

The Owner's Manual

*What Every Christian Should Know About
The Law of Moses*

Volume One:
The 613 Laws of Maimonides

By

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Introduction

It's called "The Law of Moses," but that's not a terribly accurate description. First, Moses—the "Great Emancipator" of Israel—didn't "think up" any of the so-called "Mosaic Law" himself. Yahweh did. The God who had been worshipped by Moses' ancestor Abraham, a God with whom he was barely aware of when he began his last great adventure (leading Israel out of bondage) dictated every word of this body of "law." It bears little or no resemblance to the only system of jurisprudence with which Moses would have been intimately familiar—that of 18th Dynasty Egypt. (Specifically, Egyptian "law" was designed to establish or reinforce the authority of those in power—something that shifted back and forth over time between the priesthood of Egypt's pantheon and its monarchy—the Pharaoh and the civil administrators under him. Under the Mosaic system, the priests had lots of responsibility, but no power whatsoever. And—after the leadership of Moses and Joshua had run its course—there was to be no civil ruler at all: God Himself was in charge, governing Israel through the words He had said to Moses.)

Second, in the strictest sense, the "Law of Moses" was not primarily characterized as a legal document at all, but rather, "Instructions." The word is Torah (or *Towrah*). Although it's translated "Law" 219 out of 219 times in the KJV, "Torah" actually means direction, instruction, that which is taught, custom, manner, or mode of living. So "law," though not exactly incorrect, is a less than precise definition. The word is based on two Hebrew roots that may lend insight into its meaning. *Yarah* means to throw, cast, shoot (as in archery), or pour—with heavy emphasis on the control or direction brought to bear by the subject—leading to its salient derivative definition: to teach. The second root is *towr*, which speaks of a circlet, plait, or turn (of hair or gold, for example), hence its broader usage as a custom, manner, or mode—the way things are done.

The idea behind "Torah," then, is God's instructions for us, teaching us what is proper, safe, edifying, and constructive—the "right way to do things," as opposed to making up our own rules, methods, and customs as we go along. Of course, the fact that these Instructions were given to us *by God Himself* automatically bestows upon them the force of Law. Considering the Source, we have every reason to take them seriously, for the One who told us to do these things is our Creator, omniscient and omnipotent, not to mention being the very personification of love.

Think of this as you might a high school shop class. The experienced, concerned teacher is trying to instruct his students in how to properly handle some potentially dangerous equipment. The idea is to show them how to take raw

materials—wood or metal, for instance—and make them into useful, attractive, or valuable end products. To do this, they’ll have to use power saws, drill presses, lathes, and other sharp, fast moving tools. The students could (conceivably) just come in and “give it a try,” but without proper instruction, they’re running the risk of cutting off body parts. Also, they’re far less likely to end up making anything remotely as good as it could have been, even if they do somehow manage to avoid bloodshed.

Of course, in *this* “class,” the subject—“getting through life”—is infinitely more complex and fraught with peril than your typical high school woodworking, home ec, or auto shop course. In “Mortal Life 101,” the object is to learn how to function properly in relation to God and our fellow man. We come equipped with two “natural” influences: our consciences, and our fallen, sinful human natures, but these two things are often at war with each other. One says “live peaceably with your fellow man,” while the other says, “Grab what you can, when you can.” Conscience says, “I wouldn’t want others stealing from me, seducing my spouse, spreading vicious rumors about me, or killing me, so I won’t do those things to them.” Human nature, on the other hand, says, “Conscience be damned. I want what I want, when I want it. So my only real rule in life is ‘Don’t get caught.’”

As you are about to learn, however, there is essential data to be learned in the schoolroom of life that cannot be arrived at through either conscience or human nature. As fallen creatures, we are—by definition—separated and estranged from our Maker. We can’t “think” or “work” our way to Him (which is not to say people don’t try—the result is called religion.) That is where God’s Instruction—the Torah—comes in. Yahweh’s Instructions not only tell us how to interact with our fellow human beings. Actually, that sort of thing comprises only about ten or fifteen percent of the Torah, and it all meshes perfectly with a healthy conscience. The remainder—the bulk of God’s Instruction—teaches us how to recognize and interact *with Him*.

