

The Owner's Manual

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

Volume Three:
Commandment Appendices

By

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Commandment Appendices

The Owner's Manual—the Torah—is just that: an Instruction book on how to live a successful human life. It's axiomatic that you can't go wrong if you're doing what your Owner/Creator wants you to do. And (fortunately for us) what He wants us to do is recorded in the pages of the Bible, primarily in the Torah and the Gospels—together only about 300 pages. And the actual *instruction* is only a fraction of that. (I'm not saying the rest of scripture isn't vitally important, relevant, or useful; I'm only saying that “what God specifically told us to do” doesn't take up much room at all.) In fact, Yahshua pointed out that the whole thing could be boiled down to two simple and interrelated Torah precepts: (1) Love God with your whole being; and (2) love your fellow man as much as (and in the same way that) you love yourself. What this summary lacks in detail, it more than makes up for in impact.

We—the whole human race—were designed by Yahweh to function in a certain way—and *not to work* in other ways. For example, our Creator intended that we breathe air (not water or carbon dioxide), eat food derived from living things (not rocks or sunlight), and reproduce our kind sexually (not by asexual cloning or just splitting into two). Just to make the point, He put living things in our biosphere that do all of these “unhuman” things: fish respire oxygen dissolved in water. Plants “breathe” the carbon dioxide exhaled by other living things, and “eat” sunshine and the nutrients in dirt. Bacteria reproduce by simple cell division.

God doesn't have to tell oak trees and amoebas what to breathe or eat, or how to reproduce. He doesn't have to instruct geese to fly south for the winter, teach bears to hibernate, or show squirrels how to climb trees. He doesn't run “sex education classes” for lions or limpets. They simply *know* how to reproduce their kind. And yes, humans too “automatically” know how to operate our mortal bodies: we *know* not to breathe water or eat dirt and twigs, and judging by how long our species has been around, we figured out the whole mating thing a long time ago.

That being said, God has found it necessary to instruct mankind on a whole range of issues that animals from aardvarks to zebras don't need to know about. These are the commandments and Instructions recorded for our edification in the Torah and the Gospels. What makes us different, in need of information and guidance that other sentient creatures don't? Is it the possession of a soul? No.

The Hebrew word for “soul” is *nephesh*. It is used four times in Genesis 1 (the creation chapter), to describe “sea creatures,” “every living thing that moves,” “cattle, creeping things and beasts of the earth,” and finally, “every beast of the earth, bird of the air, and everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life.”

The inference is that the presence of a soul is what makes a creature alive (as opposed to being either a pile of non-living matter, or dead). Plants do not have souls, though they are alive (until they die). But “every living thing that moves” (*movement* apparently being the key concept) in the waters, on the land, or in the sky, is made alive by the presence of a soul (*nephesh*). Death is thus defined as the moment when the soul leaves the body. And as far as we know, the phenomenon of death—mortality—is universal and unavoidable among sentient creatures, including man. Our bodies are all indwelt with souls at the moment of conception, and they are all separated from these souls at some point. We live, and then we die.

So what makes people different from other mortal animals? We read, “**And Yahweh, God, formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being** [*chay nephesh*—soul].” (Genesis 2:7) We have a lot in common with animals. We are made of the same raw materials (the “dust of the ground,” i.e., the elements found on Planet Earth). And we all become physically alive through the agency of the *nephesh*, the soul. But back up a little: what is this “breath of life” of which He speaks? God uses a different word here—one that is not used to describe the life of animals. “Breath” is the Hebrew noun *neshamah*, derived from the verb *nasham*, meaning “to pant or gasp.”

I get the feeling that God, in communicating all of this to Moses, was assigning symbolic meaning—a code, if you will—to several words found in the Hebrew language—concepts for which there are really no literal equivalents in any language. There are three separate words used to describe “life” of some sort in these scriptures, and all three of them are (in the literal sense) related to moving air or respiration (breathing), one way or another. We’ve seen the *nephesh* used to describe the soul—the mind or life force that quickens any sentient animal, including man. (It is derived from the verb *naphash*, meaning to breathe, be breathed upon, or be refreshed.) A second word, *ruach*, is used to denote “spirit” (a concept that is as broad in Hebrew as it is in English), though it literally just means “breath or wind.” And third, God uses the word *neshamah* to describe the unique type of life God breathed into Adam, making him unlike any animal.

My point is that by using three different terms, God is (apparently) teaching us that there are three different attributes or components of human life (other than the body)—things we can’t really explore scientifically: the soul, the spirit, and

this *neshamah* (for which there isn't even a proper English equivalent to describe it). Why is this important? Because sorting all of this out will explain why God gave written instructions to man, while he left the animals with nothing more specific than instinct and biological urges.

Yahshua pointed out to Nicodemus in John 3 that in order to be *spiritually* alive (i.e., beyond mere mortal life)—in order to “see the kingdom of God”—we must be “born from above” in Yahweh’s Spirit. That is, God’s Holy Spirit must dwell within us, making our souls alive, just as our souls make our bodies alive. But in order for that to happen, people have to be equipped to be “receptacles” for God’s Spirit—something mere animals are not. When Yahweh “breathed into Adam’s nostrils the breath (*neshamah*) of life,” this capacity for receiving God’s Spirit was created—and not just for Adam and Eve, but for all of their progeny, down to you and me. The best way I’ve ever heard it described is in a quote from Blaise Pascal, the 17th century French mathematician, physicist, inventor, and theologian: “There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.”

I believe this “God-shaped vacuum” is the *neshamah*, bestowed upon our parents in the Garden of Eden. It is not *in itself* the Spirit of God (which is called the *ruach*, *pneuma* in Greek), but it is the “space” within our individual souls in which the Spirit may dwell. But here’s the rub: the Spirit indwells the *neshamah* on an invitation-only basis. When Adam sinned, God’s Spirit left him. This was the “death penalty” about which Adam was warned in Genesis 2:17: his soul hadn’t left his body, but God’s Spirit had vacated his soul. God had given our parents *one* commandment—and they violated it. Having disobeyed Yahweh by eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve were now “dead,” spiritually speaking, separated and estranged from their Creator-God.

Their knowledge of this fact was demonstrated by their attempt to hide from God by putting on clothing they had made from fig leaves. But their works were insufficient (as are ours): Adam and Eve would remain dead (spiritually speaking) until they donned the tunics of animal skins (Genesis 3:21) that God provided for them. This act established several spiritual paradigms:

(1) Once they had sinned, only God (eternally sinless) could provide reconciliation and redemption. They could not do it themselves.

(2) As it had been their choice as to whether or not to sin, it was now the choice of the humans to accept or reject God’s remedy for that sin. They could either remain “dead,” estranged from God by their own volition, or regain the life they had lost by obeying His new commandment to put on the animal skins.

(3) The “spiritual” difference between humans and animals now became apparent. Mankind had been given a commandment from God (“Don’t eat the fruit from that one tree”). We therefore possessed free will: choose to obey, or elect not to. Animals, on the other hand, did not have the ability to make moral decisions. Their natures had no ethical component; they could not “sin,” even though what an animal did might prove to be “inconvenient” to people (or each other). It was not a moral failing, for example, for a lion to make off with a lamb from your flock.

(4) This established the paradigm that animals were innocent by nature, whereas men (after the unfortunate “fruit” incident) were not. God would later fine-tune the symbol to define as “clean” (suitable for sacrifice) animals as those that were vegetarians and safely edible by people. But a whole lot of water would flow under the bridge (and over it, for that matter) before these issues were germane. The species of animals God sacrificed in the Garden to cover the sin of Adam and Eve were left unspecified. The lesson was, only innocence can atone for guilt.

To sum up, then, Yahweh created humans with a unique spiritual component—the capacity to “host” His Spirit within our souls. This had the effect of bestowing upon us free will, the ability and privilege of making moral choices. Free will sounds like a good thing (and it is). But there’s a “problem” with this whole system: our ability to say “yes” requires the possibility of saying “no.” Our Creator’s single greatest defining attribute is love. He made humans and gave them free will because He wanted an object for His love—someone who could reciprocate in kind. The “problem” is that love requires choice: “love” that’s forced isn’t love at all, but something else.

Love is fundamentally different from obedience, compliance, or loyalty. It can’t be compelled, bought, stolen, held for ransom, or even manufactured; it can only be earned. Love can’t be sold or bartered; it can only be given away or freely received. Force might manifest itself in peaceful coexistence, good behavior, or societal restraint, but none of that is love. Neither a god who forced our compliance nor one who made compliance impossible by asking nothing of us (i.e., the all-inclusive god of popular religious myth) could be a God of love. As I said, love requires choice. The ability to love implies the capacity *not to* love. If the object of God’s affection cannot reject Him, then accepting Him is a meaningless concept.

Elsewhere, I explained: “Love is shown when I help my neighbor because I perceive a need and spontaneously reach out to him. But if someone *forces me* to help him, I have not shown him love; I’ve merely bowed to external pressure. The victim of a mugging has not shown love to his assailant, no matter how badly the thief needed the money. Likewise, the taxpayer has not shown love to the welfare

recipient (nor to the bureaucrat who took his cut off the top). Why? Because there was no choice involved. Whether robbed violently on the street, or ‘nicely’ through polite, legal means, the ‘giver’ hasn’t shown love to the taker. He has only bowed to coercion. In fact, he couldn’t show love under these circumstances even if he wanted to. The ‘robber’ has taken not only his money and his security, he has also stolen (in some measure) the victim’s ability to tangibly show his love to others.”

The case could be made that the only reason we’re here—the only reason *anything* exists—is that Yahweh the Creator wanted to share a relationship of love with someone. (Angels—created spirit beings—were not good candidates, since technically, they do not possess free will. Though they operate independently, they do not have permission to disobey Yahweh.) So the next bridge we need to cross is how His love and authority interact within the matrix of our free will. And not surprisingly, He has provided the perfect metaphor to help us understand how it all works: the family.

The way it is *supposed to* work is that a husband and wife, through the physical expression of the love and commitment they share, “become one flesh” quite literally through the birth of children to them. After a long and arduous gestation period, the baby comes—a brand new human being, related to both mother and father, but with no knowledge, resources, communication skills, or authority. What the baby *does have* are life, needs, potential, and relationship. Meanwhile, mom has the ability to nurture and teach, and dad has the ability to provide and protect. Working as a team (actually, it’s closer than that—it’s a corporation, not just a partnership) mom and dad set about raising their offspring. The idea is to help “Junior” to “grow in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” until such time as he (or she) is ready to exercise the privilege of choice responsibly in the world. (Please see *The Torah Code*, Volume 4, for more on these symbols.)

The point germane to our present subject is that the parents—not the child—wield 100% of the authority, even though all of them possess free will. The parents’ love is exercised largely in telling the child what to do, and what not to do. “Eat your vegetables... don’t touch that... come here and give me a hug... clean up your room... stop teasing your sister... do your homework...” None of these “commandments” are given to elevate the status of the parents, make life easier for them, or profit them in any way (except perhaps for avoiding the two o’clock AM barefoot encounter with the Lego brick in Junior’s room). Rather, they are all for the *children’s* benefit—whether they realize it or not.

God’s commandments to us are a lot like that. Some of them, anyway. Like a parent’s instructions, they are not there for the purpose of stroking God’s ego, elevating Him over His puny subjects, or giving Him some advantage He didn’t

already have. He created us, after all—and not just our bodies, but the very raw materials from which they’re built, down to the sub-atomic level. For our benefit, He invented and sustains the entire universe. Our life, on every conceivable level, is derived from His essential living existence. He made us (and everything else) to express His primary attribute: love.

So when we “keep His commandments,” *He* doesn’t benefit—*we* do, for we are fulfilling the destiny for which we were created: to reciprocate our Creator’s love for us, express that ideal by loving our fellow man, and consequently live blessed, fruitful lives. Conversely, when we fail to keep His commandments, we are frustrating (to some extent) the purpose for which our Creator designed us—becoming useless in the process.

Perhaps a metaphor is in order. Think of human beings as stringed instruments. We have varying potential, but we’re all made for one thing: making music. You may be a priceless Stradivarius violin, and your brother is a silky-smooth Gibson L-5 jazz guitar. I’m a cheap no-name banjo. Any of us can potentially be used in the hands of a master performer to make wonderful music, in one genre or another. We were all designed and built to do just that. But for our potential to be realized, the instrument has to “cooperate.” It has to submit to “adjustments.” If our tuning gears or pegs refuse to move, or if our bridge is stuck out of position, we won’t play in tune, no matter how skilled the musician may be.

Now imagine that the luthier who built us had the power to give each of his instruments life and free will—the choice of whether or not to submit to tuning or intonation adjustments—to actually assist the master in making beautiful music. Would not the partnership between instrument and musician be enhanced and enriched if they did so? Don’t look now, but that’s precisely the sort of relationship we can have with our Master and Maker, God Almighty, who built us with the purpose of bringing “music” (read: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) to a lost and willingly tone-deaf world. Remarkably, we “instruments,” the workmanship of God, have been given the privilege of helping Him help the world. As Paul put it, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”** (Ephesians 2:8-10)

The “downside” of this arrangement—and the reason it’s a privilege and a gift—is that we “instruments,” having free will, may choose *not to* respond to our Maker’s attempts to “tune” us. However, if we choose to refuse, we will find ourselves set aside, relegated to doing things other than those for which we were created in the first place. A Stradivarius may make a fine wall decoration, but that’s not why it was made. If it isn’t being used to make music, it may as well be a black velvet portrait of Elvis.

The “tuning” and “intonation” adjustments of which I’ve been speaking are, of course, the Commandments of God. They’re another way of looking at the instructions given by loving parents to their young children. Whether spoken through Moses in the Torah, or by Yahshua the Messiah in the Gospels, these commandments, these instructions, help us fulfill our God-given destinies, making us useful to our fellow man as a conduit of God’s love. Yes, it is strictly our choice as to whether or not to obey. But know this: our disobedience hurts and isolates only ourselves. If the Stradivarius refuses to play in tune, God is perfectly happy to make music on the Guernerius sitting next to it. Or the cheap student violin in the store window, for that matter.

Presuming you’ve read the first two volumes of *The Owner’s Manual*, you’re now intimately familiar with the commandments, precepts, and instructions in the Torah. And you’ve confronted three inconvenient truths:

(1) The majority of the Torah’s *mitzvot* cannot be kept today—no matter how much you might want to—for lack of a priesthood and a tabernacle or temple. We can discern, in retrospect, that in broad terms these “Levitical” precepts were given as a complex symbolic preview—a prophecy, if you will—of Yahweh’s plan for the salvation, reconciliation, and restoration of mankind.

(2) Of the ones that *can* be kept, you *haven’t*. Not perfectly, anyway. And without having the ability to perform the Levitical precepts that provide for the atonement of sin, there is nothing you can physically do to get you back into Yahweh’s good graces. (Truth be told, those Levitical precepts were never meant to save anyone anyway, but “only” to point toward the One who could: Yahshua the Messiah.)

(3) Although the Torah precepts are the very word of God (and thus invaluable for “instruction, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness”), they weren’t actually addressed to 99.8% of the world’s population—gentiles. The Jews alone (more properly, *Israel*) were instructed to perform these precepts “throughout their generations.” The rest of us were intended to observe Israel, notice how blessed they were by virtue of their wise God and His awesome and just legal system, and enquire as to how we might come to worship such a wonderful deity. Remarkably, Yahweh *knew* they would fail, and proceeded anyway, recording Israel’s disastrous subsequent history for our edification—making sure the *Instructions themselves* remained available to us.

But because they reveal the very mind of God, and because His instructions are patently good advice no matter who you are, and because the “practical” precepts were scattered from one end of the Torah (not to mention *The Owner’s Manual*) to the other, I have collected the Torah precepts that (theoretically, anyway) can still be kept. They are the subject of Appendix 1. Because of numerous repetitions and restatements, there are actually fewer unique “Laws” than you might think. I have broken them down by subject: (1) The Ten Commandments, (2) Attitude, (3) Relationships and Behavior, (4) God’s Schedule, and (5) the Mortal Body.

Appendix 2 was the result of the nagging thought in the back of my head that kept telling me, “The job’s not done—what about what *Yahshua* said to do?” He had, after all, proclaimed to His disciples pretty much what Yahweh had told Israel through Moses: “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” So I set about collecting and organizing whatever *Yahshua* actually told us to do, mostly from the Gospel accounts.

Not surprisingly, these commandments in no way contradict or undermine the Torah. But they’re not a straightforward laundry list of rules and regulations, either. Whereas Moses handed down precepts that told Israel to “do this” or “don’t do that,” Christ’s instructions are couched more in terms of “be this way.” In other words, we can’t merely develop a litany of habitual Christ-like behaviors to mindlessly perform as we go through our busy days. We actually have to *think* about these things, moment by moment, for much of what He said to do is counterintuitive and (frankly) unnatural for us fallen children of Adam.

I’ll warn you right up front: seeing it all together in one place like this can be a bit disconcerting. But it also gives us a wonderful glimpse at the kind of life toward which we’re moving if only we’ll trust Him.

Laws that *Can* Be Kept

I have noted many times that much of the Torah *cannot* be kept today, no matter how much we might want to. Although I haven't done a formal survey, it appears that about three quarters of the Law of Moses depends for its literal performance upon the existence of a working temple or tabernacle (the latest version of which was destroyed by Titus Vespasian in 70 AD) and a Jewish priesthood, something Emperor Hadrian scattered to the four winds along with the rest of the Israelite populace in 135.

Before the temple was razed by the Romans, there was a raging controversy among believers in Christ as to whether one must convert to Judaism first to become a "follower of the Way" (as Christianity was then known), or if a gentile could simply *believe*. After all, our faith was considered by all to be a Jewish sect; Yahshua (a.k.a. Jesus) had been a Jew, crucified (according to Pontius Pilate) for claiming to be the "King of the Jews." Furthermore, Christ Himself had said, **"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."** (Matthew 5:17) So the case could be made (and *was* by some Jewish Christians) that the Torah was the foundation of Christianity. Should it not therefore be honored by all believers? They had a point.

But then Paul, one of the most well-qualified Torah scholars of his generation, came along and pointed out the uncomfortable truth that nobody had *ever* kept the Law of Moses perfectly—and that's what it would take to attain salvation through its observance. He wrote as if the Torah were a ball and chain, something that would *prevent* a gentile believer from enjoying true freedom in Christ: **"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing..."** Circumcision, here as in Acts 15, was chosen as the "test case," a sign that the participant intended to live by the Torah's precepts as if he were a Jew dwelling in the Land.

"And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." That is, not by works—not by keeping the Law. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love." (Galatians 5:1-6) You can't have it both ways, he says. Either you have to rely on the sacrifice of Yahshua the Messiah as your salvation strategy (grace through faith), or depend on your own performance of the Torah's myriad

precepts. Of course, about fifteen years after Paul wrote to the Galatians, the Romans besieged Jerusalem and tore down the temple—rendering a large portion of the Torah undoable under any circumstances, and making the whole controversy rather a moot point.

Still, we can't ignore the fact that the Torah is the very Word of God—revealing His standards (and His heart) on a wide range of issues common to mortal man. The bottom line on Paul's teaching on the subject might be succinctly stated thus: The Torah is valuable and holy—a priceless guide to the mind of God. But it is worthless—even counterproductive—as a soteriological strategy. One cannot be reconciled to Yahweh by attempting to keep its precepts. Rather, the Law serves as an “Owner's Manual” for successful living to those who have *already* chosen to become children of God by grace through faith in Christ. As he wrote to Timothy, **“We know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine.”** (I Timothy 1:8-10)

Those who insist that keeping the Torah is mandatory for salvation, or required to prove they revere Yahweh, must keep several facts in mind:

(1) *Only* theocratic Israel was commanded to keep these statutes. 283 times in the Torah we read the words, “And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Speak to the *children of Israel* and say...’” (or words to that effect); but God never went on record commanding gentiles from the surrounding nations to do anything.

Why? Because there was no conceivable set of rules that could reconcile anyone to God, once they had fallen into sin. *That* could only be achieved by grace through faith in Christ—which (through its exhaustive matrix of symbols and metaphors) is what the Torah described. Israel, then, was to keep the Torah; and the rest of us were to observe *them*, ponder *their* practice, and come to the inescapable conclusion that the God they followed was Salvation personified. It would have been a whole lot easier to see if Israel had simply obeyed Him.

Sigh.

(2) The whole context of the Torah clearly reveals that it is written to a tight-knit agrarian society living in a relatively small geographic area—as witnessed (among other things) by the requirement to travel to a central location within the Land of Promise to observe certain rites and rituals *three times every year*. This would be the height of impracticality if they were spread out over the whole world. But that—the exile of the Jews—is precisely what happened, leaving us nothing but the Instructions to ponder.

(3) Foreign gentiles were welcome to join Israel, revere its God, and keep His commandments—but only within the Land of Promise. As far as Torah observance is concerned, being a proselyte to Judaism in New York City is sort of like being a Republican living in Sri Lanka. It doesn't count for much.

(4) Because the majority of the Torah requires a temple and priesthood for its literal performance, it has not been possible to keep it (or even “observe” it in its entirety) since 70 AD. For that matter, the Ark of the Covenant has been missing in action for the past 2,600 years or so—since before the Babylonian conquest—making it impossible to literally perform the crucial rites of the Day of Atonement.

(5) Recourse to the life, death, and resurrection of Yahshua the Messiah—fulfilling the symbolic requirements of the priestly portions of the Torah (just as He promised He would in Matthew 5:17)—is the only way historical reality can be reconciled with God's Law. To believe otherwise is basically to call God a liar. This was Paul's premise, and it's all the more obvious today, almost two thousand years after the temple was destroyed.

All of that being said, it is still possible to keep *some* of the Torah's precepts. We must bear in mind that much of this has a symbolic component (e.g., “murder” is a scriptural euphemism for preventing someone from having eternal life through Yahweh's plan for our redemption), even though the literal meaning of the statute is still binding and beneficial. Also, since the original audience, theocratic Israel, was a compact agrarian community (a bit like the Amish in America today), we must look beyond the agricultural metaphors (for instance, stealing a sheep, harvesting a field, or helping a fallen donkey) to find applications germane to our own lives. In other words, these principles are not pointless or invalid just because you're not a farmer.

