering of consecration.* "Then you shall take the breast of the ram of Aaron's consecration and wave it as a wave offering before Yahweh; and it shall be your portion. And from the ram of the consecration you shall consecrate the breast of the wave offering which is waved, and the thigh of the heave offering which is raised, of that which is for Aaron and of that which is for his sons. It shall be from the children of Israel for Aaron and his sons by a statute forever. For it is a heave offering; it shall be a heave offering from the children of Israel from the sacrifices of their peace offerings, that is, their heave offering to Yahweh." (Exodus 29:26-28) Not everything "waved" before Yahweh was supposed to be burned on the altar. There was to be a second wave offering of the parts of the ram Aaron and his sons were supposed to eat. These too were dedicated to Yahweh, though they would belong to the priests as their food, and this time, Moses himself was included. The ram's breast meat belonged to Moses: "And Moses took the breast and waved it as a wave offering before Yahweh. It was Moses' part of the ram of consecration, as Yahweh had commanded Moses." (Leviticus 8:29) And the other thigh (the left one) of the ram of consecration was to be eaten by Aaron and his sons.

This procedure should remind us that even the things that are "ours" are of no use to us unless they are dedicated to God's purpose. Our food should nourish us so we can serve Him and enjoy His company. Our cars, houses, clothing, the tools of our employment, even our "toys," should honor Him. (In my case, I habitually buy two things for "myself," books and guitars. Yet if the books didn't edify me—if they were light fluff that rotted my brain—then they wouldn't honor Yahweh. And if I couldn't play music with my brothers and sisters in God's presence a couple of times a week, my instruments would in my mind degenerate into an expensive and pointless indulgence.)

- (760) *Dress Aaron in the High Priest's special garments.* "Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the door of the tabernacle of meeting and wash them with water. You shall put the holy garments on Aaron, and anoint him and consecrate him, that he may minister to Me as priest." (Exodus 40:12-13) In the previous

chapter (beginning at Precept #734) we explored the special priestly garments as described in the Torah—what they were and what they meant. Here we see the donning of these objects of sartorial significance for the first time. Note first that the priests had to be clean before the garments could be put on. This is a fundamental cleanliness: Yahshua (whose role is being played by Aaron) was clean by virtue of his sinless life, and we believers (represented by Aaron’s sons) become clean through the atoning power of His shed blood. The bronze laver that stood just outside the door of the Tabernacle would enable the priests to wash their hands and feet (symbolizing the daily cleansing of their deeds and walk), but clean hands and feet would be of little use if their bodies were encrusted with the filth of an unredeemed sin nature. Yahshua pointed out this very fact as He washed His disciples’ feet on the night He was betrayed. He told Peter, **“He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.”** (John 13:10) Yahshua’s point was that Peter and most of the other disciples were “bathed,” that is, their sin had been scrubbed off by their trust in Him. But there was one among them, Judas, who was not clean. Yahshua had washed Judas’ hands and feet with the rest of them, but He knew that without first experiencing this fundamental cleansing, Judas would never “minister to Yahweh as priest,” no matter how much he thought he knew about Yahshua. Good behavior to an unbeliever is like whitewash on a tomb—it’s only a disguise masking the corruption that lies within.

Note also that Aaron did not dress himself in the priestly garments. Moses (who, you’ll recall, was playing the role of Yahweh in this vignette) placed the clothing of consecration upon his brother. This is more significant than it may appear at first glance. It means that Yahshua, who is a diminished human manifestation of Yahweh Himself, did not *in His humanity* take for Himself the role of our redeemer and savior. Rather, being found as a Man among men, He humbled Himself and accepted the role assigned to Him by the Father. The odd idea held by so many, that “Jesus” was a teacher of innovative moral principles who started one of the world’s great religions and got himself crucified for his trouble, might have been pictured by Aaron taking the priestly garments and putting them on himself. But that’s not what God instructed: Moses was to clothe Aaron; and Aaron, for his part, was to obediently accept the burden they represented.

(761) *Dress Aaron’s sons in their special priestly garments. And you shall bring his sons and clothe them with tunics. You shall anoint them, as you anointed their father, that they may minister to Me as priests; for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations.”* (Exodus 40:14-15) In

the same way, Moses was to place the tunics of ministry upon the sons of Aaron—they were not to don the garments themselves. That means, in symbolic terms, that it is Yahweh who calls us to His service: we do not call ourselves. Our anointing—our consecration and dedication as sons and followers of our great High Priest Yahshua—is done at Yahweh’s discretion, not our own. At first glance, this sounds suspiciously like we are predestined to salvation (or conversely, to some other end), and that our free will has nothing to do with our destiny. But that’s neither what I’m saying nor what the scriptures teach. We who are believers *are* predestined to something, but it isn’t our salvation. Since this is an important and often misunderstood principle, please indulge me as I chase the rabbit.

Perhaps the strongest passage “supporting” the predestination, or “Calvinist,” position is in the introduction to Paul’s letter to the believers at Ephesus: **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”** (Ephesians 1:3-5) That’s all one sentence, demonstrating what I’ve always thought: eloquence in Koine Greek makes for incomprehensible English. So let’s break this down into its component parts.

First, consider who Paul is talking to. The “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” is Yahweh. So when He refers to *our* Lord—Yahshua the Messiah—and when he says God has “blessed *us*,” he is establishing that his audience is comprised *exclusively* of believers. He’s not talking to (or about) mankind in general. It’s important to understand that. Paul begins by thanking Yahweh for the heavenly blessings we derive from His Messiah, Yahshua. Calvinists read the phrase “He chose us in Him” as “He chose us *to be* in Him,” but we’ve just established that he’s talking exclusively to believers; so it actually means, “He chose us *who are* in Him” to receive something. *When* did he choose us? “Before the foundation of the world,” that is, before we were here—before mankind even walked the earth. This argues strongly that Paul is describing a foundational principle, not God’s dealings with individual souls who didn’t exist as yet. By the way, the clause makes no sense unless you remove the comma after “world” (which isn’t there in the Greek text anyway). I’d read it, **“Even before the foundation of the world, He chose those of us who are in Him to be holy and without blame...”** The point isn’t that He

chose us to be saved—it's that He ordained that we who *are* saved were to have a particular spiritual destiny.

And what is this destiny that Yahweh chose for us believers? It has two parts. First, that we would be holy (that is, set apart from the world) and blameless before Him. We believers get so used to the whole package of our salvation that we don't often comprehend that this destiny is by no means automatic or inevitable. It didn't have to be like this. Yahweh (theoretically) could simply have chosen to "live with" our sin, to peacefully co-exist, to let bygones be bygones. Of course, since *He* is holy, that would have meant He couldn't have had a close personal relationship with us (not in His undiminished form, at least), for His very presence would have destroyed us in our sinful state, like light annihilates the darkness. So Yahweh predestined those of us who trust in Him to become blameless. Our sins aren't forgiven—they're *paid for!* Big difference.

The second part of the believer's pre-determined destiny is our adoption as children into Yahweh's family. Again, there's no particular reason God *had to* do this as part of our salvation "package." It wasn't inevitable, or even particularly logical. My wife and I adopted nine of our eleven children. It would have been possible, I suppose, to simply raise them on a "foster" basis. We could have given them a good home, kept a roof over their heads and clothes on their backs, been nice to them—even *loved* them—and on their eighteenth birthdays, wished them well and sent them on their way. But we didn't do that. We *adopted* them—they became, legally and permanently, our family members with all the rights and privileges that entails. They are my *heirs*, just like their two home-made brothers. (Okay, so there's not much to inherit, but the principle's still valid.) Yahweh *predestined* this same kind of adoption to those of us who would trust in Him—a legally binding, permanent covenant. Why did He do this? The answer's right there in the text, though again, the comma is in the wrong place: it's *love*—not ours, but His. **"...We should be holy and without blame before Him, in love having predestined us to adoption..."**

Finally, He did these things "according to the good pleasure of His will." In other words, He did them because He wanted to. Seems obvious, but it's not. Yahweh doesn't do everything He'd like to. For example, He is not willing that any should perish; He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. And yet He lets us all choose our own fate—even death. He won't choose our destiny for us unless we have already chosen to love Him. Paul then says that it is God's grace that has made us "accepted." It's nothing we did (other than choosing to be His children). Further, this

acceptance by Yahweh is “in the Beloved,” that is, it comes through what “the Beloved” (Yahshua) did—not through our own good behavior, alms, penance, or sacrifice.

So when Moses placed the white linen tunics upon the freshly washed priests, it was a picture of Yahweh giving us two things we couldn’t get for ourselves: blamelessness—imputed righteousness, allowing us to stand in the very presence of God, and adoption into Yahweh’s family—or as Moses put it, **“anointing [as] an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations.”**

(762) *Pass down the High Priest’s garments from generation to generation. “And the holy garments of Aaron shall be his sons’ after him, to be anointed in them and to be consecrated in them. That son who becomes priest in his place shall put them on for seven days, when he enters the tabernacle of meeting to minister in the holy place.”* (Exodus 29:29-30) As far as the Torah was concerned, there was always supposed to be a High Priest in Israel. And the special garments he was to wear in the execution of his office, garments laden with such prophetic and doctrinal significance, were to be passed down and worn by each succeeding generation. Yahweh, of course, knew that the priesthood (and nation) of Israel would eventually become so corrupt it would have to be removed from the Land. And His whole plan was based on the fact that His Messiah would one day fulfill every detail of the High Priest’s sartorial symbolism—rendering it for all intents and purposes beside the point, like a road map to a destination you’ve already reached. But there is a very good reason this precept was given.

That reason is latent in the timing: each new High Priest, as he was inaugurated into the office his father had filled, was to wear the holy garments for *seven days*. We’re going to see this same time frame appear in the next few precepts, and its significance (I hope) will be blatantly obvious by the time we’ve covered Precept #765. For now, however, let us merely note what the purpose of wearing the holy garments was supposed to be: the new High Priest was **“to be anointed in them and to be consecrated in them.”** “Anointed” is the Hebrew word *mashach* or *masah*, from which we derive “Messiah.” It literally means, “to rub with oil,” but often takes on the added connotation of consecrating its object. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes, “There is a fourfold theological significance of *masah*. First, to anoint an individual or an object indicated an authorized separation for God’s service.... *Masah*, while representing a position of honor, also represents increased responsibility.... Secondly, though the agent might be the priest or prophet, writers speak of anointed ones as those whom the Lord anointed. Such language underscores that it

is God who is the authorizing agent; that the anointed is inviolable; and that the anointed one is to be held in special regard. Thirdly, one may infer that divine enablement was understood as accompanying *masah* Finally, in the form *masiah*, *masah* was associated with the coming promised deliverer, Jesus.” All these things were true of the High Priest: he was separated (made holy) for Yahweh’s service, and enabled by Yahweh Himself to symbolize the coming Messiah.

“Consecrated” is the Hebrew verb *male’*. It means to fill, accomplish, be satisfied or complete. Thus to “consecrate” someone (in this context) is literally to fill them up (i.e., their *neshamah*, as in Proverbs 20:27—“**The spirit [or breath: *neshamah*] of a man is the lamp of Yahweh, searching all the inner depths of his heart.**”), to make them spiritually complete or whole. Only Yahweh’s Holy Spirit is capable of doing that. Being “consecrated” has nothing whatsoever to do with being religious, pious, solemn, respectable, or well-behaved. It means “Spirit-filled.”

- (763) *Consecrate the priests in the Tabernacle for seven days.* “**And Moses said to Aaron and his sons, ‘Boil the flesh at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and eat it there with the bread that is in the basket of consecration offerings, as I commanded, saying, “Aaron and his sons shall eat it.” What remains of the flesh and of the bread you shall burn with fire. And you shall not go outside the door of the tabernacle of meeting for seven days, until the days of your consecration are ended. For seven days he shall consecrate you. As he has done this day, so Yahweh has commanded to do, to make atonement for you. Therefore you shall stay at the door of the tabernacle of meeting day and night for seven days, and keep the charge of Yahweh, so that you may not die; for so I have been commanded.’ So Aaron and his sons did all the things that Yahweh had commanded by the hand of Moses.**” (Leviticus 8:31-36) What Aaron and his sons were to do is clear enough from the text. *Why* is not so obvious. Between this passage and the parallel text in Exodus 29, Yahweh says no fewer than six times that the consecration process is to take seven days. “**For seven days he shall consecrate you.**” This time period, of course, is one of the oft-recurring metaphorical themes of scripture: the creation week that ends with a day of rest, the work week that ends with a Sabbath rest, the Sabbatical cycle of seven years, ending again with a year of rest for the land. We have come to recognize this theme as a timeline. Yahweh is telling us His plan for the time of mortal mankind upon the earth: six thousand years of “working it out,” followed by the final Millennium, a day of spiritual rest under the perfect earthly reign of the Messiah, King Yahshua. The formula is given to us in both Psalm 90:4 and II Peter 3:8—one day in God’s plan is equivalent to one thousand years.

Here, though, we see the seven-day period not as the familiar six-plus-one scenario, but as a whole, reminding us of the definition of “to consecrate” (*male’*—to make someone spiritually complete) that we encountered in the previous precept. Let us review the symbols that are in play here: Aaron, dressed in the High Priestly garments, represents the work of Yahshua the Messiah. His sons, dressed in their clean white linen tunics, represent us who follow Him, the world’s believers, whose sins are covered by the garments of light Yahweh provides. And the Tabernacle indicates the Plan of God for our redemption, focused on the sacrifice of Christ and our response to it.

Here, then, is what’s being said: The work of Yahshua our redeemer as revealed in the Plan of God will be “consecrated,” filled up and made complete, over the entire seven-thousand-year course of fallen man. As long as mortals—people with Adam’s sin nature—walk the earth, the effect of the finished work of Yahshua will be an ongoing reality. It matters not on which side of Calvary a person is (or was): the basis of salvation is always the same. The sacrificial blood of God’s sacrifice is what cleanses us and atones for our sin, whether looking forward to it or back upon it. Our trusting response to that sacrifice is what defines us as believers. The principle was introduced even before Adam and Chavvah (Eve) left the Garden (Genesis 3:21), and it will continue until the last mortal makes his eternal choice at the end of the Millennium. A more complete explanation of how it all works can be found in the final three chapters (28-30) of *Future History*.

- (764) *Consecrate the altar for seven days along with the priests. “Thus you shall do to Aaron and his sons, according to all that I have commanded you. Seven days you shall consecrate them. And you shall offer a bull every day as a sin offering for atonement. You shall cleanse the altar when you make atonement for it, and you shall anoint it to sanctify it. Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and sanctify it. And the altar shall be most holy. Whatever touches the altar must be holy.”* (Exodus 29:35-37) The consecration procedure continues. While Aaron and his sons were fulfilling their seven days within the Sanctuary, Moses (still playing the symbolic role of God) was to continue his part by “cleansing,” and “making atonement for” the altar. He was to do this by offering up one bull each day for the seven-day period of consecration. Bulls, if you’ll recall, indicate falsehood—especially the religious deceptions of man. The sacrifice of a bull indicated the symbolic slaying of the world’s approach to its “gods”—appeasement, alms, penance, and self-centered sacrifice. All that’s left is Yahweh’s way: grace through faith in God’s sacrifice. A bull a day for seven days tells us that the consecration—the spiritual “filling-up”—of God’s people would entail

constant battle with falsehood for the entire seven-thousand-year tenure of fallen man upon the earth—starting with the serpent in the Garden of Eden and ending with the final deception of Satan at the close of the seventh Millennium—“Magog II,” as it’s alluded to in Revelation 20:7-9.

Moses was also to “sanctify” the altar by “anointing” it. This was done with the special (and symbolically significant) oil of anointing we explored in Mitzvah #436. There we saw that the oil (as revealed by its ingredients) represents “the Messiah, Yahshua, whose Spirit-filled life was the epitome of love, the standard of holiness, and sweet salvation achieved through bitter suffering.” **“Also Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. He sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the laver and its base, to consecrate them. And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head and anointed him, to consecrate him.”** (Leviticus 8:10-12) Everything within the Tabernacle courtyard was anointed.

“Everything” *includes* the High Priest himself. This reminds me of Psalm 133: **“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion. For there Yahweh commanded the blessing—Life forevermore.”** Considering how many features of the Tabernacle unmistakably depict all of God’s people—the Ekklesia of Yahshua *and* the nation of Israel—dwelling together side by side in unity (see Chapter 4 of this volume), the symbolism of Aaron’s anointing is a stunning indictment of both a “Christianity” that is for the most part antagonistic (or is that envious?) toward Israel and an Orthodox Judaism that resents us who embrace *their* Yahshua as *our* Messiah. Yahweh longs for our unity, and He will see our relationship as “good and pleasant” in the end. But alas, that day is not yet here.

- (765) *Prepare for Yahweh to appear on the eighth day.* **“It came to pass on the eighth day that Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. And he said to Aaron, ‘Take for yourself a young bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer them before Yahweh. And to the children of Israel you shall speak, saying, Take a kid of the goats as a sin offering, and a calf and a lamb, both of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering, also a bull and a ram as peace offerings, to sacrifice before Yahweh, and a grain offering mixed with oil; for today Yahweh will appear to you.’”** (Leviticus 9:1-4) This took place on the “eighth day,” that is, after the seven days of priestly consecration had been completed (prophetic of the seven-thousand year tenure of sin-natured man upon the earth, if I’m seeing this correctly).

Slightly dissimilar instructions were given to the newly consecrated priests and the Elders of Israel. Both groups were to provide sin offerings (*chata't*), and burnt offerings (*olah*), but the animals specified differed. As we saw in *The Owner's Manual*, Chapter 12, the first seven chapters of Leviticus outline several basic types of offerings to be made to Yahweh in the Tabernacle. Those directives are being followed here: the *chata't*, or sin offering, of the priests was to be a young bull (signifying repentance from false teaching); and that of the elders was to be a kid, a young male goat (indicating acknowledgment of their sin). The *olah*, or burnt offerings, varied as well. The priests were to bring a ram (a male sheep with horns, prophetic of the authority of the Lamb of God, the Messiah), and the elders were to bring a calf (speaking of service) and a lamb (indicating innocence). The *olah*, you'll recall, was to be completely consumed on the altar, a picture of total commitment and dedication. It was made as an act of homage to Yahweh.

In addition, the elders of Israel were to bring peace offerings (*selem*), a bull and a ram, as expressions of thanksgiving and to demonstrate their devotion to Yahweh. Also, a *minha*, or grain offering was offered, an acknowledgement of God's provision in this world—as always, mixed with oil, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. **“So they brought what Moses commanded before the tabernacle of meeting. And all the congregation drew near and stood before Yahweh. Then Moses said, ‘This is the thing which Yahweh commanded you to do, and the glory of Yahweh will appear to you.’ And Moses said to Aaron, ‘Go to the altar, offer your sin offering and your burnt offering, and make atonement for yourself and for the people. Offer the offering of the people, and make atonement for them, as Yahweh commanded.”** (Leviticus 9:5-7) Atonement—the symbolic result of the *olah* and *chata't* offerings—was necessary because of what had been revealed in verse 4: **“Today Yahweh will appear to you.”** Yahweh is holy. The Israelites could not be in His presence and survive the encounter unless they had been cleansed and sanctified. God's instructions said this was to be achieved by the shedding of innocent blood. But why would Yahweh institute such a convoluted and counterintuitive procedure? Anyone can see that the shedding of the blood of animals *in itself* does nothing to effect our innocence. How can God say it renders us temporarily “holy” in His eyes?

The answer is easy enough to see this side of Calvary: the shed blood of innocent animals in the Old Covenant predicted the sacrifice of The Innocent Man, Yahweh's Messiah. Although we now know what it meant, that *still* doesn't explain how the death of one can bestow life upon another. There is no logical, causal reason why this should be so. We must consider the nature of life itself, for this whole sacrifice scenario purports

to be a case of the Giver of Life choosing to bestow it upon people who trust Him enough to do what He asks. If the Giver of Life is blind chance (which is taught as if it were established fact in our schools today), then there is absolutely no reason to do anything “he” says: there are no moral absolutes and no real rules of conduct other than “Don’t get caught.” There is no good or evil, but merely convenient or inconvenient, pleasurable or painful.

If, on the other hand, the Giver of Life is a conscious, eternally living, creative being, then He has the right (not to mention the intrinsic ability) to *assign* life to whomever He wants. And when He says (as He has here in the Torah) that He will preserve the lives of those who are sanctified through sacrifices of His design, we are presented with a choice: we can either believe Him or not. Most of us would agree that life is a good thing—preserving life is to be preferred to the alternative if at all possible. So if we reject Yahweh’s sacrifice scenario, the culmination of which is the death and resurrection of Yahshua the Messiah, we are simply saying that we follow something we consider to be a higher authority, whether religious teachers who disagree with God (even if they’re not overtly “religious”), our own animal instincts, or blind chance. In the end, it’s a question of who we trust, who we deem the highest authority in our lives.

“Aaron therefore went to the altar and killed the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself. Then the sons of Aaron brought the blood to him. And he dipped his finger in the blood, put it on the horns of the altar, and poured the blood at the base of the altar. But the fat, the kidneys, and the fatty lobe from the liver of the sin offering he burned on the altar, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. The flesh and the hide he burned with fire outside the camp.” (Leviticus 9:8-11) Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel were convinced that Yahweh was indeed the highest authority there was. So without really comprehending what it all meant, they trustingly did as He had instructed. **“And he killed the burnt offering; and Aaron’s sons presented to him the blood, which he sprinkled all around on the altar. Then they presented the burnt offering to him, with its pieces and head, and he burned them on the altar. And he washed the entrails and the legs, and burned them with the burnt offering on the altar. Then he brought the people’s offering, and took the goat, which was the sin offering for the people, and killed it and offered it for sin, like the first one. And he brought the burnt offering and offered it according to the prescribed manner. Then he brought the grain offering, took a handful of it, and burned it on the altar, besides the burnt sacrifice of the morning.”** (Leviticus 9:12-17)

Every detail, every component of God’s complicated instruction, was carried out just as Yahweh had ordained. **“He also killed the bull and the**

ram as sacrifices of peace offerings, which were for the people. And Aaron's sons presented to him the blood, which he sprinkled all around on the altar, and the fat from the bull and the ram—the fatty tail, what covers the entrails and the kidneys, and the fatty lobe attached to the liver; and they put the fat on the breasts. Then he burned the fat on the altar; but the breasts and the right thigh Aaron waved as a wave offering before Yahweh, as Moses had commanded." (Leviticus 9:18-21)

We have discussed each of these symbolic elements in their turn in the previous pages. Note once again that no one was a passive bystander in this process. Everyone had a role to play, telling us something of the spiritual dynamic of the salvation process. Moses played the part of Yahweh, directing the players in this drama, overseeing its "production." Aaron the High Priest played the role of the coming Messiah, anointed for his role as intercessor for the people. During the seven days of the priestly consecration process, Moses had slain the sacrifices; but here Aaron is seen killing the animals himself—a subtle indication that the Messiah (as God incarnate) would offer *Himself* as the necessary sacrifice. On the eighth day the necessary but often confusing distinction between Yahweh and His Messiah—between glorious God and the humble Son of Man—begins to blur, until we finally comprehend that they are indeed One and the same: a spiritual unity.

Aaron's sons—his followers, prophetic of the household of faith—were actively involved in the process. The passage mentions three times that Aaron's sons "presented the blood to him," but this obscures the true meaning of the text. The word translated "presented" is actually *matsa*, meaning to find, discover, secure, obtain, or acquire. Aaron's sons (read: us) *found and obtained* the blood, which was "poured out at the base of the altar" and "sprinkled all around the altar" by Aaron (read: Christ) in order to make atonement for it. The altar (Hebrew: *mizbeach*—literally, the place of sacrifice) is in this context metaphorical of the earth—the place to which Yahshua came to "give his life as a ransom for many." Taking this train of thought to the end of the line, then, we observe the following. We as "sons of Aaron" (whose name means Light Bringer) have found and obtained the blood (in which is life) of Christ, which He poured out upon the earth to sanctify it and all who live upon it. Conversely, those who are not sons of the Light Bringer have not discovered, secured, or acquired this blood (i.e., *life*), even though it was shed on their behalf as well, being citizens of the earth.

Speaking of the "citizens of the earth," two more groups of participants are mentioned in the sacrificial scenario: the elders of Israel, and their people—the children of Israel. The elders serve as representatives for the people: it is they who have the responsibility of

truthfully communicating what is happening to those who depend upon them for leadership. Metaphorically, then, I believe Israel and its elders play the role of the world at large—those for whom the blood of the sacrifice was shed, those who have the potential for responding to the love of Yahweh. These are the objects of Yahshua’s Great Commission, the lost world He came to save. The key to this group is their promise, their potential. But note that their knowledge base rests largely in the hands of their “elders,” those who sit in positions of leadership over them, capable of directing them either toward the truth or into error. Woe to the “elder” who seduces his people into falsehood. Yahshua (in John 8:44) called such people “murderers.”

But the people *were* blessed—the sacrifices *were* made on their behalf. **“Then Aaron lifted his hand toward the people, blessed them, and came down from offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people.”** So far, what they’ve been doing could be taken for mere religious observance, like a Muslim Imam circumambulating the Ka’aba or the Pope sprinkling holy water over the crowds gathered in St. Peter’s square. All sorts of strange rites are performed in the name of religion. How are we to tell which ones are *bona fide* and which ones are bogus? How is offering sheep, goats, and bulls to Yahweh any different than spinning a prayer wheel to Shiva in Tibet? Do we have to take the priests’ word for it? No. In His own time and in His own way, the true God responds: **“Then the glory of Yahweh appeared to all the people, and fire came out from before Yahweh and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.”** (Leviticus 9:22-23)

Yahweh does not perform cheap parlor tricks, you understand. We can’t summon up “the glory of Yahweh” to wow the sheeple by slaughtering a few goats and splattering their blood around the place in the prescribed manner. But when our hearts are right before Him, Yahweh shows us His glory. Today His glory is revealed subtly and quietly to His children, for we live within an evil society. But the day is coming—and *soon*—when **“The Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”** (Matthew 16:27) The day approaches when **“You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”** (Mark 14:62) **“Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him.”** (Revelation 1:7) Yahweh responds to us and reveals Himself to us because *He can*. False gods and figments of the religious imagination cannot.

One loose end remains to be tied up. What does “the eighth day” signify? If my observation is valid that the seven days of priestly consecration represent mankind’s seven thousand year tenure upon the earth, then the eighth day can mean only one thing: the eternal state. This thought is confirmed by the promise of Leviticus 9:4, **“Today Yahweh will appear to you,”** and further validated by the fulfillment of that promise: **“Then the glory of Yahweh appeared to all the people, and fire came out from before Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 9:24) As we have seen, the artificial but necessary distinction between Yahweh and His Messiah will begin to blur somewhat during His glorious Millennial reign, and I believe it will disappear altogether as we segue into eternity—now clothed in our immortal bodies. As Paul put it, **“Each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.... Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.”** (I Corinthians 15:23-28) It’s not that there are two (or three, if you count the Spirit) “Gods” who operate under a hierarchy of descending authority. It’s that in the eternal state, when the believers have at last been given their immortal, spiritual bodies (described later in the same chapter), the separate, diminished manifestation of Yahweh’s human form will no longer have any practical use: we will finally be able to dwell with Yahweh in His undiminished glory, for we will have been consecrated, perfected, and made whole. We at last shall see God as He intended, and know Him as we are known. Until then, however, our instruction is to **“prepare for Yahweh to appear on the eighth day.”**

CONSECRATING THE SANCTUARY

- (766) *Offer daily sacrifices to continually consecrate the Tabernacle.* **“Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the first year, day by day continually. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. With the one lamb shall be one-tenth of an ephah of flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of pressed oil, and one-fourth of a hin of wine as a drink offering. And the other lamb you shall offer at twilight; and you shall offer with it the grain offering and the drink offering, as in the morning, for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh.”** (Exodus 29:38-41) We encountered this same precept back in Mitzvah #536, where we saw it from the point of view of Numbers 28:2-8. As usual, a skeptic would see this as a colossal waste of resources, the worst sort of religious pointlessness—if, that is, Yahweh didn’t have something really important to say through it. I mean, on an

annual basis, this adds up to 730 lambs, 180 gallons of wine, 47 bushels of fine flour, and another 180 gallons of olive oil—all either up in smoke (these were burnt offerings, *olah*, to be completely consumed) or poured out onto the ground. This was enough to feed all the poor people in Israel for months! What was God *thinkin'*?

He was “thinking” that He’d rather feed the whole world for eternity. (And besides, He’d already taken care of the poor through the law of the tithe.) The symbols employed here, if followed to their proper conclusion, would have ramifications far beyond temporal hunger or thirst. Yahweh explains, sort of: **“This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before Yahweh, where I will meet you to speak with you. And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory. So I will consecrate the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. I will also consecrate both Aaron and his sons to minister to Me as priests. I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am Yahweh their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am Yahweh their God.”** (Exodus 29:42-46)

Let’s review the symbols one by one. The lambs, of course, are predictive of “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” that is, Yahshua. But why are there two of them? There was only one Messiah. The answer, I think, is in the timing: the lambs were to be offered in the morning and at twilight—at the beginning and the end of each day. From the dawn of man’s sinful state until the death of death at the end of the Millennium, there is only one solution to his fatal conundrum: How could he regain the fellowship with Yahweh that he’d lost in the Garden? Only through the sacrifice of God’s Innocent One. It’s no accident that Yahshua described Himself in Revelation 1:8, **“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”** Nor should we find it strange that Yahweh described Himself in the very same terms: **“Who has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, Yahweh, am the first; and with the last I am He.”** (Isaiah 41:4) With the sacrifice of two lambs, at morning and twilight of every day, Yahweh is identifying the coming Messiah with Himself: they are One.

The grain offering (*minha*) that was to accompany each burnt offering was to be of fine flour—the useless chaff had been removed—permeated with olive oil, symbolic of the Holy Spirit. The oil is specifically said to have been “pressed,” that is, obtained from the olives through their being crushed. Together, the picture is that of the provision of our spiritual

sustenance through milling and pressing—the removal of our worthlessness and the indwelling of God’s Spirit in our lives through the brutal sacrifice of Yahshua. We’ve seen these metaphors many times by now; they should come as no surprise. Note that the amount of oil used was to be equal to the amount of wine in the drink offering (*nesek*). This should be a not-so-subtle reminder that the blood sacrifice of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell within us are linked—they are spiritually equivalent.

And what was the point of all this? As Yahweh put it, **“So I will consecrate the tabernacle of meeting and the altar.”** The Tabernacle, as we have seen, is an elaborate metaphor for the Plan of God for our redemption, centered upon the Messiah and encompassing our response to His love. The altar is the place of sacrifice, the place to which God would come to offer Himself up on our behalf: it represents the world and its inhabitants, the place that **“God so loved...that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”** (John 3:16) And what does it mean to “consecrate” something? This is our old friend *qadash*, meaning to sanctify, to make holy, to set apart. Once again we see that if the symbols are valid, then God’s message is stunningly significant—the most fundamentally, viscerally important thing in the entire world—but if they aren’t, the whole thing is a pointless waste, a costly fraud. So which is it? What do you think?

Levitical Lessons

God is impartial—He is no “respector of persons” (as it says in Proverbs 24:23 and Romans 2:11). That is, Yahweh is not impressed with what we have—our power, wealth, talent, or beauty, for these things are but gifts He has bestowed upon us (or, in some cases, things we have seized for ourselves in defiance of His statutes). In our natural state, God sees virtually no distinction between the richest, most powerful man on earth and the humblest slave. He is so far above us that there is no discernable difference between the best of us and the worst—it’s like trying to decide which of these six thousand ants at His picnic are the “good ones.” Who could tell the difference?

But that’s only in our natural state. From cover to cover, God’s Word informs us that He has provided a way for us to become “unnatural,” or if you will, “supernatural.” Yahweh has breathed into our race the “breath of life” (the *neshamah*, Genesis 2:7), something that fundamentally separates mankind from all other living things in His biosphere. We, in short, have a capacity for spiritual life that sets us apart from the animal kingdom. But since the fall of Adam, this capacity is unrealized at our births. As Yahshua put it, **“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit [both of them, is the connotation], he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”** (John 3:5-8) Our natural lives (being “born of the flesh”) get us in the door of human existence, but we aren’t truly “living beings” (in the same sense that Adam was when he received the breath of life) until (and unless) we have been “born from above,” that is, “born of the Spirit.” This, like the wind, is something that can’t be seen directly, but can be unmistakably discerned by the evidence the new birth leaves in its wake. It is at this point that we’ve left the natural state and have become *supernatural*.

Being “born” from above in the Spirit of God implies that we now have spiritual “parents.” Our “Father” in God’s metaphor is Yahweh, and our “Mother” is His Holy Spirit (a fact that lends perspective to the Fifth Commandment—see Exodus 20:12). To his human parents, a child isn’t just a child—one of a generation or a class, a nameless statistic or demographic “bean” to be counted. No, he is an individual, one of the family, the focus of his parents’ love, attention, and support. He has a name, a place in the world, a legacy, an *identity*. To his parents, he’s *somebody*. A “child” born from above of God’s Spirit is like that

too: he (or she) now has an individual identity; he is “known” to his spiritual “parents.” He is no longer just one of the ants at the picnic.

So at this point, it seems no longer strictly true that “God is no respecter of persons,” for in a sense, He “respects” and considers His child constantly and with great affection. But it is still not because of anything the child has brought to the family. He’s totally dependent, can’t do anything useful, cries a lot, and smells funny. Sure, his Father loves it when he smiles in recognition of His face and squeals, “Dada!” But God won’t love him any more when he’s able to solve differential calculus problems and run ninety-yard touchdowns for his high school football team. His love is complete and absolute the day His child is born. A “respecter of persons?” No, Yahweh is a respecter of His own character, something that gets passed on to every child “born” to Him.

Why is it, then, that Yahweh is constantly seen singling out people or groups and imposing destiny upon them, especially in the Torah? He selects a Chaldean nobody named Abram upon which to found his “chosen race,” and our boy takes half a lifetime learning to trust this God. His grandson Jacob turns out to be a scheming scoundrel who (poetically enough) gets tricked into jump starting the nation through means that would be specifically outlawed by his God four and a half centuries later (see Mitzvah #100)—a law delivered through Moses, a stuttering spoiled brat-turned-murderer who runs away from his disastrous screw-ups only to find himself enduring the terminal obscurity of tending somebody else’s sheep for forty years. Only then does Yahweh recruit him to shepherd the biggest flock of all—the nation of Israel. *Then* Yahweh chooses Moses’ brother Aaron as the father of Israel’s priesthood, and his tribe, Levi, as “His special possession,” all apparently for no other reason than that they happened to be related and breathing. It was as if God looked, shrugged, and said, “You’ll do, I guess.”

What was Yahweh *thinkin’*? Did He see some hidden heroic quality in this family, some underlying superiority, some reason to “respect” these people? *Au contraire!* When one looks at the qualifications of the people He chose—without wearing the rose-colored glasses of our traditional religious viewpoint—we find that they’re ordinary, flawed, weak, gullible, and venal—just like you and me. So how did Abram, the timid lad so slow to follow Yahweh’s instructions, become Abraham, universally respected Father of the Faithful? What transformed Jacob, usurper of his brother’s birthright, into Israel, the namesake and patriarch of God’s chosen people? How did Moses morph from outlaw to Emancipator, from

loser to Lawgiver? What makes the Levites special, or the Aaronic priesthood holy? It was nothing they did, I can assure you. It was, rather, what they allowed Yahweh to make of them.

The prophet Jeremiah was once given an object lesson. He went to the potter's workshop and saw him crafting a clay vessel. As he turned it on the wheel, however, it got lopsided and out of shape, so the potter simply smooshed it and started over. No big deal, if you're a potter. So Yahweh said, **"O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter? As the clay is in the potter's hand, so you are in my hand."** (Jeremiah 18:6) Yahweh went on to make the point that since Judah was behaving like a lumpy and lopsided bit of clay, He was perfectly willing to smoosh them and begin again, to make a proper, useful vessel out of them (useful for one thing above all others: the delivery of the Messiah to a lost world). Yahweh had actually been molding and shaping His nation from the very beginning, from the moment he called Abram out of Ur—forming and reforming them for that singular purpose, to be the vehicle for His Messiah.

The potter's art ranges from the mundane to the magnificent. It is found in both palaces and potting sheds, in museums and mud huts. And Yahweh's "pot," Israel, is both utilitarian and decorative. Yes, it was formed with the express purpose of bringing Yahshua to the world, but that doesn't mean the way it looks is of no consequence. On the contrary, God's glaze has been carefully applied and intricately layered. It's clear as crystal in places and practically opaque in others, exquisitely detailed, richly colored, and stunningly beautiful to those with the eyes to perceive its art. This "glaze" is the Law, the Torah. Its depth and meaning are fully appreciated by few of us, if any. But perhaps that's because although Yahweh has been working on this vessel *for eons*, He hasn't finished firing it. It's been in and out of the kiln of adversity for the last two and a half millennia, but the Potter still has one final step planned. The ultimate glaze, Israel's national salvation, will be set by the final—and hottest—firing of all: the Tribulation. That day is almost upon us. The kiln is heating up. A skeptical and envious world has mockingly predicted that Israel won't survive—that it will shatter under the intense heat. But the Master Potter had promised us that it will indeed emerge from the fire the most beautiful example of His art the world has ever seen. And it will "contain" the Messiah, as it was designed to do, for a thousand years.

But the underglaze, as I said, is still a bit hard to see in places. It consists largely of symbols and metaphors, parables and illustrations. Israel itself doesn't yet comprehend why it was formed or what these markings signify. The glaze? They've studied it, of course. They know they've got silica and alumina and a little copper oxide, and they're dazzled by its heavenly blue color. But they don't yet perceive that the glaze spells out a message crucial to their very survival: "Yahshua—Yahweh is Salvation." Those Jews who think about the Torah at all

seem to feel that if God has spent this much time and effort on them, they *must* be special—He surely *seems* partial toward them. But being the center of Yahweh’s attention is not the same thing as being in the center of His will. He’s still working on them because they *aren’t* finished! (The same could be said of us as individual believers, of course, but I’m speaking of Israel’s *national* redemption). If Yahweh seems to be a “respector of persons” in Israel’s case, it’s because of the extraordinary lengths He’s prepared to go to keep His own promises, not because of the intrinsic value of their raw materials.

Let us continue, then, to study what Yahweh the Master Potter has revealed to us through this glaze, the Torah, applied to Israel layer upon layer, precept upon precept, to teach us all what His masterpiece really means. And while we’re at it, let us strive to be pliable, sensitive to the Master’s touch, for we will be of no use to anyone until we have finally become what He meant for us to be.

ATONEMENT FOR PRIESTLY SINS

(767) *Sacrifice a bull to atone for the sins of the priesthood. “If a person sins unintentionally [i.e., through error] against any of the commandments of Yahweh in anything which ought not to be done, and does any of them, if the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer to Yahweh for his sin which he has sinned a young bull without blemish as a sin offering. He shall bring the bull to the door of the tabernacle of meeting before Yahweh, lay his hand on the bull’s head, and kill the bull before Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 4:2-4) We looked at the sin offering, the *chata’t*, back in Mitzvot #491 and #492. Here we see the specific case of a *chata’t* made necessary by the sin of an “anointed priest.” Notice first that the priest’s error was said to “bring guilt on the people.” Why is that? Why not just on himself? It’s because the priest is “anointed,” that is, he has been specially designated by Yahweh to be an intercessor for the people and a conduit of God’s truth to them. If the priests, those charged with communicating God’s Word to the world, are getting it wrong, then the people they are supposed to be serving will fall into falsehood. The congregation will become guilty through their ignorance (see Hosea 4:6), and it will be the *priest’s fault* for having fallen down on the job. Since the priests are a metaphor for all believers, the implications are quite serious.

That explains the sacrificial remedy: a bull was to be offered up, symbolizing our rejection of falsehood. As with all blood sacrifices, the bull’s symbolic function would be ultimately fulfilled in the death of Yahshua the Messiah. The priest’s guilt was to be transferred to the bull through the laying of his hands upon the bull’s head, just as our guilt (as believers) has been transferred to Yahshua. It is He who removes the error

and falsehood from our lives, if only we'll "lay our hands upon His head," that is, willingly acknowledge that we wish to transfer our guilt to Him. Make no mistake: the bull will die either way—with or without receiving our guilt upon himself. The transfer of guilt is not automatic. In fact, it is our prerogative, if we wish, to keep our sins, to attempt to deal with them ourselves through penance, denial, or rebellion. It won't work, you understand, but that doesn't keep the majority of mankind from trying, in their pride, to find another way to deal with the sin they know they bear. "It's too easy," they declare. "There must be a catch." *Of course* there's a catch: it's not easy at all for the bull. Man's sins cost Him his life!

"Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and bring it to the tabernacle of meeting. The priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before Yahweh, in front of the veil of the sanctuary." (Leviticus 4:5-6) The anointed priest (the one for whom the sacrifice was made, and from whom the guilt was transferred) was to take some of the bull's blood (read: life) and take it into the Tabernacle (read: the Plan of God). There he was to sprinkle it seven times before Yahweh. He was to use his own finger to do this, not some inert implement, the point being that he—the priest—was personally, physically involved in the process of removing his own sin, though the blood that had been shed was not his own. No one else could do it for him.

And where was he to do this? In front of the veil. Think back: what stood there? It was the altar of incense—the place of prayer. That is why the spot is described as being "before Yahweh," whose Shekinah manifestation "dwelled" between the two cherubim atop the mercy seat, behind the veil. The whole thing is a non-verbal prayer, which if put into verbal terms would sound something like this: "I have sinned before you, O Yahweh, and I am guilty of leading my people in the wrong direction by my actions and words. Now that I realize my error, I repent of this falsehood and ask for your forgiveness. Innocent blood has been shed on my behalf, and that blood now cries out to You: cleanse your servant of his sin, and restore me to your service and fellowship. My obedient sprinkling of this blood before You seven times tells me that my sin is completely, perfectly forgiven. Thank You, Father Yahweh."

Here's the hard question. When did *you* last realize that you weren't in perfect compliance with God's Word? When's the last time you critically examined your conduct and creed in light of God's revealed Word (as opposed to traditional religious expectation)? Neither the Church nor the rabbis of Orthodox Judaism seem willing to countenance the possibility that they might not be in the center of God's will—and yet they're poles

apart in their belief and practice, not only from each other but also from the scriptures. Something's wrong here.

PRIESTLY DUTIES

- (768) *The sons of the High Priest shall oversee the Tabernacle. “The appointed duty of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest is the oil for the light, the sweet incense, the daily grain offering, the anointing oil, the oversight of all the tabernacle, of all that is in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings.”* (Numbers 4:16) Knowing who the Torah's players represent is essential in figuring out what *our* “appointed duties” are in this world. As we have seen, Aaron the High Priest is a symbolic stand-in for the coming Messiah. His son Eleazar, then, represents Aaron's (i.e., Yahshua's) children, those who follow him—in other words, us. (It should be pointed out that not all of Aaron's sons followed him in truth: Nadab and Abihu represent, in this context, the look-alike forgeries, the “tares” in Yahshua's parable. Eleazar, though, is the real deal.) The things specified by Yahweh as Eleazar's duties should therefore be of great interest to us. Five things have been listed here.

First, he is to take care of the oil for the light. As we shall see in the next couple of Precepts, Aaron was to tend the menorah, but here we see that Eleazar was to be the custodian of the oil his father would use. Olive oil is a common scriptural metaphor for the Holy Spirit—defined perhaps most clearly in Zechariah 4:1-6. Yahshua told His disciples what their relationship with the Spirit would be. He said the Father “**will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, who the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.**” (John 14:16-17) When Yahshua said “He dwells with you,” He was referring to the state of affairs existing at that moment: He Himself was the personification of God's Spirit, living there among them. But after His impending crucifixion and resurrection, the Spirit would instead be “in” them—a change of address brought to fruition by the events of Acts 2. (By the way, because the word *Ruach* (Spirit) is a *feminine* noun in Hebrew, I have been referring to the Holy Spirit—Yahweh's *Ruach Qodesh*—as our “heavenly Mother,” feminine in symbolic persona. So note that the male personal pronouns describing the Spirit in the John 14 passage are actually *neutral* in gender: God does not call the Spirit “He” or “Him,” even in Greek.) Eleazar's first job, then, was to be a host or receptacle for the Holy Spirit of Yahweh. He was to take the oil of the Spirit wherever it needed to go.

Second, Eleazar was to take care of the sweet incense that was to be burned upon the altar of incense in the Holy Place, the small altar that

stood guarding the veil to the Most Holy, where the Shekinah of Yahweh abided between the cherubim. We discussed its exclusive formula in Mitzvah #439. Its five ingredients tell us that our prayers are to be fervent, communicating our most heartfelt pain and bitter sorrow to God, for we have been made righteous and are preserved through His sacrifice, even though we are in fact defiled, unclean creatures. As with the oil for the lamps, Aaron the High Priest (in His role as our Messiah) was to burn the incense upon the altar, and the two things were done together (see Mitzvah #433). So Eleazar kept the incense (as he had the oil) and Aaron presented them before Yahweh; that is, we Spirit-filled believers cry out to Yahweh, and our Intercessor pleads our case before Him on our behalf.

The third “appointed duty” of Eleazar was to take care of the daily grain offering (the *minha*). This, as we learned in Precept #766, was to accompany each lamb offered as an *olah* (burnt offering), morning and evening every day of the year. The *minha* was of fine flour, meaning the husks, the worthless, non-nutritive parts of the grain, had been removed by milling—a process painful for the grain (us) and laborious for the miller (God). The flour was permeated with olive oil, indicative (as usual) of the Holy Spirit. Since the root of the word *minha* means “to give,” it is evident that the grain offering indicates Yahweh’s provision for His people—especially our life (grain is from a living plant), godliness (achieved through the process of milling), and of course the indwelling of His Spirit within us. Is it just me, or do you too find that these aspects of the *minha* fairly scream the truth of which Peter wrote? **“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”** (II Peter 1:2-4)

Fourth, Eleazar was to administer the anointing oil, whose ingredients, as we discovered in Mitzvah #436, describe “the Messiah, Yahshua, whose Spirit-filled life was the epitome of love, the standard of holiness, and sweet salvation achieved through bitter suffering.” You may be thinking, “Then shouldn’t Aaron (the type of the Messiah in this context) be taking care of the oil of anointing?” No, for the simple reason that Aaron *was* the anointing oil. Eleazar was charged with making what it represented a present reality, available to the people. To put it bluntly, if we believers do not accurately present Yahshua the Messiah to the world—if we do not “rightly divide the Word of Truth”—then the job won’t get done at all. No pressure or anything.

The fifth and last “appointed duty” of Eleazar the son of Aaron was **“the oversight of all the tabernacle, of all that is in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings.”** As we discovered in such exquisite detail in Chapter 4 of this volume, the Tabernacle (and “all that is in it”) represents and reveals the Plan of God. Again, Eleazar—a metaphor for Yahweh’s true believers—aren’t in themselves the plan: we do not provide salvation, atonement, or cleansing. But it is nevertheless up to us to make the Plan accessible and comprehensible to the world in which we live. Aaron can’t do it—he’s *the central component* of the plan. Nadab and Abihu can’t do it—they’re clueless as to what the plan means (and besides, they’re dead). Only Eleazar—representing us as believers—can make the Plan of God efficacious and attractive to the people. If we fail in our responsibility, we will have failed people for whom Christ died. I for one don’t want that on my conscience.

One last thought on the subject. Eleazar was appointed five tasks. I’ve observed time and again that five seems to be the number of grace. And here, as expected, communicating God’s grace—revealing to the world Yahweh’s unmerited favor toward us—is the underlying theme of everything Eleazar was told to do.

- (769) *The High Priest shall be in charge of the golden menorah.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Command the children of Israel that they bring to you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to make the lamps burn continually. Outside the veil of the Testimony, in the tabernacle of meeting, Aaron shall be in charge of it from evening until morning before Yahweh continually; it shall be a statute forever in your generations. He shall be in charge of the lamps on the pure gold lampstand before Yahweh continually.’”** (Leviticus 24:1-4) In the previous precept, the first thing we learned was that Eleazar (symbolic of true believers) was to be the custodian of the olive oil for the menorah within the Holy Place. Here we see a further division of labor, so to speak. The children of Israel were to bring the pressed oil to Eleazar so Aaron could employ it. While “bring” is a perfectly reasonable translation of the Hebrew verb *laqach*, I should point out that several times in scripture, when applied to a person, it has the connotation of “summoning” him (as when Balak summoned Balaam in Numbers 23:11). So since we know that the oil is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit, the underlying meaning is clear: the children of Israel (representing the whole world) were they who would bring or summon the Spirit of God. How? By pressing, crushing, and beating the Spirit’s source. As Yahshua explained, **“It is to your advantage that I go away [by being beaten, crucified, entombed, and rising again from the dead]; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and**

of righteousness, and of judgment.” (John 16:7-8) Bottom line: it is the world’s sin that made necessary the indwelling of Yahweh’s Spirit in the lives of His people.

The lamps of the menorah were to “burn continually.” They were never to be allowed to go out. Moreover, this was to be something that was to go on forever—“throughout your generations.” The light represents God’s truth, the revelation of His grace, His love, and His mercy—things that were never to be extinguished through neglect or smothered with religious obfuscation. The key to making sure the light was always shining in the world was twofold. First, its fuel was Yahweh’s Messiah, the pure oil of His Spirit having been obtained by His being crushed on our behalf.

The second key is the same, though expressed with a different scriptural metaphor. Aaron (symbolic of Christ) was to **“be in charge of [the lamp] from evening until morning before Yahweh continually.”** Aaron was to make sure the supply of oil (the Spirit) that created the light was never cut off. Whether he fed the lamp himself, or had one of his sons do it, it was Aaron who was “in charge.” Twice in this passage is the fact mentioned that he was to do this “before Yahweh continually.” Our Messiah continuously stands “before Yahweh” because, in point of fact, He *is* Yahweh. When He condescended to take the form of a mortal man for our benefit, He did not relinquish His Spirit. Once again, we need to take a step backward and consider this: it was never inevitable, never to be automatically assumed that God would take personal charge of the dissemination of His truth. In fact, every religion in the world operates as if God has stepped out of the picture and turned over the “business” of faith to his “priests.” But relationship with Yahweh is not a religion, nor has He put mere men in charge of His truth. Christ is the head of this body.

Note also that Aaron was to supervise the lamp **“from evening until morning,”** that is, during the hours of darkness, when God’s light is needed most. The identity of Aaron as a type of Christ is made clear, then, in John’s eloquent observation: **“In [Yahshua] was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend [i.e., overpower, overcome, or gain control over] it.”** (John 1:5) Whereas **“men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil,”** (John 3:19) the truth of God’s love dispels the darkness. As Yahshua said a moment later, **“He who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”** (John 3:21) It’s no coincidence that the very first thing God made was light.

(770) *The lamps of the Menorah must cast their light to the front.* “And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Speak to Aaron, and say to him, When you arrange the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the lampstand.’ And Aaron did so; he arranged the lamps to face toward the front of the lampstand, as Yahweh commanded Moses. Now this workmanship of the lampstand was hammered gold; from its shaft to its flowers it was hammered work. According to the pattern which Yahweh had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand.” (Numbers 8:1-4)

Although orthodox Jews today realize that the menorah in the Tabernacle had seven branches, you’ll often see a nine-branched candlestick in synagogues today. The reason, as usual, is that Israel has substituted something they sort of understand for something they don’t remotely comprehend. The nine-branched model is designed in commemoration of the eight-day miracle (confused yet?) of the provision of oil when the Maccabees cleansed the Second Temple in 135 B.C., after the pagan Seleucid monarch Antiochus IV Epiphanes had defiled the place by sacrificing a sow on the altar. The center candle, the ninth, is called the *shammus*. It’s there to light the other candles, one night at a time, in the winter month of Kislev. Yahweh’s formula, though, was seven oil lamps, not nine candles. (See Precept #722 for a thorough analysis of the design of the Tabernacle’s menorah.) Once lit, they were to remain lit, for the light of Yahweh’s truth is eternal. The *last* thing Yahweh wanted to commemorate was the temporary triumph of one religion over another.

With candles, of course, there’s no way to arrange them so that the light is in the front—it’s on top, no matter what you do. But oil lamps are another matter, and as usual, the symbology is readily apparent, if we’ll only look for it. Oil lamps are probably the most commonly unearthed artifacts of middle-eastern antiquity—thousands of them have been found. Though they vary widely in style and materials, their function invariably dictates two design features: a reservoir for the olive oil, and a provision (a hole or notch) positioned off to one end to hold a wick. To get a constant and long-lasting light, you wouldn’t just set the oil on fire; rather, you’d let the wick absorb a small but steady supply of oil which would burn at a consistent rate—just like a candle’s wick burns liquefied paraffin at a controlled speed. The picture is that of the Holy Spirit supplying our lives in whatever measure we are prepared to absorb.

So in order to “**arrange the lamps to face toward the front of the lampstand,**” one would simply turn the oil lamps so that their wicks all faced one direction: toward the room, not the wall. The question, as always, is why? Why did Yahweh make such a big deal out of this? Between Exodus and Numbers, he mentioned this requirement at least three times, so it must be important. First, the lamps were to all point in *the same* direction. This

tells us (or at least *me*) that believers are to be unified in their outlook. In Precept #722, I theorized that the format of the menorah indicates that “three branches on one side represent Israel, and the other three represent the ekklesia or Church—all of which grow from, and are dependent upon, the center trunk: Yahshua the Messiah.” The two “sides” of belief in Yahweh, then, pre- and post-Calvary, may approach the world from different perspectives, but they should both be shedding their light in the same direction. And that direction is determined by the orientation of the Center Light, Yahshua the Messiah.

Second, the lights were all to “face” the room, not the wall. What went on in the Holy Place? Directly across from the menorah, the table of showbread commemorated God’s provision for us. And just to its left, positioned before the veil that restricted access to Yahweh’s presence in the Most Holy Place, the altar of incense stood as the venue of prayer. There were no windows in the Tabernacle—the light of the sun and moon were worthless here. The only way to perceive the sustenance and means of divine access provided by God’s Plan was by the light of the menorah—composed of the Messiah, the ekklesia, and Israel, all pointing in the same direction, all illuminating the same space.

REMUNERATION FOR THE PRIESTS

- (771) *Wave offerings, sin offerings, and trespass offerings shall belong to the priests. “And Yahweh spoke to Aaron: ‘Here, I Myself have also given you charge of My heave offerings, all the holy gifts of the children of Israel; I have given them as a portion to you and your sons, as an ordinance forever. This shall be yours of the most holy things reserved from the fire: every offering of theirs, every grain offering and every sin offering and every trespass offering which they render to Me, shall be most holy for you and your sons. In a most holy place you shall eat it; every male shall eat it. It shall be holy to you.’”* (Numbers 18:8-10) In light of today’s religious scams, it’s tempting to view the remuneration of the priests as a get-rich-quick scheme foisted by the ruling religious elite upon a cowed and superstitious populace. But it was nothing of the sort. Remember, the whole tribe of Levi, of which the priests were a subset, were specifically left without inheritance in the Promised Land. In an agricultural society, land for cultivation, grazing, orchards and vineyards was the basis of wealth, and the Levites—by divine definition—didn’t own any. That’s why the tithe was instituted: the people (who owned the land) gave a tenth of their increase to the Levites, who in turn forwarded a tenth of the tithe to the priests. Here we see that principle extended. All offerings that

weren't specifically supposed to be consumed in flame upon the altar (such as the *olah*) were to belong to the priests.

Let's look at this strictly from the point of view of the finances of the priests. Their job was to intercede between God and man—to prepare the offerings brought by the people, burn the incense of prayer, and provide the vehicle for the atonement of the sins of the nation. Their role also included communicating God's word to Israel—guarding and publishing the Torah. If you think about it, then, the better the priests did their job—the more they trained and encouraged their countrymen in the instruction of Yahweh's Word—the more “prosperous” they'd become. Not only would a faithful and holy populace be submitting tithes based upon having been abundantly blessed by God (see Leviticus 26:3-13 and Deuteronomy 28:1-14), but the people's heave offerings, sin offerings, trespass offerings, grain offerings, and peace offerings (all things that contributed to the priests' income) would have been forthcoming as the steady outpouring of a contrite and grateful national spirit attuned and attentive to the leading and admonition of Yahweh's *Ruach Qodesh*.

But what happened? The priesthood became corrupt and ineffectual (see for example, Judges 17:5, I Samuel 2:12-17), and as a result Israel fell into apostasy, a condition that persisted—relieved occasionally by the timely advent of one judge or another—until the time of King David. The financial and political fortunes of Israel were tied directly to the effectiveness and faithfulness of the Aaronic priesthood, for better or worse. And, poetically enough, the priests in turn suffered materially from the declining holiness of the nation. It was a vicious downward spiral, but one that could have been broken at any time by a High Priest who returned with a whole heart and strong hand to the Torah of Yahweh.

The instruction is given that these particular offerings were to be eaten by male descendants of Aaron (who were priests by definition). It's not that Yahweh didn't wish to provide for their wives and daughters; He did, but not with the sin offerings and trespass offerings. These were reserved for the priests themselves, who are a living metaphor for the assembly of true believers under the Messiah. We should therefore examine the symbolic or prophetic component to this precept. I believe the key is this phrase: **“This shall be yours of the most holy things reserved from the fire: every offering of theirs.”**

The world will soon experience Yahweh's judgment—a period of time commonly referred to as “The Tribulation.” During these seven years, God will go about separating the wheat from the chaff, the gold from the dross, the sheep from the goats. And when it's all over no one will be left

standing upon the earth except those who have turned to Yahweh in faith. These survivors, not coincidentally, are specifically called “priests of God and of Christ” in Revelation 20:6. During the Tribulation, a third of the world will burn (see Revelation 8:7) and something upwards of half its population (probably much more) will perish. What the godless of the earth leave behind will be their “sin offering.” And all that will be left standing after the wars and chaos of the Time of Jacob’s Trouble will be what Yahweh has “reserved from the fire.” The priests were instructed to eat their portions “in a most holy place.” That place, it transpires, will ultimately be the earth during King Yahshua’s Millennial reign—cleansed, renewed, and set apart for His glory. It was no pious platitude or sappy sentiment when Yahshua announced, **“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”** (Matthew 5:5)

- (772) *Only those within the priest’s household who are clean may share in the offerings.* **“This also is yours: the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel; I have given them to you, and your sons and daughters with you, as an ordinance forever. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it.”** (Numbers 18:11) In a continuation of the previous precept, Yahweh clarifies who is included in the remuneration picture, this time referring to the “heave offering of their gift,” which I take it would center around the *selamim*, or peace offerings brought to Yahweh (see Mitzvah #494). The “priest” himself could eat of these offerings, and his whole household were entitled to them as well, provided they were “clean.” Priests, of course, were defined as males who were descendants of Aaron, but Yahweh didn’t want to leave the impression that women and children were ineligible for salvation or sustenance. On the contrary, the offerings were to be shared with his entire family—those living under his roof related by blood or marriage to the priest. In metaphorical terms, the blood ties refer to Yahshua’s atonement, and marriage indicates our position as “the bride of Christ.” (Although the wife isn’t specifically mentioned here, her inclusion is understood, for she and her husband were considered “one flesh.” See Genesis 2:24. Also, the final description of the recipients was “*Everyone who is clean in your house.*”)

The fact that this ordinance is specifically described as enduring “forever” should be a clue that the symbolic aspect of the priest’s role is still in view. But the explicit inclusion of the priest’s children in the precept leads us to another observation about life in the coming Millennium. The sanctified survivors who enter the Kingdom after the Tribulation won’t be the last generation. Their families will continue for the next thousand years. And it is these mortal progeny that will be eligible to partake of the *selamim* heave offerings—if they are clean. As

we discovered in Chapter 15 of *The Owner's Manual*, there are any number of things that can ritually defile us, making us “unclean.” But they boil down to a common metaphor: contact with the world’s evil. Only Yahshua our Messiah can make us permanently clean—and that includes the mortal Millennial multitudes who will live their lives in His perfect society: they too must be born again, born from above into His Spirit.

- (773) *Firstfruits offerings are to be eaten by the priests. “All the best of the oil, all the best of the new wine and the grain, their firstfruits which they offer to Yahweh, I have given them to you. Whatever first ripe fruit is in their land, which they bring to Yahweh, shall be yours. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it. Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours.”* (Numbers 18:12-14) Three times per year, all Israelite males were to gather to appear before Yahweh in celebration. At each of these times, one or more crops were coming into season. At Passover/Unleavened Bread/Firstfruits in the spring, the barley crop would be just about ready. In the early summer, at the feast of Weeks (Pentecost), the wheat harvest was underway. And at the Feast of Tabernacles in the autumn, the bounty of the orchard and vineyard would have been ripening. And at each of these festivals, a sample of the crop was to be brought to Yahweh: **“The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of Yahweh your God.”** (Exodus 23:19)

Not only was the first of the crop offered to God (a sign of thankfulness and trust that Yahweh would bless the remainder of the growing season) but the best (literally, the “fat”) was to be offered up as well. This was to be a sign that the First Commandment (“You shall have no other gods before Me”) was being taken seriously: the Israelite farmer was to honor Yahweh even over himself and his family.

God, of course, doesn’t subsist on fruit, vegetables, and grain. He “needs” but one thing: our loving companionship. And until the advent of the Messiah, the priesthood was to be the vehicle—the conduit—for man’s fellowship with Yahweh (symbolically, at least). So the firstfruits of Israel’s crops that were brought in homage to God were in turn to be eaten by the priests who attended to the spiritual needs of the nation. On a symbolic level, it’s one more clarification of the principle that believers who consider themselves disinherited pilgrims in this world (like the priests and Levites were in Israel—see Precept #775) will not, in the end, be left with nothing. In God’s coming kingdom, His children will receive the best of what the world has to offer, and we’ll receive it first.

- (774) *No time limits or conditions are imposed upon Yahweh’s provision for the priests. “All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer to Yahweh, I have given to you and your sons and daughters with you as an*

ordinance forever; it is a covenant of salt forever before Yahweh with you and your descendants with you.” (Numbers 18:19) Though we use it primarily as a flavoring agent these days, salt was valued most highly in the ancient world for its properties as a preservative. Curing meat or fish in salt was the only reliable way to extend its “shelf life” in the days before refrigeration. A “covenant of salt,” then, spoke of the agreement’s intended permanence, its binding obligation upon the one making the promise. The phrase is used three times in scripture: (1) here, where God is promising to provide for the priests (read: believers) and their sons and daughters; (2) in Leviticus 2:13, where (as we saw in Mitzvah #478) Yahweh commanded every *minha* or grain offering to be offered with salt—again, the sign predicted and guaranteed Yahweh’s provision for His people; and (3) II Chronicles 13:5, where God’s promise of David’s dominion over Israel forever—clearly a Messianic reference—is recalled. So in every scriptural reference, the “covenant of salt” referred to something Yahweh unilaterally pledged to do for mankind—and in reality, it was all the same thing: the provision of salvation through the sacrifice of His Messiah. It was a binding, permanent, and obligatory pledge, one Yahweh didn’t have to make, but freely did on our behalf.

- (775) *God Himself is a gift given in lieu of worldly treasure.* **“Then Yahweh said to Aaron: ‘You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel.’”** (Numbers 18:20) It’s not that God was saying all His children were going to be dirt poor while the rest of humanity prospered. His point is that whatever we have or don’t have in this world, our *real* treasure is Him. Our roots and inheritance are not in or of this world. We are pilgrims here, just passing through. God has promised to supply all our needs, from salvation to supper; all we have to do is trust Him.

Yahshua put it in less symbolic terms for His listeners: **“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His**

righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (Matthew 6:25-34)

He’s not saying, “Don’t bother getting up and going to work in the morning, ’cause I’m in charge of providing for you.” Remember, the Israelites in the wilderness still had to go out and gather their manna—it didn’t just jump into their baskets. On the contrary, He’s telling us not to *worry* about obtaining the necessities of life. Trust Yahweh for those things. Sow your seed and trust God to make it grow. (Note that He said nothing about that new 50 inch high-def plasma screen home theater rig you’ve been coveting.) As John put it, **“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”** (I John 2:15-17) If we realize that we have no “inheritance” in the world, that we’re just passing through, then it all becomes clear. As you drive through the Colorado Rockies, you can admire and appreciate the view, but you can’t own it. The believer (ideally) recognizes that *everything* in this world is just scenery rushing past his window: enjoy it while it’s here, but don’t “love” it, don’t covet it, don’t cling to it. Our “possessions” in this world are like music: they’re here only for the moment, and then they’re gone. Yahweh, on the other hand, is our permanent inheritance.

(776) *A priest may keep the skin of the burnt offering.* **“And the priest who offers anyone’s burnt offering, that priest shall have for himself the skin of the burnt offering which he has offered.”** (Leviticus 7:8-10) This one sort of slipped through the cracks of Mitzvah #475. There we learned that the *olah*, the voluntary burnt offering made in homage to Yahweh, was killed, skinned, and cut into pieces not by the priest, but by the worshipper. The priest would then sprinkle its blood about the altar and put all of the meat upon the altar to burn it—none of it was to be eaten. We weren’t told then (in Leviticus 1:1-9) what happened to the hide. Here that oversight is rectified. The animal’s skin is given to the priest.

The question, as usual, is *why*? The entire *olah* belonged to Yahweh: it was to be consumed in flames and its blood spilled out onto the ground. Why was the skin to be kept by the priest? I believe the answer goes all the way back to the account of the fall. **“For Adam and his wife Yahweh made tunics of skin, and clothed them.”** (Genesis 2:21) The skins Adam and Eve were given to wear were in a way like *olah* sacrifices. The judgment deserved by the first family was borne instead by an innocent animal—and

the only thing that was made “useful” to mankind from that animal’s sacrifice was its skin. It wasn’t meant to cover the sinners’ shame; the fig leaves they’d sewn together worked fine for that. No, it was to cover their *guilt*—Yahweh knew that innocent blood had to be shed on their behalf. It was the first object lesson our race ever received predicting the substitutionary death of the Messiah. Now a choice had to be made: in order for Adam and Eve to once again be found guiltless before their God, they had to forsake their fig leaf clothes and don the leather tunics Yahweh had provided. They had to admit their guilt and accept the gift that would cover it. Just like us today. The priests, then, received the skins of the *olah* sacrifices as a memorial of the gift that had effected the redemption of our forebears in the Garden—and as a harbinger of the gift that would bring redemption to the entire human race on Calvary, if only we would put it on.

But *wait*, you say. Aren’t our new symbolic garments made of pure, white linen, not animal skins? It’s true that the “Bride of Christ” is pictured wearing “**fine linen, clean and bright...the righteous acts of the saints.**” (Revelation 19:8) For that matter, the priests themselves are seen wearing the same linen symbol (see Precept #743). But remember the layout of the Tabernacle: you can’t get clean at the bronze laver until you’ve first encountered blood atonement at the altar. The “skins” must be put on first; only then will the imputed righteousness of the linen garment be available to us. Or looking at it another way, the skins speak of the cause of our redemption; the linen speaks of the effect. The skins are the journey; the linen is the destination.

- (777) *The priests may keep of the grain offering.* “**Also every grain offering that is baked in the oven and all that is prepared in the covered pan, or in a pan, shall be the priest’s who offers it. Every grain offering, whether mixed with oil or dry, shall belong to all the sons of Aaron, to one as much as the other.**” (Leviticus 7:9-10) The *minha*, or grain offering, spoke not of atonement (since no blood was shed) but of our sanctification—the process of making us “good.” The milling of the whole grain had removed the husks and chaff—the non-nutritive parts—picturing the removal of the worthless areas of our lives. When raw flour was brought, the portion to be burned upon the altar was to be sprinkled with frankincense, indicating purity attained through sacrifice. The priests were not to eat any of the flour with frankincense on it, for the task of providing our purity through His sacrifice fell to the Messiah. The *minha* offerings were usually made with olive oil, symbolizing the work of the Holy Spirit, and they were always to be salted—a picture of our preservation. In addition to a grain offering of flour, the worshipper had the option of bringing his *minha* in the form of

bread, whether baked in an oven, cooked in a covered pan, or prepared on a griddle. But whatever its form, none of the bread was to be made with leaven, a symbol of the pervasive nature of sin in our lives. (An exception to this was bread offered as part of the *selem*, or peace offering, where leavened bread indicated that we didn't have to wait until we were sinless to offer our thanksgiving and gratitude to Yahweh.)

In the wake of the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, slain because of their do-it-yourself religious presumption, Moses issued further instruction concerning the *minha* to teach the priests who remained the importance of remaining set apart and consecrated to Yahweh as they went about their priestly duties. **“And Moses spoke to Aaron, and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons who were left: ‘Take the grain offering that remains of the offerings made by fire to Yahweh, and eat it without leaven beside the altar; for it is most holy. You shall eat it in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons’ due, of the sacrifices made by fire to Yahweh; for so I have been commanded.’”** (Leviticus 10:12-13) They were to eat their grain offerings within the confines of the Tabernacle enclosure, i.e., in a “holy place.” This place was further defined as being “beside the altar,” that is, adjacent to the place of sacrifice. The point is that our sanctification—God’s provision of our holiness as symbolized by the *minha*—is linked to His sacrifice: they are side-by-side concepts. Indeed, the meat of any sacrifice that was the priests’ portion was to be eaten in the same place, in the same meal. Atonement and sanctification are two sides of the same coin: as far as God is concerned, we can’t be saved without being made good; nor can we become virtuous without having been redeemed.

- (778) *The priests may keep the wave offerings.* **“The thigh of the heave offering and the breast of the wave offering they shall bring with the offerings of fat made by fire, to offer as a wave offering before Yahweh. And it shall be yours and your sons’ with you, by a statute forever, as Yahweh has commanded.”** (Leviticus 10:15) When something was given to Yahweh as an offering, but was designated in the Torah as food for the priests, the priest was to “wave” or “heave” it toward heaven, that is, lift it in symbolic recognition that it actually belonged to Yahweh—and that it had been subsequently assigned to the priest. Portions of the *asham*, *chata’t*, *selem*, and *minha* offerings, as well as firstfruits offerings, were thus waved before Yahweh before they were enjoyed by the priests and their families (see Precept #772).

Keeping in mind that the priesthood represents the universal body of believers throughout man’s tenure on this planet, we are reminded that nothing we “own” is actually ours. Like the priests, we have no inheritance in this land. Everything that falls to us is in reality a gift from

Yahweh, no matter how hard we may think we've worked for it. So Yahweh made it a "statute forever" that we, His priesthood, should "offer as a wave offering" all of these good things we receive in this life—that is, gratefully acknowledge that they are in fact His, and that He has graciously assigned them to us for our enjoyment and sustenance. We are to gratefully "wave" our temporal blessings heavenward. You can't say we don't need the exercise.

- (779) *Things brought in restitution to Yahweh shall belong to the priests. "Every offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall be his. And every man's holy things shall be his; whatever any man gives the priest shall be his."* (Numbers 5:9-10) God's system of jurisprudence stressed restitution, not retribution. One who had been wronged was to receive back what the perpetrator's act had cost him, plus one fifth of its value. Crime was not to pay in Yahweh's economy; it wasn't even supposed to break even. However, the wronged party wasn't always still around when justice was served. If that was the case, the settlement would go to the victim's heirs. But what if he had no heirs? In that case, as we saw in Mitzvot #533, the six-fifths restitution amount was to belong to Yahweh, for in point of fact, it was He who had been attacked in the original crime anyway—an offense against the child is tantamount to an offense against the Father.

Here (picking up on the context of verse 8) we see that these admittedly rare restitution payments made to God were to be given to the priests in His stead, as was any offering brought to Yahweh that wasn't supposed to be burned on the altar or poured out as an oblation, a symbolic memorial of the Messiah's sacrifice. Yahweh had thus created a mechanism whereby temporal objects could be rendered to a God who was Spirit. Yahweh was saying, "If you want to give Me something, give it to My priests, and I will reckon it as if I had received it from your hand." This isn't some obscure or insignificant point of Jewish ritual law, but a fundamental principle of God's dealings with mankind: the way you treat Yahweh's children is seen as the way you treat *Him*. If you bless them, support them, and help them, God sees your actions as having been done to Him. But if you curse them, suppress them, and hinder them, God takes your hatred personally. As Yahshua told both the "sheep and goats" in His parable concerning their behavior under pressure during the coming Tribulation, "Inasmuch as you did—or did not—do it to one of the least of these, you did—or did not—do it to Me." (Matthew 26:40, 45, blended) Would we treat our brothers and sisters the way we do if we realized that every poke we made at them would be felt by God?

CONSECRATION OF THE LEVITES

(780) *The Levites shall serve the congregation and do the work of the Tabernacle. “And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. And they shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of meeting, to do the work of the tabernacle. Also they shall attend to all the furnishings of the tabernacle of meeting, and to the needs of the children of Israel, to do the work of the tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are given entirely to him from among the children of Israel. So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall attend to their priesthood; but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death.’”* (Numbers 3:5-10) Yahweh’s metaphors work on various levels. They aren’t always restricted to precisely the same meaning, and you can’t extrapolate their lessons with impunity. For example, within His symbolic hierarchy of Israel, Yahweh often draws distinctions between one group and another to illustrate some point. So we see that the priesthood (as a group within Israel) normally represents believers in the sense that they—as sons of the High Priest—intercede between God and man. But that doesn’t mean that people outside the priesthood necessarily symbolize non-believers. We must take each example in its own context and on its own terms.

There are other places (as in the precepts rounding out this chapter) where the line of demarcation is drawn at the tribal level: the Levites are seen in the role of believers, leaving non-Levites, “outsiders” who usurp their God-ordained place (as Korah tried to do in Numbers 16), dead where they stand. In still other places, the whole nation of Israel is pictured as being set apart to Yahweh, leaving the world outside to play the role of strangers to God. But remember, these are all only pictures, symbols, or parables designed to teach us about the nature of Yahweh’s plan of redemption. The reality is that anyone, at any time, no matter where his family tree is planted, may become a child of God. The portrayal of the redeemed as priests, Levites, or Israelites merely teaches us different lessons about how we believers are to function within the Kingdom of God. Please don’t confuse God’s symbols with the truths they represent.

Here, then, we see how the Levites, as believers, are to function. Note first that they are “given” to Aaron (who represents the Messiah) to help with the work of the ministry. So who are the ordinary priests in this context? Paul tells us: **“He Himself [Yahshua] gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of**

the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.” (Ephesians 4:11-13) The priests in this metaphor, then, are the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, and *their* job is to equip the saints (a.k.a. the Levites) to minister. But minister to whom? To the world at large or to the household of faith? It may come as something of a surprise, but both passages speak of ministering only *to other believers*, not necessarily to the world. Paul speaks of “edifying (building up) the body of Christ, that is, the ekklesia or Church. He tells us in this passage to grow up, leave our old corrupt conduct behind, live in truth, understanding, honesty, industry and forgiveness, and “be kind to one another.” Moses, meanwhile, says the Levites are to (1) attend to Aaron’s (read: Yahshua’s) needs; (2) attend to the needs of the whole congregation of Israel—which is by definition set apart to Yahweh; (3) do the work of the Tabernacle by attending to its furnishings (that is, the Plan of God—something we’ll address in more detail as we proceed); and (4) attend to the needs of the priesthood—the apostles, prophets, pastors, and teachers of which Paul wrote.

Does this mean believers shouldn’t participate in “worthy causes” such as soup kitchens, drug rehab clinics, and AIDS relief efforts? Believe it or not, if your only aim is to feed the homeless, get junkies off drugs, and relieve the suffering people have brought upon themselves through their sin, then yes, that’s exactly what it means. Don’t waste your time. If, however, your aim in doing these things is to demonstrate the love of God to people who desperately need Him—if your *modus operandi* is to fulfill the Great Commission by showing compassion to those who need it most, then by all means, proceed. My point is that if you give people food or medicine, you’ve extended their lives for a day. But if you give them God’s salvation, you’ve extended their lives for eternity. Call me heartless, but charity without Christ is a cruel joke, a leaky life raft. Our *primary* instructions as believers are to attend to the needs of other believers. “A new commandment I [Yahshua] give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

- (781) *The Levites belong to Yahweh.* “Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I am Yahweh.’” (Numbers 3:11-13) Considering the fact that Yahweh, as Creator of the universe, owns everything, He has reserved to Himself very little, it seems—one small

city in all the world, Jerusalem, one nation, Israel, and of that nation, only the firstborn of both man and beast. Here Yahweh explains why. In order to free Israel from bondage in Egypt, He had slain the firstborn of Egypt—both people and livestock (Exodus 12:29-32). So in a manner of speaking, He had purchased the firstborn of Israel at the price of the firstborn of Egypt. Or as it says here, by striking Egypt, He set apart Israel to Himself—He *sanctified* it. In reality, of course, this was all designed to be a symbol of God’s unfolding plan to rescue mankind from our bondage to sin in the world—by sacrificing His own “Firstborn,” Yahshua the Messiah, to purchase our freedom. That’s why Yahweh let his chosen people spend four hundred years in slavery in a foreign land—*before* they had ever rebelled against Him. The picture He was creating would have been incomprehensible if no one could see that Israel was being saved *from* something. Not recognizing their Messiah (yet), it’s *still* incomprehensible to today’s Jews.

So principle number one is that God has claimed Israel’s firstborn for Himself. Principle number two is that He has then *substituted* one tribe out of the twelve, Levi, for Israel’s actual firstborn sons. **“Then Yahweh said to Moses: ‘Number all the firstborn males of the children of Israel from a month old and above, and take the number of their names. And you shall take the Levites for Me—I am Yahweh—instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the livestock of the children of Israel.’”** (Numbers 3:40-41) This tells us beyond the shadow of a doubt that we’re dealing with divine metaphor. Yahweh isn’t really interested in the particular men and beasts that opened the womb. Rather, He’s defining Who would be called upon to sacrifice Himself to secure mankind’s ultimate freedom: His own “Firstborn” (in the sense that His Messiah would be preeminent among men). Yahshua would be substituted as a sacrifice in place of us men who deserved to die for our crimes, just as the tribe of Levi was substituted for the firstborn of Israel. Once again, if you don’t understand the Messianic connection, the whole thing looks like Israel’s God is a manipulative megalomaniac. No wonder so many Jews are functional atheists.

- (782) *Number the Levites.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, saying: ‘Number the children of Levi by their fathers’ houses, by their families; you shall number every male from a month old and above.’”** (Numbers 3:14-15) There’s more to this than Yahweh merely wanting to know how many Levites there were (as if He didn’t know). They were to be categorized by their fathers’ houses, their clans. (We’ll see why in a bit.) Why were the males to be numbered from the age of one month, and not from birth? Again, because there’s more to this than numbers. Each male child was to

be circumcised at eight days of age, which is in itself a picture: the barrier that separates us from Yahweh at birth—sin—has been permanently removed, cut off and destroyed. It's a process that involves blood and pain, but one that makes us available for God's use. (See Mitzvah #17.) The child would have been named on the day of his circumcision. From this point on, he had his own identity (as opposed to merely being Yakob and Zibiah's baby boy). As a practical matter, however, the child was still considered vulnerable to a variety of post-natal health hazards until the age of about one month—at which point he was statistically “out of the woods.” A quick survey of each census taken by Moses reveals that baby boys were never counted in a population before the age of one month. In fact, even animals were left uncounted until they had reached the one-month milestone (cf. Numbers 18:16).

The point of all this is that once we belong to Yahweh, He “knows” who we are. He calls us by our names, knows what we're like, who we're related to, and what our background is, and recognizes our accomplishments and potential as well as our past failures and vulnerability. He knows what we want *and* what we need. We're not just a number to Him. We are His children. I have eleven kids, but I know more about my family than merely how large it is. I also know my children's names, their characters, their strengths and weaknesses, their handicaps and potential. I have a pretty good handle on what makes them tick. What kind of father would I be if I only kept track of *how many* children I had?

- (783) *Substitute the firstborn of Israel with Levites.* “Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of their livestock. The Levites shall be Mine: I am Yahweh. And for the redemption of the two hundred and seventy-three of the firstborn of the children of Israel, who are more than the number of the Levites, you shall take five shekels for each one individually; you shall take them in the currency of the shekel of the sanctuary, the shekel of twenty gerahs. And you shall give the money, with which the excess number of them is redeemed, to Aaron and his sons.’” (Numbers 3:44-48) Here is indisputable evidence that God's claim upon the “firstborn” of man and beast is symbolic of some greater reality. His command to number the firstborn of Israel, setting them apart for Himself (verse 40) was still hanging in the air when He turned around and said, in effect, “Oh, by the way, I'm not interested in the *actual* firstborn of Israel—only in their number. I want the tribe of Levi to stand in for them.” As it turned out, the number came out pretty close: there were 22,273 firstborn males in Israel at the time, and an even 22,000 Levite men (verse 39). The difference is a little over one percent.

Yahweh then provided a means to transfer “ownership” of even these few “leftovers” to the tribe of Levi. Each of the 273 men was to be “redeemed” by the payment of five shekels (about 1.8 ounces of silver) to the priests. (Five, if you’ll recall, is the number symbolic of grace.) These weren’t specific individuals, you understand. The number was simply a total of the overage, a statistic. The point is that the sacrifice of Yahweh’s firstborn, Yahshua, would be precisely “enough” to redeem *all* of mankind. No one would be left out of the offer because he was “too hard” or “beyond reach.” No one would fall into the cracks, so to speak. Anyone who chose to accept God’s gift of love would find that gift sufficient for his needs.

The percentage of firstborn to be bought back (as opposed to being directly substituted) was, as I said, slightly over one percent of the total. If I may indulge in a little blue-sky speculation, could this indicate the proportion of Israelites living today, as we approach the “time of Jacob’s trouble,” compared to the total population of earth? I honestly don’t know, because not every child of Israel knows his heritage—something that’s been a fact of life since the Assyrian invasion of 722 B.C. The Jews of which we are aware number somewhere in the neighborhood of two-tenths of one percent of the world’s population. So this hypothesis is suggesting that there may actually be *five times* that number. My gut is telling me that Yahweh may be drawing a subtle distinction between their mode of redemption and that of everyone else on the planet. Yes, I know it all boils down to grace through faith in the Messiah’s atoning sacrifice, but let’s face it: the path Israel as a nation will take in finally arriving at this conclusion will be—shall we say—*unusual*. For the gory details, see *Future History*, Chapter 22: “The Great Awakening.”

- (784) *The Levites shall encamp surrounding the Tabernacle. “The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp, everyone by his own standard, according to their armies; but the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony.”* (Numbers 1:52-53) The Tabernacle, as we have seen, is a detailed picture of the Plan of God for mankind’s salvation. The Israelites were told (in Numbers 2) where they were to encamp—by tribe—in relationship to the Sanctuary, the center of the national encampment. I find it significant that Judah (Yahshua’s tribe) is named first on the eastern side, “guarding” the only entrance to the Tabernacle compound, joined by Issachar and Zebulun. On the south side, Reuben, Simeon, and Gad were to camp. Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin took their places on the west, and Dan, Asher, and Naphtali were stationed on the north side. But the

tribe of Levi was to *surround* the Sanctuary on all four sides, forming a buffer between their brother Israelites and the Tabernacle.

I believe God's point to this arrangement is patently obvious. Wherever you are in the world, you'll need to "go through" Yahweh's true believers (represented here by the Levites) in order to enter and participate in the Plan of God. They functioned like a door or gate, blocking unauthorized entrance but admitting those who wished to enter according to Yahweh's provision. That is, since there was but one entrance to the courtyard, you couldn't just waltz up to the enclosure from any direction and force your way in—cutting through the linen fence or digging underneath it (pictures of heresy and false doctrine)—because the Levites were zealously watching. Rather, they would conduct you to the entrance—the only entrance—which in the long run turns out to be Yahshua the Messiah. Remember, the goal of visiting the Tabernacle was to approach Yahweh, who was metaphorically characterized as dwelling between the cherubim in the Most Holy Place. To get there, one had to first encounter the eastern gate, the altar, the laver, the table of showbread, the seven-branched lamp, and the altar of incense—each indicative of the Messiah's ministry in its own way. It was no flippant off-the-cuff remark when Yahshua told His disciples, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** (John 14:6) The Laws concerning the Tabernacle (like this one) had said exactly the same thing. And how does one "come to the Father through" Christ? By heeding the message of those carrying out the Great Commission, the witnesses of God's saving grace—in other words, by "going through" the Levites who surround the Tabernacle.

- (785) *The priests shall encamp nearest the entrance to the Tabernacle courtyard. **Moreover those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east, before the tabernacle of meeting, were Moses, Aaron, and his sons, keeping charge of the sanctuary, to meet the needs of the children of Israel; but the outsider who came near was to be put to death.*** (Numbers 3:38) Continuing and refining the thought of the previous precept, we see that the family within the tribe of Levi who were to camp immediately outside the entrance to the Tabernacle, on the east side of the courtyard, were the priests (including Moses). That is, among believers in general tasked with conducting the world's seekers to God's "way, truth, and life," the "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers" whom Yahweh gave to the saints to "equip them for the work of the ministry" (as we saw in Ephesians 4—Precept #780) were to be the gatekeepers of the Plan of God. The priests were appointed—and anointed—for this very

responsibility: “keeping charge of the Sanctuary, to meet the needs of the children of Israel.”

Unfortunately, being seen as God’s gatekeepers has for some brought with it the lure of personal enrichment—the satisfaction of a lust for power or prestige, or even (strangely enough) wealth. So *self-appointed* “priests” of various stripes have, through the years, placed themselves in this role—granting (or so it was claimed) access to “god” on the basis of religious tradition or personal determination instead of the Word of Yahweh. These false priests positioned themselves in between their “Levites” (the laity they were supposed to be equipping) and the Tabernacle of Truth—blocking admission to any soul who didn’t submit to their vision. I’m not singling out any one religion here, but chastising *all of them*: Catholic priests and Protestant clergy, Jewish rabbis and Muslim imams, Buddhist bodhisattvas and Hindu gurus, Communo-fascist dictators, secular-humanist philosophers and technocrats, and a hundred other permutations of this evil. If they aren’t guiding seekers to Yahweh through Yahshua the Messiah—if they’re promoting some alternative solution to man’s hunger for truth, righteousness, and personal fulfillment—then they’re not true “priests.” Remember Yahweh’s order: His priests were not recruited—they were born to the position and anointed for the task. They weren’t merely zealous Israelites; they were sons of Aaron. The priesthood was not a station to be attained; it was a calling to be answered. We dare not ignore the warning to those tempted to usurp the assigned role of Yahweh’s priests: **“the outsider who came near was to be put to death.”**

- (786) *Symbolically cleanse the Levites.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them ceremonially.’”** (Numbers 8:5-6) In this permutation of the salvation metaphor, the Levites represent the redeemed, and Israel plays the role of the world at large. First, they are to be separated (read: made holy) from the rest of the congregation. Second, they are to be ritually cleansed. This is a picture of what happens to a seeker after righteousness when he or she embraces the grace of Yahshua’s sacrifice: first, separation from the world, and then cleansing, enabling the worshipper to stand in the very presence of God.

The instructions for the cleansing were quite specific. **“Thus you shall do to them to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purification on them, and let them shave all their body, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean....”** This isn’t an anointing, such as the priests underwent in Precepts #751-#762. Although the same ultimate group (the redeemed) are being pictured, a different set of images is being employed to point out a different lesson about them. What struck me immediately was that the

cleansing of the Levites was a great deal like the cleansing of lepers, especially as we saw in Mitzvot #577 and #579. The sprinkling of their bodies with the water of purification and the washing of their clothes are often-used metaphors for a believer's spiritual cleansing in the sight of a holy God, so there's no surprise there. But the idea of completely shaving one's body is unexpected, if not shocking. As we learned in the case of the cleansed leper, however, it is indicative of ridding ourselves of the things—usually *religious* things—that tend to cloud or obscure the true nature of our relationship with Yahweh. In the case of the leper, the shaving was done subsequent to receiving the cure, but prior to having been pronounced clean by the priest. The point, here as there, is that religious practice, if it exists at all in a believer's life, is to grow naturally from his relationship with Yahweh and his fellowship with his spiritual brothers and sisters. This relationship is never the *result* of religious ritual observance.

The instructions continue. **“Then let them take a young bull with its grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, and you shall take another young bull as a sin offering.”** The first bull, as will be made clear in verse 12, was to be an *olah*, that is, a burnt offering made in homage to Yahweh. **“And you shall bring the Levites before the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall gather together the whole congregation of the children of Israel. So you shall bring the Levites before Yahweh, and the children of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites.”** (Numbers 8:7-10) The laying on of hands indicates a purposeful transference of something, as in the conveyance of the sins of a man or a nation onto the head of a sacrificial animal. So what is being transferred here from Israel (symbolic of the world) to the Levites (the redeemed)? As we'll see in the very next verse, the Levites were to “perform the work of Yahweh.” I believe what's being said here is something quite profound: the unredeemed world *cannot* “perform the work of Yahweh.” That capacity and privilege has been transferred to true believers—exclusively. Good works done by non-believers are of no value in the eternal scheme of things. They earn the do-gooder neither a pat on the back from Yahweh (since such intimate contact would kill him in his natural state), nor lay up for him treasures in heaven (since that's not his eternal home, and he doesn't have an account at that bank). I must reiterate that these are only *pictures* God is painting. He's not saying that the Levites are saved and that everybody else is damned. But in this particular drama, Israel plays the clueless villain, and the Levites are playing the hero. Note that all this happened “before Yahweh.” He is the audience (and we're right there with Him).

(787) *Offer up the Levites as a wave offering to Yahweh. “And Aaron shall offer the Levites before Yahweh like a wave offering from the children of Israel, that they may perform the work of Yahweh. Then the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the young bulls, and you shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to Yahweh, to make atonement for the Levites. And you shall stand the Levites before Aaron and his sons, and then offer them like a wave offering to Yahweh. Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the children of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine.”* (Numbers 8:11-14) A wave, or “heave,” offering was a symbolic way of “giving” to Yahweh that which wasn’t physically going to be transferred to Him. For example, the grain offerings that were to be eaten by the priests were first waved before Yahweh in dedication to Him. So although Aaron couldn’t literally pick up the Levites and wave them before Yahweh like a sheaf of wheat, the principle was the same: the Levites could be of use to the priests in the service of the Tabernacle only because they had first been dedicated to God.

The Feast of Firstfruits puts this into perspective for us. At that time, the first sheaves of the spring barley harvest were waved before Yahweh in thankfulness and anticipation of the harvest that would eventually follow. The miqra is thus prophetic of the presentation of the risen Yahshua before the Father on resurrection Sunday (following the crucifixion on Passover and the removal of our sin by His sojourn in the tomb on the Feast of Unleavened Bread). If Yahshua was the Firstfruits, the “firstborn from the dead” (compare Colossians 1:18 to I Corinthians 15:20), then we who follow Him in faith comprise the harvest that follows. And just as He was presented as a wave offering, so too are we—dedicated for the work of the ministry of the Tabernacle, the working out of the Plan of God in this world.

“After that the Levites shall go in to service the tabernacle of meeting. So you shall cleanse them and offer them like a wave offering. For they are wholly given to Me from among the children of Israel.” Again, service starts only after cleansing and dedication. It is pointless to “work for God” in our own strength or in pursuit of our own agenda. Alms, penance, and abstinence from evildoing are only of value after one is cleansed. These things have no efficacy at all in *making* a person clean or sanctified.

Yahweh now reiterates who the Levites represent, and why He wants them. **I have taken them for Myself instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the children of Israel. For all the firstborn among the children of Israel are Mine, both man and beast; on the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them to Myself. I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn of the children of Israel. And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and**

his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the work for the children of Israel in the tabernacle of meeting.” So far, this is no surprise; we’ve seen these truths before. But hold onto your hat: “...and to make atonement for the children of Israel, that there be no plague among the children of Israel when the children of Israel come near the sanctuary.” (Numbers 8:15-19) Whoa! Wait a minute! What does He mean by saying the Levites are given as a gift to Aaron to *make atonement* for the others? What about the bulls and goats of the Day of Atonement (as in Leviticus 16)? What about the altar, with all those burnt offerings and sin offerings?

Actually, all of these things are pictures of the same reality—the atoning work of the coming Messiah. Perhaps we should review what it means to “atone.” The Hebrew word is *kaphar*, a verb that means to cover (as with pitch), to purge, make reconciliation, pacify, or appease. The *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* also defines it as to “ransom, i.e., pay an amount of money as a gift, with a *quid pro quo* of so being allowed to keep one’s freedom.” The phrase *kaphar paneh* means to “pacify, give a gift, formally, cover the face, i.e., give a gift of tribute which will establish some level of relationship, possibly implying reconciliation.” So “atonement” is far less technical a concept than we ordinarily make of it. At its heart, it’s an action, prompted by a gift, that brings two parties together who were formerly estranged. Both parties have to agree on the terms of the arrangement; otherwise reconciliation would not result. The fascinating thing in the spiritual context is who is atoning for whom. Ordinarily, an act of *kaphar* would entail the exercise of humility: the weaker party would apply to the stronger, bringing a gift he hopes will cover the old animosity. But what do we see in scripture? Yahweh, the almighty, omnipotent Creator of the whole universe, is seen providing the gift He hopes will be accepted by us! Though we have estranged ourselves from God, He stands ready to heal the breach we have caused. It is He who seeks reconciliation with us (mostly ’cause we’re too dumb to know we need it, I think). I wonder what the Hebrew word for “Wow” is.

The ultimate expression of the *kaphar* gift, of course, is Yahshua’s sacrifice on Calvary. So returning to our original conundrum, what is the meaning of the Levites being given as a gift to Aaron to make atonement for the children of Israel? Yahweh, as it turns out, had explained it (sort of) in His recap of events earlier in the same paragraph. In order to extricate Israel from bondage in the world, He had “sacrificed” Egypt’s firstborn, both man and beast. Just as bulls and goats became symbolic substitutes for the reality to follow, God’s purchase price of Israel—the firstborn of Egypt—was substituted, first for the firstborn of Israel, and

then in turn for the tribe of Levi. But who was the ultimate firstborn son? Who did all of these illustrations point toward? To Yahshua the Messiah: Yahweh's symbolic "Firstborn" Son, the *kaphar* gift presented to humanity by God to reconcile us to Himself. That's right: the Levites in this context represent Christ. They are both defined as **"performing the work of Yahweh,"** and doing **"the work for the children of Israel in the Tabernacle of Meeting,"** in other words, doing the work on behalf of the people of the world in the Plan of God.

And what happens if Yahshua the Messiah is rejected, if Christ is not entrusted in our lives with the work of the Tabernacle? The Levites were put in place so **"that there [would] be no plague among the children of Israel when the children of Israel come near the sanctuary."** The only way into the Plan of God (for the umpteenth time) is through Christ. The alternative is a "plague."

- (788) *The Levites shall serve only between the ages of twenty-five and fifty.* **"Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'This is what pertains to the Levites: From twenty-five years old and above one may enter to perform service in the work of the tabernacle of meeting; and at the age of fifty years they must cease performing this work, and shall work no more. They may minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of meeting, to attend to needs, but they themselves shall do no work. Thus you shall do to the Levites regarding their duties.'**" (Numbers 8:23-26)
- Aside from being a practical rule to restrict the heavy lifting required in Tabernacle maintenance to men in their prime, I believe this is also a Messianic prophecy. As we saw in the previous precept, the Levites in their role as workers in the Tabernacle are metaphorical of Yahshua the Messiah, "performing the work of Yahweh" there. I believe we are being given subtle clues as to the outer limits of the Messiah's age during the years of His earthly ministry. From this precept, we know that He would be at least twenty-five when beginning His work, and He would have completed it before He turned fifty. And so we read the confirmation in the gospels. **"Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age."** (Luke 3:23) In a backhanded confirmation, we read in Numbers 4 that the first census of Levites (See Precepts #789-#798) would include only those men who had reached the age of thirty. Apparently, twenty-five year olds were still considered too green for this work unless supervised by their fathers. (On the other hand, you were considered old enough to fight Canaanites the day you turned twenty.)