That explains why so much of the Torah is comprised of what may seem like pointless, irrational, or unreasonable rules, rites, and rituals—things that look for all the world like so much religious hocus pocus. As much as one may wish to do so, *none* of this body of “law”—some ninety percent of the Torah—can be literally performed today—not as Yahweh instructed, anyway. Why? Because all of it depends on having a group of men—verified direct biological descendents of Moses’ brother Aaron—suitably consecrated to serve as priests of Yahweh. Most of these precepts also depend on having a temple, or at least a tabernacle, set up in the “place where Yahweh chooses to make His name abide” (which since the days of David, three thousand years ago, can *only* be in Jerusalem), complete with certain pieces of ritual furniture. As described—and commanded—in the Torah, these things *must* be done throughout Israel’s generations; and yet, they *can’t* be

done today, for the temple is no more, and the priesthood has been scattered to the four winds.

What happened? The prophet Hosea, writing seven centuries before the time of Christ, warned Israel in the name of Yahweh: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to Me. And since you have forgotten the law [i.e., Instructions, *torah*] of your God, I also will forget your children.” (Hosea 4:6) The Temple was destroyed (and not for the first time) within a generation of Yahshua’s sacrifice on Calvary—in 70 AD. The priesthood was dispersed for good in 135. All because Israel “rejected knowledge,” that is, failed to hear and heed the lessons in “their part” of the Torah—the ninety percent of it that was designed to reveal Yahweh—in the person of Yahshua the Messiah—to them.

Could not the gentiles have picked up Israel’s mantle and carried on? No. The Torah is quite specific about who was to do what. We see the phrase “And Yahweh said to Moses, saying ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say...’” (or words to that effect) literally *hundreds of times* in the Pentateuch. The physical, literal performance of the rites of the Torah were designed to be done exclusively by Israelites (commonly referred to these days as Jews), within the Land of Israel (as defined in Numbers 34). If they did, they would be immeasurably blessed by God (see Deuteronomy 28:1-14). Meanwhile, the gentiles (literally “the nations”—everybody else) would see the faithfulness of Yahweh demonstrated in Israel and honor their God. Well, that’s how it was supposed to work. The rest of Deuteronomy 28 delineates in gruesome detail what would happen to Israel if they would not follow Yahweh’s Instructions. It’s not pretty, but it reads like a history book: the “curses” that were to follow disobedience befell Israel just as Moses had warned them.

Ironically, Israel’s rebellion was prophesied as well. Indeed, it led inexorably to the direct fulfillment of most of the Torah’s ritual-pictures fifteen hundred years after Moses wrote it all down. I’m speaking, of course, of the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Yahshua in 33AD. His death (and all the rest) taught us at last what all of those ritual sacrifices and offerings in the Torah actually meant: they were prophecies of the means by which Yahweh would reconcile sinful man to Himself, healing the rift that had been created between God and man in the Garden of Eden.

So no one outside of Israel was commanded to perform the rites of the Torah, but *everyone* would (potentially) benefit from what they signified. Israel’s fortunes rose or fell (as a nation) in direct correlation to their adherence to the Torah’s precepts. But keeping the Torah—physically performing the rituals it said to do—never actually saved anyone, Jew *or* gentile, never reconciled them to Yahweh, never redeemed them from the curse of sin.

The Torah, in the end, was but a shadow, a reflection. Only the Reality that cast that shadow, the One whom we saw in its shining reflection, could do that. It is He whom we are to observe in every precept of the Torah. His name is Yahshua the Messiah—Jesus Christ—whose name means “Yahweh is Salvation” and whose title means “the Anointed One.”