The “rules” governing which Torah precepts were included in this compendium (and those which were not) are as follows:

(1) The precepts listed were delivered exclusively to Israel, their godly ancestors, or their God-appointed leaders—not to pagan gentiles.

(2) They are meant to be applied to Israel on a *national* basis—i.e., to everyone, not just a few individuals.

(3) They were commanded in the Torah—primarily in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. (Genesis records pre-Israelite events, and Numbers is mostly

historical.) Clarifications or expansions by later prophets, Apostles, or Christ Himself will not be listed.

(4) The precepts are clearly meant to be carried out on an ongoing or recurring basis, not just once or in response to a temporary or sporadic situation.

(5) They are possible to do today in a literal, physical sense. That is, no priesthood or temple is required for their performance, nor is the Promised Land (or its conquest) exclusively in view. (This is not to say they're actually *legal* in most countries. You're not allowed to stone adulterers, for example.)

(6) Strictly symbolic precepts (like circumcision or the wearing of *tsitzit*) may be included, but only if they don't involve the priests or temple.

(7) *Not* included by definition, then, would be such things as the tithe (because of the involvement of the Levites), sacrifices and offerings (administered by the priests), "holy wars" against the heathens (with the attendant plundering of the vanquished), and "cities of refuge" (sanctuary cities). I have not included passages where the instruction is simply to "Know this..." or "Remember that..." Nor have I included "covenant" passages, in which "If you do this, I will do that."

A few notes on format: I have listed these precepts by broad subject, and each subject has been broken up into sub-categories. The main headings are (1) The Ten Commandments, (2) Attitude, (3) Relationships and Behavior, (4) God's Schedule (that is, His prophetic holidays), and (5) the Mortal Body. Within each sub-category, the Torah precepts are listed in the order they appear in the Pentateuch. As you will see, there are surprisingly few "Laws," for Yahweh tends to say the same thing over and over again when a matter bears repeating. Ironically (or not), the most oft-repeated "precept" in this listing (mentioned almost fifty times) is to "Heed God's Laws."

As always, I will put God's word in a boldface font, to distinguish it from my own commentary (which I'll endeavor to keep to a minimum). Where helpful, I have cross-referenced precepts with passages elsewhere on this website. (TOM is *The Owner's Manual*, WMM is *What Maimonides Missed* (a.k.a. TOM, Volume 2), and TTC is *The Torah Code*.) As is my habit, I have consistently replaced "the LORD" in the text with the name Moses actually wrote: "Yahweh" (יהוה).

Note that there were often several headings under which it would have been appropriate to place a given precept: I have tried to organize this as logically as possible. Any repetitions are God's, not mine: if He finds these things worth repeating, I must assume they're worth closer attention or further inquiry. And forgive me, but the nature of the project necessitated that I detach some of these statements from their broader context. Feel free to look them up on your own.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Easily the most succinct compendium of statutes is the passage known as the “Ten Commandments,” found initially in Exodus 20, and repeated almost verbatim in Deuteronomy 5. Supporting passages litter the Torah from one end to the other, however, and they are listed where appropriate.

First Commandment: The Exclusive Worship of Yahweh

“I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.” (Exodus 20:2-3) The implication is that *because* Yahweh freed us from bondage (read: sin), we are to worship Him alone. Nothing else in all of creation can accomplish that—and *that*, being sinless, is required if we wish to stand in the presence of a holy God.

“You shall not permit a sorceress to live.” (Exodus 22:18) TOM ch9, #334. The point here is that sorcerers, sorceresses, wizards, necromancers, etc. all lead people away from the reverence of (and trust in) Yahweh, one way or another—often invoking demons directly.

“You shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. And whoever blasphemes the name of Yahweh shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of Yahweh, he shall be put to death.’” (Leviticus 24:15-16) TOM ch1, #3. Stoning meant the whole congregation’s participation in the execution of the criminal, meaning in turn that the whole congregation had been harmed or endangered by his blasphemy.

“I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.” (Deuteronomy 5:6-7) TOM ch1, #1. Egypt is used as a consistent metaphor for bondage in the world. And bondage is a euphemism for sin.

“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.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) TOM ch1, #6, #7. According to Christ, this is the greatest commandment of them all.

“Beware, lest you forget Yahweh who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. You shall fear Yahweh your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name.” (Deuteronomy 6:12-13) One would naturally “take oaths” on the name of the highest authority possible. That’s why we “swear on the Bible.” If you merely “affirm” your testimony, you have made *yourself* your God.

“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.” (Deuteronomy 12:5) TOM ch13, #544; TTC 1.2.3. Eventually, this place was defined as Jerusalem.

“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. But 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, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which Yahweh your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.” (Deuteronomy 13:1-5) TOM ch1, #14, #15. Literally obeying precepts like this today, of course, will get you thrown in prison for murder. For that matter, many college professors and political pundits are only alive today because we *can’t* really keep statutes of this nature. But we *can* at least beware of them—knowing that they’re living under Yahweh’s sentence of death.

“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) TOM ch9, #325, 326; TTC 3.3.13. The primary reason for imposing the death penalty on people who would lead us away from Yahweh is not punishment, but deterrence.

“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) TOM ch9, #323; TOM ch7, #246. Again, outside of theocratic Israel, this one’s doable, but not terribly practical. What can be done? Be discerning. I live in Central Virginia. I can no longer visit Washington D.C. (about a two-hour drive) without a palpable feeling of depression and dread falling upon me—so I avoid the place. God will deal with its evils soon enough, I fear.

“Yahweh your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me 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.’ And Yahweh said to me: ‘What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.’” (Deuteronomy 18:15-19) TOM ch9, #309; WMM ch2, #659. In case you didn’t catch it, that “Prophet” turned out to be Yahshua the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This Prophet is “for them” (an advocate, not an enemy), “like Moses” (that is, attuned to the will of Yahweh), and “from among their brethren” (in other words, an Israelite).

Second Commandment: Idolatry

“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, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” (Exodus 20:4-6) TOM ch9, #312; TTC 1.2.5. Yahweh was planning to introduce *His own* “graven image,” the One who would be a perfect representation of what He was like, but in a “less lethal” format. It’s another way of describing the promised “prophet like Moses.”

“You shall not make anything to be with Me—gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves.” (Exodus 20:23) TOM ch9, #313. Interesting that within two months of hearing these words, Israel was caught worshiping their golden calf.

“He who sacrifices to any god, except to Yahweh only, he shall be utterly destroyed.” (Exodus 22:20) TTC 3.3.13. Be careful what you spend your money on. As Yahshua said, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

“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) TOM ch5, #164. *Anything* you “worship” is a “god” to you. And think beyond idols and images. “Worship” is any act of devotion or sacrifice. What don’t you think you can’t live without?

“You shall make no molded gods for yourselves.” (Exodus 34:17) TOM ch9, #314. Even if you’re thinking, “This is only to remind me of Yahweh, the One True God,” don’t do it.

“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) TOM ch9, #333. “Passing your children through the fire” was an entrenched pagan custom in which one’s child was burned alive in the outstretched arms of a heated metal statue of Chemosh (a.k.a. Moloch, a.k.a. Ba’al), in hopes of securing material prosperity. The modern equivalent is the practice of abortion, in which as many as *45 million* children per year worldwide are brutally murdered in the womb for similar reasons.

“Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods: I am Yahweh your God.” (Leviticus 19:4) TOM ch9, #331. In order to worship to false gods, you have to turn away from Yahweh.

“You shall not practice divination or soothsaying. You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard. You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am Yahweh.” (Leviticus 19:26-28) TOM ch9, #335. Tattoos have become very popular of late—even for believers. At the very least, they’re a slippery slope.

“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) TOM ch9, #337, 338. There is no such thing as “innocent” dabbling in the occult. Yahweh is on record as forbidding it.

“Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given some of his descendants to Molech, to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name. And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives some of his descendants to Molech, and they do not kill him, then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people, and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech.” (Leviticus 20:2-5) TOM ch8, #286. Again, the modern world “worships Molech” through the practice of abortion, whether they know it or not. The motivation is identical.

“The person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am Yahweh your God. And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I am Yahweh who sanctifies you.” (Leviticus 20:6-8) Again, communication with demons, even if you think it’s all innocent fun, is *dangerous*.

“A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood shall be upon them.” (Leviticus 20:27) WMM ch2, #674. Remember, these precepts were commanded of theocratic Israel alone. Over the centuries, this one has been misused and misapplied countless times by evil men with evil motives. And note: Israel was commanded to *stone* witches, not burn them at the stake. These days, it’s best to wait on God’s judgment.

“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) TOM ch2, #25. This would include your television, cell phone, and other electronic devices, folks.

“Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when Yahweh spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth. And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which Yahweh your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage.” (Deuteronomy 4:15-19) TTC 3.2.16; TTC 3.2.9. Wonderful things in God’s creation are not to be used as stand-ins for God, even “merely” as reminders of His greatness. And note the subtle but crucial bit of information: Yahweh is *neither* male nor female. Gender roles are just symbols He uses to teach us about “His” attributes. Yahweh is spirit, and must be worshiped in spirit and in truth.

“Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of Yahweh your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which Yahweh your God has forbidden you. For Yahweh your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.” (Deuteronomy 4:23-24) TTC 4.1. It’s a covenant, a contract. For His part, Yahweh saves us from the bondage of sin, reconciling us to Himself. For our part, we revere Him alone. It’s not all that complicated.

“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, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of

those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” (Deuteronomy 5:8-10) The Deuteronomy 5 “Ten Commandments” list is practically identical to the original one in Exodus 20. These things bear repeating. That “third and fourth generation” notice doesn’t mean that He punishes the children for sins of the fathers. It’s merely an acknowledgement of the fact that we parents tend to pass our beliefs and attitudes down to our children, whether we mean to or not.

“You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you (for Yahweh your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of Yahweh your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.” (Deuteronomy 6:14-15) WMM ch12, #894. “When in Rome, do what the Romans do” is a dangerous heresy. How about, “When on Earth, do what its Creator instructed.”

“You shall destroy all the peoples whom Yahweh your God delivers over to you; your eye shall have no pity on them; nor shall you serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you.” (Deuteronomy 7:16) WMM ch2, #680. Echoes of the conquest of Canaan here, but the premise still stands: don’t serve gods other than Yahweh.

“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) TOM ch9, #315; TTC 4.1.11. Idolatry extends to the raw materials they’re made of. “Gold and silver” can be worshiped for their own intrinsic worth—they needn’t be shaped into little statues and bowed down to in order to function as idols. In other words, covet neither money nor the things you can buy with it. Godly ambivalence toward wealth is the ideal.

“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 12:3-4) Today, all we can really do about this is to ban such idolatry from our own hearts. But we are specifically warned not to use the world’s methods to facilitate the worship of Yahweh.

“When Yahweh your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ You shall not worship Yahweh your God in that way; for every abomination to Yahweh which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.” (Deuteronomy 12:29-31) WMM ch12, #912; TTC 3.3.13. Ecumenicism is to be avoided, and we needn’t feel like we need to

emulate the godless to attract the godly. Our God is not the deity of the lowest common denominator.

“You shall not plant for yourself any tree, as a wooden image, near the altar which you build for yourself to Yahweh your God. You shall not set up a sacred pillar, which Yahweh your God hates.” (Deuteronomy 16:21-22) TOM ch9, #350; TTC 3.3. There’s nothing wrong with planting trees. But *everything* is wrong with using them as a focal point of worship. In other words, don’t confuse environmentalism with holiness. By the way, “Christmas trees” run afoul of this statute.

“If there is found among you, within any of your gates which Yahweh your God gives you, a man or a woman who has been wicked in the sight of Yahweh your God, in transgressing His covenant, who has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, either the sun or moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded, and it is told you, and you hear of it, then you shall inquire diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination has been committed in Israel, then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has committed that wicked thing, and shall stone to death that man or woman with stones. 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. The hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall put away the evil from among you.” (Deuteronomy 17:2-7) TOM ch7, #259. You aren’t to kill godless idolators outside of theocratic Israel, but you certainly don’t have to give them a platform and a microphone, either. Since we are mortal, God has no problem with the death penalty where appropriate. All it does is speed up the inevitable demise of people who are a danger to others. But notice two things: (1) Two witness, or preferably more, are required to convict in a capital case, and (2) the witnesses themselves have to participate in carrying out the execution.

“When you come into the land which Yahweh your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. 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 out from before you. You shall be blameless before Yahweh your God. For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, Yahweh your God has not appointed such for you.” (Deuteronomy 18:9-14) TTC 3.2.14. We are to be separate from the societies in which we live: *holy*. “When in Rome, do as the Romans do,” and “Whatever happens in Vegas stays in Vegas” are two dangerous and potentially deadly heresies.

“The prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you

say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which Yahweh has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which Yahweh has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” (Deuteronomy 18:20-22) TOM ch9, #320. If you speak in the name of Ba’al, Zeus, or Allah, you are proclaiming your own death sentence. But if you are speaking for Yahweh, the truth of what you have said will vindicate you—even if that truth doesn’t come to light for many generations. Most of the Old Testament prophets issued statements about the coming Messiah that weren’t proven true until hundreds of years later, when Yahshua finally walked the earth. And some of what they said *still* hasn’t come to pass, because fulfillment is scheduled for His second advent.

“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) TOM ch3, #69; TTC 4.1.9. The “worship” of the pagan gods of Canaan involved ritual prostitution—both female (harlots) and male (perverted ones, “dogs”). Money procured through the worship of Satan could not be used to honor Yahweh. Feel free to extrapolate that principle to today’s worship practices.

Third Commandment: Respecting God’s Name

“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) TOM ch6, #204; TTC 4.1.1. Yahweh wants us to know and use His name with reverence. Forgetting it altogether out of disuse—the removal of the self-revealed divine name Yahweh from our scriptures and replacing it with an anemic title, “the LORD”—is a violation of this crucial precept.

“God said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: Yahweh, God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.’” (Exodus 3:15) WMM ch2, #660. The self-assigned name Yahweh basically means “I Am,” that is, “I am self-existent—no one created Me.” There can be no more majestic a concept.

“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) TOM ch9, #320. Yahweh is not one “god” among many. He is holy, matchless, and utterly unique.

“You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel.” (Leviticus 22:32) TOM ch1, #4. Do not treat the name or character of our Creator lightly or without reverence. After all, we owe Him our very existence.

“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.” (Deuteronomy 5:11) The Third Commandment might be paraphrased, “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.”

Fourth Commandment: The Sabbath

“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) TOM ch4, #109; TTC 2.7. Don’t look now, but God’s incessant harping about “keeping the Sabbath” has far less to do with resting one day of the week than it does with revealing His timeline for the redemption and reconciliation of fallen mankind. Beginning with the sin of Adam, there are to be six one-thousand-year “days” for us to “work things out” with our God, but on the “Seventh thousand-year Day” (the Millennial reign of Christ—see Revelation 20:4) we must “rest” in Him. Not “should,” but *must*.

“Moses said, ‘Eat that [manna] today, for today is a Sabbath to Yahweh; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.’ Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For Yahweh has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.’ So the people rested on the seventh day.” (Exodus 16:25-30) In the end, we can’t work for that which God provides. Any “Salvation” we provide for ourselves will be proven false and inadequate on the seventh day—the day in which we must rest in Christ’s finished work.

“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. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove. 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.” (Exodus 23:10-12) TOM ch6, #211; TTC 3.3.5. The same Sabbath lessons apply on a yearly basis. It’s the principle of the thing: we are to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling” (as Paul put it) for the first six thousand

years following the fall of Adam into sin. But in the end, we must rely upon what Yahweh has provided.

“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am Yahweh who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to Yahweh. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.’” (Exodus 31:12-17) As I said, the Sabbath is a sign. It *means* something. It signifies the end of our “six days” of “trial and error,” and the beginning of our rest and reliance on God’s plan.

“Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest.” (Exodus 34:21) Even when it doesn’t seem “convenient,” we are to observe the Sabbath principle. Grace, after all, is completely counterintuitive.

“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) TOM ch8, #303; TTC 2.5. He who does not participate in Yahweh’s rest is not alive. “Kindling a fire” indicates exercising judgment: there will be no judgment on God’s Sabbath—the judgment takes place prior to it.

“Keep My Sabbaths: I am Yahweh your God.” (Leviticus 19:3) The reason we are to keep the Sabbath (that is, what the Sabbath signifies) is that Yahweh is our God. It’s an expression of our trust in Him.

“You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary: I am Yahweh.” (Leviticus 19:30) The “sanctuary” symbolically describes God’s plan for our redemption, so it is natural that He would link it with the Sabbath.

“Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of Yahweh in all your dwellings.” (Leviticus 23:3) A “holy convocation” is a sacred appointment we are to keep with God. He will be there. The question is, will we show up?

“Yahweh spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 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 25:1-7) TTC 2.7. The Sabbath—indicative of our rest in Christ—affects more than us personally. Our salvation through grace has a direct impact on everything we touch, for the love of God is contagious, so to speak. Even the ground beneath our feet will experience a reversal of the curse of Adam during Yahshua’s Millennial reign.

“If you say, ‘What shall we eat in the seventh year, since we shall not sow nor gather in our produce?’ then I will command My blessing on you in the sixth year, and it will bring forth produce enough for three years. And you shall sow in the eighth year, and eat old produce until the ninth year; until its produce comes in, you shall eat of the old harvest.” (Leviticus 25:20-22) Translation: God’s salvation is sufficient for all time—even into eternity.

“You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary: I am Yahweh.” (Leviticus 26:2) The link between Sabbath and sanctuary is repeated: this is important.

“Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day.... Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.’” (Numbers 15:32, 35) In theocratic Israel, Yahweh is very serious about His pictures, symbols, and metaphors. The man was gathering firewood—suggesting (whether he knew it or not) that judgment is part of the Sabbath paradigm. But it is not. The definition of spiritual death is *not* keeping God’s Sabbath.

“Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as Yahweh your God commanded you. 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 ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Yahweh your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore Yahweh your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.” (Deuteronomy 5:12-15) TTC 3.2.5. Note finally that He said absolutely *nothing* in all of that about on which day of the week we should meet for worship.

Fifth Commandment: Honoring Parents

“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) TOM ch 3, #59; TOM ch14, #559;

WMM ch12, #892; TTC 1.2.6; TTC 4.1.3. If you see Yahweh as our “Father” and the Holy Spirit as our “Mother” (not biologically, of course, but functionally, as revealed by the roles they play in life of mankind), then this precept takes on larger-than-life proportions. Our *literal* fathers and mothers are to be honored because their roles in the family mirror and reveal those played by God Himself.

“He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.” (Exodus 21:15) TOM ch3; #60. Lashing out at God is a really bad idea.

“He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.” (Exodus 21:17) TOM ch3; #61; TTC 4.1.3. If we comprehend that this is actually a picture of cursing *God*, then this is not as extreme as it sounds at first blush.

“You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.” (Exodus 22:28) TOM ch7, #239; TOM ch1, #3. The word translated “God” here (*Elohim*), while correctly applied to Yahweh’s “job description,” can also mean rulers, judges, or even angels. This is binding on several levels.

“Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father.” (Leviticus 19:3) Reverence for one’s parents (because they’re symbolic of Yahweh) is not just for “religious people,” but is something required of all mankind.

“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 elderly are to be respected, partly because they can be presumed to have valuable wisdom and experience to impart, and partly because Yahweh has chosen to keep them alive enough to pass it along to the younger generations.

“For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother. His blood shall be upon him.” (Leviticus 20:9) TTC 4.1.2; TTC 4.1.3. Reverence for our parents mirrors reverence for God. If we do not revere our Creator, we have pronounced a death sentence upon ourselves.

“Honor your father and your mother, as Yahweh your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you.” (Deuteronomy 5:16) TTC 4.1.3. The promise attending the precept ties honor to our parents (read: God) to prosperity (or longevity, as it’s phrased in the parallel Exodus 20 passage) in the Land of Promise—a prophetic euphemism for the Kingdom of Heaven. In other words, if we revere Yahweh, we will enjoy a blessed eternity in His presence. And *vice versa*.

“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) Although this *could* be done today, it would tend to get the parents in big trouble with the local law enforcement officials. Still, the precept would serve as an effective incentive. On the symbolic level, it speaks of God's prerogative to reject and banish a disobedient human.

"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) (See TOM Chapter 5, #160, 161.) The relinquishing of the hen's "young ones or eggs" is a picture of God's sacrifice of the Messiah. But "taking the mother with the young" is a picture of usurping the place of God while practicing a religion based on the sacrifice of Christ. Alas, the majority of Christendom is guilty of this, to one extent or another.

"A man shall not take his father's wife, nor uncover his father's bed." (Deuteronomy 22:30) Adultery is a particularly intense form of disrespect. But this permutation is metaphorical (once again) of usurping the rightful place of Yahweh by seducing Israel, or causing the bride of Christ, the church, to sin.

"Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt." (Deuteronomy 27:16) WMM ch12, #923. We are reminded of the sobering words of Christ: "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come." (Matthew 12:31-32)

"Cursed is the one who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's bed." (Deuteronomy 27:20) WMM ch12, 923. Incest of this sort is bad enough, but what he's really talking about here is appropriating for your own purposes what belongs exclusively to God, whether Israel or the church.

Sixth Commandment: Murder/Manslaughter

"Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." (Genesis 9:5-6) WMM ch11, #877; TTC 4.1.4; TTC 3.2.6. Our mortal lives are precious to God. Even though they're not built to last forever, these lives are a gift of time in which we are expected to make the choices that will determine our eternal destinies. Therefore, to cut short this time—to kill a person before his natural lifespan is over—is serious matter in God's eyes.

“You shall not murder.” (Exodus 20:13) TOM ch8, #278; TTC 4.1.11. Literal murder is a metaphor for preventing someone from having *spiritual* life. This is why Yahshua called Satan “a murderer from the beginning” in John 8:44—and why He tarred Satan’s minions, the Pharisees, with the same brush.

“He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die.” (Exodus 21:12-14) WMM ch11, #866. God distinguishes unintentional manslaughter from murder. Accidents happen, though we are to take every precaution to avoid them. But premeditated murder is to be met with purposeful execution.

“Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death.” (Leviticus 24:17) WMM ch11, #865. Because of what murder means, God is on record as favoring (actually, insisting upon) the death penalty, bearing in mind the rules of evidence (two or more witnesses, no coercion, etc.).

“Whoever kills a man shall be put to death.” (Leviticus 24:21) WMM ch11, #881. What about killing someone in battle? Yahweh never specifically authorized going to war against anyone who was not actively trying to compromise His people spiritually (e.g., the seven nations of Canaan)—that is, preventing them from killing us. And soldiers seldom have a choice as to who they face—or why. But all too often, wars are fought out of hatred or paranoia or good old-fashioned greed on the part of those in power. The higher up in the chain of command one is, the more heavily this precept should weigh upon him.

“If he strikes him with an iron implement, so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. And if he strikes him with a stone in the hand, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. Or if he strikes him with a wooden hand weapon, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death. If he pushes him out of hatred or, while lying in wait, hurls something at him so that he dies, or in enmity he strikes him with his hand so that he dies, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death. He is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.” (Numbers 35:16-21) WMM ch11, #867. Here God defined “murder,” as opposed to manslaughter. The defense, “Yes, I hit him with a brick, but I didn’t mean to kill him” doesn’t fly. The excuse, “Yes, I was angry, but only for a moment” is equally invalid. The explanation, “Yes, I got drunk and tossed a rock off the freeway overpass, but I didn’t think anybody would get hurt” doesn’t hold water in God’s court. There is no such thing as “second-degree” murder. In theocratic Israel, there were no police, jails, or criminal courts *per se*. So justice was meted out by a designated “avenger of blood,” someone near of kin

to the murder victim. This is another of those features of Torah law that is now illegal in our society.

“If he pushes him suddenly without enmity, or throws anything at him without lying in wait, or uses a stone, by which a man could die, throwing it at him without seeing him, so that he dies, while he was not his enemy or seeking his harm, then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood according to these judgments. So the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood.”

(Numbers 35:22-25) WMM ch11, #868. Although the “cities of refuge” were strictly Promised-Land phenomena (thus not applicable today), the principle of *not* executing those guilty of unintentional manslaughter still applies.

“These things shall be a statute of judgment to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings. Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses; but one witness is not sufficient testimony against a person for the death penalty.” (Numbers 35:29-30) WMM ch16, #988. Witnesses are notoriously unreliable. Several of them are required to bring a guilty verdict. In principle, forensic science could act as one of the witnesses God requires. But in a capital case, circumstantial evidence—even a preponderance of it—should not be enough to convict.

“You shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death.” (Numbers 35:31) TOM ch8, #292. Today, it seems, it is all too easy for the rich and powerful to “get away with” their crimes. But in the end, vengeance belongs to Yahweh: He will repay, even if we are not able to impose justice on the guilty.

“You shall not murder.” (Deuteronomy 5:17) We don’t need gun-control laws, hate-crime legislation, or super-max prisons. In the end, all we need is for this simple rule to be observed—in every conceivable way—by everyone on earth. Don’t look now, but during the Kingdom age (coming soon to a planet near you) this law will actually operate as it was intended to.

Seventh Commandment: Adultery

“You shall not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14) TOM ch3, #102; TCC 4.1.1.; TCC 4.1.11; TCC 4.1.8; TCC 4.1.9. Because adultery is symbolic of idolatry (i.e., giving to another what rightfully belongs exclusively to one’s spouse), God forbade it.

“You shall not lie carnally with your neighbor’s wife, to defile yourself with her.” (Leviticus 19:20) WMM ch8, #807; TCC 3.2.3. Note that adultery defiles you. It degrades, desecrates, and pollutes the participants. Paul points out that it is a sin against your own body.

“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) TOM ch8, #286; TCC 4.1.8. Again, the death penalty in theocratic Israel reveals the seriousness of what the crime *means* on a spiritual-metaphorical level.

“Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of Yahweh was aroused against Israel. Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before Yahweh, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of Yahweh may turn away from Israel.’ So Moses said to the judges of Israel, ‘Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor.’” (Numbers 25:1-5) In this incident, the equivalence of adultery to idolatry was demonstrated in literal terms. It was understood (as it seldom is today) that having illicit sex with the pagan Moabite women was tantamount to worshipping their false god.

“You shall not commit adultery.” (Deuteronomy 5:18) It bears repeating, so God did.

“If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die—the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel.” (Deuteronomy 22:22) WMM ch11, #872; TCC4.1.8. As with murder, mere suspicion was not enough for a conviction. The adulterous couple had to be caught in the act. Both participants were equally guilty—it didn’t matter who had seduced whom.

Eighth Commandment: Theft

“You shall not steal.” (Exodus 20:15) WMM ch11, #878; TOM ch6, #174; TTC 4.1.11. Theft betrays not only a lack of trust in God’s provision, but a lack of love for one’s neighbor—the victim of the theft.

“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) TOM ch8, #298. The word translated “kidnap” here is *ganab*, simply meaning to steal—especially by stealth or deception. The Torah specified a range of penalties for different types of theft, usually from two to four times the value of the stolen item, depending on the circumstances. But “stealing” a human being bought you the death penalty—your life in place of the victim’s.

“You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.” (Leviticus 19:11) TOM ch7, #271, #272, #274. These are all related concepts—and they all betray a lack of reliance upon God’s provision.

“You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him.” (Leviticus 19:13) TOM ch8, #281; TOM ch6, #184. All of these things are wrapped up in the second-greatest commandment: you shall love your brother as you do yourself.

“You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume. 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.” (Leviticus 19:35-36) TOM ch6, #181. Pride says, “I will do whatever I can to elevate my status over that of my neighbor, even if it means cheating him to gain an unfair advantage.” Love, on the other hand, says “I will do whatever it takes to be fair and equitable in my business dealings with others—even if it puts me at a disadvantage. After all, I answer to Almighty God, not myself.”

“You shall not steal.” (Deuteronomy 5:19) The inevitable Deuteronomy restatement.

“If a man is found kidnapping any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and mistreats him or sells him, then that kidnapper shall die; and you shall put away the evil from among you.” (Deuteronomy 24:7) WMM ch11, #873. We belong to God, not to men. So if we kidnap someone, hold him (or her) for ransom, or sell him into slavery, we have stolen that which belongs to Yahweh.

“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) TOM ch6, #183 Note that the same blessing for compliance (“that your days may be lengthened...”) that characterized “honoring your father and your mother” is promised to those who deal justly and fairly with their neighbors. In the end, this is indicative of eternal life.

“Cursed is the one who moves his neighbor’s landmark.” (Deuteronomy 27:17) WMM ch12, #923; TTC 4.1.11. You can’t just put a piece of real estate in your satchel and walk off with it. But if you want to steal your neighbor’s land, all you have to do is move the boundary marker farther onto his side of the line, making him think what is his is actually yours. It’s theft, and God forbids it.

Ninth Commandment: Perjury

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:16) TOM ch7, #241; TTC 4.1.11. It doesn’t matter why. We are not to tell lies in order to gain an advantage—for anyone.

“You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.” (Exodus 23:1) TOM ch7, #243. Conspiracy to lie (or hide the truth) is forbidden, as is gossip. Let your yes be yes, and your no, no—no matter who stands to gain (or lose) due to your honesty.

“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) TOM ch7, #254, #258. Enticement to perjury is as bad as perjury itself. And I think we can safely read into this a prohibition against using legal trickery, loopholes, and so forth to subvert justice.

“You shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am Yahweh.” (Leviticus 19:12) TOM ch6, #205. Review the Third Commandment: “Do not 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.”

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” (Deuteronomy 5:20) It’s worth noting that *both parties* in any dispute are your “neighbors.” Just tell the truth.

“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) TOM ch7, #247; TTC 1.2. This is not just for cases of murder. Any matter needs more than one witness (although I would suggest that solid forensic evidence should serve as one of those witnesses).

“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) TOM ch7, #247. This is my personal favorite. If we could implement this precept consistently in our nation’s laws, justice might actually be served.

“Cursed is the one who takes a bribe to slay an innocent person.” (Deuteronomy 27:25) WMM ch12, #923. If two or more witnesses are required to establish a matter—in this case, murder—then some would be tempted to simply *buy* themselves some eyewitnesses. This is the very ploy the chief Priests and Pharisees used in order to convict Yahshua. But God forbids it.

Tenth Commandment: Covetousness

“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) TOM ch8, #280; TTC 4.1.11. Like theft, covetousness betrays an unwillingness to trust God, not to mention revealing a lack of love for your neighbor. In this case, however, mere *intent* is enough to make you guilty—you don’t actually have to take what you covet in order to run afoul of this precept.

“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) TOM ch8, #283. Admiration is not the same thing as covetousness. I (being a guy) could admire your custom car or chrome-encrusted motorcycle all day long. This does *not* mean I want one for myself—especially yours.

ATTITUDE

Love, Mercy, and Compassion

“You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 22:21) TOM ch2, #54; TTC 4.2.4. I believe one of the reasons Yahweh let Israel languish in Egypt for four centuries is so they’d have some sort of institutional memory of what it’s like to be oppressed and mistreated without cause. God didn’t want them—or *us*—to oppress any of His children.

“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) TOM ch2, #40. I can’t help but reflect that the practice of abortion surely must qualify as the ultimate expression of “afflicting a fatherless child.” The world can’t say we haven’t *earned* the wrath of God.

“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 23:2) Majority rule—a polite way of saying *mob* rule—is not to govern the course of our affairs. We are to do good (according to God’s Law) no matter what everyone else is doing.

“You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.” (Exodus 23:3) Under “Perjury” we were instructed not to “pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute.” Here we see the converse—don’t take his side *because of* his poverty. Let the facts speak for themselves, regardless of the financial status of the plaintiffs or defendants. This defines “affirmative action” as a sin.

“If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. 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 23:4-5) WMM ch11, #882; TTC4.1.11. Help the helpless, regardless of their prejudices.

“Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 23:9) WMM ch11, #883; TTC 4.2.4. This is a corollary to the “golden rule.”

“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.” (Exodus 23:9-10) WMM ch11, #883; TTC 4.2.4. This is the heart of Yahweh’s “welfare system.” Something was to be reserved for the poor, but he still had to work for it.

“The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning. You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am Yahweh.” (Leviticus 19:13-14) TOM ch8, #280; TOM ch6, #184. Pay your bills—before they’re due. Be kind to everyone, whether they know it or not.

“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. 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 19:15-16) TOM ch7, #252. We are to be biased toward *neither* the rich or poor, the powerful or helpless.

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. 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 19:17-19) TOM ch2, #30; TTC 4.1.11; TTC 4.1.1. This was identified by Christ as the “Second-Greatest Commandment.” Note that loving others does not include tolerating their sin, but helping them to overcome it.

“If a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am Yahweh your God.” (Leviticus 19:33-34) TTC 4.1.11. This gets complicated. See TTC 4.2.6—the chapter on Strangers & Foreigners. The bottom line: strangers are invited to be guests in the Kingdom of Heaven. They may join us in blessing; we are not to join them in apostasy.

“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 gleanings from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am Yahweh your God.” (Leviticus 23:22) TOM ch2, #41; TOM ch6, #214; TTC 4.2.4. No one was to starve to death among

God's people. A portion of the harvest was set aside for the benefit of people who owned no land of their own. They were allowed to reap and enjoy the bounty of the Land, but they had to show up and work for it, like everybody else.

“Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”
(Deuteronomy 10:19) Israel got “empathy lessons” in Egypt for four hundred years. It was a lesson they were never supposed to forget.

“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, 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. 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 15:7-11) TOM ch2, #51. Every seven years, all debts were to be forgiven (a picture of God's forgiveness of our sins during the Millennial Kingdom—the ultimate Sabbath). In practical terms, this meant that if your neighbor got in trouble and needed a loan right before the Sabbatical Year, it was more likely to be a gift than a loan. Yahweh insists that we help out anyway. Be generous: you have nothing that wasn't given to you by God, one way or another.

“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. 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 22:1-4) TOM ch7, #276; TTC 4.1.11. These are practical examples of how to implement the golden rule: “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:12) Take risks; incur expense on your neighbor's behalf; go the extra mile if you see your neighbor in need. In short, love one another.

“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) TOM ch2, #46; TOM ch6,

#185. God drew a fine line between welfare and theft. A traveler walking through your vineyard, orchard, or field was free to satisfy his hunger at your expense, but the limit of your generosity would be whatever he could carry away *in his stomach* (about a quart).

“No man shall take the lower or the upper millstone in pledge, for he takes one’s living in pledge.” (Deuteronomy 24:6) TOM ch6, #176. Exercise compassion and trust when receiving collateral for a loan. Treat every loan you make as a potential gift, for you possess nothing that wasn’t a gift to you.

“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. 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 24:10-13) TOM ch6, #177. Don’t rob a borrower of his dignity. He feels bad enough having to ask for a loan in the first place.

“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) TOM ch6, #188. If you have employees (or others who are relying upon you in some way), meet your obligations promptly and fairly—even if it puts strain on your own finances. To “look out for Number One” is tantamount to oppression in God’s eyes.

“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) TOM ch6, #180; TOM ch7, #257. Mercy and compassion trump “sound business practices” any day of the week.

“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. 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. 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 24:19-22) TOM ch2, #50; TTC 3.5.5. Welfare rules again. God commands us *not to* “run lean and mean.”

“You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” (Deuteronomy 25:4) TOM ch6, #202; TTC 3.2.5. In other words, pay the lowly a living wage.

“Cursed is the one who makes the blind to wander off the road.” (Deuteronomy 27:18) WMM ch12, #923. In other words, do not take advantage of another’s weakness in order to further your own goals. Don’t cheat somebody, just because they’re gullible.

“Cursed is the one who attacks his neighbor secretly.” (Deuteronomy 27:24) WMM ch12, #923. God sees everything we do.

Justice

“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) TOM ch7, #227. God entrusts judgment to man. We are made in God’s “image and likeness,” which means we know justice when we see it. We are therefore not to pervert such justice for our own gain.

“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) TOM ch7, #244. You can’t be saved (or lost, for that matter) for someone else.

“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. 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 25:1-3) TOM ch8, #304. Punishment, even though deserved, must be neither cruel nor humiliating. In God’s world, the punishment must fit the crime, being neither too harsh nor too lenient. And God would rather see a guilty man go free than see an innocent man punished unfairly.

“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) TOM ch7, #265. Don’t let your wife fight your battles for you. It will not end well. Nor should the church presume to inflict Christ’s wrath.

“Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due the stranger, the fatherless, and widow.” (Deuteronomy 27:19) WMM ch12, #923; TTC 4.2.4. The powerless in this world must be protected by the law, not oppressed by it.

Debt and Redemption

“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) TOM ch6, #173. Don’t make mercy a for-profit endeavor.

“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.” (Leviticus 25:35-37) TOM ch6, #171. You can call it a “loan” if you want, since it allows the one who’s fallen on hard times to maintain his dignity. And as a borrower, you *should* have every intention of paying it back. But as a lender, just assume you will never be repaid. That way, when the one you’ve helped gets back on his feet and repays the debt, it’s like found money—a pleasant and unexpected surprise.

“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, except when there may be no poor among you; for Yahweh will greatly bless you in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance.” (Deuteronomy 15:1-4) TOM ch2, #51, 57; TOM ch6, #217. It’s a corollary to the Sabbath Law (in which we are forgiven our sins against God and man as we rest in the grace of Yahshua). As a practical matter, if a lender hasn’t been able to overcome whatever caused his poverty in six years, chances are he never will. It’s not business, its mercy.

“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) TOM ch2, #58. The overt meaning of “your brother” here is obviously a fellow Israelite living in the theocratic society. But thinking symbolically, we should realize that one’s *real* brother is a child of the same father—in this case, our *Heavenly* Father, Yahweh. We should be ready and willing to forgive any debt, any sin against us, perpetrated by fellow believers. But what does “charging interest” mean in this context? Perhaps it is indicative of holding a grudge, of cutting off fellowship in the interests of self-preservation. You do the math.

Holiness

“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.’” (Genesis 17:1) WMM ch13, #935; TTC 4.2.1. “Blameless” here (Hebrew: *tamim*) doesn’t really imply sinless perfection (as great as that would be), but rather indicates something that is complete, sound, intact, having integrity and sincerity.

“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. Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.” (Exodus 20:24-26) The life-blood of the sacrifice, not the religious ritual attending it, is what’s important to God. In fact, “mystery religions” in which devotees ascend into higher orders by degrees are an anathema to God.

“Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for Yahweh, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods.” (Exodus 34:12-16) WMM ch3, #695; TTC 4.1.8. Do not compromise with the world’s values. Note the fine print: we are not to “tear down their altars” where *they* live, but where *we* live. That is, don’t allow anti-Biblical practices to make inroads into your faith. But what about the Great Commission? We are to *invite them* to receive the Gospel; it is pointless and counterproductive to *compel them*. When they receive God’s grace, it will be up to them to “break their sacred pillars and cut down their wooden images.” Remember, if you baptize a pagan, all you get is a wet pagan.

“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.’” (Leviticus 19:1-2) TOM ch3, #62. The reason we are to be set-apart to Yahweh is that He, being the one true God, is distinct from all other things that might be worshiped—unique and matchless.

“You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you.” (Leviticus 19:19) TOM ch13, #358, 359; WMM ch10, #849. The idea here is separateness. These are all practical examples of what it means to be “holy.”

“You shall be holy to Me, for I, Yahweh, am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.” (Leviticus 20:26) Believers should comprehend that although they have to live in the world, they don’t have to let the world live in them. God is commanding us to be “separated from the peoples.” It is up to us to choose whether or not to obey Him.

“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, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am Yahweh your God.’” (Numbers 15:37-41) TOM ch1, #18; TOM ch8, #284; WWM ch15, #972. These tassels, or *tsitzit*, had no function other than to remind the Israelites of who they were in relationship with Yahweh, every time they saw one another. That single blue thread in each *tsitzit* represents (if I’m not mistaken) Yahshua the Messiah—the One to whom the whole Torah points, one way or another. It is telling that modern Orthodox Jews *purposely* disobey the Torah by leaving out the blue thread on a technicality.

“Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, ‘This is the thing which Yahweh has commanded: 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 30:1-2) TOM ch6, #207. Christ would expand that: don’t make oaths at all; just do what you said. Keep your word. Tell the truth.

“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. 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.” (Numbers 30:3-8) This isn’t saying that compared to men, women are silly and frivolous. It’s purely symbolic: fathers and husbands are supposed to be acting out the role of Yahweh in the home, while daughters and wives are analogous Israel and the church—we who are under God’s protection. See the chapters on Sons, Daughters, Husbands, and Wives in TTC Volume 4.

“Any vow of a widow or a divorced woman, by which she has bound herself, shall stand against her.” (Numbers 30:9) If a woman is not under the protection of a father or husband (symbolically, read “Yahweh”), then she (like any man) must be prepared to suffer the consequences of her actions. That is, if we (any of us) are not indemnified by the blood of Christ, we will be judged on the basis of our own works.

“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 30:10-15) TTC 4.1.10. He’s not saying that “men are better than women,” but that they *represent* God’s place (leader, protector, and provider) in the family structure as He ordained it.

“You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to [people who hate Yahweh]. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. 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. For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God.” (Deuteronomy 7:2-6) TTC4.2.5. This should be compared to passages like Leviticus 19:33-34 (listed under “Love, Mercy, and Compassion,” above). The “strangers and foreigners” we are to welcome with open arms are those individuals who wish to embrace our culture, our values, and (need I say it?) our God. But if they are our enemies, sworn to destroy us and our Christ-centered way of life (like today’s Muslims, for example), then we are not required to compromise or ally ourselves with them. Loving one’s neighbor does not include committing suicide for him.

“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) TOM ch9, #347; TTC 4.1.5. Don’t emulate the world. There’s nothing particularly holy about dressing half a century out of style. But how we dress or groom ourselves should not announce “I am

trendy, insecure, and narcissistic.” What’s inside your heart—a loving, peaceful, gentle spirit—will make a more lasting impression than anything else.

“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. You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. You shall not wear a garment of different sorts, such as wool and linen mixed together.” (Deuteronomy 22:9-11) TOM ch9, #362, #363, #364, #367; TTC 3.2.5, 3.3.9. As in Leviticus 19:19 above, these are practical examples of what “holiness” looks like. We are not to mix faith in God and His Christ with any conceivable alternative. Our worship should be pure and unadulterated.

“You shall make tassels on the four corners of the clothing with which you cover yourself.” (Deuteronomy 22:12) Can people tell who you worship, just by looking at you?

“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 23:21-23) It doesn’t matter whether you “swear on a stack of Bibles” or merely make a statement of fact. A signed legal contract and a promise sealed with a handshake carry exactly the same weight before God.

Heeding and Teaching God’s Law

“One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you.” (Exodus 12:49) “Among you” is the key. People who don’t revere Yahweh or His Messiah aren’t expected to do what He says. We, on the other hand, are.

“Diligently heed the voice of Yahweh your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes.” (Exodus 15:26) TTC4.1.6. This precept, one way or another, is the most oft-repeated single theme in the Torah. Basically, this says “the most important law is to keep the Law.” The *whole* Law.

“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) TOM ch16, #583, 586. The point was that if Israel would keep Yahweh’s commandments, they would be a light and testimony to the whole world—who would then naturally enquire as to why this tiny nation was so blessed. The whole thing—the upside and downside of the covenant—would be considerably harder for the nations to perceive if Israel did *not* obey Yahweh’s voice.

“Observe what I command you this day.” (Exodus 34:11) Ironically, “keep My commandments” is the most oft-repeated precept of them all.

“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 18:2-5) TOM ch9, #332; TTC 4.1.8. The *reason* we are to keep the Law is that the lawgiver is not man, but Yahweh—God Almighty. His statutes were created not out of logic, reason, or as a reaction to problems that arose, but were crafted by our Creator (who knows us better than we know ourselves) to meet our needs.

“You shall keep My ordinance, so that you do not commit any of these abominable customs which were committed before you, and that you do not defile yourselves by them: I am Yahweh your God.” (Leviticus 18:30) The customs of *both* Egypt (the place they were leaving) and Canaan (the place to which they were going) were considered “abominable” to Yahweh—things that would defile the Israelites, even though they were all they had seen for the past four centuries. No wonder Yahweh was so specific and comprehensive in His Instructions.