And the upper limit? Yahshua's adversaries, disputing His timelessness (not to mention His deity), confirmed that he was within the requisite age parameters. **"Then the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years**

old, and have You seen Abraham?” (John 8:57) In Yahshua’s case, His earthly ministry lasted only about three and a half years. He was born in His mortal manifestation in the fall of 2 B.C., began His public ministry (putting pieces of the Plan of God into place) “about thirty” years later, in the fall of 29 A.D., and died three and a half years later, in the spring of 33, having declared, “It is finished.”

What were Levites supposed to do after they turned fifty? Retire, kick back, boss the younger guys? No, actually. They were to “minister” to the needs of the younger, stronger men. The Hebrew word is *sharat*, meaning to serve, to attend, to render assistance, the implication being to assume a lower status than the one being served. I can relate to this. I’ve been involved in worship music in some capacity or other since I was a youngster, and I assumed a leadership role in my thirties (or thereabouts—at my advanced age, I can’t remember, exactly). But when I hit my fifties, I took a back seat, so to speak: I began to *sharat* for younger musicians instead of leading worship myself. And now I can really see the wisdom in this precept. I no longer get wrapped up in the logistics of corporate worship, in the heavy lifting of preparation and execution. Now I just show up to worship, sing, and play my fingers off. I’m really *loving* this phase of my life. Of course, I didn’t realize until now that the Torah had been instructing me what to do all along. Sigh.

DUTIES OF THE LEVITES: KOHATH

- (789) *Number the working Kohathites.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: ‘Take a census of the sons of Kohath from among the children of Levi, by their families, by their fathers’ house, from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting.’”**

(Numbers 4:1-3) The work of the Tabernacle was further divided according to Levitical clan. The descendants of each of the three sons of Levi (Gershon, Kohath, and Merari) had separate job descriptions. In customary defiance of human wisdom, Yahweh lists Levi’s second son first. Kohath was the clan from which Moses and Aaron descended, so it was the family from which the priests would come. The census revealed that there were 2,750 Kohathites who fit the profile.

The name Kohath (Hebrew: *Qehath* or *Qahat*) is from an unused root meaning to ally oneself, and the name means “assembly.” To put things in perspective, a related word (*qahal* = assembly or congregation) is usually translated as *ekklesia* in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Covenant scriptures), which in turn invariably shows up in our English translations as “church.” In other words, the entity we know as the

“church” (and actually means “assembly”) is reflected in the name of Kohath. Reinforcing the thought, Kohath’s father’s name, Levi, means “joined to.” We too are an assembly, joined to Yahweh through faith in Yahshua.

- (790) *The Kohathites must wait for the priests to do their work before they can do theirs.* “**This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of meeting, relating to the most holy things: When the camp prepares to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come, and they shall take down the covering veil and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. Then they shall put on it a covering of badger [actually, porpoise] skins, and spread over that a cloth entirely of blue; and they shall insert its poles.**” (Numbers 4:4-6) When it came time to move the Tabernacle, the Kohathites were charged with the transport of the furnishings, fixtures, and implements employed there (a fact we’ll develop further in the following Precept). We begin with instructions concerning the most important thing they were to move—the ark of the covenant.

What was the first thing the Kohathites were supposed to do? They were told to *wait*. Before they could do their jobs, the priests (Aaron and his sons) had to prepare the way. Because the ark of the covenant with its two cherubim atop the mercy seat was the place where Yahweh’s Spirit—the glorious Shekinah—was said to dwell, it had to be handled with the utmost care and respect. You didn’t just throw it in the back of a pickup truck and drive off. It was to be carried by four Levites using poles that ran through four golden rings. First, the priests removed from its four pillars the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy (see Precept #723). They then covered the ark with it, or perhaps “wrapped” might be a better description, for the veil measured ten cubits (about fifteen feet) square all together. The ark was then covered with two more layers, first one of porpoise skin (as in the outer layer of the Tabernacle curtain—see Precept #714), and then one of solid royal blue (*tekelet*) cloth.

The remark about “inserting the poles” is counter to something we already know about them: these staves were *never* to be removed from their golden rings. (See Mitzvah #429, which explores Exodus 25:15, for the amazing reason.) We’ve run afoul of a Hebrew idiom here, something that, frankly, is so esoteric I can’t fault the translators for missing it. I checked at least a dozen English versions, and none of them caught it. The verb translated here as “insert” is the Hebrew *suwm*, which means to put, place, set, appoint, make, direct, determine, establish, or to set or make for a sign. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, the word is used of placing something in a location, appointing people to

positions, establishing a new relationship, assigning something to someone, to bring about a change, or to set aside something for a special purpose. So except for the fact that it makes scripture contradictory, rendering *suwm* “insert” makes perfectly good sense. But what it really means is that the poles, which were already in place (and which, if you’ll recall, represent the redeemed), were to be “established,” or invested with the nature of a sign, by the High Priest—ultimately, by Yahshua. It is He who appoints and directs us.

That’s why the Kohathites had to wait. Their (our) work is pointless and even dangerous if we “run ahead” of what our Messiah has established as our proper course of action. Since our strength—our ability to do good things in the world—is derived solely from Yahweh, we would be well advised to “Rest in Yahweh, and wait patiently for Him.... For evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait on Yahweh, they shall inherit the earth.... Wait on Yahweh, and keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land.” (Psalm 37:7, 9, 34)

- (791) *The Kohathites shall attend to the furnishings within the Tabernacle.* “On the table of showbread they [Aaron and His sons] shall spread a blue cloth, and put on it the dishes, the pans, the bowls, and the pitchers for pouring; and the showbread shall be on it. They shall spread over them a scarlet cloth, and cover the same with a covering of badger [porpoise] skins; and they shall insert its poles. And they shall take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand of the light, with its lamps, its wick-trimmers, its trays, and all its oil vessels, with which they service it. Then they shall put it with all its utensils in a covering of badger [porpoise] skins, and put it on a carrying beam. Over the golden altar they shall spread a blue cloth, and cover it with a covering of badger [porpoise] skins; and they shall insert its poles. Then they shall take all the utensils of service with which they minister in the sanctuary, put them in a blue cloth, cover them with a covering of badger [porpoise] skins, and put them on a carrying beam.” (Numbers 4:7-12) We’re still in the passage defined by the command, “**This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of meeting, relating to the most holy things.**” Again, the first thing the Kohathites were to do was wait for Aaron and his sons to properly prepare the Sanctuary furnishings for travel, which they, the Kohathites, would then transport. Each piece within the Holy Place was to be packed with the integral components that pertained to it. The “utensils of service” were to be packed in a similar way by themselves. Because all these things were considered “most holy,” nothing was to be picked up and carried “by hand.” Nor was it to be put on a cart or wagon for shipping. Rather, carrying poles like the ones used to transport the ark of the covenant were to be used. The bronze altar, the table of showbread, and the altar of incense all had rings through which these poles could be

inserted, but even the menorah was to be “put on a carrying beam” for transport.

All these things were to be covered, not only for their protection, but also to keep them from being seen by curious “outsiders.” All the ordinary Israelite would see as they traveled would be nondescript gray bundles being carried on poles by groups of Levites. The porpoise-skin coverings served the same purpose here as in the Tabernacle itself. They hid from profane view that which was reserved for the benefit of the redeemed: (1) the provision of Yahweh, represented by the table of showbread; (2) the access to God through prayer, symbolized by the altar of incense; and (3) the light provided through the Messiah, Israel, and the church by the Spirit of Yahweh, indicated by the golden lampstand.

The one exception (sort of) was the ark of the covenant, which, after being covered with the customary porpoise skins, was to be covered with an outer layer of blue-dyed cloth. This, of course, is because the ark and integral mercy seat was the place where the blood of atonement was sprinkled—salvation, after all, is not reserved for the saved; the doctor is sent to heal the sick, not the whole. So the blue covering indicated that among all the furnishings of the Tabernacle, this one piece was worthy of special attention. The royal blue covering indicated that this was the object—above all others—that represented the Messiah’s right to rule over Israel. This was where mankind could be reconciled to Yahweh, if only we would recognize His sovereignty.

- (792) *The Kohathites shall attend to the altar. “Also they [the priests] shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth over it. They shall put on it all its implements with which they minister there—the firepans, the forks, the shovels, the basins, and all the utensils of the altar—and they shall spread on it a covering of badger [porpoise] skins, and insert its poles.”* (Numbers 4:13-14)
The bronze altar of sacrifice, the largest single item in the inventory, was to be prepared for transport in the same way, even though it was ordinarily standing in plain view in the Tabernacle courtyard. Covered first with purple (*argaman*—red-purple, a reminder of the exceedingly precious commodity that was spent here: the life-blood of innocence—not *tekelet* royal blue) the altar then received the usual porpoise-skin covering (which, if you’ll recall, indicates Yahweh’s provision for life’s journey). As with the other large pieces, the altar was equipped with rings at the corners, through which poles were inserted as a means to carry it from place to place.

“And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath

shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These are the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.” (Numbers 4:15) I’m not sure why, but the bronze laver was not mentioned in this passage. I think it’s a safe assumption that the Kohathites were to carry this piece as well (since they were to carry “*all* of the furnishings of the sanctuary”). I presume the laver would have been prepared for transport by the priests in the same way—covered with porpoise skins and then carried upon the shoulders of the Kohathites with the use of poles. But we aren’t told. At any rate, it is clear that the safety of the Kohathites depended upon the priests (the pastors, teachers, etc.) having done their job correctly. If the Tabernacle furnishings had not been properly covered, wrapped, and equipped with their carrying poles, the Kohathites could inadvertently perish through accidental contact. In fact, just such an incident is recorded in II Samuel 6. We dare not handle the holy things of Yahweh in an irreverent manner. And I’m *not* just talking about furniture.

- (793) *Protect the Kohathites.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: ‘Do not cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites; but do this in regard to them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint each of them to his service and his task. But they shall not go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, lest they die.’”** (Numbers 4:17-20) Being a Levite of the house of Kohath brought with it honor and responsibility, but it also brought potential danger, for no one in Israel had more intimate contact with the holy things of the Tabernacle except for their cousins, the priests. Yahweh made it clear that if the Kohathites did their jobs improperly—either by usurping the role of Aaron and his sons or doing their own jobs in an unworthy manner—they might die.

The same two-edged sword confronts every believer today. On the one hand, we are not to presume to do the things God has reserved for Himself. “Saving people” is not our prerogative. We can’t drag recalcitrant sinners kicking and screaming to the throne of grace and expect anything good to result from our efforts. We can’t legislate morality and then expect people’s good behavior to magically blossom into eternal life. We can’t play the role of inquisitors—“conversion enforcers”—and expect our victims to do anything but curse the God we say we serve. We can’t invent religions and traditions and expect them to have any efficacy in releasing our fellow man from his bondage to sin. We can’t decide what a holy God should or should not accept as an atoning sacrifice. When we prescribe penance, when we designate saints or angels as intermediaries, when we invest manmade rules with the power to

impress and placate God, we have overstepped our mandate—we have killed the Kohathites.

On the other hand, we are not to take our God-given responsibilities lightly, either. We are to revere Yahweh. We are to love one another. We are to be witnesses of God's saving grace at home and abroad. We are to rejoice always, remain watchful, be filled with Yahweh's Spirit, live in humility, pray without ceasing, search the scriptures, and trust Yahshua with every fiber of our being. If (or is it when?) we slide into apathy toward Yahweh, ambivalence toward our fellow man, distrust of God's willingness or ability to provide our needs, when we succumb to fear, isolation, laziness, or selfishness, we are once again guilty of killing Kohath.

DUTIES OF THE LEVITES: GERSHON

- (794) *Number the working Gershonites.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Also take a census of the sons of Gershon, by their fathers’ house, by their families. From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, all who enter to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting.’”** (Numbers 4:21-23) As with the Kohathites, their brothers the sons of Gershon were to work in the service of the Tabernacle between the ages of twenty-five and fifty, though only those who had reached the age of thirty would be numbered. There were 2,630 of them in this inaugural generation, just a few less than there were Kohathites.

The meaning of Gershon's name may come as a surprise if you're expecting something encouraging and affirming about the life of a believer (like Kohath—meaning “assembly”—was). Gershon means “Exile.” It's based on the verb *garash*, meaning to drive out, expel, or drive away. If this seems like an odd moniker for people who “enter to perform the service,” and who “do the work of the Tabernacle,” remember that **“Friendship with the world is enmity with God.”** (James 4:4) David, on the run from a murderous King Saul, asked, **“Why does my lord [Saul] thus pursue his servant? For what have I done, or what evil is in my hand? Now therefore, please, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant: If Yahweh has stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering. But if it is the children of men, may they be cursed before Yahweh, for they have driven me out [*garash*] this day from sharing in the inheritance of Yahweh.”** (I Samuel 26:18-19) We too need to constantly consider whether the “exile” we endure in this world is because we are *not* at enmity with God—making outsiders uncomfortable—or whether there actually *is* “evil in our hands” from which we need to repent. In our mortal walk, we believers will invariably be held to a stricter standard than the

unredeemed—by both God and man. But believers should never forget that we are but pilgrims here, exiles in a world that irrationally hates us because they hate the God we serve.

- (795) *The Gershonites shall attend to the “soft parts” of the Tabernacle.* **“This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, in serving and carrying: They shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle and the tabernacle of meeting with its covering, the covering of [porpoise] skins that is on it, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting, the screen for the door of the gate of the court, the hangings of the court which are around the tabernacle and altar, and their cords, all the furnishings for their service and all that is made for these things: so shall they serve.”** (Numbers 4:24-26) The Levites in the family of Gershon were assigned the task of transporting the fabric and leather components of the Tabernacle and its courtyard. If you’ll recall, the Tabernacle proper had four layers of coverings, each layer consisting of either ten or eleven strips of embroidered linen, heavy woven goat-hair cloth, ram skins, or porpoise hides, six feet wide and up to forty-five feet long. Then, the linen panels making up the “fence” around the Tabernacle courtyard—fifty-six of them—each measured about seven and a half feet square. There were also substantial curtains at the entrances to the courtyard and the Holy Place. This all added up to thousands of square yards of heavy cloth or leather that had to be secured, packed, loaded, and transported—plus hundreds of gold and bronze clasps that held the curtains together at strategic places.

If you’ve ever packed up your closet to move, you may have some idea of what the Gershonites were up against every time Yahweh said, “Let’s go.” Even with almost three thousand guys, it was a big job. It was doable, but only if everyone pitched in and did his part. I can’t help but reflect that fulfilling the Great Commission (“**Go into all the world and preach the gospel.**” Mark 16:15) is (or at least *was*) also doable in the power of the Holy Spirit, if only every believer had done what he or she was supposed to be doing—if we had all been as faithful as the pilgrim exiles of Gershon were. Put another way, if the Gershonites had done their job like most “Christians” do these days, the Israelites would *still* be camped out there in Kadesh Barnea.

DUTIES OF THE LEVITES: MERARI

- (796) *Number the working sons of Merari.* **“As for the sons of Merari, you shall number them by their families and by their fathers’ house. From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, everyone who enters the service to do the work of the tabernacle of meeting.”** (Numbers 4:29-30)
Slightly more numerous than the Kohathites and Gershonites were the

third and last Levite family, the sons of Merari. Their numbers totaled 3,200 men between thirty and fifty. If you were dismayed by the “negative” connotation of Gershon’s name, then take a deep breath: Merari’s is even worse. It means “bitterness,” but with a twist. Its root verb, *marar*, means “to be or make bitter, to show bitterness,” but it carries with it the connotation of having been strengthened through the trial. Thus Job says in the midst of his distress, **“As God lives, who has taken away my justice, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter [*marar*], as long as my breath is in me, and the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit.”** (Job 27:2-4) One gets the distinct feeling that Job wouldn’t have been quite so determined to honor God—so attuned to the issue—if he hadn’t been subjected to such tribulation. His adversity had brought his priorities into sharper focus. As the saying goes, “No pain, no gain.”

Contrary to some silly preaching that goes on today, Yahshua never promised us a bed of roses in this life. Rather, He said, **“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”** (John 16:33) Paul reminded the believers at Corinth that a life lived centered on Christ could be “bitter”: **“To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now. I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.”** (I Corinthians 4:11-14) Paul’s not complaining, mind you. He’s merely telling the truth about living a life honoring to Yahweh. It can be rough, but the adversity we endure has the potential to make us stronger. As he reminded the Romans, **“Tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”** (Romans 5:4-5) The sons of Merari, as we shall see, had some heavy lifting to do. But the “bitterness” of their task produced strength. Their path led from tribulation to perseverance to character to hope—and finally to love.

- (797) *The sons of Merari shall attend to the “hard parts” of the Tabernacle. “And this is what they must carry as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting: the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, and the pillars around the court with their sockets, pegs, and cords, with all their furnishings and all their service; and you shall assign to each man by name the items he must carry.”* (Numbers 4:31-32) If Gershon was faced with a big job, Merari’s was huge. The tonnage was daunting: the foundation sockets alone—ninety-six silver bases, a massive one talent each, plus fifty-six bronze pillars and

foundation pieces for the outer fence—weighed in together at almost seven tons. And the boards, bars, and pillars, made of dense, close-grained Acacia wood, would have been heavy as well. Unlike the Kohathites, however, the Gershonites and sons of Merari didn't have to physically carry their loads from place to place. When the children of Israel had donated their gifts for the building of the Sanctuary, they brought them to Moses and Aaron on six carts or wagons pulled by teams of oxen. **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Accept these from them, that they may be used in doing the work of the tabernacle of meeting; and you shall give them to the Levites, to every man according to his service.’ So Moses took the carts and the oxen, and gave them to the Levites. Two carts and four oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon, according to their service; and four carts and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari, according to their service.... But to the sons of Kohath he gave none, because theirs was the service of the holy things, which they carried on their shoulders.”** (Numbers 7:4-9)

God knows the limits of our strength. Having made us, He is all too aware that we are not omnipotent. So, as we see here with the Levites, He provides help for us—in proportion to the weight of the load with which we're faced. He doesn't do the work Himself (though He could), for He wants us to have the joy and satisfaction of having participated, of having made a real contribution. But if we'll supply the willingness, He'll provide the strength. As David observed, **“I will love You, O Yahweh, my strength. Yahweh is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon Yahweh, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies.”** (Psalm 18:1-3) Your “enemy” might be the ninety-pound silver socket you're supposed to schlep from Kadesh to Mount Hor. It might be the economic pinch you're finding so hard to overcome. It might be the apathy, despair, or uncertainty you feel, or your frustration with the godlessness of the world you have to live in. It might even be the constant and unrelenting temptation you face. But even there, Yahweh provides help. **“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”** (I Corinthians 10:13)

It bears repeating that there is one thing Yahweh never asks us to carry—the burden of our own sin. That job was done for us at Calvary. It is finished. Now when we're told to “pick up our crosses” and follow Yahshua, the objective is to live as if we're dead to sin, but alive to God. The work we do in this life is supposed to be *in response* to our salvation, for no amount of work is sufficient to achieve it.

(798) *The Gershonites and sons of Merari shall be under the supervision of Ithamar the priest.* “Aaron and his sons shall assign all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, all their tasks and all their service. And you shall appoint to them all their tasks as their duty. This is the service of the families of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting. And their duties shall be under the authority of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.” (Numbers 4:27-28) “This is the service of the families of the sons of Merari, as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting, under the authority of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.” (Numbers 4:33) As we saw in Precept #768, Eleazar, Aaron’s oldest surviving son (and future High Priest) was tasked with “the oversight of all the tabernacle, of all that is in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings.” That means that it would naturally fall to him to supervise the Kohathites in their duties concerning the transportation of the Tabernacle’s furnishings—it’s “holy things.” Here we see that Eleazar’s brother, Ithamar, was to similarly supervise the Gershonites and the sons of Merari. As a practical matter, this division of labor made perfectly good organizational sense—two brothers supervising separate groups of Levites, working in harmony under the supervision of their father and their uncle, who in turn answered to Yahweh. But there may be more to it.

An implied symbolic distinction exists between Eleazar and Ithamar, and we need to figure out what this distinction is, for it affects our walk in this world. The Levites—who were given to Aaron (read: Yahshua) for the work of the Tabernacle (i.e., the Plan of God)—represent believers in Yahweh. And the priests (Eleazar and Ithamar) symbolize the pastors, teachers, evangelists, apostles, and prophets (see Ephesians 4:11-13, Precept #780) who would be given by Yahshua to these believers, to equip them for the work of the ministry. Eleazar, who was in charge of the operation of the Tabernacle, supervised the Kohathites. His duties, and theirs, were focused on the Tabernacle furnishings: the altar, laver, table of showbread, menorah, altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant. All of these things, in their own way, spoke of the means by which man could approach God. And they spoke as well of Yahweh’s response—atonement, cleansing, provision, illumination, communication, and ultimately, His personal presence in our lives. Eleazar, then, represents the relationship that exists between God and His believing children. Not coincidentally, Eleazar’s name means “God has helped.”

But if that’s true, who or what does Ithamar represent? His function was to supervise the Levites of the families of Gershon and Merari, whose job was concerned with the Tabernacle infrastructure—the “tent,” its walls, the foundation sockets, the pillars, veils, and the courtyard fence.

Taken together, these components describe the interface between believers and the world in which they live.

Looking in from the wilderness of the world, unredeemed man first encounters a barrier of righteousness (the linen fence) supported by bronze pillars—symbolic of judgment, the distinction between good from evil. Not only is he barred because he isn't righteous, he finds that his objective (reconciliation with God) can be approached from only one direction—it's a narrow, exclusive approach, one against which his innate fallen nature instinctively rebels. So he peeks over the fence, hoping to get a glimpse of the peace he craves. All he sees is a dull, gray tent. However, if he consults with someone who knows how the tent is constructed—Ithamar or a son of Gershon or Merari—he will learn that this is only the outside of *four* layers comprising the plan of God for his life. These porpoise skins tell him that God has provided shelter for him, if only he's willing to trust Yahweh by entering the Tabernacle through the Way He's provided. Beneath this layer, the seeker is told, is one of red-dyed ram skins: innocent blood has been shed on his behalf. Beneath that, a layer of goat's hair fabric indicates that this innocent blood has atoned for his sin—it has *already* been accepted as the sin offering Yahweh requires. And the result of this atonement is the inner layer—the one that can only be seen if the seeker enters through the narrow gate, makes his way past the altar and laver of cleansing, enters the Sanctuary, and looks up. This last layer is the pure, white linen of imputed righteousness, embroidered with images of the mighty cherubim Yahweh has tasked with our provision, protection, and correction.

Who is Ithamar, then? He represents the relationship we believers have with the lost world, just as Eleazar represents the relationship we share with God. As we have learned by studying his team, the Gershonites and sons of Merari, this is the “dirty job” of a believer's existence, but as they say of all dirty jobs, *somebody* has to do it. Somebody has to do the heavy lifting, get his hands dirty, take out the trash. Sure, we'd all like to sit around and bask in the glory of Yahweh's presence twenty-four/seven. And the day is coming when we'll all get to do that. But we haven't reached the promised land yet. So for now, Ithamar supervises Gershon (the exiles) and directs Merari (the bitterly oppressed) among Yahweh's children. Without their (our) faithful service in this world, an unredeemed but searching race will never comprehend God's love, grace, plan, or provision.

And what does the name Ithamar mean? It means “an island of palm trees,” or less literally, “an oasis.” *Huh?* Consulting the imagery of

scripture, we find that this isn't as weird as it sounds at first. Consider this: **"The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree [*tamar*]; He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of Yahweh shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that Yahweh is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."** (Psalm 92:12-15) The "bitterness" and "exile" of a life of faith and service in this world are but temporary hiccups. We who are "planted in the house of Yahweh" will flourish forever in the courts of our God.

Offering Advice

Yahweh, as Creator of the universe, owns everything. He subsequently *needs* nothing, and from what we can tell from scripture, *wants* only one thing: to share a loving relationship with us humans. It's pretty obvious (at least to me) that we were created for no other purpose—and that the rest of creation, from quarks to quasars, are only byproducts of Yahweh's quest for the one thing He doesn't possess within Himself: loving companionship.

We may therefore find it a bit surprising to find a large body of instruction in the Torah that tells man to give stuff to Yahweh. A dizzying array of offerings, sacrifices, tithes, and oblations are prescribed, each accompanied with a plethora of rules telling us precisely *how* to go about giving these things to God—and how not to. And as if to prove that this isn't some thinly disguised ploy foisted by a newly empowered priesthood upon a superstitious and gullible populace, the Torah's instructions on giving are often a bit counterintuitive. We are instructed to do apparently “wasteful” things like sacrificing the firstborn of our flocks and herds, or leaving the corners of our fields unharvested so the poor can earn a living there—and are told that these things are honoring to Yahweh. He does seemingly contradictory things like insisting that only the best—perfect, unblemished specimens—are good enough to be offered to Him, only to turn around and say to reserve for Him only the gross, unhealthful, fatty portions of the sacrificed animal, while the rest of it is to be eaten by the worshipper or the priest. He declares that waving things in the air will demonstrate that we've given them to Him, even though we are then free to turn around and use them for our own benefit. He delineates different profiles for seven distinct offering types (the *olah*, *minha*, *chata't*, *selem*, *asham*, *nesek*, and *bekor*—see Volume I, Chapter 12). And we are forced to conclude that for a God who needs nothing at all, Yahweh sure asks for a lot.

The question that must be answered, as usual, is “Why?” Why did Yahweh issue such complicated instructions telling us to give Him things He doesn't really need or want? On the surface, some of what He told the Israelites to do may have looked a bit like the pagan religions of Egypt and Canaan, what with the specially garbed priestly class, facilities set aside for ritual purposes, and blood sacrifices. But the similarities were purely superficial. Pagan ritual was designed to reinforce the attitude of submission of the worshipper. It was calculated to enhance the power of the priests and the demon-gods they served by keeping the masses subservient. Hebrew rituals, by contrast, were designed to fulfill three functions.

They were (1) an elaborate prophetic dress rehearsal of the atoning sacrifice that Yahweh would make on behalf of man, (2) a means for individual worshippers to spontaneously demonstrate their thankfulness, and (3) a way to unify the entire nation under the banner of the One true God. As with the rest of the Torah, the rules are there for *our* benefit, not His. They're there to teach us about Him, about what He has done for us, about what He has given to us. By our giving, through our sacrifices, we are given a glimmer of understanding concerning what God did for us, beginning with creation and culminating in the provision for our salvation through the sacrifice of Yahshua. In fact, nowhere in God's instructions for giving is there a precept that doesn't originate with and help to explain what He has already done for us.

In the first volume of *The Owner's Manual*, mostly in Chapters 10 through 13, we saw the rabbinical take on offerings. Even when Maimonides wasn't twisting scripture to benefit the self-appointed religious elite of which he was a part, he restricted himself to listing the mechanical letter of the law, and to this day, orthodox Jews refuse to admit that the sacrifices and offerings delineated in the Torah could have had any bearing on the mechanism Yahweh would ordain for the salvation of mankind. But if they aren't prophetic of a coming Savior, then they degenerate into a pitiful attempt to bribe God. They become nothing more than watered down imitations of the ritual infanticide practiced by the devotees of Molech—something Yahweh specifically anathematized. And the even more anemic form such attempts at appeasement assume in today's world—tossing a few dollars into an offering plate—becomes downright insulting to God if one is trying to impress Him or buy Him off. We need to come to grips with the fact that our offerings can't logically be proffered as a bribe, a form of penance, or a means to drive our guilt back into the shadows. They are worthless as inducements to forgiveness, peace, or prosperity. Our offerings must be, rather, expressions of our love toward Yahweh, outpourings of thankfulness, reflections of the love He first showed to us. And our tithes should be a statement of our grateful trust in Yahweh's continued provision. Anything beyond that is blasphemy.

The Torah also teaches us something else. The mere act of giving, scattered and undirected, is *not* what we're called to do. Its object in the Law was always well defined, falling into three broad categories: (1) pure homage to Yahweh, including the offerings of atonement that prefigure *His* offering on Calvary; (2) the upkeep and advancement of the Tabernacle (which we should now recognize as a multi-level metaphor for the Plan of God; and (3) the support of the Levites and priests—who were precluded by Yahweh's calling from earning a living in the usual manner. The Levites, from the tithes they received, were also to provide for the poor among them. Though the Tabernacle and priesthood no longer exist, the principles remain intact. We should give first and foremost

because we love Yahweh, or more accurately stated, we wish to reciprocate His love for us. Then we should give out of a desire to see the Plan of God advanced in the world, that is, out of a desire to implement the Great Commission. Third, our tithes and offerings should support those who are called by God to minister to our spiritual needs or equip *us* for the work of the ministry, and to materially assist those among us—primarily believers—who have fallen on hard times.

It is at this point that I must offer a politically incorrect caveat. Not everyone who stands behind a pulpit is called of God or is doing God's work. We are instructed to be discerning—as wise as serpents, but as harmless as doves. Granted, if you're reading this book, you probably wouldn't knowingly put up with apostasy or outright heresy in the pulpit for very long. Most Evangelical pastors have the basics (e.g., salvation by grace, the deity of the Messiah, the reality and efficacy of the resurrection, the virgin birth, etc.) down pat, but all too often, longstanding Christian traditions pass for God's truth, and they're *not the same thing*. I'm not suggesting you stop supporting your pastor if he makes a mistake: he's human—it's going to happen now and then. What I'm saying is that you shouldn't be financially supporting a ministry that systematically denies (or sidesteps) the basic truths of the faith. And if you can't in good conscience give to such a church or ministry, why associate with them at all?

In the same way, not everyone who finds himself in need is a legitimate candidate for our alms. Poverty due to laziness, substance abuse, or a rebellious attitude is not to be rewarded. But although helping believing brothers and sisters in need should be a high priority for us, our giving need not be restricted to the faithful. For example, my wife and I are involved in the support of some folks who run a couple of free clinics in Bolivia. Medical care is provided for free (which is about all their clientele can afford) and everybody who comes into the place is presented with the good news of Christ's love. But it was discovered that some people in need were *still* going without essential medical treatment because they couldn't afford the expense of travel and lodging, or there was no way to provide for their dependents if they were laid up in the hospital, even for a few days. So a "mercy fund" was set up to take care of these hidden needs—things that had nothing to do with health care. From our point of view, it was ridiculously cheap—a few hundred bucks would help dozens of people get what they needed, both medically and spiritually. Bottom line: thousands of poor Bolivians who came in for free medical treatment went away with more than they bargained for—eternal life. To me, that makes way more sense than buying fancy stained glass windows.

In giving, as with everything else, we need to draw a distinction between perpetuating religion and fostering our relationship with Yahweh. That's not to say it is always easy sorting them out—one often masquerades as the other. But

when “religious professionals” ask us to contribute to a cause, it becomes our duty to examine just how directly the ministry correlates to Yahweh’s actual instructions on the matter. In short, where is the money going? To inflated salaries, bigger and fancier buildings, or air time on cable TV channels (so they can ask for even *more* money)? Or to more effectively teaching the Word at home and supporting missions abroad, to equipping the saints for the work of the ministry, and to extending practical mercies to people in dire need. Are the funds contributing to human pride or to God’s agenda? Call me a cynic, but I’ve observed that there is often an inversely proportional correlation between the time and energy spent raising money and the worthiness of the ministry doing the asking. It’s one thing to make needs known. It’s quite another to badger people into contributing to something they neither understand nor in which they perceive God’s leading. Woe to the man who says in effect, “Give me your money because I’m doing God’s work,” when all he’s really doing is building a monument to himself.

Another permutation of error in giving is to equate a human institution—*any* human institution—with the will of God, and to support it accordingly. Roman Catholicism is the most obvious purveyor of this evil, and they’ve grown bloated with wealth over the last seventeen centuries by telling the faithful, “*The Church and its leaders represent God on earth, so you must render unto us whatever you would render unto Him.*” Though the RCC leads the pack in this regard, they are by no means alone. Any concentration of ecclesiastical power, however localized, can lead to the same attitude. The problem for the worshipper, of course, is that it can be hard to see the difference. If in doubt (or even if you’re not), check the “plant” for fruit. If a “religious institution” is found, upon close scripturally based scrutiny, to be sprouting idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contention, jealousy, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambition, dissention, or heresy, then scream and run away. If, on the other hand, it fosters love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, then you can feel good about supporting them financially.

The vast preponderance of direct scriptural instruction concerning giving is found in the Torah, and in the course of our study we will have covered all of it. References to it in the New Covenant scriptures, by contrast, are rare but worthy of our close attention. Since the New Testament doesn’t replace the Old, but builds upon it, we find its teaching complementary to the Torah, clarifying and focusing God’s message.

For example, Yahshua taught us to be discreet in giving: **“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”** (Matthew 6:1-4) Yahweh is interested in attitude, not amount. He’s more concerned with *why* we give than *how much*. Our motives determine how the gift is perceived by our heavenly Father. A gift *could* be given primarily in order to elevate the status of the giver in the eyes of his peers. While reminding us that the glory such a hypocrite sought would be his only reward, Yahshua here establishes the fact that God does indeed reward us for acts of charity if done with the proper motive—to serve Him. Motive is key. There is a movement afoot these days that says that wealth can be turned on like a faucet by giving to God’s work. The error is obvious. If your motivation is personal greed, then you’re not really “giving” at all; you’re investing. (And if your faith is in your method, rather than in God, then you’re actually *gambling*.) The Father’s “rewards” of which Yahshua speaks *could* be financial, but they could just as easily be something else—something more appropriate to your own needs: peace of mind, health, or shelter from harm in this world—or a crown of victory in the next, awarded to you “openly” before your peers at the judgment seat of Christ.

As if to punctuate these thoughts, we read, **“And He [Yahshua] looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, ‘Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.’”** (Luke 21:1-4) Everyone He saw here, rich and poor alike, presumably wished to honor Yahweh with their gifts. Because the “treasury” in the Temple was a public place, one wasn’t expected to be particularly surreptitious about making a contribution, a fact that must be balanced against what we noted a moment ago in Matthew 6. What Yahshua saw—and remarked upon—was that the widow gave “out of her poverty.” Written between the lines is her attitude of utter, unshakable trust in the God she had come to worship with her “two mites.” It didn’t matter that the amount of her gift wasn’t going to accomplish much. God didn’t need her money anyway, but He valued her devotion above all human qualities, rewarding her “openly” through this glowing tribute in His scriptures. So, did she go home and die of starvation because she’d put her entire pitiful paycheck in the offering box? No. I can *guarantee* she didn’t miss it much.

There’s another factor that needs to be addressed here. The poor widow made her contribution at a time when the high priesthood of Israel was corrupt,

unbelieving, and politically motivated. The very Temple she had visited was an edifice erected as a cultural bribe—not an act of worship—by a corrupt and murderous gentile king, a vassal of a brutal, pagan, foreign overlord. So the question must be asked: did she waste her offering by giving it to the wrong people? Was her gift “thrown away” because those who received it in the name of God were less than worthy? Yahshua didn’t seem to think so. All He was concerned with was *her* attitude, *her* devotion. She did what she could do, and He honored that. The priests would be held accountable to administer her gift in accordance with His instructions. But even if they did not, she would not be held responsible for their faithlessness. All that being said, we today usually have more options available to us than she did: we are called to be discerning about where and to whom our gifts are given.

Giving “to God” is never discouraged in scripture. It is a good thing, something we should all do. But there are guidelines for godly giving. Giving Principle #1, then, is to give whatever you give without fanfare—let it be a matter between you and God. Principle #2 is the lesson of the widows mites: trust Yahweh in all things, for this honors Him. Principle #3 is in something Paul told the believers at Corinth: **“Now concerning the collection for the saints...On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.”** (I Corinthians 16:1-4) He reminds us that needs are constant and recurring; therefore, we should *plan* to give, setting aside our gifts—in proportion to our prosperity—even before they’re needed. The gifts weren’t for Paul’s use, however. They were for the needy saints: believers in other places who had fallen on hard times or were suffering persecution. Though he volunteered to play the role of postman, Paul made it clear that the gifts should be sent by means of the Corinthians’ own choosing. This wasn’t construed as a “Support Paul’s Ministry” telethon. In a later epistle, he reiterated the principle: be prepared in advance. **“Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.”** (II Corinthians 9:5) Some might object, saying that making our giving a “budget item” sucks all the spontaneity out of it, rendering it somehow less “spiritual.” But we were told in both the Old and New Testaments: the poor would always be with us. There would always be needs to meet. There is nothing unholy about planning ahead. Yahweh does it all the time.

The passage goes on to state Giving Principle #4: **“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always**

having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.” (II Corinthians 9:6-8) Our giving is supposed to be a reflection of how we perceive what God has done for us. If we are unthankful, if we count Yahweh’s grace and provision as a small thing, then we’ll tend to give parsimoniously. But if we really appreciate what He’s done for us, we will desire to reciprocate. We may not be rich, but we as God’s children really do have “sufficiency in all things.” And that is enough to make any thoughtful believer a “cheerful giver,” a cheerful disciple, a cheerful witness—even a cheerful martyr.

Paul used the occasion to brag on the believers in Macedonia. **“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.”** (II Corinthians 8:1-5) Giving Principle #5: if your heart is in the right place, you can do *more* than you can do. The Macedonians didn’t have a lot, but notice what Paul says they did have: (1) abundant joy in the face of trial and affliction; (2) liberal generosity in the face of temporal poverty; (3) a willingness to serve that enabled them to give *beyond* their intrinsic ability; and (4) a sense of urgency in the matter of meeting the needs of others in even worse shape than they were. How did they do all that? By first giving *themselves* to Yahweh, and then dedicating themselves to aiding and abetting fellow servants like Paul who were in “the will of God.”

Seems like every time we’re given an example of somebody doing it right, they’re poor, but every time we see an admonition or rebuke on the subject, the audience is wealthy. Here, Paul instructs young Timothy how to deal with rich folks in his congregation: **“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”** (I Timothy 6:17-19) Giving Principle #6: riches are given to the rich to enable them to do good works. The man who thinks he’s “self-made” is deceiving himself: even if he got his money honestly (which cannot be automatically assumed), it was only through God’s gift of fortuitous circumstances. It was Yahweh who gave him the ability to work hard, recognize and capitalize on opportunity, be in the right place at the right time with the right idea, and so forth. He could just as easily have been born in the wrong century, in the wrong country, on the wrong side of the tracks, with the wrong skin color, the wrong intelligence quotient, or with the wrong accent in his mouth instead of a silver spoon. Does hard work make a difference? Sure, but I can guarantee there

were slaves working on sugar or cotton plantations who worked every bit as hard as Donald Trump or J. Paul Getty.

Ever heard of Humphrey Monmouth? Me neither, until recently. He was a wealthy man who actually *was* “rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,” who not only stored up *for himself* “a good foundation for the time to come,” but for us as well. You see, Humphrey was a sixteenth century English cloth merchant who grew rich selling the fabrics worn by the nation’s high society. He also led a secret life as a member of an underground society of faithful London merchants known as The Christian Brethren. At a time of intense religious oppression under the Roman Church, these daring men smuggled Christian literature into England and supported men like William Tyndale, whose ground-breaking English translation of the Bible is the linguistic foundation upon which the venerable King James Version would be built a century later, retaining ninety percent of Tyndale’s wording. Monmouth provided Tyndale with room, board and financial backing as the scholar labored diligently on his common-language translation. The merchant-disciple then paid to have it printed in Europe, smuggling the Bibles—so hated and feared by the politico-religious establishment of the day—back into England in the very shipments of cloth that would grace the backs of the bishops and princes who were so determined to keep the Word of God out of the hands of the unwashed masses. Were it not for the likes of the faithful (and rich) Humphrey Monmouth, our scriptures might *still* be in Latin.

All of this brings us to Giving Principle #7: we can only give because Yahweh first gave to us. **“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”** (I John 3:16-17) Again, notice the scripturally specified recipient of our giving, the beneficiary of the “laying down of our lives.” It’s the brethren, our fellow believers who find themselves in need. We were never commanded (at least not by God) to provide lavish lifestyles for our clergy, fancy buildings for our assembly, or welfare payments to able-bodied people who refuse to work. It bears repeating, there are only three scriptural reasons for giving: to honor Yahweh, to spread His gospel, and to support His people who are precluded by their calling or circumstances from providing for themselves.

A GODLY ATTITUDE

(799) *Give as you are blessed.* **“Three times a year all your males shall appear before Yahweh your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before Yahweh empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of Yahweh your God which He has given you.”**

(Deuteronomy 16:16-17) The tithes and offerings that Israel was to render unto God through the priests and Levites were to be based upon past blessings, not future hopes. They were not to be thought of as bribes or appeasement or advance payment rendered for divine services, a means by which one might induce his god to show his favor by sending rain in its due season and making his flocks and fields fertile. This wasn't a bill to be paid, but a way to acknowledge the source of the blessings one had *already* enjoyed, an outpouring of thankfulness to Yahweh.

The commandment that "Every man shall give as he is able" is a challenge to be honest with yourself about what God has done for you and what you in turn are doing about it. A personal anecdote may shed some light on the subject. Several decades ago, my wife and I were agonizing as to why we were finding it hard—no, *impossible*—to tithe to our local church. I was making a decent workingman's wage, and we weren't living a flamboyant lifestyle, but there just wasn't enough money to give what we wanted to give. But then it hit us: we had adopted nine children, half of whom were handicapped to one degree or another. Our ministry (although we hadn't really thought of it in those terms, 'cause we were having so much fun) was making it impossible to "minister." We couldn't give ten percent to our church because we were *already* giving fifty or sixty to God's work—and had committed to continue doing so for well into the foreseeable future. So we settled on doing what God had said to do anyway: we would give as we were able, as we had been blessed.

- (800) *Recognize your blessings.* "**None shall appear before Me empty-handed.**" (Exodus 34:20) We saw this same instruction in the previous precept, where it was tied to the three annual gatherings of Israel at the central place of worship—wherever the Tabernacle of God was at the time. Again, it is a back-handed admonition to examine your life and recognize the blessings you've received at the hand of Yahweh. God's point was that *nobody* had "nothing." Everyone, right down to the humblest bondservant, had *something* for which to be thankful, some tangible evidence of Yahweh's care and provision. All they had to do was look for it.

Is the glass half full, or half empty? We need to be aware that without the gracious provision of Yahweh, we would have neither container nor contents nor eyes to perceive our condition. This is not a call for blind optimism, however, but rather for sober realism: whatever we have, we owe thanks to God. Having lost "everything," the patriarch Job observed, "**Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I turn back toward there. Yahweh gave and Yahweh has taken away; blessed be the name of Yahweh.**" (Job 1:21) I doubt if many of us today see things quite this clearly.

Americans are in for a rude shock. Having enjoyed “full glasses” for so long without recognizing or acknowledging Yahweh’s provision, we are about to lose our position of privilege. As the Last Days approach, Yahshua (in Matthew 24:6-7) warns us, expect “**wars and rumors of war...famines, pestilences, and earthquakes** (a term that in the original Greek would include ocean-borne storms—hurricanes, tsunamis, and the like) **in various places**”—that’s *before* the end: these are but the “beginning of sorrows.” As Isaiah warned us, “**For thus Yahweh has told me, ‘I will look from My dwelling place quietly, like dazzling heat in the sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.’ For before the harvest, as soon as the bud blossoms and the flower becomes a ripening grape, then He will cut off the sprigs with pruning knives and remove and cut away the spreading branches.**” (Isaiah 18:4-5, NLT) We are about to be—no, let me rephrase that: we are in *the process of being*—pruned back like an overgrown grapevine. And all of this is because we have for too long “appeared before Him empty handed.” May Yahweh forgive us.

- (801) *Thankfulness is not to be forced.* “**If you offer a sacrifice of a peace offering to Yahweh, you shall offer it of your own free will.**” (Leviticus 19:5) I know this sounds suspiciously like saying “The executions will continue until morale improves,” but it’s not the contradiction it seems. As usual, we have to look carefully at the actual text. He’s not talking about offerings in general. Some offerings in Israel *were* mandatory when the need for them arose: the sin offering (*chata’t*), guilt offering (*asham*), the Passover lamb, the Yom Kippur goats, and so forth, each with their requisite grain offerings (*minha*) and drink oblations (*neseq*). But others, notably the peace offering mentioned here (the *selem*) and the burnt offering (*olah*) made in homage to Yahweh were purely voluntary. God never said, “You must thank Me,” but He did stipulate ways we (i.e., Israelites under the Torah) could show our appreciation if we wished to. (Hint hint, nudge nudge.)

We cannot follow the letter of the Law in this regard today, for there is no Sanctuary and no priesthood. But the lessons of the *selem* are as valid as ever. If you’ll recall from Volume I, Chapter 12, the peace offering was the prescribed way someone could offer thanksgiving to God in Israelite society, underscore a vow (also voluntary) that he or she wished to make to Yahweh, or spontaneously demonstrate one’s praise or devotion. It was a blood sacrifice—cattle, sheep, or goats, either male or female. Since the sacrifice had to be without spot or blemish, we are reminded that it ultimately represented the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah, indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Both unleavened cakes and leavened bread were included, contrasting our sinless standing before God (the result of His sacrifice)

with the corrupt, sinful nature from which we are in the process of being extricated—and from which our deliverance should make us truly thankful. These *minha* blandishments were all to be prepared with olive oil, a picture of the Spirit of God that makes all of this possible in our lives (and without which, we’re just going through the motions).

The *selem* was not a dour, burdensome obligation. On the contrary, it was a party. The food was shared with the worshipper’s family and the priest. Yahweh was invited, too. In fact, He was the guest of honor. When’s the last time *you* threw a “Thank You” party for God?

- (802) *Offer sacrifices to Yahweh only.* **“The priest shall sprinkle the blood on the altar of Yahweh at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and burn the fat for a sweet aroma to Yahweh. They shall no more offer their sacrifices to demons, after whom they have played the harlot. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations.”** (Leviticus 17:6-7) This is one of those places where knowing the identity of our God—by name—becomes critically important. If we know Yahweh only as “The LORD” (as it’s mistranslated in every major English Bible version) we may be a bit fuzzy as to precisely Who our heavenly benefactor is. After all, the god the Canaanites worshiped—Ba’al—had a name that *meant* “lord” (as Yahweh’s name means “I am”). And today, 1.4 billion Muslims worship a god that shows up in their scriptures as “the Lord” (as in Qur’an 5:72—*“They are surely infidels who blaspheme and say: ‘God is Christ, the Messiah, the son of Mary.’ But the Messiah only said: ‘O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.’”* I beg to differ: Yahshua said no such thing.) It’s easy to get away with lies when the truth is buried with apathy, apostasy, or treachery.

Here in Leviticus, Yahweh makes it clear that sacrifices not made to Him—as demonstrated by adherence to the guidelines He set down in the Torah—are in fact offered to *demons*. The modern canard that “It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you’re sincere,” is utter hogwash. He whom you serve *is* your master, and the one to whom you offer sacrifices *is* your god, whether true or false. And lest it slip past you, that includes vague emotions and hidden agendas. If the “sacrifices and offerings” you’re making are done to assuage a guilty conscience, fulfill a perceived religious obligation, or they’re rendered in response to unrelenting pressure from pulpit or peers, then your god is your circumstances, your feelings, even your misplaced sense of duty—not Yahweh.

- (803) *Offer sacrifices only at the Tabernacle.* **“Also you shall say to them: ‘Whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of**

meeting, to offer it to Yahweh, that man shall be cut off from among his people.” (Leviticus 17:8-9) The practical ramifications of the letter of the precept are obvious: the pagan peoples being displaced by the Israelites had erected temples, shrines, and worship groves (“high places”) all over the countryside. Yahweh didn’t want the Israelites “re-tasking” the existing pagan worship facilities to His service, or recycling their religious practices to venerate Him instead of Ba’al. He was holy—fundamentally different (being *real*) from the gods worshipped by the pagans, and utterly unique. Therefore His people must also be set apart from the world in every aspect of their lives and culture, including their worship practices. Restricting the site of sacrifices and offerings to one central location went a long way toward establishing that principle.

But as we learned in such detail in Chapter 4 of this volume, the Tabernacle itself was an elaborate multi-level metaphor for the Plan of God for our redemption. Every element of its design, layout, ceremony, construction materials, furniture, decoration, even its dimensions, told us something about how Yahweh would reconcile us to Himself. Therefore, by telling us to make our offerings *only* at the “door of the Tabernacle,” He is telling us in no uncertain terms that everything we do “for Him” is to be done in the context of His revealed plan. That plan begins and ends with Yahshua and His sacrifice (the altar and the ark of the covenant). It involves our cleansing (the bronze laver), His provision for our every need (the table of showbread), our part in spreading the light of His truth to the world (the seven-branched lamp), and His desire that we would communicate with Him through prayer (the altar of incense).

- (804) *Understand the difference between defective and unclean.* **“All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to Yahweh your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock. You and your household shall eat it before Yahweh your God year by year in the place which Yahweh chooses. But if there is a defect in it, if it is lame or blind or has any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to Yahweh your God. You may eat it within your gates; the unclean and the clean person alike may eat it, as if it were a gazelle or a deer.”** (Deuteronomy 15:19-22) We saw (in Mitzvah #459) that Yahweh required the firstborn of “clean” animals and men alike to be set apart to Him, for the status of being “firstborn” was a symbol of the right to wield authority. The lesson is that the authority, power, and rights we possess by virtue of having been created in the “image and likeness of God” must be surrendered to Yahweh if we wish to share a relationship with Him. We *can* choose to retain this authority for ourselves, of course, but this will make us responsible for redeeming ourselves—something that God knows cannot be done. He would spare us

the consequences of this inevitable failure, for He loves us. But He will not force us to do things His way. The choice is ours.

However, defective animals were not to be sacrificed, even if they were firstborn males. These flawed beasts are analogous to the people who choose not to acquiesce their authority to Yahweh. If they could comprehend their condition, they might think, “I have escaped death! I may be blind or lame, deaf or diseased, but by golly, I’m free to live out my life the way I want to.” But they haven’t escaped death; they’ve only postponed it. What *have* they escaped? The “inconvenient” relationship their unblemished cousins share with God. The defectives might protest, “Some escape *that* is: they end up on the dinner table—as the main course.” I’ll admit, it’s counterintuitive. Paul explains: **“I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”** (Galatians 2:19-20) Huh? We become *alive* by *dying* vicariously in/through/with the Messiah? To the defective firstborn, it sounds like nonsense. But to us who have been made alive, the truth is self-evident (which doesn’t make it any easier to explain). Life (evolutionary hypothesis notwithstanding) originates with Yahweh. But we are not truly alive—in the eternal, spiritual sense—until and unless we have been absorbed, assimilated, become *part of* the God who made us.

And what was that about the firstborn sacrifice being available to **“the unclean and the clean person alike?”** Yahweh is telling us about what Paul called **“the life which I now live in the flesh.”** Although the firstborn sacrifice that redeems us (i.e., Yahshua) must be perfect, and we achieve perfection vicariously through association with His death, one need not first become “clean” in order to avail himself of the benefits provided to us by this sacrifice. The Hebrew word used so often to indicate a state of uncleanness, defilement, or personal impurity is *tame*. It indicates a state, not a behavior; that is, it describes our fallen position as children of Adam, not our guilt as individual sinners. Yahweh employed *tame* as a metaphor for the human condition, defining it in the Torah with a broad range of events (usually related to common biological functions) that would ceremonially “defile” a person, temporarily disqualifying him from participation in certain activities that spoke symbolically of fellowship with God. The point is that here in the law of the firstborn sacrifice, one needn’t be “clean” *already* when asking Yahweh to make him perfect—like my wife insisting the dishes be spotless *before* we run the dishwasher. God is willing to repair our defects, if only we’ll come to Him in faith. Remember, in the Tabernacle, we encounter the altar (where the blood of

sacrifice is shed) *before* we reach the laver (where cleansing occurs). When Yahweh is finished with us, we'll be both perfect *and* clean.

- (805) *Be consistent in the observation of Yahweh's precepts. "Thus it shall be done for each young bull, for each ram, or for each lamb or young goat. According to the number that you prepare, so you shall do with everyone according to their number. All who are native-born shall do these things in this manner, in presenting an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to Yahweh."* (Numbers 15:11-13) The "thus" refers to verses 4-10 (which we reviewed in Chapter 12 of Volume I)—where the principle was presented that grain offerings (*minha*) and drink oblations (*neseq*) were to accompany every burnt offering (*olah*) and peace offering (*selem*). These, you'll recall, were the two types of offerings that were completely voluntary, given as pure homage to Yahweh, as an outpouring of thankfulness, or to punctuate a vow being made before Him. A different amount of grain and wine was specified for each type of sacrificial animal, in rough proportion to its size. The instructions were precise and specific, meant to be followed consistently the same way every time a burnt offering or peace offering was made—for Yahweh's love for us is as constant and unchanging as it is varied in its manifestation.

The *minha* and *neseq* were prophetic of the coming Messiah, as were the blood sacrifices they accompanied. To review: the grain offering speaks of Yahweh's provision for our needs—the foremost of which is reconciliation with our Creator. The *minha* was always to be presented with a specific amount of olive oil, symbolic of the *Ruach Qodesh* who permeates the lives of believers, comforting, convicting, and providing for us "all things that pertain to life and godliness." And the wine of the *neseq* or drink offering is a transparent metaphor for the blood of Yahshua, shed for the remission of our sins. These should be familiar and obvious symbols to all of us by now.

What isn't so obvious is the restriction shoehorned in there sideways: the people who were to observe this precept are described as "**all who are native-born.**" This isn't a "get out of compliance free" card for Jews whose parents have been thrown out of the Land for bad behavior, bereft of their Temple and priesthood—who now couldn't conform to the letter of the Torah even if they wanted to. (Our first clue that something else is afoot here comes from the realization that when the precept was given, the Israelites hadn't yet crossed the Jordan. There was no such thing as an Israelite who was "native-born" in the Land.) As happens so often, though, we'll have to get into our Hebrew lexicons to see what God is trying to teach us. "Native-born" is the Hebrew noun *'ezrah*. The surprise is its root

verb, *zarah*, which means “to arise, rise up, or shine.” Thus the east, the place of the sunrise, is called *mizrah*, and *'ezrah* is one who arises (*zarah*) out of the land (*eretz*), hence, a native. But consider the use of our root word in this millennial passage from Isaiah: **“Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of Yahweh is risen (*zarah*) upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people. But Yahweh will arise (*zarah*) over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising (*zarah*, the noun based on *zarah*).”** (Isaiah 60:1-3) What’s being said in our Precept then, ever so subtly, is this: offerings of praise and homage to Yahweh are to reflect the sacrifice of Yahshua the Messiah in the heart of the worshipper. This is reality for people who have a personal relationship with God through His Son, people over whom “the glory of Yahweh is risen” and upon whom “His glory will be seen.” But those who refuse to receive the light of Yahweh into their lives cannot “arise and shine.” Their light has *not* come, for they dwell in darkness. Their offerings are subsequently *not* a “sweet aroma to Yahweh” but rather an offensive stench in His nostrils. They shouldn’t have bothered trying to “butter up” God. Their butter has turned rancid.

- (806) *One law applies to all.* **“If a stranger dwells with you, or whoever is among you throughout your generations, and would present an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to Yahweh, just as you do, so shall he do. One ordinance shall be for you of the assembly and for the stranger who dwells with you, an ordinance forever throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the stranger be before Yahweh. One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you.”** (Numbers 15:14-16) Because Yahweh chose to reveal His plan of redemption through the nation of Israel, some have gotten the idea that salvation is only for the Jews—that one must first become a Jew and keep the Torah if he is to taste the mercy of God. Passages like this one seem at first glance to support that view. And in the absence of any conflicting instruction, this position might seem a rational and logical extrapolation to make. But there *is* conflicting instruction. It’s not contradictory, mind you, but there is another side to this—and we must consider the whole body of scriptural instruction if we hope to arrive at the truth.

Let’s look at the historical background. The crowd who left Egypt under Moses’ leadership were not all Israelites. They are described in Exodus 12:38 as a “mixed multitude.” The vast majority were Israelites, but there were a few gentiles among them. Some were serious about adopting the ways of Yahweh—the mighty Caleb was apparently one such individual, a Kenizzite (i.e., an Edomite; cf. Joshua 14:6) who had attached himself to the tribe of Judah. But some among the mixed multitude were merely a gentile rabble who had seized upon the Passover

opportunity to escape from Pharaoh's iron-fisted tyranny. It was these who first complained about the lack of dietary variety in Yahweh's miraculous provision of manna (cf. Numbers 11:4). Whether dedicated to Yahweh or mere opportunists, these "strangers" among Israel are now being informed that if they wish to live before Yahweh and among His people, His precepts and instructions will apply to them just as they do to the chosen race. One size fits all.

Unfortunately, we have scant information concerning individual gentile believers in the Old Covenant Scriptures. While the prophecies predicting the eventual redemption of the gentile nations (as in the Isaiah 60 passage we quoted above) are numerous indeed, there are few examples of gentile saints in the Old Testament, and we are given only circumstantial evidence concerning their adherence, if any, to the Torah. Rahab, the heroic harlot of Jericho, and Ruth, the faithful Moabite widow, assimilated into Israelite society so thoroughly they both show up in Yahshua's family tree. On the other hand, Naaman, the cured Syrian leper, and the Sidonian widow who fed Elijah (the prophet who subsequently raised her only son from the dead) were mentioned prominently by Yahshua (in Luke 4:24-27) as examples of gentiles who had shown more faith than anyone in Israel, but we have no indication that either of these folks attempted any sort of Torah observance. Then we have the disturbing example of Uriah the Hittite, a gentile who was by all accounts a faithful and devoted worshiper of Yahweh, a valiant soldier for His cause, who was betrayed and murdered by no less a Biblical hero than King David, a guy who was described as "a man after God's own heart." Ouch.

The final laying to rest of the "you've-gotta-become-a-Jew first" theory is presented in Acts 15, where the new gentile believers in Yahshua were told by the council in Jerusalem that they would not have to "be circumcised and keep the law." When they heard the news, the gentiles "rejoiced over its encouragement." And why had the leaders of the ekklesia determined this to be the proper course? Because these gentile believers, having come to faith, had been given the Holy Spirit—long before any of them had even considered keeping the Torah. Their trusting belief in God's promise of salvation had been counted as righteousness, just as Abraham's faith had so many years before.

So where does that leave our Precept? Has it been abrogated? No, for the simple reason that the keeping of the Torah has never saved anyone, Jew or gentile, nor was it designed to. As Peter had put it to the Jerusalem council, "**Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the [gentile] disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?**" (Acts 15:10) The

point of the Precept is simply this: there is but one path to God. It is not determined by one's religion or cultural heritage, but it is defined by something that can look quite similar: *what one believes, whom one trusts*. Where our salvation is concerned, there is no difference between Israel and the gentiles. The very Law of offerings that both the Israelites and the gentile "strangers" living among them were instructed to observe proclaimed the coming Messiah between every line—His sinless life and selfless sacrifice. That is why Yahshua could declare, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."** (John 14:6)

TRESPASS OFFERINGS: CASES IN POINT

- (807) *The spiritual status of your victim can affect your punishment.* **"Whoever lies carnally with a woman who is betrothed to a man as a concubine, and who has not at all been redeemed nor given her freedom, for this there shall be scourging; but they shall not be put to death, because she was not free. And he shall bring his trespass offering to Yahweh, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, a ram as a trespass offering. The priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering before Yahweh for his sin which he has committed. And the sin which he has committed shall be forgiven him."** (Leviticus 19:20-22) Yahweh isn't condoning slavery here, but He is once again using it as a teaching aid, employing a cultural situation to demonstrate a spiritual truth. In other words, just because we don't have concubines any more in our society (or the means to present trespass offerings to Yahweh, for that matter), we aren't free to ignore what Yahweh is saying to us.

We need to sort out the symbols in order to get to the heart of the matter. The nature of the offense is sexual contact with someone you're not married to, but with a twist. Normally, this kind of thing would fall under another precept, either (1) rape (the penalty for which is death); (2) adultery, i.e., sexual relations with someone legally joined to another (the penalty for which is also death); or (3) fornication, i.e., sex with someone *not* promised to another (the penalty for which is the payment of a dowry, accompanied, if the woman's father allows it, by marriage with no possibility of parole—no divorce, for any reason, *ever*).

The twist here is the status of the woman: she is (1) a slave, human property belonging to another man; and (2) betrothed, that is, engaged to be married (tantamount to being legally married, though the marriage has not been consummated), whether to her owner, her owner's son, or to a third party, e.g., another slave. The word translated "concubine" in our text (*shiphchah*) really just means "maid-servant," but the supporting

description (that she “has not at all been redeemed nor given her freedom”) makes it clear that she is a slave, and not merely hired help.

This distinction is important to comprehend, for sexual contact is a ubiquitous metaphor in scripture for spiritual relationships. Israel is portrayed time and again as Yahweh’s unfaithful wife because of her liaisons with Ba’al and other false gods; Paul speaks of the ekklesia as Yahshua’s spotless bride: **“For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”** (II Corinthians 11:2) Yahweh refuses to share our affections. He loves us, and wants us all for Himself—an exclusive, monogamous, lifelong, unswervingly faithful relationship. What, then, does our text’s reference to the violated concubine mean? I believe it is a metaphor for people who are *already* in spiritual bondage, “owned” by someone other than Yahweh. “Lying carnally” with someone in this state is thus a picture of presenting *someone else’s* false doctrine to them. Example: a Muslim is told by a Catholic priest that he must accept the authority of the Pope. Or, a Catholic converts to the Mormon faith (or Jehovah’s Witnesses, or Orthodox Judaism, or *you fill in the blank*) in the belief that this other religion is the road to salvation. We’re talking about jumping out of the frying pan into another frying pan. The “concubine’s” position may have changed, but it has not improved. She is still a slave, still in bondage, still in need of redemption. The only solution that would have actually helped her would have entailed her marriage to Yahshua, clothed in a wedding garment of pure light, with a bridal gift of her freedom from slavery to sin. But the false lover/rapist/seducer has only made a bad situation worse.

However, we’re only halfway done with the precept. Unlike the case of the common “adulterer,” the seducer isn’t guilty of his victim’s spiritual downfall, since she was already in bondage. You can’t murder a corpse, though it is possible to desecrate one. So his life is not forfeit, but he is to be punished—“scourged.” Forgiveness is possible (though by no means automatic) in this case. Upon repentance, a trespass offering (the *asham*, appropriate for “mistakes”) may be brought. The ram of the trespass offering, of course, is actually Yahshua the Messiah. His blood alone atones for our trespasses at “the door of the Tabernacle”—the Plan of God. How does this work? Perhaps the best example we have of a repentant “concubine seducer” is the Apostle Paul, a Pharisee who ceased trying to convert pagans to rabbinical Judaism and began leading them to the Messiah instead. I know of former Mormons, former Catholics, and even a few former Muslims, who no longer lead the lost astray but now serve Yahweh with gratitude and commitment. Their sins have been

atoned by the blood of Yahshua. No longer do they “seduce concubines.” Now they “present them as chaste virgins to Christ” if they can.

- (808) *Things given to Yahweh are His, and are not to be “retasked.”* “If a man eats the holy offering unintentionally, then he shall restore a holy offering to the priest, and add one-fifth to it. They shall not profane the holy offerings of the children of Israel, which they offer to Yahweh, or allow them to bear the guilt of trespass when they eat their holy offerings; for I Yahweh sanctify them.” (Leviticus 22:14-16) God keeps His promises, and He expects us to do the same. Things we have dedicated to Yahweh are Yahweh’s, and that includes intangibles like our time and service. We are not to make promises to Him we can’t or won’t keep (nor does He ask us to). In Israel under the Torah, of course, it was possible to make “mistakes” concerning intended offerings. Most everybody’s wealth consisted of agricultural increase, whether animals or crops. A farmer who had set aside a lamb because it was a firstborn male, for instance, might find it on his dinner table some evening, ’cause one sheep looks pretty much like another, and somebody goofed. The divine solution falls somewhere in between slitting your wrists and shrugging it off. Yahweh, in short, knows we’re as fallible as He is holy.

Once the worshipper realizes his error, he is to rectify it by replacing what was “eaten” by mistake, and add twenty percent to it. This is more than just a penalty for having encroached upon what belonged to Yahweh. It’s a reminder of our humanity, for the total comes out to six fifths of the original offering—six being the number of sinful man, falling short of God’s perfection. The point, reiterated four times in these two short sentences, is that the offerings we make to Yahweh are *holy*. That is, they are set apart for His exclusive use and purpose. They’re not a “slush fund” we can feel free to dip into when we find ourselves with too much month left at the end of our money. (How did I know what you were thinking? Because I’ve thought the same thing myself from time to time. I’m preaching to the mirror here.)

The reason He considers our offerings holy is that *His* offering—Yahshua—was holy. Though mortal like we are, there was no confusion or divided purpose in His approach to the task He came to fulfill. We’re told His adoptive father, Joseph, was a carpenter (or perhaps a stonemason), so we can presume that as a youth Yahshua was taught the same trade. I realize we’re reading between the lines here, but it’s pretty clear that from the time Yahshua was old enough to pick up a hammer, His unwavering attitude was that He “must be about His father’s business,” as He told the learned teachers in Jerusalem (Luke 2:49). But

He wasn't talking about Joseph's business; He was talking about Yahweh's. Did He, as a twenty-something journeyman craftsman, go to work in the morning, build things, and earn money to help support His earthly family until He began His teaching ministry? Most certainly. But His thoughts, His plans, and His focus, were always on His *real* job.

And what is the application for us today? What are we to learn from this? As Yahweh's offering turned out to be Himself—Yahshua, God incarnate—*our* offering, in the end, must also be *ourselves*. Once set apart for Yahweh's glory, we are not to be "retasked" to some other purpose. Following Yahshua's example, our single-mindedness in Yahweh's cause does not preclude our earning a living, materially supporting ourselves and our families. He knows we have needs, and He has promised to meet them if we'll only seek His kingdom first. But although we have to work *in* the world, we don't have to work *for* it. What is a man to do, then, if he wakes up one morning only to realize that he has lost focus and "unintentionally eaten the holy offering," that which had been dedicated to Yahweh? That is, what if he comes to appreciate that he has inadvertently reneged on his whole-hearted devotion to Yahweh, chasing instead the "good life," the "American dream," or whatever you want to call it? (Don't look so pious: we've all been there.) He is to **"restore a holy offering to the priest [read: Yahshua], and add one-fifth to it."** In other words, he is to unconditionally render his humanity to the service of Yahweh (just as Yahshua did). To fail to do so is to **"profane the holy offering."**

THE TITHE

- (809) *The tithe is based on one's increase. "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year."* (Deuteronomy 14:22) We discussed what the Torah had to say about tithing in Chapters 10 and 11 of Volume I. Somehow, Maimonides missed much of the salient teaching on the subject, failing to reference significant passages (like this one in Deuteronomy 14:22-27) and shamelessly tilting what he did find to the advantage of the rabbinical class. So let's take the opportunity to examine Moses' recounting of the topic for the generation about to enter the Promised Land, with an eye toward filling in the spots we might have missed. The Hebrew word translated "tithe" is *'asar*, a verb derived from the number ten: i.e., to "tenth" something. Not coincidentally, its consonant root (that is, without the vowel pointing) is identical to *'ashar* (to be or become rich) and *'osher* (wealth or riches). Simply stated, the Israelites were instructed to tithe, that is, to render back to Yahweh one

tenth of whatever they had increased in their agricultural wealth, year by year.

We've seen this principle before, but it bears repeating: the tithe was based on the increase that Yahweh had *already* provided—past tense. The concept of “increase” seems simple enough, but there are some fascinating lessons in the linguistics of the word. *Tebua* indicates one's produce or increase, his harvest, gain, or yield. The word is sometimes used poetically in scripture, as when a personified “Wisdom” says, “**My fruit is better than gold, yes, than fine gold, and my revenue [*tebua*] than choice silver.**” (Proverbs 8:19) Or “**Great wealth is in the house of the righteous, but trouble is in the income [*tebua*] of the wicked.**” (Proverbs 15:6) It may seem strange at first glance, but *tebua* is based on the Hebrew word *bo'*, the fourth most oft occurring verb in the Old Testament. It means “to go in, arrive, come to, or enter,” as in “**Blessed is He who comes [*bo'*] in the name of Yahweh.**” (Psalm 118:26) The “increase” that Yahweh has provided us, then, is all prophetic on some level of the ultimate expression of benefit to us—our Messiah. It is only fitting that we reciprocate the blessing, as we've been instructed to do.

One further thought: I was raised a city kid, but as the Last Days approach, my wife and I are trying to become “country folk” of sorts, hoping to be a bit less dependent on “the system” for the basic necessities of life. So we're planting fruit trees, growing veggies in back yard gardens, and so forth. Some like-minded friends of ours pointed out that some of the things they've planted—potatoes, for example—are expected (according to the research) to yield an increase of “ten times” what has been planted. It struck all of us, more or less simultaneously, that this says it all: *we invest by planting something in the ground. Yahweh provides a tenfold increase. Then He asks us to render back to Him only as much we were prepared to invest for ourselves in the first place—leaving us ninety percent richer in the bargain. And that's only after our crop has come in.* Who wouldn't want a God who works like this to run the world?

- (810) *Tithes and offerings are to benefit giver and recipient alike. “You shall eat before Yahweh your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to revere Yahweh your God always.”*

(Deuteronomy 14:23) Three parties were always involved in the Torah's giving process: (1) the giver—the one who had been blessed, whose flocks, herds, and crops had “increased” and who wished to answer Yahweh's provision with obedience; (2) the recipient—the one to whom the tithes or offerings were given: Yahweh Himself; and (3) the Levites—

the ones whom God designated as surrogate recipients, set apart from Israel with no inheritance of their own—a subset of which was the priesthood who ministered before Yahweh at the Tabernacle. The same sort of symbiotic triad exists today: Yahweh blesses the giver, who in turn shows his thankfulness to Him by supplying the needs of people He has put in his way—people whom He has designated as recipients.

I believe that's why Yahweh made a point of bringing all three parties together when the gift was given. The worshipper didn't *send* his tithe; he *brought* it. Three times a year every man in Israel was to make the short journey to "the place where Yahweh chooses to make His name abide," where the Tabernacle (read: the Plan of God) stood. Offerings like the *selem*, the firstborn offering, and the token of the tithe, were to be shared by the worshipper, the priests, their families, and Yahweh Himself (through the fat burned upon the altar). It was a big party. Everyone benefited; everyone was blessed. And today, even though there's no temple or priesthood, this triad of blessing still holds true: Yahweh blesses His people by providing them with "all things that pertain to life and godliness." We then respond in thanksgiving by supporting those few who have been precluded by God's express calling on their lives from earning a living in the normal manner—or those who find themselves in material need through no fault of their own—with gifts which will (or at least *should*) be seen as divine mercy by those whose lives they touch.

Any firefighter will tell you that a blaze can be extinguished by removing any one of its three components—heat, fuel, or oxygen. The influence of the Spirit of God can also be quenched (see I Thessalonians 5:19) by removing just one leg of the giving triad—Yahweh (the Heat), the giver (the oxygen, for he as a believer is indwelled with God's Spirit), or the surrogate recipient (Levites, i.e., God's servants and the needy "opportunities" He places in our path)—the "fuel" of our motivation. Obviously, nothing happens if nothing is given: the fire of testimony dies out if believers don't tangibly demonstrate their thankfulness. Yahweh is "removed" from the giving triad if our alms are given with the wrong spirit or motive (compulsion, self-aggrandizement, guilt, etc.). And what if the fuel turns out to be non-combustible? If the one receiving the offerings is inert to God's word, the flame of God's love will smolder and die, failing to provide its light and warmth. (Examples: an apostate cleric out to line his own pockets; a big "charity factory" that's more a business than a ministry; any number of "causes," worthy or otherwise, that aren't in line with Yahweh's agenda—Saving harp seals and spotted owls is a fine thing, I suppose, but not at the expense of human souls.)

- (811) *Tithes are not restricted to payment in kind.* **“But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where Yahweh your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when Yahweh your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which Yahweh your God chooses.”** (Deuteronomy 14:24-25) It wasn’t always practical to bring a tenth of the *actual* increase to Yahweh. If you had forty acres of wheat fields or grape vines, the weight of ten percent of your harvest could be far more than your family could carry to Jerusalem. So Yahweh provided a practical alternative: sell the crop (something you were probably planning to do with the other ninety percent anyway) and bring the cash proceeds to the Tabernacle. Today, of course, we are typically paid in money (i.e., some form of symbolic wealth that the society agrees has a specific value—in stark contrast to the barter system in common use in the bronze age). The “money” the early Israelite would have used, unlike ours, had intrinsic value of its own, being made of gold or silver, not paper and promises (or the more cynical analysis: debt and delusion). Nevertheless, the principle is the same: the tithe may be “laundered,” exchanged for its equivalent in some other form than that in which the giver’s increase in wealth was originally received. Use your imagination—but don’t enlist this precept as a way to rationalize *not* tithing. If you’re not thankful, if you don’t trust God to meet your needs, then don’t tithe—don’t give at all. Yahweh doesn’t need or want your money.
- (812) *Enjoy tithing.* **And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before Yahweh your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household.”** (Deuteronomy 14:26) When the worshipper showed up in Jerusalem (or wherever the Tabernacle was at the time) to present his tithe, a token amount of it was used to celebrate before Yahweh. The worshipper’s family and the priests would get together and have a big barbecue—a party in honor of the God who provided the “increase” in the first place. They didn’t spend the whole tithe, you understand, for it was the remuneration of the Levites, and through them, the priests and the poor. But it is significant that the very first thing the money was to be used for was to facilitate the rejoicing of the community in recognition of God’s bounty. That should tell us something about Yahweh’s priorities. Why does God love a “cheerful giver?” (cf. II Corinthians 9:7) Because He wants us to **“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”** (Philippians 4:4)

You may be thinking to yourself, *“Easy for him to say. He’s got it made—lives in a nice house, drives a nice car, has a wife who’s stuck by him through thick and thin for forty years, and gets to sit around all day writing lofty platitudes about this God he serves. But I just lost my job, my spouse left me, my dog hates me, the truck won’t start, and I’m so broke I can’t even pay attention. And God wants me to rejoice? Yeah, picture that.”* I’ve got a better idea: let’s let the prophet Zechariah “picture that.” Here he’s talking about Yahshua’s Millennial kingdom, and the restoration of Israel subsequent to their national repentance. They *need* to be restored, Yahweh says, because **“For thus says Yahweh of hosts: ‘Just as I determined to punish you when your fathers provoked Me to wrath,’ says Yahweh of hosts, ‘And I would not relent, so again in these days I am determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear.”** (Zechariah 8:14-15) How does He intend to “do good” to them? By turning their mourning into gladness, their sorrow into rejoicing. Where they used to fast and weep on the anniversaries of their greatest national tragedies, they will now, under Yahshua, rejoice! **“Thus says Yahweh of hosts: ‘The fast of the fourth month [commemorating the severe famine during the Babylonian siege], the fast of the fifth [the destruction of Solomon’s temple], the fast of the seventh [the treachery and flight into exile of Judah’s royal family], and the fast of the tenth [the commencement of Nebuchadnezzar’s siege against Jerusalem], shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.”** (Zechariah 8:19)

You think *you’ve* got trouble? You don’t *feel* like rejoicing? Try walking in Israel’s rebellious shoes for a while. But as rough as their road had been, when they finally come to terms with what Yahweh has done for them (and for us), their mourning will be turned into thankful celebration. And that’s why rejoicing is to accompany our giving. In the end, our giving is nothing more or less than a picture—a reflection—of God giving to us. It is, like so many things in the Torah, a symbol of a greater reality, a means Yahweh employs to teach us about Himself. As Paul says, **“The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”** (Galatians 3:24)

- (813) *Do not forget who and what the tithes are for. “You shall not forsake the Levite who is within your gates, for he has no part nor inheritance with you.”* (Deuteronomy 14:27) Yahweh’s structuring of Israelite society is kind of a dare—with a lesson attached. We begin with a hunk of Land and thirteen tribes (including Joseph’s double portion). But the Land is not divided up among all thirteen, but only twelve—the tribe of Levi has been removed from the pool. Why? So Israel can demonstrate their trust in Yahweh—

who had *already* proved Himself worthy of their trust, in spades. He's challenging them to be good stewards of what He's already given them.

If you do the math, God is telling each tribe that instead of giving them 100% of their inheritance, He's giving them each 108.3%—thirteen shares divided twelve ways. The land, moreover, is a gift, something they didn't have before and for which they didn't pay. All they have to do is receive it in faith. (Yes, there are battles to be fought, but Yahweh has promised to fight their battles for them, if only they'll trust Him and keep themselves separate from the nations they're displacing, nations who have forfeited their right to the Land through their abominable satanic worship practices.)

For all practical purposes, then, each of the twelve tribes is getting its own piece of land, plus 8.3% of Levi's land to hold for them in trust. So (for you bean counters out there), all He's really asking of them in the law of the tithe is 1.7% of *their* annual increase. Bear in mind that *all* crops that grow on their lands are due entirely to the provision of Yahweh. In fact, He provides for all His creatures, including sinful man, without discrimination, rarely interfering (and then only with good reason and ample warning) with the natural processes He ordained at creation. As Yahshua said, “[Your Father in heaven] makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matthew 5:45) Does any of this sound unfair or harsh to you? Does it sound at all like the caricature of a wrathful, vindictive, demanding God the world tries to paint? Yahweh says, “Give me *only* what I've caused to grow on the land that by all rights should have gone to my servants the Levites, plus less than two percent of that with which I've blessed you on your own land—land I gave you. If nothing grows, you owe me nothing. But if you get bumper crops, remember where they came from and Who you have to thank for them.”

To put things in perspective, how loudly would you protest if the government suddenly announced that your *total* annual tax—including everything from income tax to Social Security to personal property and sales taxes—would from now on be only 1.7% of your income? If you made \$50,000 a year, you'd owe only \$850. Think you could live with that? Apparently, the tax rate during Yahshua's Millennial kingdom will be somewhere in this neighborhood: “**This is the tax you must give to the prince: one bushel of wheat or barley for every sixty you harvest, one percent of your olive oil, and one sheep for every two hundred in your flocks in Israel. These will be the grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings that will make atonement for the people who bring them, says the Sovereign Yahweh.**” (Ezekiel 45:13-15 NLT) It's amazing how efficient government could be if it

wasn't spending your money on armed forces and police, disaster relief, welfare, social security, or interest on the national debt. In the Messiah's kingdom, none of those things will be needed.

And the Levites? How do they figure into all of this? Ask yourself this: what has Yahweh left in "trust" with us in the present age? If the Israelites were to act as trustees for the Levites' share of the national wealth, what have we believers in the church age been given for safekeeping? The answer is prophesied in the Levites' job description, that with which they were tasked instead of being given farmland in Israel: they were "appointed over the Tabernacle of the Testimony" and its furnishings (cf. Numbers 1:50). They were to carry it forth and encamp around it. The Tabernacle, as we have seen, is a multi-faceted metaphor for the Plan of God. So the neo-Levites are those who carry forth His Plan in today's world, who announce it, advocate it, and guard it. And who are represented by the "tribes" who were to support these Levites with the 8.3% of the "increase" on land that was a gift to begin with? These are all the believers who benefit from the labors and dedication of the neo-Levites, the new servants of God. I'll leave it to you to figure out which group you belong to, if either. But remember this: the Levites in turn tithed to the priests, who are (on another level) a symbol for believers in general. Bottom line: we are *all* to be invested in God's work, one way or another. This is no place for bystanders, innocent or otherwise.

OFFERINGS FOR CLEANSING

- (814) *Cleansing is neither free nor priced out of reach. "If [a woman who has given birth] is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons—one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean."* (Leviticus 12:8) It is never Yahweh's agenda to cause us financial hardship. But in hundreds of different ways, He instructs us that our cleansing, our atonement, is not free. In fact, it's so expensive only He could pay the ultimate price to reconcile us to Himself. Our sacrifices, then, are but shadows. We could neither comprehend nor identify with His selfless act if our purification cost us nothing. So here, the ritual cleansing of a poor woman who has given birth, something that would normally have entailed the sacrifice of a lamb, is given a mercifully inexpensive alternative. Two doves or pigeons—far less costly than a lamb—may be sacrificed instead. One was to be used as a burnt offering—pure homage to Yahweh—and the other sacrificed as a sin offering.

The classic example of this precept in practice, of course, is Mary, the mother of Yahshua. She was so poor she couldn't have paid for a lamb if her life depended on it (the wise men with their gold, frankincense, and myrrh were still a long way off), but she and her husband Joseph did manage to buy a couple of turtledoves, as required in the Torah and recorded in Luke 2:24. (The odd Roman Catholic notion that Mary was sinless is proved false here: one of the doves was brought as a *chata't*—a *sin* offering.) The irony is, as it turned out, she actually *had* “brought a lamb,” the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” More ironic still, since she couldn't pay for a lamb, the Lamb paid for her.

- (815) *We are declared clean before Yahweh, not before men. “And on the eighth day he [the cleansed leper] shall take two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and one log of oil. Then the priest who makes him clean shall present the man who is to be made clean, and those things, before Yahweh, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.”* (Leviticus 14:10-11) In Mitzvah #578, I referred briefly to the passage that will take us through to the end of this chapter. There and in the surrounding mitzvot, Maimonides was busy skirting the core issues concerning the Law of leprosy, spelled out in Leviticus 13 and 14. If you'll recall, the Israelite who had contracted leprosy and had been healed was to go before the priest to be pronounced clean, offering certain sacrifices. Now it's time to get into the details concerning these offerings. I should reiterate right up front that the phrases “**makes him clean**” and “**to be made clean**” are grossly misleading translations. The verb here is *taher*, and the connotation is that the leper (who has *already* been healed—Hebrew: *rapha*) is not *made* clean through this ceremony, but is rather being *pronounced* or *declared* to have been cleansed.

Leprosy, if you'll recall, is the Torah's metaphor for spiritual sickness, of which there are dozens of different permutations in our world—reflected in the wide variety of ailments and symptoms discussed in Leviticus. There was a formula involving cedar, hyssop, and scarlet that the leper was to follow during the first seven days of the cleansing procedure that verified his healing—the seven days prophetically referring to what happens to cleanse us during our mortal lifetimes. This precept picks up where we left off—on the eighth day—which I believe indicates that which follows our mortal lives: the eternal state. Our text provides a summary of what is to be offered (all of which, one way or another, speaks of Yahweh's cleansing work on our behalf through Yahshua the Messiah and the Holy Spirit.) We'll discuss each of these elements in turn as we proceed. For now, however, notice the circumstances of the ceremony.

The ex-leper, the one who has already been healed and is in the process of being pronounced clean, is presented by the priest to Yahweh at the door of the Tabernacle. To anyone attuned to what these symbols mean (as we all should be by this time) the ramifications are breathtaking.

We were once afflicted by a spiritual disease, one that kept us alienated from God and His people, made us odious to those around us, and would have, if left untreated, killed us in the end. We were brought to the priest—our great High Priest, Yahshua, who examined our affliction and verified that we were indeed spiritually ill. By Law, we were then required to live outside the camp, isolated from God’s people. Worse, we searched the Torah in vain for a cure, for no remedy is to be found in the Law. It’s not until we encounter the Messiah, Yahshua, that we are healed. Now, and only now, does the Law become of use to us, for it is at this point—*after we’ve been healed*—that its provisions facilitate reconciliation with Yahweh and His Congregation.

First, during our mortal lives (the first “seven days”) the priest who once declared us unclean (Yahshua) condescends to go to where we have been exiled, for we can’t legally approach Him in our ritually unclean state. Two clean birds are brought. One is slain within an earthen vessel over running water—a transparent metaphor of Yahweh being clothed in mortal humanity in the person of Yahshua, according to the living Word of God, and then sacrificed on our behalf. The priest then takes cedar wood (a symbol of our irrational pride), hyssop (our irrelevance apart from Yahweh) and scarlet thread (a picture of the indelible stain of our defilement), and dips them along with the second bird (the living one) into the blood of the slain bird. Finally, he sprinkles the blood on us (the cleansed lepers) and releases the live bird to enjoy its freedom. In other words, Yahshua has died so that we might freely live. He has taken our pride, our irrelevance, and our sin with Him to the tomb.

But now we come to the eighth day, the eternal state, where we, the cleansed lepers, are brought to stand before Yahweh. Who brings us? Our High Priest, Yahshua, who by virtue of his sacrifice enjoys unlimited and unfettered access to the throne of God. (He *is* God, of course, but for the purpose of this illustration, He plays the part of our advocate and intermediary.) He stands beside us and declares that we are no longer defiled, leprous outcasts, but have been cleansed, made well, rendered fit to join the Congregation of Yahweh. Where does all this take place? At the doorway to the Tabernacle, which speaks in detail of the Plan of God we have followed—the *only* way God has provided for us to reach Him. And Yahweh sees us standing in clean, white linen garments in the

company of His Son, and asks (though He knows the answer) “What gives you the right to stand before Me?” And we (because we’ve been coached) reply, “I’ve brought **‘two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and one log of oil,’** all of which represent Yahshua Your Son, Your Spirit, Your sustenance. It is only by virtue of the blood of His sacrifice that we stand before You, cleansed and whole.” And Yahweh smiles and says, “Good answer. Welcome, my children.” Or something like that.

- (816) *Use the first lamb as a trespass offering in the cleansing process.* **“And the priest shall take one male lamb and offer it as a trespass offering, and the log of oil, and wave them as a wave offering before Yahweh. Then he shall kill the lamb in the place where he kills the sin offering and the burnt offering, in a holy place; for as the sin offering is the priest’s, so is the trespass offering. It is most holy. The priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering, and the priest shall put it on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.”** (Leviticus 14:12-14) The first male lamb is an *asham*, or trespass offering. If you’ll recall from Volume I Chapter 12, the *asham* was offered up for our mistakes, our inevitable lapses in holiness (in contrast to our bad behavior, which was covered via the *chata’t*, or sin offering; see Precept #818). The *asham* is acknowledgment of our fallen state, the human condition, a recognition that our most sincere efforts and dedicated devotion will inevitably fall short of God’s perfect standard. And since we’re still in the context of “pronouncing lepers clean,” we, by offering up the *asham*, are declaring our reliance upon the blood of the Messiah to inoculate us against error, just as it atones for our sin.

Notice next what the priest is to do with the blood of the trespass offering: he is to apply some of it to the former leper’s right ear, right thumb, and right great toe. This, of course, is going to seem like *déjà vu* to the priest, for he experienced the very same procedure during his ordination ceremony (cf. Exodus 29:20—Precept #754). Anointing the right ear with the blood of the lamb is a picture of the former leper’s hearing and acceptance of the truth (whereas the left ear would presumably symbolize listening to lies or heeding false teaching). Similarly, the right thumb indicates doing the right thing (as opposed to the wrong thing), and the big toe on the right foot would mean walking in the right path, not in the way of the world. In a very real sense, this means that the cleansed one is being made into a priest himself, in a way. Remember, this is all after the fact. He is already cleansed of his spiritual disease; he has already (as the symbols of the first seven days of his

cleansing process attest) been set free from his pride, irrelevance, and the stain of sin. Throughout eternity, he will henceforth enjoy unrestricted access to the throne room of the Almighty Creator. Not bad for an old ex-leper.

- (817) *Use the oil to anoint the leper in the cleansing process. “And the priest shall take some of the log of oil, and pour it into the palm of his own left hand. Then the priest shall dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand, and shall sprinkle some of the oil with his finger seven times before Yahweh. And of the rest of the oil in his hand, the priest shall put some on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the blood of the trespass offering. The rest of the oil that is in the priest’s hand he shall put on the head of him who is to be cleansed. So the priest shall make atonement for him before Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 14:15-18) Olive oil, as we have seen so often before, is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. We’ve seen it used as fuel for the menorah (the only light source within the Tabernacle), as a component of the priestly anointing oil, and mixed with the flour of the *minha* grain offering. But we’ve never seen it used like this. As in the previous Precept, we see the former leper being made by the priest into something of a priest himself—not of the Levitical order, of course, but an anointed priest nonetheless. The handling of the oil here, unique in the Torah, tells us something previously unrevealed about the Holy Spirit it represents.

As with the blood of the trespass offering (indicative of atonement through Yahshua’s sacrifice), the oil is applied by the priest to the cleansed leper’s right ear, right thumb, and right big toe—this time telling us that his words, works, and walk are all to be influenced and illuminated by Yahweh’s Holy Spirit. What’s unexpected is how the priest is to go about doing this. He doesn’t just dip his right index finger into the *logh* of oil (a container or unit of liquid measure about half a liter in volume), but rather pours some of the oil from the *logh* into his *left* hand, and dips into that to perform his ritual.

Whoa! Isn’t the left side symbolic of being “wrong” or “evil” when contrasted with the right? Yes, it is. Hence the revelation: before God’s Spirit can be of use to the leper, it must be placed into a flawed, imperfect container—a human body, mortal, frail, and subject to disease and death. The human hand is a less-than-ideal container, to be sure: it doesn’t hold much liquid, what it does hold is easily spilled, and the oil, even if one is very careful, is apt to leak out through the fingers. But whose left hand is in view? It’s not the leper’s, but the priest’s. That is, Yahshua the Messiah, in order to function as High Priest on our behalf, had to assume a less-than-divine form, a frail vessel that was vulnerable to attack, pain,

weariness, and temptation—just like ours. Now you know why He was forever wandering off into the hills to commune with God—He was replenishing and refreshing the Spirit who dwelled within Him, without which His human body would not have been up to the task set before Him. The next time you’re tempted to view Yahshua’s first-century advent as somehow “easy” for Him because He was “God in the flesh, a super-human character with super-hero capabilities,” remember that. He got tired just like you do; He felt pain and struggled with temptation. He became a “left hand” so you could be anointed with the oil of Yahweh’s spirit.

But this is the eighth day, and we lepers have already been healed of our spiritual affliction. So most of the oil is used elsewhere. With His right index finger, the priest sprinkles the oil seven times before Yahweh, as if to say, “the ministry of the Holy Spirit is complete in this person’s life.” Then the rest of it—about a pint—is poured lavishly over the head of the celebrant, as if to declare that in the eternal state the cleansed one will find himself *soaked* in the Spirit of God—to coin a phrase: baptized in it!

- (818) *Use the second male lamb as a sin offering in the cleansing process.* **“Then the priest shall offer the sin offering, and make atonement for him who is to be cleansed from his uncleanness.** (Leviticus 14:19) The second male lamb is to be offered as a sin offering, a *chata’t*, which is similar to the *asham* trespass offering, but this time the cleansed leper’s own sins, his personal lapses in behavior, are in view. The point of offering both types of sacrifices is that we are not only condemned by our fallen nature (making us incapable of avoiding the mistakes that prove us unworthy to stand in the presence of a holy God), but we’re also damned by our own sins—things we can’t logically blame on Adam, our own bites out of the forbidden fruit, as it were. This sin offering, as always, is predictive of Yahshua’s atoning work on Calvary. It is a blood sacrifice of an innocent male lamb—the symbology is hard to miss.
- (819) *Use the ewe lamb as a burnt offering in the cleansing process.* **“Afterward he shall kill the burnt offering. And the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. So the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be clean.”** (Leviticus 14:20) The last sacrificial animal listed in verse 10 is **“one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish.”** Although not specified here, this is the only candidate left for the burnt offering, or *olah*, called for in our present Precept. This conclusion is bolstered by the further instruction to bring **“three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering,”** for every *olah* was to include a *minha* grain offering mixed with oil, reminding the worshipper of the provision of Yahweh through

His Holy Spirit. Also, the fact that the lamb is a female this time stresses the only component of the Messiah's human constitution that gets passed on to His followers: the Holy Spirit of Yahweh that indwelt and empowered Him, and promises to do so for us as well.

Normally, the *olah* burnt offering was completely voluntary, a spontaneous statement of one's homage to Yahweh. But here it appears to be commanded as part of the process by which the leper is pronounced clean. What gives? Is God making the *olah* sacrifice a condition for the leper's cleansing? No. Remember when this is taking place: the "eighth day," i.e., *after* the leper has been healed of his spiritual disease. The "cure" was provided when Yahshua took our sins upon Himself. But if we are to be pronounced clean before Yahweh, we must choose to avail ourselves of the cure. After all, it is possible to ignore the gift of healing we've been given and choose to remain "outside the camp," living like the other lepers, even though we no longer have to. The Monty Python comedy troupe once did a parody of this very thing, a hilarious look at the dark side of the human condition. A leper is healed by Jesus, but all he can do afterward is complain that his lucrative career as a street beggar has been ruined by this unwanted intrusion into his life—I mean, who'd give alms to an *ex-leper*? Now if he wants to eat, he'll actually have to *work* for a living.

Another anecdote (this one historical) will illustrate what our Torah precept is saying. In Luke 17, we are given the story of ten lepers who were healed by Yahshua. But of the ten, only one—and a Samaritan at that—came back to thank his Benefactor. The other nine presumably scampered off to fulfill the letter of the Law, presenting themselves to the priests at the Temple. But this guy, who didn't even *have* the Law, fulfilled its spirit anyway with his reaction to Yahshua's kindness: "**When he saw that he was healed, [he] returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks.**" (Luke 17:15-16) This spontaneous outpouring of gratitude was the very *olah*, the burnt offering, that Yahweh had specified back here in Leviticus.

We are all lepers, and we have all been given the cure for our deadly condition. Who among us will (1) realize we've been healed, (2) return, i.e., turn around (read: repent), (3) publicly glorify God, (4) worship our Healer, and (5) give Him thanks? Only those who do will be pronounced clean before Yahweh on the eighth day, in the eternal state.

- (820) *Modify the leprosy cleansing procedure to accommodate the poor.* "**But if he is poor and cannot afford it, then he shall take one male lamb as a trespass offering to be waved, to make atonement for him, one-tenth of an ephah of fine**

flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, a log of oil, and two turtledoves or two young pigeons, such as he is able to afford: one shall be a sin offering and the other a burnt offering.” (Leviticus 14:21-22) As we saw above (Precept #814) with the Law of post-childbirth cleansing, it is never Yahweh’s intention to make His instructions an unbearable financial burden, though He does want us to know that our healing didn’t come cheap—it was purchased with the most precious substance known: the blood of an innocent Man. That being said (and notwithstanding the fact that not a single Israelite was cured of leprosy under the rules of the Torah until Yahshua arrived on the scene), the expense of providing three lambs was probably out of reach for most lepers. So, having established the principles and symbols for us to learn from, Yahweh provided a more affordable version of the cleansing rite as a merciful provision for the poor. Basically, the only difference is the substitution of one turtledove or pigeon for the male lamb of the sin offering, and another in place of the ewe lamb of the burnt offering (with a corresponding reduction in the amount of flour for the *minha*). Everything else appears to be the same.

“He shall bring them to the priest on the eighth day for his cleansing, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, before Yahweh. And the priest shall take the lamb of the trespass offering and the log of oil, and the priest shall wave them as a wave offering before Yahweh. Then he shall kill the lamb of the trespass offering, and the priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering and put it on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.” (Leviticus 14:23-25) The identical procedure as before (Precept #816) is followed with the lamb of the trespass offering. The same is true of the oil (Precept #817). “And the priest shall pour some of the oil into the palm of his own left hand. Then the priest shall sprinkle with his right finger some of the oil that is in his left hand seven times before Yahweh. And the priest shall put some of the oil that is in his hand on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of the right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the place of the blood of the trespass offering. The rest of the oil that is in the priest’s hand he shall put on the head of him who is to be cleansed, to make atonement for him before Yahweh.” (Leviticus 14:26-29) The difference for the poor man is the substitution of inexpensive turtledoves or young pigeons for the second and third lambs, the sin offering and the burnt offering. “And he shall offer one of the turtledoves or young pigeons, such as he can afford—such as he is able to afford, the one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, with the grain offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him who is to be cleansed before Yahweh. This is the law for one who had a leprous sore, who cannot afford the usual cleansing.” (Leviticus

14:30-32) Since atonement is the goal, blood must be spilled, for the life is in the blood.