Foreword

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 Owner and 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.

Instructions and Signs

Let us begin our study of Maimonides' "Laws List" at the beginning, with the fundamentals—with God Himself, how He defined Himself, and how He revealed Himself. The Rabbis, sadly, refuse to acknowledge their God by name—Yahweh (יהוה), alternately rendered Yahveh, Yahowah, Yehovah, or Yahuweh—or the relatively recent English variant, Jehovah. Instead, the current practice is to refer to Him *as* "the Name," that is, *HaShem* in Hebrew. (Just as tragically, Christians have been taught to refer to Yahweh as "The LORD," because virtually every instance of His name—and there are *seven thousand* of them in the Tanach—has been edited out and replaced by the translators of every popular English language Bible version.) Maimonides, as I mentioned in the Foreword, simply used a personal pronoun, "Him" to refer to Yahweh in his list of 613 "laws," something I have admittedly "corrected" in this recounting. If the sheer ubiquity of His name in scripture is any indication, Yahweh *wants us* to know Him by name—a name that reveals His unique self-existence, not merely His authority.

The Rabbi's list speaks generally of treating God and His name with reverence and respect—which is sadly ironic because they (along with all too many Christians) refuse either to use His name or do what He instructed them to do. That being said, nine of Maimonides' ten mitzvot concerning Yahweh directly are perfectly correct, and backed up in the Torah (even if the Rabbi's emphasis is skewed in places).

Maimonides' agenda begins to show in his mitzvot concerning the Torah itself. Several of the rabbinical precepts betray a willingness to blend human "wisdom" (that promulgated by the Rabbis, that is) with what Yahweh actually had to say, even though the Torah (not to mention the New Testament) clearly warns against either adding or subtracting from God's Word.

The third area covered in this chapter barely scratches the surface of a vast ocean of Biblical revelation—that of symbols employed by Yahweh designed to teach in non-verbal terms important truths that run the risk of being lost or misconstrued if communicated through language alone. The subject of Biblical symbology, God's system of metaphors, parables, and dress rehearsals, must be reserved for another time and place. It is, in fact, the subject of another book (actually, seven volumes are planned) presented elsewhere on this website: *The Torah Code*. But expect to see the phrase "this is symbolic of..." repeated *ad nauseam* in this present work. Yahweh's symbols are ubiquitous in Scripture.

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, *qodesh*, 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 *chahal* 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 fervor 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. Yahshua, 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 *Chanukkat 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.

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. Yahshua'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 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.

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 and 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* 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 holy appointments. 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 convocations in the spring, one in early summer, and three in the fall. All the men living within Israel were to congregate 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 rottenness. 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 Moshiah/Messiah (see *Future History*, Chapter 27 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 holy appointments 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 convocations.

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 convocations 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 convocations (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 second coming of Christ, 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 *n*th 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 means 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 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 hundreds 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 23:36) 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 a 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.

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 a 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 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 *purposefully* 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 well 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 unhealthy 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.

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 it's *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 “practical” 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 stiffes 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 bondswoman (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 mitzvah, 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** (*elohiyim*: 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 *chahal*: “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 gleanings 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 differences 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.

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 depository (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 mis-translation 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 and 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.

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 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-worshiping 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 manslayer 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 over 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!”

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 of which you can be justifiably proud. 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 worshippers, 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. Yahweh has also manifested Himself as theophanies, as the Shekinah (non-anthropomorphic natural phenomena), and in dreams and visions. 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. 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. 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’etre* 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 doing so.

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.”

On the literal level, there is a recent development in agriculture that should be strongly cautioned against at this point. Certain huge chemical companies (spearheaded by Monsanto) are aggressively pushing through research, development, and implementation of GMOs—Genetically Modified Organisms. In short, they are splicing DNA from completely unrelated organisms into the genetic profile of seed crops and animals raised for food. The “brochure” insists that such goals as higher crop yields, drought resistance, shorter growing times, etc. are benefits that will far outweigh any potential downsides. But Yahweh has spoken: “**You shall not sow your field with mixed seed.**” GMOs are the very definition of “mixed seed.” We have been warned.