“You shall therefore keep all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them, that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out.” (Leviticus 20:22) WMM ch2, #678; TTC3.1.9. The Land was about to “vomit out” the seven Canaanite nations. Yahweh was putting Israel on notice that the same spiritual emetic would work on them if they failed to follow God’s Instructions.

“You shall keep My commandments, and perform them: I am Yahweh.” (Leviticus 22:31) TOM ch1, #5; WMM ch6, #758. No other reason was necessary for keeping God’s precepts. The identity of their God—not some manmade local deity, but the very Creator of the Universe—was (or should have been) quite enough.

“You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I am Yahweh your God.” (Leviticus 24:22) WMM ch11, #875; TTC 4.2.4. Gentiles were always welcome within Israelite society, as long as they embraced Yahweh as their God and adhered to His precepts. In fact, a “mixed multitude” of gentiles accompanied Israel out of Egypt at the exodus (see Exodus 12:38). Racial prejudice was never part of God’s *modus operandi*.

“Walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them.” (Leviticus 26:3) WMM ch3, #705; TTC 1.3.6. This wasn’t for God’s benefit, but for the people’s. Good things were promised if they complied—and *vice versa*.

“If you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant, I also will [punish] you.” (Leviticus 26:14-16)

As you might expect, there are consequences for breaking God's Law. But the broader context (as well as our own experience) reveals that Yahweh's "punishments" most often manifest themselves in His refusal to shield us from the natural consequences of our own actions. He needn't be proactive in dispensing His wrath—though He reserves the right to be.

"After all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins." (Leviticus 26:18) Leviticus 26 (like Deuteronomy 28) describes a pattern of escalation in the severity of punishment if the people do not repent. These passages seem focused on national or corporate response, not individual sins.

"If you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins." (Leviticus 26:21) The next escalation is described. The "blessings and cursings" of Leviticus 26 were proclaimed soon after Israel left Egypt. The miracles of the exodus were still very fresh in their minds. A second, and more extensive, recounting of the same subject is recorded in Deuteronomy 28, when they were about to enter the Promised Land—almost forty years later.

"If by these things 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." (Leviticus 26:23-24) A fourth level of punishment is decreed. Yahweh was offering Israel (and by extension, us) a very clear choice.

"After all this, if you do not obey Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins." (Leviticus 26:27-28) A fifth level of punishment escalation is declared. It's hard to envision how a nation who truly believed Yahweh was God—after they had seen indisputable proof with their own eyes ten times over—could fail to continually honor Him. But then again, the same could be said about America, could it not?

"If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me, and that I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt—then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land." (Leviticus 26:40-42) The remedy for God's escalating wrath is *not* for everyone to suddenly become perfect and sinless. That isn't going to happen, and God knows it. Rather, it is confession of our sins, admission of our past unfaithfulness, and humility before a Holy God. The three-quarters of the Torah that *can't* be performed today focuses on the forgiveness of sins (and cleansing from contamination) that are inevitable features of the human condition. One way or another, those precepts were all prophetic of the life and mission of Yahshua the Messiah. Without recourse to Him, the goal of attaining righteousness before God is hopeless.

“One ordinance shall be for you of the assembly and for the stranger who dwells with you, an ordinance forever throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the stranger be before Yahweh. One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you.” (Numbers 15:15-16) The bottom line here is that the path toward salvation is exactly the same for gentiles as it is for Jews—based not on the Law (which was given exclusively to Israel), but on what the Law reveals: the righteousness of Christ.

“The person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on Yahweh, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of Yahweh, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him.” (Numbers 15:30-31) WMM ch1, #636; TTC 3.3.2. In case you missed it, we have *all* sinned “presumptuously.” We are *all* “cut off.” The only way back to righteousness is to “borrow it” from the Messiah.

“Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which Yahweh God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of Yahweh your God which I command you.”

(Deuteronomy 4:1-2) TTC 4.2.4, 3.2.1. God’s word is sufficient and inerrant. If we don’t find “the answer” here, we aren’t looking very hard.

“Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as Yahweh my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as Yahweh our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?” (Deuteronomy 4:5-8) Israel was intended to be a witness to the world. Their observance of the precepts of God was to precipitate a reputation for being blessed due to their wisdom and understanding, leading to a realization that their God was the source of all of this.

“Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, especially concerning the day you stood before Yahweh your God in Horeb, when Yahweh said to me, ‘Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.’” (Deuteronomy 4:9-10) WMM ch12, #899. We can win the battle by honoring God. But we risk losing the war if we fail to pass our reverence on to our children.

“Know this day, and consider it in your heart, that Yahweh Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you for all time.” (Deuteronomy 4:39-40) WMM ch12, #892. The only reason we really need for doing what Yahweh says is that He is *actually God*—the Real Thing, not some manmade phony invented by kings and clerics in order to keep their people in line.

“Moses called all Israel, and said to them: ‘Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them.’” (Deuteronomy 5:1) He then recapped the Ten Commandments, as we saw above. These encapsulate and summarize God’s “statutes and judgments.”

“Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29) One might guess that Yahweh’s words here had been in response to Israel’s promise to obey and observe the Torah. But they weren’t. Rather, Israel had just expressed their sheer terror at seeing and hearing Yahweh’s awesome pyrotechnics on Mount Sinai at the giving of the Law to Moses. The people begged for an intermediary (so they wouldn’t have to experience God’s glory quite so vociferously), and Moses complied (see Exodus 20:18-19). But later, Moses revealed that the role of this Intermediary would be fulfilled by “a prophet like me” (see Deuteronomy 18:15), a prophetic reference to Yahshua the Messiah.

“You shall be careful to do as Yahweh your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the ways which Yahweh your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess.” (Deuteronomy 5:32-33) Once again, Israel’s national prosperity and length of tenure in the Promised Land was tied to their willingness to heed Yahweh’s Instructions.

“Fear Yahweh your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.” (Deuteronomy 6:2) This truth is repeated many times in the Torah. Even if the original exodus generation understood and heeded these things, they failed to pass them on to their “sons and grandsons.” History reveals the ugly consequences of this failure. And alas, I fear the modern world (especially my beloved America) has dropped the same ball—and will suffer the same consequences.

“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. You shall bind them as a sign on your

hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9) TOM ch1, #19. Reverence for God and His precepts is not to be restricted to weekly gatherings for corporate worship. It is to be an ever-present reality in our lives, 24/7/365. We are to keep Yahweh’s truth before us at all times.

“You shall not tempt Yahweh your God as you tempted Him in Massah. You shall diligently keep the commandments of Yahweh your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of Yahweh, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which Yahweh swore to your fathers, to cast out all your enemies from before you, as Yahweh has spoken.” (Deuteronomy 6:16-19) TOM ch1, #9. Don’t look for loopholes, work-arounds, or technicalities. If you want God’s blessing, just do your best to do what He said to do.

“When your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which Yahweh our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son: ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and Yahweh showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. And Yahweh commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear Yahweh our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before Yahweh our God, as He has commanded us.” (Deuteronomy 6:20-25) WMM ch12, #896. The natural curiosity of the children as to the nature of Yahweh’s Instructions was intended to open a dialogue through which they would learn of God’s mercy, love, and deliverance. It’s all one subject.

“Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which Yahweh swore to your fathers.” (Deuteronomy 8:1) Again, performance of the Torah is linked to prosperity in the Land of Promise. The ultimate lesson is, “These precepts reveal how My Anointed One will save you through the atoning of your sins. If you observe them, you will live. If you don’t, you won’t.”

“You shall keep the commandments of Yahweh your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.” (Deuteronomy 8:6) WMM ch12, #907; TTC 3.3.5, 3.3.11. The most oft-repeated of God’s commandments is “Keep My commandments.” They are not there for God’s health, but for ours.

“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 become prosperous]... you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’ And you shall remember Yahweh your God, for it is He who gives you power to

get wealth.” (Deuteronomy 8:11, 17-18) TOM ch2, #24. If nothing else, performing Yahweh’s precepts is the perfect way to keep Him in the forefront of your mind—right where He should be. We must never mistake Yahweh’s blessing for our own efforts. He is, at the very least, the One who gave us the *ability* to work hard in His world.

“What does Yahweh your God require of you, but to fear Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of Yahweh and His statutes which I command you today for your good?” (Deuteronomy 10:12-13) TOM ch12, #916. Compare this to 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 things are perfectly compatible.

“You shall love Yahweh your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always.” (Deuteronomy 11:1) Keeping God’s Instructions is not just for worship gatherings or holy days. It’s an “always” sort of thing—all day long, in good times and bad. And it all begins with our love for Yahweh our God and Creator.

“You shall keep every commandment which I command you today, that you may be strong.” (Deuteronomy 11:8) WMM ch12, #917. It’s like bodily exercise: the more you “work out,” the stronger you’ll get. The more we obey our God, the easier it gets. And *vice versa*.

“You shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which Yahweh swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.” (Deuteronomy 11:18-21) TTC 1.3.7. It is awfully hard to walk in a godly manner if you aren’t intimately familiar with His Instructions.

“Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.” (Deuteronomy 12:32) WMM ch12, #913. Alas, Rabbinical Judaism, especially from Akiba forward (that is, about a century after Christ) is built entirely on the twin evils of subtracting from and adding to the Word of God.

“Carefully obey the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe with care all these commandments which I command you today.” (Deuteronomy 15:5) “Care” is mentioned twice here, because these things are not as intuitive as simply following one’s conscience. We must go out of our way to learn what God has said, and then heed His words. Observation leads to obedience if “care” is applied.

“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.’ Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.” (Deuteronomy 17:14-17) TOM ch16, #582; TTC 3.2.14. Yahweh made it clear (in I Samuel 8:7) that Israel’s desire for a human king was in reality a rejection of His direct rule through the precepts of the Torah. But knowing what they would eventually do, He laid down ground rules for royal behavior, basically forbidding the pursuit of power, sex, and money. I’m pretty sure there has never been a ruler of any nation, during any epoch, who has kept this statute wholeheartedly—not even David, God’s favorite human. But we can also be assured that this *will* describe Yahshua the Messiah, in his coming role as King of Planet Earth.

“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. 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 17:18-20) TOM ch16, #587. There’s no evidence to suggest that *any* king of Israel ever did this, but what a difference it would have made. At the very least, they couldn’t claim they didn’t know what Yahweh wanted. And wouldn’t it be wonderful if American presidents were required by law to hand-write a copy of the Sermon on the Mount for their own use before taking the oath of office?

“This day Yahweh your God commands you to observe these statutes and judgments; therefore you shall be careful to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul.” (Deuteronomy 26:16) God isn’t particularly interested in begrudging compliance. The ideal, rather, might be characterized as enthusiastic reverence.

“Now Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people, saying: ‘Keep all the commandments which I command you today.’” (Deuteronomy 27:1) WMM ch12, #921. As this truncated precept list is demonstrating, “all” is impossible today, for lack of a temple and priesthood. Today, all we can do is *observe* them—that is, examine and ponder them with an eye toward comprehending what Yahweh meant to teach us. If we do this, we’ll see Christ written between every line.

“Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law by observing them.” (Deuteronomy 27:26) WMM ch12, #923; TTC 4.1.9. Notice two things: (1) we

confirm (approve, endorse, and ratify) God's word by observing His precepts; and (2) we are "cursed" if we fail to do so.

"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that Yahweh your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of Yahweh your God."

(Deuteronomy 28:1-2) TOM ch3, #63; TTC 2.9; TTC 1.3.8, 4.2.4. Whenever in her long history Israel has honored Yahweh (for instance, under the reigns of David and Solomon), she has found herself in a powerful position *vis-à-vis* her national neighbors. But Israel has *never* been "set high above all nations of the earth." Yet. This, however, is a two-edged prophecy: during Christ's Millennial kingdom (coming soon to planet Earth), Israel will (1) carefully observe all of Yahweh's commandments (which point directly toward Yahshua the Messiah-King), and (2) find themselves as a result "set high above all nations of the earth." *All* of them.

"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." (Deuteronomy 28:15) It bears repeating: for the most part, the "curses" for systemic national disobedience are merely the natural results of failing to heed Yahweh. If you jump off the roof of a tall building, you can't blame God for your gruesome death; nor can you blame the architect, the sidewalk, or even gravity. You can only blame yourself.

"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." (Deuteronomy 28:58-59) TOM ch11, #450. As far as Israel (the recipient of the Torah) was concerned, learning to fear (i.e., reverence, respect, stand in awe of) Yahweh would have been sufficient impetus to heed the Instructions. They didn't have to know that the whole rest of the world was watching. There is a parallel lesson here for the church, I'm thinking. Does the world blaspheme God because of what it sees us doing?

"The secret things belong to Yahweh our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

(Deuteronomy 29:29) Yahweh didn't owe Israel an explanation for the fine points of the Law. He was under no obligation to elucidate the metaphors and symbols that shaded so much of what He commanded them to do. It's like having small children: we don't have to explain *why* they have to make their beds, clean up their rooms, and brush their teeth. It is enough that they do as we say.

"For Yahweh will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, if you obey the voice of Yahweh your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are

written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” (Deuteronomy 30:9-10) The imperative here is to do as He prophesied: obey Yahweh, keep His commandments, and turn to your God, so that He could then remove the long-standing curse and “rejoice over Israel.” Don’t look now, but this is the single most often-repeated prophecy in the entire Tanakh. As unlikely as it looks (even at this late date) it *will* happen.

“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love Yahweh your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days.” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20) TTC 3.3.14, 4.1.3, 4.2. It’s a matter of life and death. Why is that so hard for us to comprehend? It is no accident that there are well over twice as many “Laws” saying “Obey God’s Laws” as there are precepts covering any other single subject.

RELATIONSHIPS AND BEHAVIOR

Marriage, Procreation, Legacy, and Divorce

“God blessed them [the man and the woman, Adam and Eve], 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) WMM ch11, #872. This is the first “commandment” in the Bible. Satan would have you believe that sex is dirty (unless it’s perverted), and families are obsolete. But the very first thing out of God’s mouth was, “make love, you two: have lots of children, so you (the resulting human race) can supervise, utilize, and enjoy my entire earthly creation.”

“A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24) WMM ch13, #928. Men are to be joined to women in marriage, and their offspring are *literally* “one flesh,” a blending of the genetic makeup of the father and the mother. The fact that we didn’t understand how this works until almost six thousand years after God revealed the truth doesn’t change anything.

“God said to [Jacob]: ‘I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body.’” (Genesis 35:11) I’d take the “be fruitful” command as a universal law.

“So you shall serve Yahweh your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.” (Exodus 23:25-26) TOM ch2, #22. Service to Yahweh tends to result in prosperity, health, fecundity, and longevity.

“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) TOM ch16, #605; TTC1.3.3, 4.1.8, 3.3.12, 4.1.9. If you follow the logic through to the end, this means that God Himself may not “remarry” unfaithful Israel. That is, she must become a “new creation in Christ” (as Paul put it) in order to be reconciled to God, who divorced her for her infidelities (see Jeremiah 3:8). That being said, God *hates* divorce.

“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) TOM ch3, #72. Everybody loves the idea of a year-long honeymoon. But nobody keeps this commandment.

“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. 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 25:5-10) TOM ch3, #79; TTC4.1.8, 4.1.9. The joke here is, “Make sure your brother marries a super-model.” Seriously, though, this precept (although it would get you in big trouble in most countries) demonstrates that Yahweh is vitally interested in our fruitfulness. Life is a relay race: there has to be someone to whom we can pass the baton.

The Firstborn

“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) TOM ch12, #459; WMM ch14, #958; TTC 4.1.7. All of our eleven children

(biological and adopted) were “dedicated” to God—that is, we promised God that we would raise them in “the nurture and admonition of Yahweh.” That’s about as far as we can go with this precept today. In theocratic Israel, however, consecration of the firstborn took on far more literal proportions. Firstborn children were redeemed by Levites, firstborn clean animals were sacrificed, and firstborn unclean animals were either swapped for clean ones or slain. It was an issue of faith, reminiscent of Abraham’s almost-sacrifice of Isaac, and prophetic of Christ’s ultimate death and resurrection on our behalf.

“It shall be, when Yahweh brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and your fathers, and gives it to you, that 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. And 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.’ It shall be as a sign on your hand and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand Yahweh brought us out of Egypt.” (Exodus 13:11-16) TTC4.1.7. *Yahweh’s* “firstborn” is Yahshua. This is all a picture of redemption through sacrifice—*His* sacrifice on our behalf.

“The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me. Likewise you shall do with your oxen and your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me.” (Exodus 22:29-30) TTC 4.1.9, 4.2.1. “Seven” is symbolic of the entire relationship between Yahweh and mortal man—from the fall of Adam to the last day of Christ’s Millennial kingdom (itself the ultimate Sabbath). The “eighth day,” then, is prophetic of the eternal state, in which we will “belong” to Yahweh in immortal bodies that can actually survive the encounter.

“All that open the womb are Mine, and every male firstborn among your livestock, whether ox or sheep. 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 34:19-20) TTC 3.2.5, 4.1.7. In the end, none of us may appear before Yahweh without having been redeemed by the blood of *His* Firstborn, Yahshua.

“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) TOM ch12, #459. It is not our labors or good deeds that are of value to God, but our very lives.

“If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved, and if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn. But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.” (Deuteronomy 21:15-17) WMM ch11, #886; TTC 4.1.7. Israel was called Yahweh’s “firstborn” (see Exodus 4:22). They were also the “wife” He was forced to “divorce” due to her spiritual adulteries. This precept, then, restricts God Himself from dumping Israel in favor of somebody He likes better—like the church. Those who hold to the odd doctrine of “Replacement Theology” need to rethink their position.

Property

“Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, animal for animal.” (Leviticus 24:18) WMM ch11, #881. These precepts will demonstrate *God’s* attitude: He is always just, fair, and logical—and He expects us to be as well.

“And whoever kills an animal shall restore it.” (Leviticus 24:21) WMM ch11, #881. The repetition of the precept is a signal for us to pay attention. God is quite serious about this. Life is precious.

“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) TOM ch6, #226; TOM ch7, #267. Although each family in Israel was given an inheritance of land, *ownership* of the land remained Yahweh’s. So you could “lease” your land in order to raise cash, but technically, you couldn’t sell it. Such leases would expire automatically at the Jubilee, which took place once every fifty years, unless the lessor or his kinsman had redeemed the land before that time.

“If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession, and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold. Or if the man has no one to redeem it, but he himself becomes able to redeem it, then let him count the years since its sale, and restore the remainder to the man to whom he sold it, that he may return to his possession. But if he is not able to have it restored to himself, then what was sold shall remain in the hand of him who bought it until the Year of Jubilee; and in the Jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his possession.” (Leviticus 25:25-28) WMM ch11, #885. The value of a piece of leased land was calculated on the time left before the Jubilee, based on the number of crops that could be grown on it. In the bigger picture, the Jubilee is symbolic of the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to receive God’s forgiveness and grace. That is, if we don’t take advantage of

Yahweh's generosity within our lifetimes, there will be no opportunity to do so afterward. So much for the doctrine of purgatory.

"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. However the houses of villages which have no wall around them shall be counted as the fields of the country. They may be redeemed, and they shall be released in the Jubilee." (Leviticus 25:29-31) TOM ch7, #269. The Rubicon here is the presence (or not) of a city wall. Look at it this way: if we are "open" to God's grace, our sins will be forgiven. But if we have "walled ourselves off" from His mercy, then forgiveness will elude us if we wait too long in our state of stubborn unrepentance.

"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." (Numbers 27:8-11) TOM ch7, #232; TTC 4.1.6. Because of the symbology of the thing, God characterizes daughters (and wives) as being under the protection of their fathers (and husbands)—just as Israel and the church are to be submissive to Yahweh and Yahshua. Satan has tried to convince the world that this means God considers females to be second-class citizens. While this *is* true in Islam, it is a blatant lie in the case of Biblical theology. And this passage proves it.

"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) TOM ch7, #270. Moving a landmark is tantamount to stealing real estate.

Liability and Restitution

"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. If there is imposed on him a sum of money, then he shall pay to redeem his life, whatever is imposed on him. Whether it has gored a son or gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him. If the ox gores a male or female servant, he shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned." (Exodus 21:28-32) WMM ch11, #884; TOM ch5, #162; TTC 3.2.5. We are supposed to be in control of the things we own, and the damage they do is our

responsibility—as if we had done the deed ourselves. The option is given for the owner of the ox to pay a fine, but there is no limit on how much he must pay; the sky’s the limit. The question being asked is “Just how much is your life worth to you?” Also, note that the value of a servant is set here—the *same price* Judas Iscariot was paid to betray Yahshua.

“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) TOM ch7, #233. Moral traps—enticements to temptation—are dangerous. You break it, you bought it.

“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) TOM ch7, #234. We are responsible for what we own, whether or not it has a mind of its own. Your dog should be well trained and kept on a leash when appropriate; your car should be well maintained; your front walk should be rendered safe and passable in icy weather. You get the idea.

“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) TOM ch7, #275; TTC 3.2.5. Crime doesn’t “pay” in God’s economy. It doesn’t even break even.

“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) TOM ch7, #235. Restitution is made from the “best” the guilty party has. There is simply no way to “get ahead” at the expense of your neighbor. But then, of course, if you truly love your neighbor, why would you want to?

“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) TOM ch7, #236. What would happen if we applied this to forest fire arsonists, whether negligent or purposeful?

“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) TOM ch7, #230; TCC 3.3.12; TCC 4.1.11.

This should apply to any kind of trustee, financial manager, or bank. And for my money, it ought to be applicable to government agencies as well.

“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 22:9-13) TOM ch7, #238. Property entrusted to us is our responsibility, but we are not responsible for what we cannot control. God is always fair, except when He’s showing mercy.

“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 22:14-15) If you borrow something, you are responsible for it. But if you rent it, the owner assumes his share of liability.

“If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him—fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him.” (Leviticus 24:19-20) WMM ch11, #874. What could be more fair than this? Of course, the usual rules of testimony and evidence apply: two witnesses, preferably three. Note also that the punishment is to fit the crime precisely—it may not exceed it.