Once again we are confronted with God's counterintuitive arithmetic. The cleansing (or the *pronouncement* of cleansing) has a cost associated with it, but that cost has no direct correlation to the severity of the disease itself. It doesn't matter if it was manifested with a tiny blemish, or your whole face was falling off. They both carry the same onus and the same curse. In a manner of speaking, all have contracted leprosy; all have fallen short of the glory God requires of us if we are to stand in His presence. But among us lepers, some of us have been given great riches, and some not so much. That is, some are blessed to live in societies where God's truth is freely available, where we can worship Yahweh openly and study His Word without fear of reprisal; others are not so lucky, for they inhabit a world of limited opportunities and suppressed truth. But blessed or not with such personal freedoms, all of us have been provided a cure for the spiritual sickness that condemns us. It is our choice to either accept and embrace the cure or not. The point of this Precept is simply that those of us blessed with opportunities to meet Yahweh openly are expected to respond in a manner consistent with our blessed status, while those who can enjoy only limited personal freedoms (or none at all) are expected to do only what they can "afford" to do. Some of us can shout the good news from the housetops; others can only scrawl their praise on the walls of the catacombs. But all of us, like the lone Samaritan leper, are expected to turn around and glorify God. We who do can look forward to an eternal anointing in the Spirit of the God who loves us.

Dates of Destiny: Past Perfect

I confess. I get impatient with well-meaning folks who are not only ignorant of certain Biblical principles, they're happy to remain so. I'm not talking about simply not realizing (yet) that some of God's Word has ramifications beyond its plain surface meaning—that Yahweh uses symbols and metaphors to communicate with us. We've all had scriptural epiphanies, where one minute we didn't "get it" and the next minute we did. Our lives as believers are a journey from darkness into light, and we all take the trip at different rates of speed. No, I'm talking about *willful* ignorance, a determination *not* to explore the Scriptures in response to questions that are begging to be answered. And why would someone do this? Because of what they've read *into* a few scattered verses, taken out of context, of course: a perceived admonition against inquiry—don't ask, don't tell, don't even think. Not knowing *everything* may not hurt you, but the fact remains, "**My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.**" (Hosea 4:6)

One of these areas of willful ignorance is the subject of Yahweh's schedule. If you're like me, you were taught that God plays His cards very close to the vest: "We can't discern anything about it," they say, because after all, Yahshua told his disciples, "**It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.**" (Acts 1:7) Or, "**But of that day and hour no one knows [literally, perceives], no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.**" (Matthew 24:36) His point (in both places) was that we should not fixate on the hour of His return for His people, but rather that we should live our lives doing His will, serving in joy while remaining watchful. But it is too often taken as a command to ignore the obvious (or semi-obvious) clues Yahweh has left us concerning His schedule, His agenda, His plan, if only we'll open our eyes. Even these "proof texts," recruited to encourage willful ignorance, teach us something significant: the Father *does* have a schedule; He *has* put times and seasons under His own authority. But Yahweh exists outside of the restraints of time. The scriptural information explaining God's schedule, strewn from Genesis to Revelation, is there for *our* benefit and enlightenment, not His.

If you've read my book on prophecy, *Future History*, you know I believe God has given us far more information on the subject of His timing than most of His children realize. However, it is not my intention here to explore Yahweh's schedule *per se*, but rather to examine one of the basic tools He has given us with which to discern that timeline. Our focus in the present work is on the Torah, and more specifically, on those things within it that were not previously addressed in

our survey of Maimonides' supposedly definitive list of 613 Laws. This "tool" we wish to investigate is the incredibly significant annual festival calendar Yahweh instructed Israel to observe, along with other periodic rites. Where the Rambam mentioned these convocations at all, it was invariably in reference to the mechanical bits and pieces he could "safely" list (such as what to present as offerings) while remaining blissfully oblivious to what God was really telling His people. These seven annual holidays, along with the weekly Sabbath, are like God's "to do" list, a schedule of events in Yahweh's personal date planner. Through them He is delineating what He considers the seven most significant milestones in His plan for our redemption, as well as revealing the order of these events. We ignore this information at our peril.

Our first scriptural listing of all these holidays together is in Leviticus 23, but I'm afraid the terminology employed in our English translations to describe their nature leaves something to be desired. **"And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: "The feasts of Yahweh, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of Yahweh in all your dwellings. These are the feasts of Yahweh, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times."'"** (Leviticus 23:1-4) The word translated "feasts" has nothing to do with food or drink, as we today might expect. (In fairness to the King James translators, the word implied something a bit closer to the correct meaning in the early seventeenth century: it's the English language that has shifted.) The Hebrew noun rendered "feast" is *mo'ed*, which means an appointed time, place, or sign; a meeting or assembly convened by an authority. The Sabbath and each of these seven *mo'edim* of Yahweh, then, are meetings, scheduled and appointed by the authority of God Himself. They were to take place at a particular time and place, and each of them signified something He deemed of the utmost importance. Although these are commonly referred to as "the Feasts of Israel," they're never called that in scripture: they're the appointments ordained by Yahweh. As we'll see, they outline His master plan not only for Israel, but for all mankind, Jew and gentile alike.

Another word we need to examine under a microscope is the one translated (correctly, though the word is seldom used these days) as "convocation." It's the Hebrew noun *miqra*, meaning a calling together into a sacred assembly (which makes it quite similar in meaning to the Greek word we errantly translate "church"—*ekklesia*: a calling out). It also means "a reading" (as in Nehemiah 8:8), that is, the content of a written communication that is publicly uttered aloud—a rehearsal or recounting. It's based on the root verb *qara*, meaning to call, call out, or recite. Since "to convoke" means to call together to a meeting, we can see that the Hebrew words *miqra* and *mo'ed* are almost synonymous. The *mo'ed* stresses the fact of the assembly—its place, time, and significance, while

the *miqra* emphasizes its purpose—the information it is to impart to those who assemble. And of course, when we see the word *qodesh* (holy) used with *miqra* (as it invariably is when referring to these special appointments with God), we are reminded that these days are to be kept set apart from other days—separate, sacred, and consecrated: they’re *special*.

Thus we can now see that the very words Yahweh chose to describe these set-apart days indicate that they were to be more than mere “holidays” to be observed. Each *mo‘ed-miqra* was to be a sign, a prophecy if you will, of a specific momentous event in God’s plan for our redemption. Each one was a recital, a retelling, of something special Yahweh intended to do for us. The things He told Israel to do—and not to do—on these days are not self-serving, pointless religious rituals. They are, rather, a recounting or rehearsal reflecting what Yahweh was promising to do for us on each of these spiritual milestones. Every instruction is, in effect, a pledge made to humanity. God is saying, “Recite these My promises week by week and year by year throughout your generations, for they tell you how I’m going to reverse the very curse of Adam.”

FEASTING BEFORE YAHWEH

(821) *Demand freedom in the name of God.* “**Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, ‘Thus says Yahweh God of Israel: Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’**” (Exodus 5:1) I’ve always found it surprising that Yahweh wasn’t entirely straightforward with Pharaoh here. He didn’t say, “Let My people go, that they may start a new life with Me in another land, free from your tyranny and oppression.” His initial demand was couched in much less far-reaching terms. He gave Pharaoh the opportunity to grant a simple request, one that would not have automatically spelled political suicide for the Egyptian leader: let these people take a holiday, a short break from their labors, so they can honor their God for a season. He didn’t ask Pharaoh to do anything particularly difficult or politically dangerous—convert to the Hebrews’ religion or give them the right to vote. Just let them take a break in honor of Yahweh.

God gave no hint that there was a monumental appointment with destiny awaiting them out there in the desert. He didn’t use the word *mo‘ed* to delineate this “feast” to which they had been called, for this would have been an indication that there was *significance* to the release of the slaves—making this something no rational political leader in Pharaoh’s position could have condoned, no matter how much good will he wanted to show. Rather, the verb Moses used for “hold a feast” was *hagag*, which means to celebrate a festival, to make a pilgrimage to a holy place for worship in a festive atmosphere—in short, to travel to the site of

a big party. Going to Woodstock in 1969 might have been described as *hagag*. Pharaoh *could* have agreed with this request. I can guarantee that Joseph's Pharaoh, four hundred years before this, would have said, "Go, enjoy yourselves. In fact, let me supply some wine and cattle to make your sojourn more enjoyable. And while you're there, please ask Yahweh your God to bless my kingdom." But the times had changed. Yahweh perceived the arrogant hardness of Pharaoh's heart, but He had to ask—He had to give Pharaoh the opportunity to do the right thing, even though He already knew how he would answer.

Egypt, of course, is a metaphor for the world, the place of our former bondage to sin. To this day, the world doesn't wish to release people to go and serve Yahweh, even temporarily. The world feels threatened by our freedom because of their strange mixture of jealousy, denial, fear, and pathological insecurity. They are afraid to be free themselves, so they cower in bondage, making what they can of a bad situation, going so far as to call it "good," or at least normal. *Religion* is tolerated, because it implies (and often personifies) a state of bondage in the guise of piety or faith, but they remain suspicious of anything that even hints that real liberty might be possible through sharing a familial relationship with God. Our freedom in Christ is a constant and uncomfortable reminder to them that they live—by their own choice—in slavery. So they do whatever they can to prevent our bodily escape, though we have already attained liberty in a spiritual sense. But Yahweh says, ever more forcefully as the Last Days approach, "**Let my people go.**"

- (822) *Recognize the holy convocations as Yahweh's. "Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: The feasts of Yahweh, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.'*" (Leviticus 23:1-2) These "feasts" (*mo'edim*—appointments) included the weekly Sabbath, seven annual "holy convocations" (*qodesh miqra'ey*), the Sabbatical year, and Jubilee, each of which was prophetic of some significant event or situation in Yahweh's plan of redemption. We will discuss these things in more detail in the following pages.

Christians today often brush off these appointments with God as mere "Jewish ritual," with no particular importance for them in a post-Calvary world. But this attitude is seriously flawed: Yahweh here declares that "These are *My* feasts." We thus ignore them to our own detriment. For generations after these instructions were given to Israel, only two of the seven annual *mo'edim* had any historical basis. To be sure, the object lessons inherent in these two (the initial Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread) marked a turning point, a national epiphany, in the life of Israel.

Before the exodus, they had been a rabble, a loosely organized assembly of Semitic clans with a common ancestral line, enslaved by their former hosts on the basis of biological prejudice and a lust for power. But after forty years under Moses' leadership in the wilderness, they emerged a nation, unified by one thing above all others—the recognition of Yahweh as the One true God. The first two *miqra'ey* gave them only a rough idea of what these special days on God's calendar were really all about—sacrifice leading to deliverance. Naturally, when they tried to assign historical precedents to the other five *mo'edim*, they obscured the real reason God had instituted them. Truth be told, the basis for *all* of these, even these first two, would be found in their prophetic nature, not their memorial significance. The events of the exodus, as momentous as they were for Israel, were only dress rehearsals for the spiritual drama that would be played out for the benefit of the whole world some fifteen centuries later on the hills of Jerusalem.

The events prophesied by the first four of Yahweh's seven annual *mo'edim* took place in 33 A.D. They are now in the history books (or would be, if historians really understood the world around them). From the way these four were fulfilled, we can confidently predict some things about the last three, those yet to be realized. First, they will be fulfilled on the specific calendar days mandated by scripture—the first, tenth, and fifteenth days of Tishri (the seventh month on the lunar Hebrew calendar, falling in September or October in the solar Gregorian system). Second, if the Levitical Law specifies a Sabbath celebration for a *miqra*, it will fall on a *natural* Sabbath (that is, Saturday) in the year of its definitive fulfillment. (This very thing happened in 33 A.D., when the Feast of Unleavened Bread fell on the Sabbath, as required, but Passover, the Feast of Firstfruits, and the Feast of Weeks did not.) This Sabbath circumstance is definitely the case for the seventh and final *miqra*, the Feast of Tabernacles, and it seems to be the case for the fifth *miqra* as well, the Feast of Trumpets, although I can't be dogmatic about that one.

Of more fundamental importance, each of the remaining three *mo'edim* can be expected to fulfill a divine promise of sweeping consequence, something on the same order of magnitude as the first four. To briefly recap these, (1) Passover marked the sacrifice Yahweh made to atone for the sins of mankind; (2) The Feast of Unleavened Bread predicted the removal of our sins from us; (3) The Feast of Firstfruits prophesied the resurrection of Yahshua from the dead, demonstrating His ability and intention to raise us who follow Him into a new life as well; and (4) the Feast of Weeks fulfilled Yahshua's John 14:17 promise (and David's Psalm 51:11 prayer) that whereas He had been *with* His disciples,

afterward He would be *in* them—manifested as the Spirit of God indwelling and empowering every believer. The final three *mo'edim* can be expected to deal with three other subjects every bit as vital to our eternal relationship with our Creator as these first four did.

- (823) *Rejoice in Yahweh's presence.* **“You shall rejoice before Yahweh your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite, who is within your gates since he has no portion nor inheritance with you.”**

(Deuteronomy 12:12) God is really *serious* when it comes to our rejoicing. The verb used here (*samach*) occurs 95 times in the Old Covenant Scriptures, the related adjective (*sameach*—joyful) 23 times, and the noun form (*simchah*—joy or gladness) occurs another 94. *Samach* means pretty much what you'd guess—to rejoice, be glad, delight in, be elated, to have a feeling or attitude of joy, mirth, or happiness—including, believe it or not, using alcohol (in moderation, of course) as a mood elevator. If that comes as a shock, you should be aware that the dour, grim-faced Christianity of popular myth—that Puritanical teetotaling killjoy attitude the world loves to hate and ridicule—is every bit as contrary to Yahweh's ideal as a self-destructive lifestyle of revelry and dissipation. God, in short, wants us to be genuinely happy. Who saw that one coming? In fact, as counterintuitive as it may seem, He actually promised to *punish* Israel's joyless, thankless attitude: **“Because you did not serve Yahweh your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom Yahweh will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you.”** (Deuteronomy 28:47-48) Notice that joy, service, and gratitude are inextricably linked.

The context of our precept is the double-edged sword of instruction concerning where to gather for worship in the Promised Land—and where not to. The Israelites were forbidden in no uncertain terms to adopt the religious practices of the Canaanites, to worship Yahweh in the same way, or even in the same places, that the indigenous pagans worshipped their gods. Rather, they were to periodically gather as a nation in one central location that would be selected by Yahweh Himself—invariably called “the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide”—eventually revealed to be the city of Jerusalem. They were *not* to “rejoice before Yahweh their God” in corporate worship anywhere other than this specified location, for this was where the Tabernacle, and later the Temple, were. That makes perfect sense, since the pattern of the Tabernacle is an elaborate pictorial metaphor for God's Plan for the redemption of Man. The point is that following Yahweh's plan would give someone ample reason for rejoicing, but do-it-yourself modes of religious

practice—however pleasurable, culturally stimulating, or effective in smothering a guilty conscience, would inevitably lead to death. They were therefore not cause for rejoicing, but for mourning.

And who was to rejoice before Yahweh? Not just the landowner, not just his family, but everyone—rich or poor, bond or free, male or female, those specially set-apart for God’s service, and plain, ordinary folk. In the same way, the joy of Yahweh’s salvation is to be a reality in the lives of every believer, not just “super-saints,” religious professionals, or believers who find themselves especially gifted in some way. The joy, after all, is not a result of our circumstances or status, but is derived from what has happened “at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide,” where the Tabernacle tells its eloquent and irresistible story: Yahshua’s sacrifice has atoned for our sins and cleansed our life so that we might enter the Holy Place, see the light of God’s love, taste of His provision, commune with Him, and ultimately enter His very presence as beloved children. If *that* doesn’t put a smile on your face, you’re not paying attention.

THE SABBATH

- (824) *Don’t light a fire on the Sabbath.* “**You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day.**” (Exodus 35:3) The rabbis immediately jumped from here to the idea that you couldn’t cook on the Sabbath because it was somebody’s usual work. That sounds reasonable enough until you factor in Yahweh’s instructions for the Passover in Exodus 12. The lamb was to be killed at twilight, when the sun was about to go down, only minutes before the Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was due to begin. It was then to be roasted—the whole thing, even the head and the entrails. Do the math: you can’t roast a whole lamb in a few minutes. It takes hours, which means that although the fire would have to have been *kindled* before the Sabbath began, the actual roasting process went on for some time into the night. The Paschal supper would have taken place sometime between the time the Lamb was ready to eat and when the Death Angel came (at “midnight”—verse 29).

Yahweh is very careful in His choice of words, and He doesn’t make dumb mistakes. The point is that there’s something else going on here, and we need to get to the bottom of it. Why did he not specifically prohibit cooking *per se*, but rather the kindling of a fire on the Sabbath day? Why did He say that this prohibition applied “throughout our dwellings,” that is, where we live? The answer is bound up in the symbols—what fire represents, and what the Sabbath predicts. Fire in scripture is that which

judges, i.e., separates the good from the worthless, purifies by melting, and proves by burning. The picture is that of the ore of precious metal being melted in fire, allowing the impurities to float to the top where they are skimmed off and discarded. It is a picture of the means by which we attain holiness, of the process of our being set apart from the worthless dross of our mortal existence. Our works are the issue. Gold, silver, and precious stones survive the fire's trial; wood, hay, and stubble do not.

The kindling of such a fire, then, is a picture of the Judge's authority, His prerogative to instigate the purification process. Thus we read in the Psalms, **"Therefore Yahweh heard this and was furious. So a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel, because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation."** (Psalm 78:22) Yahweh is the Judge: it is He alone who is worthy to kindle the fire. Why was Yahweh "furious?" Why did He feel it was necessary to "kindle a fire against Jacob?" It was because they "did not trust in His salvation." I'm afraid something's totally lost in the English here—something that's subtle enough in the Hebrew. The word translated "salvation" is (pronounced according to Strong's lexicon) Yâshuw`ah (יְשׁוּעָה), i.e., it sounds identical to the Messiah's name—not "Jesus," but *Yahshua*. Note further that Yahweh rested on the seventh day—the Sabbath rules are meant to teach us about Him. That means, if we follow this to its logical conclusion, that Yahweh's "fire kindling," His judgment and purging of Israel (not to mention the rest of humanity), will take place *before* the Sabbath—before the commencement of the Millennial reign of Yahshua the Messiah. That's why they call the Tribulation "the time of Jacob's trouble."

The Sabbath speaks of the timeframe and the identity of the One doing the judging. From the fall of Adam to the commencement of the Millennial reign of Christ, mankind will have six thousand years (the prophetic object of the six-day "work week") in which to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," as Paul puts it in Philippians 2:12. That is, while we are yet mortals, our job is to exercise faith with reverence, for as Yahshua said, **"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."** (John 6:29) For the time being, then, our works are like gold in the ground: God may have to process a ton of ore to extract an ounce of pure metal, but He's willing to do that. In the present world (our current "dwelling place"), though we try our best to live pure lives, our success is spotty and imperfect at best. But on the Sabbath—i.e., during the final Millennium—the gold of our lives that was refined in the fires of purification, kindled by Yahshua during God's "work week," will at last gleam for His glory, having been purged and separated from all our worldly impurities.

(825) *Trust Yahweh to provide what is needed for the Sabbath.* **“Yahweh said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.” (Exodus 16:4-5)** There are several important lessons to be learned from the manna in the wilderness. It is, in fact, the quintessential teaching tool for instructing us about how Yahweh provides for us, both materially and spiritually.

(1) Manna was unfamiliar and unexpected, but it filled the need to perfection. The word, loosely translated, means “What is it?” The children of Israel were not in a position to plant wheat or barley as they journeyed through the wilderness, so God provided an ongoing 40-year miracle—“bread from heaven” as it were, nutritious, tasty, and fresh every day. The only thing it “lacked” was variety, for **“The blessing of Yahweh makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it.”** (Proverbs 10:22) The manna He provided was ideal for its purpose. To add “variety” would have compromised it in some way, making it somehow less than perfect—like adding a hip-hop movement to a Bach concerto. Still, we read that the Israelites complained about the monochromatic nature of the diet Yahweh had given them. We today need to take the hint, and stifle the urge to grumble when God’s provision seems to be falling short. In reality, He always provides exactly what we need. But sometimes what we need *most* is a compelling reason to talk with our Father.

(2) The gift of manna was participatory. That is, Yahweh provided it, but the Israelites also had to *receive* it: they had to go out and harvest it, bring it back to their tents, and prepare it as they would any raw grain. For six days a week, there was work involved: gathering the manna, milling it, getting firewood, kindling a fire, cooking, and cleaning up. On the seventh day, however, God would provide no manna, and man’s involvement would be limited to enjoying what had *already* been provided by God or accomplished by their own efforts. In the same way, our mortal lives in this age are characterized by a partnership, a division of labor. Yahweh does His part, and we are to do ours: that is, receive what He has provided—gather and use the manna. It’s not that our works have any efficacy in effecting our salvation, but what we do in this life confirms what we believe and identifies who we trust—whether Yahweh or ourselves. As James put it, **“Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.... As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”** (James 2:17, 26) In the sabbatical age to come, our faith will give way to sight, and our works will serve only as confirmation that we did the right thing, and trusted the right God, in this life.

(3) There were choices involved in what to do with the manna. God provided only the raw materials. It was up to the Israelites to decide what to do with it. As with any grain, they could make it into cakes, wafers, flatbread, or leavened loaves. (As an old Keith Green song put it, they could make manna bagels, manna-cotti, or ba-manna bread.) The point for us is that we too have choices concerning what to do with what Yahweh provides for us. Using the ingredients Yahweh has provided, some of us cook up tasty and enjoyable dishes while others concoct dour and tasteless recipes. What makes the difference? Today His manna consists of **“all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us.”** (II Peter 1:3) Some of us seem to be interested only in the things that pertain to “life,” that is, our mortal circumstance, but not with “godliness,” or vice versa. But a recipe made with only half the ingredients isn’t going to taste right. Others try to gather their manna inside their tents or outside the camp—i.e., somewhere other than where God has provided it—which is “through the knowledge of Him who called us”—Yahshua. And then they wonder why the bread they’re baking turns out to be inedible.

(4) There was always just enough. An interesting phenomenon is reported in Exodus 16:16-18. The Israelites were instructed to harvest one “omer,” of manna, about half a gallon, per person per day. But as it turned out, if they gathered more than that, they wouldn’t have too much, and if they harvested too little, that would somehow turn out to be sufficient for their needs as well. God’s provision of what we need “for life and godliness” is like that: He gives us, as individuals, precisely what we need, no more and no less. Therefore, if you find yourself “gifted” in some specific way, whether materially or spiritually, it should be taken as an indication that Yahweh has a bigger than average job for you to do, and He’s supplying what you need for it up front. It could be money, or the capacity for empathy, or spiritual insight, or any number of things. Conversely, if you find yourself shortchanged in some area, rest assured that’s not where God has asked you to serve. In my own life, I’ve also observed that my areas of gifting shift over time: when I needed money to keep a growing horde of adopted kids in braces, orthopedic shoes, and Christian schools, God made sure I earned a good living; now that my kids are mostly grown and gone, I’m on a short leash financially, but I can see God’s truth more clearly than I ever could before. Ten years from now, it could be something else entirely. A believer’s life is one grand adventure.

(5) You couldn’t ordinarily keep manna leftovers. The Israelites found out the hard way that hoarding manna didn’t work. You couldn’t gather a double ration of manna today if you didn’t trust Yahweh to supply your needs tomorrow, because the stuff would go bad overnight and stink up

your tent. You had to use what Yahweh provided, when He provided it. Yahweh was teaching us to rely on Him day by day: each day's provision was sufficient for that day alone. He would still be there on the morrow with precisely what we needed for that new day. This was why Jeremiah could write during the darkest days of Judah's history, **"Through Yahweh's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness."** (Lamentations 3:22-23) Yahshua was teaching the same truth when He said, **"Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."** (Matthew 6:31-34) But then He turned around and instructed His people to gather and prepare two omers—twice the usual amount—on the day before the Sabbath. And this time it stayed fresh. Read on...

(6) Whatever God provided, He did it during the work week, not on the Sabbath. We should not overlook the fact that Yahweh provides *for* the Sabbath—not *on* the Sabbath. The pattern was established as far back as the creation account: **"Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made."** (Genesis 2:3) Our salvation, our reconciliation with Yahweh, was accomplished during His "work week." There is nothing else left to be done, nothing we can add to make His work more efficacious. Furthermore, if we wish to avail ourselves of God's provision, we must do it before the seventh day begins. That is, there's a deadline—literally. Fallen mankind will have only six thousand years to "work things out" in faith, for when the Messiah reigns on earth during the seventh millennium, man will instead "walk by sight" in the light of His physical, corporeal presence. For the time being, however, faith is required: **"Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."** (Hebrews 11:6) If we didn't believe Him during the first six "days," we can't expect to reap the rewards of faith on the seventh.

(7) The sixth-day provision of manna was said to be a test. If we believe God, we will gather and use the "manna" He's provided now, while it's still available, for He has told us in no uncertain terms that it won't always be there. Call me an alarmist, but look at the prophetic clock: it is now late afternoon on the sixth day. If you haven't yet gathered the manna you'll need to sustain you through the coming Sabbath, if you haven't harvested the "things that pertain to life and godliness" that

Yahweh has freely provided for you, then please, wake up and receive the gift while there's still time! Don't assume it will always be there waiting for you, for it won't. Yahshua said, as He was in the process of doing His part, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work." (John 9:4) That hour is almost upon us.

THE SABBATICAL YEAR

- (826) *Prosperity will result from obedience to Yahweh's precepts. "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts...You shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother. However, there will be no poor among you, since Yahweh will surely bless you in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess if only you listen obediently to the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today. For Yahweh your God will bless you just as He promised you; you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; you shall reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over you."* (Deuteronomy 15:1, 3-6. vs. 4-5: NASB) It's easy to lose the train of thought here. The context is the instruction concerning the Sabbatical year, in which "Yahweh's release" would *by law* free the poor from their bondage and debt. The point, however, is that if the Israelites as a people would "listen obediently to the voice of Yahweh," there would be virtually no debts to forgive, for there would be no poor among them, no hardship, no people living on the fringe of society struggling to get by. This is not a contradiction to the statements both Moses and Yahshua made, saying "The poor you will always have with you," for they both knew that Israel would not "carefully observe the commandments" that Moses was handing down. Poverty was a prophetic *fait accompli*. But it didn't have to be that way.

The lessons here go far beyond the prospect of temporal prosperity for theocratic Israel. The picture being painted is almost beyond human comprehension. Imagine a society finding itself with nothing to forgive. Not just monetary debt, but moral debt as well. If everyone—*everyone*—observed the Law of God (which in practice boils down to "Love Yahweh with your whole being" and "Love your neighbor as you do yourself"), then poverty and crime would disappear. War would be unheard of. Substance abuse, marital infidelity, murder, fraud, and vice would evaporate. Covetousness, dishonesty, and hidden self-serving agendas would become nonexistent. Government budgets would shrink to a tiny fraction of their present bloated reality, for they would no longer be tasked with coping with the aftereffects of sin (or, let's be honest, with the very implementation of iniquity, the institutionalization of wickedness).

Sounds like a pipe dream, you say? Maybe, but this very thing is prophesied to be the prevailing character of the coming Millennial Kingdom of Yahshua the Messiah. The “prosperity effect” of obedience to God’s precepts will be absolute in Israel, but will also be endemic throughout much of the earth for a thousand years. Needless to say, that is not the case today, as a whole different group of prophecies, predicting rebellion, apostasy, tribulation, and turmoil, is being played out on the world’s stage, and will continue to be until King Yahshua returns to take His throne. The contrast between the two worlds is like black and white, night and day. But the only real difference is whether or not we **“listen obediently to the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today.”**

PASSOVER

The first of Yahweh’s seven annual *mo’edim-miqra’ey* (appointments and convocations) was Passover. We may at first find it odd that the “Law” passages of the Torah offer little instruction concerning this appointment outside of reminding them what day it fell upon (see Precept #834). In its introduction in Exodus 12, however, the Israelites were told to perform a detailed dress rehearsal for an event that would prove to have both near and a far fulfillments. Moreover, they were told to perpetuate this rite in their future generations as a memorial of their emancipation. But Israel’s release from bondage in Egypt was not the essence of the convocation, nor its fundamental reason for being. The historical events defining the original Passover would prove to be, in and of themselves, only a picture, a prophecy, of what the day actually signified—mankind’s release from the bondage of sin through the sacrifice of Christ.

(827) *Kill the Passover lamb.* **“Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb.”** (Exodus 12:21) This is a detail worth noting: Yahweh would not slay the Passover lambs Himself, nor would Pharaoh or one of his false gods. Rather, the very people hoping to be protected by the shed blood of the lambs would have to sacrifice these innocent creatures—lambs who had been living among them like pets for the previous four days, having been specifically selected from among the flock for this “honor.” This act was designed to be personal, purposeful, and painful (not to mention prophetic). The guiltless Passover lamb, of course, was the prototype for the Messianic sacrifice to come: as John the Baptist would put it, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

An offering, by definition, is made by one who wishes to have an effect on—to influence, honor, or appease—someone whom they perceive is greater than themselves in some way. Thus we observe that the Passover lamb was more than just a meal. It was an *offering*, one whose purpose (as directed by Yahweh) was to demonstrate, to bear witness, that the household shielded by its blood was under His protection—because they had requested it. The same principles are true of the Passover lamb’s antitype. For Yahshua’s death to be efficacious in the removal of our sin, Yahweh (though He *provided* the Lamb) couldn’t offer Him up as a sacrifice (that is, it would not have solved our problem if Yahshua had committed suicide), for an offering must be made by the lesser to the greater. Besides, Yahweh had no shortcomings for which to atone. Nor could Satan (whose sins were ubiquitous) offer Him up, for Yahweh’s purpose was not to atone for the rebellion of our adversary, but rather for the sins of man. God therefore withheld His authority: Satan couldn’t touch Yahshua. That left but one possible agent: us, for our sins had separated us from our Maker. We were the ones in need. The atonement was for us. And the death kept at bay by the Lamb’s blood was our own. So we—mankind—would have to kill the Passover Lamb. And we did.

It’s incredibly ironic, if you think about it. The one thing we did right—that is, in accordance with the Torah—was the worst crime imaginable: killing the innocent Passover Lamb, Yahshua. Other, lesser crimes had already condemned us, of course. But Yahweh arranged it so that our blackest deed would shine the brightest light on our need for salvation, at the same time providing the mechanism for our redemption. That’s why Yahshua prayed, **“Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”** (Luke 23:34)

And you thought God was making this stuff up as He went along.

- (828) *Apply the blood of the Passover sacrifice to the doorway of your home. “They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it.”* (Exodus 12:7) **“And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin.”** (Exodus 12:22) The initial “celebration” of Passover would be the last time they could have observed it *as originally instructed* for the next forty years, for the tents of their wilderness wanderings had no doorposts upon which to apply the blood of the sacrifice. (They did, however, observe a modified form of the feast in the wilderness: see Numbers 9:2-3.) When Yahweh seems to be telling us to do something that’s physically impossible, it should be our first clue that the symbol it represents is what He really wants us to pay attention to.

We have seen that the Lamb ultimately represents Yahshua. What, then, do the “doorposts” and “lintel” of our house represent? It’s the cross of Christ, upon which “some of the blood” of the Lamb of God would be applied as He was sacrificed. It’s interesting that Moses didn’t say, “the doorframe,” but broke it down into its components, vertical and horizontal. Why? Because the Greek word we translate “cross” (*stauros*) doesn’t actually mean a “cross” (i.e., a tee-shaped implement) but rather an “upright stake or pole.” It therefore corresponds to each upright “doorpost,” and is analogous to the pole upon which Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, as Yahshua Himself pointed out in John 3:14. The “lintel,” then, would mirror what the Latins called the “*patibulum*,” the crosspiece hoisted to the top of the *stauros*, upon which the crucifixion victim’s arms would be outstretched. In the Exodus prototype, these two elements comprised the doorway to the Passover celebrant’s home; in the Calvary antitype, they are also a portal, this time to his permanent home—an eternal dwelling place in the presence of the Almighty.

The doorpost and *stauros* speak of the “vertical” connection, the reconciliation that is being established between man and God through Christ’s sacrifice. In contrast, the lintel and *patibulum* refer to the “horizontal” relationship between people of faith that is created through the same Selfless act—the formation of the *ekklesia* (the called-out assembly) of Yahshua the Messiah. Both relationships require the shedding of innocent blood, applied to the doorway that leads to where we live.

- (829) *Do not linger over the Passover meal. “And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is Yahweh’s Passover.”* (Exodus 12:11) The Passover meal wasn’t designed to be a particularly pleasurable, relaxed, or joyful experience, unlike some of the other *miqra’ey* on Yahweh’s calendar. The Israelites were to eat in haste, in a spirit of expectation and anticipation, prepared to bolt for the door on a moment’s notice like a sprinter on the starting blocks. It’s kind of funny, if you think about it. After four long centuries in bondage, it came down to one night of antsy watchfulness for the Israelites, after which they’d be shot out of Egypt like a human cannonball. Yahweh apparently likes to build the tension to the breaking point before He lets events unfold, knowing that when they do, they’ll fairly *explode* into place (a lesson that should not be lost on today’s prophetically pregnant world).

The watchfulness enjoined here is reminiscent of how we present-day believers are directed to live our lives. As Yahshua told His disciples,

“Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is [that is, the time of His return for them]. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” (Mark 13:33-37) We, too, it seems, are being told to keep “a belt on our waist, our sandals on our feet, and our staff in our hand,” in a constant state of readiness to leave this world behind at the drop of a hat. That’s going to be really hard to do if we’re “invested” in the things of this mortal life. Yes, as in the Passover meal, we can eat our lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs as time permits, but we aren’t to get too comfortable: we must be alert, ready to go the moment Yahshua calls us.

- (830) *Remain where God says it’s safe.* **“And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning.”** (Exodus 12:22) Another admonition for the night of the Passover feast—actually now (since the sun had set) the wee hours of the first day of the *miqra* of Unleavened Bread: the Israelites were not to go wandering around out of doors. They were to stay within the house whose doorposts and lintel had been sprinkled with the blood of the lamb. Why? Because outside was where Yahweh’s Angel of Death would be busy implementing His wrath. It was not enough merely to be an Israelite, for biological serendipity was not the criterion for receiving God’s protection. Indeed, there were a fair number of Egyptians (later referred to as the “mixed multitude”) who determined to heed Yahweh’s warning and stay indoors behind the blood-stained portal with their Israelite neighbors that night. One’s shelter and protection was based on Who he believed, not who his ancestor was.

In the same way, we today are vulnerable to wrath if we scoff at Yahweh’s warning and walk about in the darkness outside, unprotected by the blood of Yahshua sprinkled on Calvary’s upright stake and upon the lintel of fellowship. Consider the geography of the thing: the Israelites were in Egypt—symbolically, “in the world.” Yahweh was declaring their blood-spattered homes to be “embassies,” so to speak—a patch of heavenly soil set in the midst of a foreign country. We who dwell in this world under the embassy’s auspices possess diplomatic immunity, even though our respective nations are engaged in a cold war. Our Ambassador, of course, is Yahshua, who represents His “nation,” the Kingdom of Heaven, before the world. And we, the embassy staff, enjoy all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities associated with being citizens of the Kingdom. But our diplomatic protection in this foreign land is only as real

as our citizenship. If we are pretenders, if we are traveling through life on a false passport, the protection we assume to be ours is an illusion.

- (831) *Trust the blood of the Passover Lamb to save you.* “I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am Yahweh. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 12:12-13) “For Yahweh will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, Yahweh will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you.” (Exodus 12:23) There is a tacit precept latent in these verses: “You shall trust the blood of the Lamb to afford protection from the Destroyer.” It was a simple exercise in obedience based on evidence (in truth, the only kind of obedience Yahweh ever asks of us). The Israelites (not to mention the Egyptians) had seen Yahweh keep His word nine times by this point. Each promised plague had been worse than the last, each one calculated to destroy the reputation of one of Egypt’s deities. Their chief deity, the sun “god” Ra, had been the latest to fall, and still Pharaoh had hardened his heart. I get the feeling that the Egyptian king didn’t really believe in his nation’s pantheon anyway—religion was merely a convenient way to keep the masses subservient, obedient, and paying taxes. The real power, as far as Pharaoh was concerned, lay in the royal bloodline. On some level, he claimed the status of “deity” for himself, a position of ultimate lordship that would pass to his firstborn son and heir when he died. So Yahweh set about to dethrone the tenth and most tangible of Egypt’s false gods.

A clear choice was presented. Depending upon whether or not the people obeyed Yahweh in faith, they would experience one of two things: either the Destroyer would pass *through* their life, or he would pass *over* it. One might thus assume that the blood had been intended as a sign for the Destroyer, so he’d know which houses to pass over—to exempt it from wrath. But here Yahweh says that the “blood shall be a sign *for you*,” that is, for the Israelite believers. Since they weren’t supposed to be wandering around outside their dwellings during Passover, the only time they’d even *see* the blood was when they were applying it to the doorposts and lintels. At this point, the only sign they’d be able to see was their own faith. They’d done something totally illogical simply because their God had told them to: they trusted Him, even though they didn’t understand what He was doing, or how.

But fast forward fifteen hundred years or so to the definitive fulfillment of the Passover prophecy, and the intended train of thought becomes clear. (1) The Passover Lamb was to enter the Israelite “household” on the 10th day of Nisan (Exodus 12:3). Yahshua’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem took place on that very day, March 28, 33 A.D., fulfilling the Daniel 9:25 prophecy in the process. (2) The Jews were to slay the Lamb on the 14th of Nisan, which they did right on schedule by manipulating the Roman Procurator, Pilate, into crucifying the Lamb of God. (3) The Lamb’s blood was to be applied to the doorposts and lintels of Israel. These turned out to be the *stauros* and *patibulum* of a cruel Roman cross. (4) The blood was to be applied with hyssop, the same implement used to sprinkle the waters of purification in the ordinance of the “red heifer” (see Mitzvot #574-576), required for cleansing in the event of one’s contact with death (something Passover brings into razor sharp focus). Again, the sacrifice of Yahshua fulfills the Torah’s requirements perfectly. (5) The Israelites were then instructed to stay indoors, remain watchful, and trust the blood they themselves had spilled to be efficacious in protecting them from the wrath of God.

Since the blood was to be a sign for *them*, not for the death angel, it had to have far-reaching significance beyond the events of that first night. If it didn’t point directly to Yahshua’s sacrifice on Calvary—ultimately offering shelter for the entire world when the Destroyer would eventually pass through—then either Yahweh is a liar, or some other fulfillment is forthcoming. Israel *is required* to figure out what the definitive *miqra* of Passover signifies. Search all you want: history offers no suitable alternative explanation to Yahshua’s sacrifice.

- (832) *Do not forget what Yahweh has done for you. “And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which Yahweh will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ that you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice of Yahweh, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.’”* (Exodus 12:24-27) I have no axe to grind with people who wish to commemorate their nation’s history. But Jews today who insist that Passover has absolutely no significance other than God killing a few Egyptians so they could escape from slavery thirty-five hundred years ago just aren’t thinking clearly. Sure, it was a big deal at the time, and one might be inclined to see that bloody night as an earthshaking event to this very day—if it had led to permanent greatness for this nation of runaway slaves. But it didn’t. In reality, the times of Israel’s national prominence have been few and far between. In all of

Israel's long and turbulent history, they have enjoyed a combined total of *maybe* a hundred years of real glory—and none of it is directly attributable to this incident. In point of fact, it's a miracle of Biblical proportions that the nation of Israel even exists today—in any form. When asked to “observe this thing as an ordinance forever,” any thinking Jew could ask, quite reasonably, “Why? What have You done for us lately?”

The only possible explanation is that Passover *does* have significance beyond God's deadly one night stand in Egypt on behalf of Israel. Yahweh *has* done great things for them—and us—lately. It's easy to look at the prescribed response, “**It is the Passover sacrifice of Yahweh, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households,**” and conclude that the *Egyptians* were Yahweh's sacrifice. But actually, the innocent lambs (prophetic of *The Innocent Lamb*) were “the Passover sacrifice of Yahweh.” It was their blood that kept the Destroyer at bay. The Egyptians were little more than collateral damage—a physical picture of a spiritual principle, namely that whatever is not under Yahweh's protection cannot long survive. That's why observant Jews through the ages have slain and eaten lambs, not Egyptians, on Passover.

- (833) *Salvation is achieved the same way for both Jews and gentiles. “If a stranger dwells among you, and would keep Yahweh's Passover, he must do so according to the rite of the Passover and according to its ceremony; you shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger and the native of the land.”* (Numbers 9:14) The message here is virtually identical to that of Precept #806 in the previous chapter. Here the principle is specifically applied to Yahweh's Passover. The point, here as there, is that Yahweh's ordained rites have significance beyond Israel; they bear consequence that is as universal as it is fundamental: we are all saved by the same thing, if we are saved at all.

Ignorance (or denial) of this precept has invariably led to two mirror-image heresies. The first says that the gentile “strangers” must become practicing Jews before they can enter the Kingdom of Heaven: their males must be circumcised, the signs of the Torah (such as the wearing of the *tsitzit*) must be observed, the dietary laws must be obeyed, and so forth. Acts 15 effectively dealt with that one, though its practitioners persist to this day, undaunted by scripture and reason.

The converse heresy is that Israel's heritage and function—and indeed, the Torah itself—has been eclipsed by church tradition. Though the *ekklesia* was populated almost exclusively by Jews in its early years, the treacherous triumph of Akiba's rabbinical system over Israel's priesthood in the first few decades of the second century effectively killed the church

in Israel, driving it so far underground it took the better part of two millennia to resurface. The animosity became a mutual phenomenon, evidenced by the precepts laid down by the Council of Laodicea in 364. A few entries will serve to demonstrate this:

Canon 29: “Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath [Saturday], but must work on that day, rather honoring the Lord’s Day [Sunday]; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.” I beg to differ: Yahweh never set apart Sunday as a day of rest, but specified the Sabbath as His weekly *miqra*, or convocation, and He never changed that. The “church” doesn’t have the authority to refute Yahweh, nor does it have the right to pass off human tradition as God’s Word. It’s folly to even try.

Canon 37: “It is not lawful to receive portions sent from the feasts of Jews or heretics, nor to feast together with them.” This, of course, contains a direct contradiction to our present Precept. Between the resurrection of Yahshua and His Millennial Kingdom, Jewish and gentile believers were supposed to be branches grafted into the same Vine.

Canon 38: “It is not lawful to receive unleavened bread from the Jews, nor to be partakers of their impiety.” By this time, the church leaders had defined “impiety” as anything they didn’t agree with, even if Yahweh Himself had ordained it. Not to be outdone, the rabbis had ransacked Judaism, leaving nothing *but* “impiety” in their wake. But God’s Word had decreed “one ordinance, both for the stranger and the native of the land.” That ordinance was Christ.

- (834) *Observe Passover on the day specified by Yahweh. “On the fourteenth day of the first month is the Passover of Yahweh.”* (Numbers 28:16) We’re used to national holidays where the actual *date* doesn’t really matter all that much. I mean, Independence Day in the U.S. may fall officially on the fourth of July, but if the big day falls on a Sunday, everybody is going to take off Monday the fifth instead, I guarantee it. The precise date of Passover, however, is of crucial importance—as are the dates of each of the seven annual *mo’edim* of Yahweh. Not only could it have been a fatal error if you’d killed the Passover lamb a day late or a day early—leaving your firstborn child vulnerable to the Destroyer—Passover and all of the other *miqra’ey* were prophecies of significant events that would transpire in future history, on the very days of their scriptural mandate. In the case of this first *miqra*, Passover (the 14th day of Nisan, which falls in the spring, in March or April on our Gregorian calendars) was commonly referred to as the Day of Preparation, because the actual meal (that of *Chag Matzah*, the Feast of Unleavened Bread) was eaten after sunset, technically the start

of the new “day.” And John 19:31 reports that Yahshua was indeed crucified on this Day of Preparation—Passover, the day before the Sabbath. Undoubtedly, this is why Yahweh stressed only the date, the “appointed time”—the fourteenth day of Nisan—here in Numbers 28, in Leviticus 23:5, in Numbers 9:2-3, and in Deuteronomy 16:1, hardly mentioning what the Israelite celebrants were supposed to do.

Are these dates still important? Yes, aside from the historical confirmation of Yahweh’s Word in the fulfillment of the first four *miqra’ey*. That’s because the last three of these seven milestones are still in our future. When their fulfillments are due on God’s calendar, they will come about on the very days specified in the Torah, just as the first four did. The next one on His schedule is the Feast of Trumpets, *Yom Teruah*, which I’m convinced is prophetic of the rapture of the church. It will fall on the first day Tishri (in our September or October) in some future year. Next on the list is the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippurim*, on the 10th of Tishri—indicative of the day the returning King Yahshua will be recognized and hailed as the Messiah by Israel (see Zechariah 12:10-11). Last on the schedule of holy appointments is the Feast of Tabernacles, prophetic of the day when Yahshua will begin His earthly thousand-year reign upon the earth—God “camping out” with men for the duration of the fulfillment of another of Yahweh’s “schedule” metaphors, the Sabbath Day—the last of seven millennia delineating the course of Spirit-enabled man upon the earth from Adam onward.

- (835) *Congregate in the place chosen by Yahweh when observing Passover.* **“Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to Yahweh your God, for in the month of Abib Yahweh your God brought you out of Egypt by night. Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to Yahweh your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where Yahweh chooses to put His name.”** (Deuteronomy 16:1-2) Every spring, Passover Seders are celebrated by observant Jews all over the world, in apparent compliance with this passage. They eat their lamb and unleavened bread and bitter herbs (along with a wide variety of rabbinical “condiments” that weren’t even mentioned in scripture) and in so doing, they think they are following the Torah. But if we read on for a few more verses, we encounter a startling clarification: **“You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates which Yahweh your God gives you; but at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt. And you shall roast and eat it in the place which Yahweh your God chooses, and in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents.”** (Deuteronomy 16:5-7) That’s right. Once the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they were forbidden to sacrifice the Passover lambs

anywhere but where the Tabernacle was—“the place where Yahweh chooses to make His name abide.” That means that today, according to the plain reading of the Torah, Passover Seders held anywhere but Jerusalem are illegal!

Once again, we are faced with a conundrum. By evicting Israel from the Promised Land because of their sins—not once, but twice—did Yahweh make it impossible to do what He required them to do? Has He callously “written off” entire generations of Jews, simply because they didn’t have access to their ancestral homeland—in effect damning them for the sins of their fathers? It’s roughly the same problem we ran into when we realized that they haven’t had the ark of the Covenant and its mercy seat with which to carry out the rites of the Day of Atonement since before the Babylonians destroyed Solomon’s Temple in 586 B.C.—meaning that if the Torah doesn’t point toward something greater, if it isn’t symbolic of a more comprehensive reality, then their sins have accumulated without atonement or forgiveness for the last twenty-six hundred years! Yahweh hasn’t *forced* Israel to recognize Yahshua as the fulfillment of these two prophetic types (and hundreds of others), of course. But He has placed Him firmly in the “strongly suggested” category. The Jews’ only remotely logical alternatives—the self-serving prevarications of rabbinical Judaism and mindless retreat into atheism—leave much to be desired (if you ask me).

On the other hand, if Yahshua actually was (and is) the Messiah, then a whole different paradigm is in play. “The place where Yahweh chooses to make His name abide” is in reality the hearts of Spirit-indwelled believers. (Did not Paul remind us that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit? And is not the temple God’s picture of His plan for our redemption and reconciliation?) Passover is “kept” there—in our hearts—through our recognition, acceptance of, and trust in the sacrifice of Yahshua on Calvary’s cross, for He is indeed “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

The second *miqra* on Yahweh’s calendar is inextricably linked with the first—so much so that in common Jewish practice and parlance, they are seen as virtually the same thing. It’s only natural: the lamb that was slain on the afternoon of Passover was eaten after sundown, that is, technically several hours into the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The fire that was kindled during the first *miqra* was used to roast the lamb on the second. The leaven or yeast that was removed from every Israelite home on *Pesach* was the very thing characterized and defined

Chag Matzah by its absence. One day could not be observed without the other, and they were, for all intents and purposes, seen and celebrated as one holiday.

But Yahweh was very careful to separate them in His instructions, to call them by different names and place them on different dates—though the second followed immediately on the heels of the first. It behooves us to ask why. If these days were purely memorial—if they spoke only of the events surrounding the exodus—then there would be no reason to distinguish them. But if they were symbolic of separate concepts, prophetic of different events that would prove crucial to God’s plan for our redemption, then we need to carefully consider what these things might be. We have already observed that the crucifixion of Yahshua took place on the 14th of Nisan, Passover, in the year 33—His death occurred at the very time the paschal lambs were being slain. This of course is a dead giveaway (if you’ll pardon the all-too-literal expression) to Christians that Yahshua’s sacrifice was the very thing the Passover symbolically pointed toward. Indeed, recognition of this fact is what most fundamentally separates Christianity from Judaism. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, then, symbolizes a different facet of Yahweh’s plan. Precisely what that is will become apparent in the next few Precepts.

(836) *Observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the day specified by Yahweh. “On the fifteenth day of this month [the first month, Abib/Nisan] is the feast; unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work.”* (Numbers 28:17-18) The day after the Nisan 14 Passover, a seven-day festival (see Precept #838) was to begin. We are reminded that the first day of this *mo’ed* was to be a *qodesh miqra*, a holy convocation—and a Sabbath: no customary work was to be done. (We find this literally the case in the crucifixion year, 33 A.D., when Nisan 15 fell on a Saturday, the natural Sabbath.) And indeed, when the sun heralding the Sabbath fell below the horizon, the work of our redemption had been completed. The sacrifice had been made, the fires of judgment had been kindled, and Yahshua had declared, “It is finished.”

Something else had been finished as well. The leaven—all of it—had been removed from the household of faith. That is, our sin (which is what leaven represents) had been physically taken away, if we would but trust in Yahshua’s finished work. These things—the Sabbath and the removal of leaven—are related. With both images, the picture of God’s having already done the work of removing the sin from our lives is the central theme. If we fail to accept that Yahweh has removed our sin—*past tense*—we are faced with the prospect of doing it ourselves (something that has proved impossible for everyone who’s ever tried). And if we

refuse to “rest” in Yahshua’s finished work, represented by the Sabbath, we once again will be faced with a never-ending and ultimately impossible task: working to achieve reconciliation with God on our own merits.

So whereas Passover explained the means by which Yahweh would redeem us, the Feast of Unleavened Bread reveals that He has actually accomplished His mission—and that we may now rest in the assurance of our salvation: our sin has been removed from our lives. What was Yahshua doing on this day in 33? His body rested from its labors in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. His soul meanwhile, made alive by the Spirit of God, “**went and preached to the [antediluvian] spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient,**” as we’re informed in I Peter 3:19-20. That is, He did nothing more to secure *our* release from sin, for everything that could be done, had been done.

- (837) *Present an offering to Yahweh on the Feast of Unleavened Bread. “You shall present an offering made by fire as a burnt offering to Yahweh: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year. Be sure they are without blemish. Their grain offering shall be of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah you shall offer for a bull, and two-tenths for a ram; you shall offer one-tenth of an ephah for each of the seven lambs; also one goat as a sin offering, to make atonement for you. You shall offer these besides the burnt offering of the morning, which is for a regular burnt offering.”* (Numbers 28:19-23) Though in a class by itself, the Passover Lamb wasn’t the only sacrifice specified for the spring *miqra’ey*. Here, still in the context of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we see an assortment of “burnt offerings,” or *olah*, which, if you’ll recall, were not to be eaten by the priests or the worshippers, but were to be wholly consumed in the flames of the altar, indicating their dedication to Yahweh. Let us break down the list and review what each type of sacrifice signified in the liturgy of Israel.

First were two young bulls. Bulls, you’ll recall, represent false teaching, the influence and error of the world’s agenda. At first, I was puzzled as to why Yahweh would specify two of them. Indeed, if these instructions were for Israel’s edification only, this would make no sense. But Yahweh knew that eventually there would be two groups who called upon His name (or *should have*), Israel and the *ekklesia* of Yahshua, and both of them would make ruinous mistakes, foster damnable heresies, and embrace error. Not the same mistakes, mind you: Israel’s blunder would consist most fundamentally of its rejection of their Messiah; the church’s most disastrous misstep would be its propensity to incorporate pagan worship practices and attitudes. Both would display a tendency to ignore what Yahweh had told them and substitute their own manmade traditions

in place of His Word in their daily walk. The close familial relationship He wished to share with them both would all too often be cast aside in favor of mindless religion. The parent-child bond of love He desired to foster between us would be twisted by us into a sad caricature: we would habitually respond to our Heavenly Father either with arrogant pride or obsequious obeisance. Fortunately, both permutations of this “bull” are being consigned to the flame. Both Israel and the Church will be, in their own way, purged of their sacrilege.

The ram (a mature male sheep with horns) represents the Messiah, with special emphasis being placed on His authority, His right to rule. He is the Lamb of God who has been qualified, so to speak, by laying down His life for His people. This ram is a precursor of the honored Lamb in the heavenly scene recorded by John: **“Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!’ And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: ‘Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!”** (Revelation 5:11-13)

Then there were seven yearling lambs, which again represent Yahshua the Messiah, but this time emphasizing the totality of His innocence: their number, seven, speaks of completion and perfection, and they are said to be “without blemish.” All of these *olah* sacrifices are accompanied with fine flour. This flour (which speaks of God’s provision for us in this life) is grain from which the worthless, inedible husks have been removed through a milling process that can only be described as “tribulation.” The flour is permeated with olive oil, symbolic of the Holy Spirit. So ask yourself: for whom does God provide in this life, refining them through trials to become pure and undefiled, filling them with His Spirit? *Us!* We believers accompany our Messiah as the fine flour accompanies the lambs.

Finally, a goat is offered. The symbolism is explained for us right in the text: **“as a sin offering, to make atonement for you.”** Note that only one goat is offered, as if to say it’s not so much our *sins* being atoned for—the individual acts of less-than-perfect behavior that plague our days. Rather it’s our *sin*—the very concept of our failure before God. All of this is to be offered up as part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. These things are the sum total of what it means to have the “leaven” removed from our lives.

- (838) *Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days.* “In this manner you shall offer the food of the offering made by fire daily for seven days, as a sweet aroma to Yahweh; it shall be offered besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering. And on the seventh day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work.” (Numbers 28:24-25) The sacrifices that were made on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, listed in the previous precept, were to be repeated every day for the duration of the festival—seven days in all. Both the first day and the seventh day were designated Sabbaths—days in which no one was to do their regular jobs. We should contrast this with the arrangement we’ll see concerning the final *miqra*, the Feast of Tabernacles, where another Sabbath was tacked onto the end as well (see Precept #861). But there it was to fall upon the *eighth* day, not the seventh as is the case here. The symbol is different because the reality it represents is different.

As always, seven is the number indicating completion or perfection. Bearing in mind what each sacrifice meant—the two bulls, the ram, the seven lambs, the fine flour with oil, and the goat—it is clear that Yahweh wants us to understand that Yahshua’s sacrifice would be complete, perfect in every way for its intended purpose—to remove our sin from us so our fellowship with God could be restored. By declaring both the first and last days of the festival to be Sabbaths, Yahweh is telling us, in so many words, “From beginning to end, My grace is sufficient for you.” Or, as the risen Yahshua put it, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.” Then, as if to declare Himself the very personification of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the bridge between Passover and the Feast of Firstfruits, He explained, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.” (Revelation 1:17-18)

Something else worth noting: these sacrifices—made by man in recognition of God’s awesome accomplishments—are pleasing to Yahweh. They are His “food,” a “sweet aroma” to Him. As odd as it may sound (especially if we’ve been raised in an atmosphere of dour, works-based religious repression) God actually *enjoys* it when we acknowledge what He’s done for us. Like any father, he loves it when His children jump up into His lap, hug Him, and thank Him for being their Daddy. You know it’s true: moments like that make all the grief and toil worth it.

- (839) *Assemble before Yahweh on the seventh day of the feast.* “Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a sacred assembly to Yahweh your God. You shall do no work on it.” (Deuteronomy 16:8) A slightly re-phrased repetition of the same thought is found here in Deuteronomy, this time with a reminder that only unleavened bread—a symbol of the life

Yahweh provides, free from corruption—was to be eaten for the whole week. The concept of the *godesh miqra*—a holy convocation—is reintroduced here, but a different Hebrew word is used. “Sacred assembly” (“solemn,” in some translations) is the Hebrew noun *asarah*, which is derived, oddly enough, from the verb *asar*, meaning to hold back, restrain, or govern. The idea is that on this Sabbath, we are to restrain ourselves from working—from usurping Yahweh’s authority by attempting to attain a sinless state through our own efforts—presumably because it can’t be done. Being “governed” by God’s methods thus gathers us into a sacred, solemn assembly of like-minded believers, trusting in the finished work of Yahshua, as represented by the sacrifices of the *miqra*.

FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS

We discussed certain aspects of the Feast of Firstfruits in Chapter 13 of Volume One of *The Owner’s Manual*, in Mitzvot #517-#520, and again in Mitzvah #552. There we observed that Maimonides was fixated on what grain offerings must be made, how much to bring, when to do this, and in what order. It totally escaped him that without a tabernacle or temple or priesthood, none of what he said was legally possible. Once again, we are faced with the prospect that if Yahweh didn’t have something more important in mind when He instituted these appointments, if they were not symbolic of some great and fundamental truth affecting the destiny of the entire human race, then His instruction concerning them (along with the bulk of the Torah) devolves into what looks like a silly, pointless exercise in which God delights in seeing an entire race of people chase their collective tail—endeavoring to do the impossible in order to appease the unreasonable. In other words, the very idea is nonsense.

(840) *Observe the Feast of Firstfruits on the day specified by Yahweh. “Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before Yahweh, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.’”* (Leviticus 23:9-11) Even though the third *miqra* on Yahweh’s schedule wasn’t memorial of anything related to the exodus, and even though there was no overt connection between it and the first two *mo’edim*, the Feast of Firstfruits (also known as *Bikurim*) followed the initial Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread by only one day, making its scripturally mandated date the 16th of Nisan. This placed it *within* the seven-day observance of Unleavened Bread—making it part of the process

by which our sin is shown to be removed from our lives, and at the same time indicative of something entirely unique in God's plan.

Believers in Yahshua, of course, immediately recognize the significance of the timing: the day after the specified Sabbath marked the resurrection of Christ from the tomb—Sunday, Nisan 16 (April 3), 33 A.D. Our entire faith hinges on the reality of this one act: the fulfillment of the Feast of Firstfruits in the resurrection of Yahshua. It's not that it's any more important than His substitutionary death (predicted by Passover) or the fact of His having removed our sin from us forever (prophesied by the Feast of Unleavened Bread). But by conquering physical death, Yahshua proved His deity and His worthiness to be the propitiation—the One who can legitimately atone—for our sin. After all, men die because they sin. It's a universal fact of our nature. Only One who was sinless—who was in fact God incarnate—could presume to die to provide a ransom for the ruined life of someone else. If He weren't sinless, He'd be paying for His own sins, leaving the rest of us right back where we started—lost.

It isn't immediately apparent, however, how the resurrection of Yahshua meshes with the imagery set forth in the *miqra* of Firstfruits. Let's walk through it. You begin with grain, which Yahweh has caused to grow out of the dust for our benefit and nourishment. This grain is no longer growing in the field (that is, alive and walking among us) but has rather been cut down and bound by men: it's a sheaf. It is the intention of God and Man alike that the grain be used to make the bread of life, but Yahweh asks us to do something first: bring it to the priest (he whose function it is to communicate with God on our behalf), who is then to wave the sheaf before Yahweh as acknowledgment that He is the source of this blessing, the One worthy of our thankful praise.

This "sheaf" in this illustration is Yahshua, cut down by men for the benefit of men (on Passover). The "priest" is also Yahshua—He who ultimately represents mankind before Yahweh. And in a remarkable plot twist, Yahweh—the God to Whom we owe our thanks—is *also* Yahshua, voluntarily bereft of several dimensions and clothed in mortal human flesh. (I guess it's true: sometimes if you want something done right, you've got to do it Yourself.) Thus the sheaf, when lifted into the air before Yahweh, is a picture of the resurrection.

Moses notes that the sheaf will be "accepted by Yahweh on *your* behalf," that is, on behalf of—for the benefit of—those who brought it to the priest in thanksgiving to God. Logically then, if we do not thank God for the bounty He has provided (ultimately, our salvation) the sacrifice of Yahshua will *not* be "accepted by Yahweh on our behalf." In other words,

though the sheaf has been cut down, its benefit to us depends upon our willingness to accept it with thanksgiving and acknowledge its Source. After all, the Israelites (as we saw in Leviticus 23:14, Mitzvot #518-520) were forbidden to do anything with the grain until it had been presented before Yahweh as the firstfruits offering. Christ's death avails us nothing as a mere "historical event." This is personal.

And notice something else: the sheaf (Yahshua) is not all the grain there is. There is a whole field out there waiting to be harvested. Yahshua is not just the "fruit," but the *firstfruit*. The harvest to come will be comprised of grain that is like that first sheaf—it has the same sort of spiritual DNA, if you will. We are the same kind of organism—children of Yahweh—brothers and sisters of the Son of God. There are other kinds of plants out there in the world, of course, but they are not the same "species" as Yahshua and His followers. They may even look somewhat similar, but upon close examination, it becomes evident that there is nothing of value there—you can't make "bread" out of them that will spiritually nourish the world. Some of these plants are merely worthless, while some are poisonous, but none of them will participate in the harvest. Oh, they'll be cut down at the end of the age all right, but they won't be gathered into God's "barn." So the Feast of Firstfruits, between the lines, predicts a coming harvest of believers. As we shall see in a little while, the harvest itself is commemorated by another of Yahweh's seven *mo'ed-miqra'ey*.

- (841) *Present an offering to Yahweh on the Feast of Firstfruits. "You shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to Yahweh. Its grain offering shall be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to Yahweh, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin."* (Leviticus 23:12-13) As we saw in Precept #837, several symbolically significant animals from the flocks and herds of Israel were to be sacrificed as burnt offerings on each day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Since the Feast of Firstfruits falls on the second of those seven days, you might expect the offerings of Unleavened Bread to serve for both celebrations. But here we see that in addition to the bulls, rams, lambs, and goats of *Chag Matzah*, a separate burnt offering was to be made on Firstfruits, *Bikurim*. Once again, we see that Yahweh wants us to keep them separate in our minds, for they predict different things.

The special Firstfruits offerings were to be performed at the same time the sheaf of grain was being waved before Yahweh, indicating that the two things are related—indeed, the sacrifice of the lamb is the key to the meaning of the waving of the barley sheaf. The lamb, of course, signifies

The Lamb of God, Yahshua. As usual, the burnt offering is accompanied with a *minha* or grain offering with olive oil, reminding us of Yahweh's provision permeated by His Spirit. And as with most offerings (but overtly specified here) a drink offering (*nesek*) of wine was to be poured out, a transparent reference to the shed blood of Christ. "One-fourth of a hin" (somewhere between two and three pints) is significant for two reasons. First (as I explained in Vol. 1, Chapter 12) the drink offering and the oil for the *minha* were always the same amount. But second, it seems likely to me that this is the precise volume of blood Yahshua would have lost during His ordeal on the cross. The average human body holds a little under five quarts of blood, and the amount specified here is about a third of that, perhaps slightly less. Crucifixion victims did not bleed to death, though blood loss certainly weakened them. Their Roman torturers actually made it a point to avoid severing arteries with their nails, for they didn't want their prey to succumb too quickly: agony was a far better intimidation tool than mere death. The imagery of the *miqra*, then, links the blood of the Messiah spilled upon the earth with the rising of His Spirit and body, as the oil is burned upon the altar with the grain and the flesh of the lamb, rising as smoke toward the heavens. It's the perfect picture of Christ's bodily resurrection, if you know what to look for.

FEAST OF WEEKS

The Feast of Weeks was known as Pentecost in the Greek New Covenant scriptures (*pentekonta* means fifty; *pentekoste* means "the fiftieth day") because there were to be exactly fifty days between the Sabbath beginning the Feast of Unleavened Bread and this fourth *mo'ed* in Yahweh's schedule of seven appointments. It's also known as *Shavu'ot*, the Feast of the Harvest, and (since it's not confusing enough already) it's occasionally associated with the concept of "firstfruits," though this time the summer wheat harvest is in view, not the spring barley harvest—which was the focus of *the* "Feast of Firstfruits," *Bikurim*.

We covered the basics under Mitzvah #521 in Volume 1, Chapter 13. There we demonstrated from scripture that the historical event presumed by the rabbis to be the reason for the holiday is wrong—they're off by several months. The real reason for the timing is revealed in the Book of Acts, Chapter 2: this would prove to be the day Yahweh chose to send His Spirit to indwell those who had received Yahshua as their Savior and anointed King. Shortly before His passion, Yahshua had told His disciples, **"I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."** (John 14:16-17) The events of Acts 2 are the fulfillment of this

promise—tantamount to saying “God will personally dwell inside you”—as well as being the fulfillment of the Feast of Weeks.

We should recognize that for Yahweh to take up residence within His children, a major paradigm shift has taken place, making this event worthy of a place—the central position, in fact—on His exclusive *mo‘ed-miqra* list. Why? Because formerly, His stated place of residence on earth was the Tabernacle or Temple—in the Most Holy Place (see Exodus 25:8, 40:34). But from Pentecost onward, we believers—our bodies and souls—would be where Yahweh “lived.” As Paul put it, **“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”** (I Corinthians 3:16-17) And, **“What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’”** (II Corinthians 6:16; cf. Leviticus 26:12) This explains why our behavior *per se* has nothing to do with our salvation, and why practicing religion in lieu of having a personal relationship with God is spiritual suicide. The only real issue is whether or not Yahweh’s Spirit dwells within us. Remember: His Spirit only comes if invited.

(842) *Observe the Feast of Weeks on the day specified by Yahweh. “You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the grain.”* (Deuteronomy 16:9) **“Also on the day of the firstfruits, when you bring a new grain offering to Yahweh at your Feast of Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation.”** (Numbers 28:26) The timing of the Feast of Weeks is described several different ways in scripture, but they aren’t contradictory: they all boil down to the same thing. Another way of putting it was what we saw in Leviticus 23:15-16. **“You shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath.** There is a raging rabbinical controversy, of course, as to whether the “Sabbath” in question is the *miqra* of Unleavened Bread (designated a Sabbath even when it didn’t fall on the seventh day of the week), or the natural Sabbath that came closest to it. Only in one year out of seven, on average, would the *miqra* fall on a natural Sabbath. And Yahweh—who is *not* the author of confusion—saw to it that the definitive fulfillment of the Feast occurred in just such a year, 33 A.D., making the whole discussion academic.

This means that the day after the Sabbath upon which *Chag Matzah* fell, the Israelites would begin to harvest the barley crop—they would “begin to put the sickle to the grain.” By definition, this is a Sunday.

Seven weeks to the day after this (i.e., Sunday, Sivan 6) the Feast of Weeks, *Shavu'ot*, would be celebrated by, among other things, bringing the firstfruits of the *wheat* harvest as a “new grain offering,” as we saw in Numbers 28:26 above. So you may be asking, as I did, what does the wheat harvest have to do with the indwelling of God’s people with His Holy Spirit? I believe the answer is to be found in God’s consistent use of metaphor. Yahshua used this one twice in Matthew 13:

First, the parable of the sower: **“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”** (Matthew 13:19-23) Those of us who “hear the word and understand it” are those who “bear fruit.” What fruit? In context, it’s the increase of the grain that the Sower has sown, something explained later by Paul as **“the fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.”** (Galatians 5:22-23) In other words, the harvest of souls promised by the Feast of Weeks is possible *only* if those souls are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God—as evidenced by “the fruit of the Spirit” in their lives.

A second parable explains the difference between bearing “the fruit of the Spirit” and bearing no fruit at all. **“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares [weeds that look like wheat but bear no fruit] among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’ ... And His disciples came to Him, saying, ‘Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.’ He answered and said to them: ‘He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one.’”** (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-38) Beside the prophetic

ramifications for the worthless tares, the lesson at hand is: “the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom,” i.e., those who produce the “fruit of the Spirit” since they are indwelt by that Spirit. It is these alone who will be harvested when the time comes. But the harvest *per se* is a subject embodied in another *miqra*. For now, we’re “just” being shown how the Spirit of Yahweh indwells and sets apart the “wheat” growing in the field of this world—you and me, if we trust God.

- (843) *Present an offering to Yahweh on the Feast of Weeks.* “Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to Yahweh your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as Yahweh your God blesses you. You shall rejoice before Yahweh your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide. And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.” (Deuteronomy 16:10-12) In Leviticus 23:15-20 (Mitzvah #521) a whole range of offerings were mandated by Yahweh for the Feast of Weeks—all symbolic of the coming Messiah, one way or another. But here in Deuteronomy, none of that is repeated. Rather, the people are given a short list of related instructions designed to help them get to the essence of the *mo‘ed-miqra*. The “Then” that begins our passage refers to the calculation of the date for the Feast spoken of in the previous verse (and our previous Precept).

First, a “freewill offering” is to be made. That’s a *nadabah*, literally: “voluntariness.” It’s based on the verb *nadab*, meaning “to make willing, to incite.” The idea here is that Yahweh had “incited” the Israelites to thankfulness by blessing them, and they are to take the opportunity of the *miqra* to willingly respond in kind “as Yahweh your God blesses you.” It’s an admonition to remember and recognize Yahweh’s blessings.

Second, they were to rejoice—not only those who were enjoying obvious temporal blessings, but everyone. Rich and poor, free and slave, citizens and aliens, landowners and Levites, families as well as widows and orphans—*everyone* was to rejoice. Yahweh is telling us that something about this day is a universal cause for joy, something that transcends our earthly circumstances. That “something,” as it turns out, is the indwelling of Yahweh’s Holy Spirit, which is available to everyone, regardless of his or her station in life, temporal circumstances, cultural background, or personal history. No one is so broke, so oppressed, or so simple-minded that he can’t cry out to God. And no one is so rich, privileged, or gifted that he doesn’t need God.

Third, they were to keep the feast “at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide.” Physically, this was where the Tabernacle or Temple stood, but as we have seen, that “place” is now—ever since the fulfillment of the Feast of Weeks on Sunday, the sixth day of Sivan, 33 A.D.—within the hearts and minds of believers. *We* are the Temple of God; *we* are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

And fourth, they were to remember their former state as slaves, being forever cognizant of the change that had taken place in their lives. More to the point, the Israelites needed to remember Who had brought about that transformation from bondage to freedom. It was Yahweh, not themselves. They had been slaves in Egypt so long, it didn’t even occur to them that freedom was possible; nor could they have attained it for themselves by simply rebelling against the world they knew. They needed a deliverer, a redeemer, a savior. It’s the same with us: while we remain in bondage to our sin, it is not in our own power to effect our release. Only Yahweh can free us—and He has. This we must never forget.

We are by no means finished with our survey of Yahweh’s appointments, His holy convocations. But this might be a good place to take stock of where we are in His unfolding plan. Each of the four *mo’edim-miqra’ey* we’ve addressed thus far have been fulfilled in history—all within the space of a little over seven weeks in the spring and early summer of 33 A.D. Each of the four took place on the very days of the Hebrew calendar that were required in the Torah. And each of the four was ultimately centered on the life, sacrifice, and Spirit of Yahshua of Nazareth. To recap, the first appointment was Passover, fulfilled through the sacrificial death of Yahshua. The second, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, prophesied the fact that the Passover sacrifice had removed the curse of sin from our lives. The third *miqra*, the Feast of Firstfruits, was fulfilled through the Messiah’s resurrection, a harbinger of our own anticipated harvest. And the fourth, the Feast of Weeks, came to pass when the very Spirit of God took up permanent residence in the lives of the followers of the Messiah.

Of course, not everyone is prepared to perceive that the first four Feasts of Yahweh were fulfilled in the person of Yahshua. Orthodox Jews, by definition, do not. In order to see this truth, one has to be willing to accept a comprehensive, and quite consistent, system of symbols and metaphors that Yahweh built into His Torah. Some of these (such as the goat atoning for sin) He explained in the immediate context; some (like the lamb of God ultimately being fulfilled in

Christ, or the drink offering representing His spilled blood) were made clear only in the Gospels. And others (for instance, that the sacrifice of a bull represents the rejection of false worship and the world's ungodly agenda) are pretty much left for us to figure out on our own. So it's a fair question to ask: why didn't God simply spell it out in plain English—okay, Hebrew? *I'm going to manifest Myself as a human being and provide Myself as an offering, so whoever chooses to trust in the efficacy of My sacrifice to redeem him from his debt of sin will never have to die, but will enjoy fellowship with Me for all eternity.* (Oops, He *did* spell it out, not in the Torah, and not in Hebrew, but in John 3:16, in Greek) Why didn't Yahweh make His plan clearer in the beginning? Because love requires choice: He wanted folks to choose to be with Him, and that means the option must exist *not* to choose Him or accept His way. So instead, He employed symbols and metaphors, dress rehearsals and outright prophecies. To one who's looking for Yahweh, as I am, the symbols are ridiculously transparent; but to those who are not willing to accept God's grace, they're opaque, mysterious, pointless, and in the end, impossible to follow.

But I digress. We were talking about how Yahweh has delivered four essential features of His plan of redemption through Yahshua's role in the first four *miqra'ey*. We can safely surmise that something equally significant remains to be accomplished in each of the remaining three. So what's left on Yahweh's revealed "to-do" list? What has He said He would do on our behalf? What has He told us about time and again, both by implication and overt prophetic prediction, in the Old Testament and the New? It's actually a rather short list.

First (in order of human expectation, not of chronological fulfillment) is the concept that the Messiah must come. This is the one thing Orthodox Jews and Christians can agree upon, though Christians realize that He will be coming *back again*. It is clear from the large body of Messianic prophecy that no one has fulfilled *all* of the things prophesied of Him: He has yet to come in power and glory, a King reigning over the whole earth in justice and wisdom with a rod of iron, as the Scriptures insist He must. The Messiah will, moreover, rule as King of the Jews: His throne will be in Jerusalem.

The second thing on God's unfinished agenda is to restore Israel. I realize that Task Number One listed above sounds like roughly the same thing, but it's not. You see, Yahweh's idea of restoration and that of the Rabbinical Jewish mindset are two very different things. The rabbis envision a new era of earthly political power reminiscent of the glory days of Solomon. But in reality, Israel's coming political ascendancy under the Messiah's reign will be a *byproduct* of her national restoration, not its cause. That's because Israel's restoration, as far as God is concerned, will be a *spiritual* phenomenon. As Yahweh promised Solomon, **"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face,**

and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." (II Chronicles 7:14) Israel's "wicked ways" continue to this very day, evidenced by the ongoing state of exile outside of Israel and the Muslim blight within it. God has not yet "healed their land," but He will. What will it take to bring this about? A complete spiritual paradigm reversal within Israel— precipitated, I'm afraid, by the coming of God's wrath upon the earth. It may sound like the most improbable of scenarios, but this repentance leading to restoration is the single most oft-repeated prophetic theme in the entire Bible. Yahweh apparently enjoys doing the impossible, and He always keeps His word.

Third, and most astonishing of all, is the promised transformation of Yahweh's people from their present mortal state, human beings made of dust, subject to entropy and eventual death, into glorious immortal beings (not unlike the resurrected Christ), with bodies built for a new heaven and a new earth where death is a foreign concept. This miraculous "translation" from one kind of body into another isn't some Johnny-come-lately Christian theological innovation, either. It was revealed in the oldest writings in the Bible: **"All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer You."** (Job 14:14-15) What kind of "change?" **"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me."** (Job 19:25-27) Yeah. Mine too. Paul described the process God would employ to bring this about in I Corinthians 15:35-54.

We shall soon learn that these three monumental "tasks" God has set for Himself are reflected in the celebration of the final three *mo'edim* on His list. You may be thinking, *There's a fourth thing, isn't there? What about all that judgment, wrath, and hell-fire I've heard about all my life? Aren't those things on God's agenda?* Yes, they are, but they are not subjects for our celebration or commemoration. We will not participate in these things. Although Yahweh in His mercy has revealed what lies in store for His enemies, so that we might warn them, His holy convocations are appointments He's made with *us*—meetings whose time, place, and circumstances tell us of the incredible lengths to which our God went so that we might have life, abundant and eternal.

Dates of Destiny: Future Tense

In the previous chapter, we explored the first four “Feasts of Yahweh,” those whose fulfillments are now history. But Yahweh listed seven such days in total: there are still three *qodesh miqra'ey*—holy convocations—specified in the Torah that have as yet seen no fulfillment parallel to those that are already past. We are therefore anticipating three more earth-shakingly significant events—not merely three important days in the life of Israel or critical milestones in the unfolding plan of Yahweh (though these three remaining *mo'edim*, or appointments, will certainly be all that) but events that also meet several restrictive criteria.

First, they must fulfill overt prophesy. That is, they must bring about conditions that Yahweh has predicted in His Word but has not yet caused to happen. As noted in the previous chapter, these should include the transformation of our frail human state into something permanent, the spiritual restoration of Israel, and the coming of the reigning Messiah. Merely being seen as a “good thing” for God’s people does not necessarily qualify something as a candidate for one of these three remaining *miqra'ey*.

Second, there must be a logical tie-in to the unique rites and rituals associated with these days in the Levitical instructions. Passover had to do with slaying a lamb, the Feast of Unleavened Bread required the removal of yeast from the house, Firstfruits anticipated a harvest, and the Feast of Weeks focused on the time lapse since the previous *miqra'ey*—defining its celebration on the first day of the week: circumstances that were all—if we’re willing to see them—reflected in the events that fulfilled the prophecies. In the same way, the coming *miqra'ey* will have some connection to whatever it is that makes them unique: the Feast of Trumpets will have something to do with blowing trumpets or shouting; the Day of Atonement will involve affliction of the soul, and the Feast of Tabernacles will feature some permutation of the building of temporary dwelling places.

Third, they must fall upon the precise dates mandated in scripture, that is, the first, tenth, and fifteenth days of the month of Tishri on the Hebrew lunar calendar—which fall in the Gregorian calendar’s September or October. These, therefore, are commonly called “the Fall Feasts,” for they all occur in the autumn. By this criteria, such momentous events as Israel’s independence day (May 14, 1948) or their stunning victory over the forces of Islam in June, 1967, could not be considered fulfillments to Yahweh’s final *miqra'ey*, no matter how much prophecy they may have fulfilled otherwise.

Fourth, as with the first four, these last three will be fulfilled literally, though within the framework of Yahweh's consistent and extensive matrix of symbols and metaphors. (For example, if you hope to comprehend the significance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, you must understand that leaven or yeast is God's symbol for sin, pervasive and corrupting.) My point is that "spiritual" or "allegorical" fulfillments, devoid of any concrete, overt, historical manifestation or consequence, won't cut it as candidates for fulfillment. If it takes scholarly eloquence or clever argument to "prove" something has happened, then it hasn't.

And fifth, each of these last three *miqra'ey* (as before) will involve interaction between God and man. We can't by ourselves precipitate their fulfillments. On our own, we are quite incapable of controlling or even influencing Yahweh's timetable, though His agenda is scheduled solely for our benefit. Therefore, even if every living child of Yahweh, every soul redeemed by the blood of Yahshua, were to shout for joy or blow the *shofar* in commemoration of the Feast of Trumpets on the next occurrence of the first day of Tishri, that would not *in itself* constitute fulfillment of the *miqra's* prophecy, no matter how cool it would be. Fulfillment *will* happen, but only when Yahweh is good and ready.

FEAST OF TRUMPETS

There are three primary passages in the Torah where instructions concerning the seven Feasts of Yahweh are grouped: Leviticus 23, Numbers 28 and 29, and Deuteronomy 16 (though in Deuteronomy 16, the Feast of Trumpets isn't mentioned at all, for reasons that can only be understood if you comprehend what the *miqra* predicts—something we've discussed before and will again). All Maimonides had to say about it (based on what he saw in Leviticus 23:24-25) was to rest on the day (in Mitzvah #130) and also (since we're dumb sheeple and might miss it) not to work on it (Mitzvah #131). I've got no earthly idea what the difference was supposed to be. Adding to the confusion, the Rambam referred to the day as *Rosh Hashanah*, meaning "the head of the year," or "new year's day," although Yahweh plainly stated that the beginning of the Hebrew year was to coincide with the new moon in the month of Nisan, in the spring (a day, by the way, that was *not* designated as one of these seven *mo'edim*). The autumn "new year" was a bad habit the Jews picked up during their captivity in Babylon. One of many, it would seem.

The Hebrew name for this *miqra* is found in Numbers 29:1—*Yom Teruah*: the "day of shouting," or the "day of blowing the trumpet." Strong's defines *teruah* as an "alarm, signal, sound of tempest, shout, shout or blast of war, alarm, or joy; a war-cry, battle-cry; a shout of joy (with religious impulse or in general)." Baker and Carpenter add, "It refers to a loud, sharp shout or cry in general, but it often indicates a shout of joy or victory, or a great shout anticipating a coming event. It

can refer to the noise or signal put out by an instrument. Amos used the word to refer to war cries.” Although it isn’t specifically named in the text, the “blowing” connotation would naturally imply the use of the ram’s horn “trumpet,” the *shofar*, the quintessential Hebrew implement for both raising an alarm and making a joyful noise. We should contrast the *shofar* in our minds with both the bull’s horn, a symbol of secular power, and the silver trumpet, or *hasoserah*, that was used to call Israel to worship at the Tabernacle or Temple.

The *miqra* of *Yom Teruah*, then, is prophetic of a specific future day when all that is implied in the word “*teruah*” will be brought to pass in the fulfillment of one of Yahweh’s most fundamental areas of promise. We can start to home in on precisely what that is by taking a look at other usages of the word in the Tanach. Let us begin in the Psalms: **“God has gone up with a shout (*teruah*), Yahweh with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with understanding.”** (Psalm 47:5-7) Three things are seen happening in a single context: (1) Yahweh is going up; (2) this rising is accompanied by *teruah*—shouting and the blowing of the trumpet; and (3) God is consequently being praised by people who understand exactly what’s going on, namely, that He Himself is coming to reign as King over the whole earth. Today we believers sing praises to God, though to say we do it “with understanding” would be a stretch. But when “God has gone up with *teruah*,” we’ll finally *get it*. Notice, by the way, that Yahweh (the God who “has gone up”) and the reigning King of the whole earth are equated in this passage. *Yahshua is God*, not merely His anointed servant.

And as it turns out, God is not the only one who is “going up with a shout.” His people are going with Him: **“Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound (*teruah*)! They walk, O Yahweh, in the light of Your countenance. In Your name they rejoice all day long, and in Your righteousness they are exalted.”** (Psalm 89:15-16) There is more going on here than Yahweh’s people being “exalted” in their earthly circumstances. In point of fact, our normal experience tells us that people who display Yahweh’s righteousness these days are as likely to be ridiculed and persecuted as glorified. What gives? The key is the Hebrew word translated “exalted.” *Ruwm* means to rise up, be raised, set on high, be lifted up. It’s the same picture we saw above: “God has *gone up* with a shout,” and now we’re told that the people who hear and respond to the “joyful sound,” the *teruah*, who walk in His righteousness and rejoice in His light, are to be “lifted up” as well.

I’ll readily admit that without the New Covenant scriptures to illuminate this, we might never have realized what’s being prophesied (until it actually happened, of course). But the Apostle Paul helps us to connect the dots. **“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be**

changed.” (I Corinthians 15:51-52) Putting the Torah, the Psalms, and the Pauline epistles together then, it transpires that the *miqra* of *Yom Teruah*, the Feast of Trumpets, predicts nothing short of the transformation of our decaying mortal existence into a glorious immortal, incorruptible state. Not all of humanity will be changed like this, you understand, but only those who fit the Psalmist’s description—those who “know the joyful sound—the *teruah*—and who walk in the light of Yahweh’s countenance.” These alone will be “raised incorruptible” in God’s righteousness on *Yom Teruah*.

How is this going to work? I mean, according to the requirements of the Torah, it all has to transpire (as Paul put it above) “in the twinkling of an eye,” on a single autumn day. The logistics are daunting, to say the least. It would take *God Himself* to pull this off. And so it shall: **“The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”** (I Thessalonians 4:16-17) The shouting and trumpet-blowing (the *teruah*) will be done by God Himself, accompanied by an archangel. The “Lord,” the risen Yahshua, will descend to earth, gather his people, and then (as we were informed in Psalm 47) “go up” with them. This gathering is described here as being “caught up.” That’s the Greek verb *harpazo* (“to seize, carry off by force, claim for oneself eagerly, snatch out or away”—Strong’s), a word translated in the Latin Vulgate as *rapiemur*. (“*Deinde nos qui vivimus qui relinquimur simul rapiemur cum illis in nubibus obviam Domino in aera et sic semper cum Domino erimus,*” if you must know.) That’s where we get the common term for this momentous event: the “rapture.” Don’t let anybody tell you the word can’t be found in the Bible, just because it doesn’t show up as an English noun.

Is that all there is to *teruah*? I’m afraid not. Following in its wake (for those who failed to “know the joyful sound”) is pain, war, and destruction: in a word, Tribulation. **“O my soul, my soul! I am pained in my very heart! My heart makes a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm (*teruah*) of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried, for the whole land is plundered.”** (Jeremiah 4:19-20) The prophet is lamenting for Jerusalem (see verse 14). The whole extended passage is predicting the crushing of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon, a process that began in 605 B.C. and culminated in the destruction of the Temple in 586. But it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to see that this prophecy still has some life left in it. It’s also a perfect description of the coming invasion of Israel by the Islamic federation of “Magog,” prophesied so unambiguously in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Of particular interest to our present inquiry, we should note that (according to Daniel) one of the major participants in this “War of Magog” is the European leader commonly referred to as “the Antichrist.” And Paul tells us (in II Thessalonians 2:7-8) that this fellow won’t be “revealed”

(that is, he won't begin doing things that prophetically identify him as the Antichrist) until after "the Restrainer" (that is, the Holy Spirit who now indwells the *ekklesia*) is "taken out of the way." There is only one way to take the Spirit "out of the way." Catch up—*rapture*—the people in whom the Spirit dwells—on *Yom Teruah*.

So here's what Jeremiah is being shown: the "soul" of Israel is in deep distress because they have "heard the sound of the trumpet." But because they have not heeded their Messiah, this trumpet heralds not a joyful rapture—their own transformation to a glorious immortal state—but rather "the alarm of war," the other side of *teruah*. Though Israel has "heard the trumpet," they (as a nation) have not participated in the rapture: they've been left behind to face the music. Their only real ally on this earth—the believers in Yahshua—have departed: we have been "caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." This argues forcefully that the Tribulation (a.k.a. "the Time of Jacob's Trouble") will follow on the very heels of the rapture—within the space of a few years, not decades or centuries. Indeed, *Yom Teruah* seems to be the very event that precipitates the destruction and plunder of the land.

Jeremiah is not alone in this assessment, nor is Israel alone in their plight. **"The great day of Yahweh is near. It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of Yahweh is bitter. There the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm (*teruah*) against the fortified cities and against the high towers. I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against Yahweh. Their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung."** (Zephaniah 1:14-17) *Yom Teruah's* coming will signal bad news for the whole world left behind at the departure of the *ekklesia*. Again we see (if we are willing to open our eyes) that one man's rapture is another man's call to war. One man's transformation into immortality is another's ticket to a day of wrath, trouble, distress, devastation, desolation, darkness, and death. Yet at its core, the only difference between these two people is their respective relationships with Yahshua the Messiah. It either exists, or it doesn't.

- (844) *Observe the Feast of Trumpets on the day specified by Yahweh. "In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. For you it is a day of blowing the trumpets."* (Numbers 29:1) As with all seven *mo'edim-miqra'ey*, the exact calendar date is specified, leading us to the inevitable conclusion that this very day will mark the fulfillment of the prophecy. In this case, the date is the first day of Tishri—the seventh month on the Hebrew calendar, and the final

month in which anything on Yahweh's agenda is scheduled. Tishri falls in September or October on our Gregorian calendars.

For those who are fuzzy on how the two calendar systems vary, let me offer a short explanation. Our Gregorian calendar is solar based: it records one revolution of the earth around the sun per year—approximately 365¼ days (the one-quarter day being accommodated by a “leap year day” once ever four years). It is broken, quite arbitrarily, into twelve months. The Hebrew calendar, by contrast, is lunar based. Each month (or “moonth”) begins at the sighting of the first sliver of the new moon. Since the synodic lunar month lasts only about 29½ days, a twelve-month cycle is only 354 days long. So seven years out of every nineteen, a “leap month” (called Veadar, or Adar II) is added just before the first month (i.e., Nisan, in March or April) to keep the seasons from drifting. There are advantages and disadvantages to each system, but the lunar was far more user-friendly in a pre-industrial world. That's why Hebrew dates don't correspond to the same Gregorian dates from one year to the next, but vary by as much as several weeks.

Anyway, *Yom Teruah*, or the Feast of Trumpets, falls on the first day of Tishri. This makes it unique among the seven *miqra'ey*, for it falls during a period of lunar darkness, when the moon is reflecting practically none of the sun's light to earth. (*Every* lunar month begins and ends this way.) By contrast, the spring *miqra'ey* all hover around the middle of the month, the brightest part (the full moon), as does the final one, the Feast of Tabernacles. The two remaining days both occur when the moon is “waxing,” i.e., when its reflection is in the process of increasing in brightness. I don't know how significant that is, but it strikes me that none of this is accidental: Yahweh has planned every detail. He seems to be telling us that the *ekklesia* will be raptured from the earth during a period of maximum spiritual darkness. The days in which we live certainly seem to be moving in that direction. I mean, how much darker can the world get?

There's another issue that needs to be addressed. As we saw in Mitzvot #130 and #131 (Leviticus 23:24-25), and again in our present text, the Feast of Trumpets is to be celebrated as a Sabbath. No one's customary work is to be performed on this day. The bottom-line spiritual principle, of course, is that in the end, we can't earn or work for what God is proposing to do for us on this day—transform us from frail mortals to incorruptible eternal beings capable of standing in His very presence. Rather, we must accept it as Yahweh's gift to us, resting in His finished work, if we are to receive it at all. But there is a literal side to this as well. It appears (though it's by no means certain) that the definitive *Yom Teruah*

should take place in a year in which the first day of Tishri falls on a natural Sabbath. In the next few decades, there are only a handful of such dates left: 2009, 2020, 2023, and 2026 (this last one about two months before the Tribulation is scheduled to begin, if my observations are correct—see *Future History* for my thoughts on prophetic chronology).

Why am I not certain? The word used to describe the Sabbath-ness of this *miqra* (in Leviticus 23:24) is *sabbaton*, meaning “Sabbath observance.” There is a far more commonly used term for Sabbath—*Sabbat*, but it is never used in scripture to describe the Feast of Trumpets. Both words are based on the verb *sabat*, meaning to cease, desist, or rest. The *-on* suffix of *sabbaton* and other Hebrew nouns indicates their abstract or conceptual nature—the observance of Sabbath rest as opposed to the Sabbath day itself (i.e., Saturday). *Sabbaton* is used only eleven times in scripture, four times referring to the weekly Sabbath, twice to the Sabbatical year, once to *Yom Teruah*, twice referring to *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement), and twice to *Sukkot* (the Feast of Tabernacles). Two things about this list give me pause, so I’ll just lay my cards on the table. First, the word *Sabbaton* was not used of the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the actual instructions concerning it, though *Chag Matzah* did fall on a natural Sabbath in the year of its definitive fulfillment, 33 A.D. (It was only described: “You shall do no work.”) It was, however, referred to as the *Sabbat* in the Feast of Weeks instructions: “Count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath...” This is the linguistic converse of what we see with *Yom Teruah*—which is called *Sabbaton* but not *Sabbat*.

Second, the Day of Atonement is twice called a *Sabbaton*, but my research for *Future History* led me to the firm conviction that the definitive *Yom Kippur* and the definitive *Sukkot* will occur in the same year, which, according to the rules of the Torah, means they can’t both fall on natural Sabbaths, because they’re five days apart (see Precept #861). If the Day of Atonement (called a *Sabbaton*) is a Sabbath observance that will *not* fall on a natural Sabbath (since the evidence tells me that the Feast of Tabernacles *will*), could the same thing be true of the Feast of Trumpets? You can see why I’m reluctant to positively predict a Sabbath (Saturday) fulfillment for *Yom Teruah*.

The bottom line is that for us who are called out of the world by Yahshua (i.e., the *ekklesia*—the “church”), the transformation of our mortal bodies into immortal, incorruptible, spiritual beings will occur on *Yom Teruah*, the Feast of Trumpets. All the evidence I’ve seen points toward a fulfillment of this *miqra* (in an event popularly known as “the rapture”) on the first day of Tishri some year between now and 2026. And

whether or not it will fall on a natural Sabbath, no one can achieve what the day portends through his own efforts.

- (845) *Present an offering to Yahweh on the Feast of Trumpets. “You shall offer a burnt offering as a sweet aroma to Yahweh: one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, without blemish. Their grain offering shall be fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, to make atonement for you; besides the burnt offering with its grain offering for the New Moon, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, as a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh.”* (Numbers 29:2-6) In Precept #837 (Numbers 28:19-23) we looked at a similar list of burnt offerings to be made at the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The same thing is true of the Feasts of Firstfruits and Weeks. But the lists weren’t identical—there were subtle differences that help us understand the significance of each individual “appointment” with Yahweh. To recap (focusing solely on the animals to be sacrificed):

Unleavened Bread: *Olah* (burnt offering): 2 bulls; 1 ram; 7 lambs.

Chata’t (sin offering): 1 goat.

Firstfruits: *Olah*: 2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs.

Chata’t (sin offering): 1 goat.

Feast of Weeks: *Olah*: 1 bull, 2 rams, 7 lambs.

Chata’t: 1 goat.

Selem (peace offering): 2 lambs.

Feast of Trumpets: *Olah*: 1 bull, 1 ram, 7 lambs.

Chata’t: 1 goat.

In the interests of seeing the whole picture, let’s also analyze the sacrificial requirements of the two final *miqra’ey*, which we’ll cover later in this chapter:

Day of Atonement: *Olah*: 1 bull, 1 ram, 7 lambs.

Chata’t: 1 goat (that is, only one of the two “sin offering” goats was to be sacrificed; the other was set free).

Tabernacles: *Olah*: 13 bulls (first day), 2 rams, 14 lambs.
(The number of bulls decreases by 1 each day of the feast, down to 7 on the seventh day, and then to 1 on the eighth day, when the number of rams drops to 1 and lambs to 7.)
Chata't: 1 goat.

We're thus faced with a dizzying variety of combinations, and we're forced to ask ourselves just what Yahweh is up to here. Forget for a moment that without a temple or priesthood these sacrifices can't be made at all. Even if they could be, one of two conflicting propositions has to be true: either God enjoys making His people jump through hoops like trained poodles for His own amusement, or He's giving us subtle hints as to the nature of His plan for our redemption—clues that can only be understood through the application of careful scriptural forensics.

Let's start with what remains constant—the sin offering, or *chata't*, that's slain. It's always one goat, never more, never less. This tells us that an underlying theme of all of Yahweh's holy convocations is that sin—as a concept, our falling short of His perfect standard—is being dealt with throughout the entire process.

Next let's consider lambs. A lamb is a picture of innocence, which when offered as a sacrifice indicates the innocence of Yahshua the Messiah—Yahweh's "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Seven is the number of completion or perfection, so we are not surprised to see seven lambs required for each *miqra*—until we get to Tabernacles, when we're presented with a puzzle. What is the significance of fourteen lambs—seven *doubled*? To me, this seems to be a clue as to precisely who each *miqra* is addressed to, and it's not always the same. Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits both speak to believers generally: Israel, including the "mixed multitude" of gentile believers with them. But the next two, Weeks and Trumpets, address the *ekklesia*, the church, which is neither Jewish nor gentile in composition but is a new creation, a "mystery." On the Day of Atonement, however, Yahweh's focus is (as we shall see) strictly upon Israel, for the *ekklesia* will have been removed from the earthly scene (at the Feast of Trumpets) when its promise comes to fruition. Up until this point, one complete picture of the Messiah's innocence was appropriate for each spiritual group, so seven lambs are specified each time. But when we get to Tabernacles, the doubled seven tells us something remarkable: Yahweh will be dealing with both the

raptured (now immortal) *ekklesia* and the still-mortal but spiritually restored Israel (again seen leading a mixed multitude of mortal believers worldwide)—as separate, coexisting populations! Having already done my homework for this class (see the resulting thesis: *Future History*), I can assure you that every shred of prophecy supports this view.