- (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 (Numbers 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.

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 ideologies 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 of 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.

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 *ekkklesia*—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. People like her 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 tithe 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 tithe 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 *lachiy*: 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 Plan of God, centered on 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 3:16-17) **"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 Shabbat. “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 *lebana*, 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.” The sun would go down and the world would grow dark, but Yahweh saw to it that there would always be light in the sanctuary. What produced 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): it’s 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 convocation.

- (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 (*aown*) 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 tsitzit, 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.

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 *palaioo*) 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 septades of 360-day schematic years.) “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. The horns symbolize authority.
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 ordinary 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 *worshiper* 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 *minha* (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 man’s ideals and endeavors being substituted for Yahweh’s reality. 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 ‘fattened calf’ was the symbol for luxurious living—killing a fattened 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 descendents 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 6:27-30) 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*, *mincha*, *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 its 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.

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’ey*) 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 before 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 worshiper 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 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 *neseq* (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 worshiper 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

worshiper 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 worshiper 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 worshiper. 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 intended 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.

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, something 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—*gamlā*—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 #536-7), 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 worshiper. 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 worshiper 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 worshiper *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.”** Once 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.

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—which is not to say it's not still perfectly true.

“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. And could it be that the number of purification days were doubled for female children because women are twice as loving as men in this world? That’s a wild, unsupported theory, of course, but the underlying premise is solid: we are to walk through this life in the reality of Christ’s atonement and in the light of Yahweh’s 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 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 egg 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 “ordinance of the Red Heifer.” The normal word for “heifer” (which, according to Webster, is “a young cow which has not borne a calf”) would have been *eglah*, the heifer mentioned in Mitzvot #296 and #297. The word used here is *para*, a feminine form of the word *par*, ordinarily translated “bull,” “young bull,” “bullock,” or occasionally “ox.” I believe *para* was used instead of *eglah* here because of its similarity to the root verb *parar*, which means “to break (in the sense of breaking a vow), destroy, frustrate, or invalidate.” “Red” is the Hebrew *adom*, 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. It has the same consonant root as the name of our patriarch Adam—which means “man.” And as we shall see, the ordinance of the red heifer is a picture of God’s invalidation of the curse of death on mankind.

The red heifer 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 heifer 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 heifer. 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 heifer, 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 Law of the Red Heifer. Here we are given our first hint as to what is to be done with the ashes of the heifer, 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 heifer) 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 Red Heifer (See also Mitzvot #574 and #575). The ashes of the heifer 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 heifer. 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 Heifer. 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 Heifer will have upon the repentant believer: cleanness in God's sight, joy, healing, fellowship with Yahweh, the invalidation of our sins, a renewal of our spirit, and the continued indwelling of Yahweh's Spirit. 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 heifer'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 heifer 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 (though 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 around to present Yahshua— to sprinkle the water of purification, the living water imbued with the ashes of the red heifer, 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 supposed 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, was verified by the symbols right here in the Law of leprosy (Leviticus 14:39-40), where the priest "comes again on the seventh day" to make his final determination—and judgment—concerning the condition of the "house."

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 “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 heifer 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; (5) This healing is thankfully recognized as we are pronounced clean, though we still inhabit our formerly leprous bodies, (6) We relegate religious observance to its proper place—not a path to salvation, but a response to it, 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 (read: black-skinned) 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.

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 (or as least like it *was*, before they became pawns on the political chessboard). 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.” (Of course, for the Constitution—or the Scriptures—to work, you have to follow them.) 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?

Virginia Pastor Jerry Falwell became famous for at least *trying* 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 *godesh*, 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 Nazarite 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 *mincha*, 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 bondswoman. “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.