“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel: 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.’ (Numbers 5:5-7) Again, crime never pays. At the very least, there is a 20% surcharge.

“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) TOM ch7, 263. We are to take *reasonable* precautions with the things we own, to protect our neighbors: guard rails, good brakes on your car, fences around swimming pools, a leash for your dog—you get the idea.

Assault

“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) TOM ch8, #299. Acquittal from attempted murder charges, you’ll note, does not preclude being held liable for the injuries you afflicted upon your adversary. Nobody “wins” such a fight. We are commanded to love our neighbors, not duke it out with them.

“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) TOM ch8, #285. Here’s another open-ended liability issue. It’s best just to shut up and walk away, guys.

Servants/Slaves

“Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them: 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. And 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. 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 clothing, and her marriage rights. And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free.” (Exodus 21:1-11) TTC 3.3.3. For a complete discussion of slavery from a Biblical perspective, see TTC 4.2.7. The point is that we are all slaves to sin, so God allowed the practice of slavery continue to exist (though tightly regulated) to teach us valuable lessons about our own bondage.

“If a man beats his male or female servant with a rod, so that he dies under his hand, he shall surely be punished. Notwithstanding, if he remains alive a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he is his property.” (Exodus 21:20-21) WMM ch11, #876. The only thing that makes this “work” is the spiritual application. God is *not* going on record as being in favor of abusing slaves—even though slavery is a “fact of life” that He chose to let stand because it represents our common condition as slaves to sin. The spiritual equivalent of “beating your slave with a rod until he dies” is taking it upon yourself to punish an unbeliever under your control for his sin

beyond what Yahweh authorized of human governments (for example, the death penalty for murderers). In a society without *actual* slavery, it's hard to imagine a direct equivalent. But the point is clear enough: we are to show mercy, compassion, and justice to those who wrong us.

“If a man strikes the eye of his male or female servant, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for the sake of his eye. And if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant, he shall let him go free for the sake of his tooth.” (Exodus 21:26-27) Again, mercy trumps justice in God's mind.

“If the ox gores a male or female servant, he shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.” (Exodus 21:32) WMM ch15, #964. There it is again: the price of a slave—the same as that paid to Judas Iscariot for the betrayal of Christ.

“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. For they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him with rigor, but you shall fear your God.” (Leviticus 25:39-43) TOM ch6, #190. Among Israelites, the master-servant relationship was more like an employer-to-employee association. There was a contract between them, up to six years in duration (or even until the next Jubilee). But the master didn't “own” the servant—God did.

“As for your male and female slaves whom you may have—from the nations that are around you, from them you may buy male and female slaves. 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. But regarding your brethren, the children of Israel, you shall not rule over one another with rigor.” (Leviticus 25:44-46) The difference had to do with God's extensive matrix of symbols and metaphors—the subject of *The Torah Code*. “Israel” symbolized “God's family,” while gentile strangers or foreigners (who *could* be “owned” by Israelites) were by definition *outside* the family—though they were neighbors: guests, invited to join God's household.

“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. 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. 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. 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) TOM ch6, #193. People sold themselves into bondage because they were poor—they needed the money. This afforded God a perfect opportunity to teach us all about redemption—the “buying back” of our service contracts (read: our sin) by a “kinsman-redeemer” willing to pay the price. The ultimate Redeemer, of course, is Yahshua.

“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 your God 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) TOM ch6, #194, #195, #190. When a man is released from the bondage of his debt (i.e., his sin) after six years (symbolically: the age of choice, from the fall of Adam until the reign of Christ), He is to be given whatever he needs to keep from getting in trouble again. Beyond the obvious temporal application, I see here our new “immortal resurrection bodies” like those spoken of in I Corinthians 15—“human 2.0,” so to speak. We will never again fall into sin/debt, because these new bodies are incorruptible, built without the sin nature we inherited from Adam.

“If it happens that he [a slave you own] says to you, ‘I will not go away from you,’ because he loves you and your house, since he prospers with you, then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also to your female servant you shall do likewise. It shall not seem hard to you when you send him away free from you; for he has been worth a double hired servant in serving you six years. Then Yahweh your God will bless you in all that you do.” (Deuteronomy 15:16-18) WMM ch11, #887. If we are “slaves” of God, we can’t be owned by our sin.

“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) TOM ch6, #200; TCC 3.2.11. This refers not to an Israelite “bondservant,” that is, one who is “under contract” to another Israelite (and thus due under Law to be released either at the Sabbath year or Jubilee), but to a slave of a pagan master.

GOD'S SCHEDULE

Annual Celebrations

“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) TOM ch4, #107. For some odd reason, Jews today celebrate “*Rosh Hashanah*” (literally: the “head of the year”) as their New Year’s Day, in the autumn at the fifth of Yahweh’s Feasts, *Yom Teruah* or the Feast of Trumpets. But God put “New Year’s” in the spring, before Passover, and He never changed His mind.

“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) TOM ch4, #112; TOM ch12, #471; TTC 3.2.4. Several times, Yahweh pronounced that all of the males of Israel were to gather together to celebrate His holy convocations. The first gathering took place at Passover-Unleavened Bread-Firstfruits (a weeklong celebration in the spring), then at the Feast of Weeks (a.k.a. Pentecost) in the early summer, and finally at the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall.

“Three times in the year all your men shall appear before Yahweh, Yahweh—God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before you and enlarge your borders; neither will any man covet your land when you go up to appear before Yahweh your God three times in the year.” (Exodus 34:23-24) The Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement were left off the “gather-together” schedule, for reasons that would only become apparent when the prophetic ramifications of these two Convocations were revealed: the rapture of the church, and the second coming of Christ.

“These are the feasts of Yahweh which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh, a burnt offering and a grain offering, a sacrifice and drink offerings, everything on its day—besides the Sabbaths of Yahweh, besides your gifts, besides all your vows, and besides all your freewill offerings which you give to Yahweh.” (Leviticus 23:37-38) TTC 3.3.6. The “problem” with the Feasts of Yahweh is that they can’t really be kept without a temple and a priesthood. But they are central to the revelation of the Plan of God for the salvation of all mankind. In fact, *three times* in Leviticus 23 (the first passage where all seven convocations are listed in order) Yahweh commanded Israel that they were to keep these “throughout their generations.” As usual, these precepts must be kept, but *cannot be* without reference to the Messiah who fulfilled them.

“Three times a year all your males shall appear before Yahweh your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before Yahweh empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of Yahweh your God which He has given you.” (Deuteronomy 16:16-17) TOM ch4, #114; WMM ch8, #799. The issue with this precept is that the gathering place is designated as “the place Yahweh chooses,” which is obviously Jerusalem—and has been for the past three millennia. People who think they’re “keeping the Torah” because they hold a Passover Seder or erect a *sukkah* in their backyard during the feast of Tabernacles, while I congratulate them on their faithfulness, are misled. If you don’t show up in Jerusalem three times a year, sacrifice in hand, you aren’t *literally* doing what God instructed. On the other hand, the place Yahweh *really* chose to make His name abide is in our hearts, souls, and minds.

Passover

“Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. 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. And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire—its head with its legs and its entrails. You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the Yahweh’s Passover.’” (Exodus 12:3-11) TOM ch12, #460; WMM ch14, #949; TTC 3.3.3, 1.3.7, 3.2.16. Trying this with a leg of lamb you bought at the meat market isn’t really following the precept. But this all makes sense if we realize that Yahshua is the Lamb, and that this is all prophetic of His self-sacrifice on our behalf. The tenth day of Nisan (when the Lamb was to be brought into the household for four days of inspection) was fulfilled with the Triumphal Entry—Palm Monday, 33 AD. The “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” was then offered up, as required, the following Friday, Nisan 14.

“Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, ‘Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb. And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two

doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. For Yahweh will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, Yahweh will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you. And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which Yahweh will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, “What do you mean by this service?” that you shall say, “It is the Passover sacrifice of Yahweh, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.”” (Exodus 12:21-27) The “lintel and doorposts” of the house were pictures of the cross upon which Yahshua was crucified—where His blood was shed for our sins.

“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) TOM ch12, #464, 465; WMM ch14, #956. Since Passover was a picture of the self-sacrifice of Christ, only those trusting Him for their salvation—no matter their station in life—can benefit from it.

“In one house [the Passover Lamb] shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it.” (Exodus 12:46-47) TOM ch12, #466, #467; WMM ch14, #957. None of Christ’s bones was broken (as was a common procedure) when He was crucified. See also Psalm 34:19-20 for prophetic confirmation.

“You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leaven, nor shall the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover be left until morning.” (Exodus 34:25) We can’t make sacrifices at all, but Christ’s Passover self-sacrifice fulfilled this, if we understand that leaven (yeast) is a metaphor for sin: He was sinless.

“These are the feasts of Yahweh, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is Yahweh’s Passover.” (Leviticus 23:4-5) It is no coincidence that Yahshua was crucified on the fourteenth day of Nisan, in the year we reckon 33AD, dying so close to sunset that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had to hurry to entomb Him before the Sabbath (the Feast of Unleavened Bread) began.

“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 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

9:9-13) We have a choice: either Yahshua can bear our sins, or we can carry them ourselves.

“If a stranger dwells among you, and would keep Yahweh’s Passover, he must do so according to the rite of the Passover and according to its ceremony; you shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger and the native of the land.” (Numbers 9:14) WMM ch9, #833. Both Jews and gentiles may avail themselves of the atonement provided by the definitive Lamb of God. The basis of our salvation is identical (though seen from a different angle): it’s the blood of Christ, and the grace this affords us through our faith in its efficacy in atoning for our sin.

“Observe the month of Abib [a.k.a. Nisan, the first month of the Hebrew lunar calendar, in the spring], and keep the Passover to Yahweh your God, for in the month of Abib Yahweh your God brought you out of Egypt by night. Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to Yahweh your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where Yahweh chooses to put His name.” (Deuteronomy 16:1-2) WMM ch9, #835. The entire procedure, of course (Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Firstfruits) was prophetic of the Passion of the Christ, when the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” was slain for our sins in Jerusalem.

“You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates which Yahweh your God gives you; but at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt. And you shall roast and eat it in the place which Yahweh your God chooses, and in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents.” (Deuteronomy 16:5-7) WMM ch9, #835. As I said, God specified that keeping the Passover wherever you happen to be is not allowed. Jerusalem is the only place where the Passover Lamb may be sacrificed. And not coincidentally, it is the very place where Yahshua the Messiah *was* sacrificed, precisely on God’s schedule. If nothing else, this makes Yahshua a hard act to follow for any of the “false Christs” we are told to be on the lookout for.

Feast of Unleavened Bread

“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) TOM ch12, #469; WMM ch14, #950; TTC 3.1.6, 1.3.6. The deadline for removing the leaven from one’s home was sunset on Passover. What followed was a week of life without leaven. Since seven (days, in this case) indicate completion or perfection, and leaven represents sin’s corruption, the Feast of Unleavened Bread is prophetic of the complete and permanent removal of our sin—due to what happened on Passover. Not coincidentally, Christ spent the first day of this Feast in the tomb.

“Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to Yahweh. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. 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 13:6-10) TOM ch4, #123; WMM ch14, #954. Egypt is symbolic of “bondage in the world.” There is thus a direct symbolic correlation between sin, bondage, and leaven (*all of which* were eliminated via the sacrifice of the Lamb of God). The complete removal of yeast from the home (and diet) during this seven-day feast was said to be a sign—signifying that our sins had been completely and permanently removed by whatever had happened just before sundown on Passover, that is, the slaying of the perfect lamb. Why the scribes and Pharisees of Yahshua’s day couldn’t see this is beyond me.

“The Feast of Unleavened Bread you shall keep. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, in the appointed time of the month of Abib; for in the month of Abib you came out from Egypt.” (Exodus 34:18) It is a common fiction that the Hebrews simply “didn’t have time” to prepare their bread dough in the usual manner (leavened) on the morning they were evicted from Egypt—after the Tenth Plague, the death of the firstborn. But Exodus 12:14-20 makes it clear that the removal of yeast from their houses was planned *ahead of time* by Yahweh. Leaven was a picture of sin: it was important to forever associate freedom from bondage with the removal of sin in the minds of Israel.

“On the fifteenth day of the [first] 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. But you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no

customary work on it.” (Leviticus 23:6-8) TOM ch4, #117; TTC 3.1.6. It’s no coincidence that the definitive fulfillment of this prophetic Convocation took place in a year (33 AD) in which the first day of the Feast fell on a natural (that is, not merely “designated”) Sabbath. Yahweh is not making this stuff up as He goes along. It has been planned in every detail from the foundation of the world.

“You shall eat no leavened bread with [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. And no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory for seven days, nor shall any of the meat which you sacrifice the first day at twilight remain overnight until morning.” (Deuteronomy 16:3-4) TOM ch4, #126. Simply put, there is no relationship between what the Lamb represents (Yahshua as sacrifice) and that for which leaven is a metaphor (sin). And the “leftovers”? Christ’s body was not allowed to hang on the cross beyond sunset (as was the gruesome Roman custom). Ironically, the Jews themselves saw to that.

“Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a sacred assembly to Yahweh your God. You shall do no work on it.” (Deuteronomy 16:8) WMM ch9, #839. This looks forward to the (yet future) Millennial reign of Christ, the ultimate Sabbath, in which we must rest in Yahshua’s finished work.

Feast of Firstfruits

“You shall not delay to offer the first of your ripe produce and your juices.” (Exodus 22:29) TTC 4.1.9, 4.2.1. The Feast of Firstfruits is predictive of the Resurrection of Christ. He did not “delay,” but rose when He said He would, on the third day after His death. God is on a schedule, one we would be wise to study.

“The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of Yahweh your God.” (Exodus 23:19) TOM ch5, #163; TOM ch12, #472; WMM ch7, #773; TTC 4.1.3. The first to be harvested of a seasonal crop was a promise (of sorts) that there would be more to follow. On the day following the Sabbath commencement of the definitive Feast of Unleavened Bread, the slain Messiah rose from the dead, becoming a spiritual metaphor for the “firstfruits” of Yahweh’s eventual harvest of souls. Thus it is reasonable to assume that the *form* He took after His resurrection—the sort of body He now inhabited (not at all like that of the mortal one in which He had been crucified)—will be the same type of body with which we will be equipped when we are “harvested.” (See I Corinthians 15:20-58.)

“The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring to the house of Yahweh your God.” (Exodus 34:26) TTC 4.1.3. Originally, of course, the “House of Yahweh” was the tabernacle or temple. But now (since Pentecost), our bodies are the “temple of the Holy Spirit.” And because the “firstfruits of our Land” ultimately

represent the risen Christ, we are to “bring Him” within ourselves—allowing Him to abide within us.

“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before Yahweh, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. 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. Its grain offering shall be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to Yahweh, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin. 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 23:9-14) TOM ch14, #552; WMM ch9, #840; TTC 3.1.1. None of this can literally be done today, requiring, as it does, a functional priesthood (not to mention residence in the Land of Promise). But it does explain why the church habitually gathers for worship on the day *after* the Sabbath—on the first day of the week: Sunday. We are, in fact, celebrating the Feast of Firstfruits, which was prophetic of the resurrection of Yahshua our Messiah. All of the sacrificial and celebratory elements mentioned here are symbolic of various facets of what Christ accomplished by rising from the dead.

Feast of Weeks/Pentecost

“You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year’s end.” (Exodus 34:22) Since the Feast of Weeks was fulfilled on schedule (in 33 AD) by the birth of the church (witnessed by the filling of Christ’s believers with the Holy Spirit), “observing” the Feast is now tantamount to becoming a believer in Him.

“You shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; 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. And you shall proclaim on the same day 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

dwelling throughout your generations.” (Leviticus 23:15-21) TOM ch13, #521; WMM ch9, #843; TTC 3.1.6, 3.2.1, 1.3.6. The priestly components, of course, cannot be kept today, no matter how much we might wish to. All we can do now is sort out the symbols God has embedded here. (1) The “day after the Sabbath” is Sunday, resurrection day. (2) The multiple Sabbath references underscore the principle of grace: we cannot work to achieve our salvation. (3) The presence of leaven indicates a “come as you are” mindset. (4) The blood sacrifices keep Christ’s passion in view. And (5) the familiar “throughout-your-generations” requirement tells us that this soteriological strategy will never become obsolete.

“You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the grain. Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to Yahweh your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as Yahweh your God blesses you. You shall rejoice before Yahweh your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide. And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.”

(Deuteronomy 16:9-12) WMM ch9, #842; TTC 1.3.5. More symbolic components of Pentecost: (1) We are to make freewill offerings commensurate with our perception of how much God has blessed us. That is, if we really comprehend what He has done for us, our whole lives, fortunes, and energies will be devoted to His honor. (2) This realization that we owe Yahweh everything is cause for rejoicing. (3) No one is excluded from this joyful celebration of our salvation, either on the basis of race, sex, wealth, education, or social status.

Feast of Trumpets

“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 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. You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh.’” (Leviticus 23:23-25) The imagery of the Feast of Trumpets correlates perfectly with that of the rapture of the church. It would appear that the Feasts of Weeks and Trumpets are the “bookends” of the church age. Only *after* the church has been extracted from the world will Yahweh resume His direct dealing with the nation of Israel, as revealed in the Daniel 9:25-27 prophecy. Features of this Feast include (1) the blowing of trumpets (or shouting, either in joy or alarm, depending on who you are). (2) The Sabbath component reminds us that we can’t work for our salvation. (3) The “offering by fire,” as always, is a reference to Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf—the one thing that makes our salvation by grace through faith possible. (4) This is the only Feast of the seven that happens on the first day of the month, that is, at the new moon—

the time of maximum nocturnal darkness. That is, I expect the forces of darkness to have reached unprecedented strength in the world when Christ raptures His church. Bad news, good news.

Day of Atonement

“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before Yahweh your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. 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 23:26-32) WMM ch14, #948. There is a vast amount of Levitical Law surrounding the performance of the rites of Yom Kippurim, or the Day of Atonement—none of which can be done without a temple and a priesthood. Of special note is that this Convocation requires the use of the Ark of the Covenant, housed within the Most Holy Place—a piece of temple furniture that went missing half a millennium before the time of Christ. Nevertheless, we see once again that Yahweh commands the faithful to observe this statute “throughout your generations”—as long as Israel exists. The key directive here is to “afflict your souls” (Hebrew: *anah*), a word that denotes not only showing remorse and repentance, but also means “to answer or respond.” Elsewhere in scripture (notably Zechariah 12:10-14) it becomes clear that this celebration is prophetic of the Second Coming of Christ.

Feast of Tabernacles

“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 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. 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 23:33-36) TTC 3.2.3. The seventh and last of Yahweh’s Holy Convocations is the Feast of Tabernacles (or *Sukkot*, or the Feast of Booths), falling only five days after *Yom Kippurim* on the festal calendar. It represents the Millennial earthly reign of Yahshua the Messiah, and is the only Feast that is singled out as one that must be kept worldwide during the Kingdom age (see Zechariah 14:16-21). As with

Unleavened Bread and the Day of Atonement, there is a huge amount of Levitical ritual required for Tabernacles—none of which can be performed today for lack of a priesthood, but all of which was (or will be) fulfilled in either the first or second of Christ’s advents.

“On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of Yahweh for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest. 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. 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 23:39-43) WMM ch10, #864. The “booths” people were to build and live in for the week are a prophecy: Christ—God Incarnate—is “camping out” among men. The four types of branches or boughs listed symbolically indicate the various populations that will inhabit the Kingdom, beginning with Christ and including redeemed Israel and the church-age faithful—some mortal, and some inhabiting their new, immortal resurrection bodies (see #862).

“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. Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh chooses, because Yahweh your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice.” (Deuteronomy 16:13-15) TOM ch4, #113. The nature of the Feast is celebration of the harvest, but in reality what’s being celebrated is the harvest of souls into God’s eternal Kingdom. The *harvest itself* is rejoicing!

“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) TOM ch6, #220. There’s no reason at all we can’t gather our families together once every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles and read the entire Torah. Alas, nobody does this. How different things might be if we did.

Jubilee

“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. 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, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine. For it is the Jubilee; it shall be holy to you; you shall eat its produce from the field.” (Leviticus 25:8-12) TOM ch6, #221; TTC4.1.11, 2.7, 4.1.9. Jubilee was sort of a “super-Sabbath” God instituted to preview His agenda of redemption and reconciliation. It was a year-long celebration that was to take place after seven Sabbath-year cycles, or once every fifty years—once in a lifetime, for practical purposes. It was marked by liberty to those in bondage and the repatriation of lands that had been sold (actually “leased”) to others out of dire financial need during the preceding period. Basically, then, it’s a picture of our salvation, driven by grace, love, and the concept that in reality, Yahweh owns everything.

“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) TOM ch6, #170; TOM ch7, #229. When Yahshua said, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,” He was referring to the same principle of mercy that underlies Jubilee. Not coincidentally, the last recorded Jubilee celebrated in Israel was at the beginning of Bar Kochba’s rebellion in 133 AD—making Christ’s passion in 33 a Jubilee year as well (as we might have assumed). And don’t look now, but if you do the math, the *next one* (from our perspective) will take place in 2033. It will mark the *fortieth* Jubilee since Christ’s redeeming sacrifice for us (forty being the Biblical number of trial, testing, and judgment). If *that* doesn’t get your heart pumping, maybe you need new batteries in your pacemaker.

THE MORTAL BODY

Circumcision

“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; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.” (Genesis 17:10-11) TTC 2.9. This is the perennial “test case,” the *One Thing* that everybody seemed to recognize as being “doable” (and that therefore must be done). This issue was discussed at length in the Acts 15 council, the decision being that non-Israelite Christians need not be circumcised, nor are they bound to keep the Torah, in order to be saved. Genesis 17 is the Bible’s first mention of the rite, spoken to Abraham before Isaac was even conceived. Circumcision is specifically said to be “a sign of the covenant” between Yahweh and Abraham. For His part, Yahweh promised that (1) He would be the God of Abraham and his descendants forever (v7), and that (2) the Land (whose borders were defined elsewhere) was promised in perpetuity to the same people (v8). So technically, it makes no sense to physically impose this sign on people who are neither Abraham’s biological descendants nor in his household.