We see the same sort of shifting of the prophetic object when studying the variation in the number of rams. The ram (a mature male “lamb” with horns), if you’ll recall, is symbolic of the Messiah’s authority. Here we see exactly the same shifts going on, but with one exception. As before, Israel and its mixed multitude are seen anticipating One ruling Messiah, the *ekklesia* is seen following One (who of course is the *same* One, though the two groups perceive Him differently), and the Feast of Tabernacles witnesses a split between the called-out immortals and the redeemed mortals of the Millennial kingdom. After all, though their Messiah is the same, their relationship with Him—their response to His authority—is necessarily somewhat different. But what about the exception of which I spoke? The Feast of Weeks calls for *two* rams. Why is this so, if it concerns only the church? It’s because when the *ekklesia* began on the Feast of Weeks with the Spirit of God indwelling His followers, Israel had not yet systematically rejected the authority of Yahshua as Messiah. Only its leadership had declared, “We will not have this man to rule over us.” The fact is, virtually every participant in the Pentecost epiphany was Jewish. Israel’s total rejection took place a hundred years later when, following Rabbi Akiba’s endorsement, they chose to follow a false Messiah—the brutal but charismatic Bar Kochba—one whom they *still* prefer to Yahshua, even though He brought the nation to utter ruin.

Note, by the way, that on the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles, prophetic of the inauguration of the eternal state, Israel and the *ekklesia* are addressed as one entity. The indicator is that we’re again instructed to sacrifice a single ram (not two) and seven lambs (not fourteen). Then, as in the mortal church today, there will be no functional difference between Israelite and gentile believers: at this point we all will have been transformed into immortal, incorruptible, spiritual beings, relating to our Messiah and God in exactly the same way.

And what about bulls? They represent false worship, a trust in the world’s power, however it manifests itself. *Young* bulls are always specified—the epitome of temporal strength, capability, and volition, something to be seen in contrast to Yahweh’s counterintuitive means of redemption—the frail, vulnerable, innocent lamb. Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits each call for two bulls, because Israel and the mixed multitude

each brought with them different kinds of baggage—the Jews (being sons of Jacob) had a propensity to rely on themselves, their intellect and industry, while the gentiles among them fell prey with great alacrity to pagan religions and human demigods. (Some things never change.) But Weeks and Trumpets, in which one bull is specified, focus on the heresies peculiar to the *ekklesia*, while the bull of the Day of Atonement represents the errors specifically endemic in Orthodox Judaism. The eye opener is the eight-day Feast of Tabernacles, in which gradually, over the course of the week (prophetic of Yahshua’s Millennial Kingdom), every possible permutation of false worship and error will be gradually rooted out and eliminated, one by one, from among the mortal population. When it’s all over, there will be nothing left but Yahweh’s truth.

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

One of the most surprising things about the research for my book on prophecy, *Future History*, was the sheer volume of scripture promising the spiritual—followed by the physical—restoration of the nation of Israel. I mean, I knew it was going to happen, but I had no idea God had told us about it in so many places and in so many ways. This is easily the most oft-repeated theme in prophetic scripture, and taken all together, the evidence clearly precludes transference of the promises to the church—a pipe dream promulgated by ambitious Christian clergy ever since Constantine’s day. Nor will it fit the requirements of scripture to simply re-define all who come to faith as “Israel,” ignoring inconvenient biological reality. No, the “restored Israel” of the Bible is *Israel*—a literal remnant of the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all twelve tribes, redeemed, reunited, and regathered into the Land of promise under the reign of Yahshua their Messiah. I know it sounds somewhere between unlikely and impossible. But that’s where God does his best work. We should not be surprised, then, to find this fundamental truth reflected in Yahweh’s schedule of annual *mo’edim*.

These appointments with God not only predict the seven most important milestones in His plan of redemption, they also indicate their order of chronological fulfillment. The first four, now history, prophesied the death, burial, and resurrection of Yahshua, and then the calling-out of His followers from the world through the personal indwelling of His Spirit. The next one in line, as we have seen, comprises God’s “exit strategy” for these believers in Yahshua—the *ekklesia*—who were defined by the events of the fourth *miqra*. *Yom Teruah*, this fifth appointment with God, will bring about the transformation of the saints, living and dead alike, into immortal beings, inhabiting bodies not unlike Christ’s manifestation as He appeared to His disciples for forty days after His resurrection.

But alas, neither Israel (as a nation) nor the vast majority of gentile mankind will participate in the rapture, for it is an “off ramp” from a straight and narrow road that comparatively few choose to travel. That’s why Yahshua admonished us to **“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”** (Matthew 7:13-14)

So, because these days fall in chronological order, we can expect the sixth *miqra* of Yahweh to be fulfilled in a world from which the *ekklesia* of Yahshua has previously been removed. Further, based on what we learned of the downside of *teruah* in Jeremiah 4:19-20 and Zephaniah 1:14-17 above, it seems likely that this sixth *miqra*, the Day of Atonement, will take place within the period of time called the Tribulation (which will begin shortly—within a few years—after the rapture). The Tribulation is defined (in the Daniel 9 prophecy) as the time in which Yahweh will complete His program for Israel—the last of 70 “weeks” (seven “prophetic-year” periods, each 360 days in length). If the Day of Atonement concerns Israel exclusively (since the “church” is gone by this point), then its fulfillment must be linked to the spiritual restoration of the nation.

We discussed the Day of Atonement in Mitzvot #133-136 (Leviticus 23:27, 29, 31-32) and #505 (Leviticus 16:2-3), but unfortunately, Maimonides said only to rest, to fast (something that isn’t specifically commanded in scripture), and to keep the Torah’s rituals concerning the offerings, the scapegoat, etc. (something that can’t be observed, whether in his day or ours, for lack of a temple and priesthood). So the Rambam is only batting one for three here. But the core definition of the day is much more fundamental than he pictured it: **“It is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before Yahweh your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people.”** (Leviticus 23:28-29)

As always, we need to define our terminology. “Day of Atonement” is the Hebrew *Yom Kippur*, or more literally, *Yom Kippurim*—the Day of Atonements: it’s always plural in the Torah. This noun is based on the Hebrew verb *kapar* (translated here as “make atonement”), which means “to cover, purge, make an atonement, make reconciliation, to cover over (as with pitch), to pacify, to propitiate.” (Strong’s) Baker and Carpenter explain further: “*Kapar* is a verb meaning to cover, to forgive, to expiate, to reconcile. This word is of supreme theological importance in the Old Testament as it is central to an Old Testament understanding of the remission of sin. At its most basic level, the word conveys the notion of covering but not in the sense of merely concealing. Rather, it suggests the imposing of something to change its appearance or nature. It is therefore employed to signify the cancellation or “writing over” of a contract (Isaiah 28:18); the appeasing of anger (Genesis 32:20 and Proverbs 16:14); and the overlaying of wood with pitch so as to make it waterproof (Genesis 6:14). The

word also communicates God's covering of sin.... In the Old Testament, the blood of sacrifices was most notably imposed. By this imposition, sin was purged and forgiven. The offenses were removed, leaving the sinners clothed in righteousness." The ultimate *kapar* sacrifice was, of course, Yahshua.

The other word begging for illumination here is rendered "afflicted (in soul)," and while that's not incorrect, there's much more to it. '*Anah* is a Hebrew verb that carries two very different connotations, both relevant to *Yom Kippurim*. First, it means to be afflicted, humbled, or bowed down, to be occupied or busied with, or to be depressed, downcast, or in a state of oppression. This is how it's invariably handled in passages relating to *Yom Kippurim*. But in contrast to this, '*anah* also means to answer, respond, testify, speak, or to reply as a witness. I believe both definitions apply to the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement.

(846) *Be afflicted in soul and do no work on the Day of Atonement. "You shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before Yahweh your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people."* (Leviticus 23:28-30) We've seen the "Sabbath" concept many times before. The central lesson, as always, is that we cannot work to attain the salvation Yahweh has promised those who trust Him. Rather, we must rest in reliance upon His word: we must trust Yahweh to redeem us. Further, we have noted that Yahweh *Himself* rests on the Sabbath: whatever salvation He provides has been made available to us during His six-day (read: six-millennium) "work week," that is, between the fall of Adam and Yahshua's imminent return to earth in glory. That's why the scriptures say, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6) What "pleases Yahweh" is our love, and love is by its nature voluntary: it can't be forced, bought, or stolen, or it would become something else. If Yahweh forced us to receive His gift of eternal life (by cramming incontrovertible *proof* down our throats, for example), our response couldn't be love—it would merely be surrender. He's not seeking a victory; He's looking for a friend. He doesn't desire our capitulation; He wants our trust.

But what does it mean to be "afflicted in soul" on the Day of Atonement? We've seen that '*anah*, the verb translated "afflicted," not only means "to be humbled or bowed down," but also "to answer or respond." Upon returning to Jerusalem from Babylon (457 B.C.), Ezra the priest learned that some of those who had preceded him had taken pagan

wives, doing precisely what had gotten their nation in trouble in the first place—blending the abominations of Canaanite paganism with the worship of Yahweh. Ezra’s reaction is the very picture of “affliction of soul.” **“When I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished. Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to Yahweh my God. And I said: ‘O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens.’”** (Ezra 9:3-6) That’s the “affliction” part. But He also responded; he led his countrymen in answering the call of God upon their lives. **“Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath.... Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. Now therefore, make confession to Yahweh, God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives. Then all the assembly answered (‘*anah*) and said with a loud voice, ‘Yes! As you have said, so we must do.’”** (Ezra 10:5, 10-12)

Psalm 88 may also help us to understand this. The first few verses will set the scene: **“O Yahweh, God of my salvation, I have cried out day and night before You. Let my prayer come before You; Incline Your ear to my cry. For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to the grave. I am counted with those who go down to the pit; I am like a man who has no strength, adrift among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom You remember no more, and who are cut off from Your hand. You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the depths. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and You have afflicted (‘*anah*) me with all Your waves. Selah.”** (Psalm 88:1-7) The rest of the chapter goes on in the same vein: affliction, being brought down. On a national scale, it’s an experience that Daniel described (in 12:7) as “when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered.” The affliction the Psalmist is describing will be like that imposed upon the newly redeemed remnant of Israel who find they must flee from the Antichrist into the mountain wilderness (see Matthew 24:15-21) after the abomination of desolation, just before the mid-point of the Tribulation. Why have they been humbled? Why are they oppressed? Because, having rejected Yahweh and His Messiah for the past two and a half millennia, they have now changed their mind. (Read what leads up to Ezekiel 39:22 if you want to know why.) Now they’re refusing to accept the *Antichrist’s* messianic claims

instead. They have finally *'anah*: “answered, responded, testified, spoken, and replied as a witness” that Yahweh alone is God—and for that, their mortal lives are forfeit under the Antichrist’s iron rule. (The Tribulation isn’t called the “Time of Jacob’s Trouble” for nothing.) But who are they crying out to? **“Yahweh, God of my salvation.”** *Who?* The word translated “salvation” here is *yashuw’ah*—phonetically indistinguishable from the Messiah’s name: Yahshua! Whether they know it or not, Yahweh was—and is about to be again—manifested as their Messiah, Yahshua. Yahweh explains what it will take for this to come about: **“I will return again to My place till they [Israel and Judah] acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face. In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.”** (Hosea 5:15)

And when will that happen? On the Day of Atonement, of course. That is, five days before the end of the Tribulation, as the armies of the whole earth are closing in against Jerusalem under the genocidal banner of the Antichrist. Zechariah paints the scene. **“In that day Yahweh will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem... It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.”** (Zechariah 12:8-10) This “defense” of Jerusalem is the “battle” of Armageddon, and Yahweh—that is, Yahshua the Messiah (see Revelation 19:11-21)—has returned to “destroy all the nations” that come against it—and against Him. They will see Him descend upon the Mount of Olives (compare Zechariah 14:4 to Acts 1:9-12) and they will do two things, both implied in the Word *'anah*: “mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son,” for their fathers’ part in his death and for their own subsequent national rejection of His grace; and answer, respond, and testify that Yahshua the Messiah is indeed the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It’s *Yom Kippurim*: if they don’t afflict their souls in humility now, in the Messiah’s glorious presence, if they don’t respond to Him and testify of His greatness when they see Him bodily returning to earth, then they must be, as the Torah demands, “cut off from their people.”

- (847) *Observe the Day of Atonement on the day specified by Yahweh. “This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you.”* (Leviticus 16:29) As with all of Yahweh’s *mo’edim-miqra’ey*, the Day of Atonement will be fulfilled on the very day of its Levitical mandate—in this case the 10th of Tishri. The Zechariah 12 passage we just looked at makes it pretty clear that the requirements of *Yom Kippurim* will be fulfilled only a few hours before

the “battle” of Armageddon commences—that final confrontation between the Antichrist’s armies and the returning King Yahshua. And unless the conflict proves to be an uphill battle for Yahshua (something that is flatly contradicted in scripture), we are led to the conclusion that the Day of Atonement’s fulfillment and that of the Feast of Tabernacles on the 15th of Tishri—in which God “camps out” with mankind (see Precepts #861-864, below)—will occur in the same year, which means they’ll be only five days apart. My prophecy research has led me to believe that this auspicious year will be 2033—precisely two thousand years (or forty jubilee periods) after the passion of Yahshua. (Feel free to disagree with my chronological conclusion if you want, but *don’t* feel free to ignore the warning it implies.)

For reasons I’ll explain in Precept #861, I don’t believe the definitive Day of Atonement will fall on a natural Sabbath (Saturday). But I’d love to be a fly on the Wailing Wall on *Yom Kippurim* in 2028, which *will* fall on a Saturday—September 30 that year. This (according to the Tribulation timeline worked out in *Future History*) has to be very near the date of the miraculous defeat of Gog’s Islamic forces by the hand of Yahweh, spoken of in Ezekiel 38 and 39. And the conclusion of *that* little skirmish will be: **“So the house of Israel shall know that I am Yahweh their God from that day forward.”** (Ezekiel 39:22)

By the way, notice that little phrase describing the participants of *Yom Kippurim*: **“whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you.”** The same requirements are made of everyone, Jew and gentile alike: do no work, and *‘anah*—afflict your soul in repentance and respond to Yahweh. Though the *miqra* is structured in terms especially germane to Israel’s restoration, we should not be unaware that multitudes of gentiles will also come to faith during the Tribulation. And Yahweh’s means of atonement for them is the same as that for His people Israel (and for us, for that matter): the blood of His perfect sacrifice—Yahshua.

- (848) *Allow the High Priest to make atonement for you.* **“For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before Yahweh. It is a sabbath [*sabbaton*: Sabbath observance] of solemn rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls. It is a statute forever.”** (Leviticus 16:30-31) The procedure of the annual atonement ritual was to be performed by one person, the High Priest—Aaron or one of his male descendants. But notice how Yahweh defines the High Priest: **“And the priest, who is anointed and consecrated to minister as priest in his father’s place....”** Yahweh’s wording is carefully crafted (as always) to describe this Priest as one who is anointed (Hebrew: *mashach*, the word from which

“Messiah is derived), is consecrated (*male'*, meaning to fill, consecrate, satisfy, accomplish, confirm, or complete), and, most significantly, ministers as priest (read: intercessor) “*in his father's place.*” The word translated “in place” deserves our attention as well. It's the Hebrew *tachath*, meaning “under, beneath, instead of, for, or in place of.” It's the very essence of a son's role as representative of his father in Hebrew society (see Psalm 127:5). Does the phrase “Son of God” ring any bells? The High Priest performing the atonement rite is clearly a type of Yahshua the Messiah.

This Priest “**shall make atonement, and put on the linen clothes, the holy garments; then he shall make atonement for the Holy Sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tabernacle of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. This shall be an everlasting statute for you, to make atonement for the children of Israel, for all their sins, once a year.**” (Leviticus 16:32-34) We discussed the concept of atonement at length under Precept #787. To reprise my conclusion, “At its heart, atonement is an action, prompted by a gift, that brings two parties together who were formerly estranged. Both parties have to agree on the terms of the arrangement; otherwise reconciliation would not result.” That's what it *does*, but how does it relate to what it *means*? The word translated “atone” (*kapar*), as we've seen, actually means “to cover.”

Perhaps an illustration would help us to understand this. For ten years I lived at the end of a half-mile long gravel road up a hillside in Central Virginia. For ten years, my car was never clean; winter snows took *forever* to melt (meaning that if I wanted to go home in February, I had to have four wheel drive); Buick-sized potholes reappeared every spring, conspiring to steal the joy the daffodils brought to the party. Basically, I loved the house, but hated the road; I wanted the destination, but despised the journey. That road needed “atonement” in the worst way. So when I moved a couple of years ago—into a new house with a long gravel driveway—the first thing I did was to have it paved—covered over (*kapar*) with asphalt. As the Hebrew word implies, this covering of asphalt didn't merely conceal the driveway, but fundamentally altered its character—snow doesn't hang around, potholes don't form, and towering clouds of dust following my car are a thing of the past. The “atonement” of my driveway *reconciled* my home to the community in which I live. There's one thing I should add, however: there was a price to pay. Atonement doesn't come cheap, whether you're talking about driveways or human souls.

Here on the Day of Atonements (plural: *Yom Kippurim*) the High Priest is instructed to make atonement for seven distinct entities:

- (1) “You,” that is, Moses, the temporal leader of the people, who is specifically said to be in need of cleansing from all of his sins before Yahweh. Our leaders should never start to believe their own press: they not only sin, they should be first in line to seek forgiveness and cleansing.
- (2) The “Holy Sanctuary.” This is the whole Tabernacle enclosure, every detail of which reveals some facet of the Plan of Yahweh for our redemption. Please refer to Chapter 4 of this volume, “The Tabernacle of God,” for details. Atonement is needed because we—sinful people—are responsible for communicating to the world the truths that the Sanctuary represents.
- (3) The “Tabernacle of Meeting.” Though often spoken of as synonymous with the Sanctuary, this speaks specifically of the tent that stood within the courtyard, where the symbols concerning our Messiah’s role and what we’re supposed to do in light of them become most intense.
- (4) The Altar. This is where the blood of innocence was to be shed—the worst of crimes, but necessary in order to reconcile the worst of criminals—us—to the God who made us.
- (5) The priests. Those who ministered before Yahweh, whose role it was to intercede for the people, but who were themselves flawed and frail, in need of atonement. Finally,
- (6) “All the people of the assembly,” and (7) The Children of Israel. These last two, in context, sound identical, but they’re not, if you look at them in light of subsequent history. “Assembly” is the Hebrew *qahal*, usually translated *ekklesia* in the Greek Septuagint. Ultimately, the “church,” comprised of all post-resurrection believers regardless of genetic heritage, is specified here as needing atonement. In reality, it is our collective acceptance of the atonement provided by Yahweh and administered by Yahshua that *defines* us as members of this *qahal* or *ekklesia*. But the Children of Israel are listed separately as being in need of atonement. This is but one of hundreds of indicators in scripture that a remnant of *biological* Israel—outside the church (because they’ll come to faith after the *ekklesia* has been raptured) will also receive atonement under the ministry of the ultimate High Priest.

- (849) *The High Priest shall wear special linen clothing. “Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with the blood of a young bull as a sin offering, and of a ram as a burnt offering. He shall put the holy linen tunic and the linen trousers on his body; he shall be girded with a linen sash, and with the linen turban he shall be attired. These are holy garments. Therefore he shall wash his body in water, and put them on.”* (Leviticus 16:3-4) Throughout scripture, linen is a recurring symbol for grace or imputed righteousness—often contrasted with wool, a metaphor for work (something that would cause you to sweat). So we see

that the two fibers were not to be blended: **“You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you.”**

(Leviticus 19:19) That is to say, work, though a necessary part of our mortal lives, has no part to play in God’s plan of redemption. Yahweh’s formula is “grace alone through Christ alone,” not “God’s grace plus our works.” The priests and Levites who will minister in the Millennial temple are given the same instruction: **“And it shall be, whenever they enter the gates of the inner court, that they shall put on linen garments; no wool shall come upon them while they minister within the gates of the inner court or within the house. They shall have linen turbans on their heads and linen trousers on their bodies; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat.”** (Ezekiel 44:17-18)

The metaphor carries all the way through to the “marriage supper of the Lamb,” the wedding feast, so to speak, of Yahshua the Messiah and His bride, the *ekklesia*. **“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”** (Revelation 19:7-8) Righteous *acts*? That sounds like “good works,” doesn’t it? Perhaps, but the fact is, these linen wedding garments were *granted* to her (i.e., us)—she didn’t labor to attain them. That’s why we’re to give *Him* (Yahshua the Messiah, a.k.a. “the Lord God Omnipotent (v.6) glory upon learning of the readiness of His bride. He is the One who *made* the bride’s acts righteous. All this is precisely the same picture we’re being given in Leviticus 16: the priest, like the bride, is “made ready” by being cleansed by washing with water (the Word of God), followed by donning the linen garments of grace—imputed righteousness.

- (850) *The High Priest shall offer a sin offering for himself and his house. “Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house.”* (Leviticus 16:6) **“And Aaron shall bring the bull of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house, and shall kill the bull as the sin offering which is for himself.”** (Leviticus 16:11) The High Priest may have *stood* for the Messiah-Redeemer in his metaphorical role, but in reality he was a sinful man in need of atonement just like everybody else. So before he could “make atonement” for the sins of the people, he had to make sure he himself was covered. The animal specified for the task was a bull, because a real danger in being the High Priest was pride of position, which could (and sometimes did) lead to false doctrine. The sin offering of a bull addressed that.

Leviticus 16 skips around a bit, introducing subjects but only implementing them later. The schedule of events for the High Priest on the Day of Atonement is apparently as follows: (1) He bathes and puts on the holy linen garments (Precept #849); (2) he slays the *chata't* bull for the atonement of his own sins (#850); (3) offers the incense (#851); (4) sprinkles the bull's blood on the mercy seat (#852); (5) casts lots to determine the fate of the two goats (#854); (6) kills one goat and sprinkles its blood upon the mercy seat (#855); (7) sprinkles blood from both the bull and the goat upon the altar (#855); (8) sends the scapegoat into the wilderness (#857); (9) removes the special linen garments and washes himself again (#858); (10) offers the ram upon the altar as a burnt offering (#858); and (11) directs the disposal outside the camp of the carcasses of the *chata't* bull and goat (#860). One notes that considering it's a "sabbath of solemn rest," the High Priest has to work awfully hard on behalf of his people on *Yom Kippurim*. That's the point, of course: Aaron, as the anointed Priest (a type of the Messiah) does his job so the people may rest in it. Doing what he does, in fact, would be *illegal* for anyone else.

- (851) *The High Priest shall burn incense on the Day of Atonement. "Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before Yahweh, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil. And he shall put the incense on the fire before Yahweh, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die."* (Leviticus 16:12-13) If you'll recall, the altar of incense stood immediately in front of the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Normally (every morning and every evening, in fact), incense would be burned upon this small altar—a picture of constant and recurring prayer and intercession. But today, on *Yom Kippurim*, the incense was to be brought inside the veil—into the Most Holy Place—and burned in a censer. Why? Because Yahweh's Shekinah Glory was said to abide between the two cherubim atop the mercy seat on the ark of the Covenant. At this point, the blood of the bull (which would atone for the sins of the Priest) had not yet been sprinkled upon the mercy seat (see the following precept), so the process of atonement was not complete. This means that Aaron or his successor would have had to walk into the very presence of God in a sinful, unreconciled state—and that would be a fatal move. So Yahweh provided a way to insulate His glory from fallen man until the task of atonement could be performed.

In case you haven't caught the significance of all this, the incense, this insulating intercessor between God and man, is a picture of Yahshua's earthly life prior to Calvary: God Himself walking among us fallen mortals. How He did this without inadvertently killing us by His very

glorious presence is one of the great theological conundrums of the ages. Moses reports that the cloud of incense was to “cover” the mercy seat, where the Shekinah dwelt. This is not *kapar* (the verb from which we get “atonement), but *kasah*, which denotes “to cover, conceal, hide, or clothe.” (S) In Yahshua, Yahweh’s awesome deity was concealed, hidden, and covered by being clothed in mortal flesh. Like the smoke of incense, it wasn’t made to last, but this condition persisted long enough for Him to make atonement for mankind. Hallelujah!

- (852) *The High Priest shall sprinkle the blood of his sin offering on the mercy seat. “He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.”* (Leviticus 16:14) Now protected by the cloud of incense, the High Priest could begin the process of symbolic atonement—starting with his own needs. The blood of the bull (see Precept #850) was to be applied with his finger onto the east side of the mercy seat—that is, the side that was closest to the east-facing veil separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place. I get the impression that he wasn’t to loiter, walk around, and make himself at home in the Holy of Holies, but was rather to pull the veil aside, do as Yahweh had directed, and then respectfully withdraw—immediately. This was where God “dwelled.” The Priest was just visiting—he wasn’t in the process of becoming a god himself.

After applying the blood to the mercy seat, he was to sprinkle the bull’s blood seven times upon the ground in front of the ark of the covenant and its mercy seat. The number seven denotes completion or perfection, signifying that the act was perfectly efficacious in achieving its purpose—atonement for the High Priest and his household. But why was the blood to be sprinkled on the mercy seat *and* on the ground? The mercy seat sat atop the ark of the covenant, where the two tablets upon which Yahweh had written the Ten Commandments were kept, telling us, I believe, that the blood so applied would satisfy the requirements of the Law. The earth before the ark was sprinkled with blood for the same reason: what *it* contained—namely, us—would also be perfectly and completely reconciled to Yahweh through the atonement process—if only we’d accept the gift.

The Priest was to use his own finger as the tool of application (not some neutral implement like a sprig of hyssop). That is, the One represented by the anointed High Priest—Yahshua the Messiah—would personally (not vicariously) apply the blood of atonement. Moreover, He

would do it—it wouldn't be done to Him. He would be the subject of atonement, not the object; our Savior, not our victim.

- (853) *Present a burnt offering and sin offering to Yahweh on the Day of Atonement. “He shall take from the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats as a sin offering, and one ram as a burnt offering.”* (Leviticus 16:5) The burnt offering (*olah*) of a ram symbolically indicated the priest's recognition of, and homage to, the authority of the Lamb of God. But the really unique feature of the *Yom Kippurim* was the use of two goats in the atonement process. Although both goats were considered *chata't*, or sin offerings, only one was to be actually slain, as we shall see in the next couple of precepts.

We should note that the concept of “offering” is only *implied* in the noun *chata't*. Along with a number of other derivatives with various closely related shades of meaning, it is based on the verb *chata'*, meaning to miss, miss the way, sin, incur guilt, forfeit, or purify from uncleanness. Thus *chata't* (the most often used form) was used of both the offense and the means of purification from its consequences. *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes that although “sin was understood in the ancient near eastern religions as a violation of the status quo in cultic, political, and social life,” in theocratic Israel, “the people learned by revelation that sin was disobedience of God's will and exploitation or disregard of the rights of other people. Sin was declared to be an extremely serious matter and could only be taken care of by a creative and gracious act of merciful forgiveness by God. And the cure was effective, bringing about a new life of joy and fruitfulness.” So we see that the concept of shedding blood is incidental, but not essential, to the concept of *chata't*. (In contrast, the verb *zabach*, translated “to sacrifice,” actually means to slaughter.) Thus sacrificing only one of the two *chata't* goats isn't self-contradictory.

- (854) *Cast lots to decide the fate of the two goats. “He shall take the two goats and present them before Yahweh at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for Yahweh and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat on which Yahweh's lot fell, and offer it as a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before Yahweh, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness.”* (Leviticus 16:7-10) This instruction is unique in the entire Law of Moses: two goats, both called *chata't*, or sin offerings, are to be brought before Yahweh, but only one of them is to die (Precept #855) while the other one lives (#857). God is telling us that both death and life are involved, and indeed required, in the atonement process. We'll

discuss what the ramifications are in the coming precepts, but for now let us examine the means by which the goats' relative fates are decided: by "casting lots." Although the goats were to be as similar as possible—both young, male, and without blemish—Yahweh is *not* telling us (like Allah would have) that whoever lives and whoever dies is a coin toss. Rather, the goats are to be seen as a set, a unit, two sides of the same coin: each of them plays a part in explaining Yahweh's procedure for our reconciliation with Him, and both of them are said to provide atonement for the people, each in his own way. Neither goat tells the whole story or does the whole job. Therefore, for God's purpose, it doesn't really matter which goat does which job.

- (855) *Make atonement for the people.* "Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat. So he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness." (Leviticus 16:15-16) We discussed how (and why) the blood of the bull was to be applied (atoning for the Priest) in Precept #852. Here we see the process being repeated, this time with the blood of the slain goat—the *chata't* required for the sin of the people. Three things made it necessary for blood to be shed: (1) The "uncleanness" of the people. This is the Hebrew *tum'ah*: impurity, uncleanness, dross, or foreign particulate matter. The goal, then, would be to purify them, to separate them from their sin. (2) "Transgression" or *pesha*, is an act of rebellion, crime, or revolt—that which is contrary to God's standard—emphasizing not the error but the rebellion. And (3) "sin" is *chata'ah*, a violation of a standard, in the sense of missing a mark.

Surprisingly perhaps, making atonement for the people in this way was also said to atone for the Holy Place and the tabernacle of meeting. Because of their nature, these things obviously didn't sin, rebel, or become impure by their own behavior. Nevertheless, they were detailed symbols describing Yahweh's plan of redemption for mankind, and more to the point, they were to be used by God's chosen people to communicate the story to the rest of the world. So if Israel rebelled, if they became impure or missed the mark, the message of the Tabernacle would be obscured. Unfortunately, that very thing has become historical fact: Israel's sin has made the lessons of the Sanctuary opaque to the world, not to mention themselves. *Yom Kippurim* will correct that.

(856) *The High Priest must do his work alone.* “There shall be no man in the tabernacle of meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the Holy Place, until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel. And he shall go out to the altar that is before Yahweh, and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. Then he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, cleanse it, and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.” (Leviticus 16:17-19) The activities of the Day of Atonement were centered in one man, the High Priest. He was the only one allowed in the Tabernacle sprinkling blood or burning incense. We’ve seen before that the High Priest is a type of the coming Messiah, and this bears out that fact: Yahshua accomplished our atonement single-handedly. No one else’s sacrifice—the ultimate “good deed”—would have any part to play in the reconciliation of man to God. Not even martyrdom can secure one’s place in the Kingdom. Only Christ’s innocent blood can do that.

I may be reading too much into this, but when we’re told that the High Priest made atonement for “his household, *and* for all the assembly of Israel,” I see a theological distinction between the two things. “The assembly of Israel” is easy enough to figure out, of course. But what precisely is the High Priest’s “household” (beyond the obvious literal context—his immediate family)? After all, his wife and children were in no physical danger when he strode into the Holy of Holies with his incense and the blood of the bull, so why were they not simply included in “the assembly of Israel?” I believe the answer is prophetic: the “household” of the ultimate High Priest, Yahshua the Messiah—the temple and dwelling place of His Holy Spirit—would not be confined to biological Israel, but would find realization in every nation, tribe, and tongue. I’m speaking, of course, of the church, the *ekklesia*, the called-out assembly of Yahshua’s followers. We too, even if we’re not of Israelite ancestry, receive the gift of atonement if we “afflict our souls” in repentance, answer Yahweh’s call (we are, after all, the *ekklesia*—the “called-out”), and rest in His finished work.

(857) *The live goat shall bear the sin of the people into the wilderness.* “And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat. Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.” (Leviticus 16:20-22) *Yom Kippurim* not

only covers our sins; it also removes them. Yes, the innocent blood of the first goat was required to atone, to propitiate—to pay the penalty—for our sins. But the job is really only half done at this point. It is not enough to merely be dead to sin: we must at the same time become alive to God. This is where the second goat comes into the picture. Both death and life are required.

Both goats are a picture of what Christ accomplished for us on Calvary. Not only was He slain for our transgressions (prophesied by Passover), He also lives on our behalf (the point of the Feast of Firstfruits). What lies in between (the Feast of Unleavened Bread) is the task of the second goat, the living one. The sins of the people were to be symbolically laid upon his head, and he was to bear them to a place where they could no longer trouble God's people in any way: to the wilderness, an "uninhabited land."

The world's religions make a killing (sometimes literally) by fostering and nurturing the guilt that their adherents feel concerning their sin. They are in the business (again, literally) of providing ways to deal with the shame that sin inevitably leaves in its wake for people who perceive, deep within their souls, that there is a God who has standards of holiness they have violated. There is money to be made and power to be grasped selling indulgences, prescribing penance, and declaring oneself to be the sole doorkeeper to paradise. Guilt is a tar baby: it's best to leave it alone. I'm not suggesting that we should flippantly brush off the consequences of our sin, you understand. The "afflict-your-souls" connotation of *Yom Kippurim*'s *'anah* requirement demonstrates that repentance and contrition is part of the atonement process. But if we are to embrace the other side of *'anah*—to answer and respond to God—then we need to come to terms with the fact that our sins have been carried away to an uninhabited place. Yahweh has already dealt with them. They are gone, never to return. We can—we *must*—rest assured of that.

- (858) *The High Priest shall change clothes to present the burnt offering. "Then Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of meeting, shall take off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the Holy Place, and shall leave them there. And he shall wash his body with water in a holy place, put on his garments, come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, and make atonement for himself and for the people."* (Leviticus 16:23-24) If we see the High Priest's special linen garments as the imputed righteousness of God's grace and nothing more, we'll miss part of the subtle picture Yahweh is painting. I mean, our knee jerk reaction is, "If linen garments indicate imputed righteousness, we should *all* wear them, not just the Priest, and

we should never take them off for any reason.” So we’re being told there’s more to it. Let’s analyze the instructions.

Aaron was told to bathe and don the linen garb before he did anything else on *Yom Kippurim*. Thus prepared, he proceeded with all of the sin offerings, slaying the bull and the first goat, sprinkling their blood, then pronouncing the sins of the people on the scapegoat and sending it off into the wilderness. Only now, with all of the *chata’t* sacrifices and offerings out of the way, is he to bathe again and put his regular clothing back on. But he’s not finished at the altar: he must now offer up the ram as an *olah*, a burnt offering. Why change clothes?

The most obvious factor is that when sprinkling the blood on the mercy seat, the High Priest was standing in the physical presence of Yahweh’s Shekinah Glory, and you can’t do that in your own righteousness if you want to survive. Moreover, Aaron was acting out a scene, playing the part of the Messiah Himself—the source of our righteousness. And later, when sending the scapegoat into the wilderness, he was playing God’s role before the people—for we in our own strength have no means to rid ourselves of our iniquity.

But the *olah* is a different matter. Here Aaron was back in the persona of a priest, and more to the point, a son of Israel—a mere man. An *olah*, if you’ll recall, is a voluntary act of homage to God. If I may quote myself (from Volume I, Chapter 12), “The *olah* was a voluntary sacrifice made for atonement, homage to Yahweh, and celebration before Him. Total dedication is implied, for the offering was to be completely consumed by fire. Abraham’s intended sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah was called an *olah*, making the messianic message evident. Through it we are reminded that Yahshua’s self sacrifice for our redemption was not something He *had* to do, but was something He *wanted* to do, because He loved us.” The burnt offering, then, is *not* part of the process whereby Yahshua’s righteousness is accounted to us. It is, rather, an expression of deep, humble gratitude for having already attained that amazing status. And that, to my mind, explains the High Priest’s change of apparel.

- (859) *The “suitable man” shall undergo cleansing. “He who released the goat as the scapegoat shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.”* (Leviticus 16:26) Here we are given instruction concerning one of the supporting cast—the “suitable” man (verse 21) who was assigned to take the goat out of the camp into the wilderness. The word translated “suitable” is *itiy*, meaning able, fit, ready—pertaining to one who is capable of accomplishing a task. The “task,” in this case, was to see to it that the sin-bearer reached his destination, i.e., the uninhabited

land, where the sin could no longer trouble God's people. God may be alluding to those rare individuals who serve as "moral compasses" for their communities, whose refusal to compromise with the world becomes a quiet beacon of truth and love, whether or not they purposely set out to become reformers or spokesmen for Yahweh's cause. A few Biblical examples: Job, Gideon, Ruth, Samuel, Abigail, Daniel, John the Baptist, and Nicodemus.

But "taking out the garbage" can be a dirty business. The lesson is not that these people are capable and willing to do what God has called them to do (though that's what defines them). It's that their willingness and ability to do God's work does not *in itself* qualify them to "come into the camp," that is, become a part of the congregation of the saints. What qualifies them, rather, is "washing their clothes and bath with water," that is, allowing their lives to be cleansed by the Word of God, which speaks of the sacrifice of Yahshua. No matter how "suitable" we are to do good works in this world, our position before God requires us to be clean—and only He can provide that.

(860) *The fat of the sin offerings shall be burned on the altar, but their flesh shall be burned outside the camp.* **"The fat of the sin offering he shall burn on the altar.... The bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp. And they shall burn in the fire their skins, their flesh, and their offal. Then he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp."** (Leviticus 16:25, 27-28) In contrast to the burnt offering of the ram, which was to be completely consumed upon the altar, the sin offerings of the Day of Atonement were quite selective in what was burned on the altar. As always with *chata't* sacrifices, the fatty portions were removed and burned upon the altar in homage to Yahweh. On reflection, I think these might be—like the olive oil mixed with grain offerings—symbolic of the Spirit that indwells the worshipper, which is being declared to be God's in the sacrificial act.

Normally with a sin offering, the priest who performed the ceremony would receive the flesh of the sacrificed animal to eat, so long as the *chata't* wasn't being offered to cover *his* sins. But here, it was: the bull in very specific terms, and the goat in a general way—the High Priest was, after all, part of the congregation for whose sins the goat was being offered to atone. So the entire carcass, the flesh, the skin, and the inner organs—everything but the blood and the **"fat that covers the entrails and all the fat which is on the entrails, the two kidneys and the fat that is on them by the flanks, and the fatty lobe attached to the liver above the kidneys,"** (Leviticus 4:8-

9) was taken outside the camp and burned. This once again is a Messianic prophecy. Yahshua, who had taken our sins upon Himself, was taken “outside the camp,” that is, outside Jerusalem’s city walls, to receive the sentence of judgment for our trespasses (which is what “burning” represents).

As with the “suitable man” who accompanied the scapegoat into the wilderness, the man who was tasked with the burning of the carcasses of the bull and the second goat was not allowed to enter the camp until he had “washed his clothes and bathed his body in water.” This is the flip side of the same coin. Metaphorically, the “carcass burner” is the one who inflicted judgment on God’s Messiah. This isn’t limited to a few Roman soldiers in Jerusalem. In reality, it means *all of us*: we’re all complicit in His crucifixion. In the end, then, our salvation doesn’t depend on whether we *meant* to do good or not. We have all fallen short of Yahweh’s perfect standard. But all of us—not only those who sincerely tried to keep the curse of sin from wandering freely among the people, but even those of us who in our ignorance and pride executed judgment upon God’s innocent Messiah—can be admitted into “the camp,” into fellowship with Yahweh and His people. The price of admission is cleanliness: we must be washed clean by the Word of God and in the blood that we have so blithely shed—the blood of Yahshua the Christ.

FEAST OF TABERNACLES

The seventh and final appointment with God on the Hebrew festival calendar is called *Sukkot*, or the Feast of Tabernacles. We’ve already explored aspects of this *miqra* under Mitzvot #137-142, #522, #543, and #838. This was structured as an end-of-summer “harvest party,” a week long celebration where the whole nation of Israel would gather where Yahweh had “chosen to make His name abide” (which, from David’s reign onward, was the city of Jerusalem) and “camp out” in temporary shelters for the duration of the feast.

The name of the *miqra* is derived from *sukkah* (as in Leviticus 23:34; *Sukkot* is the plural form), which means a dwelling place or shelter—a thicket or covert (when animals are being housed—e.g. Genesis 33:17) or a hut, booth, tent, pavilion or canopy (when referring to people). This is *not* the word translated “Tabernacle” when referring to the “tent of meeting” (Hebrew: *mishkan*), although the Tabernacle was occasionally referred to as a *sukkah*—most poignantly in the noble protest of Uriah the Hittite, husband of Bathsheba, who said to the desperate and deceitful king David, “**The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in tents (*sukkot*).... Shall I then go to my house to eat and drink, and to lie with my wife? As I live and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.**” (II Samuel 11:11) But from

Yahweh's point of view, the *mishkan*-Tabernacle and the *sukkah*-tabernacle represent two very different truths, the first (as we saw in Chapter 4 of this volume) being a detailed treatise on the Plan of God for our redemption, and the second embodying Yahweh's incredible desire to enjoy personal fellowship, or stated more informally, to "hang out," with us. I wouldn't exactly call it "slumming," but the amazing fact is, in spite of our shortcomings and failures, Yahweh actually *likes* us. He enjoys our company. And if He has to leave His heavenly abode to spend "quality time" with us (until we're ready to inhabit His world), then that's what He'll do. The *mo'ed-miqra* of *Sukkot*, in the most graphic of terms, is a prophecy of Yahweh coming to "camp out" among men.

We can get a more focused view of *sukkah/Sukkot* by examining some other instances of the word's usage. In a clearly Millennial passage, the prophet Amos reports, **"On that day I will raise up the tabernacle (*sukkah*) of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old."** (Amos 9:11) The "tabernacle of David" is his earthly kingdom, which "fell down" only one generation after his death, with the division of Israel from Judah. It will be restored, however—all twelve tribes together again, with Yahshua on the throne—during the thousand-year reign, the Kingdom of God upon the earth.

Speaking of the same glorious time, Isaiah writes, **"And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem. When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, then Yahweh will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering. And there will be a tabernacle (*sukkah*) for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain."** (Isaiah 4:3-6) What is this *sukkah* of which he speaks? What is this "covering" that will provide "refuge" and "shelter from storm and rain?" Why, it's the Shekinah of Yahweh—His glorious presence that will once again fill the Temple on Moriah (see Ezekiel 43:4)—the very presence of God dwelling among men.

(861) *Observe the Feast of Tabernacles on the day specified by Yahweh. "On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of Yahweh for seven days."* (Leviticus 23:39) As always, Yahweh was very specific about when the children of Israel were to observe the *miqra*. Considering the history of the festivals' fulfillments so far, we can only conclude that we're being told the very date of the year upon which Yahweh will bring about whatever it is that the *miqra* is designed to teach us. In this case, it's the ascension to the throne of earth

by Yahshua the Messiah (the bodily manifestation of Yahweh's Shekinah Glory, as we saw above). He will rule His people in perfect peace for a thousand years—and beyond. As Isaiah told us, **“The government will be upon His shoulder, and His name will be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”** (Isaiah 9:6)

I find it interesting that the names of the Hebrew months are seldom mentioned in scripture. They're usually just numbered, as here: the “seventh month.” (Days of the week aren't named either; they're merely numbered, one through seven.) The names we commonly assign to the months of the Jewish calendar are derived from those used by their Babylonian captors (the obvious tip-off being the fourth month, named after the prototypical sun-god counterfeit, Tammuz). In fact, we only have the original names of four of the twelve months. For the record: the first month, Nisan, was called Abib (which means “ripening of grain”). The second, Iyar, was originally named Zin (meaning “splendor, or radiance”); the seventh month, Tishri, was first called Ethanim (“everflowing streams”); and the eighth, Cheshvan, was originally called Bul (which means “to produce,” in the sense of providing rain). The rest of the names have been lost to posterity.

Anyway, the date specified for the Feast of Tabernacles is the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Tishri), which usually falls sometime within the Gregorian calendar's October. Of course, because the symbols Yahweh is using to communicate His truths are so well established by this time, we could perhaps paraphrase our current precept as follows: *“When the reflection of Yahweh's truth upon the earth has at last reached its brightest phase—that is, when God's plan has reached a climax of perfection, marked by the completion of His harvest of believing souls from every age into the Kingdom of Heaven upon the earth—then it's time to celebrate with a joy that will never cease. But beware: one cannot work to attain a seat at Yahweh's banquet table, whether in the earthly kingdom, or in the eternal state that follows, for it is a gift from God that we may either accept with thanksgiving or reject with contempt. The choice is ours.”*

Or, we can try to joyfully discern when He will bring this most amazing event to pass. We've been told the day of the year, Tishri 15; can we determine which year? After all, He called this a *mo'ed*, an *appointment*. Even if we don't actually have to arrange to show up on time ('cause He's promised to send His limo for us, so to speak), an appointment presupposes that both parties know when to meet, does it not? Notwithstanding the prevailing Christian opinion that we can't know

anything at all about Yahweh's chronology (despite scores of scriptural clues and outright prophecies), I believe God *did* tell us the year of the definitive Feast of Tabernacles. (Everybody in this parade is out of step but me, right?) The Apostle Peter tells us, **"Beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."** (II Peter 3:8; cf. Psalm 90:4) The reason so many of us think God's timing is all a big mystery is that we *have* forgotten "this one thing." In both the creation-week account and the institution of the six-day work week followed by a Sabbath rest, Yahweh was telling us what His schedule for mankind's redemption was going to be: six thousand years of "work" (laboring under a sin nature that separated us from direct fellowship with Him, making grace through faith necessary), followed by one day of "rest" in His finished work (the Millennial Kingdom of Yahshua). All this would be followed by the eternal state, in which all believers would relate to Yahweh directly, having at last received their immortal, "spiritual" bodies, as described in I Corinthians 15.

The only "innovation" I've brought to the theological table is the thought that *The Millennium* (the seventh) isn't the only one defined by a period of exactly one thousand years—they *all* are. (I know, it sounds slam-dunk obvious when you say it out loud.) But if this is true, then each of the seven millennia of Yahweh's plan will have begun with a spiritually significant "milestone," a millennial marker. Most of these markers are clearly apparent once you start looking for them, and I've discussed them all in *Future History*. At this juncture, I just want to reiterate that the *really* obvious one, the anchor by which all the others are firmly secured in history, is 33 AD, the year of Yahshua's passion, the year in which the first four *miqra'ey* of Yahweh were fulfilled. That fact leads me to the unshakable conclusion that Yahshua's Millennial Kingdom will begin in 2033—two thousand years after Christ's sacrifice. On the Feast of Tabernacles, the tenth day of Tishri, Yahshua will commence his earthly reign, fulfilling the requirements of the *miqra's* prophecy.

For me, this chronological epiphany finally made sense of such esoteric statements as this: **"Come, and let us [in context, Ephraim and Judah—all of Israel] return to Yahweh; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us. On the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight."** (Hosea 6:1-2) If a "day" is only a day, then this makes no sense that I can see (though it suggests that the timing of Christ's death and sojourn in the tomb—something Jews today refuse to acknowledge—may also be prophetic of Israel's plight). But if Peter's formula is applied, it means that Israel would be "torn" and "stricken" for *two thousand years*, beginning in 33. That much is historical

fact. But Hosea reports that they will also be “raised up” on the *third day*—that is, during the third millennium after the crucifixion, a period of time that will begin in 2033.

You’d like a little confirmation? Okay. King Hezekiah got sick and was told by Isaiah that death was near. When he protested, pouted and prayed, the prophet was told to go back and tell him this: **“Thus says Yahweh, the God of David your father: ‘I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of Yahweh.’”** (II Kings 20:5) I believe Hezekiah’s illness was a picture of Israel’s impending “torn and stricken” condition. Isaiah has thus prophesied the same thing Hosea did: Israel would be restored, but not until *two thousand years* had passed. And not only restored politically. They would “go up to the house of Yahweh,” a euphemism for the Temple, which you and I now know to be a comprehensive metaphor for God’s plan of redemption: Israel’s restoration would be *spiritual!*

And what about the Sabbath issue? The Feast of Tabernacles is described as a Sabbath (*Sabbaton*), a day of rest. Although the “do-not-work-for-your-salvation” admonition is what we must primarily heed, it is not without significance that in the year 2033, *Sukkot* does fall on a natural Sabbath, Saturday, October 8. The reason I concluded that the Day of Atonement (also a *Sabbaton*) would *not* fall on a natural Sabbath is that if they are fulfilled in the same year (as scripture seems to indicate), they can’t both be on Saturdays, because they fall only five days apart.

- (862) *Build booths in which to “camp out” on the first day of the feast. “You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before Yahweh your God for seven days.* (Leviticus 23:40) When I covered this under Mitzvah #141, I was so busy looking at the forest, I neglected to examine the trees—literally. For that I apologize, and will endeavor now to make amends by getting to the root of their meanings. If you’ll recall, our introduction to this section revealed that the *sukkah*, the booth or tabernacle each Israelite family was to build at “the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide” was a picture of the Shekinah Glory of Yahweh. *He* personifies the covering that provides refuge and shelter from the storms of our existence. Here, we’ll see the flip side of this coin. The four types of trees, the components from which the *Sukkot* are to be made, indicate who will populate Yahshua’s Kingdom: those who by definition are indwelled and empowered with the Spirit of Yahweh. As we shall see, this is not the random assemblage of building

materials as it first appears, but rather a comprehensive list—a detailed and multifaceted description—of those in whom the Holy Spirit abides.

(1) “Beautiful” is from the Hebrew verb *hadar*, meaning to honor, adorn, or make glorious. Not surprisingly, it is a word used of the return of Yahweh (in the persona of Yahshua) to the earth as He takes care of business a few days before the Feast of Tabernacles: **“Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious (*hadar*) in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength?—‘I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.’”** (Isaiah 63:1) Or how about this? **“His glory is great in your salvation [that’s *Yâshuw`ah* (ישׁוּעָה)—the Messiah’s given name]; honor and majesty (*hadar*) you have placed upon Him.”** (Psalm 21:5) The first “tree,” then, represents King Yahshua, the very personification of the Shekinah and Spirit of God, returning to earth to reign in glory. Note, however, that the people were instructed to use the “fruit” of beautiful trees to build their booths. That’s the Hebrew word *pariy*, meaning fruit, produce, offspring, children, or progeny. And who are the spiritual progeny of King Yahshua? We who trust Him. **“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!... Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”** (I John 3:1-2)

(2) “Palm trees” are the Hebrew noun *tamar*, the water-loving date palms that congregate in oasis settings. **“The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree; He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of Yahweh shall flourish in the courts of our God.”** (Psalm 92:12-13) Who are these “righteous ones?” Job’s friend Elihu explains that Yahweh **“does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous; but they are on the throne with kings, for He has seated them forever, and they are exalted.”** (Job 36:7) But righteousness (as you know) is not the result of our own efforts, but God’s on our behalf: **“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”** (James 2:23) The second tree, then, stands for those accounted righteous—we who believe God—who will populate the Kingdom under Yahshua’s sovereignty. We will be “planted in the house of Yahweh” and shall “flourish in the courts of our God,” for He does “not withdraw His eyes” from us. *Ever*.

(3) “Leafy” trees. The adjective *abot* means thick with leaves, dense with foliage. So, he’s saying we’re *dense*? Well, not exactly. The verb from which “leafy” is derived, *abat*, means “to weave together, to conspire, to wrap up, to intertwine something.” Who are these who conspire together, who are weaved or intertwined into one in the context

of the Millennium? Why, Israel and the *ekklesia*. I'll admit, I probably would have missed that one if I hadn't already studied the structure of the wilderness Tabernacle (see Precepts #712-#715, #720, and #722). If you look at the details, this concept is everywhere you look: the *ekklesia* and the nation of Israel are side by side, united but distinct, working shoulder to shoulder. The *ekklesia* has not absorbed—or replaced—Israel, nor have they become part of Israel. Rather, we are entwined like branches grafted into the same divine tree (see Romans 11), or woven together like the warp and woof of one magnificent tapestry, created by and for the glory of Yahweh. If you don't believe me, read on...

(4) “Willows of the brook” are designated by the Hebrew noun *ereb*, meaning a willow or poplar tree. A virtually identical noun, however (with the same consonant root), denotes “a mixture, a mixed company, interwoven. The primary meaning is a grouping of people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It was used of the heterogeneous band associated with the nation of Israel as it departed from Egypt...” (Baker and Carpenter) The word also means “woof,” as in the threads that cross and interweave with the warp in a fabric. This, perhaps, sheds new light on the reason *ereb* is used in Exodus 12:38 to describe the “mixed” gentile multitude that believed in Yahweh and left Egypt along with the Israelites in the exodus. The two groups were interwoven, interdependent, and symbiotic, but their identities and heritage remained somewhat distinct.

Together, then, the four trees listed in Leviticus 23:40 signify the populace of the Millennial Kingdom of our Messiah, beginning with the glorious King, Yahshua himself, and including His “children,” the righteous who will flourish in His courts: those of Israel and every other nation who have “conspired” together to love and honor Yahweh in truth and trust—every believer from every age, from Adam until the last child born during the Millennium. Perhaps the most amazing fact of all is that these people are said to be the very *dwelling place* of the Glory of God.

Either that, or I'm just making this stuff up as I go along.

- (863) *Keep the Feast of Tabernacles in the place God has specified. “Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh chooses, because Yahweh your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice.”* (Deuteronomy 16:15) The Israelites were never to formally gather for worship (at least when sacrifices were involved) anywhere except where the Tabernacle or Temple and the ark of the Covenant were. But they were *required* to make the short journey three times a year to wherever this was. The Feast of Tabernacles is one of those times. Once again, we observe that Yahweh

has, because of Israel's idolatry and the rejection of her Messiah, made it impossible to do what He's required them to do. Even if you're a Jew living in Jerusalem, you cannot literally "keep" *Sukkot* today, because there is no Temple and no priesthood. Symbolically, however, is another matter. "The place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide" is defined by what it means: the Tabernacle is a detailed picture of the Plan of God for our redemption, centered in Yahshua the Messiah. Therefore, if the Spirit of Yahweh dwells within you (as a result of your trusting belief in Yahshua's atoning work) then *you* are the place Yahweh chooses to be; *you* are the "fruit of the beautiful tree," *you* are the righteous one who "flourishes like the palm tree," the "leafy tree" intertwined in worship with Yahweh's other children, and the "willow" who's such a vital part of God's joyous mixed company. Yahweh has blessed us with life, love, and His very presence. We shall surely rejoice!

- (864) *Observe the seventh feast by dwelling in tabernacles for seven days during the seventh month. "You shall keep the feast of Yahweh for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest."* (Leviticus 23:39) *"You shall keep it as a feast to Yahweh for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am Yahweh your God."* (Leviticus 23:41-43) The prevalence of the number seven in these instructions tells us that God intends to use what the *miqra* foreshadows to bring the affairs of mankind to a complete and perfect end. This is not the first week-long festival on Yahweh's calendar, however: the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the spring taught us that our sins could be removed from our lives—*completely*. This second and final seven-day appointment with God will at last reunite us (who had been estranged from Him by our sin) to perfect and intimate fellowship.

Note that the seventh month, though it marks the end of the story of our redemption as told through the seven *mo'edim-miqra'ey* of Yahweh, is not the end of the calendar year. There are many months yet to run. These months, I believe, are analogous to the eighth day of the feast: they represent the eternal state—that which comes after the Millennial Kingdom. The eighth day is a *sabbaton*, an observed Sabbath, so it's clear that the principle of grace will never be abrogated. The number of bulls sacrificed will have dropped from thirteen on the first day to one on the eighth (see Precept #845), leading me to the conclusion that error and falsehood will be a thing of the past.

During the eternal eighth day, however, the tabernacles or booths that we lived in during the festival week will no longer be inhabited. Why? Because the unique relationship we shared with Yahshua the Messiah (the “beautiful tree” in the metaphor) will no longer be precisely what it had been. Yahweh will no longer be “camping out” among men. He won’t have to. Since all of God’s children will at last be clothed in our immortal, spiritual bodies, it will no longer be necessary for Yahweh to diminish His glory by showing Himself to us in an assumed human form, as Yahshua the Messiah. At last we will see Him as He is; we will know as we are known—things that would have killed the most holy of mortal men.

In a sense, every created entity is as a metaphor designed to teach us about its Creator: light and sound, earth and sky, good and evil, life and death—they can exist in our understanding only because we ourselves have been given corporeal reality by our God. But on the eighth day, there will be no more need for these metaphors, symbols, and parables. Biology, chemistry, and physics were introduced by Yahweh for only one reason: to bring into being the mechanism by which He could love and be loved in return. But on the “eighth” day, the eternal day, the physical properties defining our *immortal* bodies will no longer be dependent on these things. Now that Yahweh’s little “science project”—the physical universe—will have finally served its purpose, He has something new planned, something that did not necessarily have its origins in the Big Bang (through which Yahweh Himself created our present physical existence). A new heaven and new earth await. This is what Paul was talking about in II Corinthians 5:16-17: **“Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”**

Loving Your Neighbor

In America, it is our practice to elect people to enact laws. Then we elect or appoint judges to implement—and if necessary, interpret, amend, or invalidate—those laws. Over the course of a couple of centuries, this has resulted in an impenetrable maze of rules, procedures, guidelines, exceptions, and exceptions to the exceptions. This in turn requires the attention of armies of lawyers—most of whom are being handsomely paid by clients with personal agendas to swing the outcome in one direction or the other, regardless of what's right or wrong. And we ordinary citizens begin to wonder where the law ceased being our protector and started becoming our master. The whole idea of having laws in the first place was to make life safe and fair for all concerned. Where did we go wrong?

It has become fashionable in Christian circles to declare that although we've forgotten our roots, the Ten Commandments were the foundation for our whole system of common law, and we should therefore keep them posted on the courthouse wall. I'll agree that they *should have* been the basis of American jurisprudence, but from the very beginning, we edited the life out of God's list. In truth, only four of the Ten Commandments were *ever* the law of the land in this country: do not murder, do not commit adultery (and we've long since jettisoned that one—it's no longer considered a crime in this country), don't steal, and don't perjure yourself. None of the rest of them (i.e., worship Yahweh only, don't make idols, use the name of God with respect, keep the Sabbath, honor your parents, and do not covet) were *ever* taken seriously by our lawmakers (or the European legal traditions they built upon). So our legislators didn't exactly go wrong by abandoning the Ten Commandments along the way. Rather, they (we) went astray by failing to implement them in the first place. (I'm speaking of law in the United States because that's what I know, but I suspect that much of what I'm saying applies to most nations.)

But as Yahshua pointed out, there are two "laws" that, if heeded, would have rendered the Ten Commandments, and indeed the entire Torah, more or less redundant. First, **"You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."** (Deuteronomy 6:5) And the second is a natural result of doing the first: **"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."** (Leviticus 19:18) I submit to you that not only the "Torah and the Prophets" hang upon these two precepts; if we all followed them, they would also eliminate the need for ninety percent of American law. Think it through: how much of our legal system is dedicated to trying to ensure that people *act as though* they "loved their neighbors as they do

themselves?” It’s not just the obviously criminal stuff like, “Don’t mug a guy and steal his wallet.” Everything from trade and banking regulations to civil rights, consumer protection, patents and copyrights, family law, environmental protection, immigration, national defense, intellectual property, probate and taxes, malpractice and workers’ compensation law, the regulation of alcohol, tobacco, and firearms—and a score of other categories—would have no reason for being there if we all simply loved our neighbors as much (and in the same way) as we love ourselves. Most statutes would be rendered obsolete if we (and I mean *worldwide*) didn’t covet what others had, if we didn’t try to steal from them, and if we didn’t seek to murder them, whether literally or figuratively.

I would never do that, you protest. Maybe, but *somebody’s* doing it. Let’s play the David vs. Nathan “You-Are-The-Man” game, and see if anything rings a bell. Say you work for a bank who’s making loans to shaky customers—taking unwarranted risks with money that isn’t theirs in hopes of making a quick buck. (*The FDIC will always bail us out if we go too far.*) Or maybe you work for a manufacturer whose only reason for making their product safe or suitable, or whose only motivation for the safe disposal of their company’s waste products is that the government will fine them if they don’t do the right thing. My son just ran into this one: he put \$27 worth of gasoline on his *pre-paid* debit card, but they charged him \$60. Why? Because they can. They’re allowed to “escrow” the remainder, it turns out, until the transaction is finalized—which means he’s got his wings clipped for a week or so. (It’s all designed to trick card users into making overdrafts, engendering hefty and unexpected fees. I’m told the banking industry “earned” over fifteen billion dollars last year by doing this. Makes me want to pay for everything in pennies.) Maybe you’re guiltless here, but I’m not. I used to be a packaging designer. How many times, I wonder, did I try my best to “put lipstick on the pig” so to speak—to make a product look better than it really was? It’s one thing to put your best foot forward; it’s another to lie to your client’s customer. Sometimes it was very hard to tell where that line was. My point is, if I really *loved* the consumer, I would have found a way to let him know that this nifty energy-saving electronic light bulb I’d just sold him wouldn’t actually fit in any standard table lamp known to man.

God never specified a penalty for failing to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Good thing, too. Nobody actually attains perfection in loving his neighbor in this life, which is not to say we shouldn’t constantly try. This is clearly less “law” than instruction: a goal to aim for, like when Yahweh said, “Be holy, for I am holy.” The ability to love, like the ability to be holy, are gifts from God: we can’t really do this in our own strength. Loving people is a byproduct, a natural result, of loving Yahweh—or more correctly, reciprocating His love for us. In the end, you can’t love your fellow man without loving God, for Yahweh is the source of love in this world. The best we can achieve in our own strength is love’s negative

permutation—not showing hatred, not doing harm. Is it really *love* to refrain from robbing a man? No, it isn't. There's a big difference between not stealing his money and meeting his needs by spending yours. That's why Yahweh instructed us to love our neighbors *as we do ourselves*.

How *do* we love ourselves? We feed us, clothe us, try to keep ourselves from injury or pain. We do what we can to meet our own needs and desires. We try to make ourselves happy and healthy, and if we're smart, we'll come to the realization somewhere along the line that the happiness we seek is best achieved through fellowship, intimate contact with other people and with God. (That's why solitary confinement is considered such a harsh form of punishment.) If you think about it, love is always a transaction: it requires two parties, a giver and a recipient (who can and do—and *should*—swap roles). When we "love *ourselves*," it actually means our souls are providing what our bodies want or need—and conversely, our bodies are giving our souls sustenance. (When the body gives the *body* what it wants, it's not love at all—it's lust, and the soul is likely to "regret it in the morning.") "Loving our neighbors" therefore implies a transference of the same kind: doing for other people what we can to make them happy, safe, fulfilled, or contented—whether physically or spiritually. Consider the alternative: the refusal to love puts *both* the potential giver and his recipient into a solitary confinement of sorts—it carries with it its own punishment: isolation.

Though Yahweh didn't designate a specific penalty for failing to love one's neighbor, He did lay out detailed rules delineating what should happen in the wake of various key indicators of that absence of love: murder, kidnapping, rape, adultery, theft, criminal negligence, and so forth. Maimonides addressed some of these, of course, which we covered in turn, primarily in Volume 1, Chapter 8. Here we'll pick up the precepts that fell through the cracks. I've broken these down by type: retaliation, retribution, recompense, restitution, restoration, redemption, and respect. These seven "R's" reveal God's remedy for our failure to love—a progression that in itself teaches us something about Yahweh's method for reconciling us to Himself and for leading us into His love.

Man's laws and the Bible generally consider the same sorts of things to be right or wrong. Paul explains why: **"When Gentiles, who do not have the law [i.e., the Torah], by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them."** (Romans 2:14-15) In other words, a man's conscience normally tells him the difference between right and wrong, whether he's got actual laws to guide him or not. (It's an artifact of having been made in the image and likeness of God.) There isn't a society on earth that considers murder, theft, or adultery to be good things (within their own social unit, that is). Since we (mankind and God) basically agree on what's right and what's not, it's instructive to examine the ways with

which Yahweh instructed society to deal with criminal sins and compare them against our own man-made solutions. We aren't remotely close to being on the same page here. Man's solutions tend to be socio-centric, that is, they endeavor to make things better for the group by (1) punishing the wrong-doer, (2) rehabilitating him, or (3) insulating the community from him so he can cause no further harm. God's solutions, in contrast, are victim-centric: they address the wrongs done to individual people, doing what can be done to make restitution, minimizing the impact of the crime. Punishment in Yahweh's economy is invariably reserved for cases in which restitution cannot be made—you can't undo a murder, for example. In addition, there is always a spiritual undercurrent in Yahweh's criminal laws, a reflection of how He restores us as victims of Satan's crimes against God and humanity.

There is some overlap in these stated purposes of jurisprudence, of course. God's law, like man's, seeks to confront wrongdoing, rehabilitate the sinner, and protect society. But the methods employed to achieve these goals are poles apart. Man's basic tool for dealing with crime is incarceration—prison. In theory, the worse the crime, the longer the sentence. The cost to society is staggering: over sixty billion dollars per year in America alone—that's \$88 per prisoner per day. Currently in America, over seven people out of every one thousand are behind bars—almost one percent of the population! Granted, that's four or five times the average among western democracies, but that's probably because we've become as adept at catching criminals as we are at creating them. *Creating* them? Yes, that's precisely what we've done. You can't systematically suppress God's precepts in your society (as we have) and expect people to behave in a godly manner. Like I said, loving one's neighbor is an outgrowth of loving God.

Yahweh, in contrast, mandated no prison system in Israel. The closest He came was to institute cities of refuge (see Mitzvot #292-#295), which were actually designed to prevent unauthorized revenge killings—think of them as “protective custody.” So how did He expect to maintain law and order among His people? The answer sounds absurdly simple when compared to the legal labyrinth we are asked to negotiate these days. Yahweh merely gave teeth to the golden rule. For all intents and purposes, He told His society to *assume* that people treated others as they wanted to be treated. If you stole, you “obviously” wanted to be stolen from in return, and society was to oblige the thief. If you murdered someone, you were “requesting” to be slain by your victim's closest kin, and he was authorized to do as you had “asked.” If you betrayed your spouse by committing adultery, you were declaring your desire to be betrayed in turn. As we have seen (and will again) the institution of slavery had a part to play in Yahweh's system of practical justice, though He didn't institute the practice—He merely made use of it. Prisons today can fulfill the role slavery played in theocratic Israel, but these days jail sentences are pressed into service to punish

virtually any kind of offense—while “being sold into slavery” was resorted to in the Torah only in rare instances where restitution couldn’t be made. God’s wisdom virtually guaranteed that there would be no such thing as a “career criminal” in Israel.

Justice under God was swift, sure, and designed to fit the crime perfectly—being neither too harsh nor too lenient. False accusations were punishable by the same sentence the innocent accused would have suffered, and perjury was such a serious matter, it rated a spot in the Ten Commandments. Judges were to be chosen for their character, not their cunning or charisma, and bribery was strictly forbidden. More than one witness was required to convict someone of a capital offense. All things considered, Yahweh’s justice system was engineered to deliver justice to the guilty, restitution to the victim, and peace to the community, while systematically giving the benefit of the doubt to the accused in questionable situations. But we should not forget that this kind of merciful justice is only possible in a society that honors God, for it depends on those two baseline principles being endemic in the community: loving Yahweh with their whole heart, soul, and strength, and loving their neighbors as themselves. That’s why the Psalmist declares of Yahweh, **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face.”** (Psalm 89:14)

RETALIATION

(865) *Employ the death penalty for murderers.* **“Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death.”** (Leviticus 24:17) The translation “kill” here falls somewhat short of the true meaning of the Hebrew expression *nakah nephesh*. *Nakah* is a verb meaning “to strike, smite, hit, beat, scourge, slay, kill, give a thrust, attack, destroy, conquer, subjugate, chastise, send judgment upon, or punish.” (Strong’s) And *nephesh* is the familiar designation for one’s soul, the “self, life, person, appetite, mind, living being, desire, emotion, passion; that which breathes, the breathing substance or being, soul, the inner being of man; the living being (with life in the blood); the man himself, the person or individual; the seat of emotions and passions, or the activity of mind.” (S) So a more precise translation might be, “Whoever strikes at the soul of any man” or “Whoever attacks a person’s life...” “Murder” would be a far more accurate translation than “kill,” and it’s clear that the *intent* to do harm, and not merely one’s success at accomplishing this evil, is condemned. Murder and attempted murder are seen as virtually the same crime. The idea is that of trying to destroy someone’s life, with malice and purpose.

It’s clear from the Bible’s many warnings against false teachers that this “murder” need not be physical, the slaying of the body—technically,

the separation of someone's body from his soul. Of much more far reaching significance is the murder of someone's soul—preventing the victim from having a relationship with Yahweh, thus robbing him of the opportunity to be indwelt with God's eternal Spirit. Let's face it: murder of the body may deprive someone of a few years of mortal life in a fallen world, but murder of the soul is a matter with perpetual ramifications.

As we shall see, Yahweh distinguishes between murder and accidental homicide (manslaughter), though both have serious consequences. But there are no "degrees" of murder in His view that qualify the perpetrator to greater or lesser degrees of punishment depending on his state of mind, circumstances, weaponry, or age. There are no "plea bargains" to be made, only guilt or innocence to be determined. And there is only one penalty prescribed for the murderer: death.

I am not unaware that the death penalty is out of fashion in our world. According to Amnesty International, 137 nations have abolished the death penalty. Though seventy countries still have provision for it on the books, only twenty-four of them carried out executions in 2007 (1,252 souls, down from 1,591 in 2006), while there are upwards of 20,000 prisoners on death row worldwide. (There's currently a twelve-year lag, on average, between sentencing and execution in the U.S.) But compare these statistics to the numbers of *murders* worldwide—520,000 reported in 2000 alone—and you begin to see the problem. People who don't ascribe to Yahweh's wisdom here, who think that the death penalty is immoral because it does not serve as a deterrent (an idea that's by no means proven), are missing the fact that the statistics tell the would-be murderer, "Go ahead—even if you get caught, there's only a 0.02% chance you'll die for your crime." But if the 18,000 murders per year in the U.S. (more or less) resulted in the arrest, conviction, and *execution* of, say, 10,000 criminals, *then* you'd be able to tell if the "deterrent effect" of capital punishment was real.

All of this misses the point, of course. Yahweh never even hinted that executing murderers should be done to deter others from committing the same crime (although deterrence *is* mentioned as a factor in the execution of idol worshippers). It was to be done simply because justice demands it: it's not only *not* immoral, it's the only possible moral course of action, if the victim is figured into the equation. As I said, there's no way to restore one's mortal life after you've murdered him, so restitution is impossible. Retaliation is the only just measure available: a life for a life.

But, "*What ever happened to mercy?*" you ask. "*Doesn't God love murderers too?*" Yes, so much so that He sent His only Son, His Messiah, to die for our sins—to be executed in our place: again, a life for a life.

Why, then, does He still require the death penalty for murderers? It's because flesh is flesh: the things done in the flesh must be answered in the flesh if justice is to be served. The things done in the spirit will likewise be answered in the spirit. We will under no circumstances carry the deeds of the flesh (whether bad or good) into the afterlife, the world of the spirit. In fact, we will not enter "the afterlife" at all if our souls are not indwelt with an eternal Spirit. Our bodies are not built to last forever: they are "alive" only so long as they are made so by their soul (the *nephesh*). But the *nephesh* cannot survive without a body unless it in turn is made alive by an eternal indwelling spirit (Hebrew: *ruach*).

That's why Yahshua told Nicodemus, **"Unless one is born again [literally: from above], he cannot see the Kingdom of God.... That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.... For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."** (John 3:3, 6, 16-18) Condemned *already*? Yes, because the only way to make one's soul truly alive—the only way to receive the Spirit of Yahweh—is to **"believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God,"** Yahshua the Messiah. This "condemnation" of which Yahshua speaks has two possible manifestations. First, the default: one may be spiritually dead (or perhaps more accurately stated, spiritually non-living or inert). His soul has no indwelling spirit to give it life after the body's death, so his physical demise is the end of his existence, for all practical purposes. But second, there is a horrible alternative type of condemnation: his soul *can* be indwelt with a demonic or satanic spirit (if he has put his trust in Satan as he should have in God)—he can be "born *from below*." This will make his sojourn in the afterlife a living, eternal hell. Yahshua spoke of this "option" when He called the scribes and Pharisees a "brood of vipers," that is, the spiritual offspring of the serpent, Satan. Thus there are *three* doors to the eternal state, not just two (as is usually taught): life, death, and damnation.

Therefore, the only deeds that follow us into eternity are those done "in the spirit" (whether Yahweh's Spirit or Satan's). Deeds (whether "good" or "bad") that are done by dead (i.e., spiritless) people don't really exist beyond the mortal realm. That explains why justice must be served *in the flesh* for crimes perpetrated in the flesh. But it's also why murderers are not necessarily precluded from coming to faith, from accepting the

grace of God. True, Yahweh won't bail them out of their self-imposed troubles in this life, but He has *already* paid their debt in the next.

- (866) *Distinguish between murder and manslaughter.* **“He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die.”** (Exodus 21:12-14) The institution of the six “cities of refuge” in the Promised Land facilitated the judicial distinction between murderers and those guilty of manslaughter. If a man killed someone, he was to flee to the nearest city of refuge, where he would be protected from possible avengers from the victim's family (see Precept #869) until his case could be tried in an impartial hearing. If the wrongful death was found to be an accident or unintentional, the killer was required to remain in the city of refuge (see Precept #870) until the death of the High Priest, after which time he was free to return to his own home. But if the court (see Precept #868) found him guilty of murder—of purposely and maliciously slaying his victim—then the city of refuge would offer no further protection. The avenger of blood would be allowed to slay the slayer no matter where he went to hide, even if he appealed to Yahweh Himself (seen here as clinging desperately to the altar of sacrifice at the Sanctuary, pleading for mercy).

As I pointed out in Mitzvah #260, we are all guilty of the death of Yahshua the Messiah. Whether intentionally murdering Him (by rejecting His mercy and allying ourselves with the adversary) or “merely” violating Yahweh's standard of holiness (necessitating Yahshua's atoning sacrifice), we are all guilty of something. The city of refuge represents mortal life. If we are guilty of Son-of-Man-slaughter, we dare not leave this city without the protection afforded by the death of the High Priest (a role also played by Yahshua). And if we “leave” the city—this life—without availing ourselves of the amnesty provided by the High Priest's death, we are no longer protected from the avenger of blood, the slain Yahshua's “next of kin”—Almighty Yahweh Himself.

In a very real sense, leaving unprotected from the city of refuge is a picture of the Great White Throne judgment. John reports, **“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.”** (Revelation 20:11-12) The dead, those guilty souls who have left the “city of refuge,” are to

be judged “according to their works.” That is, since their names are not recorded in the Book of Life, the divine Judge is reviewing the evidence of each case to determine which defendant is guilty of murder and which of manslaughter. Then, having made His determinations, He passes sentence: **“Anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”** (Revelation 20:15) Both accidental manslaughter (those not indemnified by the death of the High Priest) and malicious murderers are consigned to the lake of fire—*everyone* not found in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

What, then, was the point of judgment? After all, being “judged” (Greek: *krino*) implies separation (to decide, select, choose, or determine), in this case, one type of unatoned guilt from another. In *Future History*, Chapter 29, I explored the little-known (but scripturally ubiquitous) principle of God’s separation of the *dead* (those whose souls will be destroyed or annihilated—something I dubbed “Door Number Two”) from the *damned* (those whose indwelling with Satan’s spirit has delivered them into everlasting torment in hell, sharing Satan’s eternal destiny—i.e., “Door Number Three”). Allow me to quote a couple of paragraphs:

“Who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to Yahweh an offering in righteousness.’

(Malachi 3:2-3) This refining process is primarily one of separation—removing the worthless dross from the pure metal by heating it to a liquid state and letting the impurities float to the top. But here beyond the Great White Throne, the precious metal has already been removed and put in a safe place. So in the case of the “lake of fire,” the separation is that of one kind of dross from another—the merely worthless from the toxic waste—door number two from door number three.

“The lake of fire, then, is a graphic portrayal of a place or state where lost souls enter a refining process—a *krino*-judgment that separates the dead from the damned. The lightweight worthless dross floats to the top of the ‘lake’ and spills out into dissipation, annihilation, destruction—what we’ve been calling door number two. But the weightier Satanic spirit-laden souls sink to the bottom of this eternal abyss, never to escape, never to rest, never to forget. The bottom of the lake of fire is door number three.” Even though we’re all guilty of one thing or another, both of these fates—one a tragic waste of life and the other a horror beyond human comprehension—are completely avoidable. “Door Number One” is eternal life, freely and graciously offered to sinners who stay in the city of refuge,

leaving only when the death of Yahshua the High Priest has rendered them innocent in the eyes of the Avenger of Blood—Yahweh.

- (867) *Weigh factors such as weaponry and attitude when determining the nature of the crime.* **“If he strikes him with an iron implement, so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. And if he strikes him with a stone in the hand, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. Or if he strikes him with a wooden hand weapon, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.”** (Numbers 35:16-18) Yahweh makes determining the nature of the crime (murder vs. manslaughter) relatively straightforward. The use of a potentially lethal weapon to intentionally kill someone cannot be construed as an “accident.” It doesn’t really matter if you “merely” lashed out in anger with a baseball bat without thinking about the consequences. “Second Degree Murder” in this country, which typically carries with it a lesser punishment than premeditated homicide, is defined as “an intentional killing that is not premeditated or planned, or a killing caused by dangerous conduct and the offender’s obvious lack of concern for human life.” God, who recognizes that the victim can’t really see the distinction, doesn’t split hairs: murder is murder.

Moses continues: **“If he pushes him out of hatred or, while lying in wait, hurls something at him so that he dies, or in enmity he strikes him with his hand so that he dies, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death. He is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.”** (Numbers 35:20-21) All it takes is a bad attitude. If you meant to merely hurt someone and he dies, you’re a murderer. If the gun you were waving around to intimidate someone goes off “accidentally” and kills him, you’re a murderer. Because Yahweh considers the victim, states of diminished responsibility such as substance abuse or post traumatic stress disorder are inadmissible as defenses. The dead victim doesn’t really care if you were “temporarily insane” when you shot him. Nor does he care if you ever “get over it” and start to “feel better” as long as you take your meds. He doesn’t care if you stabbed him once or forty-seven times. He’s dead, so forgiveness, understanding, reason, and mercy are beyond his ability. God’s justice isn’t being served on behalf of the courts, the victim’s loved ones, or society at large. His justice serves the victim. Why doesn’t ours?

I should reiterate that the same criteria apply to *spiritual* murder or manslaughter—the prevention of someone forming a relationship with Yahweh. It’s bad enough (though theoretically forgivable) to be guilty of spiritual manslaughter—through carelessness, ignorance, or apathy leading someone to the conclusion that Yahweh needn’t be the center of

their lives. (This is the primary danger with the practice of religion, whether nominal “Christianity” or something else.) But it is infinitely worse to do it on purpose, to “push him out of hatred” (or greed, or lust for power), or to “lie in wait” for your victim, purposely “hurling” deadly lies designed to lead him away from Yahweh’s love. That explains Yahshua’s scathing rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees: **“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.”** (John 8:44) John later provided commentary: **“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”** (I John 3:14-15) I hasten to point out that retribution was to be carried out not by society, but by the victim’s near kin. We are not to go on “crusades,” declaring “holy war” on people we perceive are spiritual murderers or manslayers, killing them physically for their spiritual crimes. Yahweh reserves that right for Himself.

- (868) *The congregation shall determine the nature of the crime.* **“However, if he pushes him suddenly without enmity, or throws anything at him without lying in wait, or uses a stone, by which a man could die, throwing it at him without seeing him, so that he dies, while he was not his enemy or seeking his harm, then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood according to these judgments.”** (Numbers 35:22-24) This is the Torah’s description of non-intentional homicide—manslaughter—for which crime the guilty party had to seek shelter in the city of refuge, remaining there until the death of the High Priest. Because he didn’t mean any harm or demonstrate any aggression, he is not guilty of murder, but there is still a corpse to answer for, and an avenger of blood to deal with.

As we saw previously, this “judging,” done to determine whether the slayer is guilty of manslaughter or murder, is a picture of the coming Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20. The Hebrew word for “to judge” (*shaphat*) is the rough equivalent of the Greek *krino*: to judge, decide, adjudicate a matter between two parties, to decide a controversy. But at first glance, there appears to be a glitch to this theory...

At the Great White Throne, the One doing the judging is obviously God: He “from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away.” But here in the Torah, it says “the *congregation* shall judge.” Once again, we must turn to our Hebrew lexicons to discover the amazing solution to a seeming Biblical contradiction. The word for “congregation” is *edah*—a gathering or assembly. And I have no doubt that in theocratic Israel, the congregation—the people—were indeed meant by Yahweh to be

responsible for figuring out what had really happened in cases of homicide. But there is a second *'edah* in Hebrew, also a feminine noun, spelled and pronounced exactly the same way. This one means “testimony or witness.” Baker and Carpenter note that “this term refers to the act of testifying to a fact or an event.” This would put the second meaning of *'edah* in perfect sync with the criteria by which the Great White Throne defendants are to be judged: the evidence, their works, what they did, and why they did it. After all, their sins have not been atoned—*covered*—by the blood of the Messiah. The only thing left upon which to judge them, and indeed the only fair and just criteria, is the witness of the facts in the case, the testimony of the evidence—none of which is hidden from Yahweh or inadmissible in His court.

- (869) *The avenger of blood shall serve as executioner. “The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death.”* (Numbers 35:19) Within Israel, some punishments were to be carried out by “the congregation.” For instance, stoning was prescribed in cases of Ba’al or Molech worship, or when a betrothed virgin had had sex with another man (if a case of rape, only he was stoned; if consensual, both of them). The crime in these cases, Yahweh is saying, was against society as a whole, and therefore must be addressed by the whole congregation. But in the case of homicide, a single individual, a close relative of the slain person, was to serve as executioner. Murder was not to be seen as a “crime against humanity” or an affront to the nation of Israel. It was personal. And that should give us pause, for the “homicide victim” about whom all of this is designed to teach us—the One of whose blood we are all guilty—is Yahshua, the “Son” of God. Thus His “avenger of blood” is going to be Yahweh Himself. This means there’s no place to run unless He Himself provides it.

The term “avenger of blood,” while describing his *function* in this scenario well enough, isn’t a particularly accurate translation. “Avenger” is from the Hebrew verb *ga’al*, which means to redeem, to buy back, to free from captivity or release from blame or debt. The related noun *go’el* was the “kinsman redeemer” whose privilege and duty it was to extricate a near relative from debt or servitude. A more direct translation might be, “One redeeming of the blood.” The “blood,” of course (Hebrew: *dam*), is where the life is (Leviticus 17:11, 14). The idea is that of a near relative “buying back” the life of the victim with the blood of his murderer. It’s not so much vengeance as it is redemption. It’s not so much punishment as it is justice.

The avenger/redeemer was instructed to put the murderer (or the manslayer, if he left the city of refuge—see Precept #870) to death *when he meets him*. Yahweh has so far chosen not to “meet” with us for the purpose of judgment as long as we inhabit these mortal bodies—our “cities of refuge,” as it were. (Being God Almighty, He *could* have exercised His prerogative for wrath at any time, but He has other plans.) The time is coming, however—and soon—when Yahweh will finally begin to scour the “cities of refuge” to deal with the murderers who have been hiding out there for the past two millennia. I’m speaking, of course, of the coming Tribulation, the impending seven-year period of God’s overdue wrath upon mankind. Those manslaughterers indemnified by the death of the High Priest (i.e., the *ekklesia*, the world’s believers in Yahshua) will have already left the “cities.” They will have been raptured—“caught up”—before the manhunt begins. The “murderers,” however, those who purposely aligned themselves against Yahweh, will find themselves being told, “**Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels, ...And these will go away into everlasting punishment.**” (Matthew 25:41, 46) In other words, the divine Avenger/Redeemer, when He has finally chosen to “meet” the murderers, will have put them to death—the *second* death—just as the Torah requires.

- (870) *The manslayer must stay within the city of refuge to be legally protected.* “**But if the manslayer at any time goes outside the limits of the city of refuge where he fled, and the avenger of blood finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood, because he should have remained in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest.**” (Numbers 35:26-28) The manslayer—one who was responsible for the death of another though it hadn’t been intended or precipitated by malice—was safe as long as he remained where Yahweh had provided shelter for him. But if he chose to ignore the protection afforded by God’s law and prematurely leave the city of refuge, then the “avenger of blood” could kill him “when he met him” without himself becoming guilty of murder. In fact, the *only* thing that would “buy” for the manslayer safe passage outside the city of refuge was the death of the High Priest.

At the very least, we are all manslaughterers—we are all complicit in the death of God’s Messiah. It is our sins that sent Him to Calvary’s pole, though we intended no harm and bore him no malice. (Oh, we *sinned* on purpose, alright; we just didn’t factor in the consequences. We had no idea it would all get so *personal* between us and our Creator.) So we are safe only as long as we remain in the city of refuge. But here’s the rub: this city represents our mortal life, which means we can’t stay there forever. Everyone eventually dies; that’s what mortality means (Latin: *mortis* =

death). But the *first* death, the death of the body, is not the real problem. The problem is what can happen afterward—the *second* death, as we saw above: the death of the soul for lack of the eternal Spirit of God indwelling it—death, legal and justified, at the hands of Yahshua’s “avenger of blood.” That’s the life that’s indemnified by the death of the High Priest—the Anointed Savior, Yahshua the Messiah.

The moral of the story: don’t leave your mortal life unless you’re protected by the atoning death of Yahshua.

- (871) *The manslayer’s sentence is to remain in protective custody in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest. “But after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession. And these things shall be a statute of judgment to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings.”* (Numbers 35:28-29) Son-of-Man-slaughter carries with it a life sentence, but it’s not the *manslayer’s* life. The life and death of the anointed High Priest (read: the Messiah) determines when (or whether) the guilty party is safe to leave the city (i.e., his mortal life). But what does it mean to “return to the land of his possession?” Yahshua told His disciples about it: “In My Father’s house are many mansions.... I go to prepare a place for you.... I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:2-3) The writer to the Hebrews explained further: “All these faithful ones [Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah] died without receiving what God had promised them, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed the promises of God. They agreed that they were no more than foreigners and nomads here on earth. And obviously people who talk like that are looking forward to a country they can call their own. If they had meant the country they came from, they would have found a way to go back. But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a heavenly city for them.” (Hebrews 11:13-16 NLT) We manslayers are but “foreigners and nomads” while we live in the “cities of refuge” of our mortal lives. It is not until we embrace the freedom afforded to us by the death of the High Priest, Yahshua the Messiah, that we can at last go home.

RETRIBUTION

- (872) *Adultery is to be punished with death. “If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die—the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel.”* (Deuteronomy 22:22) These days adultery is commonly regarded as grounds for divorce, but it’s not considered a crime, much less a capital offense. Our society says, “Okay, so you caught your spouse with

someone else. They're only human, and you're not perfect either. I can see where you might not trust 'em anymore, but life goes on: get over it already!" God, meanwhile, looks at the very same act and says, "This is treachery—a form of betrayal that pollutes my people like a cancer, destroying them from within. So both the adulterer and adulteress must die." Clearly, Yahweh and modern society are not on the same page here. What does God know that we apparently don't?

It's not sex He objects to. He created us as males and females who reproduce sexually, and He Himself commanded us to **"Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth."** (Genesis 1:28) In fact, it was the very *first* thing He told us to do. But almost immediately, He put boundaries about it: **"A man...shall be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."** (Genesis 2:24) That is, a man shall not be joined to someone else's wife, only his own. Over the course of centuries, it would become clear that Yahweh was crafting a metaphor describing His relationship with His own "wife," the people on this earth with whom He shared a familial bond, one of trust, faith, love, intimacy, and fruitfulness.

Notice that when adultery is described in the Bible, it is invariably couched in terms similar to those we see here: "a man found lying with a woman married to a husband." Is it not possible for adultery to be committed between an unmarried woman and a married man? Indeed it is, but in the reality that Yahweh's metaphor represents, the husband—*Him*—is *never* unfaithful. The same cannot be said of the wife, unfortunately. So if Yahweh is the Husband, and His people the wife, who is the "man" with whom the "wife" is being unfaithful? "He" by definition is *that which is not God*—in other words, false objects of worship. It could be the "graven images" that plagued the ancient world, representations of false gods like Ba'al and Astarte, Isis and Osiris, or Zeus and Diana. But the most seductive would-be adulterers over the ages would prove to be far more subtle—intangibles we find ourselves placing before Yahweh in our affections before we even know we're doing it: pride, tradition, possessions, pleasure, and comfort—in other words, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Like sex, none of these things are necessarily bad in themselves. We *should* maintain a certain amount of self respect, for we are made in the image of God. Traditions *can* be useful, helping us get through the day without having to re-invent the wheel every time we turn around. We are mortal, having physical needs for which we must work—food, clothing, and shelter. Pleasure is the same emotion Yahweh felt when He looked at His creation and called it "very good." And comfort—the lack of pain—is

the underlying condition that defines being in the center of God's will: **"All these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you because you obey the voice of Yahweh your God."** (Deuteronomy 28:2) But it is incredibly easy to let any of these "good" things become "gods" in their own right—that is, to become the objects of our affection, our goals. When we allow that to happen, it is tantamount to spiritual adultery, betrayal of Yahweh.

We should not be unmindful that *both* guilty parties are to be put to death. Not only will the unfaithful "wife" be forever separated from her "Husband," bereft of His eternal Spirit, but the things of the world that people so often put before Yahweh in their affections are also destined for destruction. One could work his whole life seeking wealth or power for himself, pursuing the elusive goddess of pleasure, chasing vindication through intellectual pursuit, or searching for solace through penance and pious tradition, only to find in the end that all such would-be substitutes for Yahweh—riches, lust, pride, and even religion—are all blind alleys, "adulterers" that cannot and will not endure in the light of God's glory.

- (873) *Kidnapping is to be punished with death. "If a man is found kidnapping any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and mistreats him or sells him, then that kidnapper shall die; and you shall put away the evil from among you."*

(Deuteronomy 24:7) The word for "kidnapping" in Hebrew is *ganab*, a verb simply meaning to steal (whether an object or a person), the emphasis being on the deceptive nature of the crime. (The noun—"kidnapper"—is virtually the same word but with different vowel pointing.) So technically, the basic admonition against kidnapping is covered in the Eighth Commandment, "You shall not steal." (See Precept #878.) Here we are told of the penalty for this particular type of theft. Yahweh's victim-centric instructions demand the death penalty, even if the abductee was not killed.

I'm told there's a technical difference in English Common Law between "kidnapping" and "abduction." (It's called abduction when the victim is a woman.) Yahweh makes a different distinction, based not on the gender of the victim but upon the intentions of the kidnapper. Anticipating a phenomenon that must have been exceedingly rare in theocratic Israel (but is quite common in our own dysfunctional society), God withholds capital retribution for those whose motive is not harm or profit. In America today, instances of child stealing by strangers are outnumbered by a margin of over five to one by kidnappings perpetrated by *parents* who don't have legal custody. These inter-family kidnappings, however misguided, are usually carried out in a perceived effort to *protect* the children from the estranged spouse—not to harm them, but to keep

them from harm. The perceptions of such a kidnapper may be skewed, but his (or her) motives are not. Such “innocent” abductions, justified or not, do not carry the death penalty.

That leaves two basic types of “real” kidnapping, both of which earn the penalty of death, even if the abductee gets rescued or is returned unharmed in the end. (Criminals don’t get bonus points for either skill or incompetence.) The first type is kidnapping for ransom (whether the intended “redeemer” is the victim’s family, a slave buyer, or a third party targeted for extortion). This crime has a long and nefarious tradition going back to the age of the patriarchs (see Genesis 14). It has become a thriving cottage industry in many third world countries today. The motivation is usually greed, fueled by covetousness and sloth, though occasionally the perpetrators are seeking political leverage, their impetus being hatred, pride, or envy. Second (and even more disturbing) are the kidnappings committed out of lust, whether twisted sexual proclivities or the unnatural desire to exert power over one’s victim. These two broad categories are not mutually exclusive, of course. They can and do overlap or morph from one to the other. Muhammad, the founder of Islam, was an avid proponent of both (or should I say, all) of these forms of kidnapping. He not only financed his rise to power through kidnapping for ransom and torture for fun and profit, he also raped scores of captive women, teaching his followers to do the same. His methods were the very antithesis of “loving your neighbor as yourself.”

As always, there is a spiritual component to this. The potential victim who’s protected by the law is called “any of [the kidnapper’s] brethren of the Children of Israel.” This identifies both the victim and the perpetrator as “Israelites,” a euphemism for people who purport to be of the household of faith, people who profess a belief in God. The crime is “stealing a person.” In spiritual terms, this would equate to taking them away from their spiritual “families,” the people who love and care about them (and remember, the verb *ganab* implies stealth or deceit). But the crime is further defined by two factors. First, is it the intention of the kidnapper to “mistreat” his captive? That is, is the kidnapper’s exercise of dominion over his victim the point of his action? Is the result of “stealing” this person likely to cause the victim harm, whether physically, mentally, or spiritually? Second, is the kidnapper hoping to enrich himself through the captivity of his victim? Is there money to be made or status to be achieved?

These conditions fairly *scream* a warning to those who would sneak in and take you away from your life in Yahweh’s close-knit family and

replace this relationship with religion—placing you in bondage to ecclesiastical hierarchy, the rules and traditions of man, and a system of penance, alms, and works designed to obfuscate—and compete with—the finished work of Christ. This sort of thing isn't merely unfortunate or inconvenient for God's people: it's a *crime* against them—it's kidnapping, spiritual abduction, the penalty for which, specified in the Torah, is *death*. God is very serious about us avoiding religion if it gets in the way of a relationship with Him. (Religion *can* be useful as a matrix or medium through which one can express his faith in Yahweh, but it is of no use whatsoever in establishing the relationship we must have with our God. In fact, it all too often masquerades as that very relationship, preventing the real thing from happening.)

Paul informed Timothy, his young protégé, that this kind of “spiritual kidnapping” would become a virtual crime wave in the last days. **“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”** (II Timothy 3:1-7) Here we've been given a clear “mug shot” of the potential “kidnappers” of our day. We've also been informed that avoiding their snare is our prerogative. We can—we *must*—stop being gullible, stop getting carried away by our lusts, and stop confusing information with truth.

RECOMPENSE

- (874) *Evil inflicted is to be paid back with the equivalent evil.* **“If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him—fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him.”** (Leviticus 24:19-20) Whether through malice or negligence, injuries inflicted are to be met with payment in kind. The stark logic and equity of God's law can be somewhat startling when compared with the anemic shadow we see in our own legal statutes. Consider this hypothetical scenario: a guy walks into a bar (no, this isn't the beginning of a joke) and has a few too many beers. Another patron comes in and says something that offends him, so our drunken subject expresses his opinion to the contrary with a pool cue, breaking the man's arm.

Under our laws, he might be arrested for being drunk and disorderly with a side order of assault, jailed for a month at taxpayer' expense, slapped with a fine (which goes to the county, not the victim), and released on parole (again, at taxpayers' expense). The victim, meanwhile, goes to the hospital to get his arm set, misses four days of work, sticks his insurance company with the bill (after paying a hefty deductible), and then weighs the option of hiring a lawyer to sue his assailant for damages, deciding in the end that since the inebriate with the pool cue is probably as broke as he is stupid, suing him would be an expensive exercise in futility. The insurance company spreads out their loss over the future premiums of a hundred thousand policy holders, the county uses the perp's fine to cover court costs and police salaries, and the victim's employer builds the cost of his recovery time into the price of their product, passing it on to you and me.

Yahweh's law works a bit differently. The witnesses would take the offender to the town's elders and explain what happened. Upon confirmation of the facts, he would be required to (1) pay out of his own pocket all of his victim's medical expenses; (2) make good the loss of income the victim (or his employer) would have incurred due to his injuries (see Mitzvah #299, Exodus 21:18-19); and then (3) have his own arm broken with a pool cue. Direct, just, and dare I say, downright poetic. At this point, of course, the perp (having sobered up) is thinking to himself, *I think I'm losing my taste for beer. Thank God I didn't shoot him in the kneecap.*

The whole thing could have turned out quite differently under our laws, of course. Yahweh's instructions prevent *this* scenario as well: the victim *does* decide to sue, and hires the slickest lawyer he can find. He wins his civil case and is awarded four thousand dollars in actual damages (though neither his insurance company or employer ever get reimbursed for their expenses) and *four million* in punitive damages. The offender's insurance company negotiates it down to two point five mil and passes the loss on to their policyholders. Justice has not been served here. It has been mugged and left for dead on the sidewalk.

The inevitable spiritual application looks like this: if your handling of spiritual matters (doctrine, exegesis, interpretation, etc.) is used maliciously or negligently to harm or exert control, hindering someone's search for God's truth, expect the "weapons" you use to be turned back against you. I know you're probably getting tired of hearing me say this, but religion is often the single biggest impediment to forming a

relationship with Yahweh. If your philosophy blinds your brother to the truth of Yahweh's love, you'd better start getting used to life in the dark.