Prophets from Moses onward, however, would draw a distinction between being circumcised in the flesh and being circumcised *in the heart*. That is, the sign itself was a picture of something—something that had nothing to do with genealogy or one’s place of residence. It was symbolic of a far larger and more significant covenant—one that defines the spiritual state of all believers: the separation of that person from his sin. When the foreskin of a male’s penis is cut off (a process involving blood and pain) it cannot be reattached, nor does it grow back. Ever. This is a picture of what happens when we receive God’s covenant of grace (i.e., being circumcised in our hearts): our sins are separated from us, permanently and completely. But we can’t earn our salvation: it is *Christ* who shed the blood and endured the pain pictured in the circumcision rite.

“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.” (Genesis 17:12-13) To fine-tune and further explain the metaphor, the circumcision rite was extended to everyone who lived in Abraham’s household—even if they were only slaves. From a spiritual perspective, every Christian should be able to see his connection (and obligation) to the house of Abraham, the father of our faith, even if we are not biologically descended from him. As always, Israel was to perform the rite, and the gentiles were to observe it, ponder what it might mean, and honor the God who instituted it for the edification of all.

“The uncircumcised 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 17:14) The converse of the sign is also significant: if we retain our sins (which is what *not* being circumcised would represent), then we cannot be a part of the household of faith.

“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.” (Leviticus 12:2) TOM ch15, #564. In the Torah proper, it was the mother’s responsibility to have her baby boy circumcised on the eighth day of life. The chronological symbology is transparent enough: we mortals will remain unclean for “seven days,” that is, as long as we live in our fallen state—from the sin of Adam until the conclusion of Christ’s thousand-year reign. The “eighth day” represents the eternal state that will follow the Millennium. Our sin, then, will finally be removed from our race—the fact will at last catch up with the promise—when the last mortal believer has received his or her immortal resurrection body (as described in I Corinthians 15).

“Circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.” (Deuteronomy 10:16) Supporting scriptures for further exploration: Leviticus 26:41; Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Ezekiel 44:7; Romans 2:25, 28-29; Colossians 2:11, etc.

Illicit or Pre-Marital Sex; Rape

“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) TOM ch8, #300. Adultery would have been a stoning offense, but pre-marital sex is not “adultery” (technically) if the young woman was not promised to another. The Inventor of hormones, after all, knows how it works. But pre-marital sex is tantamount to marriage—if the girl’s father allows it to go forward. (For more on this, see Deuteronomy 22:29, below.)

“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) TOM ch6, #196. That seems pretty clear on the face of it. But I guess the question on my mind is, “How can you *prevent* your daughter from becoming a harlot when you are living a land that is *already* “full of wickedness”? Sigh.

“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. 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 22:13-21) TOM ch3, #75. I'm afraid that although we *could* do this, the result would be genocide in our morally corrupt culture. Virginity at marriage? *Forty-eight percent* of "first children" worldwide are born out of wedlock, and the percentages of births to unmarried women have doubled or tripled over the past half century. The mare has already left the barn—it's too late to close the door. What makes this even worse is that fornication/adultery is a scriptural euphemism for idolatry—of giving to "another god" what rightfully belongs only to Yahweh.

"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. 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, 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, but there was no one to save her." (Deuteronomy 22:23-27) TOM ch8, #288. Israelite gated cities were small and compact. If a girl screamed, it was taken as a "given" that any number of townsmen would immediately come to her aid. Out in the countryside, however, you might scream all day and no one would hear you. So this was (in Israelite society) deemed the simplest way to differentiate between rape and adultery. Note that rapists, as well as adulterers *and* adulteresses, were to be stoned to death. Victims, however, were presumed innocent. But the marriage status (betrothed vs. non-betrothed) played a part as well. Read on...

"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; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days." (Deuteronomy 22:28-29) TOM ch8, #301, 302; TCC 4.1.5, 4.1.8. If a non-betrothed virgin had

sex with a man, it was presumed to be consensual, but with a twist. When found out, the man would have to pay the traditional bride-price for her hand in marriage—but her father still had the option of deeming him a rapist (or merely a loser). If the father (heeding his daughter’s word—and remembering his own youth) decided that the marriage could proceed, it did, with the provision that the new husband could never divorce his bride—his whole life, for any reason. This presumably kept the hanky-panky down to manageable levels.

Incest

“None of you shall approach anyone who is near of kin to him, to uncover his nakedness: I am Yahweh. The nakedness of your father or the nakedness of your mother you shall not uncover. She is your mother; you shall not uncover her nakedness. The nakedness of your father’s wife you shall not uncover; it is your father’s nakedness. 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. The nakedness of your son’s daughter or your daughter’s daughter, their nakedness you shall not uncover; for theirs is your own nakedness. The nakedness of your father’s wife’s daughter, begotten by your father—she is your sister—you shall not uncover her nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s sister; she is near of kin to your father. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother’s sister, for she is near of kin to your mother. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s brother. You shall not approach his wife; she is your aunt. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law—she is your son’s wife—you shall not uncover her nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother’s wife; it is your brother’s nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, nor shall you take her son’s daughter or her daughter’s daughter, to uncover her nakedness. They are near of kin to her. It is wickedness. Nor shall you take a woman as a rival to her sister, to uncover her nakedness while the other is alive.”

(Leviticus 18:6-18) “Uncovering someone’s nakedness” is a thinly veiled euphemism for sexual intercourse. Extra-marital sexual contact generally is handled under other laws (such as the Seventh Commandment). But occasionally the opportunity arose for a man to marry a close relative, or perhaps the widow of a close relative. Here, then, such incestuous relationships are defined—and forbidden. God is (among other things) warning us about potential medical dangers we wouldn’t understand for another 3,500 years—the emergence of debilitating recessive genes.

“The man who lies with his father’s wife has uncovered his father’s nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them. If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death. They have committed perversion. Their blood shall be upon them.” (Leviticus 20:11-12) There’s more to it than preventative medicine, of course. There are also the overlapping issues of

honor and symbolism. Sex symbolizes the fruitful covenant relationship between God and mankind. Anything that violates this picture is forbidden.

“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) Multiple wives were allowed, for Yahweh would have parallel covenant relationships with both Israel and (through Yahshua) the church. But Christ cannot be the husband of (for example) the church and Islam at the same time.

“If a man takes his sister, his father’s daughter or his mother’s daughter, and sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness, it is a wicked thing. And they shall be cut off in the sight of their people. He has uncovered his sister’s nakedness. He shall bear his guilt.” (Leviticus 20:17) More incest rules. Ironically, Abraham’s wife Sarah was his half-sister.

“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother’s sister nor of your father’s sister, for that would uncover his near of kin. They shall bear their guilt. If a man lies with his uncle’s wife, he has uncovered his uncle’s nakedness. They shall bear their sin; they shall die childless. If a man takes his brother’s wife, it is an unclean thing. He has uncovered his brother’s nakedness. They shall be childless.” (Leviticus 20:19-21) The intended end result of sexual partnerships was to bear children. But certain potential relationships (and I’m sure you can perceive the spiritual application here) are doomed to remain fruitless.

“Cursed is the one who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.” (Deuteronomy 27:22) That is, his half-sister. Recessive genes again.

“Cursed is the one who lies with his mother-in-law.” (Deuteronomy 27:23) Ummm, okay.

Homosexuality

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.” (Leviticus 18:22) TOM ch3, #103; TTC 4.1.1. There’s nothing new about homosexuality. It is the prototypical perversion—sexual contact without the possibility of fruitfulness, thus a violation of the very first commandment God gave the human race: “Multiply and fill the earth.” Yahweh calls it “an abomination,” the strongest language in the entire Bible. How telling it is, then, that homosexuality has become a point of *pride* today for people who reject Christ—the celebration of a pointless, dead-end life.

“If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.” (Leviticus 20:13) TTC 4.2.1. If I may quote a paragraph from *The Torah Code* (4.2.6): “All of these sexual sins are symbolic, one way or another, of idolatry—

of giving the reverence and devotion due to Yahweh alone to someone or something else. With adultery, it's another "deity," some "god" other than Yahweh. With incest, it's apparently the worship of something "like God," but not actually God Himself, making it (if I'm seeing this correctly) a picture of man-made religion—a form of godliness bereft of its power to save. With homosexuality, it would appear to be reverence for one's own kind—in other words, it's a euphemism for today's secular humanism, the worship of man. That would make bestiality a picture of the direct worship of Satan—adoration of the beast. All of these things, then, are examples of sexual relationships between people (or things) other than husbands and their wives. And all of them are symbolic, one way or another, of unfaithfulness to Yahweh—the path of corruption, sterility, illegitimacy, and/or death.”

“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) TOM ch13, #366. For some reason, God never specifically forbade lesbianism (although we may safely infer from Leviticus 18:22 or 20:13 that it's a bad idea). But He did go out of His way to prohibit “cross-dressing,” the purposeful confusion of sexual identity. Of course, Moses could never have dreamed of (nor did he have the vocabulary to describe) the lengths to which this perversion has been taken recently. The idea of surgically and/or chemically altering one's sexual characteristics (with the goal of changing one's sexual identity) is surely a sign that we are nearing the Last Days. The symbology of gender roles (fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters) is a well-developed Biblical theme—which explains why Satan is so keen to blur the lines between the sexes. For more on this area of study, please see *The Torah Code*, Volume 4, Unit 1, elsewhere on this website.

Bestiality

“Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death.” (Exodus 22:19) My analysis of this bit of weirdness is quoted above: “Bestiality [is] a picture of the direct worship of Satan—adoration of the beast.”

“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.” (Leviticus 18:23) TOM ch3, #104. Satan works very hard these days to make what God defines as “perversion” seem normal and acceptable. So there is a choice implied: in the end, it's either “worship Yahweh,” or “worship Satan.”

“If a man mates with an animal, he shall surely be put to death, and you shall kill the animal. If a woman approaches any animal and mates with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood is upon them.” (Leviticus

20:15-16) If I may quote myself again (this time from *The End of the Beginning*, Volume 4, Appendix 6), “All of this begs the question: if you can only get a sexually transmitted disease from someone who was infected before you, how did these diseases begin in the first place? You’re not going to like the answer, I’m afraid. I was only able to track down a few of them, but they point toward parallel perversions. Syphilis is from a bacteria that lives naturally (and harmlessly) in sheep; and the HIV virus was first contracted by humans having sexual contact with primates—apes—in Africa. Chlamydia is caused by bacteria carried by dogs. Herpes is endemic in chimpanzee populations. In other words, the problem is bestiality. I’m having trouble seeing the attraction, but I’m told it exists.”

“Cursed is the one who lies with any kind of animal.” (Deuteronomy 27:21) Lest there should be any confusion, bestiality is not just weird, not just perverted—it’s cursed behavior.

Diseases and Bodily Functions

“Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: “When any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean. 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. 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.”

(Leviticus 15:1-12) TOM ch15, #569. We’re not talking about sin (moral failings) here, but the ordinary and largely unavoidable sources of uncleanness that are our lot as mortal humans. We can only speculate as to how disease was suppressed in the Garden of Eden, but ever since our fall into sin, we have been subject to all sorts of microbial dangers. It is telling that God built into His Law some practical precepts concerning basic hygiene—which if one followed “religiously” would minimize or prevent most communicable diseases.

“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) TOM ch15, #570, #571. If there were no “emissions of semen,” the human race would go extinct in one generation. That being said, God has declared that a state of “uncleanness” exists when this has happened—without reference to marital status, you’ll notice. Besides the general hygiene factor, the point (I think) is that our need for constant and recurring cleansing will persist as long as mortal mankind does—“until evening” being a transparent euphemism for physical death, both as individuals and as a species. This is not, however, an indication of sin. Remember: the tabernacle courtyard had both an altar of sacrifice (to take care of our sins) and a bronze laver (to cleanse our hands and feet—our works and our walk—before God).

“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) TOM ch15, #572. A woman’s customary menstrual cycle is the rough symbolic equivalent of a man’s “emissions of semen.” That is, beyond the obvious hygiene factors, it is symbolic of the periodic need for cleansing if we wish to be fruitful.

“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) TOM ch15, #573. See Luke 8:43-48. Christ takes our uncleanness upon Himself, healing us.

“You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness as long as she is in her customary impurity.” (Leviticus 18:19) TOM ch3, #101; TTC 4.1.8, 4.1.10. Allow me (once again) to quote from another passage (TOM ch15, #572) “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.’”

“If a man lies with a woman during her sickness and uncovers her nakedness, he has exposed her flow, and she has uncovered the flow of her blood. Both of them shall be cut off from their people.” (Leviticus 20:18) TOM ch3, #101. We are reminded that “the life is in the blood.” It is revealing that God chose “blood” to be the vehicle of cleansing of a woman’s reproductive system. And sure enough, medical science tells us that abstinence during menstruation is a safe, low-tech means of enhancing fertility.

“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.’ And the children of Israel did so, and put them outside the camp; as Yahweh spoke to Moses, so the children of Israel did.” (Numbers 5:1-4) TOM ch10, #391. The principle of quarantine is valid both in physical matters and spiritual ones. And it should apply to national security as well: Islam is a cultural cancer that infects a society from within—like spiritual leprosy. A nation (like America) founded on Christian principles should recognize the threat posed by this institutional evil and refuse to invite it in to our body. Political “correctness” is suicide.

“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) TOM ch16, #608. This seems awfully broad and non-specific. But the bottom line (from a prophetic point of view) is that (1) we are going to sin, whether we mean to or not. (2) Our sin separates us from God. (3) Evening (or sunset) is a thinly veiled euphemism for our inevitable physical deaths. (4) “Washing with water” is purification via the Word of God (see Ephesians 5:26), personified by Christ Himself. In other words, death will release us from our sinful state if we are relying upon Christ for atonement.

“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. 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 23:12-14) TOM ch16, #609. When I was researching vaccines (TEOTB, Appendix 6) I was surprised to discover that some virulent diseases (measles, pertussis, and smallpox for example) were already in severe decline *before* their vaccines were introduced, due to improved general health, cleaner water and sanitation, public utilities, better living and working conditions, improved nutrition and other medical advancements. So it’s not particularly surprising that Yahweh gave us a heavy-handed hint in the Torah.

“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 24:8-9) (See Leviticus 13-14) TOM ch15, #580. Miriam, the sister of Moses, had been stricken with leprosy because she had challenged the exclusive anointing of Moses (see Numbers 12). We are told that the whole episode was precipitated by her racial prejudice, for Moses had married an Ethiopian woman. (There’s a lesson for us in there somewhere, I think.) We are to heed His instructions to the priests, who were told how to identify “leprosy” (which turned out to be a broad range of infectious conditions) and quarantine the victims to safeguard the populace. There are no Levitical priests today, of course, but the church is referred to as “a kingdom of priests,” in that we have access to and intercessory privileges with God. It is therefore up to us to safeguard the congregation against “spiritual diseases” ranging from entrenched extra-scriptural religious practices to encroaching Islam.

Diet

“God said, ‘See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.’” (Genesis 1:29) TTC 1.3.6, 3.1.9. In the beginning, before we fell into sin, a strictly vegan diet was sufficient to keep us well-fed and healthy. Note, however, that it was the genetic component of the plant (the seed—the fruit) that was to be our food. Even back then, God was telling us that something (and later, Someone) would have to die in order that we could have life.

“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.” (Genesis 9:3) TOM ch5, #167, TTC 3.2.9. At the time of the flood of Noah, the deteriorated ecosphere required that animal-based food—meat, eggs, dairy, etc.—be added to the human menu.

“You shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.” (Genesis 9:4) From the moment meat was placed on the human menu, we were admonished to remove the blood before eating it. The ramifications are both physical and spiritual.

“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 22:31) No college-level course in microbiology was offered here—just “Do as I say and you’ll remain healthy.”

“You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.” (Exodus 23:19) TOM ch5, #163, #164; TTC 4.1.3. Weird, but okay.

“You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.” (Exodus 34:26) TOM ch5, #163, #164; TTC4.1.3. That’s twice. This must be important. Keep reading.

“This shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwellings: you shall eat neither fat nor blood.” (Leviticus 3:17) Not only was blood not to be eaten, the concentrations of fat were to be avoided as well. In the Levitical sacrifices (which can’t be performed today, of course) the blood was to be poured out on the ground, and the “fatty lobes” on certain internal organs were to be reserved for the altar’s fire in honor of Yahweh. But the same rules held even if you were only fixing dinner: eat neither fat nor blood.

“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. Moreover 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 7:22-27) TOM ch5, #166; TTC 3.1.4. More on fat and blood. You couldn’t eat an animal that had died in some manner other than purposeful slaughtering, but you could make use of the fat for such purposes as making candles or soap.

“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: 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 11:1-8) TOM ch5, #143, 144. Noah had been told he no longer had to be a strict vegetarian, but could now eat any animal he could catch. Here a millennium and a

half later, God has once again altered the rules in response to a deteriorating biosphere. He has restricted the “okay-to-eat” list of land animals to plant eaters with complicated digestive systems: cattle, sheep, goats, and their wild cousins, deer, antelope, bison, etc. As usual, we wouldn’t know *why* until thousands of years later, but if we simply trusted Yahweh, we would remain healthier.

“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. They 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 11:9-12) TOM ch5, #145, 146. Again, the list of seafood has been restricted to true fish. Even if there are things in the water that can be quite tasty, we are not to eat them, but rather trust Yahweh to know what’s best.

“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 [Hebrew: *peres*, literally, an ossifrage, or osprey, not the ostrich], 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) TOM ch5, #148. As for birds, “barnyard birds” and their wild cousins with a basically vegetarian diet (excuse the odd bug or worm) are okay to eat, but hunters and carrion birds are not safe.

“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) TOM ch5, #149. You’d think that all bugs would be off limits, but one family was declared by God to be okay to eat—which is not to say they aren’t an acquired taste. Locusts and grasshoppers, it turns out, have very discriminating palates, and are thus deemed safe.

“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. Therefore I said to the children of Israel, ‘No one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood.’” (Leviticus 17:10-12) TOM ch5, #167; TTC 2.3, 4.2.4.

“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) TOM ch5, #168. This precept has been repeated sporadically many times since first given at the time of the flood. Not only is blood invariably toxic when compared to the animal’s meat, this is a relatively transparent reference to the blood of Christ that would be shed for the atonement of our sins. We can’t thrive (spiritually speaking) by taking the blood of the Savior—He must be allowed to offer it up freely on our behalf.

“Every person who eats what died naturally or what was torn by beasts, whether he is a native of your own country or a stranger, he shall both wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. Then he shall be clean. But if he does not wash them or bathe his body, then he shall bear his guilt.” (Leviticus 17:15-16) WMM ch1, #650. Blood again. Don’t eat it.

“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) TOM ch9, #360, #361. “Uncircumcised” here bears the connotation of being forbidden, i.e., outside of the covenant.

“You shall not eat anything with the blood.” (Leviticus 19:26) TOM ch9, #335, #336. Just in case we missed it: don’t eat blood.

“You shall therefore distinguish between clean animals and unclean, between unclean birds and clean, and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean.” (Leviticus 20:25) TTC3.2.9. The lesson with all of these dietary rules is to be discerning about what to put into your body. The parallel spiritual ramifications are obvious enough.

“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. Only you shall not eat the blood; you shall pour it on the earth like water.” (Deuteronomy 12:15-16) TOM ch14, #547. God drew a distinction between making *sacrifices* (which could only be done by the priests at the tabernacle or temple) and simply eating meat—whether clean domesticated animals or wild game—which could be done whenever the mood struck. Oh, and don’t eat blood—make sure the carcass is properly drained.

“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. Only 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. You shall not eat it, that it may go well with you and your children after you, when you do what is right in the sight of Yahweh.” (Deuteronomy 12:20-25) TOM ch5, #157; TOM ch14, #547; TTC 3.2.2. Call it a hunch, but I don’t think God wants us to eat any meat that hasn’t been drained of its blood.

“You shall not eat any detestable thing. 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. Nevertheless, of those that chew the cud or have cloven hooves, you shall not eat, such as these: the camel, the hare, and the rock hyrax; for they chew the cud but do not have cloven hooves; they are unclean for you. Also the swine is unclean for you, because it has cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud; you shall not eat their flesh or touch their dead carcasses.” (Deuteronomy 14:3-8) TOM ch14, #554. God was very specific about what kinds of animals were safe to eat. Basically, the “safe” list boiled down to animals that had discriminating vegetarian palates and complex digestive systems. It didn’t matter if pigs and possums could be mighty tasty: comparatively speaking, they weren’t safe to eat.

“These you may eat of all that are in the waters: you may eat all that have fins and scales. And whatever does not have fins and scales you shall not eat; it is unclean for you.” (Deuteronomy 14:9-10) This pretty much boils down the seafood menu to true fish. Lobsters, shrimp, crabs, oysters, and clams are important as God’s ecological clean-up crew, but they were never intended to be food for humans.

“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 [literally: 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) TOM ch5, #147; TTC 3.2.9. The key, once again, is the bird’s diet: seed eaters—vegetarians (give or take the odd bug)—are okay to eat, but hunters and carrion birds, while important ecologically, are not safe to eat.

“Every creeping thing that flies is unclean for you; they shall not be eaten.” (Deuteronomy 14:19) TOM ch5, #154. There were exceptions, listed elsewhere (see Leviticus 11:22). Jumping insects like locusts, crickets, or grasshoppers (all

of which are very fastidious eaters) are safe to eat—which is not to say they’re not an acquired taste.

“You may eat all clean birds.” (Deuteronomy 14:20) Clean birds are those that don’t eat the meat of dead animals. The issue would once again appear to have something to do with the effects of eating blood—even on a second-hand basis.

“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) Again, it’s impossible to drain the blood from an already-dead animal.

“You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.” (Deuteronomy 14:21) TOM ch5, #163, #164; TTC4.1.3. Okay, as odd as this sounds, this is the *third time* God has told us not to do this. And that fact alone begs us to dig deeper. The key (I think) is the relationship between the young goat and his mother. If we see the young goat as Christ in his role as sin bearer, then His “mother” would be (in a symbolic sense) the Holy Spirit, and her “milk” would indicate that which comes from the Spirit to sustain us—the word of God. So basically, Yahweh is warning us not to use His word as a weapon against His work (for example, taking His word out of context in order to elevate ourselves, or subjugate, control, or otherwise take advantage of the would-be faithful). *Both* of the Exodus passages we saw earlier (23:19 and 34:26) tie this concept to firstfruits—the idea that we are to dedicate the *first* of our earnings or harvest to Yahweh. I can only surmise that failing to do so would comprise an example of “boiling a young goat in its mother’s milk.” That is, when we neglect honoring God with our firstfruits, we have in effect used God’s bounty to suggest we’re more important than Christ.

Unclean Animals

“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) TOM ch15, #561. This is an extension of the Levitical dietary laws. The idea is, not only are we not to eat unclean animals, we aren’t even to touch their dead bodies if we can help it. This does not preclude petting your cat—the emphasis is on contact with their carcasses. I think the moral lesson here is that there is a direct and proportional relationship between that which is “unclean” (that is, something you shouldn’t

assimilate into your body) and that which is overtly sinful. For example, we should be wary of the entertainments we participate in. The music, books, activities and shows we experience can be either good for us, or neutral (read: worthless), or dangerous. We are to be discerning.

“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. Anything on which any of them 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. Nevertheless a spring or a cistern, in which there is plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass becomes unclean. And if a part of any such carcass falls on any planting seed which is to be sown, it remains clean. But if water is put on the seed, and if a part of any such carcass falls on it, it becomes unclean to you.” (Leviticus 11:29-38) TOM ch15, #561; TTC 3.3.

Uncleanness happens. We need to be aware of what causes it, and how to return our lives back to their “clean” state.

“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) TOM ch15, #563. Even clean animals (with all the spiritual symbology that concept carries with it) sometimes die of natural causes—and somebody has to deal with the carcasses. (My mind immediately leaps to Reformers like Luther and Calvin, dealing with the corpse of the once “alive” Roman Catholic Church.) Since we are venal, vulnerable mortal men, the process of handling the carcass of even “clean” animals can render us temporarily defiled in the process. A few more symbolic clues: (1) one’s “clothes” are a metaphor for “the way God sees us,” that is our spiritual state. Are we butt naked before God, wearing fig leaves, the skins of slain animals, the wool of good works, or the clean white linen of imputed righteousness? Whatever state we’re in, God has provided the means for cleansing. And (2), “evening” is a thinly veiled euphemism for physical death—that which awaits us all at the end of the day. In other words, we are not going to become perfect in this life, for even if we’re redeemed and forgiven, we are still fallen, mortal humans. Yes, Yahweh has an “upgrade” planned for us—Human 2.0—but it requires a total reboot of the system in order to install it (if you catch my drift).

“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. You shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creeps; nor shall you make yourselves unclean with them, lest you be defiled by them. For I am Yahweh your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am Yahweh who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.” (Leviticus 11:41-45) TOM ch5, #150, #151. The dietary ramifications are clear enough. But the lesson here is primarily spiritual: in our vernacular, *don't hang out with creeps*.

That is, stay away from whatever God considers “abominable.” The quick list: (1) the customs of the pagans (Leviticus 18:30); (2) those who believe there is no God (Psalm 14:1, 53:1); (3) those who “drink iniquity like water” (Job 15:16); (4) those who “profess to know God but deny Him by their actions” (Titus 1:16); (5) the cowardly, unbelieving, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars (Revelation 21:8); (6) serving gods other than Yahweh (Jeremiah 44:4); (7) unclean animals (Deuteronomy 14:3, Leviticus 11:43); (8) idolatry (Isaiah 65:4, I Peter 4:3, I Kings 11:7, Malachi 2:11); (9) dishonest weights and measures (Micah 6:10, Proverbs 11:1); (9) devious people (Proverbs 3:32); (10) the prayer of one who rejects the Torah (Proverbs 28:9); (11) homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, Deuteronomy 22:5); (12) cross-dressing (Deuteronomy 22:5); and last, but not least (13) Satan masquerading as Christ—the “abomination of desolation” (Mark 13:14, Daniel 12:11; Matthew 24:15).

So, do you still think you're “Torah compliant” just because you're circumcised, you meet for worship on Saturday instead of Sunday, and you once built a *sukkah* in your backyard at the Feast of Tabernacles? Bear in mind that these precepts I've listed are *only* the parts of the Torah that can be kept in the absence of a temple, priesthood, and a theocratic society dwelling in the Promised Land. God has commanded that far more than this truncated list be kept—even though doing so has been literally impossible for the past two millennia.

We are faced, then, with a conundrum. It is obvious that we cannot do what God said to do—and even if it were possible, none of us ever has. It is patently obvious that what Paul declared is true: **“All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.”** (Romans 3:23) Jeremiah put it this way: **“Yahweh, we confess our wickedness and that of our ancestors, too. We all have sinned against you.”** (Jeremiah 14:20 NLT)

And it's no good throwing mankind's failure back in the face of the Jews, since only they (technically) were required to keep the Torah. The fact is, what "Law" we gentiles *did* have—our consciences—was violated at every turn. It is as if we never even tried, though the evidence of a holy Creator is, and always has been, all around us. For the most part, we *know* what's right—we just don't want to do it, and even if we *do* want to, we fail.

None of this took Yahweh by surprise. From the moment of creation, before we even *were*, He knew our problem, and had a plan for solving it. So what was the purpose of the Torah, if He knew we couldn't (or at least wouldn't) keep it? Truth be told, most of it was a pantomime or dress rehearsal describing His plan of redemption. Israel was tasked with perform these rites, and the rest of the world was supposed to observe them and ponder their meaning. Notwithstanding God's declaration, **"You shall keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them,"** (Leviticus 18:5) the Torah *itself* was not expected to be the road to our salvation, but was "only" intended to be the *map* (so to speak) describing that road. The "road" is Yahshua the Christ, who informed us, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."** (John 14:6)

The Law was designed neither to save us nor enslave us. It was, rather, designed to *inform* us. Although we aren't really expected to be Torah compliant, we all ought to be Torah *observant*. That is, we should study and heed these priceless Instructions, for they reveal the very mind of God.

The Commandments of Christ

Our first appendix listed the things commanded by God in the Torah that can still be done today—that is, *without* a temple, priesthood, and theocratic Israelite society dwelling within the Land of Promise. The vast preponderance of Torah precepts, of course—the ones depending upon these things for their performance—were fulfilled in the life and mission of Yahshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ). That is, these precepts were actually prophecies, dress rehearsals meant to foreshadow what Yahweh's Anointed One would achieve on behalf of mankind. All of the offerings and sacrifices, all of the cleansing rituals, and all of the priestly ceremony were symbolic, one way or another, of that which Yahshua accomplished at Calvary: the atonement of our sins, our sanctification before God, and our eternal reconciliation with Him. So Israel was charged with “acting them out,” rehearsing them like players on the world's stage.

The remainder—the relatively small percentage of Torah precepts that *can* still be kept today—teach us how to dwell in peace and love with our neighbors, how to keep our bodies functioning properly during the days Yahweh has allotted to us, and live holy lives before our God. But all of this begs the question: what did *Yahshua Himself* instruct us to do? After all, He told us, **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”** (Matthew 5:17) His followers called Him “Teacher” and “Rabbi” (literally, Master). So what did He teach them (i.e., *us*) to do? If He is the One we have chosen to be our Master and Lord, does it not behoove us to identify precisely what His instructions were—and then follow them? These teachings will be the subject of this Appendix.

Since Christ is Yahweh in flesh, we might have expected a simple recitation of the high points of the Torah. But the Torah, you'll recall, was addressed exclusively to Israel—with the idea that everyone else would observe their performance and subsequent blessing and come to honor the God who instituted such a wise roadmap to successful life—not to mention such a symbolically pregnant revelation of our Creator's plan for our reconciliation. Beyond the sad fact that Israel did *not* keep the Torah's precepts, we must remember that Christ was also addressing the church—future believers in the efficacy of His mission. And the church (the *ekklesia*, literally, those “called-out” by Christ) would expand far beyond its beginnings as a strictly “Jewish sect,” and thus would not, by definition, be subject to the Torah in any specific way. (That is, we gentile believers were given a different job to do—distinct from Israel's.)

And sure enough, what we actually observe in scripture is that Yahshua *did not* merely repeat the Torah's commandments and call it a day. Nothing He said, mind you, is incompatible with the Law of Moses, but He takes obedience in a whole new direction, stressing the spirit over the letter, pure motives over rote compliance, and relationship over submission. Theoretically, one could grit his teeth and comply with the Torah's overt commandments—though none of us has ever done so perfectly. But Yahshua's commandments are infinitely more difficult to keep as fallen human beings, for they take not only outward obedience into account, but also our *reasons* for doing these good things. Moses tells not to murder; Christ tells us that hatred or resentment (i.e., harboring motives for murder) is pretty much the same thing. Moses tells us not to commit adultery; Yahshua informs us that “merely” embracing lust is tantamount to adultery—even if we never laid a hand on the object of our desire.

In other words, doing what Christ said to do *looks impossible*, and it's even harder than it looks. Speaking of the Torah, Peter summed it up for us: “Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the [gentile] disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.” (Acts 15:10-11) Salvation, he says, comes through grace—imputed righteousness bestowed upon us through our faith in the finished work of Christ. That is, it is *not* the result of doing good works—even if we *are* instructed to do these things. Furthermore, this principle is true for everyone—Jew and gentile alike: we are saved by grace through faith, or not at all.

That being said, our works—keeping Christ's specific commandments—are vitally important, for several reasons. (1) They separate us from the world, making us stand out as being “different” from the lost. (2) They comprise our most eloquent testimony—those “actions that speak louder than our words.” And (3) they identify to the world (and to ourselves) precisely who our God is—Who it is that we worship and endeavor to obey (even if we're not perfect in our compliance). Conversely, if we proclaim Christ with our lips but don't at least *attempt* to keep His commandments, then we are revealed to be hypocrites, pretenders, liars. As Christ Himself said, “**If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word.**” (John 14:23) And that behooves us to come to know what “His word” is—and not just vague feelings or sweeping generalizations (like “Be holy”) but those specific things Yahshua actually said to do.

For the most part, these aren't really “things we are supposed to do,” a laundry list of rules to keep or a “bucket list” of tasks to mindlessly check off, like the seven pillars of Islam. Rather, they are most often expressed as “ways we should be,” or “attitudes that ought to characterize us,” or “things we should keep in mind.” It would seem that even the “Do this” passages are mostly examples of

larger subjects that we are to apply creatively to a broad range of human endeavor. So when Yahshua says to “wash one another’s feet,” or “go the extra mile,” we are to view these precepts as launching pads for successful Christian life and testimony—not specific rules, logical extensions of which may be ignored with impunity.

A quick perusal of the subheadings comprising this appendix will provide some idea of what I’m talking about:

Worship God Alone

Love One Another

Walk God’s Path; Grow in Grace

Be Salt and Light in the World

Do Not Worry or Fear

Be Discerning; Be Wise

Believe in God’s Power, Mercy, and Grace.

Have Honest and Godly Motives

Pray in God’s Will

Lay Up Treasures in Heaven

Repent

Observe God’s timing

Recognize that Christ Fulfills the Law and the Prophets

Heed God’s Symbols, Metaphors, and Parables

A few words about content and format: Naturally, all of these entries contain quotes from Yahshua Himself—the “red letter” stuff in your Bible. So most of them are recorded in the Gospels, with a few from Revelation and even one from I Corinthians. Not everything Yahshua said can be construed as “commandments,” however. I have not included passages that are purely informational, no matter how important they might be. But if a course of action is implied, even if not stated outright, I have presented the quote for your consideration.

If Christ quoted a precept from the Torah, even if He didn’t further comment on it, I have included the statement. We’ll find that nothing He said contradicts or

weakens the Law of Moses, though much of it goes *beyond* the Torah, cutting straight to the heart of the matter—to our innermost motivations and desires. Christ didn't impose rules for rules' sake, but invariably used them only to reveal to us what we were really all about. Whereas the Torah (not to mention the oral traditions that centuries of rabbinical meddling had piled upon it) allowed one to keep the “letter of the Law” as far as the public could see, the *spirit* of the law, revealing one's true heart attitude, was always what was on Yahshua's mind. Of course, that principle was true of Moses' revelation as well (as in when he pleaded with Israel to “Circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer,” Deuteronomy 10:16) but the very structure of the Torah suggested the “letter” first, with the “spirit” coming in a distant second. Not so with Christ's teachings.

We get the feeling that Yahshua said some of these things on multiple occasions, and quite a few of them show up in more than one Gospel account, perhaps with slight variations (which is quite natural, since they were spoken in Aramaic but recorded in Koine Greek, on their way to being translated into a plethora of slightly different English versions). I haven't quoted every variant, but have rather recited only one (often Matthew's—which seem to reflect a publican's penchant for precision) and merely referenced the others. If you're curious, I encourage you to look up the parallel statements.

As we might expect, some of Yahshua's instructions were intended for a universal audience, and some were meant for specific people under specific circumstances—such as those of us living in the “next-to-last” days. But all of it is “given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (II Timothy 3:16-17)

Worship God Alone

In Moses' microcosm of the Law, the Ten Commandments, the very first (and most fundamental) precept is “You shall have no other gods before Me.” (Exodus 20:3) Whether “before Me” means “above Me,” or merely “in My presence” is left unclear (though the former seems more likely). But the Second Commandment (the one forbidding the making of idols) flatly states that we are to have no other “gods” *at all*—that Yahweh was to be the *only* thing in our lives receiving devotion or adoration. The surprise would come when we discovered that Yahweh would provide *His own* “graven image” of Himself for us—in the person of Yahshua the Messiah.

The first hurdle to get over (for some) is the concept that Yahshua—Jesus Christ—was *actually* Yahweh Himself in human form. He was not “merely” a prophet or a messenger or a teacher, though He was all of those things. The fact

that He temporarily set aside His heavenly glory and chose to manifest Himself as a mortal man dwelling among men should not cloud the issue of Christ's *identity*. He was—and *is*—God Almighty.

He didn't just pop out of Mary's womb declaring that fact, however. The whole point of God's coming as an innocent and helpless baby born of a woman, coming in the form of a servant, was so that He might sacrifice Himself—in precise fulfillment of the Torah's myriad offerings—as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” That meant that He couldn't declare His true identity publicly until the very end of His mortal life. Indeed, He spend most of His three and a half years of ministry deflecting questions about Who He really was. He mostly called Himself “the Son of Man,” a title that reveals His love, but not His identity. Getting stoned for imagined or presumed blasphemy would not have met the requirements of the Torah or Prophets. He had to go to the cross in order to fulfill the Law: He had to be the Passover Lamb chosen by the High Priest—who declared, without realizing the import of his prophecy, “It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” (John 11:50) So Yahshua was quite coy about declaring His divinity until it was time for Him to be sacrificed for our sins on Passover, 33 AD. That being said, His miracles revealed His deity quite convincingly, for no one who was not of God could do such things.

The angel who announced the conception of Yahshua to His mother Mary said He would be called “the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). But the only direct and unambiguous Old Testament prophecies of this concept are found in the Psalms: “I will declare the decree: Yahweh has said to Me, ‘You are My Son; today I have begotten You.’” (Psalm 2:7) And the Psalmist Ethan prophesies, “He shall cry to Me, ‘You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.’ Also I will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.” (Psalm 89:26-27) Yahshua never actually referred to Himself as “the Son of God,” although when pressed by the High Priest at His trial, He could not deny it. But the title *was* used of Him by others—the insightful Simon Peter, for example, in addition to Satan and a few demons whom Yahshua had cast out. (Later in this Appendix, you'll find a whole section on “Observing God's Timing,” which often meant concealing Christ's divine identity until the moment was right. Of course, now that the cat is out of the bag, we are free to shout that truth from the rooftops.)

To our generation, even the “Son-of-God” title sounds a bit slippery, like saying He was actually “something less than God,” or “a second-generation deity.” But in the idiom of the day, it was perfectly clear: a son (especially the firstborn) *was* his father for all practical purposes. That is, they had the same profession, the same agenda, the same authority, the same assets, the same reputation, and the same honor. And if the father was the *king*, the firstborn son

was presumed to be the *future king*. Yahshua proved that He possessed the same power as His Father Yahweh by rising from the dead under His own authority on the third day. So when we worship the Messiah, we *are* worshiping God alone: He and Yahweh are One.

That's the only reason Yahshua could say with a straight face, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."** (John 14:6) No one would fully comprehend what that meant, of course, until the significance of His death and resurrection had sunk in. As He explained (*after* He had risen) to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32), the Law and the Prophets had foretold His mission in a thousand different ways. What they had read in the Tanakh was merely the shadow of God's plan, while Christ was the reality casting that shadow. Coming to God "through Him" was tantamount to exercising faith in the efficacy of His perfect life, His sacrificial death, and His miraculous and unprecedented resurrection. As He Himself had said, **"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."** (John 6:29)

At the beginning of His ministry, after being baptized by John, Christ went out to be tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Naturally, He made good use of the "whole armor of God" (see Ephesians 6:10-18), especially the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (v. 17) He fended off Satan's enticements by quoting scripture: **"But He answered [Satan] and said, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God....' It is written again, 'You shall not tempt Yahweh your God....'"** Note that here, toe-to-toe with the devil, Yahshua clearly equated Himself with Yahweh.

In the Psalm 2 passage I quoted above, Yahweh promised to give His Son "the nations for an inheritance, and the ends of the earth for His possession." But here, Satan offered to give Yahshua all of that—*without going to the cross*—if He would only bow down before him. **"Then Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship Yahweh your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"** (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16, and 6:13; cf. Luke 4:1-13) Not surprisingly, Yahweh in Flesh (Yahshua) confirmed what Yahweh in Spirit had directed Moses to proclaim: worship Yahweh alone.

The Third Commandment (the one about not "taking the name of God in vain") *literally* means we are not to use the name or reputation of Yahweh in a manner that is empty, worthless, false, or futile. That is, we are not to attribute God's character or works to someone else, and vice versa. But that's exactly what the Pharisees were doing (whether they knew it or not) when they accused Yahshua of operating in demonic power when He cast out demons: **"Now when the Pharisees heard [about the healing of the demon-possessed man] they said, 'This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons....'"** Excuse me, gentlemen; your jealousy is showing. The proper response would have been,

“Praise God; this man has been delivered from his affliction. We should enquire as to His Healer’s relationship with the Almighty, for there obviously is one.”

“But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.’”

Yahshua cut straight to the flaw in their paranoid logic. **“If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house....”** You can’t cast out demons unless you’re operating in a power greater than theirs. *Do the math*, He says: *what you’ve seen here is evidence that I am wielding the very power of God.*

And because you have witnessed this miracle, you must therefore choose a side—either Yahweh’s, or Satan’s: **“He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad. Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.”** (Matthew 12:24-32) The implied imperative here is to look at the evidence and worship God alone, for He has defeated Satan before your very eyes. Do not, under any circumstances, treat the Spirit of God with contempt.

The next one is subtle, but bear with me. Yahshua said, **“When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.”** (Matthew 12:43-45) He’s saying, in effect, that it doesn’t help to turn your back on a false or empty religion if you don’t replace it with the true worship of Yahweh. Leaving Islam for Hinduism (for example), or atheism for new-age “spirituality” doesn’t fill any real need in your life: you have merely exchanged one demon for another (or several of them), jumping back and forth between the frying pan and the fire. We are designed to worship God alone—the One True God, Yahweh, through His incarnation, Yahshua.

A variation on the theme is presented here: **“Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil....”** With an overwhelming sense of gratitude, love, and

worship, Mary (a sister of the man whom Christ had raised from the dead) spent the equivalent of a year's wages in a spectacularly lavish gesture that not even she fully understood. But how do you demonstrate your appreciation to God, when you suddenly perceive that He is standing in your very presence? You show your devotion in the most extravagant manner you can. Note that it wasn't just the cost of the fragrant oil, either. Mary was a wealthy woman, but she assumed the posture of the lowliest of servants before Yahshua, kneeling before Him to wipe His feet with her hair. She worshiped God alone, having recognized God's presence in the Person of Yahshua—and she didn't care what anybody thought of her outlandish, emotional act.

But as inspirational as it was, emulating Mary was not the commandment Yahshua issued here. **“But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, 'Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.’”** (John 12:1-8) There will, of course, be opportunity and impetus to “cast our crowns” before the feet of Christ when we at last see Him in Person. But in the meantime, He issued a warning: “Leave her alone.” That is, don't disparage or interfere with what may seem to you like outrageous displays of devotional fervor on the part of people more demonstrative—or less practical—than you are. There is room (and need) for both Mary and Martha in the Kingdom of Heaven. Remember the wise words of Solomon: “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1) And bear in mind what happened to Michal, King David's wife, after she ridiculed her husband for celebrating with reckless abandon before Yahweh: she remained barren—childless—her entire life. (See II Samuel 6:23.)

It cannot be overstressed: if we are to worship God alone, we must be “in Christ.” There is no other way to achieve reconciliation, for as we saw above, Yahshua said, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”** (John 14:6) So His final word on the subject is as follows: **“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned....”** Picture a grapevine. It is rooted in the earth, from which it draws water and nourishment. But the fruit (if any) grows on the branches that extend outward from the central trunk (called “the vine” here). The branches do not (and cannot) produce fruit apart from their connection to (actually, their *growth from*) the vine. If cut off, they simply shrivel and die. So to

be fruitful and productive, the branches must “abide,” be anchored in and growing from, the central vine.

The same is true of our relationship with God. We cannot “do good works” apart from Him—no matter how much we might want to. **“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”** (John 15:4-10) Christ is the vine, our lifeline to Yahweh (represented here by the good earth). Once again, Yahshua has equated Himself with Father Yahweh, without actually saying so. If we are connected to Him, we are connected to Yahweh as well, for they are one symbiotic system, one entity. In fact, the *only* way for us “branches” to be connected to the sustaining earth (Yahweh) is through the “vine,” Yahshua.