- (875) *One law shall apply to all people in the Land. "You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I am Yahweh your God."* (Leviticus 24:22) If non-Israelites chose to live among God's people in the Land (and many did) they were to live by the same standards of behavior as Israel. This precept was precipitated by an incident in which the son of a mixed marriage (Egyptian father, Israelite mother) had blasphemed the name of Yahweh. The question naturally arose, "Should we relax our stance concerning God's law in the face of cultural diversity?" The answer was an unequivocal No! Everyone in God's country was to live by God's Law. Why? Because He said, "**I am Yahweh your God.**" I hasten to point out that we're talking about conduct *among God's people* here, folks who purport to follow Yahweh, not the world. He's not advocating going back and forcing Egypt to toe the line, imposing Yahweh's rules and morals upon people who don't want or claim to have a relationship with Him.

Remember that our customs and traditions, even (or should I say, *especially*) our religious traditions, are not necessarily the same thing as God's Law. A silly example might shed light on this truth. Congregations have very different "cultures" when it comes to music worship styles. One employs a piano, organ, and robed choir. Another has a loud, boisterous "praise band," complete with drums and electric guitars. Another allows no instrumental music at all, but sings its praises to God *a cappella*. Who's right? Actually, all of them, if done in the spirit of reverent, joyful honor to Yahweh, not pinch-faced legalism or fawning emulation of the world's ways. For that matter, music need not be a part of the congregational experience at all. It's not a matter of Law; it's a matter of taste, of style, of personal preference, even of God's provision.

But then take two congregations with identical forms of expression and compare their doctrine. One might play fast and loose with the First or Second Commandments, piously exercise politically correct "tolerance" toward what Yahweh considers abominable religious practices, or *de facto* worship gods of pride, prosperity, popularity, or power. The other assembly, meanwhile, strives only to honor Yahweh and his Word, love each other, and be light and salt to their community. To the untrained ear, they may *sound* the same, but they're not. One is following God's Law; the other isn't.

There is another facet to this precept that we should not overlook. We believers often think in terms of a double standard—the very thing Yahweh is warning us against. We brush off our own sins as somehow

inconsequential, since we're "saved by grace" and "washed in the blood." But at the same time, we *act as if* we believe the searching world should be compelled to embrace "Christian" standards of morality and behavior, as if such outward performance is the door to eternal life. While I'll admit that life would be considerably safer and more pleasant if everyone were to refrain from murder, theft, adultery, perjury, and covetousness, the outward observance of these Commandments brings one no closer to the family of Yahweh. Only God's grace—the very thing we so stupidly recruit to excuse our own bad behavior—can reconcile us to Him. No, the believer and the "stranger" alike have but one Law, and as we have seen, this Torah points toward one thing above all others: our utter hopelessness in trying to reach God through our own merits. The grace we take so lightly is the only lifeboat aboard this sinking ship. Without it, we would all—passengers and crew alike—drown in our sins. You'd think we'd treat it more carefully.

- (876) *Do not mistreat a slave who belongs to you. "And if a man beats his male or female servant with a rod, so that he dies under his hand, he shall surely be punished. Notwithstanding, if he remains alive a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he is his property."* (Exodus 21:20-21) Western Christians, awash in a sea of political correctness, would be either puzzled or horrified to learn (though most never get that far) that Yahweh doesn't specifically condemn slavery as an institution. Rather, his Torah regulates it, mitigates its abuses, and arranges for people to be extricated from it. But He never says anything remotely resembling, "There shall be no slavery in Israel." Why would God "tolerate" such an obvious evil?

Let me answer the question with another question. Why would God tolerate *death*? The answer is the same. Death, like slavery, is a temporary evil that serves as a pungent illustration of a far greater spiritual truth. Just as physical death (the separation of the soul from the body) warns us about spiritual death (the separateness of God's eternal Spirit from one's soul), so the institution of slavery informs us of a universal spiritual reality: all of us serve someone or something. Who we serve is our master; we are by definition slaves to whatever or whomever we obey (see Romans 6:16). Like death, slavery is universally understood (at least by those who are subject to it) to be a bad thing, and yet Yahweh lets it stand (for the moment, anyway) to teach us valuable lessons about master-slave relationships: (1) We are not our own: we have all been bought and paid for; (2) He who has bought us is entitled to our service; (3) If we disobey our Master, discipline is His prerogative; (4) If we flee from His service, we are fleeing from the shelter and provision of His household as well; (5) Running away from our rightful Master (the One who paid for us) never

results in real liberty, but in either the tyranny of a precarious future or slavery to another master, a usurper; (6) The only one who can legally grant us freedom is the Master who paid for us; and (7) perhaps the most surprising fact of all—voluntary service to a kind and loving Master is actually better than emancipation into an uncertain and hostile world.

Our *real* Master, of course—the One who paid for our souls with the most precious substance in existence, the blood of His own “Son”—is Yahweh. Actually, it’s worse than it seems: Yahweh first created us (which defines us as His possessions) after which we sold ourselves into bondage to Satan, an act that made our subsequent redemption necessary. So He is in reality our Owner twice over. Most epistles in the New Covenant Scriptures make reference to the writer being a “slave” or “servant” or “prisoner” of Christ—though not with chains of legal authority, for they (and we) have long since been granted our freedom. No, our “chains” are gratitude, loyalty, and love, things that bind us more securely than any physical restraint ever could. This is pictured beautifully in the Torah in Exodus 21:5-6 (see Mitzvah #189 and Precept #887): the bondservant, having been freed, may opt rather to remain in his master’s service for life.

So who does the abusive slave master in our present precept represent? It’s not Yahweh, for He always treats His servants with respect—even when He finds discipline necessary. No, this is a cruel master to whom a disobedient and rebellious slave has fled—Satan or one of his agents. Satan’s agenda is to force man’s submission, and he’s not above using the rod to obtain it. So what if he kills a few of us? We were only chattel to him anyway, a means to an end, disposable. Think of the disobedient slave as a runaway teenager irrationally rebelling against the authority of her parents; and think of the “cruel master” as the pimp who gets his hooks into her when she hits the big city. She has made a bad bargain, whether she knows it or not. The freedom she sought has proved to be an illusion. That’s what it’s like when we run from God. Survival and restoration are possible, but by no means guaranteed, and many runaways never realize that Satan, the pimp, has no real power over them. The amazing truth is, all we have to do to free ourselves is get up, swallow our pride, and return to our Father Yahweh. But make no mistake: we are not safe on our own. Even if we flee from Satan’s clutches, if we don’t then go home to our Father Yahweh, the devil will hunt us down and kill us. He’ll do whatever he can to prevent us from having eternal life in Christ. Yahweh, however, promises that the murderer, whether Satan or his agent, *will* receive justice—death for death.

But what about this enigmatic alternative scenario, “If he [the slave] remains alive a day or two, he [the slave owner] shall not be punished; for he is his property.” I believe this is telling us that even though someone misleads Yahweh’s servant, if he fails to completely and permanently separate the runaway from God’s love, his status as a “spiritual murderer” will not have been legally established. By usurping Yahweh’s place as the Master, this “pimp” has taken a terrible risk, of course. With ownership comes responsibility, and even though you can’t really *own* another person, possession is, as they say, nine tenths of the law: if you control a person’s spiritual outlook, you are responsible for his spiritual welfare—his very life.

It is instructive to compare the Torah’s slavery scenario with Paul’s course of action when dealing with Philemon’s runaway slave, Onesimus, who had come to Christ under Paul’s ministry. Paul could have “kept” Onesimus in his own service, but knowing the Torah, he realized that the slave’s service was not his to use, nor was freedom his to grant. Philemon (who, by a remarkable coincidence, had also come to faith through Paul’s teaching) was asked to receive Onesimus back, accept his repentant heart, and display a merciful spirit. After all, that’s precisely what Yahweh does, receiving us runaways back into his household when we repent. But we can only repent if we leave those cruel masters to which we have foolishly fled—those who would enslave, mistreat, and kill us if given the chance.

(877) *Man is responsible for the punishment of crimes against man.* “**Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.**” (Genesis 9:5-6) It’s a logical question to ask: why doesn’t God punish criminals Himself? Why does he require man to provide justice for other men? After all, it is *He* who “demands a reckoning” when a man’s blood is spilled, when a life is taken. This line of inquiry will lead us to some very fundamental truths.

The atheistic secular humanists who control our public policy these days insist that man is nothing but a highly evolved animal, one whose basic nature is not all that different from an ape, a salamander, or a garden slug. We find ourselves at the top of the food chain, they say, because we have, over eons of evolution, developed into a smarter, more “fit” species than our ecological contemporaries. God’s word, on the other hand, states that man is a fundamentally unique kind of being: we alone are “made by God in His image.” We alone have been placed on earth to relate to and fellowship with our Creator. It’s not my purpose here to debate the issue.

(I think you know where I stand.) Rather, I would like to explore just one key indicator, comparing what we observe in nature against these two competing “theories.” That subject is justice.

Animals have no sense of justice, no concept of fair play, no notion of moral right and wrong. Though some have greater cognitive ability than others, they are all motivated by instinct, biological imperatives like hunger, reproduction, self preservation, and the continuance of the species. It’s hard to say what gazelles and wildebeests think when one of their own is run down by lions and killed, but it’s safe to say they don’t find the lions morally culpable. They apparently feel no sense of injustice or righteous outrage that one of their group has been “murdered.” In fact, once the kill has been made, the herd very quickly goes back to business as usual, knowing that for the moment, their adversaries are not interested in pursuing them.

Men, on the other hand, have an inbred sense of right and wrong. One of the first complaints our children are likely to express in verbal terms is, “It’s not *fair!*” Remarkably, they’re often right—it’s *not* fair—but how would a three year old know that? It would require an innate biological *need* for justice, a built-in moral compass, something the Bible indicates every child was born with (e.g. Romans 2:14-15). This sense of justice is not merely a highly developed pain-avoidance mechanism, either, for it transfers to others. We “feel sorry” for people who are being mistreated—people we don’t even know. Our species is uniquely “wired” to seek justice. That so many of us eventually learn to suppress our inborn need for fair play in order to gratify our carnal desires doesn’t change that fact. Like it or not, we are “made in the image and likeness of God.”

If we *were* mere animals, all driven by the same evolutionary imperatives, our entire concept of law (whether God’s law, man’s, or the law of our consciences) would be detrimental to the survival and advancement of the species. In seeking justice, we are in effect protecting the weak from the strong. But evolution can only advance (so the theory goes) if the strong prevail and the weak are eliminated. According to the humanist creed’s bottom line, then, every act of kindness or mercy not motivated by our own survival or short term gratification is a nail in the coffin of the human race—every act of justice weakens the species.

But we are *not* mere animals. Not only are we made “in the likeness of God” (which is a maddeningly nebulous description), we have within us a mechanism, unique to man, by which Yahweh’s eternal Spirit can dwell within us, described in Genesis 2:7 as the “breath of life,” the *neshamah*. This is neither the soul (the *nephesh*, something any animal possesses),

nor the spirit itself (the *ruach*), but a capacity for life of an entirely different paradigm than that of your ordinary dung beetle or chimpanzee. Yes, our bodies are mortal—subject to decay—but *we* can live forever! This explains why Yahweh is so protective of the sanctity of human life—why He takes it personally and demands retribution when a man’s blood is spilled, whether by another man or by a beast.

But why, if He feels this way, does God insist that we mortals execute justice in the mortal realm, rather than dispensing it Himself? There are two reasons (at least). First, His standards are absolute and perfect, while we are frail, fallen creatures. In this world, if Yahweh were to take it upon Himself to right every wrong according to His own standard of holiness, none of us would survive past breakfast. And He *wants* us to survive, for our life is essential to His agenda (boiled down to one word, Love); which brings us to the second reason, the very reason provided in our Genesis text: **“For in the image of God He made man.”** We are to deal justly because the One after whom we are patterned is just. We are to be holy, because He is holy (that is, we are to be set apart *in* the world because Yahweh is separate *from* it). We are to treat human life with reverence and respect because God sacrificed The Perfect Human Life to redeem us from our fallen state. If Satan can convince us that human life is cheap, Yahshua’s awesome sacrifice will be rendered insignificant in our eyes. I assure you, it is nothing of the sort. His blood is the most precious substance known to man.

RESTITUTION

- (878) *Don’t steal. “You shall not steal.”* (Exodus 20:15) Maimonides scoured the Talmud to extract the “613 laws” that Jews are supposed to follow. Somehow, he managed to miss this one. Considering what we’ve seen in the last few precepts, I can’t help but wonder if that was a Freudian omission. Like so many of the other Commandments of the Decalogue, this one, the eighth, has ramifications that go far beyond the surface prohibition against taking other people’s stuff. Is Yahweh really all that concerned about purloining a candy bar from a convenience store? In principle, He is, for theft makes a statement. First, stealing betrays a lack of respect for a fellow child of God, the absence of the love of our neighbor that’s so important. Second, it’s an indication that we don’t really trust Yahweh to supply our needs. Third, in a way, theft is idolatry, for it shows that we desire the material possessions of this world more than we do fellowship with our God.

But as I said, it isn't just *stuff* God is concerned with. His primary, overarching goal is to establish a loving relationship with mankind. Restricting or preventing the formation of this liaison is the worst sort of stealing: it's the theft of the soul. This explains why Yahshua was so angry at the religious elite of His time: **"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves."** (Matthew 23:12-15) We don't hear Yahshua condemning prostitutes or publicans like this, though by definition, they were law-breaking sinners, and at some level they all knew it. He invariably encouraged them to "Go and sin no more." To a belatedly repentant thief, caught and in the process of being punished for his crimes, He said, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise." But these guys, the scribes and Pharisees, were, as far as the man on the street could tell, *good* people, law-abiding and religious. They gave alms, paid their tithes, and prayed eloquently in public. What were they doing that was so upsetting to the Messiah? They were stealing the opportunity God had given to honest searchers to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. They were stealing life itself.

- (879) *Restore what has been stolen, plus twenty percent.* **"If a person sins and commits a trespass against Yahweh by lying to his neighbor about what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or about a pledge, or about a robbery, or if he has extorted from his neighbor, or if he has found what was lost and lies concerning it, and swears falsely—in any one of these things that a man may do in which he sins: then it shall be, because he has sinned and is guilty, that he shall restore what he has stolen, or the thing which he has extorted, or what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or the lost thing which he found, or all that about which he has sworn falsely. He shall restore its full value, add one-fifth more to it, and give it to whomever it belongs, on the day of his trespass offering."** (Leviticus 6:2-5) I'll admit that the law of restitution can get a little complicated. Back in Exodus 22, we learned that if someone stole a sheep and sold or slaughtered it, he had to pay back four sheep in restitution, and if it was an ox he stole, the payback was five oxen (the idea apparently being that the ox was not only valuable property, but was also a "tool" its owner needed to earn a living—it was the man's tractor, so to speak). On the other hand, if the thief was found with the goods still in his possession, he "only" had

to pay back double. Clearly, the mental anguish of the victim is as important in God's restitution formula as is the financial loss.

Here we see a case in which the owner/victim is paid back not two, four, or five times what was stolen, but only twenty percent more than what was taken. What's different? The type of theft in view here is not the type perpetrated by a violent criminal (armed robbery, burglary, hijacking, mugging, etc.) but rather what we might call "white-collar crime." Examples in our sort of society might be tax or insurance fraud, cooking the books to defraud shareholders, overbilling, selling pirated entertainment media, the use of substandard materials to cheat on the terms of a contract, insider trading, pension fund shenanigans, bait and switch advertising—you get the idea. It's any kind of dishonest dealing where the victim wasn't even supposed to know he'd been cheated.

This kind of theft is positively endemic in our godless society today. Individuals and businesses have made "shady dealing" a way of life—effectively demonstrating a refusal to honor God and trust Him for provision. Creditors or utilities purposely send their bills too late for the customer to avoid incurring late fees. Manufacturers tweak their packaging to hide price increases. (Have you tried buying a "gallon" of paint lately? It can't be done.) Livestock and poultry is fed sub-therapeutic levels of antibiotics—not to ward off disease, but to cause water weight retention, in effect, invisibly cheapening the product. Employers often schedule their employees almost—but not quite—enough hours to let them qualify for benefit packages, and then they wonder why these same employees show no loyalty to them at all. As with violent crime, these sneaky, underhanded practices would cease if everyone loved Yahweh and loved his neighbor.

- (880) *A thief may obtain forgiveness after restitution by making a trespass offering. "And he shall bring his trespass offering to Yahweh, a ram without blemish from the flock, with your valuation, as a trespass offering, to the priest. So the priest shall make atonement for him before Yahweh, and he shall be forgiven for any one of these things that he may have done in which he trespasses."* (Leviticus 6:6-7) Okay, so the merchant succumbed to temptation to make a quick shekel, made a transaction using dishonest scales, got caught, and then made restitution by paying the defrauded customer back in full plus twenty percent. Is he *no longer guilty* under the law at this point? Is he *forgiven*? No, he's merely a thief who got busted. His restitution has made his neighbor whole, but his guilt before God remains. What can he do? He can (and must) bring a trespass offering (*asham*) to the Sanctuary as an expression of his repentance before Yahweh. The sacrificial animal

specified for this transgression is a ram without blemish—a symbol (whether he knows it or not) that the authority of Yahweh’s Messiah has been recognized by the offender.

If you’ll recall from Volume I, Chapter 12, there is a subtle difference between the sin offering (the *chata’t*) and the trespass offering (the *asham*). Simply stated, the *chata’t* was rendered for lapses in behavior, while the *asham* was brought to atone for lapses in holiness. God is therefore saying here, “I don’t care if everybody in town is cheating just like you did. You have been called out of the world—you’re to be separate from it, set apart and consecrated to Me. So participate in the trespass offering by bringing a perfect ram to the altar. His blood will cover your sin in My eyes, for I consider it precious: it represents the blood of My own Son, who will tell you, ‘Go, and sin no more.’”

- (881) *Lethal incidents concerning other people’s animals must be paid for.* **“Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, animal for animal.”** (Leviticus 24:18) **And whoever kills an animal shall restore it; but whoever kills a man shall be put to death.**” (Leviticus 24:21) This one flies in the face of evolutionary theory, who insists that man is nothing but a highly developed animal. Because a man is made in the image of God, the penalty for murdering him is death. But the penalty for doing the same sort of thing to someone’s animal is to merely replace it with another of the same kind and value. “Animal rights” people should note: we’re not talking about killing an animal (one you own) for food or sacrifice. Rather, it’s killing your neighbor’s dog because he barks incessantly, or killing his goat because it got into your vineyard and wiped out next year’s cabernet. Animals can be inconvenient (don’t get me started about deer in my vegetable garden), but if they belong to someone else, they’re his property—and his responsibility. If your neighbor’s goat ate your grapes, it’s up to him to restore your loss—it’s *not* up to you to execute the goat for its crimes. Once again, we see that God’s victim-centric system of jurisprudence stresses restitution over retribution.

RESTORATION

- (882) *One in a position to help must help.* **“If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again.”** (Exodus 23:4) Now you know where Yahshua’s revolutionary statement in the beatitudes came from: **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”** (Matthew 5:43-

45) This is but one of many ways to “love your neighbor as yourself.” But note that “your neighbor” isn’t necessarily only someone who you’d normally *want* to do a favor for—someone you’re on good terms with. No, it’s also your *enemy’s* ox or donkey you’re to return. These days, most of us don’t have “assets” that are prone to wander off by themselves, of course. But we can be creative in the application of this precept. Your rude neighbor down the street is away on vacation, but you see a van backed into his driveway at two o’clock in the morning: don’t ignore it just because he’s obnoxious. Call the cops—his house is being robbed. Of course, if we acted like this consistently, we might find ourselves unable to keep the strict letter of the precept, for we could eventually find ourselves *without* any enemies.

- (883) *Do not limit acts of love or mercy to people you know. “Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”* (Exodus 23:9) Not only must we not reserve our acts of kindness to people we like (as we learned in the previous precept), we are even responsible to love people we don’t even know—anyone we come in contact with. Remember, “oppression” in God’s eyes needn’t be a purposeful act of overt evil toward someone; simply to refuse assistance to someone whom it’s in your power to help is oppression.

This, of course, is the point of Yahshua’s familiar story about the “Good Samaritan.” A religious lawyer had asked Him what he could do to inherit eternal life. When Yahshua asked him what he saw as the Torah’s requirement, the lawyer named the same two precepts we have been discussing: Love Yahweh, and love your neighbor. And Yahshua readily agreed. “**But [the lawyer], wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’** Then Jesus answered and said: ‘**A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side....**’” By doing this, the priest and the Levite in the parable had not only violated our present precept, but also the law of mercy implied in such passages as Deuteronomy 22:4—“Don’t pretend you didn’t see the problem.” By seeing the stranger in need and refusing to help, the priest and the Levite had “oppressed” him just as surely as the thieves had.

“**But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii,**

gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, “Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.” So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?’ And he said, ‘He who showed mercy on him.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’” (Luke 10:29-37) The Samaritan was a total stranger to the guy who’d been mugged. In fact, since the victim was coming from Jerusalem, we can assume he was a Jew, who would ordinarily (at this point in history) have considered a Samaritan, if not an enemy, at least someone to be shunned, culturally despised, and treated with contempt. From this Samaritan’s point of view, even though the cultural prejudices ran both ways, the only impetus he needed to show mercy to the man was, “He saw him.”

There is no shortage of need—even tragedy—in the world today, and because of our advanced communications technology, we are in a position to become aware of personal catastrophes happening all over the globe. Mutilation and starvation in Africa; flood devastation in Southeast Asia; earthquakes and volcanoes, terrorist attacks and wars, rampant crime in the inner city. We look at the news reports and take note of the statistics, and we shake our heads and mutter, “Even if I sent my entire income to the Red Cross or Salvation Army, I couldn’t make a dent in this. It’s hopeless!” It is therefore instructive to study what the good Samaritan did, and what he didn’t do.

(1) He met the immediate need he saw before him, not some need he’d heard about in Capernaum or Cairo. (2) He took time out of his own busy schedule, postponing his plans but not canceling them altogether. (3) He didn’t consider the race, color, creed, or personality profile of the victim, only his need for immediate help. (4) He didn’t judge the victim for having been alone and unprotected on a notoriously dangerous stretch of road. (5) He provided what was required to get the victim back to whatever condition he had enjoyed before the bandits jumped him, but he made no attempt to change or “improve” the man’s whole life, imposing his own value system on the man. What he gave to help the victim was considerable, but not to the point that it threatened the welfare or security of his own family. In today’s terms, he went to the local Walgreen’s, bought some bandages, antiseptic, and aspirin, and then took the victim to a nearby Motel 6 and paid for his room for a few days and for food at the Macdonald’s next door while he was there. He spent maybe two or three hundred bucks, a significant sum but not his entire life savings. (6) He promised to check on the victim’s welfare, and pay for any further necessary expenses, on his return trip. In other words, he wasn’t merely throwing money at the problem in order to ease his own guilty conscience, but was investing himself in the well being of the individual he’d found in

need. And (7) He did not take up a collection, hold a telethon, or demand that the government or other passers-by contribute their “fair share,” nor did he ask the victim to reimburse him. He simply did what he did because it was the right thing to do. He got personally involved.

We needn't restrict our “rescue efforts” to the physically wounded, however. We'll meet people along the way who have been mugged spiritually through false teaching and hypocrisy, and they too need our help. The Samaritan, we are told, provided “bandages” to staunch the loss of the victim's life's blood. That is, in spiritual terms, he made available the “**fine linen, clean and bright...the righteous acts of the saints**” (Revelation 19:8) that alone could enable him to stand one day before His Creator, alive and whole. He anointed him, pouring “oil” on the man's wounds—that is, he manifested the Spirit of God's love, comforting, nurturing, and consoling him, giving him the will to live and the knowledge that someone cared deeply for him. And finally, he cleansed the victim's wounds with “wine,” a picture of the blood Yahshua shed to cleanse us from our sins. Although the Samaritan couldn't have known it, God was subtly telling us that even if the man's wounds weren't mortal, infection from the filth of the world could still kill him. He had to be washed—sterilized—in the blood of the true vine, Yahshua (cf. John 15:1-11). Religion couldn't (and didn't) help the man. Only someone willing to show him Yahweh's righteousness, Spirit, and sacrifice could be of real assistance.

REDEMPTION

- (884) *The life of one guilty of fatal criminal negligence may be redeemed. “If there is imposed on him [the owner of an ox who has killed someone] a sum of money, then he shall pay to redeem his life, whatever is imposed on him. Whether it has gored a son or gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him.”* (Exodus 21:30-31) The context for this precept was referenced in Maimonides' listing of dietary laws, though it has virtually nothing to do with diet: “**If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, then the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten.**” That's all the farther the Rambam went. “**But the owner of the ox shall be acquitted. But if the ox tended to thrust with its horn in times past, and it has been made known to his owner, and he has not kept it confined, so that it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death.**” (Exodus 21:28-29) The immediate point is that we are responsible for the actions of our animals. I realize that not too many people keep oxen in their back yards these days, but the same principles would apply across the board—millions of people own dogs, for instance. A distinction is drawn between an animal that

unexpectedly injures or kills a person and one who has been known to be dangerously aggressive in the past. One who keeps Pit Bulls or Rottweilers is *required* to be aware of the breeds' characteristics, and take appropriate precautions.

What is to happen if such a dangerous beast, one who has a history of aggression, attacks and kills a person? Even the most politically correct animal activist can see that the animal should be destroyed. But what about its owner? Under the Torah, his life is forfeit also, for his negligence is directly responsible for an innocent person's death. However, the family of the victim has the option of "suing" him in lieu of letting him suffer the ultimate penalty, and apparently, the sky's the limit: "*whatever* is imposed on him." From the negligent owner's point of view, when your very skin is at stake, losing your shirt may not sound so bad. The scary thing is, the *default* penalty for this type of criminal negligence is death: the option of allowing the guilty party's life to be redeemed is strictly up to the victim's kin. They are not required to do so.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see the spiritual ramifications here. The sinful world's ultimate "beast" was the Roman empire. It had been described prophetically to Daniel as "**dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet.**" (Daniel 7:8) The religious elite of Israel knew that Rome would, if properly motivated, attack and kill their inconvenient antagonist, Yahshua the Messiah, for them. So in the spring of 33 A.D., they conspired with this creature for their own evil ends. Both of these two "beasts," Rome and the Sanhedrin, were personally guilty of Christ's death: the former a raging ox, goring, slashing, and trampling, and the latter the vicious little dog nipping at its heels, driving it to madness. The "owner" of both these two beasts was *us*—Adam's fallen race—who *should have known* that both unrestrained political power and arrogant religious ambition could be deadly, especially when working together. Thus we had, under the Torah, earned the death penalty just as surely as the animals who did the actual killing.

The two beasts were to be destroyed: there was no equivocation in the law about that. But there was still the issue of whether or not mankind, the irresponsible "owner," would be given the chance to redeem its life. Would the victim's "next of kin"—Almighty Yahweh—allow us to be redeemed for our act of criminal negligence, and if so, what price would He demand? The answer is a good news-bad news story for anyone who desires to remain estranged and aloof from the God who made him. Yes, we may be redeemed, but the price of our deliverance is horrendous, not to

mention being impossible to obtain through our own efforts. It's the most precious substance known to man—the blood of God's only Son. The irony of ironies is that the price of redemption is the same blood that was shed by our own vicious "animals." It's as if Yahweh is saying, "Sure, you can buy your way out of this one. Just give me back the life-blood of My Son, the blood you shed at Calvary." *But that's impossible*, you say. "Yes, it is," God replies, "so because I love you, I have made the blood of My Son available for your redemption. All you have to do is accept my gracious offer. You've got three choices, then. You can either accept My gift, you can insult Me by trying to pay Me off through your own pitiful efforts, or you can die." Gee, that's a tough one.

The Torah's spiritual application in this regard isn't limited to the case of the Messiah's death, of course. Anyone, a "son or daughter," a "man or woman," who is "gored to death" by our rampaging ox receives the same consideration under God's victim-centric Law. This is just one more way of saying that preventing someone from having eternal life through the indwelling of Yahweh's Spirit is a crime punishable by death. The point is that you needn't murder people personally to merit God's wrath: doing it through an agent, something you own or control, also defines your guilt.

- (885) *Permanent possessions lost through poverty may be redeemed at any time. "If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession, and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold."* (Leviticus 25:25) This is part of the Law of Jubilee, describing, as we have seen, the things that impact the eternal state (as the Sabbatical year is prophetic of the Millennial reign of Yahshua the Messiah). "Becoming poor" is a euphemism for falling into sin, the consequence of which is "selling" our "possession"—the earth—to Satan. This has been the state of affairs since our father Adam first encountered the curse of sin in the Garden of Eden. Satan's 7,000-year "lease" will be up at the end of the Millennial Kingdom (the last thousand years of which he'll spend locked up in the abyss, thank God). The point here is that we need not wait until then to get our land back. Our "redeeming relative," Yahshua, has come to buy back what we lost. The price of redemption has already been paid. All we have to do is go back home, though few realize that our poverty and servitude need not continue one more minute.

Moses' treatise continues: "**Or if the man has no one to redeem it, but he himself becomes able to redeem it, then let him count the years since its sale, and restore the remainder to the man to whom he sold it, that he may return to his possession. But if he is not able to have it restored to himself, then what was sold shall remain in the hand of him who bought it until the Year of Jubilee; and in the**

Jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his possession." (Leviticus 25:26-28) In spiritual terms, of course, none of us has proven willing or able to "redeem our own possession," for this would entail undoing what cost us our inheritance in the first place, reversing the effects of sin—becoming sinless in our own right. Moses is pointing out, however, that doing so is *theoretically* possible; that is, if one were to keep the whole Torah, one would have earned what is required to buy back the time left on the lease. The fact that no one has ever achieved this (except for our Redeemer Himself) doesn't mean it's intrinsically impossible. As a practical matter, of course, Yahweh wished to give every Israelite every opportunity to enjoy the bounty of his own inheritance for as long as possible. So he made it *legal* to buy back one's land at any time. One who had been poor did not have to wait until the Jubilee to reclaim his inheritance. Nor do we, having received the grace of God, have to wait until the end of the seventh Millennium to start enjoying our inheritance: everlasting life in Christ. Eternity begins now.

RESPECT

- (886) *Respect the right of the firstborn.* "If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved, and if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn. But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his." (Deuteronomy 21:15-17) Though we may find it strange (as is the case with slavery), Yahweh never specifically outlawed polygamy. The reason, we may surmise, is the same: He had lessons to teach us that could most readily be understood in the context of this practice. Israel was, of course, quite familiar with this very scenario, for Jacob had ended up with two wives and two concubines, but only one of these women was really loved. Reuben, his firstborn, was the son of his unloved wife, Leah. Yet though Jacob recognized his status as the firstborn son, we read of no double portion being bestowed upon him, but rather a curse: "Unstable as water, you shall not excel." (Genesis 49:4) (If you want to know why, read in Genesis 35:22 about what Reuben had done.) Rather, Jacob *de facto* bestowed the firstborn's double portion on Joseph, the first son of his beloved Rachel, by "adopting" Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (see Genesis 48:16).

Jacob hadn't actually violated the Torah, of course, for it hadn't yet been handed down. But Yahweh now wished to establish the normal order of things: the firstborn (even if he was the son of an unloved wife) was to receive the status of leadership and the double portion of the inheritance. Since Yahweh never supported human institutions and traditions for their own sake, we must ask ourselves *why*. What did He wish to teach us with the Law of the firstborn? Remember first that God is, in a manner of speaking, polygamous Himself. That is, He characterized the Nation of Israel as his "wife"—one who was subsequently unfaithful to him. Then, manifested as Yahshua the Messiah, God took a second "wife," the *ekklesia* or called-out assembly of believers (a.k.a. "the Church")—called the "bride of Christ." This is clearly less an "arranged marriage," and more a love match, than Yahweh's union with Israel. As part of this "bride," I can assure you that there is real passion in this romance.

What, then, is the point of the Torah's precept? I believe it's a prophecy. When Yahshua receives His kingdom, the nation of Israel—now restored and cleansed—will function as the "firstborn son" among nations, receiving a double portion of honor, authority, and blessing. The sons of the Church (the Millennial gentile believers), while enjoying the blessings of the kingdom, will look to Israel as their honored "eldest brother," holding the uncontested position of leadership among Millennial mortals. This is in direct contradiction to the "Onward Christian Soldiers" mentality so prevalent a century ago that insisted the Church had replaced Israel in the plan and the heart of God. Yahweh begs to differ.

(887) *Respect the devotion of your servants.* **"And if it happens that he [the servant who loves his master] says to you, 'I will not go away from you,' because he loves you and your house, since he prospers with you, then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also to your female servant you shall do likewise."** (Deuteronomy 15:16-17) This is part of the Law of the Sabbatical year. At the end of six years of service, the one who had been sold into servitude would be free to go, staked and supplied with whatever it would take to get him on his feet for good (verses 13-14). At this point, the only "bonds" the master might have upon the servant would be those of thankfulness, loyalty, and love. He had no legal right to expect any more service from his former bondservant. The servant, likewise, had no legal right to ask anything further from his former master. Except for one thing...

Let's back up a step. What had caused the "servant" to come into the master's household in the first place? He had become "poor," a euphemism, as I noted, for having sinned against God, incurring a spiritual

debt he could not pay. His six years of service represent his mortal life as a fallen man. So in spiritual terms, we poor servants are, until the day we die, in the debt of the Master, He who paid the price of our redemption *up front*. Since “the wages of sin is death,” we are no longer in God’s debt after we’ve died. And since He has provided us with “all things that pertain to life and godliness” while we spend our days upon His earth, He too has done everything that could be reasonably expected of Him. We could then, at the end of our mortal lives, simply part company from God, no harm, no foul. There would be neither friendship nor enmity; neither punishment nor reward; neither relationship nor responsibility. The servant’s labors cease at his death, but this state of affairs is neither heaven nor hell. It’s something else entirely: the second of “three doors”—the three possible eternal destinations I spoke of in Precepts #865 and #866 above. It is simply ceasing to exist. No more pain or sorrow. But no more joy or fulfillment, either.

But what is that “one thing” I spoke of, that loophole in the Law of the Sabbatical year? What is the servant who has fulfilled his contract legally entitled to demand of the master who has likewise kept his end of the bargain? This servant may, at his own discretion and volition, request to make his place of service in the master’s household *permanent*—extend his contract indefinitely, so to speak. Why would he do this? Isn’t freedom to be desired above all things? No, it isn’t. It all depends on what you wish to be set free *from*. Sure, freedom from tyranny, oppression, fruitless toil, and pain would be a good thing, but life under our Master Yahweh is none of those things. It is, rather, a time of joyful labor, of justice tempered by mercy, of loving, nurturing relationships—things no sane person desires to be “freed” from. You may protest that life for the vast majority of mankind answers to the former description, tyranny and oppression. True, but that’s not because Yahweh is a tyrant or oppressor. It’s because they have been serving some other master, some usurper. It is tragic indeed to spend your life serving someone or something other than the God who bought you, but *woe* to the one who is responsible for your condition.

The servant, then, may ask to serve his master forever, continuing to do the same fulfilling work, maintaining the same loving relationships, enjoying the same peace and security he or she did before. The formal procedure—piercing the earlobe with an awl—involves blood and pain, for it is a picture of the price the Master originally paid for his redemption: the sacrifice of His Son, Yahshua, upon Calvary’s pole. But it is a privilege indeed for the servant to be counted worthy to partake in that sacrifice. Note that the choice is entirely up to the servant. The master apparently has no say in the matter: he is required by law to comply with

the servant's request. Amazingly, Yahweh has put limits on His own power here. He has made it *illegal for Himself* to refuse the servant's appeal. (Of course, one who is not actually His bondservant, one who has been serving another master, has no such rights.) According to His own Law, Yahweh may neither compel the servant to stay, nor decline to honor the servant's choice to remain with Him forever. The choice to enter into eternal life, "Door Number One," is ours to make. There's only one word to describe a God who would arrange this awesome opportunity for us: Yahweh is *Love*.

Learning From Experience

Love—arguably the only thing God wants from us—is by its very nature a bizarre and intangible entity. It's a matrix that exists between two beings. Yahweh, being “One,” could therefore not participate in a loving relationship until He created us. That is, His very nature, that of a loving God, could not be meaningfully manifested until there was something toward which He could express that love, and that “something” had to be *like Him* in a way: alive, animate, aware, and, if I'm right about this, capable of loving Him. It was thus an act of pure love when Yahweh created space-time, matter-energy, and organic life, for those things are prerequisites for our physical existence, and more to the point, for our ability to reciprocate His love.

For two beings to love each other, they must have the same nature. That is, an animal can love another animal because they both possess souls, the attribute of “life” expressed in Hebrew as the *nephesh*. So a man can love a dog or a horse, and *vice versa*, but he cannot “love” a sunset or a job or a motorcycle. But Yahweh's nature is spiritual (Hebrew: *ruach*. See John 4:24). Consequently, for a man to be able to love God, he must have a spirit as well as a soul. We read in Genesis 2:7 that Yahweh “**breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.**” The word translated “breath of life” is neither *nephesh* nor *ruach*—neither soul nor spirit. It's *neshamah*. It is this attribute, exclusive to the human race since it was bestowed on Adam, that distinguishes man from other animals with souls, for it allows him to have a *spiritual nature* in addition to his mortal life. Man is thus uniquely equipped to dwell in a matrix of love with his Creator—something no mere animal can do. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), the French mathematician, physicist, and philosopher, wrote “There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man that cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.” That's a pretty fair description of the *neshamah*, if you think about it.

This matrix of love is ephemeral and elusive. It must be offered freely—even unconditionally—or it morphs before our very eyes into something else: an inducement, a bribe, a subtle form of pressure. And it must be accepted on the same terms, or once again it changes imperceptibly into something that is not love at all. Love can be desired, but not acquired. It can be given, but not forced upon its object. It can be offered, but not delivered. It can be accepted, but not seized. Love cannot be bought, sold, bartered, or cajoled. It cannot be earned, coerced, or programmed. It can only be freely given and voluntarily received.

Returning someone's offering of love requires choice—free will—for without it, love degenerates into something less, such as loyalty, fidelity, gratitude, politeness, or obedience. Therefore, as strange as it sounds, in order for the concept of love to have any meaning whatsoever, it must be possible—even permissible—*not* to love. Angels, apparently, do not have this capacity. They are created spirit beings who function like soldiers: their nature is to do what the Commander says to do, and if they rebel (for like all soldiers, they *do* have the capability of disobedience, though not the privilege), they will be punished, sent to the brig, as it were. When an angel does what Yahweh commands, he is demonstrating loyalty and obedience, not love. And conversely, if the angel rebels and becomes a demon, he is not showing a lack of love: technically, he is “only” being treacherous and defiant. We humans, on the other hand, have a choice: we may reciprocate God's love or not—it's our decision. Unlike the angels, when we obey God's precepts (if we're doing it *because* they're His precepts), we're demonstrating our love, for it is our prerogative to ignore Him if we want to.

At this point, people steeped in conventional Christian theology think they've spotted a glaring flaw in my logic. What about hell? *Oh sure, we have the God-given right to ignore Him and refuse to reciprocate His love, but if we do, He'll consign us to an eternity of torment in hell fire. Some choice!* We must ask ourselves (in the undying words of the serpent in the Garden), “Has God indeed said this?” He *does* speak of everlasting affliction in hell for Satan and his followers. But for those who simply fail to love Yahweh, the scriptures speak not of punishment but rather of *destruction*, of becoming nothing, of ceasing to be. What's the difference? “Hell's torments” and “destruction” sound equally bad, you may be thinking. But they're not. One who is “destroyed” *no longer exists*: someone in this state cannot, by definition, suffer “eternal torment.” One Hebrew word used to describe this state (unfortunately translated “corruption”) is *beliy*, which actually means nothingness—it is the word for negation, literally: “no, not, or without.” This isn't heaven, I'll grant you, but in comparison with hell's eternal waking torment, it is the most tender of mercies. Death is not remotely the same thing as damnation.

Hell, it turns out, is reserved for those who *prevent others* from choosing to reciprocate the love of Yahweh, a group coterminous with those who have been indwelled by demonic spirits in the same way believers are indwelled by Yahweh's Holy Spirit. They're “born from below” as we are “born from above.” Those slated for destruction or “nothingness,” by contrast, *aren't born at all* in a spiritual sense. Their *neshamah* remains an empty vessel, a “vacuum” inhabited by no god of any shape, true or false. It's one thing to choose to pass up a good thing yourself. Yes, it's a waste, a squandering of potential blessing, but at least it's *your* blessing you're throwing away—it's your decision, your prerogative. It's something else entirely to force, trick, or otherwise seek to prevent other people

from experiencing that good thing for themselves. Making available to mankind the choice to love Him was Yahweh's whole point in creating us. As we saw in the previous chapter, God considers it murder to thwart the loving relationship He has offered to us. And spiritual murder is a capital crime. If somebody offered to give you a million dollars, but you, whether out of suspicion, pride, or apathy, told him to go away and leave you alone, your relative poverty could not logically be blamed on your would-be patron. It might, however, be blamed on a third party who talked you out of accepting the free gift.

Yahweh obviously wants us to obey Him, but it's entirely up to us—there's no pressure, bribery or inducement for acquiescence, nor threats for noncompliance. There are *consequences*, of course. We reap whatever we sow. But Yahweh does not demand that we plant wheat instead of opium poppies. He merely points out what can be expected to thrive in this soil we call human life, and what will best nourish us after the harvest. The point is that we humans are creatures imbued with choice: love God or not, obey Him or not, trust Him or not. The only real penalties associated with our failure to love, obey, and trust Him are intrinsic in the act of rebuffing our Benefactor. As we have seen throughout our study of the Torah, this “Owner's Manual” of God's is there for our benefit, not His ego. He told us these things so that we might, through following His precepts, enjoy happier, healthier lives, both physically and spiritually. His only motivation for issuing these instructions was that He loved us.

So we should not be surprised to find that the “penalties” for noncompliance are usually built in, not added on. (For example, although there is a penalty imposed for murder, the “penalty” for *not enforcing this penalty* is the gradual unraveling of society. It's inherent in the nature of injustice. It's a “natural law.”) If you insist on eating pigs, don't blame Yahweh when you contract trichinosis. If you marry your sister, don't blame God if your children are plagued with hereditary diseases brought on by dredging recessive genes to the surface. If you refuse to honor Yahweh in your public institutions, don't blame Him when your civilization degenerates into chaos and despair. If you refuse to keep the Sabbath, don't blame Yahweh when the Day of Judgment sneaks up on you like a thief in the night. Because He loves us, He told us everything we need to know concerning life and godliness. It's not God's fault if we choose to ignore His truth.

It bears repeating: history is a stern schoolmaster. If we do not learn its lessons, we will flunk out and have to repeat the class. Solomon, bemoaning the vanity, the emptiness, of man's labors under the sun, identifies the reason for our spiritual frustration: we don't remember the lessons of the past. We refuse to learn from experience. We choose ignorance over wisdom. **“That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is**

there anything of which it may be said, 'See, this is new'? It has already been in ancient times before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after." (Ecclesiastes 1:9-11) So his counsel, after all was said and done, was to remember what God had told us. "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them.'" (Ecclesiastes 12:1) *Remember*. Choose to learn from the experiences, insights, and revelations Yahweh has recorded in His word, for His counsel is refuge against the insanity of the lost world. Remember your Creator now; heed His precepts "before the difficult days come." Make no mistake: they *are* coming.

REMEMBER WHAT GOD HAS DONE AND SAID

(888) *Know that Yahweh chastises us when we need correction. "Remember what Yahweh your God did to Miriam on the way when you came out of Egypt!"* (Deuteronomy 24:9) The story of "what Yahweh did to Miriam" is recorded in Numbers 12. In a nutshell, Miriam (backed by Aaron, who, we get the feeling, never instigated anything in his entire life, good *or* bad) criticized Moses for marrying a black woman, an Ethiopian. We are not told if his first wife, Zipporah (a Midianite, from Northern Arabia) had died, or if this new wife was taken in addition to her. I would guess it was the former, since we read of no similar objection lodged by either Zipporah or her father Reuel/Jethro, both of whom were known to speak their mind. Zipporah would have been over sixty years old at this time. We last see her in the Biblical record, perhaps two years before this point, in Exodus 18, so it's hard to know for sure what had happened. But in any case, God had not outlawed polygamy, nor would He. This leads me to conclude that Miriam's criticism was racially motivated.

Yahweh had nothing to say either way about Mo's second marriage. His issue was that someone would have the temerity to speak against His chosen prophet—nay, more than a prophet: Moses was, He pointed out, a servant who was "faithful in all My house; I speak with him face to face [not in dreams and visions, like ordinary prophets], even plainly, not in dark sayings." (Numbers 12:7-8) Yahweh, though angry with Miriam, hadn't lost His sense of humor. It was as if He said, "You say you don't like black skin, Miriam? Okay, I aim to please." "And when the cloud [the Shekinah] departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow." (Numbers 12:10) This, of course, meant that she would be ostracized from the congregation of Israel, forced to live outside the camp. No more lofty status for her; no more of the perks that came with being the big sister of the guy who ran the whole country. A horrified and repentant Aaron, not

knowing what lay in store for him, pleaded with Moses to intercede for their stricken sister, which Moses did. And Yahweh did as His servant had requested, though He gave Miriam seven long days as a leper in which to contemplate her sins.

And what are we to learn from this? First, and most basically, Yahweh is not reluctant to chastise us—His own children—when we need His rod of correction. In my long experience, His punishment always fits the crime—neither too harsh nor too lenient—and not infrequently, it’s just as poetic as it was here. Modern Christians who don’t believe in corporal punishment should be aware that Yahweh Himself uses it to instruct and guide us. Second, we need not defend our status as servants of God (if that is indeed what we are). Yahweh is the One who vindicates us. For our part, we should endeavor to be as Moses was described: “very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.” Third, the incident happened when they were “on the way...out of Egypt.” That is, if you’re still living “in the world,” don’t expect to feel God’s rod of correction across your backside. It’s only when you leave it, when you begin your journey toward the Promised Land—life under Yahweh’s sovereignty—that you are ready for His guidance. Remember, a rudder is useless as long as the ship is tied up at the dock; it can only steer a vessel that’s moving.

- (889) *Recognize God’s tests for what they are.* **“And Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.’ Then they fell on their faces, and said, ‘O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?’”** (Numbers 16:20-22) For some people, it doesn’t matter how humble you are. If God exalts you, they’re going to resent it and covet your status before Him. Such was the case with Miriam, as we just saw. And now, in Numbers 16, we have a similar tale, the story of Korah’s intended coup. It’s a classic confrontation between man’s ways and God’s. We begin with bloodline: Korah was a Levite of the house of Kohath (the same clan as Moses and Aaron). If the Kohathite Levites were to be the leaders, he figured, why Moses, and not him? As a supporting cast, Korah’s two main cohorts were Reubenites, that is, descendants of Jacob’s firstborn. (That ought to entitle them some added prestige, according to human wisdom.) But Korah didn’t stop there: he next recruited two hundred and fifty of the leading men of Israel. In doing so, he figured he’d wrapped up the “electoral college.” If this had been a democracy, Moses would have been a lame duck, except for one small detail: in the immortal words of John Knox, “A man with God is always in the majority.”

Moses, who remembered his sister's little mutiny, knew this couldn't end well. So he devised a test whereby God might demonstrate whom He had chosen to be the leader: all of Korah's two hundred and fifty "elders" were to present censers with incense. If Yahweh selected them, their smoke would rise toward heaven, but if only Aaron's did, then he and Moses would have been revealed (again) to be the chosen leaders. Simple enough, but it never got that far. The rebels gathered together not only the two hundred and fifty, but the whole congregation to help them intimidate Moses and Aaron. This is where our current precept comes in: Yahweh now says, in effect, "That's it. I'm going to wipe them all out and start over. You two may not want to be standing so close. This is going to get ugly."

Moses and his brother recognized the threat as a test, and immediately pleaded with God to consider His own character: a just God, One not willing to destroy the righteous with the wicked. So the challenge was changed: if Korah and his big shots lived happily ever after (or even died a normal death) then *that* was to be the sign that Yahweh had not chosen Moses. **"But if Yahweh creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected Yahweh."** (Numbers 16:30) What were the chances of that happening? Zero, if there was no God, or if He hadn't called Moses to the position of leadership in Israel. But the words had barely left Mo's lips when that very thing happened. Then fire from Yahweh came and consumed the two hundred and fifty ringleaders. God had made His point.

That should have ended the debate, but no. **"On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, 'You have killed the people of Yahweh.'"** (Numbers 16:41) I don't get it. If Korah and his two Reubenite cohorts had been "the people of Yahweh," then why didn't God protect them? And if *Moses and Aaron* had somehow made the ground swallow them up—tents and all—you'd think that maybe the Israelites might have figured out it wasn't such a hot idea to defy them to their faces. But the Israelites, just like the world *we* live in, had lost the ability to reason, to weigh the evidence, to recognize the hand of God at work among them. *Don't confuse us with facts; our minds are made up!* So Yahweh was compelled to sing the song again: second verse, same as the first. **"And Yahweh spoke to Moses [*again*], saying, 'Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.'"** (Numbers 16:44-45) At this point, I (being slow but teachable) might have said, "Okay, I see Your point. I'm out of here!" But Moses, once again being technically disobedient to Yahweh but willing to defend His character to the death,

simply fell on his face and pleaded for mercy for his people. Then, as the plague began, Moses instructed Aaron to hurry and perform what the *first test* had proposed as a sign: intercede for the people with a censer burning incense as a prayer to Yahweh. And God did indeed halt the plague, but not before it had slain another 14,700 rebellious Israelites.

Some things never change. The world still doesn't want to consider the evidence—choosing to believe manmade myths over God's revealed truth ninety-nine percent of the time. But what is "the congregation of man" going to do when all the faithful have been removed from the earth—when there is no longer a Moses to plead for mercy for them, or an Aaron running out among them praying to God for the plague to stop? The core issue will not have changed: the world will still be figuring out whom it will follow. The choice, in the end, will be between Yahshua (Yahweh's Man—for whom both Moses and Aaron are a prototype), and the Antichrist (Satan's boy, his Korah-equivalent). Remarkably, we are told that the Antichrist and his false prophet will end up pretty much like Korah and his Reubenite buddies did—and for roughly the same reason: **"Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone."** (Revelation 19:20)

(890) *Don't make up your own religion.* **"You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes—for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which Yahweh your God is giving you. But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, then there will be the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide."** (Deuteronomy 12:8-11) "Crossing over the Jordan" is seen in some of the old hymns as "entering heaven" (doubtless an artifact of Bunyan's allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*). But it's no such thing. It's a picture of commencing one's life as a believer in Yahweh—in this world. The fact is that the battles don't even really *begin* until we've entered this Promised Land. The point of the passage is that within the believer's earthly experience, our faith in Yahweh's grace must lead us to faith in His instructions as well. It's disingenuous to say we're relying on God for our salvation when we refuse to take His word or counsel about anything else in life.

The believer's life is like a room with two doors, a window, and a table and chair sitting in the middle. God invites us to leave the world and enter the room through the first door (salvation), sit in the chair, attend to

whatever tasks we find upon the table that need to be done, and when we're finished, exit by the second door—the one that leads to heaven. Subject Number One enters, only to be distracted by what he sees through the window (the world). He never sits down and never does what God prepared for him to do, but he never impacts the world either, for he's not out there anymore. When he leaves the room, though nothing of value has been accomplished, he feels fatigued and frustrated. Subject Number Two, on the other hand, enters the room and never bothers to look out the window at all. But he doesn't sit down and follow God's instructions, either. Rather, he sets about busily decorating the room, laying carpet, hanging curtains, painting the walls, and rearranging the furniture. A lot of things get done, though none of them were on God's to-do list—a fact that totally eludes him. He finally leaves the room, exhausted and famished but inordinately proud of his “accomplishments.”

Subject Number Three, however, enters the room and, because he really trusts Yahweh to know what's best, does as he was told: he sits at the table to begin the work God assigned to him. Once seated (resting in God's word), he discovers all sorts of things the other two missed. First, there's the list of tasks God left for him, so he knows precisely what he needs to be doing with his time. Next he sees that the view out the window is quite different from this angle: he can now see what's really going on out there in the world, and what it will take to make it a better place—information he needs in order to address his to-do list. He notices there's a phone on the table, so he can talk to the world, listen to their problems, counsel and comfort them, and even call 911 for them if need be. He notices a menu for a nice little Kosher Deli nearby, so he orders himself a tasty lunch to sustain him through the day. When it's finally time to go home, his to-do list has been seriously depleted, but his spirits have not.

Subject Number One is what Paul would call a “carnal Christian,” someone guided not by the Spirit of God, but rather by their own flesh, “behaving like a mere man,” as he says in I Corinthians 3:3. Number Two is the “religious Christian,” someone so busy doing “good works,” he never takes time to consider whether they're actually what God wants him to do—confusing progress with process, generating lots of heat but very little light. But Number Three is the “obedient believer” spoken of by John: **“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”** (I John 2:3-6) How did Yahshua

walk? He did the will of His “Father,” Yahweh. He was obedient, even to the point of death.

Our present precept speaks to all three types. Moses admonishes us that as we enter the life of a believer, we are to (1) leave the world’s ways behind us, (2) prepare to fight our spiritual battles in God’s strength, not our own, and (3) commune with Yahweh according to His direction, not our invention. There is a place, He says, where He will “choose to make His name abide.” We are to meet Him there, and *only* there—not where our spiritual adversaries are accustomed to bowing to their false gods. Although God may be present in religion, in nature, or in the better impulses of the human psyche, we are instructed *not to seek Him there*. We are, rather, to meet Him in His sanctuary, the place where His name abides and His Spirit dwells. And where is that? Yahshua promised us, “I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him or knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:16-17) Or as Paul asked, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (I Corinthians 3:16) God is with us and in us. Once we have “crossed the Jordan,” we don’t have very far to go at all.

- (891) *Verify God’s word through historical inquiry.* “For ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether any great thing like this has happened, or anything like it has been heard. Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live? Or did God ever try to go and take for Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that Yahweh your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that Yahweh Himself is God; there is none other besides Him.” (Deuteronomy 4:32-35) It’s abundantly clear that choice is our prerogative. But real choice requires two things: knowledge and the freedom to act upon it. Here Yahweh is saying to put His words and deeds to the test—compare what He has done for you to the résumé of any conceivable rival. Acquire the knowledge necessary to make an informed decision. Conduct historical, scientific, or philosophical inquiry, for the facts—the truth of the matter—will vindicate His word at every turn. It’s a dare, a challenge: God has nothing to fear from “full disclosure.” He’s not looking for “blind faith.” He wants us to open our eyes: to exercise faith based on historical reality.

“Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that He might instruct you; on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire. And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power, driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land as an inheritance, as it is this day.” (Deuteronomy 4:36-38) The history of Israel’s deliverance is a metaphor for God’s calling upon all of us, if only we’ll choose to follow Him. We too “hear His voice.” We too “see His fire.” We too are brought by His presence and power out of the world that held us in bondage. And formidable forces of evil that would threaten, confound, and beguile us are still driven out from before us, if we will but trust in Yahweh to keep His word. The evidence the Israelites saw and heard was admittedly more palpable, more tangible, than what we experience today. They *saw* the pillar of fire; they *heard* the thundering voice of Yahweh upon the mountaintop; they smelled the smoke and felt the earth tremble. But for all that, they did not have what we do: sure knowledge of our deliverance from the bondage of Adam’s curse—historical confirmation that Yahweh has kept His word, fulfilling the promise of redemption through the sacrifice of His Messiah—redemption that was prophesied in hundreds of the Torah’s precepts. The evidence of God’s glory we enjoy today is no less real than that which awed the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai. The fact that Yahweh now speaks in a still, small voice instead of a thunderous roar should neither lessen our awareness nor mitigate our awe.

- (892) *Base your conclusions on truth, and apply logic to formulate a plan of action.* **“Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that Yahweh Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you for all time.”** (Deuteronomy 4:39-40) The “therefore” refers back to the indisputable evidence of Yahweh’s glory Moses has been talking about for the last few Precepts—and I would include the historical evidence for the Messiah’s redemptive act in that admonition. The simple, profound conclusion we are encouraged to reach is that Yahweh alone is God. And because He is God, He has the right to call the shots: we are to “keep His statutes and commandments.” Note that the promise attached to the precept is virtually identical to the Fifth Commandment of the Decalogue: **“Honor your father [a surrogate for Yahweh] and your mother [symbolic of His Holy Spirit], that your days may be long upon the land which Yahweh your God is giving you.”** (Exodus 20:12) Honoring—taking seriously—God and His

Ruach Qodesh is therefore equated to “keeping His statutes.” It reminds me of what John said in the passage quoted above: “**Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.**” (I John 2:3)

At the risk of appearing to beat a dead horse, let me point out (again) that even though the Land was given to Israel “for all time,” it has *not* “gone well with them.” Because they did not “keep His statutes,” Israel was evicted from their Land lock, stock, and barrel—*twice*. If (as some of them claim) they *have* been following Yahweh’s statutes this whole time then Yahweh is either a liar or incompetent. It’s only in the last century or so that the Jews have returned to their inheritance in any significant numbers, or with any significant political presence (and that’s only because Yahweh still has a boatload of prophecies to fulfill concerning their restoration). Yahweh did *not* tell them to “keep the statutes and commandments that *your rabbis* will command you to do.” By now (900 pages into this book) you should realize that the two bodies of Law—Torah and Talmud—bear only a superficial resemblance to each other. But both Old and New Covenant scriptures insist that keeping Yahweh’s actual commandments—not the traditions of men—is how we can “know God” and “prolong our days” in the land He has given us.

- (893) *Don’t let your prosperity distract you from the God who provided it. “So it shall be, when Yahweh your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full—then beware, lest you forget Yahweh who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.”* (Deuteronomy 6:10-12) Who among us can truthfully claim to be “self-made?” You might declare, “I worked hard, kept my nose clean, learned how to get ahead in life, and the success I’m enjoying is entirely because of my own efforts.” But that’s a narrow, provincial, and dare I say, disingenuous view. Who gave you the intelligence, the aptitude, the opportunity, the physical ability, and the shelter from unforeseen disaster that were baseline prerequisites for your success before you even lifted a finger? Who lined up the intangibles for you—that first job, the chance meeting, the accident you narrowly avoided, the fact that you were born in, say, North America in the 20th Century instead of in Central Africa in the 18th? You would not be precisely what you are (whether for better or for worse) without a thousand factors that are entirely out of your control.

I’m not saying we are strictly the products of our environment. I’m saying, rather, that we are responsible before God to play the hand we’re

dealt. When we're blessed, we are to acknowledge His bounty and provision. When afflicted, we are to cry out for mercy to the One who has the power to deliver us. Yes, hard work and discipline are good things. But in the end, what we have is the sum total of what we've done with the gifts—and the challenges—Yahweh has given us. Israel's entrance into the Promised Land serves as a microcosm of this principle. Like us today, they were given the opportunity to stand on the shoulders of those who had gone before them, reaping where they had not sewn. Like us, the blessings they were given could either be viewed as gifts from God or things to which they were entitled by right of conquest. But Yahweh warned them—and us—not to let prosperity or accomplishment cloud our memory, our sense of gratitude, or our appreciation of how we got here.

- (894) *Remember who the real God is.* **“You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you (for Yahweh your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of Yahweh your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.”** (Deuteronomy 6:14-15) This is the same basic tenet as the Second Commandment—an admonition to honor Yahweh as God (Creator-deity, Master, Provider, and Savior) and at the same time to refrain from showing reverence, devotion, or adulation to other things other people might worship. Back in bronze age Israel, these things were usually easy to spot—false “gods,” with names like Ba'al, Chemosh and Molech, with characteristics and desires men had ascribed to them, idols that represented them, and cults built around them. But today, the “other gods” people pursue are usually far more subtle: wealth, sex, power, fame, pleasure, respect, or popularity. They could manifest themselves as almost anything: a fancier car, a bigger house, a greener lawn, a lower golf score, or a higher high. They might be “political causes” like fighting for world peace, saving the environment from its inhabitants, pressing one's views on gun control, abortion, or the right to copulate with whomever or whatever one felt like, or simply escaping from the realities and responsibilities of human civilization. These “other gods” always seem to be just out of reach, constantly requiring just a little more devotion, a little more sacrifice. Our “other gods” are, in short, anything that stands between us and Yahweh—things that distract us, that broach no recourse to Godly counsel, things in which our relationship with Yahweh is declared to be “beside the point.”

Interestingly, things need not be *intrinsically* bad to be characterized as the “other gods” about which Yahweh has warned us. In fact, many of the same things could just as easily be right or wrong—depending on how they affect our walk with God. Wealth can easily distract us, and yet Yahweh showered great wealth on some of the most faithful men in the

Biblical record: Job, Abraham, David, etc.—without corrupting their character. Sex is implicit in the very first command Yahweh issued to the human race: “Go forth and multiply.” And yet its practice outside of God’s guidelines—holy matrimony between one man and one woman for a lifetime—has been a constant source of distraction in our world since mankind left the Garden, “another god” that we should have left alone.

Religion is another example: it can serve as a matrix in which like minded believers can congregate to separate themselves from the influences of the world—acting as a medium through which holiness (becoming set-apart and consecrated to Yahweh, being called out of the world) is worked out in practical terms. But it can all too easily become a substitute for the very God it is designed to honor. I recently reread John Bunyan’s classic allegory *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. I realize it’s merely semantic nitpicking on my part, but Bunyan constantly refers to “religion” as if it’s the sum total of the Christian experience in this world. It is nothing of the sort. Rather, it is a loaded gun—an inherently dangerous but potentially useful implement that can be used to either bring home dinner or kill it’s owner. It must be handled with great care.

Moses uses a word here that may seem odd to our ears: he says Yahweh is a “jealous” God. Actually, he repeats this six times in the Torah. The word in Hebrew is *qanna*, from a verb meaning to be zealous, jealous, or even envious. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* points out the basic idea: “zeal for another’s property is envy, while zeal for one’s own property is jealousy.” Since “we are not our own; we have been bought with a price”—the blood of the Lamb of God—we belong to Yahweh. If we have chosen to accept the terms of our redemption, we are by our own admission His property. He is quite within His “rights,” then, to claim our exclusive love as His own, becoming angry if we squander our affections on “other gods.” It bears repeating. Although Yahweh’s children would never bow to a Molech, Zeus, or Allah, we can find ourselves “worshipping” other gods without even realizing it. Beware!

- (895) *Be diligent about observing Yahweh’s statutes.* **“You shall diligently keep the commandments of Yahweh your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of Yahweh, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which Yahweh swore to your fathers, to cast out all your enemies from before you, as Yahweh has spoken.”** (Deuteronomy 6:17-19) If this were as obvious as it looks, God wouldn’t have had to repeat it so many times and in so many ways. Several factors bear mentioning. (1) You can’t “diligently keep the commandments of Yahweh” if you don’t know what

they are. That's why it's so important to study God's word. Don't assume anything. Don't take anyone's word for it (and that includes mine). Look it up for yourself. Let the Holy Spirit teach you, bringing to remembrance what Yahweh has instructed as you walk through this world.

(2) Doing "what is right in the sight of Yahweh" is for our benefit, not His. The natural result of compliance is that "it may be well with you." The "enemies" Yahweh promised to cast out if we obey Him are not necessarily people. They could be our own self-destructive tendencies, the "lusts that war against our members." "Possessing the good land" is living in peace and security as believing mortals *in this life*, and we'll never do that if we refuse to trust Yahweh to know what's best for us here and now.

(3) We are not to define our own standards of right and wrong, and we are certainly not to defer to clerics and kings to define good and evil for us. Rather, we are to "do what is right and good in the sight of Yahweh." His world, His rules.

And (4) note that we are to observe three categories of instruction. First are Yahweh's "commandments"—those things that are to be manifested as a constant, ongoing reality in our lives. These are not so much things we *do* as things we *are*. They invariably have a spiritual undercurrent, even if they seem on the surface to deal with outward behavior. For example, the commandment to honor one's father and mother, while valid and binding on the literal face of it, actually means we are to take Yahweh and His Holy Spirit seriously. Second are His "testimonies"—the characterizations, symbols, and metaphors that pepper the Torah, and indeed, the entire Bible from one end to the other. The tabernacle, the sacrifices, the festival calendar: all of these things and more conspire to inform us, if we will but heed them, of Yahweh's unfolding plan for our redemption. And third are His "statutes"—the rules that govern our human interactions and guard our health, things that make civilization *civil* and encourage us to demonstrate our trust in Yahweh's love by keeping His word.

(896) *Look for the meaning behind God's statutes.* "When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which Yahweh our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your son: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and Yahweh showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. And Yahweh commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear Yahweh our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. Then

it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before Yahweh our God, as He has commanded us.”

(Deuteronomy 6:20-25) Allow me to boil this down to its essentials. *What does the Torah mean? Deliverance! Why should we heed all these instructions?* Because Yahweh is interested in our welfare, liberty, preservation, and righteousness. Revering our God and observing His statutes will naturally result in all of these good things.

The underlying assumption here is that the “testimonies, statutes, and judgments” of the Torah *do* have meaning. They’re not only rules for successful living (though they are certainly that). Yes, the *halakhah*, the path that one walks, is the focus of the statutes (Hebrew *choq*: a regulation, decree, ordinance, or boundary; a clear prescription of what one should do). But beyond the statutes, there are also “judgments” (*mishpat*: the act of deciding a legal dispute or case; the proclamation of a verdict; the dispensing of justice) and “testimonies” (*edah*: a witness—an object used as a memorial or remembrance of a covenant).

It is this last category—the *edah* or testimony—that completely eludes the rabbis. In Genesis 31, we see Jacob erecting a heap of stones as a pillar—a witness of the covenant he had made between himself and his deceitful father-in-law Laban. The reason is stated in verse 52: **“This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm.”** Yahweh has characterized the Torah as the same sort of “witness” or “testimony” against Israel. As Jacob’s pillar had cautionary significance to the parties of the covenant, so did the Torah. As the pillar was more than a pointless heap of rocks, so the Torah was more than a meaningless collection of rules. Both parties, Yahweh and Israel (and through them, us) were expected—were *required*—to consider the meaning of the *edah*, or testimony. And what was the meaning? What was the very first thing the Hebrew father was to answer his son when asked that question? **“We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.”** That is, we were in bondage to sin in the world, and Yahweh delivered us. How? By sending His Messiah, His only begotten Son, to fulfill the promise of all the bloody sacrifices prescribed in the Torah. They were signs, witnesses, *testimonies*, and every last one of them pointed toward Yahshua.

(897) *Warn Israel concerning their wicked ways. “Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel.”*

(Deuteronomy 31:19) Knowing what’s coming can be a curse if it’s bad

news for someone you love. Sometimes I think being omniscient must be really depressing for Yahweh. The context here is God's prophetic assessment of what Israel would do with the revelation they'd been given. It wasn't pretty: **"This people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land.... They will forsake me and break my covenant.... My anger shall be aroused against them.... They shall be devoured.... I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they have done."** (Deuteronomy 31:16-18) These weren't hypotheticals. There was no "if" involved. These things *would* happen. So Moses was instructed to write a song (recorded in Chapter 32)—sort of a parallel to the letters John was told to send to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3—a prophecy of sweeping proportions outlining the future history of Israel after Moses was gone.

He begins (vs. 1-4) by reminding them who the Rock of their salvation is. Then (vs. 5-14) he recounts God's calling of Israel, their special place in His heart. But Israel's rebellion, apostasy, and pride is then recounted (vs. 15-21), including a tantalizing preview of the "foolish" gentiles (the *ekklesia*) who would take up the mantle of truth they'd dropped (driving Israel crazy by doing so). Verses 22-27 declare that if Yahweh had not given his word to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He would have allowed Israel to disappear from the face of the earth—He's that angry. He laments their ignorance (vs. 28-33) and recounts His determination to show them where they went wrong—no matter how painful it is (vs. 34-38). Finally (vs. 39-43), Yahweh promises vengeance upon His enemies and atonement for His people—calling once again on the gentiles to rejoice over the restoration of Israel.

I don't really know how an observant Jew today can look at Deuteronomy 32 and keep from cringing. Moses did his job: he recorded for all time Yahweh's "witness against the children of Israel." It has all come about precisely as He predicted—right up to verse 38, at which point Israel's **"power is gone, and there is no one remaining, bond or free,"** and He challenges them to call upon their false gods to save them. When did they reach this point? 1945—the final year of the Nazi holocaust. Since then, we have seen only glimmers of the coming fulfillment of the rest of the Song of Moses. Yahweh says, **"Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand. For I raise My hand to heaven, and say, 'As I live forever, if I whet My glittering sword, and My hand takes hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to My enemies, and repay those who hate Me. I will make My arrows drunk with blood, and My sword shall devour flesh, with the blood of the slain and the captives, from the heads of the leaders of the enemy.' Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and render vengeance to**

His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people.”

(Deuteronomy 32:39-43) That’s a somewhat squishy, though thoroughly consistent, view of the coming Tribulation. If God’s word has proved one hundred percent accurate up to our current point in history (and it has), what are the chances He’ll drop the ball now—now that He’s sprinting past the two yard line? Only a fool would bet against His crossing the goal line—and soon. Israel has been warned. We’ve *all* been warned.

TAKE HEED

- (898) *Don’t mistake God’s blessing for your own greatness. “For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as Yahweh our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life.”* (Deuteronomy 4:7-9) It is easy for us to take our blessings for granted. It’s not so much that we feel entitled to them; it’s that we become so used to them, we never even think about where they came from. At this point in their history, Israel had seen God’s mighty hand up close and personal—or at least their parents had. These desert pilgrims had never known anything but Yahweh’s miraculous guidance, provision, and instruction: the pillar of cloud and fire, the manna, the water from the rock. Their national deliverance from Egypt was as real to them as, say, World War II was to me—something that had fundamentally shaped their parents’ world view, even though it had passed into history and legend before they were even born. God’s personal presence, and a leader who talked with Him face to face, were all they had ever known. It would have been easy to forget that this was *not normal*: other nations had no such privileged personal relationship with their Creator and Deliverer.

Moses therefore cautions the children of Israel to be cognizant of their unique position—and their singular responsibility. He knew that when they entered the Promised Land, the comparatively “normal” routine of life they found there could easily distract them from their unique and amazing heritage. As they fought the inevitable battles, it would be tempting to credit their victories to their own valor or superior strength, rather than to Yahweh’s provision. But if they always kept in mind “the things their eyes had seen” on a national level, the natural tendency to ascribe God’s blessing to their own effort would be kept at bay.

This principle is just as valid on a personal level. Anyone who has witnessed Yahweh’s greatness for any length of time is in danger of taking

it for granted. Anyone who has enjoyed God's blessing runs the risk of becoming less thankful than he should be. We are cautioned here to "take heed," diligently and purposefully making a point to remember how great our God is, and thankfully recount His blessings.

- (899) *Pass on Yahweh's precepts to future generations. "And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, especially concerning the day you stood before Yahweh your God in Horeb, when Yahweh said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'" (Deuteronomy 4:9-10)*

At my age, I've seen a remarkable shift in how successive generations view material wealth. My parents and grandparents were products of the Great Depression, so they remained quite frugal even after they no longer had to be. My "baby-boomer" contemporaries, building on our parents' phobias, tended to fixate on money and security. So *our* children and grandchildren—reacting to our obsession with success—all too often squandered their opportunities and despised their birthrights—setting *their* children up for another round of hard times. My point is that the legacy we pass on to future generations is just as often a response to our failures as it is the result of our successes. What we teach our children is shaped more by what we value than by what we say.

What's evident in the material realm is even more true in the spiritual: our children can spot our hypocrisy—the dichotomy between what we say and what we do—a mile away. We can teach God's precepts to our children with our lips, but the lessons will go unheeded if they're not borne out by the way we live our lives. We can tell them to love God and trust Him, but it will all be for naught if we despise and cheat our neighbors. We can instruct them to "honor their parents," but our words will sound hollow indeed if we ship grandma off to a nursing home at the first sign of our own "inconvenience." If we value religious tradition over a personal relationship with Yahweh, our children will sense it. If we trust our own efforts instead of the provision of God, they will know. What we tell them doesn't matter nearly as much as what we do.

The point of teaching our children the ways of God is not to make them well behaved or compliant. Moses reminds us that it's so they might learn to revere Yahweh. And why is that important? Because **"The reverence of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments."** (Psalm 111:10) And again, why are wisdom and understanding so critical? **"Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the**

things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand; in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her.” (Proverbs 3:13-18) That’s quite a legacy, and it is within our power to bestow it upon our children—reverence toward Yahweh, leading to wisdom, leading in turn to something better than mere temporal wealth: happiness, long life (in the end, *eternal* life), true riches, honor, pleasantness (*no ‘am*: grace, favor, kindness, delight, or beauty), peace, and abundant life. You can’t leave stuff like that to your kids in your will. You have to give it to them in person, or not at all.

- (900) *Be careful not to worship created things instead of their Creator. “Take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which Yahweh your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage. But Yahweh has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people, an inheritance, as you are this day.”* (Deuteronomy 4:19-20) It is axiomatic that if you’re going to worship something, that “something” must logically be greater than you are. In fact, it only makes sense to reserve your worship for the *greatest thing* of which you can conceive—not the second or third greatest. Unfortunately, once mankind had, as a whole, turned its back on its Creator, the kind of insight that can only be gained through a personal relationship with Him—the kind enjoyed by Adam, Seth, Enoch, and Noah—was supplanted by mere human logic. At that point, God and man both had a problem. For man’s part, he was now equipped with a *neshamah* (the “breath of life” of Genesis 2:7) that enabled his soul to be made alive forever by the indwelling of the Spirit of God—but without which he was an incomplete and deficient being—spiritually empty. Mankind now had a thirst for God—a nagging consciousness of his unfulfilled, unborn spiritual state. He was compelled by his very nature to try to fill this “God-shaped vacuum.” He was *driven* to search for the very God he had chosen not to honor.

Yahweh too had a problem. His fundamental nature is Love, which as we have observed, cannot be forced upon its object without morphing into something else. He therefore couldn’t make His work, purpose, or even His presence, known in unambiguous terms to the intended object of His love—*us*—without robbing us of the ability and privilege of choosing to love Him, for such a choice implies and requires the option of *not* doing so. But He had already created us, which in turn had necessitated the creation of an infrastructure in which to maintain our organic life: earth, an oxygen-rich atmosphere, liquid water, a sun just the right size and

distance away to provide light and energy, and a large moon to drive tides, weather, and plate tectonics—all of which, and much more, are essential to our biosphere.

So here's the human race—fallen from the pure state and living in a world surrounded with really impressive big, bright, shiny things in the sky. The sun is the most obvious: its heat and light bring life and security to our world. It's so critical to our survival, even a *caveman* could appreciate its importance. (Am I allowed to say that?) And the moon? Viewed from earth, it's *exactly* the same size as the sun, and though it's not as bright, it's far more interesting—disappearing and then magically reappearing in small increments every thirty days or so. The starry heavens too are fascinating and majestic, marching serenely across the night sky in pace with the seasons, forming pictures and suggesting stories in the minds of inquisitive men. The problem is that fallen man can't easily fathom anything greater than these, for the God who made them—Yahweh—doesn't force His presence and creative role into the forefront of our imaginations. And to make matters worse, until well into the twentieth century it was assumed that the sun, moon, and stars had *always* existed. The finite lifespan of the universe (about 14 billion years) wasn't scientifically established until Einstein's relativity, Hubble's red shifts, and Penzias' and Wilson's cosmic microwave background radiation had been thoroughly vindicated.

The idea of worshiping the sun, moon, and stars, then, isn't as crazy as it sounds to our jaded twenty-first century ears. It was what you might call an "understandable error." That's why Yahweh was careful to specifically point out that these things are not to be worshipped. They are merely created things, placed by God into our experience for our benefit—not only to sustain life on this planet, but also to teach us something about *His* glory. As David wrote, **"The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or a word; their voice is silent in the skies; yet their message has gone out to all the earth, and their words to all the world. The sun lives in the heavens where God placed it. It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding. It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race. The sun rises at one end of the heavens and follows its course to the other end. Nothing can hide from its heat."** (Psalm 19:1-6 NLT)

- (901) *Be careful to remember Yahweh's covenant.* **"Furthermore Yahweh was angry with me [Moses] for your sakes, and swore that I would not cross over the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance. But I must die in this land, I must not cross over the Jordan; but you**

shall cross over and possess that good land. Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of Yahweh your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which Yahweh your God has forbidden you. For Yahweh your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.”

(Deuteronomy 4:21-24) Moses is saying, in effect, “You’re about to enter the Land of Promise, and I can’t go with you. But if you’ll heed the covenant Yahweh made with your fathers after they left Egypt, you’ll do just fine without me.”

A covenant is an agreement or contract between two parties, both of whom are expected to keep their end of the bargain. What were the terms of this “Mosaic” covenant? Let’s go back and review it: **“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”** (Exodus 19:4-6) For the Israelites’ part, they were to “obey Yahweh’s voice.” The word translated “indeed obey” is the Hebrew verb *shama*: to hear, listen to, heed, or obey, with interest, attention, and understanding. That is, they were to carefully do as He instructed them through Moses, the heart of which is related in the very next chapter—the “Ten Commandments.”

Yahweh’s part of the bargain was three-fold—beyond what He’d already accomplished on behalf of Israel. First, He would consider Israel His “special treasure,” elevated in status and affection above all the peoples on the earth. The single Hebrew word translated “special treasure” is *segulla*, which actually means “personal property,” or “possession.” It is used of something especially valued by its owner, something for which he has extraordinary affection. Malachi fleshes out the idea: **“Then those who revered Yahweh spoke to one another, and Yahweh listened and heard them. So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear Yahweh and who meditate on His name. ‘They shall be Mine,’ says Yahweh of hosts, ‘on the day that I make them My jewels [*segulla*]. And I will spare [Hebrew *chamal*: to have pity or compassion on, to show kindness to] them as a man spares his own son who serves him.”** (Malachi 3:16-17)

Second, Yahweh would make Israel a “kingdom of priests.” A kingdom, by definition, has a king—in this case, Yahweh Himself manifested in the flesh, the One we know as Yahshua the Messiah. A priest is one who intercedes for others, one who goes before God on behalf of mankind. So a “kingdom of priests” is a group who represent the world before God—the King—and also represent God to the world. The *ekklesia*—the “Church”—is described in deceptively similar terms: not a

kingdom of priests, but “*kings* and priests” (Revelation 1:6 and 5:10). Though our role as intercessors before King Yahshua will be the same as restored Israel’s, the members of the *ekklesia*, as resurrected, immortal, perfected beings, will function as co-regents with Christ during His Millennial Kingdom. The thought makes me blush, but that’s God’s plan.

Third, Israel would be a “holy nation.” That is, they would be set apart from the other nations as God’s “special people,” selected and consecrated for His glory and His purpose. Mere national survival—even against incredible odds and in the face of intense persecution—does not define Israel as a “holy nation” today. Only the recognition and acceptance of their Messiah, Yahshua of Nazareth, will declare that they at last have “obeyed Yahweh’s voice” and “kept His covenant.” As unlikely as it looks, that day is coming—and soon.

- (902) *Remember that blessing is contingent on obedience.* **“When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of Yahweh your God to provoke Him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong your days in it, but will be utterly destroyed.”** (Deuteronomy 4:25-26) There are two contrasting bodies of prophecy concerning the nation of Israel. There are unconditional promises that the Land will always belong to them and that their destiny as Yahweh’s people is secure. On the other hand, there are also scathing predictions and dire warnings of judgment and eviction from the Land in the wake of their disobedience of God’s Law. These may seem contradictory, since they predict diametrically opposite events, but they’re not. The first group of promises are predicated on Yahweh’s unchangeable character; the second on Israel’s behavior. Once again we see that only a God who transcends time—who can see the end and the beginning in the same view—could say with assurance that Israel *will* “act corruptly” and “perish from the land” but they will also be restored—if and when they repent. **“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”** (II Chronicles 7:14)
- (903) *Recognize that good weather is an indicator of God’s approval.* **“It shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love Yahweh your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled.”** (Deuteronomy

11:13-15) The unsubstantiated opinion of atheist evolutionists notwithstanding, the data of science strongly suggest that our biosphere here on the earth balances on a razor's edge—indicating quite convincingly that an Intelligent Designer is behind it all. A small variation in any of a number of factors (for example, the strength of any of the four basic forces of nature—gravity, the weak and strong nuclear forces, and electromagnetism—the distance of Earth from the sun, the mass of the moon, the percentage of oxygen in our atmosphere, etc.) would result in the impossibility of life as we know it existing here. Our governments spend billions on the search for extraterrestrial life, hoping against hope that they can find something with which to bolster their sagging atheistic presuppositions: *“Life is nothing but a lucky accident—there’s no need to acknowledge an Intelligent Creator, especially one with such inconvenient moral standards!”* And then they spend billions more on “disaster relief” when the weather goes haywire, destroying people’s lives and property.

Call me a cheapskate, but it seems to me we could save ourselves a lot of money and grief if we simply honored the God who *told us* that He would use weather as an indicator of how we were doing in His sight. Yes, the promises were made specifically to Israel (once a “land of milk and honey,” now a barren wasteland except where industrious Jews have wrested gardens from the recalcitrant soil through Herculean effort and unimaginable personal sacrifice), but I believe the principles apply to anyone who purports to follow God. Favorable weather, allowing material prosperity to follow in its wake, is a sign that we are in favor with Yahweh; whereas droughts, floods, destructive hurricanes, and earthquakes are signs that we may not be. What is the real issue here? Moses explains further: **“Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest Yahweh’s anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which Yahweh is giving you.”** (Deuteronomy 11:16-17) Disastrous weather is promised as a direct result of “turning aside and serving other gods.”

It is not without significance that “bad weather” (sent in response to the “serving” of false gods) is a sign of the coming of the last days—*before* Christ has returned for His ekklesia. **“Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.”** (Matthew 24:4-8) Famines, of course, are caused by droughts,

among other things. But notice also the warning about “earthquakes.” The Greek word is *seismos*, which according to scriptural usage includes not only earthquakes, but also “tempests,” i.e., violent storms (Matthew 8:24)—hurricanes, typhoons, tornadoes, tsunamis, and so forth. We can’t say we haven’t been warned.

- (904) *Remember how to reestablish fellowship with Yahweh.* “**And Yahweh will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where Yahweh will drive you. And there you will serve gods, the work of men’s hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there you will seek Yahweh your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things come upon you, in the latter days when you turn to Yahweh your God and obey His voice (for Yahweh your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.**” (Deuteronomy 4:27-31) I found it distressing that Yahweh didn’t couch Israel’s apostasy in terms of “if,” but of “when.” He flatly said “You’re going to turn your back on Me.” But He also unequivocally declared that they would come back to Him “in the latter days.” When they (or any of us, really) find themselves in distress, suffering the consequences of having turned their backs on Yahweh, there are simple, profound instructions here for obtaining His mercy: **“Turn to Yahweh your God and obey His voice.... Seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.”**

The rabbis, of course, would insist that they never left Him. But to hold this opinion is to call Yahweh a liar, for the Jews *are* “scattered among the peoples.” They *are* “few in number.” And even now that Yahweh has resurrected their political presence in the Land, the vast majority of Israelis living there are either agnostics or atheists—they *do* serve “other gods” that have no life. What will it take to compel Israel to “seek Yahweh their God with all their heart and soul?” Disaster, I’m afraid—a war worthy of Tolkien’s epic saga of good against evil in Middle Earth. With their backs to the Wailing Wall, Israel will witness Yahweh’s miraculous defeat of the world’s combined Muslim armies, determined to once and for all drive them into the sea. The story is recounted in all its gory detail in Ezekiel 38 and 39. The bottom line is, **“So the house of Israel shall know that I am Yahweh their God from that day forward.”** (Ezekiel 39:22) Better late than never.

- (905) *Note that Yahweh has never led you astray in the past.* **“Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which Yahweh swore to your fathers. And you shall remember that Yahweh your God led you all the way**

these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.”

(Deuteronomy 8:1-2) Even though the Israelites were no longer oppressed slaves in Egypt, no one would suggest that their wilderness wanderings were a picnic. Besides the material inconveniences, their life during that time was one continual test. Sometimes they passed with flying colors; other times they failed miserably (just like us). So as graduation day approaches, Moses reminds them that it wasn't him who led them all these years—it was God Himself. Yahweh told them where to go and when to stop. Yahweh fed them and gave them water to drink. And Yahweh gave them a priesthood and tabernacle that would explain, if they would but open their eyes, how He planned to provide salvation to the whole world—using them as a vehicle. They had left Egypt a contentious, ignorant rabble. They would enter the Promised Land a dedicated, disciplined army, empowered and enlightened personally by the One True God. Moses didn't reserve one iota of credit for himself. To the very end, he simply pleaded with his people to heed the commandments of Yahweh.

Moses later continued the theme. **“He is your praise [that is, the One in whom you can rightfully boast], and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen. Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now Yahweh your God has made you as the stars of heaven in multitude. Therefore you shall love Yahweh your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always.”**

(Deuteronomy 10:21-22, 11:1) This is one more restatement of the agreement, the covenant, that existed between Yahweh and Israel. Moses' point here is that Yahweh had, here at the end of the wilderness wanderings, followed through on his end of the bargain at every turn. The Israelites were about to get their first real opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to keeping up their part, as they prepared to cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land (read: “begin living the day-to-day life of a believer”). Yahweh doesn't ask us to love or obey Him without giving us ample—actually, *overwhelming*—reasons for doing so. He demonstrated His love for us long before He invited us to reciprocate.

- (906) *Observe that trials are there to teach us lessons. “So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of Yahweh. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so Yahweh your God chastens you.”* (Deuteronomy 8:3-5) Point number one: a lesson isn't worth much if it doesn't make an impact on our lives. A drunk driver who is

merely told by the officer who pulls him over, “Please don’t do that any more” is far less likely to change his ways than the one who loses his driving privilege for six months. Saul of Tarsus needed to be struck blind for three days before he could hear the call of Yahweh on his life. Pain tells us to remove our hand from the hot skillet before we seriously injure ourselves. The sad fact is that the most effective lessons often involve a little discomfort. At the very least, they shake us out of our complacency. These lessons are a gift from God, like the manna in the wilderness—something we desperately need, even if they’re as unfamiliar as they are timely. Yahweh, who loves us, is perfectly willing to make us “uncomfortable” in the interests of teaching us His ways, for His ways lead to life, health, and happiness.

I have eleven children, and when necessary as they were growing up, I disciplined them. But I never chastised the neighbors’ kids (even if they obviously needed it). Point number two: God doesn’t expend breath teaching other people’s children—only his own. I know it seldom feels like it at the time, but that should be a great comfort to us: when “bad things” happen to a child of God, we can rest assured that there’s always something valuable He intends to teach us through the experience—something he wants us to learn and remember, something that will make us (or those who know us) better people. When similar “bad things” happen to people who do not wish to call Yahweh their Father, these things are merely the result of living in a fallen world, the natural consequences of sin, whether their own or someone else’s. I realize it sounds counterintuitive, not to mention being so conveniently nebulous it can’t be disproved. But remember the conundrum of love: Yahweh can’t bribe us with blessings or threaten us with cursings in order to gain our love. Only after our love has been freely given to Him do His blessings and chastisements become effective in guiding our paths.

Point number three, then, is that the trials that fall into our lives are there for our benefit. The very first thing James wrote about in his epistle was, **“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”** (James 1:2-4) Peter too reminds us that this “testing of our faith” can lead to all sorts of profitable results: **“Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (II Peter 1:5-8)

(907) *Know that when we keep Yahweh's commandments, He will provide for all of our needs.* **"Therefore you shall keep the commandments of Yahweh your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. For Yahweh your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper."** (Deuteronomy 8:6-9) Back in Precept #903, we were reminded that the rainfall that had made the Promised Land perennially lush and fertile was henceforth to be contingent upon the Israelites' obedience to the commandments of Yahweh. Here we see the same truth presented in slightly different terms. God says, in effect, *Because I have prepared this good and productive land for you to live in—a land you didn't have to work for, develop, or purchase—you are to revere Me and follow my instructions.* The pattern never changes: Yahweh first created us, loved us, provided for our needs, and set us free from bondage. In response, we are to acknowledge His authority and reciprocate His love. We are never asked to exercise "blind faith" in God's word (and we're specifically *prohibited* from blindly following what men tell us). We are merely invited to open our eyes (eyes *He gave us*, by the way), recognize His great goodness toward us, and respond accordingly. In reality, Yahweh is asking for little more than good manners from us. He has given us the world, and all He wants is a thank-you note.

But what do we do? All too often, we see the good land before us and assume we're entitled to it. We credit good luck or our own strength when we win battles (though we still curse God when we lose). We refuse to see His provision, and instead invent myths honoring "chance" and "destiny" and "valor." We leverage our meager successes in order to subjugate our brothers, and then we congratulate ourselves for "outgrowing our dependence on God." And we wonder why the rains cease, the trees wither, and the topsoil blows away. Compare the description of the "good land" Yahweh deeded to Israel, described above, to the barren wasteland to which they began returning in the 19th century. Therein lies the difference between honoring Yahweh and serving "other gods."

(908) *Observe that the choice between prosperity and death is ours to make.* **"You shall remember Yahweh your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. Then it shall be, if you by any means forget Yahweh your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. As the nations which Yahweh destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of Yahweh your God."**

(Deuteronomy 8:18-20) As if he hadn't already made his point, Moses says it again. *You are a covenant people. Honor the covenant you've made with Yahweh and you will be blessed as a result. Or serve other gods instead, as the nations around you do, and perish.* The destruction he speaks of is a national phenomenon: Israel's political existence within the Land depends upon their national observance of their covenant with Yahweh. Of course, the people to whom Moses was preaching were intimately familiar with the power and provision of their God. They'd lived in its shadow, quite literally, all their lives. But Moses points out where they would run afoul of the commandment: they would *forget*. Their national memory would be lulled to sleep by the background noise of business as usual in the Land. To the generation that crossed the Jordan, the exodus from Egypt was the stuff of bedtime stories; to their children, ancient legend, and to *their* children, misty half-forgotten myth.

“Remembering Yahweh” was built into the Law. The Torah is peppered from one end to the other with devices great and small designed to prevent Israel from forgetting. Wearing the tzeit, resting on the Sabbath, writing God's Instructions on the doorposts of your house, tithing, observing new moon celebrations, congregating three times a year in a central location to bring sacrifices and rejoice before Yahweh—all these things and more were designed to keep Yahweh's persona constantly before Israel. In the theocracy of early Israel, it would have been really hard to forget about Yahweh by accident. You'd have to purposely ignore Him, for evidence of His provision was everywhere you looked.

(909) *Never assume the good things in your life are there because you deserve them. “Do not think in your heart, after Yahweh your God has cast them out before you, saying, ‘Because of my righteousness Yahweh has brought me in to possess this land’; but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that Yahweh is driving them out from before you.”* (Deuteronomy 9:4) When we find ourselves blessed by God, there are several logical ways to respond, and they're not all correct. We could say, “*Of course* I'm being blessed. I'm better than my neighbor, more moral, upright, and religious. God must be very happy to have me on His team.” Don't be too sure. The Pharisees of Yahshua's day enjoyed the same sort of prosperity and displayed the same sort of pride—and God was furious with them for their hypocrisy.

We could say, “These good things I'm enjoying are merely the result of following God's Law. After all, He said that if I walked in His statutes and kept His commandments, He would give me fair weather, bountiful harvests, peace, security, and prosperity. So since life is pretty good, I must be doing everything right.” While it's true that keeping Yahweh's

commandments can be expected to have certain “natural” consequences that benefit us, we should not mistake the prosperity we gain by living “godly” lives for a relationship with the God who pointed these things out to us. This was the actual source of the Pharisees’ general state of prosperity—nobody kept the letter of the Law more rigorously than they did. Today, we see the same sort of phenomenon. Mormons, for example, are often statistically more prosperous than their neighbors. Why? Because their religion tells them to work hard, live clean, and behave themselves. But the “blessings” they enjoy are not specially bestowed upon them by Yahweh. They are, rather, the result of “natural law.” They’re “blessed” for pretty much the same reason that Amish people don’t die in high speed car crashes.

Thus we observe that Israel wasn’t given the Promised Land because they had the Torah—and certainly not because they kept it. Their possession of the Land was based on only one thing: Yahweh chose to give it to them—centuries before the Canaanite inhabitants had earned themselves a one way ticket to oblivion. So Yahweh warns them in this Precept not to start “believing their own press.” It is not because they were especially good, but because the Canaanites were particularly bad, that the Land was changing hands. The underlying truth was that if Israel became as bad as the former tenants, they too would be evicted. What, then, was the proper response to having been blessed with possession of this good land? They should have said, “Thank you, Father Yahweh. Though we have done nothing to deserve this, we will endeavor to become worthy of your goodness by observing your statutes, keeping your commandments, and teaching our children to honor you as well. Please help us!”

- (910) *Remember what makes God angry.* **“Remember! Do not forget how you provoked Yahweh your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against Yahweh. Also in Horeb you provoked Yahweh to wrath, so that Yahweh was angry enough with you to have destroyed you.”** (Deuteronomy 9:7-8) Learning from experience is a two way street. Not only should we take notice of our blessings and consider their source, but we should also remember the “bad things,” those times when we “provoked Yahweh our God to wrath” and lived to tell the tale. If we bear in mind what has angered God in the past, we’ll naturally be more careful about repeating those same stupid mistakes in the future. Yahweh is not unreasonable: He has told us what He wants us to do. God went to a lot of trouble to inform us of His Instructions. Moses reports, **“When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which Yahweh made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread**

nor drank water. Then Yahweh delivered to me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words which Yahweh had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. And it came to pass, at the end of forty days and forty nights, that Yahweh gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.” (Deuteronomy 9:9-11) Can you blame Him for being angry when we don’t even *try* to keep His commandments?

These lessons are not just for Israel. They’re for anyone who purports to honor Yahweh—and they apply on a national as well as a personal level. Picture Yahweh as your Father. Although He may offer *advice* to the other neighborhood kids, He exercises *authority* over you—a very different thing. Because you are His own child, He both blesses and disciplines you, but he does neither of these things to other people’s children (in His role as our Father, that is. He will soon assume a different role—that of King—and things will change a bit). My point is that in a life (whether individual or national) that professes to honor Yahweh, the things that happen, whether good or bad, should be viewed as having been ordained by God. They may (or may not) be the direct result of our actions, but they are definitely the result of our relationship.

A contemporary example of how this all works was chronicled by journalist William Koenig in his book *Eye To Eye—Facing the Consequences of Dividing Israel*. He lists scores of instances during the Clinton and Bush years that linked America’s official attempts to betray Israel to the Palestinians to devastating consequences on our own soil, suffered by our own people—fires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and terrorist attacks—all of which happened within 48 hours of our attempts to plunder Israel in the name of “peace.” But what were Yahweh’s clear instructions on the matter? He had told Abraham, “**I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you.**” (Genesis 12:3) He revealed through Isaiah, “**Then behold, at eventide, trouble! And before the morning, he is no more. This is the portion of those who plunder us, and the lot of those who rob us.**” (Isaiah 17:14) And finally, “**It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.**” (Zechariah 12:9) We Americans have “provoked Yahweh to wrath.” We have rebelled against Him and plundered His chosen people. Call me politically naïve, but it seems to me we ought to stop doing what angers God and start doing what pleases Him.

- (911) *Know that your actions can affect future generations, not just yourself. “Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of Yahweh your God.”* (Deuteronomy 12:28) This is a corollary to Precept #899. Forget for a moment about “morality,” “doing the right

thing” and “following your inner compass.” The most visceral, primeval reason for following Yahweh’s instructions is that if you do, “it will go well with you.” And even if you’re so other-worldly that you don’t care about what happens to yourself (which is really stupid, since God told us to love our neighbors as we do *ourselves*), then think about the consequences that will fall upon your children: they too will reap temporal benefits from your spiritual obedience.

It may come as a shock to some devout believers: God encourages us to obey Him not solely out of pious duty or religious obligation, but out of sheer self-interest. He *wants it* to “go well with us.” The same God who told us to worship Him alone, rest on the Sabbath day, and refrain from disrespect, murder, theft, adultery, perjury, and covetousness also commanded us to *rejoice*. We must try to understand that everything Yahweh commanded us to do is *good for us*—even the stuff we don’t quite understand. If there’s no direct and obvious benefit associated with a precept, then the benefit is indirect and obscure—but it’s always *there*.

I realize that we all have a rebellious streak a mile wide. We hate being told what to do. If I take cold medicine, I suddenly get this irresistible urge to go out and operate heavy machinery, simply because the instructions have told me not to. If Yahweh’s one and only commandment had been, “Thou shalt not hit thy thumb with a ball peen hammer,” I can practically guarantee that within a generation, a cult would have arisen whose sole purpose would be finding ways to “get around” this onerous burden. We’d be smashing our thumbs with rubber mallets or in door jambs, or going for our pinky fingers, or shattering other people’s thumbs. We would be engaging in heated theological debates about whether only the ball peen end of the hammer head was meant, but not the flat side, or whether it might be permissible to whack your thumb with the handle. One group would be advocating outlawing hammers altogether. Another would conclude that thumbs were so holy, it was a sin to let them be seen in public. We’d do *anything* to “keep the law” while rebelling against its Author. Who among us would comprehend that because the Lawgiver loved us, He simply wanted to keep us, and our children, free from pain?

- (912) *Be careful not to be influenced by what you’re fighting.* “When Yahweh your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ You shall not worship Yahweh your God in that way; for every

abomination to Yahweh which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.” (Deuteronomy 12:29-31) Yahweh made it relatively easy to distinguish between worshipping Him and practicing the rites of the Canaanites. There was no overlap at all. The Canaanites had temples, shrines, and worship groves all over the place; Yahweh directed them to formally worship only “in the place where He chose to make His name abide.” The worshippers of Ba’al, Molech, Chemosh, Dagon, and Asthoreth, etc. bowed before idols representing their gods; Yahweh strictly forbade the making of images—even of Himself—for worship. The temples of Canaan’s false gods were as large and impressive as their devotees could manage to build; Yahweh’s “house” was a small, gray, nondescript portable structure surrounded by a flimsy linen fence—they wouldn’t have a “real” temple for almost half a millennium. It was as if Yahweh was telling Israel, “You don’t need all the props, the hype, and the impressive infrastructure. You’ve got Me, and though I’m Spirit, I Am *real*—unlike all these pitiful counterfeits you see being worshipped in the Land.

The lesson of this precept is largely lost on the Church in today’s world. All too often, we employ psychology in place of the simplicity of the Gospel; we measure success by counting noses (or worse, dollars) instead of reaching hearts; we use Madison Avenue marketing techniques instead of the seeming foolishness of preaching the unabashed truth. In short, we “inquire after the gods of the land,” and say to ourselves, “How does the world achieve its goals? I will do likewise.” We have been warned not to do this.

(913) *Neither ignore God nor “put words in His mouth.” “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.”*

(Deuteronomy 12:32) Neither Israel nor the Church have a very good track record in their “care” in observing Yahweh’s commandments. Speaking in broad generalities, the Jewish approach has traditionally been to “add to it,” that is, to place a hedge about God’s word with layer upon layer of insulation, explanation, and interpretation—until the truth is buried so deep it can no longer be detected or discerned.

The classic Christian pitfall, on the other hand, is to “take away from it,” to remove from our daily experience everything we don’t understand (or don’t *want to* understand) and don’t have the maturity or courage to honestly explore. That could include anything beyond the bare-bones doctrine of our salvation: the “hard sayings” and inconvenient commandments of Christ, the prophetic texts of the Old and New Covenant Scriptures, and the Torah—*especially* the Torah. Perhaps the

most blatant example of this approach is the famous “Jefferson Bible,” in which our third President unabashedly edited Yahweh’s scriptures down to forty-six pages of platitudes with which he was prepared to agree, leaving nothing miraculous, nothing divine. Explaining his project in a letter to John Adams in 1813, Jefferson wrote, “We must reduce our volume to the simple evangelists, select, even from them, the very words only of Jesus, paring off the amphibologisms [ambiguous declarations] into which they have been led, by forgetting often, or not understanding, what had fallen from him, by giving their own misconceptions as his dicta, and expressing unintelligibly for others what they had not understood themselves. There will be found remaining the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man. I have performed this operation for my own use, by cutting verse by verse out of the printed book, and arranging the matter which is evidently his, and which is as easily distinguishable as diamonds in a dunghill.” I don’t know, Tom. Unlike you, I haven’t exactly found the *other* 1,271 pages of God’s Word a “dunghill.” By taking away from the Bible Yahweh’s commandment *not to* “take away from it,” Jefferson (and so many others) have merely demonstrated their own arrogance and ignorance.

But I’m preaching to the choir, am I not? By now you surely know that the Torah is absolutely consistent with the New Covenant texts (including both TJ’s “diamonds” and his “dunghill”), and if you’ve read my previous work, *Future History*, you know that the New and Old Testament prophetic passages are in perfect sync as well, if you have the chronology straight. It is not without significance that the Bible closes (almost) with a virtual restatement of this precept’s principle, this time enumerating the dire consequences for refusing to comply: **“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’”** (Revelation 22:18-20) If you find yourself purposely obfuscating or denying God’s truth, there is still time to repent—but not much.

- (914) *Don’t be afraid of Yahweh’s adversaries.* **“If you should say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?’—you shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember well what Yahweh your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt: the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and the wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm, by which Yahweh your God brought you out. So shall Yahweh your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. Moreover Yahweh your God will send the hornet among them until those who are**

left, who hide themselves from you, are destroyed.” (Deuteronomy 7:17-20)

The Israelites may have been surrounded by God’s enemies, but they are not alone in this respect. In these Last Days, the Called-Out of Christ too find themselves surrounded like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid by hostile and aggressive foes. But as with Israel, to ask ourselves, “How can I dispossess them?” is to ask the wrong question. Overcoming Yahweh’s antagonists is not our job. He will take care of it, and what’s more, He has already told us how He will do it. No, our task is to preach the “foolishness” of the Good News to the world, feed Yahshua’s “sheep,” love our God, and love each other as we do ourselves.

But what about the enemies that beset us, depicting truth as lies and presenting lies as established fact, declaring Yahweh “dead” (or worse, redefining Him as being the same as somebody else’s false deity), ridiculing our scriptures and faith, and threatening our rights, freedoms, and even (gasp!) our standard of living? Yahweh’s instructions are quite clear: **“You shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember well what Yahweh your God did to Pharaoh.”** As bad as things are (or promise to get), Christians today will likely never face a situation bleaker than what Israel labored under just prior to the exodus—slavery, despair, and the hopelessness of having forgotten the promises of God. The Church under overt persecution—the “Smyrna” of Revelation 2:8-11—though still suffering here and there in our world, is no longer *characteristic* of our age, although they were given virtually the same commandment our current Precept offers: **“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.”** (Revelation 2:10) The Church that defines our current state is that of Philadelphia, who were told, **“See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.”** (Revelation 3:8) Here the risen Christ is informing us as to *why* we need not be afraid, and the answer is the same as it’s always been: Yahweh is fighting our battles for us. This fact may not be quite as blatantly obvious as it was when Yahweh brought Pharaoh to his knees (if not his senses), but the days of the “mighty hand and outstretched arm” of Yahweh are about to visibly return. In the meantime, we are *commanded* not to be afraid of God’s enemies.

- (915) *Endeavor to be the tool in Yahweh’s hand.* **“Yahweh your God will drive out those nations before you little by little; you will be unable to destroy them at once, lest the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. But Yahweh your God will deliver them over to you, and will inflict defeat upon them until they are destroyed. And He will deliver their kings into your hand, and you will destroy their name from under heaven; no one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them.”** (Deuteronomy 7:22-24) The days of military conquest in the name

of Yahweh were confined to a finite list of national adversaries (see Mitzvot #352, #353, #601, #602, and **Precept #918**) a long time ago. But that doesn't mean the lessons inherent in God's instructions for the conquest of Canaan have been abrogated. The principle is still valid: Yahweh often chooses to fulfill His purposes through the agency of men. The reason, of course, is that His *direct* action would leave little or no room for free will in our response—we would be obligated to adore Him, leading to the conundrum of which we spoke earlier: love compelled is not love at all. Interestingly, Yahweh's human agents needn't even be of the "believing" variety. The rod of God's correction is often seen wielded by pagan monarchs like Nebuchadnezzar, whom Yahweh called "My servant" in Jeremiah 25:9. And consider this: Adolph Hitler did more to give the Jews their own homeland and state than any other man in modern history.

That being said, I believe the highest honor to which a believer can aspire in this life is to be a tool in the hand of Yahweh. As Uncle Mordecai reminded Esther, **"If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"** (Esther 4:14) In other words, if we don't fulfill the destiny Yahweh has prepared for us, He will simply bestow our privileges of service onto someone more willing. As Mordecai pointed out, the power needed to achieve God's goals remains in His hands anyway. We merely have to be willing to walk in that strength. I know it seems counterintuitive, but if we're willing to pick up His shovel, He'll hand us the keys to His back hoe. Even with all that power available to us, however, Yahweh cautions us that He won't achieve more than we're willing to attempt. He wants us to walk *together* through this world, side by side. We are neither to lag behind nor race ahead of Him. Of course, Yahweh could, if He chose to do so, accomplish all of His goals in the blink of an eye. But like any doting Father teaching His children, He condescends to our inadequacies: the "result" He's *really* after is fellowship with us. So in this life, the work we do in Yahweh's power will get done at man's pace, not God's. If we'll offer to drain the swamp for Him, He won't let us find ourselves up to our aspirations in alligators.

- (916) *Show your reverence for Yahweh through your love, obedience, and service.* **"And now, Israel, what does Yahweh your God require of you, but to fear Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of Yahweh and His statutes which I command you today for your good? Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to Yahweh your God, also the earth with all that is in it. Yahweh delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their**

descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.”

(Deuteronomy 10:12-16) Lest there should be any confusion on the matter, Moses here flatly states that all these things we’ve been talking about: reverence for God, righteousness, love, service, and obedience are not merely suggestions or recommendations—they’re requirements! He reminds them that Yahweh’s love for, and delight in, their forefathers, beginning with Abraham, resulted in His choosing Israel, out of every nation on earth, to be His covenant people. That gave them astounding privileges, but also serious responsibilities. They were, in short, to be the people through whom Yahweh’s promise to Abraham would be kept: **“In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”** (Genesis 12:3)

With the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, we can see today that that promise was fulfilled in the advent and sacrifice of Yahshua the Messiah—though many Jews, still characterized by an “uncircumcised” attitude and “stiff neck,” refuse to believe it. But if, as I have been insisting, the Torah looks forward to Christ in every symbol, rite, and precept, then “revering Yahweh, walking in His ways, loving, serving, and obeying Him” are all tantamount to embracing Yahshua as the promised Messiah. These requirements cannot be met by half-heartedly and imperfectly following a contrived list of 613 regulations cherry-picked from the Torah—half of them altered beyond recognition by self-serving rabbis.

Since these things are “required” specifically of Israel, does that mean mankind in general is held to a lower standard? Not really. The prophet Micah explains what God wants from the rest of us: **“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does Yahweh require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”** (Micah 6:8) In intuitively practical, albeit less specific, terms than those given above, this “list” boils down to the same thing. The key, of course, is “walking humbly with our God.” If we are walking *with* Him (not against, in front of, or behind Him) in humility (i.e., realistically assessing our relationship, not arrogantly replacing His truth with our own concepts), then justice, mercy, and all the rest will naturally tend to fall in line.

- (917) *Appreciate the unique nature of the Promised Land.* **“Therefore you shall keep every commandment which I command you today, that you may be strong, and go in and possess the land which you cross over to possess, and that you may prolong your days in the land which Yahweh swore to give your fathers, to them and their descendants, ‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’”** (Deuteronomy 11:8-9) This is but one of many places in the Torah where the possession of the Land is seen as being contingent upon keeping Yahweh’s commandments.

Note that Moses didn't say "some of them" but "*every* commandment" God has made. Now that we have seen most of them, it is readily apparent that quite a few of these precepts—especially the overtly symbolic ones, those having to do with Yahweh's seven annual convocations, the tabernacle, sacrifices, or the priesthood—could *only* be kept in the Land. It was, in fact, *illegal* to "keep" them in any location other than "where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide." So Yahweh was actually telling Israel, "If you *won't* worship Me, I'll arrange it so that you *can't* worship Me." Seems to me, that lesson still applies—to all of us.

It's helpful to remember that at the time of the exodus, the climate of the Land of Promise was very different from what it is today. **"For the land which you go to possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and watered it by foot, as a vegetable garden; but the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which Yahweh your God cares; the eyes of Yahweh your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year."** (Deuteronomy 11:10-12) Even this is symbolic of Yahweh's redemption. The land they had left, while prosperous enough, required lots of labor, in addition to the provision of God's predictable seasonal weather and the annual flooding of the Nile. Yes, with irrigation and manpower, you could coax a decent living from Egyptian soil, and they did just that for millennia. But Canaan was different. At that point in history, the prevailing west winds constantly blew moisture from the Mediterranean over the Land. (They still would, if Yahweh wasn't so displeased with the sons of Abraham who live there.) The clouds would pile up against the hills, precipitating their precious cargo over the costal plain—much like the weather pattern we normally see in Washington State and Oregon. Behind this range lies the Jordan Valley—all of which is hundreds of feet below sea level—and beyond that, desert.

If "Egypt" represents living in the world, and "the Land" symbolizes walking through life as Yahweh's children, then the climatic differences between the two places illustrate the dichotomy between our old life and our new one. We have moved from being dependent on our own never-ending labor to being reliant upon Yahweh's provision—not just for our daily bread, but for our very spiritual existence. Don't lose sight of what introduced us to this concept. Our possession of the "Land" (the blessed life of a believer) is contingent upon our observation of Yahweh's commandments—which, as I've noted 'til I'm blue in the face, all point unequivocally to our grace and cleansing provided by Yahweh through the life and sacrifice of His Messiah, Yahshua of Nazareth. The bottom line:

believe God, and it will be counted unto you as righteousness. (Gee, that sounds sort of familiar, doesn't it?)

- (918) *Expect victory if you love Yahweh and obey Him.* “If you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do—to love Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him—then Yahweh will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the River Euphrates, even to the Western Sea, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand against you; Yahweh your God will put the dread of you and the fear of you upon all the land where you tread, just as He has said to you.” (Deuteronomy 11:22-25) We’ve already identified who these “great and mighty” nations were. To reprise the list, “When Yahweh your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when Yahweh your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them.” (Deuteronomy 7:1-2) What we haven’t done (yet) is to figure out what they represent from a symbolic point of view. These are things we will encounter *in the Land*—that is, as we endeavor to walk in Yahweh’s grace. He promises to “drive them out from before us,” but only if we’ll “walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him.” So, who are these bad boys?

(1) The Hittites are the sons of Heth, a Canaanite tribe. “Heth” means “terror,” so Yahweh is saying we need not be afraid.

(2) The Girgashites are also descendants of Canaan. The name means “dwelling on a clayey soil.” I can relate to that, living in Central Virginia. “Clayey” soil is nutrient-poor, unproductive, and hard as a rock, like the “stony places” in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:5-6. Where the seed couldn’t grow deep roots, it withered and died. Yahweh, then, is telling us we can be productive and fruitful.

(3) The Amorites’ name is derived from the verb *amar*, meaning “to say, speak, command, boast, or avow.” I believe Yahweh is saying we can “dispossess” empty speech, that is, we will be able to discern fact from fiction, truth from lies, even as those around us are being deceived.

(4) The Canaanites were descended from the son of Ham who was cursed by Noah in Genesis 9:20-25. The name is derived from the primitive verb *kana*, meaning “to be humbled, subdued, or made low.” Yahweh is telling us that His enemies will never succeed in bringing us down. We are reminded of Peter’s declaration that Yahshua was “the Messiah, the Son of the Living God,” upon which truth Yahshua promised

to build his called-out assembly, against whom “the gates of Hell would not prevail.” (See Matthew 16:18.)

(5) The Perizzites’ name is derived from *paraziy*, meaning one who dwells in a village, hamlet, rural setting, or in the open country—that is, one who lives unprotected by a city wall. God will never leave us unprotected.

(6) The Hivites at first seem to mean something similar to the Perizzites. It means “villagers,” from a word, *chavvah*, meaning “a village, town or tent-village.” But notice that Chavvah (spelled and pronounced the same way) is also the name of the person we usually call “Eve,” as in Adam’s wife, the one who was first deceived by Satan. Could it be that Yahweh was telling us that we will no longer be deceived into sin if we will keep His commandments? Sounds good to me.

(7) The Jebusites were another Canaanite tribe, named for Jebus, from a verb (*bus*) meaning to tread down, trample, reject, or desecrate. Yahweh is once again reminding us that no one will tread His children underfoot if they’ll keep His precepts.

BLESSING AND CURSING

- (919) *Choose between the blessing and the curse.* **“Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of Yahweh your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of Yahweh your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known.”**

(Deuteronomy 11:26-28) Choice is the exercise of the privileged. In my neighborhood, we can choose between twenty brands of coffee, thirty-five kinds of breakfast cereal, and about eighty different varieties of cheese. Paper or plastic. Regular or high-test. Windows or Mac. Some places in the world, the choice is between scrounging through the city dump and going hungry. But seldom is the choice this clear cut, this blatantly obvious as to which option we should choose. Let’s see, live or die, blessing or curse? Gee, that’s a tough one.

Here’s the tricky part in today’s world. The purveyors of modern Babylon—in the guise of politics, commerce, and religion, often offer choices that aren’t really choices at all. *Would you like the red curse, or the blue curse? It’s your choice.* Only Yahweh offers us a real choice: obey His commandments and live in blessing, or disobey them and bring the curse of estrangement from Him to your doorstep. Remember, He doesn’t have to go out of His way to “punish” us for breaking His laws.

The punishment is built in. If you “break the Law” of gravity by stepping off of the roof of a forty story building, don’t blame God for “punishing you” with the sidewalk at the end of your journey. And don’t forget that there may be a gap between the sin and its consequences. It does no good to say “So far, so good” as you fly past the twentieth floor on your way down.

- (920) *Assign physical reminders of the choice God offers.* **“Now it shall be, when Yahweh your God has brought you into the land which you go to possess, that you shall put the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. Are they not on the other side of the Jordan, toward the setting sun, in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the plain opposite Gilgal, beside the terebinth trees of Moreh? For you will cross over the Jordan and go in to possess the land which Yahweh your God is giving you, and you will possess it and dwell in it. And you shall be careful to observe all the statutes and judgments which I set before you today.”** (Deuteronomy 11:29-32) How this was to be done would be recorded in Deuteronomy 27, which we’ll get to shortly. For now, just notice that God assigned physical objects—two entire mountains—to punctuate His instructions, or more precisely, the choice to be made between heeding them or not. His Law wasn’t merely to be a mental exercise—a series of esoteric rhetorical points to be discussed, debated, codified, and then relegated to musty theological tomes by learned scholars in ivory towers. Rather, the Torah was to live and breathe in the experience and walk of every Israelite—as obvious and as hard to ignore as a mountain. That was the point, of course, of using *two* mountains to make His point: one had to choose between them—you couldn’t stand upon both at the same time.
- (921) *Publicly display the words of the Law.* **“Now Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people, saying: “Keep all the commandments which I command you today. And it shall be, on the day when you cross over the Jordan to the land which Yahweh your God is giving you, that you shall set up for yourselves large stones, and whitewash them with lime. You shall write on them all the words of this law, when you have crossed over, that you may enter the land which Yahweh your God is giving you, ‘a land flowing with milk and honey,’ just as Yahweh, God of your fathers, promised you.”** (Deuteronomy 27:1-3) Joshua ended up splitting Moses’ instructions into a two part process, because the Israelites’ crossing point over the Jordan was almost thirty miles from Mount Ebal—a long way to carry a pile of heavy unhewn boulders. First, he built an altar of large stones taken from the riverbed (Joshua 4:8-9) , setting them up in nearby Gilgal (4:20). Later, after the conquests of Jericho and Ai, the Israelites traveled north and gathered at Shechem, a village nestled between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, to complete the task.

“Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan, that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I command you today, and you shall whitewash them with lime. And there you shall build an altar to Yahweh your God, an altar of stones; you shall not use an iron tool on them. You shall build with whole stones the altar of Yahweh your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to Yahweh your God. You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before Yahweh your God. And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law.” (Deuteronomy 27:4-8) So we read that **“Joshua built an altar to Yahweh, God of Israel, in Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of Yahweh had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: ‘an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron tool.’ And they offered on it burnt offerings to Yahweh, and sacrificed peace offerings.”** This was perfectly permissible, because the Tabernacle and the ark of the Covenant were there. **“And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written.”** (Joshua 8:30-32)

If you want to bring militant atheists and their lawyers crawling out of the woodwork in America today, all you have to do is post a copy of the Ten Commandments in a public place. Even if we never attempted to keep this microcosm of the Torah, from our very beginnings we recognized the source of whatever justice is latent in our legal system: God’s word. But in our zeal to separate manmade religion from our public policy (in itself a noble and worthy goal) we have declared war on reason, declaring *persona non grata* the very God whose words these religions have twisted. So today, without Yahweh’s definition of right and wrong to guide us, our civilization has begun to degenerate. Our national doctrines are now (1) “might makes right,” (2) the golden rule (i.e., “he who has the gold gets to make the rules”), (3) “your government knows best,” (4) “share the wealth” (a.k.a. “rob from the productive and give the booty to everybody else”), (5) “protect the rights of criminals,” and (6) “all men are created equal—and some are more equal than others.” Because we have purposely neglected to build upon the foundation of judicial and moral sanity that Yahweh gave us, we now find ourselves a nation sinking into the quicksand of chaos and despair, easy prey to false Christs and false hope. Separating church and state may be a good thing; separating *God* and state is suicide.

- (922) *Be careful and attentive with God’s Word.* **“Then Moses and the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying, “Take heed and listen, O Israel: This day you have become the people of Yahweh your God. Therefore you shall obey the voice of Yahweh your God, and observe His commandments and His statutes which I command you today.”** (Deuteronomy 27:9-10) Although their parents had (see Exodus 19:8) affirmed their determination to follow Yahweh’s

precepts (and then proceeded to rebel against Him every chance they got) this new generation of Israelites, many of whom were born during the wilderness wanderings, had never—until now—had the opportunity to formally voice their own opinion on the matter. Moses reports what they decided: **“Today you have proclaimed Yahweh to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice. Also today Yahweh has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to Yahweh your God, just as He has spoken.”** (Deuteronomy 26:17-19) My point is that we can only choose or reject Yahweh for ourselves; we *cannot* do so on behalf of other people, even our own children. In the end, everyone has to choose their own master; every individual must select whom—if anyone—they will trust with their eternal destiny.

Having voiced their choice, they are reminded—for the umpteenth time—that their commitment entails obedience. Note that it doesn’t actually demand *perfection*, for the Torah is peppered with provisions for dealing with sin: sacrifices, washings, and priestly intercession. It is a given that they will, being human, fall short of the mark. Obedience to Yahweh’s precepts therefore includes a willingness to avail oneself of His provision for reconciliation—it doesn’t presuppose that we won’t need it. That provision for reconciliation, of course, is personified in Yahshua the Messiah: the very “voice of Yahweh our God.”

- (923) *Know that behavior has consequences, for good or ill. “And Moses commanded the people on the same day, saying, ‘These shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, when you have crossed over the Jordan: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin; and these shall stand on Mount Ebal to curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.’”* (Deuteronomy 27:11-13) These two “mountains” (actually just rocky hills, rising less than 1000 feet above the surrounding plain) are quite similar in a lot of ways, making them the ideal metaphor for “choosing one thing or the other.” As if to punctuate this fact, Ebal, the “mount of cursing” (whose name means “bare” or “bald”), is sparse on vegetation, while Gerizim, the “mount of blessing,” is covered with trees.

Like a card stunt at a football game, the idea here was to involve the whole audience in “acting out” or “performing” their commitment to following Yahweh’s instructions. Six tribes were to stand on the northern hill, Ebal, facing south, to confirm the curses for not following God’s Law, and the other six were to station themselves on Gerizim, facing

north, to affirm the blessings that would result from compliance with Yahweh's statutes. The Levites were to stand in the middle, like cheerleaders, reading the precepts, to which the audience was to respond by saying "Amen" (pronounced aw-Mane), which means "truly," or "so be it." It's from the verb *'aman*, meaning to support, confirm, be faithful, be established, to verify, to be certain, or to believe in.

The spatial orientation of this piece of "performance art" may be significant. Although Yahweh is omnipresent, the seat of divine power was culturally conceived to be in the north. Thus we read of Satan's ambition: **"For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north."** (Isaiah 14:13) Gerizim's six "blessing" tribes would be facing north; in other words, they are pictured as being in communication and communion with the authority of Yahweh. Mount Ebal's six "cursing" tribes, meanwhile, are depicted as having their backs turned upon God.

There are twelve each of cursings and blessings listed. The cursings are listed as individual infractions: **"And the Levites shall speak with a loud voice and say to all the men of Israel... *Cursed is the one who does this.*"** The list is by no means comprehensive. It leans heavily toward the "practical" end of the scale—things that, for the most part, define "loving one's neighbor as oneself" or would otherwise tend to hold society together if the admonitions were heeded. Note also that the list stresses secretive, covert sins—things done underhandedly or in private.

(1) Idolatry—as in the Second Commandment: **'Cursed is the one who makes a carved or molded image, an abomination to Yahweh, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets it up in secret.'** And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen!'" (Deuteronomy 27:14-15)

(2) Disrespect of parents—as in the Fifth Commandment: **"'Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt.'** And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'" (Deuteronomy 27:16)

(3) Land fraud, included in the Eighth Commandment: **"'Cursed is the one who moves his neighbor's landmark.'** And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'" (Deuteronomy 27:17)

(4) Leading the innocent and helpless astray: **"'Cursed is the one who makes the blind to wander off the road.'** And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'" (Deuteronomy 27:18)

(5) Injustice and an unmerciful spirit toward the helpless, included within the Ninth Commandment: **"'Cursed is the one who perverts the justice**

due the stranger, the fatherless, and widow.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’”
(Deuteronomy 27:19)

(6-9) Sexual sins, represented by the Seventh Commandment:
“‘Cursed is the one who lies with his father’s wife, because he has uncovered his father’s bed.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ ‘Cursed is the one who lies with any kind of animal.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ ‘Cursed is the one who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ ‘Cursed is the one who lies with his mother-in-law.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’” (Deuteronomy 27:20-23)

(10) Any manifestation of hatred: **“‘Cursed is the one who attacks his neighbor secretly.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’”** (Deuteronomy 27:24)

(11) Perversion of justice: **“‘Cursed is the one who takes a bribe to slay an innocent person.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’”** (Deuteronomy 27:25)

(12) Rebellion against God’s revealed will: **“‘Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’”**
(Deuteronomy 27:26)

The blessings, on the other hand, are not linked to individual good deeds, but are rather a listing of different ways Yahweh would bless Israel if they observed the blanket admonition to “keep My commandments.” **“Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that Yahweh your God will....”** He would give them twelve kinds of blessing:

(1) Political ascendancy over other nations: **“Set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of Yahweh your God....”**

(2) Security throughout the Land: **“Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country....”**

(3) A population boom, both of people and livestock: **“Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks....”**

(4) A plentiful food supply: **“Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl....”**

(5) Triumph over circumstances: **“Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out....”**

(6) Military victory: **“Yahweh will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways....”**

(7) Fertile soil: **“Yahweh will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you....”**

(8) A reputation as God’s chosen race: **“Yahweh will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of Yahweh your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of Yahweh, and they shall be afraid of you....”**

(9) Material wealth and prosperity: **“And Yahweh will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which Yahweh swore to your fathers to give you....”**

(10) Good weather: **“Yahweh will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand....”**

(11) An overabundance of riches: **“You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow....”**

(12) A position of leadership: **“And Yahweh will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of Yahweh your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them. So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them.” (Deuteronomy 28:1-14)**

Is the Torah optional? Sure it is. We have the option of heeding it and reaping its inevitable rewards, or ignoring it and suffering the curses that follow disobedience like a shadow on a sunny day.

Messianic Messages I: From Eden To Israel

The concept of a coming “Messiah,” an “Anointed Savior,” was unveiled only gradually in Yahweh’s scriptures. By the close of the Old Covenant canon, the keepers of those scriptures had some fairly well-defined expectations of who He might be and what He might do, but most of the prophecies were cryptic, to say the least. There is no single passage where Yahweh laid out His whole program concerning the Messiah in one comprehensive declaration: *I’m going to make it possible for people to regain the harmonious relationship I once shared with mankind, before Adam sinned against Me. At a certain pre-determined time, I will shed My glory, humble Myself and take the form of a man, born into a specific family. I will offer Myself up as a sacrifice, shedding My blood so that those who choose to trust and believe in Me will be reconciled, purified, and redeemed. I will then reassume My former glory and return on a pre-ordained date to reign as King of Kings upon the earth, separating those who trust in Me from those who do not.* Yahweh did tell us all of these things in His Word, but not all at once, and not necessarily in plain English (or Hebrew, as the case may be). Rather, He doled out His plan one small clue at a time over the course of several millennia, pieces of a puzzle often presented in such obscure language that by themselves in isolation, they might have led to any number of conjectures. It is only by putting the puzzle pieces together that a clear picture begins to emerge.

The Messiah Himself, as He matured from boy to man, recognized that His coming and mission had been foretold in God’s Word—a remarkable epiphany in itself, considering how few people had discovered this when He was born into the world. Even Anna and Simeon (Luke 2) didn’t so much figure it out from the scriptures as they did learn of the Messianic advent through the exercise of their prophetic gifts—listening to the voice of God’s Holy Spirit. The Jewish religious leaders of the day were convinced that the key to everlasting life was to be found in the Law of Moses, and Yahshua agreed with them, in a left-handed sort of way. He told them, **“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”** (John 5:39) In other words, they were looking in the right place for answers, but they weren’t prepared to accept what was actually there. What saved someone wasn’t the outward observance of the Torah’s individual mitzvot (something no one was able to do perfectly), but rather what these precepts *meant*—what they signified, what they pointed toward. For example, the scribes and Pharisees knew they were supposed to sacrifice a spotless lamb on Passover and remove the leaven from their homes. But they

didn't comprehend that this lamb was symbolic and prophetic of the means God would use to provide eternal life for them, and that the leaven represented the corruption of sin that the Messiah's sacrificial death would (or at least *could*) banish from their lives. John the Baptist had introduced Yahshua to the world by declaring, **"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"** (John 1:29) John understood the concept that Yahweh had planted in His Word. The Pharisees did not.

But like I said, the concept was by no means obvious. Even those who *wanted* to believe in Yahshua didn't really understand what had happened when He was suddenly condemned and crucified. It seemed to them as if God's promise had somehow been thwarted, for they, like the scribes, had embraced only the "reigning Messiah" prophecies, while largely ignoring all those unsettling and incomprehensible "suffering Savior" passages. But on the afternoon of His resurrection, Yahshua—concealing His identity—discussed what had happened with a couple of disciples as they walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus. He asked them, **"Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"** And **beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.**" (Luke 24:26-27) We've grown used to hearing of Messianic predictions from prophets like David, Isaiah, and Daniel. But *Moses*? Yes. Yahshua declared that the story begins here, at the very beginning, in the Torah.

You've stuck with me for what is turning out to be a very long book. Along the way we've seen hundreds of places where the Torah does indeed indicate a coming Messiah. But these truths are presented in such a way that you can choose to see them or not—that is, you can decide to perceive Messianic significance in God's precepts, or you can restrict your comprehension to their "face value," denying that they might mean anything beyond merely being orders we're required to follow. It is only in hindsight that we can see what Yahweh was in the process of communicating to us. It is only in the shadow of Calvary that we can perceive the evidence God left behind for us—evidence that His plan of redemption was in motion from the very beginning, even before Adam proved there was a need for it. And even now, the evidence is not so blatantly compelling that men are *forced* to accept it, for that would make it impossible to freely reciprocate God's love—our affirmative response would have become nothing more than acquiescing to unassailable logic, like obeying the "law" of gravity. Yahweh has, in fact, made the evidence easy to deny—and easier to ignore—if we want to. But it is there by the boatload for those of us who choose to seek and receive God's truth.

The richest repository of these Messianic Messages in the Torah is contained in the blood sacrifices demanded by Yahweh. But judging by these instructions

alone, in isolation from the rest of the Bible, one might conclude that the God who required them is capricious and unreasonable. There are lambs, rams, bulls, goats, and more—always with very precise rituals to follow and specifications to meet: a particular number, of a particular gender, in a particular order, offered on a certain day, at a certain time of day, butchered in a certain way by certain people, eaten (or not) by certain participants, accompanied by a certain amount of grain and wine and oil. Always with salt; never with leaven. Always made at a central worship location of God’s choosing; never where the worshipper just happened to live.

Then there are the “contradictions.” First, Yahweh demands that these sacrifices be made; then He says He doesn’t really want them. God issues excruciatingly detailed instructions for a place and priesthood to administer the blood sacrifices, and then He allows idolaters from foreign lands to come in and destroy His sanctuary and scatter His people to the four winds—leaving them without a temple and priesthood for thousands of years. Why haven’t the Jews figured out that there’s something wrong with this picture? How can they follow a God who, for all they can tell, is *both* a fickle control freak obsessed with unattainable perfection *and* woefully incapable of blessing, or even protecting, His own chosen people? It’s no wonder so many Jews today are practicing atheists. Without the Messianic Messages of the Torah, Psalms, and Prophets—fulfilled to the letter in the life and work of Yahshua of Nazareth—their religion makes absolutely no sense.

Yahshua Himself revealed the problem with rabbinical Judaism: without the recognition of the Savior-Messiah prophesied in the Tanach, it is a religious system empty of God’s truth and devoid of life. **“The Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me.... But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.... Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”** (John 5:37-40, 45-47) That’s the crux of the problem, isn’t it? For all the Pharisaical veneration of Moses, they didn’t really *believe* what he’d said. Oh, they tried like crazy to adhere to the maze of regulations he had handed down from God. But they refused to see what (or Whom) these Instructions were really about. So Moses, Yahshua says, stands in witness against them—against the most scrupulously religious, faithfully observant practitioners of the Mosaic Law the world had ever seen, before or since! The line, then, has been drawn in the sand. Either the Torah is a compendium of pointless (and ultimately impossible to perform) rules and rituals imposed by a sadistic, micromanaging control-freak of a god, or it is a signpost pointing out the way to an abundant and joyous eternal

life: Yahweh's Anointed One. If the Torah is indeed God's Word, then either the Pharisees were correct or Yahshua was. But there can be no middle ground: they cannot both be right.

It is not my purpose here to compile every shred of evidence in the Torah that points toward the life and mission of Yahshua as God's Messiah. We have already covered much of it. I do not intend to revisit the vast body of material explaining the sacrificial rites Israel was instructed to perform, all of which were Messianic prophecies, one way or another. I won't repeat what we've already seen concerning the design of the Tabernacle, which with every nuance reveals the coming Christ as the centerpiece of God's Plan for our redemption. Nor do I wish to return in detail to the seven holy convocations of Yahweh, though they too reveal the Messiah's mission as He brings to pass the seven most significant milestones in Yahweh's Plan. We've covered these subjects elsewhere in *The Owner's Manual* (though I reserve the right to revisit a few "high points" heralding the Messiah's role that I touched upon earlier—some of this stuff is too wonderful to say only once). My primary intention now is to sweep the Torah for indicators we might have missed. Up to this point, everything we've discussed has been somehow connected with God's instruction—what He specifically told Israel to do. In the interests of identifying these references to the coming Messiah, I will henceforth be ignoring that convention, opening up the field of inquiry to the Torah's historical commentary as well. To keep things consistent, however, I'll maintain the number-precept-scripture-commentary format I've used throughout this book.

CREATION, EDEN, AND BEYOND

(924) *The Messiah must appear on the fourth "day"—i.e., during the fourth millennium of the Plan of God. "Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day." (Genesis 1:14-19) I have become convinced that the creation week (six "days" of creation followed by one of rest),*

mirrored in the seven-day week and seven-year sabbatical cycle, are God's way of telling us the timing of His plan for our reconciliation, informing us of the duration of our allotted time on earth as fallen mortals. That is, from Adam's fall—the inauguration of our need for redemption—to the commencement of our “rest” under King Yahshua's rule during the final Millennium, we will have had six thousand years to “work it out,” to make our choices as to whether to honor Yahweh or not. This “one-day-equals-one-thousand-years” formula is stated in both Psalm 90:4 and II Peter 3:8. Although we tend to read these verses as pure metaphor, as if they're merely saying, “God is really patient with us,” I can't shake the feeling that He's also imparting specific information to us, if only we'll take Him at His word.

The second observation I must make is that the case for a literal six-day creation period (that is, getting it all done within 144 hours as measured by the earth's rotation relative to the sun) is scientifically untenable, no matter what a surface reading of the King James text may lead you to believe. Nor does the scripture (in Hebrew, anyway) demand such an interpretation. Call me a heretic if you must, but the scientific data seems to indicate a “big-bang” creation about 13.7 billion years ago, with our solar system being formed somewhere in the neighborhood of four billion years ago. The whole procedure is so exquisitely balanced, it fairly screams that an Intelligent Designer with infinite power and wisdom controlled the process from the very beginning, and did it all with a very specific purpose in mind. Life does not and cannot spontaneously generate itself, nor can one life-form evolve into something fundamentally different (though small changes within a genome happen all the time). The geological history of our planet, rather, is the record of a Creative Deity introducing life into our biosphere, one “kind” at a time, as soon as the earth was ready to receive it—just as the Genesis record reports it.

There is, however, a glitch in the Genesis 1 account—something that is not scientifically possible in any literal sense. The passage upon which our precept is based declares that the sun and moon—and the stars, for that matter—showed up *after* plant life appeared on the earth. Since the earth is made of heavy elements formed by the collapse of second generation stars, the *creation* of the stars on the fourth day can't be what God meant to describe. The simple answer, of course, is that earth's atmosphere wasn't transparent enough to clearly reveal the heavenly bodies until plant life had taken hold, taking greenhouse gasses out of the atmosphere and putting free oxygen in. But I believe there's more to it. The Bible, though scientifically accurate (allowing that it's written in common vernacular), is not *about* science—it concerns only the redemption of fallen mankind.

Could it be that Yahweh was trying to tell us something significant by planting an obvious “mistake” in the creation account?

Malachi reports, **“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,”** says Yahweh of hosts, **‘That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings.’** (Malachi 4:1-2) It’s a Messianic prophecy, with both of Yahshua’s advents in view. Judgment is coming, he says, for the proud and wicked, but those who revere the name of Yahweh shall experience healing. And *both* the judgment and the healing will be accomplished by the “Sun of Righteousness,” obviously a reference to the Messiah. Judgment will be visited upon the earth during the Tribulation—when all these wicked ones will be consumed as stubble in the flame—and onward into the Millennial Kingdom, when Yahshua will rule mankind with a scepter of iron. But when will the God-fearing people receive healing? When the “Sun of Righteousness” arises. And when will that be, according to the Genesis creation account? During the *fourth day!*

By my reckoning, the first thousand-year “day” of Yahweh’s redemptive plan began with the fall of Adam; the second at the time of the flood; the third with Abraham’s almost-sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah; the fourth with the building of Solomon’s temple; the fifth with the sacrifice of Christ (33 A.D.); the sixth with the low water mark of the Christian faith in 1033 (see Mitzvah #535) and *Future History*, Chapter 3); and the seventh day will begin with the commencement of Yahshua’s Millennial reign (due in 2033, unless my theory is seriously flawed). The “fourth day,” then—the day when the Sun of Righteousness would arise—ended in 33 A.D., as Yahshua’s earthly mission was completed. We are “healed” by what Yahshua our Messiah did during His first advent—or we aren’t healed at all.

- (925) *Understand the relationship between God and Man.* **“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”** (Genesis 1:26-28) Anthropologists will tell you that Man created gods in our own image: that is, part of being human is the compulsion to worship a deity of some sort, something we conceive as being in control of the awesome forces of

nature that we ourselves cannot comprehend—much less harness and manage. We invest these gods (they say) with human-like attributes—feelings, needs, volition, etc.—because that’s all we understand. We fear them and try to appease them because we perceive that they have the power to harm us but also the ability to help us. The tacit message of the anthropologists’ science is that if Man can learn to comprehend and control his environment, we will have no more need for these primitive superstitions—we will be free at last to live our lives without the inconvenient moral standards imposed upon us by these gods and their self-appointed spokesmen.

God, on the other hand, contends that just the opposite is true: *He* made man in *His* own image—complete with feelings, needs, and volition—because He wished to share His own innate nature—Love—with someone who had the capacity to reciprocate that love, even if He had to create that “someone” first. That explains whatever similarities the anthropologists find between mankind and their objects of worship: they are either Yahweh Himself or false gods we’ve substituted for Him.

Where is the Messianic Message in all of this? Note that the Creator has invested man with “dominion” over the earth. This is our first hint that God—the One to whom dominion intrinsically belongs—intended to manifest Himself as a man—not as an animal (a serpent, for instance) or an angel or some other glorified being. If you think about it, that’s a remarkable and counterintuitive turn of events, one nobody could have seen coming. We can understand the converse, of course—a man wanting to be worshipped as a god, grasping for himself power and glory beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. But *this*—that God Almighty would elect to exercise dominion over His creation through the agency of a mortal man—frail, feeble, and subject to death—is unexpected, to say the least. Man would never invent a God who would humble Himself in such a way—it’s not in our nature.

- (926) *God’s work on our behalf is finite in scope. “Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”* (Genesis 2:1-3)
Yahweh has informed us that He set Himself a task—one that would have a beginning and an end. His “work” would be followed by “rest.” If you think about it, this is a rather remarkable thing to do, for this God purports to be eternal and unchanging. When man conceives of god, he sees a never ending cycle of confrontation and gratification: the god (through his

priests) makes demands, and people sacrifice to appease him, either to receive his blessing or prevent him from hurting them. It's the original "protection racket." But the God of the Torah does things quite contrary to our natural expectations. *He* works, *He* sacrifices, and then He invites us to enjoy the fruit of *His* labor. Yes, He tells us what we should do, but not in order to gratify His own desires. He does this because He loves us: He wants us to prosper physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And having built us, He knows precisely what it will take to attain this blessed state.

But right here at the beginning, He starts hinting at the temporary nature of our mortal existence—the "work which He had done." There is something beyond this, He intimates, something outside our present experience in a physical universe comprised of "the heavens and the earth and all the host of them." There is a day of rest awaiting us, and He is working so that we might enjoy that rest with Him. Although He doesn't say so here, it would transpire that the work He would perform in our finite world would be accomplished in and through His Messiah—making Him the bridge between today and tomorrow, between natural and supernatural, between God's work and our rest.

- (927) *Man is a spiritual being.* "And Yahweh, God, formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." (Genesis 2:7) We've encountered this verse several times in our exploration of the scriptures, and for good reason. This is God's explanation of what makes mankind different from the animals: we have Yahweh's "breath of life" within us. It's not just that we're living beings, that is, that we have souls (*nephesh*) that are alive (*chay*), even though those very words are used here to describe our condition: "man became a living being." But other animals—apparently *all* of them—are described in exactly the same terms: "living creatures" that abound in the waters (Genesis 1:20), every "living thing" that moves (1:21), more "living creatures" like cattle, creeping things, and beasts of the earth (1:24), and beasts, birds, and creeping things that have "life" (1:30). But none of these are described as having received the *neshamah*, the breath of life, from Yahweh—only man is. In other words, animals are "alive," but not in precisely the same way that men are. The difference is our capacity for spiritual life: we alone, among all of God's creatures, have the opportunity to remain alive even after our bodies have perished, for just as the soul makes the body of an animal physically alive, a spirit, indwelling our *neshamah*, can give a soul (our *nephesh*) spiritual life. And since spirits are eternal, our souls will endure as long as their spirits dwell within them—forever!

That is good news, of course, but it also has a potential downside. First, there's the eventuality about which Yahweh warned Adam and Chavvah (Eve) in the Garden. If they disobeyed Him by eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, they would "surely die," and not just "someday," but on *the very day* of their sin. Because we are then told that Adam lived on as a mortal man for 930 years, begetting sons and daughters, it's obvious that physical death (the separation of the soul from the body) was not what Yahweh had been talking about. No, it was the departure of God's Spirit (his *Ruach*) from Adam's *neshamah*. The withdrawal of His Spirit, for all intents and purposes, rendered them mere animals, spiritually lifeless, subject to corruption. But their capacity for spiritual indwelling remained intact, and I believe Adam and Chavvah, by accepting the coverings of the slain-animal skins Yahweh provided (a picture of the imputed righteousness still available to us today), demonstrated their repentance—and their acceptance of the salvation Yahweh had made on their behalf through His blood sacrifice.

But the "bad news" doesn't end there. You see, Yahweh's *Ruach Qodesh*—His Holy Spirit—is not the only spiritual being in existence, even if it is the only *uncreated* spiritual entity. But God also made angels, beings of pure spirit, some of whom rebelled against Him and became demons. These too are capable of indwelling the *neshamah* of a man—with eternally disastrous results. We are warned about this in Proverbs 20:27, "**The spirit of a man is the lamp of Yahweh, searching all the inner depths of his heart.**" "Spirit" here is a bad translation. It's not *ruach*. The word is *neshamah*, the place within us where the spirit resides. Solomon is informing us that the *neshamah* discloses to God the "inner depths of the heart" of man. That is, the *neshamah* is the light that reveals his spiritual condition: it is indwelled either with Yahweh's Spirit, with no spirit, or with the spirit of a demon. It is the litmus test that determines whether a person is alive, dead, or damned for eternity.

None of that, of course, reveals anything directly about the coming Messiah. But there's one more word we should examine a bit more closely. What did Yahweh do after He "formed man from the dust of the ground?" He "breathed" into him the *neshamah*. Not surprisingly, we find that the verb translated "breathed" is related to *nephesh*, or soul. It's the Hebrew *naphach*. It means "to breathe, blow at, sniff at, seethe, or [and here's what we need to take note of] to give up or lose one's life." (S) The *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* points out that when used in conjunction with *nephesh* (as it is here in Genesis 2:7) *naphach* can mean "die: formally, breathe out life, i.e., enter into the state of death, as an extension of breathing out one's last breath of air." In the

same vein, it can also mean “to die: formally, cause to pant, i.e., make another to be in a state of anxiety or distress, as an extension of causing a person to exert great energy and so gasp for breath.”

I realize that as Messianic clues go, this one’s awfully esoteric, but try to visualize what Yahweh is telling us here: by “breathing into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life,” He gave him a choice: either God could breathe out *His own life* on behalf of man, or His death would “make another [i.e., the one whose *neshamah* was empty or had been indwelled with a satanic spirit] to be in a state of anxiety or distress.” And how did Yahweh intend to “breathe out His own life?” By setting aside His glory, becoming a man Himself—the Messiah—and offering Himself up as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of a fallen human race.

- (928) *The Messiah will become joined as “one flesh” with humanity. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”* (Genesis 2:24) It seems to me that if ever there was an unassailable argument disproving Darwinian evolution, it’s the existence of sexual reproduction. What conceivable environmental stimulus would it have taken to induce an organism to shift from simple cell division to the impossibly complex systems involved in dividing a species into distinct male and female components? It would appear disingenuous indeed for an evolutionist who believes such an unlikely eventuality to flippantly accuse a Christian of exercising “blind faith.” But right here at the beginning, Yahweh describes His spiritual pattern in biological terms: a man and his wife become “one flesh” when their DNA is blended in the conception of their child.

If Yahweh designed us that way—male and female—we should ask ourselves the obvious question: why did He do that? It has to be something more profound than merely figuring we might enjoy the process of getting from one generation to the next. The structure of the family as God ordained it—a man joined with his wife and becoming “one flesh”—is of fundamental importance, not only as biological imperative, but also as a spiritual principle. This becomes clear when we realize that Yahweh symbolically characterizes His followers as being “joined” in marriage to Him. Israel is called His “wife,” and the called-out followers of Yahshua are referred to as “the Bride of Christ.” Like human children, believers are spiritually “conceived” through an act of love—the love of the Messiah toward His ekklesia.

This discourse began with an observation. Yahweh had noted, “**It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.**” (Genesis 2:18) The word translated “comparable” bears closer

scrutiny. It's *neged*, meaning: "before, in front of, straight ahead, i.e., pertaining to a spatial position anterior to another object...being in the presence of another; opposite, beyond, i.e., a spatial position in front of another object, but with a space between; nearby, i.e., pertaining to a spatial position which is in proximity to another object" (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*). The noun form of *neged* denotes a counterpart, that is, an object that corresponds to or is like another object. Considering the fact that Yahweh had **"created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them,"** (Genesis 1:27) we can begin to see what was on His mind. He's really talking about Himself. He's saying, in effect, "It is not good for *Me* to be alone in the universe; I will make a helper, a companion, comparable (in a way) to Myself—made in My own image and likeness, with a spiritual nature—to stand before Me, near Me, in My presence."

The Messianic Message in this is evident. It is not for nothing that Yahshua is called the "Son of God." In order for Him to take us as His bride, He had to "leave His Father and Mother," that is, set aside the power and privilege that were rightfully His in heaven, humble Himself, assume the form of a mortal man, and do whatever it would take to reconcile us to Himself. Thus Paul reminds us, **"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish."** (Ephesians 5:25-27)

- (929) *The "woman's seed" will conquer Satan.* **"The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.' So Yahweh, God, said to the serpent: 'Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field. On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.'"** (Genesis 3:13-15) We covered this passage in the first chapter of this volume, under **Precept #615** where the lesson was: "Recognize your enemy." Here I'd like to emphasize instead that the "seed of the woman" Who was destined to crush the head of the serpent (Satan) is ultimately Yahshua the Messiah. That may seem obvious to many of us today, but the Jews still don't get it, and most of the world is oblivious to the ramifications of the prophecy. What's lost on us these days is the tremendous impact this prediction had on the generations immediately following Adam's fall. It shaped their expectations and colored their outlook. Ever since being kicked out of Eden, they were looking expectantly for a redeemer, someone who could reverse the curse of Adam's sin. I have no doubt that Chavvah (Eve) fully

expected her firstborn son to fulfill the prophecy, naming him Cain, which can be translated “spear.”

But it was in the proto-Babylonian mystery religion a few generations after the flood that the counterfeit fulfillment of the “woman’s seed” prophecy gained traction—influence that’s still being felt today. It was here, after the death of the first demigod worthy of the name, Nimrod (some say, at the hands of the righteous Shem), that his widow, Semiramis, bore a male child near the winter solstice—late December. This son (or “yule”) was marketed as the reincarnated Nimrod, and more to the point, the fulfillment of the Genesis 3 prophecy. Tammuz thereby gained the dubious honor of being the world’s first “false messiah”—almost three thousand years before the Real Thing showed up.

Queen Semiramis, having conceived Tammuz long after Nimrod’s demise, invented the fiction of an “immaculate conception” to explain her situation. Had not the prophecy declared that *the woman’s* seed would crush the serpent’s head? The worship of this unholy trinity, Nimrod, Semiramis, and Tammuz, became the prototype for false religions and pagan cults from one end of the earth to the other. All of them, of course, ignore the *other* requirement of the prophecy: the woman whose Son would conquer evil would be “at enmity” with the serpent—she would be an adversary to our Adversary, and a friend of Yahweh. Mary was; Semiramis was not.

The idea of the Deliverer being the seed of the *woman*—implying that He would not at the same time be the seed of a man—would be developed and refined in subsequent Messianic prophecies (cf. Isaiah 7:14). The only way that could happen, logically, is for the “woman” to be a virgin, pure and undefiled—like Mary of Nazareth was when she conceived Yahshua through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Satan, though an accomplished illusionist and a master of spin, cannot perform creative miracles. He had to settle for the bastard child of an illicit sexual liaison to perpetrate his forgery. Considering the success his false messiahs have enjoyed over the centuries, it makes me shudder to think of what he could have done to us if he had any *real* power. The devil has “bruised” the heel of Yahweh’s Anointed, the seed of the woman. We have only to wait for the second half of the prophecy to be fulfilled: the Messiah *will* crush the head of Satan. Soon.

(930) *Innocent blood had to be shed in order to cover our shame. Also for Adam and his wife Yahweh, God, made tunics of skin, and clothed them.*” (Genesis 3:21) After they had eaten of the fruit of the forbidden tree, Adam and Chavvah (Eve) suddenly realized that they were naked before God. I get

the impression that a vague sense of inferiority now swept over them. They somehow knew what they had never comprehended before, that Yahweh was fundamentally unlike them: totally pure, awesomely majestic, on a different plane of existence altogether—in a word, holy. The serpent had, in a way, told the truth: having disobeyed God, they could now see the difference between good and evil. The shocking epiphany for them, however, was that *they* were evil, utterly unworthy of being in the presence of such a holy being as Yahweh. They had not expected that, for their inferiority had never been an issue until now. Yahweh had never brought it up, and they had been blissfully unaware of it. Sure, they knew that He was in charge, but He had always conversed with them as a friend and companion, not a master or overlord. They had been treated like family, like the children of a loving father, not merely the subjects of a powerful ruler, or worse, the chattel of a slave owner. That secure feeling had now departed, leaving in its place a vague sensation of dread, a shame that compelled them to hide, to flee, to cover themselves. They couldn't let Yahweh see them in this condition. What would He think of them? It was all too horrible to contemplate.

For His part, Yahweh seems to have been saddened, but not surprised. He first asked Adam and Eve what they had done, not because He didn't know, but because He wanted them to come to terms with their own sin—that it was their doing, their responsibility, and that it had fundamentally changed the nature of their relationship with Him. There would be consequences—the most basic of which they had already discovered: sin had separated them from their God, for His Spirit had departed, making them unworthy to stand in his presence.

And what about the clothing they had sewn together out of fig leaves? Yahweh's response said, in so many words, "Okay, you understand the problem, or at least part of it. You're naked and guilty before Me. But you don't yet understand the solution. Not only must you be covered, but the penalty for your sin must be paid. I warned you about this: 'In the day that you eat of the tree in the middle of the garden, you will surely die.' And as things stand now, you *are* dead, spiritually, anyway. My Spirit has departed from you, leaving the *neshamah* I breathed into you an empty shell. If nothing changes, when your body dies (as it must) your life will be destroyed, for a soul not indwelt by an eternal spirit cannot survive without its body. But I have provided an alternative to this death you've earned yourselves, because, let's face it, I love you and don't want to see you perish.

“You must understand: the wages of sin is death. You knew that going in. Because you’ve sinned, death is decreed. It doesn’t have to be *your* death, however. It is possible for Someone else—Someone also made in My image and likeness, as guiltless as you were before you threw away your innocence—to die in your place. But none of your children will ever fit that description, so I have resolved to become a human being Myself. I will come to the earth at a time of my choosing and offer Myself up as a sacrifice on your behalf. In the meantime, I’ll give you a demonstration guaranteeing my intent: I will kill an innocent animal and make clothing for you from it’s hide. If you will trust Me, accept My offer, and wear this clothing as a sign of your faith, I will re-establish the spiritual relationship we once enjoyed together in the garden. But if you insist on trying to cover your sin your own way with those ridiculous shriveling fig leaves—or worse, decide to walk through life butt naked—My Spirit will not return to dwell within you. The choice is yours.”

- (931) *Innocent blood must be spilled for an offering to atone for sin.* “**And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to Yahweh. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And Yahweh respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.**” (Genesis 4:3-5) Yahweh evaluated two things when Cain and Abel brought their offerings. First was the attitude of the supplicant: Abel was honestly trying to follow God’s own lead, shown in the act of atoning for the sins of his parents. But Cain was still “wearing an apron of fig leaves,” as far as Yahweh was concerned—he was practicing a religion of his own invention, not following in faith what God had instructed by example.

Second was the nature of the sacrifice. Let’s assume for the sake of argument that the value of Cain’s vegetables and Abel’s lamb or goat were equivalent. God is not complaining that Cain should have brought *more*, or even that his sacrifice should have been *better*. It was not a question of quantity *or* quality. The problem was that there was no “life” in Cain’s tomatoes and cabbages—at least not in the same way that Abel’s lamb was alive: with a soul, with blood coursing through its veins. God had made it plain in the Garden: our sin carried with it the penalty of death. You couldn’t buy your life back with non-living sacrifices—not with garden produce, and not with gold. Only Life could redeem life. Only Innocence could buy back innocence.

We aren’t told how, but it became painfully obvious to Cain that his bloodless sacrifice had been rejected. But his reaction was neither remorse leading to repentance, nor perplexity leading to inquiry. It was anger—the

child of pride. **“So Yahweh said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?’** If he had not sinned, there would have been no need for an atoning sacrifice. **“And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.”** (Genesis 4:6-7) I believe this enigmatic statement is a play on words. The word for “sin” here (*chata’ah*) is closely related to another Hebrew noun, *chata’t*, which as we have seen, denotes the *offering* for sin. Yahweh seems to be saying that if Cain would but acknowledge his sin, the proper blood sacrifice was readily available to him—a lamb or goat crouching right outside his dwelling—a metaphor for the Messiah that Yahweh would Himself provide. But if he would not humble himself, a personified “Sin” was laying in wait, preparing to pounce upon and devour him. Yahweh’s counsel was for Cain to “rule over” the wickedness in his heart that desired to overcome him. Yahweh had given Cain another chance to get it right, as Abel already had. He was now faced with a choice: repent or rebel.

He chose poorly. **“Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then Yahweh said to Cain, ‘Where is Abel your brother?’”** As usual, it was not because He didn’t know the answer, but because He wanted to give Cain a chance to come clean. **“He said, ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?’ And He [Yahweh] said, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.’”** (Genesis 4:8-10) Let me ask a provocative question. If God had decreed that innocent blood must be shed in order to atone for the sins of mankind, then why wasn’t Cain’s murder of Abel considered a “good thing,” an offering on a par with the slaying of the innocent lamb for Abel’s sacrifice? We get the impression that God had given mankind very little instruction (outside His own example) of how and what to sacrifice. Furthermore, Yahweh at this point had issued no proclamation prohibiting murder. Let’s look at the evidence.

First, there is no indication that the death of Abel was intended to be a sacrifice. Cain merely lashed out in a fit of anger and jealousy. His actions demonstrate the danger inherent in religion, in the sense of being a manmade attempt to approach God, rather than a corporate response to God’s offer of redemption. Cain wasn’t apathetic: he truly wanted to be accepted by Yahweh—but on his own terms, through his own efforts. He *had* offered a sacrifice. Yahweh, knowing Cain’s heart, had rejected it.

Second, Cain *knew* that murder was wrong. This is demonstrated in his deceptive answer to Yahweh’s question. If his conscience had been clear in the matter—if he had not realized that murder was morally wrong—then he would have answered by saying something like, “Abel? Oh, he’s lying out there in the field. I crushed his head with a rock ’cause he was annoying me. Why, is there a problem?” As with the fig-leaf fashions of Adam and Eve, an attempt to conceal the crime proves the awareness of one’s guilt.

Third, Abel’s life could not be given (or taken) as a sacrifice to atone for the sin of Cain because Abel wasn’t actually “innocent.” Even though he was a far more righteous man than his brother, Abel was aware that he too had fallen short of Yahweh’s standard of perfection. That’s why he had offered a sacrifice of the “firstborn of his flock.” The point is that God doesn’t grade on the curve. There is no point at which our good deeds outweigh our bad ones, making us worthy to be God’s children. In fact, our behavior has nothing to do with our salvation, except as an indicator of what (and Who) we believe. If we really love Yahweh, we will at least *try* to keep His commandments. Abel did; Cain did not.

THE ANTEDILLUVIAN WORLD

(932) *The names of the men in the godly line during the first millennium tell the story of Yahweh’s redemptive plan. “In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.”* (Genesis 5:1-3) Genesis 5 is one of those passages everybody skips over, because it’s “just” a genealogy. There’s “obviously” no doctrine there, precious little narrative, and no great spiritual truth. Or is there? What would happen if we analyzed the ten names we find here, looking for clues in their meanings? After all, names in the Bible invariably mean something—and these meanings are often significant in the grand scheme of things.

(1) Let us begin at the beginning, with Adam. **“Yahweh, God, formed man of the dust of the ground.”** (Genesis 2:7) The word translated “man” is *adam*, and the “ground” from which he was formed is a related word: *adamah*. (Since the ground was rich in iron oxides, *adam* also means “red,” reflected in such derivatives as “Edom,” named after Esau, who sold his birthright for a bowl of red porridge, and *adem*, meaning red or ruddy—the color of blood). So the first name on the list simply means man, or *mankind*.

(2) The godly line continued through Adam's third recorded son, Seth, for Cain had slain the godly Abel. **"And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, 'For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.'"** (Genesis 4:25) "Seth," as revealed in the text, means *appointed*.

(3) The next in line was Enosh or Enos, which is another word for mankind, but this time stressing man's mortality, his vulnerability to death. **"And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of Yahweh."** (Genesis 4:26) It was finally sinking in: the curse of sin had indeed doomed the entire race of mankind to a slow death. Enosh is from the root *anash*. It means mortal, frail, weak, sick, miserable, or incurable; it is a word used of a wound, grief, woe, sickness, or wickedness. So the root meaning of Enosh is *mortal frailty*.

(4) The name of Kenan or Cainan (*Qeynan*) continues in the same pessimistic tone as that of his father Enosh. It means "a possession," but it is apparently derived from a word (*qiynah*) that denotes lamentation, sorrow, a dirge or elegy—the doleful expression of one who finds himself someone else's possession—a slave to sin. Kenan is *sorrow*.

(5) The next name in the godly line, Mahalalel, is a compound of several Hebrew words (an arrangement more common than not). *Ma* means "what," or "that which." *Halal* is a verb meaning to bless or praise, or to shine, radiate, or reflect light. (Thus we find it a component of the quintessential exclamation of praise to God—Hallelujah, which literally means, "shine forth the light of Yahweh.") The last piece of Mahalalel's name is *el*, which is the generic designation for deity: God. The fifth patriarch's name, then, could be translated: what is blessed or praised by God, or that which shines of God, hence *the Light of God*.

(6) Mahalalel's son, Jared, reminds us that there is no "J" sound in Hebrew. The "J" is an artifact from the evolving English language dating from the 17th century. It should be pronounced as a "Y" (as we saw above in the word Hallelujah; Joshua therefore is rightly pronounced "Yahshua"). We should also be aware that vowels weren't part of the Hebrew text until well into the Christian era: thus they are a matter of some conjecture. The root verb of Jared is *yaradh*, which means to descend. We are familiar with a related word: the "Jordan" River is actually the *Yaraden*: the "descender," emptying into the lowest spot on the face of the earth, the Dead Sea. Jared, then, means *shall come down*.

(7) Enoch, the next in line, is a transliteration of the Hebrew *Chanowk*, from the verb *chanak*, meaning to train or to dedicate. We see the concept emerging in the name of the Jewish holiday, Chanukah—the festival of

dedication, commemorative of the cleansing and re-dedication of the second temple under the Maccabees. Enoch means *dedicated*.

(8) Methuselah is another compound word. *Muth* means death, and *shelach* is a verb denoting to bring or send forth. (It's related to the word for "dart" or "spear," i.e., something "sent out.") It seems an odd thing to name one's child, but remember, Enoch his father walked closely with Yahweh: so closely, in fact, that Yahweh "took him"—*raptured* him, if you will—long before his natural life span had run its course. His son's name was meant to be prophetic of a significant event. What was to be "brought" or "sent forth" at the death of Methuselah? God's judgment upon a corrupt and unrepentant world. As it turns out, he died in the same year as Noah's flood, at the extremely ripe old age of 969—making him the oldest man on record. This demonstrates, if you're willing to read between the lines, that although Yahweh is inordinately patient with us, there is eventually a place where mercy ends and judgment begins. Methuselah means *his death shall bring it*.

(9) Lamech, or Lamek, is a bit harder to pin down. One source I consulted defined it as lamenting, or despairing. Another said it means powerful. Another claimed it denotes a wild man. Worse, none of these sources offered any corroborating evidence, no root verbs or other obvious linguistic origins. So allow me to stick my neck out a bit and propose a theory. The final letter of Lamech, the "K" sound, is the Hebrew khaf (כ), which as you can see looks quite similar to the dalet (ד), the "D" sound. They would be formed with virtually identical pen strokes, the main difference being a slightly longer "tail" on the final-khaf. I realize, of course, that the original text would have been written not in Babylonian Hebrew (shown here) but in paleo-Hebrew. But there too the letters are similar, and they are in the Aramaic alphabet as well. Depending on the scribe, there is potentially almost no difference between LMK and LMD. (By the way, we have no ancient manuscripts of this passage to consult: it is missing in the Dead Sea Scrolls.) So where does this take us? *Lamad* (LMD) is a primitive Hebrew verb meaning to teach, to learn, to be taught or trained. Thus *limud* is one who is taught, one who learns, a disciple, as in, "The Lord Yahweh has given Me the tongue of disciples (*limud*), that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning; He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple (*limud*)." (Isaiah 50:4) It seems to me far more likely that Methuselah would name his baby boy "one who learns" than calling him wild man, powerful, or despairing. If you don't believe me, compare what Isaiah said about "weary ones" to the meaning of the name of Lamech's son, Noah, below. Lamech (Limud), then, means *disciple*.

(10) Noah, the last name on the list, is derived from the verb *nuwach*: to rest, repose, make quiet, comfort, or to permit. So we read, **“And he [Lamech/Limud] called his name Noah, saying, “This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which Yahweh has cursed.”** (Genesis 5:29) Noah means *rest*.

The ten names from Genesis 5 together, then, form a comprehensive thought, one that explains our condition and Yahweh’s solution for it: “Mankind... (is) appointed... (to) mortal frailty... (and) sorrow... (but) the Light of God... shall come down... (being) dedicated... (and) His death shall bring... (His) disciples... rest.

Does anybody but me have goose bumps?

(933) *The ark of Noah is a picture of God’s Messiah.* **“Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.”** (Genesis 6:9) **“The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch.’”** (Genesis 6:11-14) We talked about Noah’s little adventure a bit in the first chapter of this volume. But there I didn’t emphasize the Messianic symbology of the ark. Note first that although scripture makes it clear that all men have sinned (and pointedly records one of Noah’s lapses), Noah is said to have been “just,” “perfect,” and walking in fellowship with Yahweh. At this late hour we should all realize that this “righteousness” wasn’t merely in comparison to his less well-behaved neighbors, but was something attributed or imputed to Noah by God in response to the man’s faith and love for Him.

Second, when God sees universal corruption upon the earth, His natural response is to wipe it out and start over again. As its Creator, this is His prerogative alone, and the decision as to when mankind has become irretrievably corrupt is His to make as well. Note that the only stated evidence of this corruption is the sin of violence. In a delicious coincidence (maybe), the Hebrew word for this violence is *hamas*.

Third, notice that the ark was to be “anointed” with pitch inside and out to keep God’s implement of judgment—the flood—from leaking into it. The word translated “cover” is *kapar*, which means both “to cover, purge, make atonement or reconciliation, pacify, or propitiate” and “coat or cover over with pitch” (S) And the word for “pitch” is related: it’s *koper*, which in addition to denoting asphalt or pitch, also means “the price of a life; a ransom or bribe.” I’m sure you’ll recognize these words

as being the root of the name of the sixth *miqra* in Yahweh's schedule: the Day of Atonement—*Yom Kippurim*. The lesson is, the atonement provided by the Messiah's sacrifice insulates and separates us from the wrath of God, just as the coating of pitch insulated and separated the hull of the ark from the waters of judgment.

The narrative and its lessons continue: **"But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you...."** Being in the ark for protection from God's wrath is a picture of being "in Christ." **"And you shall take for yourself of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather it to yourself; and it shall be food for you and for them.' Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did."** (Genesis 6:18, 21-22) Not only would being in the ark (i.e., in Christ) shelter Noah's family from wrath, but this would also be where his temporal needs would be met. Yahweh didn't miraculously stock the ark with food, however. Noah had to go out and gather it, acting in faith on God's instructions. The only "miracle" consisted of the foreknowledge Noah needed to make his preparations in a timely fashion. God warned him, and he heeded the admonition. We too have been advised of the coming judgment; we too have the opportunity to find shelter in an ark of safety—Yahweh's Messiah. But what we're going to "live on" there—if anything—is up to us. We can stock the ark with beets and Brussels sprouts (dour religious legalism), with Skittles and soda pop (shallow, self-centered feel-good theology), or with a balanced variety of nutritious and tasty spiritual provisions—a healthful and enjoyable diet including all four spiritual "food groups," doctrine, fellowship, prayer, and worship.

"So He [Yahweh] destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive." (Genesis 7:23) As in the days of Noah, we are living in a world ripe for judgment. And now as then, only those of us who have sought shelter in Yahweh's ark—Yahshua the Messiah—will survive.

MESSIAH'S FAMILY TREE

- (934) *God's plan will come to pass through Shem.* **"And [Noah] said: "Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem; and may Canaan be his servant."** (Genesis 9:26-27) As is often the case with prophecy, we can only see in hindsight what God (through Noah) was talking about here—that is, we can only discern the meaning of the prophecy by examining its fulfillment. First, Yahweh is described as "the God of Shem," though both Ham and

Japheth were believers as well. The promised Messiah, He's saying, would come through the line of Shem, not through one of his godly brothers. Yahshua was indeed born into Shem's family, a lineage later prophetically narrowed to Abraham, to Israel, Judah, and David.

Second, Japheth would follow Shem—his descendants would somehow be dependent upon Shem's prophetic role. Geographically, from the resting place of the ark on the mountains of Ararat, Shem's line spread mostly to the south and east; Japheth's descendants went north, and Ham's family settled to the south and west. Noah's prophecy intimates that although the Messiah would come through Shem's line, the family of Japheth would comprise the core of the world's believers, and this has indeed been the case: the ekklesia of Yahshua spread fastest and farthest in Asia Minor and Europe—Japhethite territory.

Interestingly, Ham's prophetic spiritual destiny isn't mentioned, for good or ill. But one of his sons, Canaan, is singled out for condemnation: he would find himself subservient to both Shem and Japheth. The conquest of Canaan by Israel under Joshua is a fulfillment of this prophecy.

(935) *God's plan will come to pass through Abraham.* **“Now Yahweh had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”** (Genesis 12:1-3) One doesn't have to be in the lineage of the Messiah to be blessed by God, though I'll admit, getting singled out like this is pretty remarkable. But what would have to happen for “all the families of the earth” to be blessed through you? What kind of universal accomplishment would have to be made in order to bless *everybody*? Create fire? Invent the wheel? Harness the power of chocolate? No, there's only one thing that could bless everyone—including people who lived *before* Abram. Find a way to reverse the curse of Adam's sin; reestablish the fellowship the human race had with Yahweh before we decided we'd rather follow our own road. Yahshua, a descendant of Abram, did that very thing for us.

That's not to say it wasn't “impossible,” but Yahweh seems to enjoy doing what can't be done. It separates the Real God from the riffraff. **“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.’”** (Genesis 17:1-2) I realize people lived longer back then than they do today, but

ninety-nine years old back then is still like, say, sixty-nine these days. In other words, good luck, Abe: Viagra hasn't been invented yet. And what was merely improbable for Abraham actually *was* impossible for his wife. At ninety, she was well past menopause. Think of Sarah as a sixty year old—looking good for her age, maybe, but simply not equipped to bear children any longer. Yahweh didn't care. Our barrenness is no particular obstacle to the Creator of life. **“Then God said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.’”** (Genesis 17:15-16) Just as Abram (“Exalted Father”) had been changed to Abraham (Father of Many), so Sarai's name would be changed to reflect her prophetic status as the “mother of kings.” Baker and Carpenter explain that “The change in name indicated the multitude of persons who would come forth from her.... The name means ‘princess’ or ‘woman of nobility.’”

(936) *God's plan will come to pass through Isaac.* **“Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.”** (Genesis 17:19) **“In Isaac your seed shall be called.”** (Genesis 21:12) The child of promise would descend from Isaac, not Abraham's firstborn son, Ishmael. Why? Because Ishmael was not the son of Abraham's lawful wife. No marriage covenant existed between Abraham and Hagar. Since the lifelong marriage union between a man and a woman is designed to mirror Yahweh's covenant relationship with us who love and trust Him, the child of promise would have to be Sarah's son, even if such a thing was physically “impossible.” **“Is anything too hard for Yahweh? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.”** (Genesis 18:14) And so she did. Yahweh is very serious about His metaphors.

(937) *God's plan will come to pass through Jacob.* **“Now Isaac pleaded with Yahweh for his wife, because she was barren; and Yahweh granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said, “If all is well, why am I like this?” So she went to inquire of Yahweh. And Yahweh said to her: ‘Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.’”** (Genesis 25:21-23) Once again, the lineage of the coming Messiah was refined: He would come through the younger of Isaac and Rebekah's twin sons—through Jacob, not Esau.

On his deathbed, though, the half-blind Isaac had apparently forgotten all about this prophecy, for he thought he was giving the covenant blessing to his firstborn Esau when he told Jacob, **“Let peoples serve you, and nations**

bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!" (Genesis 27:29) Later, having learned of Jacob's deceit, but having also been reminded of his own spiritual lapse, Isaac admitted that Yahweh had indeed called Jacob, not Esau: **"May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; And give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham."** (Genesis 28:3-4) And Yahweh confirmed the blessing. **"And behold, Yahweh stood above it [the ladder to heaven in Jacob's dream] and said: "I am Yahweh, God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** (Genesis 28:13-14) Jacob (later known as Israel) received virtually the same promise his grandfather Abraham had been given—to be fulfilled in the life and mission of the same anointed Man, Yahshua the Messiah.

We tend to take these prophetic pronouncements for granted, but we shouldn't, for they're unique in the annals of religious tradition—Judeo-Christian or otherwise. The world thinks that "Jesus" was merely a man, a great moral innovator, the founder of a great religion. He was none of those things, but rather, the One in whom "all the families of the earth would be blessed." In order to fulfill that mission, He would have to be more than a mere man. He would have to be God incarnate, not the arbiter of a manmade moral code but the very personification of goodness. That's why Yahweh began laying down subtle hints concerning Him within hours of Adam's fall, and why we were given stunning and specific prophecies like this one several millennia before the fact. We're not only being told what the Messiah would accomplish, but who His distant ancestors would be. Later prophets would pinpoint the time of His coming, His birthplace, and even His name (subtly revealed over seventy times in the Old Covenant scriptures—invariably translated "salvation." See [Chapter 16](#) of this volume).

This is on a whole different level than predicting that someone will come and do something someday, for example, Alexander the Great, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, or the Antichrist—all of whom are mentioned, though not by name, in prophetic scripture. This is more like sticking your neck out and declaring something like, "The Antichrist will be the direct descendant of Cnaeus Domitius and his lovely wife Agrippina, through their son Lucius." (The Bible makes no such prediction, you understand.

This is just to give you a feel for the kind of boldness it would take.) It's one thing to make the prediction, but if it's going to be meaningful, the genealogical records linking Cnaeus and the Antichrist must be extant and unbroken. They *are* for Yahshua of Nazareth—the verified physical descendant of David, Judah, Jacob, Abraham, Shem, and Seth, just as prophetic scripture requires, recorded in Luke 3:23-38. Furthermore, since the Hebrew genealogical archives were destroyed when Vespasian sacked Jerusalem in 70 A.D., any rival claimant to Yahshua for the throne of David would have a tough time proving his case. False christs are a dime a dozen in our world, but only because their followers are ignorant of the requirements of Yahweh's scriptures. If they knew the prophecies, they'd know that the Messiah has a specific prophetic bloodline, including being in the legal lineage of Israel's kings *and* being born of a virgin. Yahshua of Nazareth is the only man in history who fits the profile.

- (938) *God's plan will come to pass through Judah. "Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise. Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's children shall bow down before you."* (Genesis 49:8) Jacob/Israel had twelve sons, and it is here, in his prophetic blessing near the end of his life, that we see Yahweh's pick for which tribe would convey the Messiah to the world. He begins by noting the character of his fourth son, Judah. **"Judah is a lion's whelp. From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him?"** Yes, no one messes with the lion, does he? He has a well deserved reputation as the King of beasts, the authority figure among God's creatures. Thus the messianic prophecy: **"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people...."** Shiloh means "he whose it is," or "to whom it belongs." It's based on a verb (*shalah*) denoting to be at rest, to prosper, or to be at ease—like the young lion Israel was imagining in his mind, the very picture of confident authority backed by awesome strength. The prophecy itself states that once a king from Judah has ascended the throne, no dynasty from another tribe of Israel will supplant him. This was fulfilled in the line of David, after the scepter *did* depart from the tribe of Benjamin. After the kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians, they had no king at all until Herod the Great showed up—but he wasn't an Israelite. He was an Idumean, a descendant of Esau. Thus the "King" who finally revealed Himself as Shiloh—He to whom it (the throne) belongs—was Yahshua, a descendant of Judah through King David.

The prophecy isn't done, however. **"Binding his donkey to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than**

milk.” (Genesis 49:9-12) The donkey and the colt are, of course, prophetic references to the humble mode of transport that Yahshua employed during His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (see Matthew 21:1-9; John 12:12-15). The rest is a reference to His second coming, this time in bloody judgment upon a world that has rejected Him (Isaiah 63:1-4).

Moses has the last word on the messianic destiny of Judah: **“And this he said of Judah: Hear, Yahweh, the voice of Judah, and bring him to his people; Let his hands be sufficient for him, and may You be a help against his enemies.”** (Deuteronomy 33:7) His prayer, in essence, is that the promise made to Abraham would be fulfilled in a son of Judah—that through the sufficiency of His work, all the families of the world *would* be blessed. We who have accepted this blessing with thanksgiving still pray to Father Yahweh, “Bring Him to His people.”

DEFINING MOMENTS

- (939) *Melchizedek is a picture of the coming Messiah.* **“Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.’”** (Genesis 14:18-20) Abram’s encounter with this enigmatic character tells us quite a bit about God’s relationship with mankind. But Melchizedek might have remained a mystery to us, were it not for the commentary we’re given about him in the Book of Hebrews, where he’s described as being **“without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God...a priest continually.”** (Hebrews 7:3) At the very least, Melchizedek is a metaphor for Christ. But many commentators, myself among them, feel that he was probably a theophany—a pre-messianic manifestation of Yahweh in human form, not unlike the “God” who walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden, or the “Angel of Yahweh” who conversed with Abraham before the destruction of Sodom.

As the writer to the Hebrews points out, Melchizedek’s office was the “king of Salem,” that is, the king of peace (*shalom*), but his name means “king of righteousness.” (*Melek* means “king,” and *tsedeq* denotes justice, rightness, righteousness—an ethical, moral standard defined by the nature and commandments of God.) Melchizedek’s symbolic role as “king” is mirrored perfectly in the life and legacy of Yahshua, the “prince of peace” (Isaiah 9:6) who was born of the royal tribe of Judah, in the lineage of King David, as the scriptures demand—and who in His glory is to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16). Thus we read in the

Psalms, “Surely His [Yahweh’s] salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.” (Psalm 85:9-10) These things are *not* coincidental.

Melchizedek was also said to be the priest of the “Most High”—One who is then identified as being the same God Abram serves, later revealed by name: Yahweh. A priest is one who serves as an intermediary or intercessor between God and man. As the writer to the Hebrews points out, priests of the Levitical order of Aaron had to keep getting replaced, because they were “prevented by death from continuing.” (Hebrews 7:23) Yahshua, on the other hand, is a priest of a different order—that of Melchizedek (since you can’t descend from both Judah and Levi). As David prophesied, “**Yahweh has sworn and will not relent, You [referring to Yahshua] are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.**” (Psalm 110:4) In other words, He, being eternal, will *always* be our liaison with Yahweh, the form of deity through which Yahweh chooses to reveal Himself to mortal men. As Yahshua explained to Philip, “**He who has seen Me has seen the Father.**” (John 14:9)

And what else did Melchizedek do to clue us in to his real identity? He brought “bread and wine” to Abram. Once again, the Messianic connection is too blatant to ignore. On the night He was betrayed, “**Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.’**” (Matthew 26:26-28) As we have seen, these two substances figure heavily in the imagery of the Tabernacle. Grain is a recurring symbol of God’s provision, and the bread into which it’s made is a picture of the ultimate expression of that provision—the body of Yahshua the Messiah, broken for us. As an offering, it was always accompanied with olive oil (a metaphor for the Holy Spirit) and was often sprinkled with frankincense as well—a picture of purity achieved through sacrifice. And the cup? Wine oblations accompanied every animal sacrifice. This *nesek*, or drink offering, was a transparent symbol of the blood of Christ poured out on our behalf. It was always poured out on or before the altar, and the amount was invariably the same as that of the oil that was brought with the *minha*, or grain offering, symbolically equating the blood of redemption to the eternal life afforded by God’s Spirit.

- (940) *Abraham’s test was a dress-rehearsal for Yahshua’s sacrifice.* “**Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as**

a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” (Genesis 22:1-2) People who aren't prepared to face the fact of Yahshua's atoning sacrifice are apt to look at this passage and declare that the Hebrews' God, Yahweh, is a cruel and bloodthirsty figment of Abraham's imagination—sort of like Molech was to the Canaanites. Offering a human sacrifice to appease a local deity, hoping to procure some temporal benefit—numerous children or bountiful crops—was not unheard of, even this far back. But notice that Yahweh offered Abraham nothing in return for the life of his son. He just said, “Do it.” That Isaac had been born at all was a miracle, one God had promised and then delivered on. So written between the lines in Yahweh's instructions was a challenge: “You believed Me before, Abraham, and I didn't let you down. Your son Isaac is still the child of promise. Trust Me on this, and do as I ask. I will provide.” Abraham couldn't have known—even after it was all over—that his obedience would give the world a stunningly accurate preview of how Yahweh would provide salvation for the entire world: every detail foreshadows some facet of Yahweh's impending sacrifice of His own Son, Yahshua.

Let's look at those details. **“So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey.”** Yahshua too would begin His journey riding a donkey, amid the optimism and celebration of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. **“...and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son....”** The players in this drama are Abraham (which means “father of many”) playing the role of Father Yahweh, Isaac his son of promise, playing the part of the promised Son of God, Yahshua the Anointed Savior, and two “young men,” servants in Abe's household. These two, I believe, represent the two branches of Yahweh's household of faith, believing Israel and the assembly of Yahshua, the Church, we who are called out to be witnesses of God's unfolding plan.

“...And he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.” We'll get to the wood in a moment. Note that God told Abraham of a specific place where He wanted this act of worship to take place. Earlier it had been described as being “in the land of Moriah,” on “one of the mountains” there. This is the future site of the city of Jerusalem. The ridge that would become identified as Mount Moriah runs roughly north and south, flanked on the west by Mount Zion, and on the east by the Mount of Olives. At its northern end, its highest point would later come to be known as the Bizita Hill, a.k.a. Golgotha, a.k.a. Calvary. Being the highest spot on the “mountain of Moriah,” I believe this is where Abraham took Isaac. **“Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off....”** Yahshua and His Father also made

a journey, and then too the destination only came into view on the “third day.” Their destination was heavenly glory: following a day of sacrifice (Passover), and a day of separation (the Feast of Unleavened Bread), the third day of that journey was a day of celebration—resurrection Sunday (the Feast of Firstfruits).

“And Abraham said to his young men, [the two witnesses, representing Israel and the ekklesia] “Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.” Where did they stay? I’m guessing, of course, but I believe they camped out on the lower plateau of Mount Moriah, the place where the temple of Solomon would eventually stand—a few hundred yards short of the site of the actual sacrifice. **“So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son....”** The “wood of the burnt offering” is seen again in the wooden *stauros*, the upright pole of the cross of Christ. If we reverse-engineer the prophecy, it becomes clear that it wasn’t really the Romans who sent Yahshua to the hill of crucifixion. It was Yahweh Himself. I should reiterate that the word translated “burnt offering” (*olah*) doesn’t really contain the concept of being “burnt.” It’s based on the verb *ala*, meaning to climb, ascend, or go up, which in the *olah* is descriptive of the smoke of a fire, hence the connection. But the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes, “The key appears to be that alone among the Israelite sacrifices the *olah* is wholly burned, rather than partially burned [that is, the fatty portions] and eaten by the worshipers and/or the priest. Thus, the whole animal is brought up to the altar and the whole is offered as a gift in homage to Yahweh. ‘Whole offering’ would be a better rendering in English to convey the theology of the *olah*. It is indeed burned, but the burning is essentially secondary to the giving of the whole creature to Yahweh.” So the burning of the *olah* is in reality a metaphor for judgment—subjection to the “fire,” i.e., the agent that separates the pure from the worthless.

“...And he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ Then he said, ‘Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’” The plot thickens, as they say. Isaac (who, I would guess, was about twelve years old at this time) noticed that they had everything they needed for a sacrifice except for the animal. **“And Abraham said, ‘My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.’ So the two of them went together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order.”** So far, so good, Isaac may have thought, but then Abraham **“...bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son....”** It’s at this point that we wish we had a little more

information. Did Abraham explain to Isaac what was going on? Did Isaac willingly agree that following Yahweh's instructions was the right thing to do, even if it cost him his life? Isaac was a "lad," old enough and strong enough to schlep a load of firewood up the hillside, while his dad was, like, a hundred and ten years old—Isaac could have escaped if he'd really wanted to. But no, I believe Abraham's faith in Yahweh had, long before this, been taught to his son. Both of them, I'm convinced, were sure that if Abraham slew his son as God had instructed, that God would also raise him from the dead. His birth had been miraculous; his resurrection would be no more so. So they proceeded in utterly unshakable faith.

"But the Angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!'" At this point, some of us would have said, "Gimme a minute, Lord. I'm a little busy right now. As soon as I've cut my son's throat and got this fire going, I'll be right with you." We need to learn to be not only obedient to Yahweh, but also sensitive to His voice. We need to learn that God doesn't always give us all the information up front. And in these Last Days we're living in, we need to learn that He has His timing down to the nanosecond, and He apparently likes to cut things close, if you'll pardon the expression. Fortunately, Abraham was listening. **"So he said, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me....'"** Nor would Yahweh withhold *His* only Son from us—which is the only reason I'm here to write about it.

"Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns." The ram (a mature male "lamb") is a transparent metaphor for the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," i.e., Yahshua. The thicket is reminiscent of the crown of thorns He wore as He was crucified. Note that the ram's horns indicate authority or power. The point is that Yahshua was not crucified in weakness. He wasn't hunted down, captured, and killed for his crimes by a higher authority, though that was the story published by the Jewish religious leaders and their Roman allies. No, He was restrained by *His own power*: He, being the only one whose death could make a difference on our behalf, was "caught" on the horns of a dilemma, so to speak. If he walked away from this death (as He was certainly able to do) He would have been untrue to His own nature—love. So at this point the metaphor shifts: **"Abraham [standing in for Yahweh] went and took the ram [symbolic of Yahshua], and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son."** That's the nature of Yahshua's sacrifice: His life was offered up in place of ours—it's a substitute. And because of this, we can now become adopted children of Yahweh ourselves! **"And Abraham called the name of the**

place, Yahweh-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, “In the Mount of Yahweh it shall be provided.” (Genesis 22:3-14) That’s now past tense. In the “Mount of Yahweh,” that is, Moriah, it was provided. Now it’s up to us to accept God’s gift of the substitutionary ram, for if we do not, *we* will have to atone for our own sins—we will be the burnt offering.

- (941) *The Master’s bride must come from His Father’s house.* “Now my master [Abraham] made me swear, saying, ‘You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell; but you shall go to my father’s house and to my family, and take a wife for my son.’” (Genesis 24:37-38) There is more to this than mere history. The symbols of the Moriah experience continue: As before, Abraham represents Yahweh, and Isaac stands in for the *real* Son of promise, Yahshua. The issue being decided is who is going to become Isaac’s (i.e., Yahshua’s) bride. Abraham gave His servant strict instructions: he was not to espouse Isaac to any of the pagan women from the communities that surrounded them, for even though they might make good matches from the world’s point of view, they wouldn’t from God’s. The one thing that would sanctify a marriage, the one thing that would make it truly blessed—a common faith in Yahweh—was not to be found among them. So Abraham’s servant (metaphorically, any servant of Yahweh) was instructed to be selective, patient, and resourceful in finding Isaac’s bride—going to great lengths to find her, avoiding what was merely attractive, convenient, or available.

The point is obvious. In order to become part of the ekklesia, the bride of Christ, we must be part of Yahweh’s household. That is, we must have a relationship in faith with our Creator, not with the world. If you take a pagan, stick him in a church pew and put a hymnal in his hand, you can’t expect him to magically become a “Christian.” Oh, you might induce him to clean up his language, stop kicking the dog, and drop money in the offering plate. But in the end, without a fundamental inward change of spiritual address, all you’ll really have is a well-behaved pagan. Baptize a heathen, and all you’ve got is a wet heathen. It’s not a question of conduct, appearance, or convenience. It’s a question of relationship. Servants of God are instructed to be discerning—resisting the temptation to pair Isaac with a pagan bride—that is, to compromise with the world’s values and practices in order to gain prestige, power, or popularity. Yahshua made this abundantly clear in the warnings given to the churches in Pergamos, Thyatira, and Sardis, in Revelation 2.

Pagans (and other mis-believers) can, of course, *become* related to Yahweh—through adoption, as it were. (You don’t have to be born into a Christian family to become a believer; nor will being born into a Christian

family *make* you a believer.) In order to understand (in this context, anyway) how the process of becoming part of the bride of Christ unfolds, let's return to the text, and be prepared to stretch God's metaphor a little. **"Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her."** (Genesis 24:67) What is "Sarah's tent?" Sarah had been Abraham's wife, Isaac's mother. So in this elaborate metaphor, Sarah is a type of the Holy Spirit of Yahweh. Moving "into her tent" is a picture of spiritual regeneration, the act of being "born from above" that Yahshua described in John 3. It is only upon being indwelt with Yahweh's Spirit that we become "the bride" of Yahshua.

Compare the imagery of Isaac's marriage to Rebekah with Yahshua's words: **"If you love Me, keep My commandments."** The foremost of these commandments is to trust Him. **"And I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."** You've heard me say that *the Ruach Qodesh* is feminine in character (indicated by "Her" role in our lives as well as the gender of the Hebrew words describing Her.) Don't let the masculine pronouns for the Holy Spirit here throw you. In the original Greek, they're neutral: "It." But beyond that, the Father (Yahweh), His Spirit (our heavenly "Mother"), and the Son (God's Messiah, Yahshua) are all seen as having *the same identity* here—interchangeable in persona, if not in form: they're all the same God, just manifested in different ways. **"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."** In the terms of our present precept, Sarah (metaphorical of Yahweh's Spirit) was "in"—was *part of*—Isaac, and he, with his bride Rebekah, dwelled "in her tent" in a matrix of love. **"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."** (John 14:15-21) Love happens when we dwell in wedded bliss with the Son of Promise in the shelter of the Holy Spirit.

- (942) *Yahweh allows us to "wrestle" with Him.* **"Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, 'Let Me go, for the day breaks.' But he said, 'I will not let You go unless You bless me!'"** (Genesis 32:24-26) This is one of the most revealing passages in all of scripture, mostly because it's so counterintuitive, so contrary to the way we normally think of God. Yahweh is Almighty God, Creator of the universe, so big and

powerful that we can't even begin to comprehend His greatness, and so holy that we can't appear in His presence in our natural state and survive the encounter—His very essence would destroy us as light destroys the darkness, not out of malice, but simply by its nature. But here we see Jacob wrestling with God who has assumed the form of a man (Hebrew *iysh*: a human being, i.e., a person, in contrast to deity).

Even here, we can sort of comprehend it, since we're familiar with the concept of *Immanuel*, Yahshua coming as a human being to walk among men: God with us. But what we (or is it just me?) can't quite get a grip on is how God could wrestle with Jacob *and not prevail against him*—struggling with him as an equally matched “opponent.” I guess I've always had it in the back of my mind that even when God condescended to interact with man (which He did because He loves us and seeks to develop a rapport with us), He did so under “false pretenses”—that is, He merely refrained from using the awesome power that was His by right and nature. I imagined that He was just “holding back,” concealing his divine attributes, and that even in His humanity Yahshua actually retained the power (at least some of it) that was rightfully His as God—though He refused to use it for vindication or defense because of His love for us. But this passage has shifted my perception, and I'm even more awestruck than I was before. It appears that God *actually* emptied Himself of His divine power for the purpose of edifying Jacob—He didn't merely assume the form of a man, but He *became* one, with all the frailty, risk, and limitation that implies. The implication is that what He did here for Jacob, He also did for us, becoming a mere man in the person of Yahshua of Nazareth, stripping Himself not only of heaven's awesome glory, but also of every vestige of divine power and knowledge, holding nothing in reserve.

If I'm right about this, then the ramifications are stunning. (1) The *only* thing empowering Yahshua during his first-century advent was the Holy Spirit of Yahweh—the very Spirit that indwells *us* as believers. The same “power source” that fueled Yahshua's miracles resides within us today. (2) The knowledge, insight, and perception that Yahshua displayed were due to two factors, both of which are available to us: the written Word of God, and the illumination of God's Spirit. He saw and understood the things that Yahweh had communicated in the Scriptures—things that nobody else comprehended—because He was in perfect conformity with God's Spirit, who communicated with Him freely and naturally. And (3), the Messiah's perfect, sinless walk before God allowed the Spirit to be manifested without restriction through what He did and said. The only reason the Spirit's power is not similarly displayed in our lives is that we (unlike Yahshua) are fallen creatures whose sin and disbelief quenches and

grieves the Spirit of God dwelling within us, to one extent or another. I'm not suggesting that if we try hard enough to harness the Spirit's energy we can become, just like Yahshua, unfettered channels for the power of God. Yahshua's soul was Yahweh's own life residing in the shell of a mortal man. It was not encumbered with Adam's sin nature as ours are. No, I'm only saying that we believers fall far short of our potential as mirrors of Christ's love and power in this world because we restrict and hamper the Spirit of Yahweh who dwells within us.

We are told, **"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."** (James 4:7) But what happens if we resist *Yahweh*? This is where our Genesis 32 passage gains traction: unlike the devil, Yahweh will neither "flee" from us nor crush us with His awesome strength. Rather, He is willing to "wrestle" with us all night long. That is, He gives us the opportunity to try Him, test Him, probe for weaknesses, and find out through experience what He's "made of." But there are some things we need to notice about this process. First, we can't "beat" Yahweh: He will be proven worthy, true, and faithful at every turn. Second, though we might run away from Him, He will never flee from us. As long as we're willing to challenge Him in faith, as long as we "wrestle" as honest seekers after the truth, He will never give up on us. Third, our wrestling match with God cannot go on forever. When the "day breaks," a decision has to have been made. This dawning can represent either our own physical death, or, for the last generation (the one that walks the earth today, if I'm not mistaken), the commencement of the Kingdom of God on earth.

How did this wrestling match turn out for Jacob? **"So He said to him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Jacob.' And He said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.'" (Genesis 32:27-28)** His new name means, "God prevails," or "Prevails with God." It wasn't that Jacob/Israel had "beaten" Yahweh, or vice versa. It was that his objective in wrestling with Him all night had been achieved: Jacob had stubbornly held on until God had blessed him. Thus he was no longer the "Cheater," the "Supplanter." Now he was the one who had tried God and found Him to be true: Jacob had prevailed with God, and Yahweh had likewise prevailed with Him. By the way, in case you're not convinced that it was actually a theophany—a manifestation of God in human form—with which Jacob had been wrestling, the issue is clarified by the prophet Hosea: **"He [Jacob] took his brother by the heel in the womb, and in his strength he struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; He wept, and sought favor from Him. He found Him in Bethel, and there He spoke to us—that is, Yahweh, God of hosts. Yahweh is His memorial name."** (Hosea 12:3-5)

The Genesis record continues. **“Then Jacob asked, saying, ‘Tell me Your name, I pray.’ And He said, ‘Why is it that you ask about My name?...”** Twice in scripture a theophany is asked his name, and both times this rather evasive answer is given. The other instance is in Judges 13, where the “Angel of Yahweh” is announcing the miraculous conception of Samson to his parents. As far as I can tell, the reason for God’s elusiveness is that He didn’t want to leave a false impression. If He said, “My name is Yahweh,” as He had to Moses at the burning bush, Jacob (and Manoah) might have gotten the impression that “God” was restricted to a human form, when the reality was so far beyond this it was virtually incomprehensible. But if He had used the name of His future human manifestation, Yahshua, that too would have been misleading, for the Messiah’s name implies His mission: Yahshua (or Yahushua) means “Yahweh is salvation.” His first century advent would prove the name to be matched to the mission. But here in Genesis (and in Judges) although the man/messenger was indeed God in human form, the immediate task at hand was not the salvation of mankind, so the name of the theophany was withheld.

“And He blessed him there. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: ‘For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.’” (Genesis 32:29-30) For his part, Jacob, now Israel, was under no illusions: the One with which he had wrestled was God in human form. The name he gave the place reflects this understanding. Peniel (or Penuel) is made of two Hebrew words: *Panah* means to turn, as in, to turn to face someone; and *El* is the generic word for God. So Peniel means “turning to God” or “facing God.” The remarkable thing, as Jacob noted, is that one *can* “face God” and live to tell the tale. Actually, facing God is the *only* way one’s life can be preserved.

Messianic Messages II: The Egyptian Experience

The family of Abraham had been selected by Yahweh to be the vehicle through which “all the families of the earth would be blessed.” As it would turn out, this “vehicle” would have to be something of an “all terrain” model, for there would be bumps in the road, obstacles to overcome, detours into uncharted territory, and hijackers to elude. This wouldn't be a drag race—a sprint in a straight line from point A to point B. It would be more like a cross between a steeplechase and an explorer's expedition: the destination was defined (sort of), but not the path leading to it. The chosen family had no road map, no instructions to speak of, no Bible to go by. Their knowledge of the God who had set them apart was limited to treasured stories of the brief and sporadic encounters their patriarchs had had with Him. He had given them sweeping but imprecise promises, and equally vague instructions: *separate yourselves from the nations around you; go to a land I'll show you; walk blamelessly before Me.*

As time went on, the promises would become more specific, and the Instructions would eventually be so explicit they'd take on a life of their own. But even in the hazy and indistinct beginning of this journey, glimpses of the goal were given to God's people. Like dabs of paint in an impressionist's masterpiece, each new spot of color contributed to the lucidity and definition of the overall picture, though it may not have seemed particularly significant on its own. At the time, only the Artist knew what each brushstroke would mean. But we, having the privilege of standing back and seeing the finished work from the proper perspective, are in a position to comprehend how all those seemingly unimportant and unrelated details work together to form a cohesive and comprehensive whole.

The question is, do we? What do we see in the finished picture? Do we perceive it at all? The painting, a portrait of the Son of Man, is entitled: “Yahweh is Salvation.” Here it is, hanging in a public place for all to see. And here we are, for whatever reason, in the same place. Some of us intended to come here to see it, and some happened upon this place quite by accident. But we're all here now. So let's do a man-on-the-street interview with some of these folks...

“You, sir, what do you think of the picture?” *I don't have an opinion.* “Is that from ignorance, or apathy?” *I don't know, and I don't care.*

“Okay, moving along then. You, Ma'am?” *Oh, it's lovely. I'd like to have something like this hanging in my spare bedroom. It would go nicely with the drapes in there.*

“Alrighty, then. You, sir, with the magnifying glass. Any opinion you’d like to share with us?” *I’m the art critic for the Times. Of course I have an opinion. I’ll admit: the brushwork is remarkable—the craftsmanship, the juxtaposition of color, the richness of the texture...* “So you like the painting?” *Like it? No, don’t be an idiot. It’s too pedestrian to be taken seriously—too simplistic and unsophisticated. He paints as if there’s such a thing as absolute truth. I’m told this is a self portrait—a subject I find beneath the calling of a true artist. I’ve never even heard of this guy. What’s his name? Yahweh? If he wanted to put “Salvation” in the title, he should have painted something of great social importance, you know, like saving the whales or finding a cure for AIDS!*

“I see. Well then. You, young man. Can you tell me what you think?” *Yes, I’ll tell you, he says, as a tear rolls down his cheek. This is the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen. I took two busses and a subway to get here. And now that I’m here, I don’t think I can ever go home again. You see here, where the Artist sacrificed Himself so that I could live? I’ve been looking for this all my life. If you stand back far enough, you can see that it’s not just a picture of a man—it’s Love, Mercy, and Truth personified. And when you look more closely, every brushstroke, every highlight, every shadow, contributes something wonderful to the story. It’s almost as if it’s alive—and the Life within it is contagious.*

Yes, we don’t all see the same thing when we look at Yahweh’s portrait of His Anointed Redeemer. What we see, or don’t see, depends as much on our own attitudes as upon what God has placed before our eyes. In short, we see what we want to see—we see what we *choose* to see. This portrayal of God’s was not always as clear as it is today. During the age of the patriarchs, it was only seemingly random brushstrokes on an otherwise blank canvas. Progress on the painting, slow and sporadic, was made between Moses and Malachi. But then, early in the First Century, Yahweh labored with sudden intensity to finish His work, though the gallery (our world) was restricted by its architecture and hampered by its lighting. But now, two thousand years later, we are no longer handicapped by poor sight lines and dim oil lamps—we are blessed with an unrestricted view of God’s finished work, lit with brilliant sunlight, for “the Sun of righteousness has arisen with healing in His wings.” At this late date, we (and I mean the whole human race) can see Yahshua more clearly than we ever could before, if only we’ll choose to look at God’s portrait through eyes of faith and trust.

But let us not forget that the Yahshua of history and faith is only a mortal representation, a *picture* of the love of God. Though He’s God incarnate, Yahshua is not *all there is* of God, but is only a pale shadow of Yahweh’s actual being. The day is coming, however, and soon, when Yahweh will actually walk among us as King Yahshua, the reigning, glorified, undiminished personification of God’s Love. The Picture will no longer be mankind’s sole source of insight about

Yahweh's salvation, for we will rejoice in the very presence of the One about whom the Picture was painted. The reality will have overtaken the symbol. The very *dimensions* that He laid aside in the process of communicating Yahweh's love to us will be restored. And we will at last know as we are known.

In the present world, however, we must content ourselves with what we can see, if not with the eyes of understanding, then with the eyes of faith. Until King Yahshua walks the earth in glory, we must continue to study the portrait that Yahweh left behind. After all, false Christs abound. If we don't know what the real Messiah looks like, we won't be able to identify the phony ones.

JOSEPH

(943) *The Messiah's authority will breed animosity among men.* **"Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. So he said to them, 'Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.' And his brothers said to him, 'Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?' So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words."** (Genesis 37:5-8) The story of Joseph is a rich repository of parallels to the life of the Messiah. One commentator counted forty-two places where Joseph is seen as a "type" of Christ. I don't intend to examine them all, but we would do well to explore some of the more obvious Messianic Messages in Joseph's story. Joseph's brothers were already envious of him, for his father Israel had given him a tunic of many colors, a gift that betrayed his special affection for the son of his old age, and more to the point, the firstborn son of Rachel, the wife he actually loved. Singling out Joseph for blessing was thus seen by Joseph's brothers as an insult to their mothers. Between the lines, a subtle truth emerges: God's affection for those indwelt by His Holy Spirit is seen as an affront to those who have some other spirit within them. Just as Israel loved all of his children but had special fondness for Rachel's son Joseph, Yahweh loves all people—so much so that He sacrificed Himself to save them—but He has a special bond with His Spirit-indwelt children. It's a different kind of relationship altogether, not Creator to creature, but Parent to child. And the world hates and envies us as a result.

So with one strike against him already, Joseph announced that, according to his dream, his brothers would bow down to him. Neither he nor his brothers had any doubt as to what the imagery meant. Strike two. He then had another dream, and as before, immediately spoke of it to

those who might be expected to see themselves as being on the losing end of this thing. **“Then [Joseph] dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, ‘Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me.’ So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, ‘What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?’ And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind.”** (Genesis 37:9-11) Strike three. If Joseph had been a bit more mature or circumspect, he might have kept the matter to himself, but he was just a kid, and a spoiled one at that—he (apparently) had no idea what effect such talk might have on his family. Israel was the only one who perceived that the dreams came from somewhere—or rather, some One—and that God might indeed be telling them all something important.

What that “something” was would become apparent as the events of Joseph’s life transpired. We’re all familiar with the story. Through a series of unforeseeable incidents and remarkable “coincidences,” Joseph’s faith in Yahweh elevated him to the top position of leadership in the kingdom, second only to Pharaoh himself—putting him in a position in which he could save his “world,” if only they’d heed his warning and take his advice—which they did. His brothers did indeed end up bowing down to him, just as his dream had predicted. What’s not so obvious is that all of this was a dress rehearsal for a much larger drama. God’s Son would, like Joseph, announce His destiny to His brothers, find Himself betrayed and sold for the price of a slave, unexpectedly rise to receive the throne of the Kingdom, and offer salvation to a hungry, dying world. The only question yet to be answered is, will *our* world welcome His reign and accept His provision for the spiritual famine that’s ravaging the land, or will we, in our jealous envy, continue to hate and resent Him? One way or another, every knee *will* bow before Yahshua.

- (944) *Innocence breeds insight.* **“And Joseph said to [Pharaoh’s chief cupbearer], ‘This is the interpretation of [your dream]: The three branches are three days. Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler. But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon.’”** (Genesis 40:12-15) There is an interesting theme that recurs sporadically throughout the Bible. Lots of folks are given dreams and visions, but only those who are spiritually attuned are able to determine what they mean. Joseph’s rise from prison to palace was fueled by just such an ability. Another

remarkable example is Daniel, whose interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's "statue" dream not only kept his head on his shoulders, but also gave us invaluable information about the future course of world history—including events that haven't to this day come to pass. Yahshua Himself was so spiritually astute, He didn't even need to wait for someone to have a dream. He knew what people were thinking before they did—even if they weren't willing to admit the truth to themselves.

The gift of insight, the ability to see the needle of truth in a haystack of mere information, seems to me to be directly proportional to a person's willingness to surrender to the leading of the Holy Spirit. I'm not talking about flawless behavior, you understand, but having a heart for God. The calling of the prophet Isaiah is telling. **"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory!' And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke."** In theory, anybody might have received a vision like this, but only one (like Isaiah) who was both spiritually responsive and acutely aware of his inadequacy before God would have reacted as he did. **"So I said: 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of hosts.'"** Fortunately, Yahweh has a remedy for our uncleanness. **"Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips. Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.' Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'"** (Isaiah 6:1-8) That's the common thread that runs through the stories of spiritually aware men and women from one end of the Bible to the other—a willingness to be cleansed by God and sent out to a lost world on His behalf. To these people, Yahweh gives insight, which I would define as the ability to perceive the true nature of things, regardless of an ocean of "conventional wisdom" to the contrary.

It might be instructive to review a few instances of the converse: where Yahweh *withheld* the ability to perceive truth in response to a rejection of His Spirit. First, we see the stubborn and arrogant attitude of the Pharaoh of the exodus, and note that God "hardened his heart." (Exodus 10:27, etc.) Isaiah's first task upon making himself available to Yahweh was to go to the rebellious house of Israel and pronounce spiritual blindness upon them: **"And He said, 'Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing,**

but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.” Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.” (Isaiah 6:9-10) Then, we are reminded of Paul’s dire warning to those “who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” He says that they “became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.... Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness... [and] vile passions.... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind.” (Romans 1:18-28) In other words, because of their active unwillingness to accept the truth, Yahweh relieved all of these people of the ability to see it at all. He didn’t abrogate their free will; on the contrary, He determined to forever honor the disastrous choice they had already made.

Like Joseph in prison, we today—if we’re sensitive to the voice of Yahweh’s *Ruach Qodesh*—have the opportunity to interpret the disturbing “dreams” of a lost and searching world. Joseph was able to give Pharaoh’s butler good news, but the baker wasn’t so lucky, though his dream had been superficially similar. If we listen to the Spirit’s testimony within us, we can say to some today, “Take heart. Even though things may look impossibly bleak right now, the King is preparing to vindicate you, for He knows you, and He knows that you trust in Him.” But as Joseph had nothing but bad news for the baker, we too must caution the unbelieving world, “Beware, for your trials are just beginning. The King has perceived that you are neither His friend, His servant, nor His child. Therefore, repent, I beg you, before He locks the door you have already slammed in His face.”

- (945) *God will place Someone wise and discerning over the affairs of the world.* “Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:33) At this point, Joseph had interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams, and told him the good news and the bad news: the land would see seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Having delivered the data, he now proffered the advice: *do something* about it, while there’s still time. “Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine.” (Genesis 41:34-36) Christ has also told us (today’s world) that the time of abundance will end, to be followed by seven years of spiritual famine. And He has added to the raw data this wise counsel: “Do not lay up

for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19-21) His advice to us is thus more or less the same as Joseph’s was to Pharaoh: *Take whatever is necessary to sustain your life and put in a safe place—somewhere where the uncertainties of the world cannot affect it.*

“So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?’” This is one of those delicious moments where the scriptural record lets us sort of fill in the blank with our own imaginations. The vizier looks sideways at the captain of the guard, who trades glances with the chief cupbearer, as if to say, “You’re kidding me, right? The guy who read his dream and figured out how to prepare for it is standing right in front of him. Yeah, I think we can find somebody like that. . . .” “Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.’ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.’” (Genesis 41:37-41) What we tend to forget is that we still have a “recommendation” to make to our King, Yahweh. Who would we like to see put in charge of saving Egypt—or the world? Are we going to vote that the One who single-handedly provided the means of salvation for all mankind be “set over” the kingdom (which is so slam-dunk obvious it’s silly), or are we going to recommend that somebody else—or nobody at all—be made responsible for our destiny? In the end, just as in Joseph’s day, God lets us decide who we’d like to be in control. But now, as then, He’s going to do what’s right. He’s going to set Yahshua “over all the land,” and “all His people shall be ruled according to His word.”

- (946) *A ministry of salvation begins at the age of thirty.* “Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:46) It doesn’t mean much by itself, I suppose, but taken in tandem with a thousand other details, the age of the commencement of Joseph’s service is one more indication that his life was meant to be a dress rehearsal for the Messiah’s—and is therefore significant. We read in Luke’s Gospel, “Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age.” (Luke 3:23)

This could be a coincidence, of course, but I don’t think it is. Yahweh went out of His way to reinforce the idea when He defined the service period of the Levites (the priestly tribe) as beginning at thirty years of age:

“All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel numbered, by their families and by their fathers’ houses, from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who came to do the work of service and the work of bearing burdens in the tabernacle of meeting—those who were numbered were eight thousand five hundred and eighty.” (Numbers 4:46-48)

Interesting, how that’s phrased: “the work of service and the work of bearing burdens in the tabernacle” began at thirty. The whole point of the tabernacle, as we have seen, was to present a complex and beautiful picture of our approach to God through the work of Yahshua the Messiah. His work was one of service (healing the sick, raising the dead, and so forth) and of bearing the spiritual “burden” of the tabernacle (fulfilling its symbols, especially giving His life as a sacrificial ransom for many).

One didn’t *become* a Levite at thirty, of course. One was a “Levite” on the day he was born. Moreover, Levites actually began working in their assigned roles at the age of *twenty-five* (see Numbers 8:24 and [Precept #983](#)). But they weren’t *numbered* into the Levitical ranks until they turned thirty. In the same way, Yahshua was Yahweh’s Son on the day He entered the world, and being found as a man, He humbled Himself, learning His adoptive father’s trade and studying the scriptures like any devout young Israelite man would have done. It was only when He turned thirty that His identity could be verified through performing the specific ministry God had assigned to Him. It was only at this age that He could officially begin to fulfill the destiny that His heritage had assigned to Him—becoming the Savior of Mankind.

(947) *Our sin against God requires a blood sacrifice.* **“Then they said to one another, ‘We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.’ And Reuben answered them, saying, ‘Did I not speak to you, saying, “Do not sin against the boy”; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.”** (Genesis 42:21-22) Over twenty years had gone by, and Joseph’s brothers still harbored the guilt of their secret sin, as if they had betrayed him only yesterday. Reuben, Israel’s firstborn, understood as none of the others did that a sin against Joseph was in fact a sin against their father (Genesis 37:22, 30). He also understood that even though his intentions toward Joseph had not been quite as evil as those of the other brothers, all of them were equally guilty before God, and Joseph’s blood was now required of them.

But how? Their lives were not in immediate danger. At this point in the story, the vice-Pharaoh (the incognito Joseph) had demanded that to prove they weren’t spies, they must bring their youngest brother back to

Egypt with them—Benjamin, the only living son (as far as they knew) of Israel’s late beloved wife Rachel. Israel’s hope had been reflected in the name he gave his infant boy: “son of the right hand.” One’s “right hand” was the place of honor and strength; there was no question of Israel’s affection, even obsession, for the lad. Having lost Joseph, he would do *anything* to protect Benjamin. So as the famine in Canaan wore on, Israel adamantly refused to send young Benjamin to Egypt with his brothers—until it became clear that without Egyptian grain, his whole family, including Benjamin, would perish.

Was Yahweh’s conundrum any different? The spiritual famine that was ravaging the earth could not be solved by ignoring it in heaven, and it was clear to Him (as all things are) that only by sending His beloved Son into the world—into harm’s way—that those who depended upon Him could be saved. Moreover, just as Benjamin was perceived as a substitute for Joseph, Yahshua would be offered up as a substitute for Adam and all of his progeny—us. Reuben had correctly noted that Joseph’s blood would be required of the brothers. But who would actually be making the sacrifice? Not the brothers, and not even young Benjamin. It was *Israel*, who by sending Benjamin, the Son of his right hand, was a type of Yahweh sending Yahshua, the Son of *His* Right Hand.

- (948) *Yahweh can use man’s evil as an agent for the greater good.* **“Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph; does my father still live?’ But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Please come near to me.’ So they came near. Then he said: ‘I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.’”** (Genesis 45:3-5) It was one of the most dramatic and emotional moments in the entire Bible: Joseph, after concealing his identity for what must have seemed like an eternity to him, at last took the “mask” off and told his brothers who he really was. Why had he waited? I believe he wanted to find out how they felt about their treachery after all these years. Were they repentant, or did they still harbor hatred and envy? Did they acknowledge their guilt, or were they glad Joseph was gone? His question was answered with the exchange recorded in our [previous](#) [precept](#): **“We are truly guilty concerning our brother... Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.”** However, having seen God’s hand at work in his life, Joseph wasn’t thinking about revenge, but about forgiveness.

This scene is another dress rehearsal, this time for a play that still is yet to be performed in our day—the final reconciliation of the nation of Israel with her Messiah. The parallels are stunning. Having betrayed their

Kinsman for the price of a slave, Israel has now fallen into a state of spiritual famine: they are starving for their God, who over the last two millennia has become a total stranger to them. He didn't leave them, however—*they left Him*, when they crucified His Messiah and traded in the Torah for the rabbinical fables of the Talmud. Long before Joseph and his brothers met face to face, he had *already* provided the means for their salvation. And before he finally revealed his true identity, he had *already* delivered the sustenance they so desperately needed. In the same way, salvation was provided long ago by Yahshua's sacrificial act. But He will also physically deliver them from national extinction *before* He unveils His identity to them—during the battle of Magog. (See Ezekiel 38 and 39.) His unveiling—His *revelation*, if you will—will take place four or five years later, if I've got the timeline right.

What am I talking about? Zechariah describes the scene: **“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem.”** (Zechariah 12:10-11) Who did the inhabitants of Jerusalem “pierce”? It was Yahshua. The same thoughts that raced through the minds of Joseph's brothers when they finally realized who he was will strike the Last-Days Jewish remnant like a thunderbolt: *Oh my God! We killed the Messiah!* Will they be “dismayed,” like Joseph's brother's were? Yeah, I can pretty much guarantee it.

When will this take place? On the definitive Day of Atonement (October 3, 2033, if I'm not mistaken), when Yahshua the Messiah returns to earth as its glorified King, splitting the Mount of Olives, from which He ascended 2000 years previously. (See Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:9-11.) The remnant's very prophesied reaction to Yahshua's return is the definitive requirement of *Yom Kippurim*: **“And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before Yahweh your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people.’** (Leviticus 23:26-30) Joseph forgave his brothers because they were repentant, “afflicted in soul” for their crimes, and they were more than willing to rest in Joseph's provision, for they had wisely concluded that they could not save themselves.

But the story's not quite done. After the death of Israel their father, the brothers once again came to fear that their past misdeeds would be held against them—that Joseph's kindness toward them was but a temporary reprieve designed to honor the old man who had loved him so much. So they sent emissaries to Joseph to plead for forgiveness, though it had already been granted long before this. **“I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you. Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.’ And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, ‘Behold, we are your servants.’”** Gee, I guess the dreams he'd had all those years ago were true after all. **“Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?’** Well, that's refreshing, I must say. Most powerful politicians these days think they *are*. **“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.”** (Genesis 50:17-21) Again, the parallels to scriptural history are too blatant to ignore. The Jewish religious leaders too intended “evil” against Yahshua. In getting the Romans to execute Him, they meant to be rid of Him forever, maintaining their own pitiful status quo in the process. But Yahweh used their animosity to bring about good—the ultimate good for all mankind. Through Yahshua's death the promise Yahweh had made to Abram would at last be fulfilled. Every family on earth *would* be blessed: a way had been found to restore the fellowship lost through Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, available through trust in Yahshua to every man who had ever lived. **“Now therefore, do not be afraid.”**

THE EXODUS

- (949) *The Passover Lamb must enter the household of Israel on the tenth day of Nisan.* **“Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household.... Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.”** (Exodus 12:3, 6) We discussed this briefly in [Mitzvah #460](#), but it really deserves a more detailed explanation. Passover (a.k.a. “the Day of Preparation” for the Feast of Unleavened Bread—the day upon which the paschal lamb was to be slain in the late afternoon) was to fall on the 14th day of the month of Nisan. In the year 33 A.D., that day fell on Friday, April 1.

Using the day by day record in the Gospel of Mark, we can work backwards to reconstruct the events leading up to this, and determine the days upon which they took place. Mark 14:1 says, “**After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.**” He’s referring to the events of Chapters 12 and 13—in which Yahshua confounded the Pharisees and taught His disciples—notably, delivering the Olivet Discourse. Since Passover fell on Friday Nisan 14, he’s talking about Wednesday and Thursday (*after which* came the Passover). Wednesday Nisan 12, then, begins at Mark 11:20—“**Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.**” So these next words mark the commencement of the events of Tuesday, Nisan 11: “**Now on the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry.**” (Mark 11:12) Seeing a fig tree with no fruit on it, He cursed it, the results of which were noted the following morning.

Mark notes that this was the “next day.” The next day after *what*? What happened on Monday, Nisan 10? Mark records that as Yahshua walked with His disciples toward Jerusalem from Bethany, He asked them to borrow a donkey’s colt for Him (See Zechariah 9:9). Mounted upon it, He entered Jerusalem amid a throng of worshippers who had gathered along the road to witness the High Priest bringing the “official” Passover lamb into the city from Bethlehem—as required in Exodus 12:3. Recognizing Yahshua, the crowd turned their attention to Him, crying out, “**Hosanna!** [that is, “Save now!”] **Blessed is He who comes in the name of Yahweh! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!**” (Mark 11:9-10; cf. Psalm 118:26) The throng recognized that Yahshua had indeed come in the name of Yahweh. His recent miracles had proved it beyond the shadow of a doubt. What they didn’t understand (yet) was that *He* was to be the very Passover Lamb they had come to see—as John the Baptist had put it, “**the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**” (John 1:29)

So the precise requirements of our present precept were met by Yahshua: He entered the household of Israel on the tenth day of Nisan, allowing the people of Jerusalem to become thoroughly familiar with Him—in person, not just by reputation—just as the Law prescribed. But there is more to it: the timing of the Triumphal Entry fulfills more than just Exodus 12:3. Daniel had been told: “**Seventy weeks** [literally, *sevens*] **are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two**

weeks.” (Daniel 9:24-25) A “week” is seven of something, in this case, a specified time unit. It could be a day, a year, or some other length of time. By reverse-engineering some of the prophecies that are expressed in the terms of this system (note that “time, times and half a time,” 42 months, and 1,260 days all seem to refer to the same span of time) it is apparent that Daniel’s “week” is seven 360-day “prophetic” years. The prophecy is given in terms of one of several calendars in use simultaneously in the world Daniel was familiar with—a schematic 360-day “year” of twelve 30-day months, with a five day compensator tacked onto the end. (The Babylonians, like the Jews, knew perfectly well that a solar year was about 365¼ days long, but the schematic year made dates and schedules far easier to keep track of than either a lunar calendar or a goofy system like the one we use.) Interestingly, Yahweh never actually calls this time period a “year.”

The coming of “Messiah the Prince,” then, would occur precisely 69 “sevens” of “prophetic years,” that is, 483 of them, after a “command to restore and build Jerusalem” was issued. That multiplies out to 173,880 days. This very decree was recorded in Nehemiah 2:1-6, dated to **“the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes.”** When? Allow me to quote from Future History:

“Most scholars (including the esteemed Sir Robert Anderson, whom I believe was the first to calculate this) peg the twentieth year of Artaxerxes at 445 B.C. It’s simple arithmetic. His father, Xerxes (a.k.a. Ahasuerus, husband of Queen Esther) died in 465; add twenty years to that and you come to 445. But they fail to take into account the little drama that transpired following the death (okay, *murder*) of Xerxes. The king had been killed in his sleep by an ambitious fellow named Artabanus, the king’s vizier or bodyguard, who also (according to Aristotle) killed the heir apparent, Darius. Another royal son, Hustapis, was out of the country, safe for the moment. That left Artaxerxes, a mere teenager at the time. Artabanus left him alive, figuring he could rule through him as regent. Then, seven months later, he changed his mind and tried to kill him, too. But as luck would have it, the lad killed Artabanus instead. Hustapis showed up shortly thereafter and tried to claim the throne, so Artaxerxes killed him as well. These guys needed a Constitution in the worst way. Anyway, all this maneuvering took the better part of a year: thus Artie wasn’t able to assume the throne until 464. That would make the starting date of Daniel’s prophecy the 1st of Nisan, 444 B.C.

“From this date, we must count **“seven weeks and sixty two weeks.”** That is, there would be forty-nine years until Jerusalem’s “street and wall” were

built, “**even in troublesome times**”—the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah relate just how troublesome they were—and another 434 years, or 483 years total, “**until Messiah the Prince.**” 483 years times 360 days—the length of the Hebrew prophetic year—comes out to 173,880 days, or 476 solar years and 25 days inclusive, i.e., to the 10th of Nisan, or March 28, A.D. 33. And on March 28, A.D. 33, if my calculations are correct, Yahshua of Nazareth rode into Jerusalem on a donkey amid the adulation of a teeming throng of Jewish worshipers in town for the Passover holiday. Messiah the Prince had come.”

The 10th of Nisan is the very day Yahweh had specified for the Passover lamb to be brought into the household. So Yahshua not only fulfilled the day required by prophecy, but also the year. The fact that it would be centuries before anybody figured this out doesn’t make it any less amazing. But it all conspires to disqualify any rival claimant to the title “Messiah the Prince.” Jews today looking for their Messiah are required by scripture to consider *only* candidates who (1) announce their anointing precisely 173,880 days after a decree matching that of Artaxerxes, (2) enter Jerusalem for their inspection on the 10th of Nisan, and (3) offer themselves up as atonement sacrifices four days later on Passover. Any takers? (Other than the obvious, I mean.) I didn’t think so.

(950) *Note the symbolic connection between slaying the Passover Lamb and the removal of leaven. “So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to Yahweh throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.”* (Exodus 12:14-15) Yahweh is careful to separate the imagery of Passover (on Nisan 14) from that of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (on Nisan 15—a designated Sabbath). *Pesach* speaks of the death of the lamb, whose blood, smeared on the doorposts and lintels of the Israelites’ houses, was to keep the Death Angel at bay. *Chag Matzah*, by contrast, speaks of an ongoing state where leaven or yeast (symbolic of sin) is absent. The days seem quite different in symbolic purpose. But in reality, Yahweh is merely distinguishing cause from effect. What happened on Passover made possible the reality of the sinless state symbolized by the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In practical terms, it is impossible to separate the celebration of Passover from Unleavened Bread, for each relies upon the other. First, the actual meal when the lamb is consumed takes place after sunset—technically pushing it into the next calendar “day,” since sunset marks the

beginning of each new day. Thus technically, the Passover meal is not eaten on Passover, but rather on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Second, the deadline for having killed the Passover lamb was the same as that for removing the leaven from the household. By sundown on the 14th of Nisan, both jobs had to be done, plus one more: the fire upon which the lamb was to be roasted had to have been kindled by this same hour, for it was illegal to start a fire on the Sabbath day. So the judgment that would fall upon the substitutionary sacrifice on Nisan 14 is linked to the removal of sin from our lives, while the protection, nourishment, and vindication this judgment would bring in its wake could only be enjoyed after that—and as a result of it—on and following Nisan 15. You'd have to work awfully hard not to see the Messianic connection to all of this. By being crucified (on Passover), Yahshua removed the sin from our lives. The subsequent ongoing state of sinlessness we enjoy (in spiritual fact if not in physical experience) is the direct result of His sacrifice and the judgment He endured in our stead. That's why Yahweh made the Feast a weeklong event: our sinlessness has become a permanent feature (seven days symbolizing completion) of our relationship with God. In fact, our permanent sinlessness is what makes that relationship possible.

Fine tuning the symbols, Yahweh continues: **“On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you.”** (Exodus 12:16) Normally, you couldn't prepare food on a Sabbath, but here we're given an exception. The lesson is clear. We can't take the place of the Lamb—we can't accomplish our own salvation. Nor can we do anything to enhance, add to, or complete the work He began on our behalf. Rather, **“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”** (Hebrews 12:1-2) But although Yahshua is both “the author and finisher of our faith,” we still have a part to play. In the time allotted to us, we are to “prepare that which everyone must eat.” That is, “laying aside the sins which so easily ensnare us,” we are to provide spiritual sustenance—truth and light—to the world we're leaving behind. **“So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance.”** (Exodus 12:17)

- (951) *The elders of Israel are to kill the Passover Lamb. “Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Pick out and take lambs for yourselves*

according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb.” (Exodus 12:21) As a practical matter at the first Passover, Moses gathered the elders in order to pass the word of God along to the individual families they represented, and the heads of those families would have selected unblemished lambs from their own flocks. But the letter of the Torah stands: the *elders* were instructed to “pick out” and “kill the Passover lamb.” *They* were responsible for choosing who would be sacrificed to secure Israel’s salvation.

So we read the Gospel account, amazed at the utter precision of God’s word: **“Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, ‘Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?’ For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.... But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.”** (Matthew 27:15-18, 20) Yes, as required in the Torah, it was the job of the elders of Israel to choose who would be sacrificed on Passover. They chose Yahshua: the very “Lamb” whom God had sent, John had identified, and their citizens had acclaimed. Why they couldn’t see the irony in all this (and still can’t) is beyond me.

A fascinating study in contrasts is the comparison of the death of Yahshua to that of the only man ever to be declared the messiah by the elders of Israel: Simon ben Kosiba. The power of the chief priests was a thing of the past by his day, usurped by the rabbis early in the second century. The influential Rabbi Akiba declared this arrogant and brutal warlord to be the fulfillment of Balaam’s messianic prophecy: **“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.”** (Numbers 24:17) So Akiba renamed ben Kosiba “Bar Kochba,” that is, “son of a star.” To this day, Bar Kochba is the Jewish ideal of the Messiah: he came within a whisker of defeating the Romans, even taking back Jerusalem for a short time. But he did not prevail: he (and Akiba) were slain in 135. Orthodox Jews may protest, “So what? Yahshua didn’t prevail either. He too was slain by the Romans.” Good point, so it behooves us to determine what the scriptures require concerning the Messiah’s death.

It is my contention that the whole Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread scenario makes no sense unless it is meant to be a preview of a larger event, one of universal significance—the offer of salvation to all mankind through the sacrifice of the Messiah, the “Lamb of God.” Therefore, the

Messiah *must* be slain on Nisan 14. Yahshua was. Further, the location of His sacrifice must be in “the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide.” There isn’t a Jew on earth who would deny that this place is Jerusalem, and indeed, Yahshua was slain in this city—on Mount Moriah, no less. Daniel too (in 9:26) intimates that Jerusalem is the city where “Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself”—i.e., not for His own crimes. But how does this stack up against the death of Bar Kochba? He was not slain on Nisan 14, but on the 9th of Av (the same date both the first and second temples were razed, which ought to be a clue). And where did he die? Not in Jerusalem, but in Betar, some six miles to the southwest (a place not even mentioned in the Tanach). The name means “fortress” (literally, “house of the enemy”) in Aramaic. The carnage he brought upon his people was outrageous. Cassius Dio reported that 580,000 Jews were killed in Bar Kochba’s rebellion; 50 fortified cities were taken and 985 villages were destroyed. The Talmud claims that the Romans “kept on killing until their horses were submerged in blood to their nostrils,” and it reports that for seventeen years, the Romans did not allow the Jews to bury the dead of Betar. Yahshua, in contrast, lost none of His disciples in the wake of His sacrifice (see John 17:12), except for Judas, and *that* had been prophesied in Psalm 41:9.

- (952) *Yahweh will strike down whoever in the world is not protected by the blood of the Lamb. “And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. For Yahweh will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, Yahweh will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you.”* (Exodus 12:22-23) What is the price of freedom? Americans today tend to regard Abraham Lincoln as our greatest president—not because he preserved the Union (something we take for granted these days) but because he freed the slaves—prosecuting a long and bloody war to do so. Freedom is widely regarded as our most important asset—a commodity well worth fighting for. How odd it is, then, that many of the same people who venerate Lincoln today vilify Yahweh for striking down the Egyptian firstborn in order to obtain liberty for the Israelite slaves. They characterize Him as a bloody and vindictive God, a celestial bully who won’t hesitate to kill anyone who gets in His way.

The hypocrisy (and shortsightedness) of this position is stunning. Even though Egypt had no right or reason to enslave Israel in the first place, Yahweh in His patience let four centuries pass before He made a move to free them. Then He gave the Egyptians nine golden opportunities to let

His people go, before finally resorting to the angel of death. God is nothing if not patient. But patience is not the same thing as senility: Yes, Yahweh is longsuffering. He's also acutely aware of what we're doing with His earth, even if He doesn't constantly throw His weight around. There is a limit to His patience, and He has told us so in a number of different ways—one of them right here in the Passover account. In so many words, He's saying, "I will give you ample opportunity to recognize my sovereignty and provision. But if you opt not to do so, I will at some point close the door, leaving you to suffer the fate that you yourself have chosen. Count on it."

While prosecuting what was by some measures the bloodiest war ever fought by Americans, Lincoln came to realize two things: that one man's freedom does not include the right to enslave someone else, and that securing freedom is a terribly costly endeavor. Yahweh never had any illusions about these things. Bloodshed had always been the price of liberty: this had been the sad reality as far back as the Garden of Eden. Here in Egypt, the principle of substitutionary sacrifice—an innocent life, free of sin, being the ransom for a guilty one enslaved to iniquity—was reiterated. We're all guilty; we've all fallen into sin (well, some of us *jumped*)—we've become slaves to it. And not only slaves, but prisoners. We're living under the death sentence of our fallen mortality: nobody gets out of here alive. The question is, will *we ourselves* pay the penalty for having fallen short of Yahweh's standards of perfection or would we rather somebody else pay the penalty for us? On Passover, *somebody* had to die—either the firstborn son or an innocent lamb. In every family in Egypt that night, a choice was made: pay the price of freedom personally—or vicariously.

The lessons are still germane today. There is still a penalty to be paid, for we have all fallen short of God's perfect standard. And the choice remains the same: try to atone for your sins yourself, or allow Yahweh to do it for you. No amount of charity, dedication, piety, or penance will suffice. The price of redemption is blood. Always was; always will be.

- (953) *Remember what was accomplished by the Passover. "You shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which Yahweh will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of Yahweh, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.'" (Exodus 12:24-27) If the Passover sacrifice wasn't fraught with perpetually meaningful symbolism, it is*

inconceivable that Yahweh would have directed Israel to observe it forever. If we understand what the symbols mean, the significance of the act in its larger context becomes clear. The children of Israel are symbolic of believers in Yahweh, whatever our actual genetic heritage happens to be. Egypt is the world, its values and idolatrous practice. The slavery from which the people were to be delivered represents our bondage to sin. The angel of death that slew the firstborn of the Egyptians is metaphorical of the divine judgment that still looms like the sword of Damocles over a lost and unrepentant world. And the Passover lamb whose blood was smeared on the doorposts and lintels of the Israelites' dwellings is symbolic of Yahshua the Messiah, whose blood was similarly applied to a cruel Roman *stauros*, the cross of Calvary.

So in reality, what are the Israelites being instructed to tell their children about the Passover rite? They *should* be saying, "It is a picture of Yahweh's sacrifice of His own Firstborn Son, the anointed One, our Salvation—Yahshua. Yahweh shelters and protects those of us who trust and believe in Him, and He delivers us from slavery to sin in this fallen world—a world upon whom God's wrath still rests."

- (954) *Remember what was accomplished by the Feast of Unleavened Bread.* "You shall tell your son in that day, saying, 'This is done because of what Yahweh did for me when I came up from Egypt.' It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that Yahweh's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand Yahweh has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year." (Exodus 13:8-10) Just as Yahweh had instructed Israel to memorialize Passover (see Precept #953), He made a separate point out of doing the same sort of thing for the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Moses had just finished saying, "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand Yahweh brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. On this day you are going out, in the month Abib. And it shall be, when Yahweh brings you into the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service in this month. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to Yahweh. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters." (Exodus 13:3-7)

Though Passover could be seen merely as a "preparation day" for the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed immediately on its heels, different realities were to be celebrated and memorialized on each of these

two days. Whereas *Pesach* stressed Yahweh's sacrifice and the life it bought for Israel, *Chag Matzah* was to be remembered for the freedom that resulted from having been given this life, and the vehicle for the lesson is repeated no fewer than five times in this passage: *the absence of yeast in their bread*.

Bread was (and is) the foundation of the Middle Eastern diet—as ubiquitous as rice is in Asia or tortillas are in Latin America. It would be a normal part of every meal. Normally, it would be made with yeast, or leaven, which makes it “rise.” This property made leaven a handy and unmistakable metaphor for sin. Just as even a small amount of leaven added to a lump of bread dough would eventually permeate the whole loaf, permanently changing its character and altering its chemical composition, sin would permeate and transform the whole *life*. Sin, if you'll recall, is not technically bad behavior, evil deeds, or a rebellious attitude. This is a marksmanship term: it simply means “missing the target.” What is the target? Perfection. And who defines perfection? Yahweh, our Creator.

Most of us at least *try* to “hit the target” in our daily lives. We generally heed the conscience God placed within us, or even study His Word in an attempt to do the right thing. Do we succeed? Sometimes, but not always. Somewhere along the way—invariably very early in our lives—we all miss the target of moral perfection—we let just a few grams of “leaven” into our lump of life. Nobody *starts* by bombing Poland and opening concentration camps in Auschwitz. No, the first little bit of leaven is more likely to be a moment of defiance against mommy, or selfishly seizing a sibling's toy—little things, “normal” human foibles. But the leaven is now there in our lives, and there's no way to stop it from spreading, no way to turn back the clock. Why do we do these things? Why do we miss the target of perfection? Because we're not perfect. It's not in our nature to shoot straight. It's in our nature, rather, to rebel and covet. Blame it on mom and dad if you want to, or on Adam and Eve. It doesn't change the fact that *all of us* have missed the mark—we have all fallen short of God's perfect standard. We are all walking around with a nasty yeast infection, so to speak. Our sin nature is rising within us, and there's nothing we can do about it.

Or is there? Yahweh told the children of Israel to remove the leaven from their homes for the duration of the festival. That should tell us that it is possible—even necessary—to expel the sin from our lives. But how? They were instructed, in so many words, to have the leaven out of their houses *at the same time* the Passover lamb was being slain and its blood

applied to their doorposts. “Twilight” on the 14th day of Nisan was the deadline for both symbolic acts. These two things are related; they’re equivalent in effect. The sacrifice of the Lamb of God *is* what removes the sin from our lives, if we’ll apply its blood where we live. And the fact that the Feast of Unleavened Bread lasts for seven days tells us that this removal of sin is permanent.

(955) *Judgment is coming.* **“And it came to pass at midnight that Yahweh struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead.”** (Exodus 12:29-30) What happened to those whose households were not indemnified by the blood of the Passover Lamb? The firstborn offspring of every man and beast was slain. God could, of course, have slain *every* Egyptian, but His purpose was not to destroy the world, but save it. By slaying only the firstborn, He was revealing His plan: His own Firstborn would be sacrificed in order that others might live and walk in freedom. Yes, there was a “great cry in Egypt” when their loss was discovered—but no lesser a cry went up in heaven, I’m thinking, when Yahweh purposely turned His back on His only begotten Son for our benefit.

Those unwilling to see the big picture may criticize Yahweh for killing all those innocent people. But we should be aware of two things, related to each other. First, none of them were in fact innocent. All have sinned. It is through God’s mercy alone that we are not consumed on any given day. Second: in truth, they were *already* dead—that is, they were mortal, subject to corruption. Their physical deaths were inevitable. Even if God had left them alone, none of them would have lived another century. Yahweh merely moved up the schedule a little, reminding us that we never really know how much time we have left to walk the earth. As so often happens in scripture, physical death here is “merely” a metaphor for spiritual death. (I know, it didn’t seem particularly “metaphorical” at the time.) The point is that the blood of the Lamb of God, Yahshua, is necessary to shield us from spiritual death, just as the blood of the Passover lambs protected the Israelites from physical death.

Though at this late date the symbolism explaining the tenth plague is patently obvious, only one reason for sending it is actually stated in scripture: **“that you [Pharaoh] may know that Yahweh does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.”** (Exodus 11:7) God distinguishes between His own children and those of the world. Moses (in 11:5) told Pharaoh

quite plainly what would happen if (actually, *when*) he refused to free Israel following the ninth plague. In the same way, Yahweh wants today's world to know what awaits those who reject His word. If the blood of the Lamb of God has not covered their sins, then their own blood will be required of them. Judgment awaits. It's only a matter of time. If you are not set apart for Yahweh's honor, then you will be set aside from His presence.

- (956) *Only God's people can celebrate God's salvation. "And Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, 'This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it.'*" (Exodus 12:43) It may seem obvious when you say it out loud, but it's not. Salvation is only for those who choose to be saved, who agree to the terms of Yahweh's Plan, who become part of His family. The word for "foreigner" is *ben nekar*, literally, "son of a foreign land," that is, one who has no ties of kinship—someone who is not of your own family. You need not be *born into* the family, however: that is, you don't have to be a physical descendant of Israel to be saved through Yahshua's blood (nor, for that matter, does being born an Israelite necessarily assure your status as a child of Yahweh. As I said, Israel is only a metaphor for familial relationship with God). It is possible to become a member of a family through adoption (and if my own family experience is any indication, it's even more likely—nine of my eleven children were adopted).

Moses explains how a "foreigner" might be transformed into a family member: **"But every man's servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it. A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat it. In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to Yahweh, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you."** (Exodus 12:44-49) Requirement #1: He must "dwell with you." That is, the stranger must share the son's reverence and affection for his Father Yahweh. He cannot merely be a sojourner or hireling, one whose involvement is contrived, coincidental or commercial. #2: He must "want to keep the Passover"—he must desire to be covered and protected by the atoning blood of the Lamb, meaning that he must also trust in its efficacy. #3: He must be circumcised, meaning that he must agree to be permanently separated from his sin through a process involving blood and pain. #4: He must change his identity. He will no longer be a "foreigner" or "stranger," but will be "as a native of the land." That is a picture of being adopted into the family of Yahweh. One thing is perfectly clear in

all of this: either you are, or you aren't, a family member. There is no middle ground, no gray area. It's a question of holiness—being set apart. Family members keep the Passover. Strangers do not.

(957) *Do not break the bones of the Passover Lamb. "...nor shall you break one of its bones."* (Exodus 12:46) Crucifixion was designed to be a deterrent as much as a punishment. The idea wasn't merely to kill the victim, but to do it in such a way as to prolong the public suffering of execution as long as possible. There are cases on record where the victim remained alive for as long as three days—in extreme agony the whole time. In order to stay alive, the victim had to get enough air into his lungs for one more breath. But since his shoulders had been ripped out of their sockets, the only way he could do this was to push up with his legs—an extremely painful proposition if his feet were nailed to the *stauros*—the upright pole. If he did, he might live for another twenty seconds, after which he would have to start the process all over again. The agony was as much mental as it was physical: the victim was forced to choose the moment of his death. The message was, *you see what excruciating pain I am enduring for my misdeeds. I beg you, don't do anything that will put you in this position. Obey those in power or they will do this to you.*

The rule, then, was to prolong the torture. But there were exceptions to the rule. We read of one in John's Gospel: **"Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs."** (John 19:31-33) The Feast of Unleavened Bread was always a "high" Sabbath, a specially designated holy day, no matter what day of the week the 15th of Nisan fell upon in any given year. Apparently it didn't bother the Jewish religious leaders too much if a criminal remained hanging on a cross over a regular weekly Sabbath. But this was different. Because of the special nature of the approaching festival, the chief priests went to the Procurator Pilate and requested that he get those three criminals off their crosses and into their graves before the holiday began, at sunset. Pilate didn't have a problem granting a request that didn't cost him anything, so he sent soldiers to break the legs of the victims—the point being that if they couldn't push up with their legs, they would suffocate almost immediately.

We aren't told if the chief priests knew that breaking Yahshua's legs would disqualify Him as being God's Passover Lamb. I get the feeling that they didn't really understand the ramifications of what they were doing.

But the fact remains, Yahweh had declared that *not one* of the Lamb's bones were to be broken—a prophecy borne out with precision. By the way, the prophecy was repeated by David: **“He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken.”** (Psalm 34:20) By the time the soldiers came to carry out Pilate's orders, the Messiah was already dead: problem solved.

John's notice that **“That Sabbath was a high day”** helps to confirm the April 1, 33 A.D. date of the Passover crucifixion (making Daniel's prophecy—[see Precept #949](#)—precisely accurate). John didn't say that “the high day was a Sabbath,” as if to remind us that there were special rules for the seven *miqra'ey* of Yahweh. No, he was telling us that the high day, the first day of Feast of Unleavened Bread, actually fell on a natural Sabbath, a Saturday, that year—which it did in 33. It is not without significance that of the four *miqra'ey* already fulfilled in history, the only one required by the Torah to be an actual Sabbath (and not merely a Sabbath *observance*—a *sabbaton*) did indeed fall on the last day of the week in the year of its definitive fulfillment. It's just one more of a thousand tiny details that conspire to identify Yahshua of Nazareth as the Messiah, Yahweh's promised Anointed One.

- (958) *The firstborn belong to Yahweh.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine.’”** (Exodus 13:1-2) To “consecrate” is to set apart for someone's honor or use—especially to deity. And the “firstborn,” though it technically indicates the initial offspring born to a set a parents, in this context it means something more: that which is preeminent, honored, the beginning of one's strength, the focus of one's hopes. The firstborn was always an “only child” at some point—seen as being special. After all, there was no guarantee of any more offspring. Therefore, to “consecrate to Yahweh all the firstborn” was to express your complete trust in Him—to place the entire future of your family and nation, your financial prospects and political posterity, in God's care, without reservation and without doubt.

The converse is also true: to withhold the consecration of your firstborn to Yahweh is to declare your mistrust of and independence from Him. This is precisely what Egypt had done, which explains Yahweh's selection of the firstborn of Egypt, both man and beast, as the focus of the Death Angel's grim attentions. But the metaphor goes even deeper: the innocent lambs the Israelites were told to sacrifice, though not necessarily “firstborn” themselves, prophetically represented Yahweh's “Firstborn” Son, Yahshua—as He phrased it in John 3:16, “His *only* begotten Son.”

This explains why Yahweh limited the sacrificial firstborn function to males: **“The males shall be Yahweh’s.”** (Exodus 13:12)

There were three categories of firstborn males: men, clean animals, and unclean animals (their status as clean or unclean being determined by the Levitical dietary laws). (1) Clean domestic animals that opened the womb (sheep, oxen, and goats) were to be sacrificed. (2) Unclean animals (horses, camels, donkeys, etc.) were to be either exchanged for lambs or “wasted.” The principle was that if they weren’t redeemed, no benefit was to be derived from their life. The animal who was both unclean and unredeemed could not be sacrificed, provide nourishment or resources, or perform labor benefiting mankind. He was to be of no value to anyone, not even to himself. **“But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck.”** This, of course, is the perfect picture of us. It doesn’t matter how “good” a specimen we might be: we’re still unclean. We’ll either be exchanged for the Lamb of God who has died in our place, or we’ll die for our own uncleanness. And finally (3), **“All the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem.”** (Exodus 13:13) firstborn men were to be bought back. They were not to be slain as sacrifices, but were to be redeemed (their lives were exchanged for innocent lambs) and then substituted for Levites, who would henceforth be the unique “property” of Yahweh. (This fact proves that the consecration of the “firstborn” was symbolic of a larger truth: it wasn’t the actual firstborn son God was interested in—only what, *or Who*, he represented.)

Once again, the Israelites are told that Yahweh’s instructions are there to elicit questions from their children. He knows these things look counterintuitive. That’s the whole point. The kids are *supposed* to look at all this and ask, “Why, Daddy?” **“So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is this?’ that you shall say to him, ‘By strength of hand Yahweh brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that Yahweh killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to Yahweh all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’ It shall be as a sign on your hand and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand Yahweh brought us out of Egypt.”** (Exodus 13:14-16) Let us once more paraphrase this according to the symbols God has revealed. He’s saying, for those of us who have ears to hear it, “Yahweh did a great and wonderful thing when He called us out of the world, away from our slavery to sin. The false god of this world did not want to let us go. All of his plans depended on keeping us in submission and servitude. The world’s death grip upon us was broken only by the love of Yahweh. To

obtain our freedom He invested the most precious thing there was—His own firstborn Son, Yahshua—who defeated our adversary’s hopes and aspirations on the day of our release from bondage. So now we consecrate our firstborn males to Yahweh in homage and gratitude for what He did to free us from our sin. Everything we do and think should demonstrate our understanding of the power of God and our appreciation of His love.”

(959) *Our survival depends on a tree that Yahweh shows us. “So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’ So he cried out to Yahweh, and Yahweh showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet.”* (Exodus 15:22-25) It is said that we can live three minutes without air, three days without water, or three weeks without food. At this point in the life of Israel, Yahweh had only recently provided air for the Israelites to breathe by opening a path through the Red Sea, while Pharaoh’s army had perished in presumption: their three minutes without air were up. You can’t live long without the breath of life (read: Spirit) that God provides. We’ll discuss going without food a bit later. For now, let’s talk about our need for water.

They were three days in, and the Israelites were already at the end of their rope. They couldn’t go another day without water before folks began dying, and they knew it. I for one am willing to cut the ex-slaves a little slack here. Yes, they had seen the power of God over and over again at this point, but it had been manifested only in the selective destruction of their enemies. They knew their God could send plagues and kill people, but could He, and *would He*, also do miracles of provision? ’Cause, that’s what it was going to take, and making things is a whole lot harder than destroying them. Now that they were rid of the Egyptians, they found that they still had a deadly enemy stalking them—their own human mortality. Their big mistake was complaining against Moses, as if *he* were providing the miracles. They should have cried out to Yahweh, but they were new to this whole freedom thing. I honestly don’t think it even occurred to them. We, on the other hand, have no excuse. Do we complain against our national leaders when things go wrong? Incessantly. But why in the world would we assume that they have any real power or wisdom, or exert any actual control over world events? What makes us think they can solve our problems? Only Yahweh can do that. We should be taking the matter up with Him.

“*Marah*” is a play on words. *Marah* (or *mar*: Strong’s #4751) is an adjective that means bitter—having an astringent, pungent, or disagreeable taste; or being poisonous—noxious or deadly. Thus *mar nephesh*, literally “bitter of soul,” means discontented, in a state of unhappiness or mental distress. But there is another *Marah* in Hebrew (Strong’s #4785, spelled the same way). It’s a verb that means to be rebellious against or disobedient toward someone. So in one word, Moses named the place after the foul taste of the water *and* the subsequent rebellion and discontent of the people—something that must taste pretty foul to Yahweh.

The history of this incident is relatively straightforward. **“So he cried out to Yahweh, and Yahweh showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet.”** What we have to ask ourselves is, “Why is this in scripture? Is it meaningful, symbolic, or prophetic?” Since throwing a tree into a fetid pond isn’t normally efficacious in making its waters potable, I’d have to guess that God was trying to tell us something. And indeed, the imagery appears elsewhere in scripture, informing us as to what Yahweh wanted us to understand.

There are two elements, the water and the tree. Of the former, Yahshua Himself promised, **“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”** The phrase “living water” was a common euphemism for fresh, flowing water, the way someone might describe a gushing spring or mountain brook. John explains what this living water consisted of: **“But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”** (John 7:37-39) Is water symbolic of the Holy Spirit, then? Not exactly. It’s more a metaphor of what God’s Spirit would do in and for a believer. The prophet Isaiah clarifies the subject for us: **“Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; For YAH, Yahweh, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation. Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”** (Isaiah 12:2-3) All three times the word “salvation” is used here, the Hebrew word actually identifies the Messiah—by name. The word is *yāshuw`ah*—that is, “Yahshua.” So what is the prophet saying? (1) God is Yahshua, in whom we can have confidence; (2) Yahweh, who is his strength and song, has *become* Yahshua. (Note that Yahweh is also referred to as Yah—the shortened form of the divine name used forty-nine times in the Tanach, though transliterated properly in most English versions only once—here.) And (3) believers (“you”) will draw water from the wells of Yahshua. What water? John already told us: the living water is the Holy Spirit living within us. The bottom line is that “water” is

symbolic of *salvation*—personified in Yahshua the Messiah and witnessed within us by the indwelling Spirit of God.

Okay, then. What is the “tree,” without which the salvation we seek is only a bitter and unfulfilled promise? If you think about it for a nanosecond, it becomes perfectly obvious. Let’s begin with the function of this tree: **“If a man [Actually, that’s “if man....” The article is missing in the Hebrew] has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.”**

(Deuteronomy 21:22-23) We’re being told that if (in truth, *when*) mankind does something worthy of our collective death penalty (and our goose was cooked in that regard in the Garden of Eden), and a man is hanged on a tree (Hebrew: *ets*, the same word used in Exodus 15:25) to pay for that crime (as was Yahshua on Calvary), then his body is not to be left hanging there overnight. The Romans, of course, left victims hanging on crosses overnight all the time. The land was well and truly defiled. But Yahshua’s corpse would not be among those polluting the place that Yahweh our God had chosen to make His name abide. As we saw in [Precept #957](#), there was a rush to make sure Yahshua was dead and down from His “tree” before the Feast of Unleavened Bread began at Passover sunset, though I can pretty much guarantee that the chief priests didn’t comprehend the ramifications of Deuteronomy 21. Yahshua the Messiah was “accursed” by God for our sakes, because of our sins. But even in death, He did not defile the Land, but cleansed it.

Let us, then, put the pieces together. The “tree” is the cross of Christ—the *stauros* or upright pole pointing the way toward heaven. Hundreds of people were crucified over the years, however. So as with Moses, Yahweh has gone out of His way to show us precisely which “tree” He’s talking about. The “water” into which the tree is thrown is the potential for the salvation of mankind, personified by Yahshua and achieved through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This water is “bitter”—that is, it remains unavailable for our needs—*until and unless* the cross enters it. Yahshua’s death is what makes the prospect of our salvation sweet and life-giving. Without it, the promise of salvation would have been nothing but a poisonous myth, a bitter fraud. Those who today wish to drink the water of life while despising the tree of sacrifice are making a fatal error.

- (960) *To obtain salvation, strike the rock. “And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you*

there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." (Exodus 17:5-6) So, the next time the Israelites found themselves in a place with no water, they trusted Yahweh to provide for their needs, and wisely entreated Moses to intercede for them, right? No, sorry. Israel apparently had a learning disability. They blamed Moses *again*, this time threatening to stone him. Sigh. Funny thing, though: if they *had* stoned him, they *would have* died of thirst out there in the desert.

It turns out that there was a reason—a prophetic object lesson—for which Yahweh had led them into a dry place. It wasn't that He wanted them to suffer; He merely wanted them (and us) to learn. We've discovered that water is Yahweh's metaphor for salvation. So what did He instruct Moses to do in order to deliver the life-giving fluid to His people? Mo was told to walk up to a big rock outcropping and strike it with his shepherd's rod—the same rod (perhaps better translated "staff") that he had used to demonstrate Yahweh's power to Pharaoh. Significantly, the same word (*mateh*) is used to describe a staff of governance—a scepter, so to speak—in Psalm 110:2 **"Yahweh shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!"** We've therefore established that the authority of God was to be exercised in bringing water—salvation—to the people.

And what about the rock that was to be struck? Is this symbolic of something? (Would I ask if it weren't?) Here we have scripture to interpret scripture. First, we read in the Psalms, **"Truly my soul silently waits for God. From Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved."** (Psalm 62:1-2) "Rock" here is the same word used in our Exodus passage (*tsur*), and "Salvation" is once again *yāshuw`ah*—that is, "Yahshua." Not only is salvation *from* God, Salvation *is* God. Then, Paul writes of the Israelites and their Rock: **"All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."** (I Corinthians 10:3-4) There can be no doubt or confusion: the rock Moses was instructed to strike symbolized Yahshua the Messiah, who was struck down for our transgressions.

So are we to crucify Christ anew every time we fall into sin, or does Yahweh have something else in mind? Read on...

- (961) *To obtain salvation, speak to the rock.* **"Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.' So Moses took the rod from before Yahweh as He commanded him."** (Numbers

20:7-9) Here we go again. Another dry place, another rock, another thirsty, angry mob. Was Moses told to give the rock a whack again, like before? The record goes on to explain that that's exactly what he did—he let his anger and frustration get the better of him, and he hit the rock with his rod, *twice*. But in so doing, Moses made Yahweh very angry at him, for he had goofed up the object lesson He wanted to teach us.

No, this time he was instructed to *speak* to the rock. That Hebrew word is *dabar*, which the *Dictionary of Biblical Languages* defines, “speak, tell, say, i.e., speak or talk in verbal communication, with a possible focus on the aloud-sounds and content of verbalization.” It goes on to note, “Context in English allows for many different translation words as one fine-tunes the meaning; here are some possible translation options: address, announce, argue, ask, boast, command, complain, declare, decree, describe, direct, discuss, encourage, explain, foretell, give opinion, instruct, invite, mention, name, order, plead, pray, preach, predict, proclaim, promise, propose, recite, repeat, reply, report, say, sing, speak, state, talk, teach, tell, threaten, urge, utter.”

If our communication with God is characterized by lapsing into a mode of obsequious piety, a fawning, phony, hyper-religious exhibition in which we inexplicably shift into seventeenth century English and suppress all human feeling while telling God what we think He wants to hear, then we've missed the point of “speaking to the rock.” Sure, we should always converse with Yahweh respectfully, but He *wants us* to tell Him what's on our minds, vent our feelings, express our concerns, get it off our chests. You're thirsty? *Talk to Him*. You think life isn't fair? *Talk to Him*. You don't understand what He wants from you? *Talk to Him*. You think you're not good enough to ask Him for a favor, for forgiveness, for provision, or even for a miracle? Believe me, He knows this already. Yet His instructions stand: *Talk to Him*. Speak to the Rock.

Oh, and by the way, don't forget to listen to what He says in reply.

- (962) *God provides to each one according to his need. “This is the thing which Yahweh has commanded: ‘Let every man gather it [the manna] according to each one's need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent.’”* (Exodus 16:16) As He had with air and water, Yahweh also miraculously provided food for the Israelite hordes. We should not be surprised to learn that this process began in exactly the same way—with the faithless and angry masses complaining about God's apparent shortsightedness and questioning Moses' sanity. I'm not suggesting that *we* should use this approach, you understand. Though Yahweh delivered the people, He was clearly disappointed at their

denseness, their seeming inability to connect the dots. Let's see: "God freed us from bondage... and then He has saved us from our pursuing enemies... and then He delivered us from death by thirst... *but now (sob!) it looks like we're all gonna die from starvation!*" Oh really? It would transpire that all but two people out of this 600,000-man mob would die of *stupidity*, but not a single soul would succumb to hunger. There's a lesson in there somewhere.

Here's what happened: **"And the children of Israel said to [Moses and Aaron], 'Oh, that we had died by the hand of Yahweh in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'" In other words, "Slavery wasn't so bad. It had it's perks. At least we were getting abused on a full stomach. You guys aren't just incompetent, you're evil: you *meant* for us to die out here."** At this point, I would have sent 'em back to Egypt with my sincere apologies. Good thing I'm not God. Yahweh calmly mused, "Okay, folks, you've recognized your need, and you've realized you can't meet it in your own strength. Good; we're finally getting somewhere. I'm now going to meet that need—just as I'll meet the need it was designed to teach you about: your *spiritual* emptiness." **"Then Yahweh said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you.'" (Exodus 16:3-4)** It's no coincidence that the word for "heaven," (*shamayim*) can mean either the atmospheric sky, the starry heavens, or the abode of God. For just as the "bread from heaven," manna, would sustain their physical bodies, Yahweh would send "bread from heaven" of another kind to nourish their souls—Yahshua the Messiah.

The physical bread was described like this: **"And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground. So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, 'This is the bread which Yahweh has given you to eat.'" (Exodus 16:14-15)** The spiritual "bread" was also described in scripture, and it's pretty clear that the Israelites didn't know what *that* was, either. Yahshua Himself explained the connection: **"Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father [the same One who gave you the manna] gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.... I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.'" (John 6:32-35)** The bread of God is Yahshua, Yahweh manifested in human form.

“This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day....”

When Yahweh provided manna in the wilderness, the people had to *believe* in it—on Yahweh’s word alone, they had to go out and pick it up off the ground, trusting that it was edible and would sustain life, even though it wasn’t the kind of bread they were used to. Manna wouldn’t keep them alive forever, however. Doing that would be the function of the *real* “bread from heaven,” Yahshua. **“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”** (John 6:40, 47-51) He did that very thing on Passover, 33 A.D. The Living Bread—Yahshua—is available to all of us. As with the manna, He is what we need to sustain life, if only we will follow God’s instructions and assimilate Him into our being—if only we will *believe*.

- (963) *God’s provision is a test.* **“And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.”** (Exodus 16:4-5) Yahweh didn’t force the people to gather manna, and He didn’t tell them what to make out of it. He did, however, insist that if they were going to avail themselves of His provision, they must do it *His way* in two significant respects. First, they must gather only enough for one day at a time. They couldn’t horde it, for if they did, it would breed worms and begin to stink. The lesson was that He could be trusted to take care of their needs day by day. A God who is self-existent (Yahweh), who stresses His *being* over any other attribute, will be absolutely consistent in His love and capability: His promises can be counted upon. (Contrast this to a hypothetical “god” whose character is best described by the title “the Lord.” If his whole agenda were to dominate us and make us submit to him, then our needs would always be subsidiary to his whims—making provision a matter of convenience, not promise.)

Second, the Israelites were informed that the manna would not appear on the seventh day, the Sabbath. They were therefore to gather enough for two days on the sixth day of each week. It’s as if Yahweh is telling them, “This is no mere natural phenomenon—a fortunate and timely confluence of environmental forces from which you happen to be in a position to benefit—like seasonal rainfall or the flooding of the Nile. No, it is a direct, ongoing miracle, one I will be performing on your behalf for as long as

you need it. If you'll just trust Me, if you'll obey Me in this one simple matter, you'll never go hungry." Many followed His instructions, but some did not: **"Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And Yahweh said to Moses, 'How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For Yahweh has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.'** So the people rested on the seventh day." (Exodus 16:27-30)

Since the manna was a metaphor for the Messiah's bodily advent, the true "bread from heaven," what are we to deduce from this six-plus-one pattern Yahweh has employed—for the umpteenth time? I have become convinced that the pattern is a timeline. If Psalm 90:4 and II Peter 3:8 have any literal validity (declaring that one day really *is* a thousand years in God's plan) then the pattern of sevens is telling us that His schedule of redemption—the time from Adam's sin to the conclusion of the Messiah's glorious earthly reign—will run *seven thousand years*. But within that span of time, Yahweh's provision of grace through faith in Yahshua (the availability of manna, so to speak) will be offered only during the first *six* thousand years. Why? Because during the seventh Millennium, King Yahshua will walk among us. Faith will become redundant, for His glorious presence will for all practical purposes destroy the element of "reasonable doubt" harbored by those who don't wish to acknowledge God in this age. Rebellion will still be possible, of course, just as it was possible to go out and look for manna on the Sabbath. But the element of trusting obedience, of acting in faith, will have evaporated. During the Millennium, if you want to defy God, you'll have to do it to His face.

Here's the rub. Any way you slice it, our six thousand years have just about run their course. The sun is nearing the western horizon on our sixth day. The opportunity to go out and gather manna—to act upon our trust in Yahweh's promise of salvation—is almost over. And there are multitudes who have not availed themselves of Yahweh's ongoing miracle. Perhaps we should remind them of the lateness of the hour.

Messianic Messages III: Do This In Remembrance of Me

For the past two chapters, we've been examining incidents in the Torah where the Messiah's mission was foretold and defined through circumstances, dress rehearsals, types, and prophecies. I'd like to now return to the realm of what Yahweh actually said to do—His instructions. As we have seen throughout this book, some of these seem to be logical rules any wise bronze age ruler might have imposed upon his people in order to ensure that his society ran smoothly. Others, however, have no apparent basis in human interaction. They don't promote peace, enhance public safety, advance health or welfare, ensure fairness, impose a moral standard, or even benefit the temporal ruler. Rather, they fall into the category of "religious law," ritual statutes for which there is no clear reason other than "God said to do this." We need to recognize that both categories of instruction were given by the same God, to the same people, with the same overarching purpose. Our study has led us (or at least *me*) to the conclusion that the fundamental reason behind *everything* in the Torah—from the mundane to the esoteric—explains something about Yahweh's plan for reconciling mankind back to Himself. He wished to make it possible for us to regain what was lost when our forebears sinned in the Garden of Eden: our innocence. Why? Because that innocence is a necessary component of our fellowship with Him—of communication, of a shared love—for evil cannot dwell in the presence of a holy God any more than darkness can exist in the presence of light. And sharing a loving relationship with mankind is the only thing Yahweh really wants.

Figuring out what God wants from us is the stated goal of every religion on earth, though the various solutions men have proposed betray an abysmal lack of understanding of the character and capability of the supreme deity. Think about it: what's a gift-giver's worst nightmare? It's shopping for the "man who has everything," right? If he wants it, he already has it. And if he doesn't own it already, it's probably because he'd really rather not have it. (I mean, who really *wants* a pouncing black panther table lamp with a clock in its stomach?) An infinitely stickier problem, then, is "shopping" for the Creator of the universe, the One who is holy and complete within Himself.

Virtually every religion assumes that its God wants to be appeased in some way. The Muslim bows toward Mecca five times a day (though their scriptures reveal that Allah really wanted *fifty* prostrations—pointed toward *Jerusalem*). The Jew tries to observe 613 customs and traditions he believes are derived from the

Torah (though as we have seen, half of them bear no more than a passing resemblance to the original Instructions). The Buddhist, reasoning that God must want as many prayers as possible, spins a prayer wheel *automating* the tedious process of talking to a deity with whom he can't relate—and doesn't really want to. The Hindu, believing that all living things contain the divine, meditates, chants mantras, or prepares offerings of food for his favorite god among millions of possible deities—leaving the rest of them ignored and unattended. The Catholic goes to mass and pays *the church* (not God) for the privilege of lighting candles to expedite prayer or extricate his loved ones from purgatory, while performing contrived penances to pay for his own sins—in effect declaring the sacrifice of Christ to be inadequate. The typical Protestant, meanwhile, figures he's done God a big favor by showing up at church for an hour a week, enduring a sermon and dropping a few dollars into the offering plate. We've come a long, long way from the *serious* religions of the past, where one might have been expected to mutilate himself or sacrifice his own child as a burnt offering. We cringe at the prospect of a god who would want such things, of course. But ask yourself: what kind of God would be so shallow as to allow Himself to be placated with the cheap, silly things *we* offer Him these days.

All of these “religious” things—the serious and the silly—are calculated to appease God, to buy Him off. They are not designed as avenues for relationship with Him, but rather as bribes, inducements to persuade Him to either bestow some kind of boon on the worshipper or simply go away and leave him alone—to do him no harm. Religion, in short, is the world's biggest protection racket. The stated goals may differ, but the underlying motivation is always the same: giving the “worshipper,” what he wants. He might be looking for a paradise populated by seventy sex-starved virgins, a place dripping with low hanging fruit and rivers of wine. He might seek nirvana, a state of nothingness where the pain and turmoil of life can no longer trouble him. He might be angling for reincarnation as somebody richer or more privileged than he is now. His motivation might simply be escape from the fiery damnation in hell his guilty conscience tells him he's earned. Man calculates that if he can figure out what God wants—and then give it to Him—then God will reciprocate in kind. But why do men assume the Creator of the universe would be the least bit interested in the pitiful things they do to appease Him? The God I know can spend His mornings building things like the Orion Nebula if He wants to. What makes us think He'll be awed with our devotion if we decorate a cow with flowers, circumambulate the Ka'aba, or manipulate a rosary? I submit to you that the religious things we do “for God” are nothing but “black panther table lamps” to Him. He'd rather we didn't bother. *Really*.

But then we look at the Torah, and we see hundreds of directives that, for all we can tell, look even less logical than mindlessly mumbling multiple “hail Marys” or fasting all day during Ramadan. These precepts were entrusted

exclusively to one nation, Israel—who were then told to separate themselves from the surrounding peoples. In some cases these outsiders were specifically prohibited from joining Israel in the performance of these rites. The Jews are inexplicably told to do things like refraining from work on Saturday, cutting off the foreskins of the penises of their male babies on the eighth day of life, killing their firstborn male animals, removing the yeast from their homes for one week each year, making a gold-covered wooden box with statues of angels on top, putting it in a special room in a tent where nobody is allowed to go except for one guy, one day a year, who sprinkles it with the blood of a dead goat—and hundreds of other things that on the surface seem far goofier than anything the Muslims or Hindus do. It all begs the question: *what's the difference?* One prophet says that Yahweh handed down a body of law. Another prophet insists that *Allah* handed down a body of law—a code diametrically opposed to the first. Moses, Buddha, Muhammad, Confucius, and a plethora of popes, princes, preachers, pundits, potentates, and presidents all claim to have the solution to life's puzzle: *follow me and prosper*. Who, if anybody, can we trust? Each one seems crazier than the next.

But there *is* a difference, though it's one you can only see if you're looking for it—if you're willing to take Yahweh at His word. This fundamental distinction is that all of the world's religions describe and dictate what they think *man must do for God* in order to appease and placate Him—and that includes Judaism's skewed take on the Torah. But in reality, the Torah describes the converse: *what God is doing for man*. This is what makes it absolutely unique among documents of faith. It also explains why its precepts seem so incredibly pointless if taken as mere “religious duties.” Even the word “precept” clues us in that there is more to the Torah than its face value. “Precept” is from the Latin *praeceptum*, based on a verb meaning literally “to take beforehand.” The instruction goes *before* the truth we are to derive from it. The law is not the lesson any more than a map is the actual place. The signpost is not the destination. The religious precepts of Muhammad, Buddha, or Zoroaster are but maps and signposts to cities that do not exist—handed down by “gods” who are figments of their prophets' imaginations. But the precepts of Moses are the words of the true and living God. Yes, the Torah is only a map, but the city toward which it guides us is *real*: a place of shelter, peace, and salvation. That “city” is Yahshua the Messiah.

After his resurrection from the dead, Yahshua explained it all to a couple of very confused disciples: **“Then He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”** (Luke 24:25-27) He pointed out that the writings of Moses—the precepts of the Torah—all concern, predict, and define the coming Anointed One. They are therefore not to

be seen as religious duties, rites and rituals devoid of (or independent from) prophetic significance. They are not things Israel was supposed to do to appease Yahweh, to keep Him “off their backs,” even though obedience promised blessing. They were, rather, symbols on the roadmap of heaven, indications of a thousand specific ways in which Yahweh was in the process of reconciling mankind to Himself—saving the world from its sin.

Paul, too, spoke of the fundamental difference between religious observance and a personal, living relationship with Yahshua. **“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”** Philosophy and tradition (which together define religion) are to be avoided, he says, because they are deceitful products of the fallen world. We are made complete, perfect, and whole not through the “principles of the world,” but through the One in Whom Yahweh dwells among us in bodily form: King Yahshua. **“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead....”** As if to make my point for me, Paul now refers to two ostensibly “religious” rites, one from the Torah and the other from New Covenant practice. Both of these have deep symbolic significance, though they make no practical sense whatsoever. Circumcision, he says, is a picture of “putting off the sins of the flesh,” and water baptism (literally, immersion) is symbolic of being buried and raised again with Christ—both things done as expressions of our faith in the promises of God. Neither of these things are of any value intrinsically; they only become significant in the context of what they represent—the shadow being evidence of the object that casts it.

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross....” I realize that this “handwriting of requirements against us” sounds at first blush like he might be talking about the Torah. But in the Greek, it’s clear that this is an erroneous deduction. The word (*cheirographon*) means “a document or note of indebtedness, written with one’s own hand, as proof of obligation.” It’s an I.O.U., so to speak. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* notes, “The reference is to God’s pronouncement that the note which testifies against us is cancelled. The phrase is obviously based on a thought which is common in Judaism, namely, that God keeps an account of man’s debt.... The point of the metaphor of the note of indebtedness is to underline the preceding statement ‘forgiven you all trespasses.’ God has forgiven sins. He has cancelled the note of indebtedness by taking it and

fixing it to the cross of Christ.” In other words, that which God has nailed to the cross is *not* the Law—rather, it’s the debt we owe, the penalty for our sin: death itself.

Paul now comes to the point: **“Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”** (Colossians 2:8-17) He’s saying that *the way* we observe the symbolic precepts of the Torah is of little consequence, for they are but shadows of the substantial reality—Yahshua. His work is finished, and He has triumphed over the forces of evil (though admittedly, the physical reality hasn’t quite caught up with the spiritual). Since the destination has already been reached, it matters little whether we thought of the journey in terms of kilometers or miles or hours traveled. He makes it clear that both the “practical” and “religious” sides of the Torah point toward the Messiah, each in its own way. The things we are instructed to do are symbolic of what Yahweh was doing for us. They’re a reflection of His work, His grace, His love. We do them not to placate God, but to prepare for His presence.

The examples Paul cites will serve to demonstrate the principle. (1) *Food and drink*. If we follow the Torah’s dietary guidelines, we are showing our trust in Yahweh’s knowledge of what’s good or bad for us—even if we don’t know anything about nutrition or intestinal parasites. Spiritually, this is a picture of being discerning, assimilating into our souls only what is clean, pure, and undefiled—ultimately the body and blood of Yahshua. (2) *Festivals*. If we observe the seven “holy convocations,” the appointments with Yahweh He described in such detail in the Torah, we will see His entire plan of redemption at a glance. They’re sort of a “highlight reel” of the Big Game. But if we substitute Passover with Easter, Tabernacles with Christmas, and dismiss the rest of the *miqra’ey* as “mere Jewish tradition,” we will have a poor grasp indeed on Yahweh’s *modus operandi*. (3) *New moons*. If we don’t make a point of periodically renewing our relationship with Yahweh—as the Israelites were instructed to do at each new moon—we run the risk of growing stale and complacent in our relationship with our God. And (4) *Sabbaths*. If we refuse to honor the institution of the Sabbath, we will rob ourselves not only of the weekly reminder that Yahweh’s plan of redemption is on a schedule, we will miss the point that in the end, we cannot work to achieve our own salvation. God’s work is finished, and all of *our* works—whether done for God’s glory or our own—will also be complete by sundown on the sixth day, that is, the close of the sixth millennium since Adam’s fall. That day is rapidly approaching, but it need not catch us unaware like a thief in the night.

These and a thousand other things have been commanded by Yahweh, not so that we might appease Him, but so that He might teach us about His love and provision. They're not for His benefit, but for ours. Every precept reflects God's light from a slightly different angle, like the facets on a diamond. And like any precious jewel, the Torah is beautiful only if it is seen in the pure light of day. It is of no use to anyone if kept in a box.

SYMBOLIC INFORMATION

(964) *The price of a dead slave is thirty shekels of silver. "One guilty of fatal criminal negligence in the case of a slave must pay the owner the price of a slave. If the ox gores a male or female servant, he shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned."* (Exodus 21:32) Why would Yahweh bother setting the price for a slave who had been slain through gross criminal negligence? Because He Himself was planning to become just such a slave on our behalf. Paul explains: **"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."** (Philippians 2:5-8) Paul's point is that for God Himself to willingly set aside His glory to take the form of a man, He had to abase Himself far beyond what the ordinary slave, having lost his status as a free man, would have endured. We can't begin to imagine the degree of sacrifice such an act would have required, for Yahshua relinquished more than mere power. He gave up actual dimensions (at least one: time) in order to enter our world. It's not like a handsome prince in a fairy tale becoming a toad; it's more like the prince becoming a *picture* of a toad!

Yahshua, then, volunteered to become the slave who was destined to be "gored to death by an out-of-control ox." This ox, of course, was the Roman Empire (goaded into action by the Jewish Sanhedrin, as I pointed out in [Precept #884](#)), and its criminally negligent "owner" was the human race—us. And just as the Torah required, a price had to be paid for the life of this "slave," thirty silver shekels: **"Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?' And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him."** (Matthew 26:14-16) At this late date, I am no longer amazed at the incredible accuracy of the Torah's smallest details—or that they all point directly and unequivocally to Christ. What leaves me speechless is that the chief priests and the scribes—who prided themselves on knowing their scriptures inside and

out—couldn't see that their own actions, time and time again, conspired to identify Yahshua of Nazareth as the Messiah.

(965) *God's sacrifice had to be sinless. "You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning."*

(Exodus 23:18) A grain offering accompanied every blood sacrifice, though its form (bread, cakes, etc.) was not specified. As we have seen, bread, the staple of the Hebrew diet, would normally have been leavened; that is, yeast would have been employed to make the dough rise in the baking process. But Yahweh symbolically associated leaven with sin in His instructions for the Feast of Unleavened Bread—a small amount of it being enough to chemically alter the entire loaf, changing it from within, just like sin does to our lives. So leaven was never to be a component of the bread offered up with a blood sacrifice, for both the bread and the animal were metaphorical of the Messiah in their own ways. Grain was symbolic of God's provision, and its being made into bread fine tuned the picture to represent His provision of the body of Christ (see I Corinthians 11:24).

This, of course, tacitly requires that the Messiah Himself would have to be sinless, which explains why the scribes and Pharisees worked so hard trying (unsuccessfully) to prove that He was a sinner. If He *had* been sinful, they would have been entirely justified in having Him executed, for He claimed to be One with God. Their standard of "sinlessness," however, was slavish adherence to the impenetrable maze of rules their own "oral law" had extracted from the Torah—not the Torah itself. It would have been physically impossible to observe the requirements of their oral law, for two reasons. First, it is internally inconsistent, at war with itself: its tenets were entirely dependent upon which rabbinical school one chose to follow. Second, it wasn't codified at this point: the Mishnah (the previously forbidden written form of the oral law) wouldn't be created for another century or so. But according to the standards of the Torah, Yahshua—though enduring the same temptations we all face—remained faultless before God. **"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."** (Hebrews 4:14-15) As Paul, one of the foremost Torah scholars of his day, noted, **"He [Yahweh] made Him who knew no sin [Yahshua] to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** (II Corinthians 5:21) I guess that explains why both "sin" and the "sin offering" that covers it are expressed with the same Hebrew word: *chata't*.

And what was that about “the fat of My sacrifice not remaining until morning”? The fat of the sacrifice was Yahweh’s portion. It was to be completely consumed on the altar—a picture of the judgment Yahshua endured. The context of this passage is the observance of the three times each year all Israelite males were to keep the holy appointments of Yahweh—the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the spring (including Passover and Firstfruits), the Feast of Weeks in the early summer, and the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall. We are reminded that the Messiah’s “judgment,” that is, His sojourn in sheol while he endured the wrath of God on our behalf, took place on the Feast of Unleavened Bread. By the morning of the next day (Sunday, the Feast of Firstfruits), Yahshua had already resurrected Himself from the dead. **“Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.... The angel answered and said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.’”** (Matthew 28:1, 5-6) The “fat of God’s sacrifice” had not “remained until morning.” It had not continued under judgment, constrained by death, one moment longer than the Torah had required.

- (966) *Aaron and his sons represent the Messiah and His followers.* **“And Aaron and his sons you shall bring to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall wash them with water. Then you shall take the garments, put the tunic on Aaron, and the robe of the ephod, the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the intricately woven band of the ephod. You shall put the turban on his head, and put the holy crown on the turban. And you shall take the anointing oil, pour it on his head, and anoint him. Then you shall bring his sons and put tunics on them. And you shall gird them with sashes, Aaron and his sons, and put the hats on them. The priesthood shall be theirs for a perpetual statute. So you shall consecrate Aaron and his sons.”** (Exodus 29:4-9) We’ve previously discussed the symbology of the various garments and rituals associated with the Hebrew priesthood, so I won’t repeat the particulars. I’d just like to note that there are priesthods, and then there is *Yahweh’s* priesthood. Every religion on earth has a “priesthood” of some sort—a class of people who claim to intercede between the god of that religion and the common people. They station themselves as gatekeepers—interpreters of the divine psyche. Whether called “priests” or something else, these individuals enjoy power, prestige, and privilege because of their exalted position as go-betweens with the deity *du jour*. Even godless religions like atheistic secular humanism have their priests—the media stars, business moguls, politicians, and professors who shape public perception and mold society to honor un gods of their own manufacture: pleasure, profit, pride, political

correctness, or popular technology. Not surprisingly, these priesthoods are seen as positions to be aspired to, worked for, and coveted.

But in Yahweh's world, you can't join the priesthood. You can't aspire to it or educate yourself to become part of it. You have to be *born* into it. Under the Torah, to become a priest, one must be a male heir of Aaron. In fact, that qualification defines you as a priest, whether you meant to be one or not. The reason God set it up this way was that following His instructions isn't really a religion. A religion is something you *join*; a relationship is something you *experience*. A religion is something you *do*; a relationship is something you *are*. His priests aren't there to rule the people, but to serve them. They aren't tasked with controlling access to God, but merely enabling it.

More to the point, the Hebrew priesthood was—like virtually everything else in the Torah—designed to point toward a greater reality, something beyond its own temporal existence. The anointed High Priest was a transparent picture of the coming Messiah, and his sons are obviously those who “follow Him.” Like the priests of Israel who served in the tabernacle, we who follow Christ must be “born” into the job—that is, we must be “born from above” in His Spirit, as He explained in John 3. Moses was told to consecrate (make holy, set apart) Aaron and his sons for the work of the priesthood. Those who were not consecrated in this way were forbidden to serve in the capacity of a priest of Yahweh. In the same way, one who is not born from above in Yahweh's Spirit is intrinsically incapable of serving God or mankind in any meaningful way—and by “meaningful,” I mean in a manner that will have significance or value beyond our mortal lives.

(967) *We must be ransomed to avoid being plagued.* “Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a ransom for himself to Yahweh, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them.’” (Exodus 30:11-12) The census to which Yahweh is referring was to be done for military purposes, males “**from twenty years old and above—all who are able to go to war in Israel.**” (Numbers 1:3) Each Israelite male (excluding Levites) who would be tasked with ridding the Land of its corrupt inhabitants was to be ransomed for half a shekel of silver—metal that would be used in the Tabernacle (See Exodus 38:27, [Mitzvah #404](#), [Precept #715](#)).

Following God's train of symbolic thought through all of this is enough to make your head swim. The census “ransom” was not a fee or tax. It was an offering given to make a point: the Israelite soldiers were not to rely on their own strength, numbers, skill, or individual valor in

battle. Rather, Yahweh specifically said that *He* would be fighting their battles for them. His point is that self-reliance is antithetical to God-reliance. In fact, self-sufficiency is a plague that will, in the end, inflict death upon the one who does not trust Yahweh in the battles of life: we cannot save ourselves. So the soldier is “ransomed,” that is, exchanged for a nominal amount of silver. **“This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (a shekel is twenty gerahs). The half-shekel shall be an offering to Yahweh. Everyone included among those who are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering to Yahweh.”** (Exodus 30:13-14) The message is: “this half shekel is given in place of the life of the soldier/believer, for the soldier is not responsible for Israel’s welfare or victory in battle—Yahweh is.

The “value” of the individual soldier had nothing to do with this arrangement. The muscular, seasoned Special Forces type of guy didn’t pay more than the skinny, green recruit, for the simple reason that this wasn’t about what *he* could do, but rather what *God* would do for him—and through him. **“The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when you give an offering to Yahweh, to make atonement for yourselves. And you shall take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the children of Israel before Yahweh, to make atonement for yourselves.”** (Exodus 30:15-16) The offering was made *to* Yahweh, but it was to be used *for* “the service of the tabernacle,” in a manner we’ll discuss in a moment. This should be a clue to us that the plan of God is in view, for that is what the tabernacle is all about—each element of its design and ritual said something about Yahweh’s plan for our redemption. Bear in mind that “ransom” (*koper*) and “atonement” (*kapar*) are closely related words. The idea is to atone (that is, cover) by offering a substitute—often a blood sacrifice, but here a silver coin, which as we will see, is going to be pressed into service to represent the same thing.

The silver was used to make the foundation bases, the “sockets” into which the wall-planks of the tabernacle and the supports for the veil concealing the Most Holy Place would be anchored. **“And the silver from those who were numbered of the congregation was one hundred talents and one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary: a bekah for each man (that is, half a shekel, according to the shekel of the sanctuary), for everyone included in the numbering from twenty years old and above, for six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty men. And from the hundred talents of silver were cast the sockets of the sanctuary and the bases of the veil: one hundred sockets from the hundred talents, one talent for each socket.”** (Exodus 38:25-27) As I pointed out a few chapters back, the word

for “socket” (*'eden*) is spelled the same as the word for lord or master (*'adon*), and not by accident, I’m thinking. The symbols lead us (or at least *me*) to conclude that we are being held upright, made secure, and kept set apart from the earth by our Master, Yahshua the Messiah—and specifically by the atoning ransom (*kapar/koper*) that He provided for us by shedding His blood for us on Calvary.

- (968) *Burnt offerings predict the Messiah.* **‘When any one of you brings an offering to Yahweh, you shall bring your offering of the livestock—of the herd and of the flock. If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before Yahweh.** (Leviticus 1:2-3) The *olah*, or “burnt offering,” was completely voluntary, an act denoting homage to Yahweh or celebrating His atonement of the worshipper’s sins. Although it was offered of one’s own free will, there were restrictions concerning *how* it was to be done. The reason, as we shall see, was that Yahshua’s death on Calvary was to be an *olah*—a voluntary sacrifice that the Messiah would make of Himself, honoring Yahweh, providing atonement and celebrating the freedom it would bring to mankind. First, it had to be a clean animal (as defined by the Mosaic dietary laws). One couldn’t offer up a snake or pig, an act of penance, a sum of money, or even one’s firstborn child. Because it was a picture of the Messiah’s self-sacrifice, this had to involve the spilling of blood: an innocent life had to be given up—its innocence represented by restricting the types of animals that could be used to those that were “clean” for dietary purposes. Yahshua would later bring this metaphor home to roost, declaring that we had to “eat His flesh” and “drink His blood”—that is, assimilate Him into our very lives—in order to be saved.

Second, the *olah* had to be performed at a specific place: at the tabernacle of meeting. **“Then he [that is, the one who brings the offering] shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. He shall kill the bull before Yahweh; and the priests, Aaron’s sons, shall bring the blood and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of meeting.”** (Leviticus 1:4-5) Although the tabernacle was portable by design, its function was eventually “set in stone” with the building of the temple, on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. The geography of the crucifixion provides remarkable confirmation of the Torah’s prophetic accuracy. The blood had to be sprinkled “all around the altar.” It would transpire that Yahshua was scourged within an inch of His life in the Tower of Antonia—only a few hundred feet from where the altar stood in the temple. Bulls or oxen were to be sacrificed on the *west* side of the altar (that is, between the altar and the door of the tabernacle, which faced east—v.3), and sheep on the *north*

side (v.11). And sure enough, the crucifixion site was *northwest* of the temple mount, at a spot now known as “Gordon’s Calvary,” a rock escarpment tucked in behind Jerusalem’s present day main bus station, a mere seven hundred paces from the temple (*not* down south at the religion-encrusted Church of the Holy Sepulcher). Here you can still see the “skull’s face” alluded to in John 19:17.

Third, just as the worshipper transferred his guilt to the sacrificial animal by placing his hand upon its head, our atonement is achieved through the transference of our sin to Yahshua. Note that the priest doesn’t slay the *olah*—that is done by the one who has brought the offering. Each of us is *personally* responsible for the death of God’s Messiah. Note also that this slaying is done “before Yahweh.” Nothing is hidden from Him.

- (969) *Grain, oil, and wine offerings must accompany every animal sacrifice.* “When you have come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving to you, and you make an offering by fire to Yahweh, a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or in your appointed feasts, to make a sweet aroma to Yahweh, from the herd or the flock, then he who presents his offering to Yahweh shall bring a grain offering of one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of oil; and one-fourth of a hin of wine as a drink offering you shall prepare with the burnt offering or the sacrifice, for each lamb.” (Numbers 15:2-5) The Levitical sacrifices—and there were several types (see Volume I, [Chapter 12](#))—were never supposed to be offered up by themselves. Whenever innocent blood was shed during one of the ordained sacrificial rites, three other things had to be presented as well: grain, olive oil, and wine. This should be taken as a clue that there is more to our salvation than one guiltless Man offering Himself up as a sacrifice.

First, grain (wheat or barley) was to accompany the sacrifice. We’ll cover this element more thoroughly in the [following Precept](#), but the central truth here is that grain represents God’s provision. More specifically, the grain given with an animal sacrifice had to be “fine flour,” that is, grain that had been crushed, ground to powder, and from which all of the hulls or chaff had been removed. In this form, the grain represented the body of the Messiah, free of worthlessness (the non-nutritive “chaff” of a mortal life as a fallen, sinful creature), and ground fine in the mill of adversity and sacrifice for the benefit of mankind. Only grain that had been subjected to this “abuse” would be suitable for our spiritual sustenance. Only a Messiah who had shed the protective “hull” of heaven would be available to nourish our souls. An “ephah” was a dry measure equivalent to .652 bushels, or about 20.9 quarts; so the “tenth of an ephah” required here was just over half a gallon, or 2.3 liters.

The title “Messiah,” of course, means “anointed.” Kings and priests were anointed with olive oil poured over the head—inaugurating and consecrating them for their roles of leadership and service. Thus we should not be surprised to find that the “fine flour” that represented the body of Christ was to be infused with oil. This oil (as would be explained in Zechariah 4) represents the Holy Spirit. Thus the metaphor comes full circle: the “oil” with which the Messiah, Yahshua, was to be anointed was, in truth, Yahweh’s Spirit. It would not merely be poured out upon Him, either, but would be “mixed” throughout His very being, shaping His character and providing His power. Since a “hin” is about a gallon and a half, making a quarter of a hin one and a half quarts or 1.2 liters, we can deduce that the fine flour was positively *goopy* with oil—permeated, saturated, *wet* with it. Yahshua wasn’t just *influenced* by the Holy Spirit; He was oozing the Spirit’s presence from every pore. This same Spirit dwells within every believer today. So why isn’t our walk as flawless as Yahshua’s was? Maybe it’s a *lubrication* problem—not enough “oil” in our lives.

The third sacrificial element was wine, which was to be poured out as an oblation upon the ground. It was, in Yahshua’s words, **“the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”**

(I Corinthians 11:25) But the blood of the lambs and goats was to be spilled upon the ground as well. Why the doubling of the symbol? I believe the answer is latent in the instruction as to *how much* wine to pour out: one quarter hin—the very same amount as the oil. The equivalence, it seems, implies a link between the blood of Christ and the Spirit that indwelt Him. We are told several times in scripture, “The life is in the blood.” Our eternal life is, in the same way, dependent upon the presence of Yahweh’s Spirit: **“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again [literally, from above].’”** (John 3:5-7)

(970) *Grain offerings predict the Messiah.* **“When anyone offers a grain offering to Yahweh, his offering shall be of fine flour. And he shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it. He shall bring it to Aaron’s sons, the priests, one of whom shall take from it his handful of fine flour and oil with all the frankincense. And the priest shall burn it as a memorial on the altar, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to Yahweh.... And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt.”** (Leviticus 2:1-2, 13) We have seen that grain, bread, and even manna are representative of the body of Christ. As He Himself said, **“I am the bread of life.... I am the living bread**

which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh.” (John 6:48-51) **“Take [this bread] and eat. This is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”**

(I Corinthians 11:24) Here in Leviticus we learn that offerings of grain (which were to accompany every blood sacrifice—see [Precept #969](#)) always had to have several ingredients added to them. First, olive oil was to be poured upon the grain or the bread. This, as we saw above, is symbolic of the Spirit of God that would permeate the life of Yahshua. Second, frankincense was to be sprinkled on it. This white powder, you’ll recall, was indicative of purity through sacrifice—specifically, *our* purity achieved through *His* sacrifice. And third, every grain offering was to be seasoned with salt, a picture of preservation and flavor, as well as being a symbol of God’s promise and our acceptance: a “covenant of salt,” where two parties would exchange a bit of salt upon reaching an agreement, was like our “shaking hands on it.”

There were also some ingredients that were specifically forbidden in the grain offerings—things that might ordinarily have been part of the process of making bread. **“No grain offering which you bring to Yahweh shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey in any offering to Yahweh made by fire.”** (Leviticus 2:11) Leaven, as we have seen, is a picture of sin. The Messiah would be slain for our sins, not His own. As Daniel’s stunning 70-weeks prophecy puts it, He would be “cut off, but not for Himself.” Or as Isaiah wrote, **“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”** (Isaiah 53:4-5) So leaven was not to be part of the grain offering, for Yahshua did not sin—ever.

Honey was also forbidden as an added ingredient. As I noted in [Mitzvah #477](#) “Honey is pleasant and sweet, a delight to the taste. Christ’s sacrifice, by contrast, was marked by sorrow and bitterness, pain and suffering. Honey was not descriptive of Messiah’s first-century mission, so it was not to be offered.” A telling description of Israel’s privileged position as Yahweh’s chosen people includes this detail: **“You were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil.”** (Ezekiel 16:13) Fine flour was obtained by crushing the kernels of grain, and oil was produced by crushing ripe olives—both things predictive of the pain the Messiah would endure. But honey, the sweetness of a pleasant mortal life (obtained, it must be noted, by stealing it from those who had labored to make it) would not be the Messiah’s lot. He would instead be called a “Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.”

There were also instructions with Messianic significance concerning the manner in which the grain offering was to be prepared. **“If you offer a grain offering of your firstfruits to Yahweh, you shall offer for the grain offering of your firstfruits green heads of grain roasted on the fire, grain beaten from full heads. And you shall put oil on it, and lay frankincense on it. It is a grain offering. Then the priest shall burn the memorial portion: part of its beaten grain and part of its oil, with all the frankincense, as an offering made by fire to Yahweh.”**

(Leviticus 2:14-16) Specifically in reference to the offering of firstfruits—a representative of the expected harvest—we see that the “green” or barely ripe grain was to be “beaten from full heads.” “Green” is the Hebrew *abib*, the original name for the month of Nisan—the first month in the Jewish calendar. It indicates grain (in this case, barley) that is ripe, but is still soft. Normally, the barley crop would be harvested in the second month, Iyar, when it had been given time to mature and dry out a bit in the field. Thus the firstfruits offering was made when the barley was at the peak of freshness—when it held the maximum promise for a bountiful harvest. Yahshua, of course, is the antitype for the firstfruits offering. His resurrection from the dead on the Feast of Firstfruits is a harbinger, a promise, of *our* coming harvest, the resurrection of the living and dead saints of His *ekklesia*. This harvest is indicated in Yahweh’s “appointment book” by the Feast of Trumpets, scheduled for the first day of the month of Tishri, in the autumn.

Note that the just-ripe grain offering of firstfruits was to be “beaten from full heads.” No chaff (the worthless, non-nutritive part of the grain) was to be offered up by fire (read: judgment) to Yahweh. Instead, the barley kernel was to be extricated from its husk by beating or threshing—a violent process predictive of the abuse our Savior would suffer on our behalf on His way to crucifixion. Note also that only part of the firstfruits grain, and only part of the oil, were to be consumed in the fire. This tells us that although God subjected His own Spirit-filled Son to wrath for our sakes, He did not consume *Himself* in the process: God is not dead. However, *all* of the frankincense was to be used, telling us that our purity was achieved *completely* through His sacrifice—there is nothing that must be added later, nothing for us to do to finish God’s work, no works, alms, or penance. As Yahshua declared, “It *is* finished.”

- (971) *The Torah’s dietary rules predict the Messiah.* **“You shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creeps; nor shall you make yourselves unclean with them, lest you be defiled by them. For I am Yahweh your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am Yahweh who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God.**

You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.” (Leviticus 11:43-45) There were certain animals that the Israelites were not only not to eat, they weren’t even supposed to touch their dead carcasses. But note what Yahweh *doesn’t* say here. He doesn’t talk about health hazards, warning of tummy aches or skin rashes; He doesn’t speak of intestinal parasites and food-borne toxins. Rather, Yahweh appeals—no fewer than six times in these three short verses—to a *spiritual* principle: *set yourselves apart from the world because I, Yahweh your God, am set apart from My creation.* What we put into our bodies is analogous to what we put into our souls. If eating toxic meat is bad for our bodies, then thinking evil thoughts and idolizing worthless things is bad for our souls. **“This is the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.”** (Leviticus 11:46-47) We are to distinguish, discriminate, *decide* what to put into our lives, choosing the good from among a plethora of spiritual possibilities.

Yahweh uses two words to describe the negative result of association (dietary or otherwise) with these “unclean creatures,” neither of them having anything in particular to do with health or nutrition. First, “abominable” is from the verb *shaqats*, meaning to “detest, abhor, disdain, i.e., have a strong emotional response of rejection and antipathy...feel contempt or scorn for those seen as bad, dirty, or without value; defile.” (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*) Yahweh is saying that this is how He will feel about the one who ingests “creeping things.” The second word is “unclean,” also translated “defiled.” *Tame’* is a Hebrew verb meaning “to be or become unclean, become impure—sexually, religiously, or ceremonially; to defile oneself or be defiled by idolatry; to profane God’s name.” (*Strong’s*)

On the other hand, there are a few words in this passage that speak of the positive aspects of avoiding these “creeping things” and other dietary no-noes. The first is translated “consecrate.” *Qadash* is a verb meaning: “to be sacred, consecrated, i.e., dedicate to service and loyalty to God...to set apart, consecrate, dedicate, regard as holy; be holy, i.e., be in a state of having superior moral qualities, with behavior which is positively unique and pure, in contrast to other corrupt standards.” “Be holy,” uses an adjective based on the same root: *qadowsh* means “holy, i.e., pertaining to being unique and pure in the sense of superior moral qualities and possessing certain essential divine qualities in contrast with what is human; sacred, consecrated, i.e., pertaining to what is dedicated in service to God.” The word translated “clean” is *tahowr*, an adjective that means,

“clean, i.e., pertaining to being ceremonially or ritually clean: pure, i.e., pertaining to the feature of an object not having foreign particles or impurities; flawless, perfect, i.e., without defect of any kind and so free from moral impurity.” (DBL-SD)

There is clearly more to this than eating some things and avoiding others. God has drawn a very clear contrast between the two worlds, the clean and the unclean. Eating “clean” animals for food is a metaphor for being set apart for Yahweh’s glory and purpose, dedicated to His honor and friendship, remaining untainted by the world’s moral standards and unimpressed with its wiles—which the believer understands to be dangerous, if not toxic. But eating “unclean” animals like pigs, shellfish, carrion birds, rodents, insects, and reptiles, is symbolic of buying into the world’s system—staying behind in Egypt, so to speak—where Satan’s spiritual substitutes promise exotic experiences, dangerous delights, or merely plausibly palatable counterfeits for the believer’s diet: the bread of life, living water, and a main course of the Lamb of God. The devil would have you believe that what God offers you is bland and boring. I find *nothing* boring about Yahshua. But spicy satanic concoctions like sin salad, pride pâté, and Babylon bouillabaisse leave a lost and hungry world sick to their souls and even closer to spiritual starvation than they were before they sat down to eat. How can we make the world understand that the antidote to poison is not more poison?

- (972) *Tsitzits are to function as reminders of God’s covenant. “Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of Yahweh and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. I am Yahweh your God.’”* (Numbers 15:37-41) We looked at this concept way back in [\[Mitzvah #18\]](#) so I’ll try not to repeat myself too much. These tassels were to be worn by everybody in Israel, throughout their generations. Doing this would achieve several goals. First, when you saw someone else wearing the tsitzit, you’d know immediately that he (or she) was an Israelite—a brother or sister and a fellow member of Yahweh’s “chosen family.” Many of God’s Instructions distinguished between how Jews were to relate to each other from how they were to deal with the world, so this was a practical, reliable, low tech means of identifying your own people—sort of like wearing gang colors would be today in some inner city neighborhoods, only without all the crime and bloodshed.

Second, they were meant to be a distraction from the daily grind of life. One's "life" in the Promised Land might seem to consist of waging war, tending sheep, planting wheat, making bread, or raising children. But this, Yahweh says, is an illusion—it's not your life, only your job. Your life, He says, is defined by the covenant—Israel's special relationship with Yahweh. Twice in this passage, among hundreds of repetitions in the Torah, He reminds Israel to "do all My commandments." At this late date, we have come to recognize that Yahweh's commandments, *all* of them, are there to teach Israel (and through them, the gentiles as well) about His plan for our redemption. Every precept, one way or another, makes a statement about how God was going to save mankind, where He would do it, when, why, or through Whom.

So the third objective of wearing the tsitzit was to instruct Israel about their coming Redeemer. We are not told what the fibers were suppose to be made of. I believe this is purposeful, for if Yahweh had specified wool, we might have read "works" into the precept; and if linen, we would have seen grace—imputed righteousness. As it is, the source of the tassel's thread is left unspecified, as if to say, "The tsitzit represents all of Israel, for better or worse, obedient or not, faithful or not, holy or not." All of the fibers except one would have been white or off-white in color, no matter what they were made of. And that one exception was the key to understanding the significance of the tsitzit.

That single thread was to be dyed blue—the color of authority, of royalty, of extravagant expenditure. The message was messianic: there would be *One* among Israel who had the right to rule. This one thread was made of the same stuff as the rest of them. That is, the Messiah would be human, an Israelite. But its color set it apart (read: *made it holy*) from all the rest, indicating that this One would be special, an eternal King. This blue fiber was, however, bound into a bundle with all the other threads—they all lived in the same Land, walked through the same world.

Blue dye, however, also implied another message: somebody had to get dirty—He had to become unclean. In order to obtain this precious fluid, the *tekelet* blue or purple dye, someone had to handle a ritually defiling animal—the carcass of a dead shellfish, the *murex* snail. Someone would have to sacrifice himself—take the people's impurity upon himself—in order that the Torah might be kept. That "Someone" would turn out to be the same One represented by the blue thread of royalty: Yahshua the Messiah.

(973) *The Messiah's mother must bring both a burnt offering and a sin offering. "When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter, [a*

new mother] shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then he shall offer it before Yahweh, and make atonement for her.”

(Leviticus 12:6-7) Catholics have been known to jump to the conclusion that because Christ was sinless, his earthly mother must have been sinless as well—making Mary an object of veneration, if not outright worship. But the Torah proves that notion to be false. Luke 2:24 reports that Mary brought “a pair of turtledoves or young pigeons” in order to fulfill the Law. That is, she took the “poor mother’s” option, as described in the Torah: **“If she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons—one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering.”** (Leviticus 12:8) The sin offering (*chata't*) was required **“if a person sins unintentionally [i.e., through error] against any of the commandments of Yahweh in anything which ought to be done, and does any of them.”** (Leviticus 4:2) If she had been sinless, then no sin offering would have been needed. By bringing one of the turtle doves, Mary was acknowledging her guilt before God—something we all need to do.

But what about the “burnt offering,” (*olah*) the sacrifice of homage and atonement that was also required? The Torah allowed, and Mary brought, a turtledove or young pigeon (see Leviticus 1:14 and 12:8), though a lamb was clearly preferred. Funny thing: although Mary didn’t know it, she *had* brought a “Lamb” to her purification ceremony: her own son, Yahshua. As John the Baptist would announce some thirty years later, **“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”** (John 1:29)

- (974) *Bring two goats to describe the Messiah’s role in our atonement. “And Aaron shall bring the goat on which Yahweh’s lot fell, and offer it as a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before Yahweh, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness.”* (Leviticus 16:9-10) On *Yom Kippurim*, the Day of Atonement, two goats were used to achieve the purpose of the *miqra*, which was stated thus: **“This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you. For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 16:29-30) We have previously discussed several key *Yom Kippurim* concepts. (1) “Affliction of the soul” (Hebrew *'anah*), entails *both* repentance, contrition, and acknowledgment of guilt, *and* answering and responding to Yahweh—together achieving personal reconciliation, the formation and development of a familial relationship with Him. (2) The Priest who makes atonement for us is ultimately Yahshua—the only worthy intercessor between God

and man. And (3) the point of atonement (literally, “covering”—a concept related to the paying of a ransom) is to cleanse us from our sins, for becoming clean and pure is the only way we can stand before Yahweh, whose very presence is as lethal to evil as light is to darkness.

Here, I’d like to focus on another aspect of the *miqra*: the relationship between the goats, our sin, and the mission of the Messiah. Two goats were used because two different things happened to our sin through the sacrifice of Yahshua. One of them—designated as a sin offering (*chata’t*) for all of the people—was slain, and its blood was sprinkled by the Priest upon the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place. If the events I reported in *Future History—Chapter 13: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem”*—are true (and I believe they are, though I can’t prove it), then the blood of *Yahshua Himself*, our ultimate sin offering, was literally, physically sprinkled upon the mercy seat, which was secreted away in a limestone cave directly beneath the crucifixion site. The Messiah’s blood was thus, by God’s own definition, efficacious in atoning for the sins of the people—“native” Israelites and believing gentile “strangers” alike.

But Yahshua, having sacrificed His life on our behalf, didn’t remain dead. So the second goat is recruited to reenact the mission of the living Messiah: the physical removal of our sins far away from us. This goat, having had the sins of the people symbolically transferred to him through the placing of the High Priest’s hands upon his head, was led into the wilderness, where no man dwells. Thus “all our iniquities” and “all our transgressions, concerning all our sins” (v.21) are not only covered over and paid for; they’re also separated from us by physical distance: they need never again trouble us. If you think about it, this becoming set apart from our sins is the very *definition* of holiness.

THE “RED HEIFER”

- (975) *Slaughter a red heifer outside the camp. “Now Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘This is the ordinance of the law which Yahweh has commanded, saying: Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which a yoke has never come. You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, that he may take it outside the camp, and it shall be slaughtered before him; and Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, and sprinkle some of its blood seven times directly in front of the tabernacle of meeting.’”* (Numbers 19:1-4) We discussed the Ordinance of the Red Heifer at length in Volume I, *Chapter 15* but the subject bears a second look. Remember what I said about “religious law” in the Torah making no sense if there’s no prophetic or symbolic meaning to it? This one is as

goofy as they get, if Yahweh isn't trying to tell us something. In fact, the Jewish sages assert that this is the only thing in the Torah that stumped Solomon.

The *purpose* of the law, however, is perfectly straightforward. Short version: the idea is to have a supply of ritually-prepared “water of purification” on hand at all times. This water, mixed with the ashes of the burned carcass of the red heifer and some other things, was to be sprinkled upon anyone who had touched a dead body. Without this sprinkling, they would remain ritually impure—a bad thing, for it disqualified the unclean person from participating in temple worship. If the ritual was pointless and self-serving, of course, one could merely shrug, yawn, and go on with his life. But if Yahweh meant for the rite to teach us about a spiritual reality, then its execution becomes a vitally important symbolic gesture. The lesson is: don't let death touch you without being cleansed.

But there's a rub. Actually, several of them. First, as usual, the rite can't be performed without a sanctuary and priesthood in place—things that haven't been available to the Jews for almost two thousand years now. Worse, this dog is chasing its tail. That is, the rabbis have declared that because Moses wrote, **“the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of Yahweh,”** (v. 20) the *sanctuary itself* is defiled, as is the priesthood (or, they would be, if they existed). They therefore must be cleansed—through the Red Heifer ordinance. But that would require that the temple and priesthood were already available—and in a state of ritual purity. In other words, both the chicken *and* the egg must come first.

Then there's the little problem of obtaining a kosher red heifer. According to the rabbinical rules (which are far more restrictive than Yahweh's) the heifer must be *all* red—no more than three hairs on its entire hide can be another color; it must be born in Israel; and it must be in its third year. Since the time of Moses, only nine such animals have been seen in the Land—none within the last two millennia. However, prime examples of Red Angus cows that could potentially meet the Levitical *and* rabbinical requirements are readily available in America. So Christian cattle breeder Clyde Lott began working with Orthodox rabbis in Israel in the 1990s to produce the perfect Israeli red heifer. It's only a matter of time before they succeed. And *that* will bring Israel one step closer to returning in faith to Yahweh their God, for it would clear one more hurdle in the Jewish mind concerning the rebuilding of the temple—something that's explicitly predicted in Scripture to happen during the Last Days.

So let's review the Torah's actual, literal requirements so far. (1) The red heifer must be presented by the people of Israel. (2) It must be without blemish or defect (something Clyde Lott interprets to mean, "a good-milking, sweetly disposed, handsomely constructed animal—basically, a twenty-first-century, high-tech cow"). (3) It must never have labored as a working draft animal; (4) It is to be delivered to "Eleazar the priest." Since Aaron was still alive when the law was delivered, his son Eleazar represents his successors down through the generations. Through tradition and DNA analysis, the Jews presume to have identified the priestly line, the Cohenim—technically, males whose genetic profile features the CMH, or "Cohen Modal Haplotype." (5) The Heifer is to be slaughtered "outside the camp," which today I'd take to mean outside the old city of Jerusalem. The traditional site for this is on the Mount of Olives (though something tells me Yahweh had another hill in mind: Moriah). (6) The priest is to take some of the blood and sprinkle it "seven times directly in front of the tabernacle of meeting." This, of course is a problem if no tabernacle or temple stands, but perhaps once the *site* of the future temple is determined, the ritual could be carried out as the Jewish faithful endeavor to once again draw near to their God.

These six points find symbolic fulfillment in the sacrifice of Christ, if only we'll bother to look for them. (1) Yahshua was an Israelite, from the tribe of Judah and the royal line of David. (2) Though fully human, He was without sin. (3) The cleansing of mankind came not through His life and work, but through His death and resurrection. (4) Yahshua stood condemned for our sins before Caiaphas the High Priest, a descendant of Aaron. (5) He was crucified outside the city walls of Jerusalem. And (6) Christ's blood was not only "sprinkled" near the temple during a horrific pre-crucifixion beating in the tower of Antonia (situated next to the temple mount), there is also evidence that His blood was literally splattered onto the ark of the covenant, secreted away for hundreds of years in a cavern directly beneath the execution site (as I mentioned above: see [Future History, Chapter 13](#)). All of this and much more suggests—dare I say, *proves*—that Yahshua the Messiah, crucified outside Jerusalem's Damascus Gate on Nisan 14, 33 A.D., was *Himself* the Red Heifer whose body would provide purification for mankind, allowing us to overcome the stigma of death.

- (976) *Burn the heifer with cedar, hyssop, and scarlet. "Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight: its hide, its flesh, its blood, and its offal shall be burned. And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet, and cast them into the midst of the fire burning the heifer."* (Numbers 19:5-6) Fire represents judgment, the separation of the worthy from the worthless. It's the same

symbol as that presented by the altar that stood outside the tabernacle: Yahshua was enduring our judgment for us, allowing us to stand as worthy and righteous children before God. The fact that the entire heifer was to be burned made this akin to an *olah*, the “burnt offering” of Leviticus that was a voluntary sacrifice made in homage to Yahweh, for atonement, or in celebration. And note that this was to be done “in the sight” of Eleazar. He (representing the followers of Christ our High Priest) was to be a witness of the sacrifice—just like we are to be.

But in the case of the red heifer, there are three other elements that were to be burned along with the animal. Cedar wood speaks of pride, majesty, or great achievement. Hyssop is basically the opposite concept, denoting humility and insignificance. Thus the ashes that would indemnify us from the curse of death would contain not only Yahshua’s atoning body and blood, but also both our pride and insignificance. It’s as if to say, the whole range of our human experience must be sacrificed, as Christ’s body was sacrificed, in order to be made clean and pure. That is, neither our greatest work nor our most self-effacing humility is of any value in the face of death, unless they’re accompanied by the sacrifice of Yahshua. And the scarlet? Scarlet represents our sin, as well as the blood required to atone for it. We must be willing to consign it to the flame of judgment if we wish to be purified.

(977) *Realize that the process of cleansing makes us unclean. “Then the priest shall wash his clothes, he shall bathe in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp; the priest shall be unclean until evening. And the one who burns it shall wash his clothes in water, bathe in water, and shall be unclean until evening. Then a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and store them outside the camp in a clean place.... And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until evening. It shall be a statute forever to the children of Israel and to the stranger who dwells among them.”* (Numbers 19:7-10) If this seems counterintuitive, it may help to sort out who is assigned to do what in the ordinance of the red heifer. The High Priest (the original being Aaron, and the prophetic antitype being Yahshua) is involved only in handing over to his son Eleazar the heifer that’s been brought to him by the people. (The heifer, of course, is also prophetic of the purifying work of Christ.) Eleazar, being Aaron’s son and follower, is symbolic of us as believers. He is to sprinkle the blood before the tabernacle and then supervise another man as he burns the red heifer to ash with the cedar, hyssop, and scarlet. Since the tabernacle is metaphorical of the Plan of God for our salvation, sprinkling the blood of Christ before it would seem to indicate making sure that the Messiah’s blood and the Plan of God are associated—connected—in the minds of those watching.

And the man who actually burns the carcass of the red heifer? He, I believe, represents anyone who finds himself being taught and guided by “Eleazar,” the believers of the world. We’re thus being given a picture of the Great Commission: we (Eleazar) are to go into all the world and preach the gospel (i.e., sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice before the tabernacle) to every creature (represented by the man tasked with burning the red heifer). A third man then gathers the ashes and stores them in a clean place outside the camp (i.e., a place in the world but not tainted by its values and practices). This man, I believe, represents those of us who are specifically tasked by God to transmit His truth, the good news of our indemnification against the curse of death, to succeeding generations. These three are involved in making the ashes of the red heifer available for use. There is also a fourth person in the cleansing process—the one who mixes and sprinkles the water of purification upon the defiled subject (see [Precept #980](#)). All of these people are rendered temporarily unclean through the performance of their roles. But all of them, like the one to whom they minister, will be cleansed in the end.

Some of us, of course, find ourselves included in several of the symbolic groups involved in the ordinance of the red heifer. Thus we should not be surprised to see that the consequences of carrying out this ordinance—and the remedy—are the same for everyone involved. We all find ourselves rendered unclean by walking through the world. And what is the cure for this defilement? It’s a three-step process. (1) We are to wash our clothing. What we wear is metaphorical of our status before God—how He sees us. Are we butt naked, or wearing fig leaf aprons or tunics of skin? Are we wearing the scratchy wool of works-based religion, or the brilliant white linen of grace—of imputed righteousness? In any case, we aren’t called to monastic isolation. We are told to go into all the world as witnesses of God’s love. As we walk through the world as mortal believers, it’s inevitable that we’ll brush up against things that make us unclean. But we aren’t to stay that way: we are to wash our garments.

(2) Next, we are to bathe. This is the same basic picture as that presented by the bronze laver standing between the altar of sacrifice and the tabernacle, carried through to the rite of water baptism as a picture of joining Christ in death to our old life and arising in life anew in Him. The water, in the end, is the Word of God, conveyed by His Spirit dwelling within us. It is Yahweh’s truth that makes us clean.

(3) Lastly (and this is the tough one for us, if we consider it carefully) we are to wait until sunset—a pretty clear euphemism for physical death. In other words, the process of purification won’t be fully accomplished as

long as we're still walking about in our mortal carcasses. But death (or rapture, if that happens to occur first) will free us from the bondage of these sinful bodies, making our cleansing complete.

(978) *Trust the ashes of the red heifer to purify from sin, cleansing the stigma of death.* “**And [the ashes] shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for the water of purification; it is for purifying from sin.... He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean. Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of Yahweh. That person shall be cut off from Israel. He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness is still on him.**” (Numbers 19:9, 11-13) Mixed with water (see [Precept #980](#)), the ashes became the “active ingredient,” so to speak, in the “water of purification” mixture that was to be sprinkled upon anyone who had come into contact with a dead body—defined here as “sin.” Although there was a straightforward and relatively simple remedy for having been defiled in this way, God attached dire symbolic significance to contact with death—going so far as to declare that one who did not purify himself as prescribed would be “cut off from Israel,” that is, excluded from the household of faith. This, in Yahweh’s view, is serious stuff.

But as usual, it’s not terribly “practical.” I mean, there’s no particular antiseptic value in sprinkling someone who has been exposed to germs with water that has cow ashes dissolved in it. If God had instructed the subject to do only as the red heifer preparation team had done—washing their clothes and their bodies, and then waiting until the sun went down—there might be some scientific logic to this. But the death-toucher was not told to do these things until the very end of the process. Let’s face it: getting splashed a couple of times with muddy water never made *anything* clean or pure. Yahweh has left us with no alternative but to look for symbolic meaning to the ordinance. And in truth, it’s not all that hard to see, this side of Calvary.

First, there are the ingredients of the “water of purification.” The ashes are made from the burning of a red heifer, which, given the breeding stock Israel had been using ever since the days of Jacob (see Genesis 30-32), turned out to be an exceedingly rare genetic anomaly. As I said, only nine such heifers have ever been used for this purpose, none of them within the last two thousand years. The point is that the Messiah’s advent is not an everyday occurrence, but He’s definitely worth waiting for—the central

ingredient in God's plan for the indemnification of death. Also in the ash mixture were cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet—together symbolic of the human condition that must be surrendered to Yahweh if we are to overcome our mortality (see [Mitzvah #574](#) and [Precept #976](#)). Finally, the water must be “flowing,” (literally, “living”) a clear reference to the Word of God.

Next, let's examine the timing. The defiled person was to have himself sprinkled with the water of purification on the third day and the seventh day after his contact with the dead body. In Yahweh's prophetic timetable, when did death occur? On Passover—the very day Yahshua would sacrifice His life on our behalf. The third day, then, would fall on the third *miqra*, the Feast of Firstfruits—prophetic of the resurrection of Christ from the tomb, a preview of our own impending reawakenings. The seventh day, likewise, is prophetic of Yahweh's timetable—the proverbial “day of rest” that follows the six-day “work week.” At their core, then, the schedule of the days of sprinkling with the water of purification symbolize—they *personify*—the life made available to us through Yahshua's sacrifice. If we refuse to trust in the efficacy of the resurrection, and if we despise the life we can enjoy under Christ's loving rule, then we will find ourselves unclean forever—cut off from God's people.

- (979) *Be aware that death surrounds us.* **“This is the law when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who are in the tent shall be unclean seven days; and every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, is unclean. Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.”** (Numbers 19:14-16) Here we see that we need not be in physical contact with death in order to be tainted by its curse. Merely being in an enclosed space with it—in its sphere of influence—is enough to defile us. In the light of modern microbiology, we can now see the practical wisdom of this precept: germs are dangerous, even if we can't see them. Worse, infections can travel from dead bodies to living ones under the right (i.e., *wrong*) circumstances. What's not so easy to grasp is the parallel spiritual connotation.

As you'll recall from Numbers 19:9, the death from which the ashes of the red heifer cleanse us is characterized as “sin.” Paul would point out the same connection—and the same cure. **“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Romans 6:23) What, then, is the spiritual equivalent of being found “in a tent” with a dead body? I believe what we have here is a not-so-subtle picture of the prevailing religion of a given place and time. It's your cultural environment. If you lived in the

Roman empire during Paul's lifetime, it would have been paganism; in Renaissance Europe it would have been Catholicism; in the Middle East, Islam; in America (until recently) Protestant Christianity. Of course, one need not paint with such a broad brush: our immediate neighborhoods can have a profound effect on our attitudes and preconceptions when it comes to our relationship with God. Someone who grew up in an Irish Catholic neighborhood in Boston might see things quite differently than the average guy from Dallas does, or a San Franciscan might. These are the "tents" in which we find ourselves, and from what I've seen, most of them have dead bodies lying around stinking up the place. And what about touching corpses in the "open field"? When society is in upheaval or when cultural influences are in a state of flux, it's even harder to remain undefiled, for the "graves" of our religious traditions are hidden, lurking, for all we know, like land mines underfoot. Insofar as religion obfuscates the love of Yahweh, it is both dead and deadly. The point: even children of Yahweh need cleansing as we walk through our lives. We are all in need of the purifying work of Yahshua the Messiah.

(980) *Mix the ashes of the red heifer with running water. "And for an unclean person they shall take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, and running water shall be put on them in a vessel."* (Numbers 19:17)

Here's the scenario. The ashes of the red heifer (burned along with the cedar, hyssop and scarlet) had been obtained and stored for future use. Then someone who had come in contact with a corpse would present himself or herself to a ritually clean person who would then pour running water into a vessel containing some of the ashes and administer the mixture as we'll see in the next precept.

To give you a feel for the numbers here, in a nation of a million souls (and Israel was bigger than that when it left Egypt), normal attrition would account for over 14,000 deaths per year, or about forty per day on average—each one requiring *at least* one person to become unclean under the law. If the nation were at war, the number of people requiring cleansing would run much higher, for Canaanite and Philistine corpses killed in battle would defile you just like your octogenarian grandfather's did. Because the sprinkling rituals were to be performed twice per person, on the third and seventh days, we must double that number: over eighty souls a day needed to be attended to. In other words, if *the priests* had been exclusively tasked with carrying out this ordinance they would have been busy with it all day, every day. As a practical matter (although it isn't spelled out), the priests, or at least the Levites, would have been entrusted with the safe keeping of the red heifer's ashes. But one didn't have to be a priest or Levite to prepare the water of purification, or sprinkle the defiled

person with it—he only had to be ritually clean. This tells me that the love and testimony of God is not the exclusive province of religious “professionals,” people who have received a special calling upon their lives. No, the simplest, most “unqualified” believer can be the implement of cleansing to those who have been touched by death. That’s why hyssop was used to sprinkle the water of purification—it’s a metaphor for humility and apparent insignificance. Any willing soul can be a powerful tool in the hands of Yahweh.

The water was to be “running” or “flowing,” that is, fresh from a spring or brook. The Hebrew word used, however, is revealing of the mind of God: it’s *chay*, usually translated “living” or “alive.” Thus we read that **“Yahweh, God, formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (the *neshamah*); and man became a living being (*chayah*).”** (Genesis 2:7) Yahweh, of all the “gods” that men worship, is the only One said to be *chay*, alive: **“There is none like You. But they are altogether dull-hearted and foolish. A wooden idol is a worthless doctrine.... But Yahweh is the true God. He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth will tremble, and the nations will not be able to endure His indignation.”** (Jeremiah 10:8, 10)

And living water? Look closely at this glimpse of Christ’s Millennial kingdom: **“In that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur. And Yahweh shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be: ‘Yahweh is one,’ and His name one.”** (Zechariah 14:8-9) This living water won’t just flow *from* the Messiah, either. In a sense, it will *be* the Messiah (in the form of the Holy Spirit living within us), as He Himself explained to the woman at the well: **“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.... Whoever drinks of this [well] water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”** (John 4:10, 13) Yahshua died for us so His Spirit might “spring up” to live within us (see John 14:17). So in the end, the water in which the ashes of the red heifer are dissolved is metaphorical of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Yahweh is the vehicle by which our salvation, through the death of Christ, is delivered, giving us eternal life.

- (981) *The one who has encountered death must be sprinkled with the water of purification on the third and seventh days. “A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, sprinkle it on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave.*

The clean person shall sprinkle the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean.” (Numbers 19:18-19) As we saw above [Precept #978] the timing of the two sprinklings of cleansing is significant. The “third day” is obviously (to those of us this side of Calvary with eyes to see it) a reference to the resurrection of the Messiah, which took place on the third day after He “touched death.” Yahshua, of course, being God incarnate and knowing His own scriptures, knew this well in advance of the fact, telling His disciples, **“The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.”** (Luke 9:22) This rising on the third day after experiencing death was prophesied in the series of annual appointments that Yahweh had instructed Israel to keep with Him throughout their generations. Death was encountered on the first *miqra*, Passover. The Feast of Firstfruits took place on the third day after this. And what was to happen on this day? **“When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before Yahweh, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.”** (Leviticus 23:10-11) The sheaf of grain, representing the Messiah’s body, was to be “waved,” that is, lifted up before Yahweh. This is clearly a picture of the resurrection. The ordinance of the red heifer is telling us that the Messiah’s resurrection—the evidence that He had overcome death—would effect our cleansing, thereby enabling us to overcome death as well.

The seventh day is, just as obviously, a reference to the Sabbath rest mandated by God. **“The feasts of Yahweh, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of Yahweh in all your dwellings.”** (Leviticus 23:2-3) All the work in the world won’t make us clean before God. In the end, we must rest in His willingness and ability to do the job on our behalf. Indeed, that job is already done: it was accomplished at the resurrection. In a very real sense, God’s *offer* of cleansing is made through the sprinkling of the water of purification on the third day, and our *acceptance* of the offer is symbolized by repeating the rite on the seventh day.

Another way of looking at this is based on the literal reality of II Peter 3:8—that with Yahweh, one day *really is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day. That is, Yahweh’s entire plan for the redemption of mankind was *designed* to take precisely 7,000 years to unfold, beginning at the need for our salvation (the fall of Adam) and ending at the conclusion of the Millennial reign of Yahshua (after which

time the eternal state will commence). The *offer* of cleansing was made during the third millennium—with the giving of the Torah, in all its prophetic glory, and the setting apart of Israel as the vehicle with which God purposed to deliver the Messiah to the world. The *acceptance* is our life as citizens of the Kingdom during the seventh Millennium, resting in Yahweh’s grace on the ultimate thousand-year Sabbath. In truth, it’s all pretty much the same metaphor, just upside down and inside out.

Resting in Yahshua’s finished work, we who have “touched death” are to finally undergo the same cleansing procedure as that required of the priest, the man who burned the red heifer, and the one who carried the ashes: **“On the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean.”** Only after the offer of purification has been made on the third day, and accepted on the seventh, can the *real* cleansing take place. As we have seen, clean clothes represent the way we are now perceived by God: as innocent. And bathing in water is immersion in Yahweh’s Spirit and truth—the “washing of water by the Word.” By the evening of the seventh day—by the end of our sojourn in time and at the beginning of the eternal state—we shall at last be totally, eternally cleansed of the curse of death.

- (982) *One not purified with the ashes of the red heifer remains defiled.* **“But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of Yahweh. The water of purification has not been sprinkled on him; he is unclean. It shall be a perpetual statute for them.”** (Numbers 19:20-21) Once again, we are confronted with the fact that Israel has been unable to literally comply with the ordinance of the red heifer for the past two thousand years—defining the *entire nation* as being “cut off from among the assembly.” The fact that the precept is symbolic—that its real meaning comes to fruition in the death, and subsequent life, of Yahshua the Messiah—doesn’t help Israel out of their collective pickle, because they (as a nation) still don’t recognize Him. So, since they can’t perform the ordinance literally, and they refuse to accept its meaning symbolically, Israel remains defiled. (I hasten to add that Israel’s national rejection of their Messiah is not a permanent condition. The events of the Tribulation will conspire to open their eyes. In fact, Israel’s restoration is the most often repeated prophetic theme in the entire Tanach.)

Note that Moses states that the unclean one shall be “cut off” because he “has defiled the sanctuary of Yahweh,” *not* because he has touched a dead body. We have established through examining scores of precepts that the sanctuary—its rituals, personnel, structure, layout, and furnishings—is

a complex metaphor for Yahweh's plan for our redemption through the sacrifice of Yahshua the Messiah. So what's being said here is quite profound: he who remains unclean (because he failed to avail himself of what the red heifer signifies—cleansing through Yahshua's sacrifice) has defiled, thwarted, and rejected the very plan of Yahweh.

Moses then reminds us that helping others to reacquire their purity can in itself be a dirty business. The participants in the great commission, though sanctified, still need to be cleansed after walking through the world. **“He who sprinkles the water of purification shall wash his clothes; and he who touches the water of purification shall be unclean until evening. Whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean; and the person who touches it shall be unclean until evening.”** (Numbers 19:21-22) This, I believe, is the same picture presented by the layout of the tabernacle courtyard. After we've passed the altar (where our sins were atoned with the blood sacrifice), we still couldn't enter the tabernacle (God's Plan) without first encountering the bronze laver, washing our hands and feet—that is, cleansing our work and our walk—with the Word of God. Only then can we enter the sanctuary, see things by the light of Yahweh's truth, be nourished through His provision, offer up our petitions and thanksgiving, and finally enter into the very presence of our God.

Messianic Messages IV: God as King

Yahweh went to great lengths to tell us who His Messiah would be. He declared unambiguously that this anointed One would be a descendant of Abraham, an Israelite from the tribe of Judah, and come from the line of King David, though He would also somehow be God incarnate. He narrowed His human lineage to a highly improbable set of circumstances—met in the end by only one man that we know of. He specified three different places, *all of which* the Messiah had to “come from,” one way or another. He defined the nature of His ministry and mandated His age at its commencement. He specified the price of His betrayal, the date of His appearing, and the precise nature of the wounds He would suffer on our behalf (*and* the ones He would not). Then He told us that for “snakebite,”—the death that Satan the dragon would have us all suffer—the cure would be to look in faith to One lifted up on a pole. *That one* narrowed the field a bit.

God even gave us heavy-handed hints about the coming Messiah's personal identity, saying, “**My name is in Him.**” (Exodus 23:21) “*My name?*” That would be Yahweh—the name by which our God identified Himself to Moses at the burning bush, a name He used seven thousand times in the Tanach to identify Himself (and a name we consistently and foolishly edited out of His scriptures, replacing it with an anemic and misleading title: “The Lord.”) Another 49 times the shortened form “Yah” is used (*also* edited out of existence in most versions but correctly rendered in the NKJV in Psalm 86:4). We'll recognize “Yah” as a component of such illustrious biblical names as Nehemiah (meaning “Yahweh has comforted”), Isaiah (“Yahweh has saved”), Jeremiah (“Yahweh establishes”), Obadiah (“servant of Yahweh”), Zephaniah (“hidden of Yahweh”) and Zechariah (“Yahweh remembers”). All those names have been “anglicized,” of course. Yâsha`yah and Yirmâyah (Isaiah's and Jeremiah's *real* names) still sound strange and foreign to most of us.

The New Testament, having been penned in Koine Greek and transmitted to us through Latin, doesn't help us much. We read that Mary was told, “**Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.**” (Luke 1:31) But actually, it wasn't “Jesus” at all. It was the rather common Hebrew name Yâhowshuwa`, which we usually transliterate “Joshua,” but which (since the “J” sound didn't exist in the Hebrew alphabet) I have been consistently transliterating “Yahshua.” This name in turn has two component sources, *yâshuw`ah* (meaning salvation) and Yah. “Joshua” thus means “Yahweh is

salvation.” This, being Jesus’ *real* name, has Yahweh’s name within it—just as indicated in the Torah. But a name (*shem* in Hebrew, *onoma* in Greek) is more than what you call someone; it is also (as far as Biblical names are concerned) meant to convey one’s character, reputation, title or unique personal identity. So the name Jesus or Joshua (Yâhowshuwa`, i.e., Yahshua) indicates not only the fact that Yahweh is salvation, but that the person who bears this name is intended or destined to characterize this concept as a living reality.

It behooves us, then, to track down the “salvation” component of the Messiah’s name, since Yahweh is said to *be* this thing. The word *yâshuw`ah* (pronounced, not coincidentally, the same as “Yahshua”) is used 78 times in the Tanach. It is the passive participle of the Hebrew verb *yasha*: “to save, deliver, rescue, or liberate.” It is usually translated “salvation” or “deliverance” in our English Bible versions. And although this is a perfectly correct rendition, my contention is that Yahweh was also telling us Who His Messiah would be—*by name*: Yahshua.

Here are a few of the more blatant examples from the Torah: **“For Your salvation [*yâshuw`ah*] I wait, O Yahweh.”** (Genesis 49:18) Jacob was waiting not just for salvation, but *Yahweh’s* salvation: Yahshua. **“Yahweh is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation [*yâshuw`ah*]; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father’s God, and I will extol Him.”** (Exodus 15:2) Note: Yahweh *has become* Yahshua! And He (the personified Salvation—Yahshua) is identified as “my God.” **“But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked—You are grown fat, thick, and sleek—Then he forsook God who made him, and scorned the Rock of his salvation [*yâshuw`ah*].”** (Deuteronomy. 32:15) Here Yahweh has prophesied Israel’s scornful future mindset against His Messiah.

The historical and wisdom books refer to Yahshua as well: **“Therefore I will give thanks to You, O Yahweh, among the nations, and I will sing praises to Your name. He is a tower of deliverance [*yâshuw`ah*] to His king, and shows lovingkindness to His anointed, to David and his descendants forever.”** (II Samuel 22:50-51) Note that Yahweh was “Yahshua” in the eyes of King David. **“Sing to Yahweh, all the earth; proclaim the good news of His salvation [*yâshuw`ah*] from day to day.”** (I Chronicles 16:23) Yahshua is Yahweh’s “good news.” We didn’t really have to wait until we got into the “Gospels” to learn that, did we? **“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him. He also shall be my salvation [*yâshuw`ah*], for a hypocrite could not come before Him.”** (Job 13:15-16) Here Yahweh is equated with the One who “shall be” Yahshua. Job has also identified Yahshua as the One who enables us to stand before Yahweh as if we were blameless and holy—for that is what his salvation does for us.

References to God’s salvation, personified in the Messiah, are ubiquitous in the Psalms. **“Many are they who say of me, ‘There is no help [*yâshuw`ah*] for him in God.’”** (Psalm 3:2) Israel’s denial of their Messiah is once again predicted. **“Have**

mercy on me, O Yahweh! Consider my trouble from those who hate me, You who lift me up from the gates of death, that I may tell of all Your praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion. I will rejoice in Your salvation [*yâshuw`ah*].” (Psalm 9:13-14) **“But I have trusted in Your mercy. My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation [*yâshuw`ah*].”** (Psalm 13:5) In these two passages, the Psalmist David voices a significant component of the most oft-repeated prophetic theme in all of scripture: that Israel *will* come to recognize that Yahshua is their Messiah. Their national spiritual restoration as predicted in Ezekiel 37:11-14 depends on it. **“Oh, that the salvation [*yâshuw`ah*] of Israel would come out of Zion! When Yahweh brings back the captivity of His people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad.”** (Psalm 14:7, repeated in Psalm 53:6) As Moses said, when the Messiah comes, He will arise from Israel.

Yahshua quoted this Psalm on the cross, applying it to Himself: **“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping [*yâshuw`ah*] Me?”** (Psalm 22:1) The pain of the cross was more than merely physical. As Yahshua “became sin” for us, Yahweh had no choice but to distance Himself from His only begotten Son. **“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help [*yâshuw`ah*] of His countenance.”** (Psalm 42:5, repeated in both 42:11 and 43:5) We are to praise God for Yahshua because He is literally the countenance, the face, the presence of Yahweh among us. **“Truly my soul silently waits for God. From Him comes my salvation [*yâshuw`ah*]. He only is my rock and my salvation [*yâshuw`ah*]. He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved.”** (Psalm 62:1-2) Yahshua comes from God. And oh, by the way, “He alone (i.e., God) *is* Yahshua.” **“God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation [*yâshuw`ah*] among all nations.”** (Psalm 67:1-2) Yahshua will be known among all nations, and this is equated with “Your (God’s) way being known on earth.” This is a prayer for Yahweh’s mercy and justice to be shown during His Millennial reign, just as Yahshua instructed us to pray: **“Your kingdom come; Your will be done in earth as it is in heaven.”** (Matthew 6:10) Yahweh’s kingdom, and His will, are actually *Yahshua’s* kingdom and will.

“A fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel, because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation [*yâshuw`ah*].” (Psalm 78:22) Once again, Yahweh has predicted Israel’s rejection and disbelief—and He says He’s angry. **“O Yahweh, God of my salvation [*yâshuw`ah*], I have cried out day and night before You. Let my prayer come before You. Incline Your ear to my cry.”** (Psalm 88:1-2) Yahweh is the God of Yahshua. Why would anyone want to be His enemy? **“He [God’s “holy One”] shall cry to Me, ‘You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation [*yâshuw`ah*].’”** (Psalm 89:26) Here God the Father is once again equated with Yahshua. **“Salvation [*yâshuw`ah*] is far from the wicked, for they do not seek Your statutes.”** (Psalm 119:155) Yahshua is far from the wicked. We should therefore want to be close to Him. **“Yahweh, I hope for Your salvation [*yâshuw`ah*], and I do Your**

commandments.” (Psalm 119:166) Doing Yahweh’s commandments is equated here with hoping for Yahshua. The whole Torah points toward this one reality.

Of all the prophets, Isaiah saw most clearly the connection between Yahweh and His salvation, personified in Yahshua the Messiah. **“In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: ‘We have a strong city; God will appoint salvation [yâshuw`ah] for walls and bulwarks.’”** (Isaiah 26:1) Yahshua, he says, is appointed by Yahweh to be Israel’s defender. And once again, we are told that Judah *will* in the end recognize Yahshua as its savior. **“Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation [yâshuw`ah] to the ends of the earth.’”** (Isaiah 49:6) Yahshua will be a light to the Gentiles first—Then He will raise up Israel (those who allow themselves to be “preserved”). The same Savior will accomplish both feats: Yahshua. And finally, **“Thus says Yahweh: ‘Keep justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation [yâshuw`ah] is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed.’”** (Isaiah 56:1) Yes, Yahshua (who is the embodiment of Yahweh’s righteousness) is about to come.

The evidence is overwhelming: Yahweh told us time and again who His anointed one would be—*by name*: Yahshua. And His name reveals His character, His function, and His role: He would be Yahweh in the flesh, our deliverer and our salvation from the curse of sin.

MESSIANIC FINGERPRINTS

(983) *The Messiah will perform His service between the ages of twenty-five and fifty, officially entering His ministry at the age of thirty.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘This is what pertains to the Levites: From twenty-five years old and above one may enter to perform service in the work of the tabernacle of meeting; and at the age of fifty years they must cease performing this work, and shall work no more.’”** (Numbers 8:23-25) **“From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, everyone who enters the service to do the work of the tabernacle of meeting.”** (Numbers 4:30) God is not a control freak. When He says to the Levites “your career in My service will take place between your twenty-fifth and fiftieth years, but you will begin your service *in an official capacity* at thirty years of age, we can be reasonably certain there’s more to this than “human resources” issues for one tribe in Israel. This is a prophecy of the Messiah’s tenure of service as a mortal man: He must not begin “working” before His twenty-fifth year, and He will have finished His mission prior to His fiftieth birthday. Moreover, He must be officially inaugurated or ordained in some fashion when He is thirty years old.

So how does this line up with the Gospel narratives? Perfectly. **“Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age.”** (Luke 3:23) Though there can be no doubt that His Messianic Self-awareness had crystallized years prior to this, Yahshua—obedient to the Torah—waited until He was thirty to “officially” begin to show the world who He was. What was the occasion? It’s stated in the previous verses: **“Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, ‘You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.’”** (Luke 3:21-22)

And how old was He when He declared, “It is finished”? His earthly ministry spanned only about three and a half years. He was born at the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall of 2 B.C., placing His baptism, at “about thirty,” sometime near the autumn of 29 A.D. The crucifixion took place in the spring of 33, making Him about thirty-three and a half at His death, well short of the fifty-year “forced retirement” cutoff date. This was verified in general terms by the observations of the very men who would condemn Him: **“Then the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’”** (John 8:57) Once again, Yahshua had precisely fulfilled the requirements of the Torah, and His detractors had unwittingly confirmed it.

- (984) *Someone from the tribe of Judah shall lead Israel.* **“And the children of Israel set out from the Wilderness of Sinai on their journeys; then the cloud settled down in the Wilderness of Paran. So they started out for the first time according to the command of Yahweh by the hand of Moses. The standard of the camp of the children of Judah set out first according to their armies; over their army was Nahshon the son of Amminadab.”** (Numbers 10:12-14) If *men* had been leading Israel, I can guarantee that the Levites would have placed themselves firmly in the position of leadership at every level. After all, although the nation at this point had no formal king, Moses (a Levite) was clearly the chief, and his brother Aaron had been designated High Priest, a position of inestimable national significance. From a human point of view, the Levites were in a class by themselves in Israel. So it is something of a shock to find the tribe of Judah placed first in line, preeminent in the order of travel. Other tribes followed as family units, but Levi didn’t even travel as a complete tribe. They were broken up in sub-units, the clans of Gershon and Merari following Zebulun, but the Kohathites (Moses’ and Aaron’s clan—the priests) following three tribes later, buried inconspicuously somewhere in the middle of the parade (but perhaps we should read that, “placed in the very center, at the heart of Israel”).

This wasn't the only place where Judah was given a leadership role, either. **"Now the leaders offered the dedication offering for the altar when it was anointed; so the leaders offered their offering before the altar. For Yahweh said to Moses, 'They shall offer their offering, one leader each day, for the dedication of the altar.' And the one who offered his offering on the first day was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, from the tribe of Judah."** (Numbers 7:10-12) Judah was also listed first among the tribes in the wilderness camping arrangement, being assigned to the prime spot, immediately east of the tabernacle of meeting (that is, closest to the only entrance—see Numbers 2:3).

We should ask ourselves why this was so. Why was Judah, and not Levi or some other tribe, given the preeminent position as the leading tribe of Israel? Judah wasn't the firstborn: that distinction fell upon Reuben. Nor was he the son of the wife Jacob loved, Rachel; he was the fourth son of the unloved wife, Leah (see Genesis 29 for that whole strange tale). Was he particularly well behaved? No, he got into as much trouble as the next guy, even fathering his own twin grandchildren. We get our first glimmer of Judah's preeminent role in the prophetic blessing given by his father Jacob: **"Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise."** Actually, the name Judah *means* praise. **"Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh [that is, 'he to whom it belongs'] comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people."** (Genesis 49:8-10) Jacob has thereby specified that Israel's royal line would come through Judah, and that includes the ultimate King, the Messiah—the anointed One.

The leader of the tribe of Judah, mentioned several times in our passage, was a man named Nahshon. He was Aaron's brother-in-law, and he shows up in Yahshua's family tree (see Luke 3:32) as the great-great-great grandfather of King David. But his name comes as something of a shock. It means "enchanter," or "charmer," something patently antithetical to the set-apart nature of the newly liberated Israel under Yahweh. Nahshon's name (also spelled Nachshown) is based on a root verb (*nachash*) from which we get several concepts: serpent, divination, and bronze or copper. This verb actually means to learn by experience, to observe, take as an omen—hence the derivative: to practice divination. But of course, one need not embrace occultism to observe and learn from experience, and you don't have to be a sorcerer to "read the writing on the wall," which I think is what Yahweh is showing us here. By selecting a man named Nahshon as Judah's leader, Yahweh is subtly saying (as I will explore further in [Precept #987](#)), *Observe and learn, O Israel; take this as*

an omen. Soon you will rebel against Me, and I will chasten you with poisonous serpents. I will direct my servant Moses to erect a pole with a bronze serpent upon it as a sign to you. If you look upon it in faith, you will live. Let this bronze serpent (nachosheth nachash) remind you of Nachshown's name, for My Anointed One, who will come from the royal line of the tribe of Judah now being led by Nachshown, shall also be lifted up upon a pole, and whoever trusts in Him will not perish, for I will give him eternal life.

REVERENCE FOR YAHWEH'S MESSIAH

(985) *“Cursing” and “blaspheming” Yahweh carry separate penalties. “Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. And whoever blasphemes the name of Yahweh shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of Yahweh, he shall be put to death.”* (Leviticus 24:15-16) We’ve seen this concept before, but it bears repeating. There are two contrasting sins in view here, carrying two distinct consequences. First is “cursing” God. That translation is off the mark a bit: the word (*qalal*) actually means to esteem lightly, to consider insignificant, to treat with contempt or dishonor. There are many who, whether through superstition or politeness, would never “curse” God; yet they don’t pay Him any attention, either. They go about their lives as if He didn’t exist, or as though if He *did* exist, He wouldn’t or couldn’t do anything to personally help or harm them. *Qalal* is kind of like the relationship we usually have with our elected politicians. On a day-to-day basis, we don’t “curse” them so much as we merely ignore them. And what is the penalty for taking God lightly? We will “bear our sin.” That is, we will carry the weight of our own error. That may not sound too bad until we realize that it’s tantamount to remaining forever unforgiven for our sin. Yahshua’s entire Messianic mission was to provide this forgiveness, atonement, and reconciliation with God to anyone who would place their faith in Him. But since He is Yahweh incarnate—God in the form of a man—taking God lightly would include taking *Yahshua* lightly. Forgiveness will not be forthcoming to one who treats His sacrifice with contempt or indifference.

To “blaspheme the name of Yahweh” is a different matter, and it carries with it an entirely different—and more serious—penalty: *death*. “Blaspheme” is the Hebrew verb *naqab*, meaning literally, to bore, to pierce, or to designate or specify by name—in modern parlance, we might say it means to focus on something in a negative or destructive way, to attack, molest, or assault it. Whereas *qalal* was a passive concept—

“merely” failing to take God seriously—*naqab* implies a proactive hatred of its object, in this case, Yahweh Himself. It speaks of purposely going out of one’s way to harm the name (*shem*: the reputation—how one is known) of God. (Note: you can’t hurt Yahweh in any physical sense, no matter how much you hate Him. Attacking His *shem* is the closest one can get to waging war against God. So the pain of an attack on God is felt by those He loves.) The consequence of *naqab* is therefore of the same nature—active, purposeful, and personal: the penalty is death.

Once again we see that Yahweh draws a distinction between those who simply fail to reciprocate His love and those who purposely choose to defy Him. We discussed this at length in [*Future History*, Chapter 29: “The Three Doors,”] where the scriptural position on eternal destiny was explored. Careful exegesis revealed that, as one might expect with a loving God, Yahweh does not damn people to an eternity of hellish torments simply because they weren’t smart enough or lucky enough to be in a position to see and respond to His grace. As the Messiah told Nicodemus in John 3, “You must be born from above”—that is, you must *choose* to be adopted into a familial relationship with God—in order to receive everlasting life. In the same way, you won’t suffer eternal damnation—defined as having formed a similar relationship with the adversary, Satan—unless you *choose* that fate. This is characterized here in Leviticus 24 as “blaspheming (*naqab*) the name of Yahweh,” that is, pointedly attacking His *shem*, His name and reputation, especially with the purpose of preventing others from choosing to reciprocate His love.

But what of those who choose neither God nor the devil, who seek to form no spiritual relationship at all (in a word, *qalal*), whether out of ignorance, apathy, or lack of opportunity? These will simply “bear their sin.” Yahweh won’t punish them, but He won’t forgive them, either. Their souls will simply cease to exist when they die. Looking at this from the viewpoint of hell, it might seem like the most tender of mercies—and it is. But looking at it from heaven, it is a tragedy of immense proportions, a horrible waste of precious life and potential.

- (986) *The punishment must fit the crime.* “If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him—fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him.” (Leviticus 24:19-20) This sort of thing is called “cruel and unusual” by most people today. I’ll grant you, it *is* unusual—nothing in western jurisprudence today is this logical, this sensible, this *fair*. We habitually substitute anemic and pointless punishments for infractions of law, typically incarceration or fines, that have neither any direct bearing

on the problem, nor deterrent value, nor redress for the injured party. I submit to you, however, that direct and equivalent response is anything but cruel. It is merely the logical, practical application of the golden rule.

Note that intent is beside the point in this precept. Malice and negligence are treated the same way if they result in the same injury. The guy whose leg you broke when you ran over him in your car doesn't much care if you aimed at him on purpose, couldn't control your vehicle because you were drunk, or were simply too irresponsible to watch where you were going. If you fire a gun randomly into the air and hit somebody three blocks away having a backyard barbecue, you're no less guilty than if you had been purposely aiming at him. Would we do the things we do if we *knew* that the same pain we had caused would be inflicted in turn upon us? I doubt it. Everything we do in this life should be calculated to show mercy and kindness to our fellow man—to be as harmless as possible in every situation.

But be aware also that the “disfigurement” that our precept addresses need not be physical. It can also be psychological or spiritual. The hurtful or misleading things we say and do can leave deep emotional scars; our attitudes and words can result in the spiritual blindness of the people we meet. We need to be careful. We need to be vigilant. On the other side of this coin, we must not fail to warn people of their impending doom, whether out of our laziness, apathy, or a misplaced sense of political correctness: to do so is criminal negligence. I'm not talking about forcing people to submit to our own moral or ethical code, or to toe our religious or cultural line, since “good” behavior won't in itself save anyone. I'm merely saying that if we see them in danger of hurting themselves, we *owe them* a word of caution.

The ultimate example of “disfigurement” at the hands of others, in my opinion, is that of Yahshua at His crucifixion. Isaiah had predicted that He would have “**no beauty, that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men.... He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.**” (Isaiah 53:2, 4-5) The gospels report that Yahshua was subjected to scourging with a Roman flagrum, whose leather whips were embedded with sharp pieces of bone or metal. The procedure was often fatal in itself. He was beaten on the head with a rod, struck with fists, mocked, spat upon, had a crown of cruel thorns jammed down upon his brow, and was then forced to carry a heavy wooden *stauros*, a pole or stake, to the place of execution. There He was stripped naked and offered a drug to deaden the pain—which He refused. His outstretched hands were nailed (between

the wrist bones) with long iron spikes to the *patibulum* or cross piece that was then hoisted to rest atop the *stauros*. Once in place, the weight of His body would have caused his shoulders to dislocate from their sockets. His feet were then nailed to the *stauros*, for if He had been allowed to hang freely from his wrists, He would have been unable to fill His lungs with air and would have died within minutes—spoiling the gruesome spectacle. It was the intention of the chief priests to have His legs broken so He would die before the religious holiday began, but He expired before the soldiers had a chance to do it.

My point is that all this “disfigurement” was *caused* by somebody—and not just the four Roman soldiers assigned to do the deed. The guilt can’t even be confined to the political and religious elite who engineered Yahshua’s execution, or even to the Jews in Jerusalem for the Passover festival on the day it happened. No, the guilty parties are those for whose sins Yahshua’s sacrifice was designed to atone: *all of us*. It matters not if we meant to do it, or if we were merely criminally negligent. The sentence of the Torah is: “so it shall be done to him.” There is a debt to be paid.

But who will pay it? If we read further from the Isaiah passage we just visited, we find this: **“He [Yahweh] shall see the travail of His [Yahshua’s] soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He will bear their iniquities.”** (Isaiah 53:11) The very act that defined our guilt can also pay our debt. If we will but accept the fact of our freedom, we can walk out of court as free men. Hallelujah!

- (987) *The cure for sin is to perceive in faith what is set upon the pole. “Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against Yahweh and against you; pray to Yahweh that He take away the serpents from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people. Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.’ So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.”* (Numbers 21:7-9) From Genesis 3 to Revelation 20, evil is personified as a serpent. Satan visited Eve in Eden disguised as a snake, and we see his Millennial incarceration in the same terms: **“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.”** (Revelation 20:1-3) So it can be surprising at first to see *the serpent* being displayed on a pole

to serve as the focal point for faith in God's cure for the poisonous snake bites that were tormenting the Israelites.

Some of our confusion is dissipated when we realize that the "fiery serpent" Yahweh instructed Moses to make, and the "bronze serpent" he placed on the pole, are two different words in Hebrew. "Fiery serpent" is from *sarap*, a verb that means, "to burn," which becomes the basis for two nouns that mean radically different things. One is a venomous serpent, whose bite inflicts burning pain. The other is the transliterated designation "seraph" (the plural of which is the more familiar seraphim), the fiery six-winged angelic beings mentioned only in Isaiah 6. The "bronze serpent," on the other hand, is *nachosheth* (bronze, brass, or copper) *nachash* (the ordinary word for snake or serpent).

The real answer begins to emerge in Yahshua's after-hours discussion with Nicodemus. **"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."** (John 3:14-15) Yahshua is pointedly declaring that the whole "snakes-in-the-wilderness" scenario was but a prophetic dress rehearsal for His own crucifixion, and the outcome is identical: **"And it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live."** We've all been bitten, for we have all sinned. The cure for the snakebite of sin has not changed: we must still look with faith upon what was set upon the pole—in the end, Yahshua the Messiah. So why was Moses told to put a symbol for sin—the snake—on the pole? Because that's where our sin would end up, *literally*: **"Be reconciled to God, for He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** (II Corinthians 5:20-21) The sinless Messiah *became* sin for our sakes. How is that possible? I haven't got a clue, any more than I understand how we can *become* the very righteousness of God. But I'm willing (and thankful) to take it on faith.

There's one more word we need to run down. The "pole" Moses was instructed to erect is the Hebrew noun *nes*, meaning something lifted up, a standard, signal, pole, ensign, banner, sign, sail, or rallying point. It's significance has far more to do with its psychological function than its physical form. And as implied in John 3:14, the "cross" upon which Yahshua would be "lifted up" is equivalent to the *nes* of Numbers 21. As we have seen, the Greek word for "cross" is *stauros*, which actually means an upright stake, a pole or post—making it quite similar in meaning to the Hebrew *nes*.

In a passage that I am convinced prophesies America's fate in the Last Days, Isaiah reports (literally translated), **"Go, swift messengers, to a nation**

spread out and independent, to a people feared and respected from their beginning onward, a nation powerful and measured out, whose land the rivers cut through. All inhabitants of the world and dwellers on the earth: When He [Yahweh] lifts up a standard [nes] on the mountains, you [America, if the description means what it seems to] see it; and when He blows a trumpet [the shofar], you give heed to it.” (Isaiah 18:2-3) The prophet, I believe, is saying that America will see and rally to the “banner” of Yahweh—the “cross” of Christ. And America *has* done this, more than any other nation on the face of the planet, though it’s far from being a universal phenomenon. Note that we Americans will also “hear the trumpet” (this, I’m convinced, means the “catching up” at the last trumpet—the rapture of the Church). And “all inhabitants of the world and dwellers on the earth” are commanded to take note of this. I wonder if they will.

- (988) *Murderers will suffer the death penalty.* **“These things shall be a statute of judgment to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings. Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses; but one witness is not sufficient testimony against a person for the death penalty. Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death.”** (Numbers 35:29-31) The death penalty for murderers is the unequivocal commandment of God. Those who would do away with it are stuck in the unenviable position of contradicting Yahweh—a place that ought to make them extremely uncomfortable, but apparently doesn’t. There are safeguards against false accusations, of course—as you’d expect to see from a God of Justice: at least two witnesses (one of which, I take it, could be forensic evidence) are required to convict someone. And note that, as we saw elsewhere, manslaughter—unintentional or accidental homicide—was dealt with through what amounted to “house arrest.” The person responsible for another’s death, but not by intentional murder, was required to remain within one of six “cities of refuge” until the death of the High Priest—a thinly disguised metaphor for being indemnified by the sacrifice of Yahshua the Messiah. Note also that “plea bargains” are illegal under God’s law: no ransom, whether money, inside information, or sworn testimony against other guilty parties, was to be accepted. The Torah doesn’t allow the old Mafia two-step, where a thug kills his way to the top and then “retires” to a light jail term or witness protection in exchange for what he knows about his cohorts in crime when the police start closing in.

I fully realize that our convoluted system of jurisprudence is designed with the best of intentions. It’s engineered to deliver justice in an imperfect world. But because perfect wisdom is required to follow Yahweh’s model—justice tempered with mercy—we settle for justice

tempered by the law of averages: what seems to work under the most common circumstances. Bottom line: most people who are tasked with making the judgment call are pathologically terrified of executing the wrong man, as well they should be. But at its core, this terror is based on the erroneous assumption that there is no possibility of life after death: that if we punish the wrong man for capital murder, there will be no recourse for him in a higher court—a heavenly court. The fact, however, is that what happens to a man’s body in this life has no bearing on his eternal destiny. None of us get out of here alive, and most of us never learn the hour of our departure ahead of time. The guilty man set free is just as sure to die as the innocent man sent to the gallows.

Alexander Solshenitzin, who spent years unjustly incarcerated in Soviet political prisons, observed that he really had no right to complain, for we’re all guilty of something—whether or not that’s what we’re being punished for at the moment. In point of fact, we’re all guilty of the death of Yahshua the Messiah. Though Yahshua has provided a mechanism for our salvation and vindication—the “death of the High Priest” (Himself) that sets us free from condemnation within the city of refuge (our mortal lives)—some are guilty not of Son-of-Manslaughter, but of murder, intentional and malicious. They have not only declared themselves enemies of God, they have tried to stop others from entering into a relationship with Him through Yahshua the Messiah. The eternal living-death penalty awaits the one who hinders his brother from seeking eternal life, for the purposeful prevention of life is murder.

- (989) *Obey the voice of Yahweh’s Messenger.* **“Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions, for My name is in Him. But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.”** (Exodus 23:20-22) Was God talking about an *angel* here—a spirit messenger being tasked with carrying out His orders—or was He talking about the coming Messiah? The answer is *Yes*—both of these things. The verses following these make it plain that Israel’s near-term battles were in view, and that Yahweh’s angel would lead them against such real-world foes as the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites. But the verses immediately preceding this passage speak of keeping the Sabbath, the Sabbatical year, and meeting three times a year to celebrate Yahweh’s appointments—all things that prophesy Yahweh’s plan of redemption through His Messiah. The word translated “angel” (*malak*) really just means a messenger or representative, one dispatched as a deputy. We should not dismiss the big picture simply

because the small one is so easy to see. The “angel” we need to recognize in these verses is none other than Yahshua. This is a Messianic Message.

Note that the *Malak* is sent by Yahweh to do two things. First, He will “keep you in the way.” That is, He will guard, watch over, restrain, and protect the people of God in the path we have chosen, the journey in holiness we endeavor to take through this life, our manner of conduct and belief. It is no coincidence that the early *ekklesia* was called “the Way,” or that in a very real sense, the *Malak* that indwells us is Yahshua Himself, in the form of the “Spirit of Truth.” (See John 14:17) Second, the *Malak* will “bring you into the place which I have prepared.” You’d have to be blind not to see the connection between this and the promise Yahshua made: “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:1-3)

Next we see a warning, one that can be a bit shocking if we’re used to marshmallow Christianity (you know: soft, sweet, and totally lacking in nutritional value). He says that there are conditions under which the *Malak* will *not* “pardon your transgressions,” literally, “bear your rebellion” (that’s *pesa*: revolt, rebellion, defiance to authority, crime or fault, that which is purposely contrary to God’s standard). We are warned not to “provoke” Him. That’s the Hebrew verb *Marah*, which means to defy, to rebel, to be openly hostile and defiant against authority. The root of this behavior is bitterness, a state of misery, mental distress and anguish. We’re not talking about making mistakes or falling short of perfection here; we’re talking about open mutiny against Yahweh. Don’t expect the Messiah to sweep it all under the rug for you. Why? Because “My name is in Him.” That is, Yahweh’s *shem*, His name, reputation, and character, are *in* the *Malak*—whose name, by the way, is Yahshua: “Yahweh is Salvation.”

Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu wrote in *The Art of War* that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” While that’s not necessarily true in any causal sense (as demonstrated by decades of disastrous U.S. foreign policy) it is certainly true here. “If you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.” But what does it mean to “obey His voice?” The short answer is related by James: “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God.” (James 2:23) One could do worse, I’m thinking.

(990) *Israel’s King will someday rule the earth. “The utterance of him who hears the words of God, and has the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the*

Almighty, who falls down, with eyes wide open: 'I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near. A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult. And Edom shall be a possession; Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession, while Israel does valiantly. Out of Jacob One shall have dominion, and destroy the remains of the city.'" (Numbers 24:16-19) Sometimes a prophecy is as remarkable for the circumstances in which it was given as for its content. When we search the Tanach, we'll see a fair amount of this sort of thing—predictions of a future Jewish King destined to set everything right in the world, a Messiah reigning with a rod of iron. They are invariably delivered by Jewish prophets—men whom the world usually shrugs off as being a bit too enthusiastic in their patriotism and religious fervor. But this prophecy, one of the earliest and most sweeping of its type, is nothing of the sort. It wasn't delivered by an Israelite, but by a gentile who was being paid handsomely (by a *Moabite* king, no less) to curse them: a prophet-for-hire named Balaam.

God is not restricted as to whom He can use to declare His glory and purpose. He doesn't have to use perfect people (if He had, the Bible would have been one *skinny* volume). He doesn't have to use sons of Israel. He doesn't even have to use His friends. It seems strange, but pronouncing God's truth is no particular guarantee of one's relationship with Him. Yahshua explained, **"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"** (Matthew 7:21-23) The criteria for entrance into the Kingdom is not doing great things for God or even worshipping Him (for in the end, *every* knee will bow—whether they want to or not). It's merely being "known" by Him. *That* is what it is to "do the will of the Father."

Paul put it like this: **"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing."** (I Corinthians 13:1-3) Balaam did indeed "have the gift of prophecy," but it "profited him nothing," because he used his gift not for love, but for money. Balaam may have "feared" Yahweh, but he did not revere or respect Him: he didn't want to "know" Him. If love is what drives us, it is because *we are known by God*, for God is love: **"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then**

face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.” (I Corinthians 13:12)

But Balaam’s lack of reverence for Yahweh, as strange as it sounds, does not negate his prophetic gift—which after all, was not given to him for *his* benefit, but for ours. Boiled down to its essentials, the prophecy states that sometime in the unforeseeable future (from the prophet’s perspective—about 3,500 years before our time), one shall arise from the family of Israel who shall be both (1) a star (*kowkab*—a star or its light, or figuratively, a king wielding heavenly power); and (2) a scepter (*shebet*—a rod or club used to control sheep or people, hence a scepter of royal authority or the one who wields it). This ruler, it is said, will possess Edom and Mt. Seir (in today’s southern Jordan) and will “**batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.**” Moab too is in modern Jordan. “Tumult” is the Hebrew *Sheth*, which can mean any (or all) of several things: rebellion or defiance; a group of nomadic tribes in southern Jordan (today, the home of the world’s largest population of “Palestinian” Arabs); or basic principles, that is, the foundations of society. The word also denotes “buttocks,” the foundation, as it were, of a seated man. Did Balaam just inform us that the Jewish Messiah will someday destroy all the Palestinian buttheads? Or am I reading too much into this?

(991) *Do not take Yahweh’s presence lightly.* “**So it was, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, that you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders. And you said: ‘Surely Yahweh our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that God speaks with man; yet he still lives. Now therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of Yahweh our God anymore, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?’**” (Deuteronomy 5:23-26) Here’s the scene: three months after the Israelite hordes had left Egypt, they arrived at Mount Sinai, near the northwest corner of modern day Saudi Arabia, having endured several tests of their faith and obedience. Yahweh told Moses to have the people sanctify and prepare themselves for three days. Something big was about to happen.

What they experienced then was beyond anything they had ever imagined. “**It came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because**

Yahweh descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. Then Yahweh came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And Yahweh called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.” (Exodus 19:16-20) There, Moses received the Ten Commandments—the heart and summary of the Torah, followed later, apparently, by the rest of it. Yahweh was faced with a bit of a logistics problem here, a balancing act. He wished to demonstrate His power to the people of Israel, so they’d know beyond a shadow of a doubt that He was the One True God. Yes, He’d done that in a score of ways great and small in the past few months, but this time He wanted to make His authority unambiguous, His glory unmistakable—with no “practical” object (like feeding the multitude or destroying the Egyptian armies) in view other than revealing His majesty. The problem was going to be doing this without killing folks—without turning the entire planet into a smoldering cinder. Remember, this is the same God who had declared, *Let there be matter and energy, time and space*, and these things became corporeal reality. If He did too little, the people (being *people*) would not have been suitably impressed, but if He did too much, they would not have survived the encounter.

Being a God of wisdom as well as power, Yahweh gave them a Goldilocks demonstration. It was *just right*: thunder and lightning, fire and smoke, trembling earth and awesome sounds—the mighty blast of a celestial shofar and the very voice of God. For the moment, anyway, the children of Israel were struck with a godly fear—with respect for Yahweh’s power, to be sure, but also with the distinct impression that coming into His presence uninvited would be hazardous to one’s health.

Israel’s godly fear persisted as long as they remained at Mount Sinai—almost a year (Numbers 10:11), during which time they built the Tabernacle and got used to life under Yahweh’s direct rule and provision. But just three days after they broke camp, the complaining began. I’ll admit, my first instinct is to castigate the Israelites for their faithlessness. They had seen and heard the powerful signs of Yahweh’s presence only a year previously; they had been eating His bread and drinking His water ever since. How could they have forgotten so quickly? But then I realize that although my own salvation is a far greater miracle than anything the Israelites ever witnessed, and that God’s provision for me has been an ongoing reality for the past *half century*, I *still* feel like complaining when adversity strikes. At this late date, I should know better. I must never allow my easy familiarity with my Father Yahweh to degenerate into something resembling complacency.

(992) *Ask for a mediator to communicate between you and Yahweh.* “Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, ‘You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.’” (Exodus 20:18-19) I can’t help but chuckle at the Israelites’ reaction to Yahweh’s awesome display of power on Mount Sinai: “Hey Moses, that mountain looks really dangerous; so *you* go up there and talk with God, and then come back and tell us what He said, okay?” Of course, the people were absolutely right to be terrified. Yahweh had provided signs and wonders calculated to produce that very effect. Why? Because He wanted to introduce us to the concept of an intermediary—Someone who would stand before the Almighty on our behalf, passing His instructions on to us in a way to which we can relate. Moses here is a picture of the coming Messiah.

Yahweh wasn’t displeased with their timidity in the face of all the sound and fury going on up on Sinai. He had, in fact, strictly warned Moses to declare the mountain off limits to them (Exodus 19:12). In the recounting of the story in Deuteronomy, Moses makes it clear that Yahweh was pleased that the people understood their need for a mediator. They had said, “**You go near and hear all that Yahweh our God may say, and tell us all that Yahweh our God says to you, and we will hear and do it.**’ Then Yahweh heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and Yahweh said to me: ‘I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken. Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!’” (Deuteronomy 5:27-29) It’s a revealing exercise to compare what the people had said with what Yahweh commended them for saying, for they aren’t precisely the same thing. The people were mostly interested in having someone positioned between themselves and Yahweh, someone who would represent Him and present His instructions without frightening them to death. Yahweh responded, “They are right,” but He wasn’t thinking about Moses; He was envisioning the role *His Messiah* would play: an intermediary between God and men who would give them a heart of reverence and a desire to keep His commandments, for this very reverent obedience would prove to be the key to our well being—for eternity.

(993) *Consider the glory of God a test of our reverence.* “**And Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.’ So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.**” (Exodus 20:20-21) I realize that this sounds contradictory in English: “Don’t fear, but *do* fear.” And even in

Hebrew, the same word family is used in both places. The verb and adjective *yare* (to fear, revere, or be afraid) are the basis of the noun *yirah*: reverence, fear, piety and respect toward a superior, terror (i.e., a state of anxiety or alarm), worship, awe or awesomeness (that which causes wonder or astonishment). The word translated “test” is central to our understanding here. *Nasah* means to “try, test, or assay (to attempt to learn the true nature of something); to attempt, that is, to exert oneself to do something; or to test or try—cause or allow hardship or trouble in a circumstance, often with choices within the situation, implying that a different outcome is possible.” (*Dictionary of Bible Languages with Semantic Domains*) So I would paraphrase Moses’ admonition: “Do not be afraid, for God has come to ascertain whether or not you will choose to revere Him. His awesome glory has been displayed so that you might not miss the goal He has set before you.”

Don’t complain, asking “Since Yahweh never shows His glory in the world today, how are we supposed to be suitably awed?” Actually, He does it constantly, if only we’ll look for it. The obvious place to start is to look into the sky. **“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.”** (Psalm 19:1) There, we are faced with a choice. We can either view stars as great balls of hydrogen and helium that happened totally by chance, or we can see them as the factories where God manufactures the heavy elements upon which our mortal existence depends. Scientists have figured out *when* God “created the heavens and the earth,” (about 13.7 billion years ago), and they have some idea of how “awesome” it is, but they have not yet determined *how* He did it, and don’t seem to care why. Nevertheless, I submit to you that only a fool can look at the starry heavens and fail to be awed by them.

Then, we can look at the magnificence of Yahweh’s living creation: **“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”** (Matthew 6:28-30) The phenomenon of life is another subject that eludes science, though Yahweh has presented its stunning complexity in seemingly infinite variety. Those not awestruck by life—those who assume it’s a pointless accident of nature—are simply not paying attention. Paul sums it up: **“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God [that is, although they had ample evidence of His existence and benevolence], they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their**

foolish hearts were darkened.” (Romans 1:20-21) We shouldn’t need thunder and lightning or fire and smoke upon the mountaintop to understand something of the power of God, nor should we take His creation—of which we are a part—for granted. It’s all here for our benefit, to teach us to revere Yahweh, so that we might not sin.

- (994) *Know that Yahweh wants us to be filled with His Spirit. “Then Moses said to [Joshua], ‘Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all Yahweh’s people were prophets and that Yahweh would put His Spirit upon them!’”* (Numbers 11:29) The background here is that (as usual) the children of Israel were complaining—this time about the food. Yes, manna was being provided daily, so they weren’t starving to death, but they really missed the leeks, garlic, and fish they’d had to eat as slaves in Egypt. *C’mon, Moses, they whined. This manna is boring! Give us something to eat that’ll make our breath stink. Give us some meat, already!* Moses, of course, had no meat to give them, and frustrated to the point of madness, he told Yahweh (and again, I paraphrase), *Please! Don’t make me tend these ridiculous sheeple any longer. If you love me, just kill me! Put me out of my misery.* (v.15) Yahweh had a better idea, arranging for Moses to share the burden of leadership with seventy elders of Israel—the prototype of the Sanhedrin. These seventy were instructed to surround the Tabernacle, where they were informed that they would soon have so much meat (in the form of low-flying quail) that they’d be vomiting out of their noses before it was all over. Yum.

But that’s another story. These seventy elders were each given the same Spirit that was upon Moses (v.25), and they began to prophesy (Hebrew *naba*: to speak as a prophet; to communicate a message from a deity, either of proper behavior to a standard, or of future events—*DBL-SD*). But something strange happened. Two of the appointed seventy didn’t get the memo. But back in the camp, they too began carrying on just like their peers over at the Tabernacle—prophesying, speaking out powerfully in the name of Yahweh. The names of the two missing elders are revealing. They were called Eldad and Medad. The “-*dad*” component (*dowd* or *dawd*) is the basis of King David’s name. It means “beloved.” Medad means “He who is loved,” and Eldad denotes “loved by God.” Some things never change: we who are loved by God can’t help but speak out in His name.

Joshua, jealous for Moses’ sake, was horrified at what seemed to him like a gross breach of spiritual protocol, but Moses was thrilled, pointing out to his protégé that it was God’s ideal that *everybody* would speak to Him, and of Him, and for Him. As a later prophet would put it, “Behold,

the days are coming, says Yahweh, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says Yahweh. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know Yahweh,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says Yahweh. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34) The same kind of close personal fellowship the called-out assembly of Yahshua (a.k.a. the Church) enjoys with their God will someday be a living reality in Israel. In the end, the redeemed and restored children of Israel will know Yahweh.

Joel describes what being filled with the Spirit of God looks like: “**And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams; your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.**” The glory that Yahweh showed us on Sinai will be reprised as well: “**And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of Yahweh. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of Yahweh shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as Yahweh has said, among the remnant whom Yahweh calls.**” (Joel 2:28-32) That “deliverance” will be personified in the reigning Messiah, Yahshua.

CHOOSE THIS DAY...

- (995) *We should ask Yahweh for a Shepherd to guide us.* “**Then Moses spoke to Yahweh, saying: ‘Let Yahweh, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of Yahweh may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.’**” (Numbers 27:15-17) At this point, a new Israelite generation was preparing to enter the Land. Moses was pushing 120 years of age. More to the point, Yahweh had told him decades before this that he would not be allowed to lead his people into their inheritance. So his thoughts naturally turned to succession of leadership in Israel.

One of the hallmarks of a mature nation is that they know how to transfer power peacefully from one generation to the next. Some nations never do get the hang of it—they simply spasm from one tyrant to the

next, their people desperately hoping that the next regime change won't be quite as bloody as the last. Others suffer from political Alzheimer's: even if they manage to transition to the next government in relative peace, the old social order is forgotten the moment the new leader takes the reins, for law and tradition is sacrificed to the attitudes and whims of the victor of the *coup du jour*—it's literally "winner take all." Then, many nations these days rely on organized mob rule to transition from one regime to the next: it's called "democracy," and it's perpetrated—I mean *achieved*—by convincing more voters than your opponent to vote for you, even if to do so you have to lie, cheat, intimidate, invent scapegoats, or make ridiculous promises you can't hope to deliver on. Most candidates offer "change." Few deliver improvement.

Moses didn't do any of that. He was all too aware that he himself had been called by Yahweh to the task, plucked from obscurity and exile to do a job to which he neither aspired nor felt qualified to perform. (I kind of suspect that this is why God chose him.) In truth, he had been in preparation for his role from birth: Yahweh had engineered his unique qualifications. Moses knew that he wasn't the *leader* of Israel anyway, not really. Yahweh was; Mo was only His secretary, amanuensis, and ambassador. God had put a "government" in place—priests, Levites, and elders tasked with administering a relatively simple and straightforward code of civil law. But nobody in Israel had what we'd call "power." The Torah did not provide for any kind of political supremacy—only positions (mostly hereditary) of service and responsibility. Israel's tribal leaders were mentors and ambassadors, not governors and warlords. There were rules limiting kings, but no provision for acquiring one. There wasn't even a police force: "enforcing" the law was everybody's job. If we compare the statutory administration of early Israel with our national governments today—any of them—it becomes clear that we've gone horribly wrong somewhere.

But Moses knew that battles lay ahead for his people, and that the conquest of Canaan would require a leader tasked with coordinating the armies of Israel with the mind of Yahweh—Who, after all, had promised to fight their battles for them. Having been a shepherd for forty years, Moses knew that the children of Israel were like a big flock of sheep: they might be okay as long as there was food, water, and safety from predators, but if they had to move—for any reason—they'd need a shepherd to guide them. Moses surely had a successor in mind—his assistant, protégé, and friend for the previous four decades—but notice that he didn't suggest to Yahweh, "Hey, how's about we install Joshua as the next Mo-Man?" No,

Moses simply asked Yahweh to choose a worthy and responsible successor. Why can't we do that?

- (996) *Know that Yahweh has provided the Shepherd we need. "And Yahweh said to Moses: 'Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight.'*" (Numbers 27:18-19) Yahweh honored Moses' prayer, and chose the man he had obviously hoped for, but for whom he hadn't lobbied: Joshua, the son of Nun. As if to tell us that God's servants can come from anywhere, the record (in Numbers 13:8) states that Joshua (a.k.a. Hoshea, a.k.a. Jeshua—phonetically, Yahowshuwa or Yahushua) was not from the tribe of Levi (as Moses and Aaron were), nor did he hail from Judah (already established as the preeminent tribe—eventually to emerge as the royal tribe of Israel). Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim.

"Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it." (Deuteronomy 1:38) We (okay, I) tend to think of Joshua as the "kid" that always hung out with Moses—his gofer or minion. But he was more like the full colonel who acts as aide for a four-star general. Joshua, who had led the disastrous spy expedition to Canaan, was apparently the oldest man in Israel when Moses died (since everyone from the exodus generation over twenty had died off except for him and Caleb, who was about thirteen years his junior). The record seems to indicate that Joshua was about fifty-five years old at the time of the exodus, and ninety five when he led the Israelites into the promised land. He died at the age of one hundred and ten.

Moses was instructed to "inaugurate" Joshua. The Hebrew word is *tsavah*, meaning literally to command, give charge to, commission, appoint, or ordain. This ordination was not to be done in secret, but publicly, before the High Priest and the entire congregation. Since Joshua (in whom was the Spirit of Yahweh) is a transparent metaphor for Yahshua the Messiah—they even share the same name—the picture is one of transferring authority (all of which ultimately rests in Yahweh) from Moses to Yahshua, that is, from Law to grace. Again, the names themselves are a clue as to what's happening. Moses means "drawn" in Hebrew (since he was drawn out of the water by Pharaoh's daughter—see Exodus 2:10—or "born" in Egyptian, whereas Yahshua (as we have seen) means "salvation" or "deliverance." Thus we read the words of Yahshua to Nicodemus explaining this two-step process: **"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I say to you,**

you must be born again [literally, from above].” (John 3:5-7) The state of being “born of water” (“born of flesh”) is thus represented by Moses and His realm, the Law. But being subsequently born of the Spirit is represented by Joshua (i.e., Yahshua), to whom the Law’s authority has been transferred. The Law is fulfilled through our Salvation.

- (997) *Recognize Joshua’s authority.* **“And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before Yahweh for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him—all the congregation.”**

(Numbers 27:20-21) Moses happily did as he had been instructed, relieved to know that Israel would be in good hands for a while after he was gone. **“Then He inaugurated Joshua the son of Nun, and said, “Be strong and of good courage; for you shall bring the children of Israel into the land of which I swore to them, and I will be with you.”** (Deuteronomy 31:23) This is really getting interesting. Once more, Joshua is presented as a prophetic dress rehearsal for the coming Messiah. Did you catch it? *Joshua* would be the one to “bring the children of Israel into the land,” but *Yahweh* had promised, “I will be with you.” At some symbolic level then, Joshua’s role and Yahweh’s (through Yahshua) are linked, even equated.

Of course, Moses couldn’t have known that his successor’s name was the same as that of the coming Messiah. Yahshua, meaning “Yahweh is Salvation,” is a rather common name in Hebrew history, popping up several times in scripture before we even get close to the New Covenant. But let’s look at Josh’s *father’s* name. Nun is from a word meaning “to continue in perpetuity, to increase, to propagate.” This verb is used only once in scripture: **“His [in context, the Messiah’s] name shall endure forever. His name shall continue [nun: go on perpetually, increasing in glory] as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him. All nations shall call Him blessed. Blessed be Yahweh, God, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things!”** (Psalm 72:17) So it could be reasonably stated that “Joshua, the son of Nun” is a name that tells us that the one in whom “Yahweh is Salvation” will be “the son of perpetuity.” *Who* is perpetual? *Who* “continues” and “increases?” Again, the answer is contained in the name: “Yahweh” means “I Am,” or “I exist”—a statement denoting perpetual continuance. This is precisely the relationship that exists between the Messiah, Yahshua of Nazareth, who was described in the womb as Immanuel—“God with us”—and God the Father, Yahweh. “Joshua, the son of Nun” is a name that describes who the Messiah would be *and* what the Messiah would do.

“Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as Yahweh had

commanded Moses.” (Deuteronomy 34:9) At the present time, Israel does not “heed” the *ultimate* Joshua, Yahshua the Messiah. Israel as a nation has not listened to Him, nor has this generation done as Yahweh commanded Moses. But the restoration of Israel, their turning back to Yahweh’s Messiah, resulting in a glorious national reawakening, is by far the most oft-repeated prophetic theme in all of scripture. It *will* happen, or Yahweh is a liar.

- (998) *Defer to Yahweh when choosing your leader.* **“When you come to the land which Yahweh your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom Yahweh your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.”** (Deuteronomy 17:14-15) This is not, as is sometimes claimed, a command to set up a monarchy in Israel in place of the theocracy that existed under Moses. It is merely instruction on how to go about doing so if and when they ever did. In fact, when it finally happened almost four hundred years later, the move was characterized by God’s prophet as a rejection of Yahweh as Israel’s Leader—even though they followed both the Torah and Samuel’s instructions in the process of the selection of King Saul (see I Samuel 10:17-19).

Several things bear notice in Yahweh’s precept. First, He alone has the authority to choose men to rule over Israel, whether legitimate or not. It’s clear to me that even when evil tyrants ruled, Yahweh had taken a hand in placing them on the throne with an eye toward testing (or even punishing) Israel. Indeed, in the infamous “blessings and cursings” passage of Deuteronomy 28, contrast is drawn between the consequences of asking Yahweh to rule and choosing an earthly king instead. If they obeyed the voice of Yahweh, it says, **“Yahweh will establish you as a people holy [i.e., set apart] to Himself.... All peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of Yahweh, and they shall be in awe of you.... And Yahweh will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not beneath.”** (vs. 9, 10, 13) But if they did not, **“Yahweh will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke.... Yahweh will bring you and the king whom you set over you to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods—wood and stone.”** (vs. 20, 36) Bad kings in Israel would be the result of the people’s disobedience against God. I can’t help but reflect that we gentile nations have pretty much the same deal: the quality of our leaders is apparently a reflection of the spiritual condition of our populations. That ought to sting a bit. Does it?

Second, God's people were prohibited from having a "foreigner" rule over them. Besides being a left-handed admonition to adhere to God's Law, thus avoiding having characters like Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Herod, Caesar, Saladin, or Stalin ruling over them, it is a tacit reminder that their true and eternal King, the Messiah, would be a son of Israel. According to my reading of prophecy, Israel will have one more opportunity to get this one right: they will have to choose whether or not to accept the gentile Antichrist's messianic claims or to reject Him. Most of the world will seize upon the Antichrist's silver-tongued lies in the desperation and despair of a post nuclear-war world, but scripture tells us that a sizeable remnant of Israel, comprehending Yahweh's love at last (better late than never), will reject the world dictator's satanic claims and choose to flee to the wilderness—their final three and a half years of exile—rather than accept his satanically inspired "mark of the beast." The King they finally embrace will be the returning Jewish Messiah—their "Brother," Yahshua.

(999) *Look for a coming prophet who, "like Moses," will communicate God's words as an intermediary or emissary, in a calm, non-frightening manner. "Yahweh your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me [i.e., like Moses] from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of Yahweh your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of Yahweh my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.'" (Deuteronomy 18:15-16)* Israel's close encounter with Yahweh's glory at Sinai was a terrifying experience. All that fire, smoke, lightning, earth shaking, and rock splitting were more than these poor ex-slaves were equipped to deal with. They were convinced (and not without reason) that if God continued to confront them personally like that, they would all die. As it was, of course, Yahweh had shown them but a tiny hint of His real power—just enough to get their attention.

Yahweh's little demonstration had the desired effect: the people were so awe stricken, they begged Moses to intercede for them, to talk with Yahweh himself and then tell them what He'd said, instead of having God communicating with them directly. What they pleaded for in their terrified state was precisely what Yahweh had in mind all along—a human intercessor filled with the Spirit of God, an anointed representative for both heaven and earth—a Messiah. **"And Yahweh said to me: 'What they have spoken is good.'** As if this were *their* idea. **"I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him."** (Deuteronomy 18:17-19) Yahweh's response made it clear that Moses

himself was not the ultimate intercessor, but that someone “like him” in certain ways would be “raised up” at some point in the future. This Spokesman, moreover, would be “raised up for them.” Interesting turn of phrase.

First, this person would be “a Prophet.” That is, He would be a *nabi*, one who proclaims truth with divine insight, either foretelling or forth-telling the words of God. Second, this Prophet would be “like” Moses, who was characterized by his humility and diligent service while leading God’s chosen people, as well as his being filled with Yahweh’s Spirit, allowing him to speak with God “face to face.” Third, this Messianic figure would be raised up “from among *their* brethren” (not *my* brethren). That is, He would be an Israelite, though not necessarily from the tribe of Levi like Moses. Fourth, He would speak the very words of God, words that Yahweh Himself would put in His mouth. Fifth, those words would carry Yahweh’s authority: if anyone refuses to hear the Prophet, Yahweh promises to demand an answer as to why.

And sixth, being human, the Prophet would not be as “awesome” (read: *scary*) as Yahweh’s Mount Sinai manifestation. **“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law.”** (Isaiah 42:1-4) No more thunder, lightning, fire and smoke. Rather than causing earthquakes, the coming Prophet would calm the raging seas with a simple word, prompting His disciples to remark in awe, **“Who can this be, that even the waves and the sea obey Him?”** (Matthew 8:27)

We have no record of any Israelite other than Yahshua—*ever*—speaking out with the personal authority of Yahweh. At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, we read these telling words: **“And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”** (Matthew 7:28-29) The prophets of Israel had couched their pronouncements in terms of divine messages: “Hear, O Israel: thus says Yahweh...” The scribes and Pharisees merely parroted the opinions of previous sages: “Rabbi so-and-so argued thusly...” But Yahshua said comparatively outlandish things like, **“Everyone who hears these saying of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and**

it fell. And great was its fall.” (Matthew 7:26-27) Either He *was* the Prophet promised by Yahweh through Moses, or He was a fraud who *should* have been crucified for leading people astray. There is no middle ground. If you don’t believe that Yahshua was (and is) the Messiah, then be prepared to tell God why you think so: He has vowed to require an answer from you.

(1000) *Beware of false prophets.* “But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which Yahweh has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which Yahweh has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” (Deuteronomy 18:20-22) In contrast to the ultimate Prophet “like Moses” whom Yahweh promised to send to the people so they wouldn’t have to endure frightening atmospheric or tectonic phenomena every time He had something to say, God now advises them to be on the lookout for other prophets—both true and false. And since lies can sound plausible, Yahweh laid down some criteria for separating truth from falsehood.

First, the people were instructed to discern who the “prophet” was representing: Whose words did he purport to be speaking? If he claimed to speaking in the authority of some “deity” other than Yahweh—Ba’al or Molech, for example—then that prophet was to be put to death: period, end of story. But if he declared, “Thus says Yahweh” (as Moses did) then two means were given whereby the prophet’s pronouncements could be put to the test. In our English translation, these sound pretty much like the same thing, but they’re not. “If the thing does not come to pass” means pretty much what it sounds like: in the case of a predictive prophecy, the fulfillment of that prophecy—however unlikely it seemed—would be the vindication of the prophet’s words.

But the other contingency, “if the thing does not happen,” is not quite as straightforward. Literally, it says “if the thing does not exist,” or “if the thing is not established.” It employs the verb “to be,” *hayah*—the same word upon which Yahweh’s name is based. The problem is that not all prophetic pronouncements are predictive of some future event. Many—as testified by the bulk of the Torah—are commandments or statements of fact. So how are these things to be “established?” Remember that the Ten Commandments were delivered amid undeniable signs from God: fire, smoke, and so forth. It follows, then, that purported messages from Yahweh must be in harmony with these Commandments. So when Yahweh says, “You shall not commit adultery,” but the would-be

“prophet” suggests honoring the local “gods” by engaging in ritual sex with their temple prostitutes, you know what to believe—and who to stone. Or when Yahweh says, “You shall not steal,” and “You shall not covet,” you should know immediately that Muhammad is a false prophet when he authorizes raids on caravans and villages.

Predictive prophecy has its own little glitch. Not all (actually, very few) Biblical prophecies were fulfilled in the prophet’s lifetime. We are rarely treated to “prophet’s duels,” such as Elijah’s bout with the four hundred prophets of Ba’al on Mount Carmel—where the vindication of the true spokesman of God is revealed immediately. Equally rare are instances where God’s schedule is openly revealed in the context of the prophecy (as in Daniel 9:24-27). The premise of my book on prophecy, *Future History*, was to identify and place into its chronological framework every yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecy in the entire Bible—and even at this late date, there are still so many of them it took me nine hundred pages to discuss them all. The point is, the prophets themselves never saw the fulfillments of much of what they predicted. As far as their contemporaries (and ours) are concerned, these “things have not come to pass.”

It is up to us, then, to determine whether a spokesman is a prophet of Yahweh, or is speaking for someone else—himself, a religious organization, or even a false god. The prophets of the Bible, to a man, were in perfect accord with Yahweh’s revealed program in every place such a thing could be verified—leaving us no logical alternative but to receive their words in the places where new information is being imparted. In the end, we are faced with an unprecedented phenomenon: forty authors, living over a span of fifteen hundred years, writing of a variety of subjects, in a variety of languages and styles, from a variety of cultures, all purporting to speak for God, and all in perfect agreement with each other. The only possible explanation is that Yahweh Himself was guiding them, inspiring them, putting His words into their hearts and minds.

That’s not to say that every wannabe prophet speaks for Yahweh. We are told what to do with those whose message is out of sync with Yahweh’s scriptures, but unfortunately, our English translation here is totally misleading when it says, **“The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”** This really means, “The prophet has spoken it in his insolence, arrogance, and pride—in contempt, scorn, and lack of respect (all of which is meant by the Hebrew word *zadown*). You shall not dwell, sojourn, or gather together with him, live as an alien in his land, nor be his guest” (which is the meaning of the Hebrew verb *gur*). In other words, we are to consider those who speak lies in Yahweh’s name—as

measured against the truth of His Word—to be arrogant, self-willed rebels. We are to avoid them, shun them, and refuse to listen to them. Of course, doing this requires that we learn and know what the Word of God says. Otherwise, we risk becoming the false prophet’s victim, for he preys upon the uninformed. As Hosea put it, **“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”** (Hosea 4:6)

Identifying and embracing the real standard of truth is essential. After all, Yahshua Himself was accused of being a false prophet by the religious leaders of Israel, but only because they themselves had adopted a false standard—Jewish tradition, the oral law—in place of Yahweh’s Torah. In the end, Yahshua kept the Torah flawlessly—and He fulfilled it to the letter.

After His resurrection, Yahshua reminded His disciples, **“These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures....”** We have looked at only one small part of the prophetic record to which He referred—the Law of Moses. Don’t blame me if it’s taken us over a thousand pages to cover it. Yahweh is nothing if not thorough, and as far as I’m concerned, it would have been unworthy of His love for us to settle for merely skimming over it once lightly.

“Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” (Luke 24:44-49) Salvation was never meant to be the exclusive privilege of Israel, nor was the Torah meant to be opaque and meaningless to anyone other than the Jews. Its truth is universal; its message is for all nations. The good news proclaimed in the New Covenant is predicted in the Torah, and here in the risen Yahshua’s benediction, the entire sweep of Yahweh’s grand plan is reprised. We should not find it the least bit surprising that every point He raised is echoed somewhere in the seven consecrated annual appointments Israel was instructed to keep throughout their generations. Did you spot them?

(1) The “suffering” of Yahweh’s Anointed One was fulfilled on the first of Yahweh’s holy appointments, Passover. (2) The “remission of our sins” was

accomplished through the separation of Life from death as Yahshua's body lay in the tomb on the second miqra, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (3) His "rising from the dead on the third day" was predicted by the Feast of Firstfruits—which promises that we, the harvest of redeemed souls, will someday follow Him. (4) Our personal indwelling with "power from on high"—none other than the Holy Spirit of Yahweh—was achieved on the fourth of God's appointments, the Feast of Weeks. (5) Our "witness of these things," our preaching the good news of God's redemption to every nation, will reach its ultimate expression when we who trusted Yahshua are called to glory at the blowing of Yahweh's shofar—on the Feast of Trumpets, while those left behind are commanded to "give heed" to our testimony (Isaiah 18:3). (6) The "repentance" of Israel, "beginning at Jerusalem," will be accomplished at last on the definitive Day of Atonement, the sixth appointment of the series. And (7) the "promise of the Father's presence" dwelling and reigning personally among us will be kept on the last and greatest miqra of all, the ultimate Feast of Tabernacles. Yahweh's message is nothing if not consistent. And Yahweh's mercy is nothing if not breathtaking.

We indeed are witnesses of these things. *Maranatha!*

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