But there is a caveat. It is also possible to be a branch growing on another vine—something other than Christ—growing not in God, but in evil, depleted, or poisonous soil. Even if there is a harvest in this scenario, it won’t be “good fruit.” The grapes of wrath will be either tasteless, sour, or downright poisonous. The good news is that even if we were “born” on a bad vine, anchored in toxic ground, it is possible to break us off and graft us into God’s Messiah, becoming in the process part of a living, growing, fruitful entity planted in God. And better still, the choice of which vine we branches wish to “abide in” is ours alone. Who ever heard of such a thing?

The stunning bottom line: we become part of whatever we worship.

Love One Another

If the instructions of God were to be boiled down to one word, one concept, it would have to be *love*. This may come as something of a shock (or at least an epiphany) to people who are not intimately familiar with the Christian Scriptures, for every religion on earth—including nominal (read: apostate) Christianity—operates on some other paradigm. The reason, of course, is that *religion* (by definition) is man’s search for god (however we define “him”). So the starting point is our inevitably flawed guess at what the Supreme Being might be like, and what he (or she) must want.

For example, Islam assumes (based on the opinion of its lone “prophet,” Muhammad) that their god will be happy with nothing less than world conquest—even though he relies solely on the sword of his Muslim warriors to achieve that goal: Allah never lifts a finger in his own cause. Hindus recognize over three hundred million “gods,” who (according to common wisdom) must be constantly

appeased with offerings and ritual prayers, or they'll lose focus and cease doing the things gods are supposed to do, like making predictable weather and causing crops to grow. A plethora of spin off Eastern religions (e.g. Buddhism, Shintoism, Taoists, etc.) are essentially atheistic in nature, focused on achieving inner peace in a world wracked with turmoil, through introspection, meditation, and total self-absorption. Their "holy grail" is to achieve nothing—or rather, *nothingness*—escaping the cycle of reincarnation through the annihilation of the soul. Atheism too is a religion in every sense of the word, worshiping man (in a sect called secular humanism), the environment, or blind chance. Nominal (i.e., not-genuine) Christianity, meanwhile, seeks to please the god they have invented, through such means as obedience (not to god, but to the church), alms, rituals, penance, veneration of saints, lowest-common-denominator theology, and whatever "cause" momentarily attracts their attention. (For a more detailed analysis of all this, see *The End of the Beginning*, Appendix 11: "The Faith Factor," elsewhere on this website.)

But Yahweh's concept is the antithesis of religion. Technically, He doesn't want us to search for Him at all, but rather to simply trust Him, following the path He Himself has laid at our feet. We cannot think, work, or buy our way to God; we can only graciously and humbly receive the free gift of salvation that's revealed in His Word. God (Yahweh) loves us, even though we're fallen, sinful creatures. And He has shown that love by providing a means by which we might be redeemed (bought back from bondage in sin) and reconciled—reunited—with Him. The work and sacrifice is all done on Yahweh's side of the equation. Our role is simply to receive it, giving thanks and honoring God by reciprocating His awesome love. I know: it sounds "too easy," "too good to be true." But the reality is, only innocence can atone for guilt—and *we're not innocent*. If God didn't provide grace as a free gift, we would forever remain lost in our sins. So as God loved us, He asks that we love one another in return, "paying forward" His grace, as it were.

It's not as if this concept was something new, something invented by Yahshua and spread by His disciples. It had been around since the very beginning, and was even codified into the Torah: **"Then one of them, a lawyer, asked [Yahshua] a question, testing Him, and saying, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, 'You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."** (Matthew 22:35-39, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18; cf. Mark 12:28-31) And as John would later point out (see I John 4:7-21, etc.), the only effective way to demonstrate our love for God is to love our fellow man; and conversely, if we don't love our neighbors, we don't really love God either.

This might sting a bit, but “loving our neighbors” means more than simply tolerating or ignoring them. Yahshua—mostly in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7, Luke 6)—taught us what such “love” looked like. It requires a soft heart and a godly attitude: in other words, you can’t fake it.

He said, **“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’”** So far, so good. I’ve never murdered anybody. **“But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.”** Okay, I’m hanging onto that phrase “without a cause” with every fiber of my being. **“And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire....”** Uh-oh. I’m in trouble now. “Raca” is an epithet meaning “empty-headed,” a stupid, good-for-nothing numbskull. *But Lord, I’m dealing with your enemies here—or at the very least, people who don’t agree with me politically, morally, or spiritually.* He tells me, “Are they not merely lost, as you once were? Let Me deal with them.” The word translated “fool” here is the Greek *moros*, from which we get our “moron.” It literally means dull in understanding, insipid, or mentally inert. Two of my adopted children were *moros*—*literally* brain-damaged—so I would never use the word as a pejorative (except when I *do*). Interestingly, Yahshua Himself used this very word to describe hypocritical scribes and Pharisees (see Matthew 23:17). *Moros* pops up a dozen places in the Gospels and Epistles to describe various states of misunderstanding or error—even (in I Corinthians 4:10) of Christ’s Apostles in the eyes of foolish people who presumed they know better. All I can do here is agree with Yahshua: calling someone a moron is a dangerous thing to do. Judge not, lest you yourself be judged.

Yahshua continues: **“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.”** If you can’t find it in your heart to live in peace with your fellow man, then don’t presume you can “buy” your way into God’s good graces with alms or penance. God is *primarily* interested in our love for one another—even if it’s only one sided. **“Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.”** (Matthew 5:21-26) The point here, if I may paraphrase, is “Don’t insist on life being fair, for this life—populated as it is by fallen, sinful men like yourself—is anything but. Rather, do whatever you can to defuse personal grievances before they take on a life of their own, before your pride has swallowed you whole and spit you out.” Love your neighbor, even if it costs you—even if he doesn’t *deserve* your love.

A few verses later, Yahshua repeated and clarified the principle: **“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.”** (Matthew 5:38-42) Yes, the punishment should fit the crime, and justice is to be preferred to corruption. But at the same time, know for certain that “vengeance belongs to Yahweh.” In the end, He is the one whose right it is to determine what’s just and what is not. He can be trusted to “make things right” on His own schedule. In the meantime, we are to gracefully allow the morons of this world (did I just say that? *Again?*) to trample our rights and demean our character. Are your taxes well-nigh unbearable? Pay them anyway—without complaint. It’s only money, and our Father owns the cattle on a thousand hills—and the hills. Did you get a traffic ticket for that perfectly safe one-mile-an-hour “California rolling stop” through the right turn at the red light? Vow to do better, and get out your checkbook. Just be thankful for all those times you were driving 40 in a 35 MPH zone, and *didn’t* get caught. (And yes, those are personal examples from my own life. You know what *you’ve* done as well, I imagine. Face it: the only *sinless* person died at birth.)

These sayings are quotes from the Sermon on the Mount. This is Luke’s recounting of what Yahshua said next: **“But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you....”** Love our *enemies*? Yes. The verb “to love” here is the Greek *agapao*, from which the familiar noun *agape* is derived. Technically, this kind of love means “to be full of good-will toward...to have a preference for, wish well to, regard the welfare of... to take pleasure in the thing, prize it above other things, be unwilling to abandon it or do without it... to welcome with desire, to long for.” (*Thayer*) No pressure or anything, but this is exactly what Christ did when He sacrificed Himself to save us all—knowing beforehand that most of us would reject Him. He loved Adolph Hitler *and* Mother Teresa equally—not to mention you and me—preferring our eternal well-being even to His own mortal life.

So how does one “love his enemies” in the real world? We are to do for them what Yahshua did for us—to whatever extent the opportunity presents itself. We can’t sacrifice ourselves to atone for their sins, of course, but, **“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.”** It is as if we are being asked to compensate for the unfairness of the world around us—to love them even more than they hate us. Our enemies despise us for several reasons. They may covet what we have, envying our prosperity (due to God’s provision) or our inexplicable inner peace; they may

have been *taught* to hate us or the people we support (e.g. Israel); they may detest the God we worship, rebelling against His authority. They may simply fear us, not understanding that we mean them no harm. But we are instructed to simply treat them as we would like to be treated—with compassion, understanding, and love: **“And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise....”** How does one apply the “golden rule” to the likes of Saddam Hussein or Kim Jong Un? Pray for them—not for their *success in doing evil*, of course, but for their repentance and salvation. Christ can change the heart of the worst sinner, as long as he draws breath.

“But if you love [only] those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back.” It’s relatively easy to love people (in the *agapao* sense) if they are “on your side.” Even if they want something from you, at least they mean you no harm. Your enemies, on the other hand, are not so benign: by definition, they don’t care if you get hurt by what they do—or neglect to do. They may even hate you on principle. At the very least, they’re your philosophical adversaries. Loving *them* is not so easy to do. **“But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.”** (Luke 6:27-36; cf. Matthew 5:43-48) Remember, Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; the least we can do (in emulation of His love) is to treat people who hate us with love, generosity of spirit, and unfeigned mercy.

I’m going to make an observation here that isn’t overtly spelled out in the text, but it seems valid nevertheless: the love we are to show to our “enemies” is primarily a personal, one-on-one sort of thing (that is, it is *not* national in scope). Furthermore, it is something based on and derived from our relationship with Yahweh; consequently, if we have no such familial relationship with God, then we can neither “love our enemies,” nor expect the “Heavenly Father” to shield us from the potentially adverse consequences of doing so. You can’t radiate God’s light if He does not dwell within you.

The obvious contemporary example of “doing it wrong” is post-Christian Europe. They *seem* to be following Christ’s commandment to “love their enemies” when they (actually, their globalist leaders) invite hundreds of thousands of Muslims to invade (excuse me—*immigrate to*) their lands. (The practice began shortly after World War II, when the goal was to provide a source of cheap unskilled labor to replace the populace who had been killed in the war. It’s still true: the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.) Today’s “refugees” insist they are seeking shelter from the oppressive culture of their

Islamic homelands, but at the same time, they are bringing that very culture with them, intact and deadly. So places that *used to* honor God half a millennium (or even half a century) ago now have to deal with a cultural cancer they have inflicted upon themselves—a culture of terror, rape, pedophilia, crime, greed, and sloth. And there is no way to stop it, short of repentance before God.

Partially post-Christian America has the same problem, albeit to a lesser degree. And in addition to the Muslim curse, we also deal with illegal immigration from Latin America (and elsewhere) on an industrial scale. Some of these folks merely want to escape the crushing poverty and crime endemic in their own home countries; but many others are looking for a free ride at the American taxpayer's expense—welfare, healthcare, free education, and more. Worse, some are only here to pursue organized criminal enterprise (by their tattoos ye shall know them). Liberal politicians perceive a base of support in these illegal residents (or at least their children), so they play “Robin Hood” with the already overburdened taxpayers' resources, buying votes with stolen dollars.

So some of these folks fall into the “widows, orphans, and oppressed” category (who thus are supposed to be recipients of our mercy), and the rest are our unabashed “enemies,” to whom Christ also instructed us to show love. The question remains: what does it mean to “love” them? Somehow, I don't think presenting yourself (or your family) as a willing victim of a violent crime or political corruption is quite what God had in mind. The key to our proper response is what Christ did. In many of Yahshua's examples, Israel's Roman occupiers were the object of His lessons. (“Go the extra mile; turn the other cheek,” etc.) He never suggested revolting against Rome or refusing to pay the taxes they so unreasonably demanded. But He didn't obsequiously “sell out” to Rome, either (as the Chief Priests did). Rather, the Great Physician adhered to the Hippocratic Oath toward the Romans, so to speak: “First, do no harm.”

His love for this particular “enemy” manifested itself in individual, personal terms—for example, offering without qualm or hesitation to help a Roman centurion, healing his servant and then commending him for his great faith (Matthew 8:5-13). But note something else: the centurion, though ostensibly Israel's “enemy,” had proactively appealed to Yahshua, reaching out to Him in hope and faith (and yes, desperation). There were thousands of Romans in Judea who neither sought nor received any material help from Yahshua. I think this might be the key to how we are to “love our enemies.” If you meet a “foreigner” or “stranger” (even one presumed to be your “enemy”) who needs and wants your help, by all means aid him in whatever way you can. Don't judge his motives toward you by the color of his skin, his manner of dress, or the accent on his tongue. Of course, if his agenda turns out to be to kill you or rape your daughter,

you are under no obligation to assist him. But how will you know what he needs, unless you respect him enough to listen?

The mirror-image principle to “loving your enemy” is the Law of Leprosy (Leviticus 13-14). Basically, the Israelites were instructed to remain physically separate from whole populations of people who—through no fault of their own—had the power and potential to destroy them. Lepers were, in a manner of speaking, *enemies* to those who had no such disease. It is no stretch at all to see Islam as “spiritual leprosy” today. Yes, the majority of its adherents are but victims of its curse, but according to God’s Word, the solution is *not* to invite the “infected” to dwell among the otherwise healthy populace. Leprosy is contagious; the cure isn’t.

Note that most of the Torah’s Law of Leprosy concerned itself with two things: (1) identifying the disease, and (2) rituals declaring one to have been healed. Mind you, there was no prescribed remedy: in all of recorded scripture, no one was ever *cured* of leprosy under the Law—*until* Yahshua began healing them and sending them to the priests for verification under Torah rules. We are specifically informed that “a great number of priests became obedient to the faith.” (Acts 6:7) I like to imagine that the great influx of cured lepers Yahshua had sent to them had something to do with their readiness to believe the gospel.

Fast-forward two thousand years, and there’s *still* no cure for spiritual leprosy (read: Islam) other than Christ. Without Him, the disease remains debilitating, contagious, and lethal. So “loving your (Muslim) enemy” does *not* entail importing him and a million of his closest friends to your neighborhood. Alas for Germany, France, Britain, and Scandinavia: that is precisely what they have done, substituting God’s principles with politically correct counterfeits, and ending up with ever-expanding “leper colonies” within their own nations, rife with rape, crime, and a stubborn unwillingness to contribute anything of value to society.

What should have been done? How can we “love this enemy” in light of Biblical example and precept? (1) In Bible times, alms were given so that lepers might be provided with food and shelter, even as they were isolated from the general population. We should do no less (bearing in mind that God provided the latter-day lepers with vast natural resources, so they could take care of themselves—something they refuse to do). (2) Since Yahshua the Messiah was the *only* cure for leprosy (spiritual *or* literal) in the first century, it should be obvious that He is the only cure now—and I don’t mean subjecting the sufferers to another, more benign curse, like the apostate Christian religion. (3) If and when we *personally* encounter sufferers of “spiritual leprosy,” we should always be ready to introduce them to the Cure—Yahshua the Messiah.

Of course, we are not to love *only* our enemies. As a practical matter, the recipients of our love were most often expected to be those close to us, whether in

proximity or philosophy. So Christ's most often repeated instruction on the subject is this: **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."** (John 13:34-35) Several reasons are given that we should love our fellow believers. (1) Because Yahshua said to. That should be all we need as incentive. (2) Our love is a tangible reflection of His love for us—a practical way for us to be "like Him." (3) This love is a powerful testimony to those outside the faith that we are different, that we have something special living within us—the love of Christ. Though the Reformation was good and necessary, the subsequent wars between Catholics and Protestants told the world that there was something amiss in the religion of Christianity—and worse, if Christians didn't love one another, then their God was probably unloving as well. It never would have occurred to most outsiders that one (or both) of the warring parties within Christendom weren't really Christians at all.

But wait, there's more... more cause for us to love one another, that is. At the Last Supper, Yahshua said, **"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.... These things I command you, that you love one another."** (John 15:11-14, 17) Reason (4) is joy: it is very hard to be miserable if we are enjoying a relationship of love with our God and fellowship with His people. Even in times of pain, hardship, or personal loss, we can rejoice in the knowledge that we are loved unconditionally. (5) We have Christ's example of precisely how to love one another—up to and including laying down our lives for each other, in the unlikely event that it comes to that. We are all too aware that some Muslims don't mind dying for their faith. Their reason for this (based on the bizarre promises of their only "prophet"), is that scores of sex-starved virgins await them in paradise if they're martyred in battle. Christians, on the other hand, make cheerful martyrs simply because of our hope-driven precedent: we know beyond the shadow of a doubt that God will raise us from the dead to a state of blessed immortality—just as Yahshua rose.

Another component of loving one another is the realization that although provision ultimately comes from God, we are instructed to be the conduits of that provision. **"But He answered and said to them, 'You give them something to eat.'"** (Mark 6:37; cf. Luke 9:13, Matthew 14:13-21, John 6:1-14) As He was about to feed the five thousand, Yahshua informed His disciples that a "lack of resources" is not always what it seems. All they had between them was five loaves of bread and

two fish—barely enough to provide lunch for the disciples themselves. But Christ miraculously multiplied this into enough to feed thousands of people. And the *leftovers* they collected filled twelve baskets—one for each of them. If “the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil,” then it would appear that ambivalence toward money—if exercised in love—can be the root of all sorts of good. At least, I have found this to be true in my own personal experience.

Another episode—this one *after* Christ’s resurrection—sheds more light on what it means for us to love one another. Peter, you’ll remember, was the first one to recognize out loud that Yahshua was Yahweh’s Messiah. Before the crucifixion, Peter had boasted that even if all of the other disciples chickened out, he would remain steadfast (see Matthew 26:31-35), and indeed, he had been the only one of the twelve to defiantly draw his sword when the mob came for the Master. But Yahshua had informed the impetuous disciple that he would deny Him three times—he would suffer utter failure, despite his glowing intentions.

After *everything* had taken place precisely as Yahshua had predicted, the risen Lord gently confronted Peter about it over a breakfast of miraculously caught fish. **“Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?’...”** That is, “...more than these other disciples love Me.” This is exactly what Peter had claimed with his impulsive and ill-advised boast, which was now the root and source of his shame. (And don’t look so pious: you and I have also done things to bring disgrace upon ourselves, although perhaps not so spectacularly.)

Peter’s response reveals his hard-won humility. **“He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’...”** Yahshua’s inquiry about Peter’s love had used the root verb *agapao* (*Thayer*’s definition again: “to be full of good-will toward...to have a preference for, wish well to, regard the welfare of... to take pleasure in the thing, prize it above other things, be unwilling to abandon it or do without it... to welcome with desire, to long for.” In common usage, the word implies unconditional love, the sort of self-sacrificial love Christ showed us.) But Peter’s response was couched in slightly softer, less definitive terms. *His* word for “love” was from the Greek verb *phileo*, meaning “to be friendly to someone... to delight in, long for... to be kindly disposed to, or wish one well.” (*Thayer*) *Phileo* is a love founded in admiration, veneration, or esteem. It denotes friendship, fondness, or affection—brotherly love. It can even describe a love founded in and springing from faith. But based as it is on emotion, it stops short of the kind of unconditional, purposeful, go-to-the-cross kind of love that Christ showed to us. *Strong*’s notes that *phileo* means “to be a friend to (be fond of), i.e. have affection for (denoting personal attachment, as a matter of sentiment or feeling; while *agapao* is wider, embracing especially the judgment and the deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty and propriety: the two thus stand related (the

former [*phileo*] being chiefly of the heart and the latter [*agapao*] of the head).” Simply put, *agapao* is an act of purpose, while *phileo* is an emotional response.

Basically, Peter was declaring his undying emotional affection for Yahshua, but was now reticent to rashly vow he would defend Him to the death. Yahshua’s response ignored the softening of Peter’s expression. **“He said to him, ‘Feed My lambs.’...”** It is as if Christ is saying, “I know your confidence has been shaken by your failure. Your job, however, hasn’t changed. If you count me as your Friend (and I know you do), then take care of My little ones—spiritually, physically, emotionally, any way you can.” *That*, by the way, requires an act of the will: *agapao*.

Because Peter had denied Yahshua three times, Yahshua was compelled to ask the question three times: **“He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Tend My sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep.’... And when He had spoken this, He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’”** (John 21:15-17, 19) The third time He asked the question, Yahshua used Peter’s softer word for love—*phileo*. That had to sting a little. But the effect was to make it clear (at least in the Greek) that even if our love for Christ is “only” an emotionally driven affection (which ought to be a component of our devotion in any case), the job is still the same: take care of those who know the Good Shepherd’s voice, but who are nevertheless apt to go astray. Feed them, nurture them, and protect them from the ravenous wolves that lurk outside the sheepfold.

Back in the Sermon on the Mount, we read, **“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned.”** He is *not* saying that we need not be discerning about what sin is and what it isn’t. What He’s saying is that we are not to condemn “sinners” for their crimes against God and man, for we *all* fall into that category—sinners—even if we try with all our might to do the right thing. No one is righteous (apart from God’s grace), and we have all fallen short of God’s opinion (the Greek *doxa*, translated “glory” in Romans 3:23) of how things ought to be. So if we want to be shown mercy for our mistakes, we are to show mercy to those around us. **“Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”** (Luke 6:37-38) This is all one thought, a corollary to the “Golden Rule.” If we want to receive good things from God’s bounty, then we are to give good things from what we already have to the needy who God places in our path. These are all—whether positive or negative—manifestations of loving our neighbors.

The closest “neighbor” one has, I would venture, is his spouse. So over and over again, Yahshua addressed the related subjects of adultery and divorce—both of which are violations of His commandment to love one another. **“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”** As with murder, He points out that it is our attitude, our intent—not just our overt action—that defines sexual immorality. So He counsels us to remove from our lives whatever it is that is causing us to sin: **“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell....”**

Does your eye or your hand really cause you to sin? Or is it something else? The brain or heart, perhaps. Or some other organ located a bit lower on the body. I would submit to you that what He’s prescribing here is to rid ourselves of the one the one thing that actually *does* cause us to sin: our sin nature. Remarkably, there is one ordinance within the Law that *pictures* this very thing. I’m speaking, of course, of circumcision—the cutting off of the foreskin of a male’s penis on the eighth day of life. **“Cut it off and cast it from you?”** That is precisely what the ritual of circumcision illustrates. It is a metaphor for the permanent and irreversible separation from our sin nature from us. And what does “the eighth day” signify? If (as I believe) the Sabbath principle is a picture of fallen man’s tenure upon the earth—from Adam’s sin until the end of the Millennial Kingdom—then the eighth day represents the eternal state, when all of us who are alive in Christ will find ourselves “cut off” from our sin natures—in reality as we now are in promise.

So Christ continues the thought: **“Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”** (Matthew 5:27-32; cf. Matthew 18:8-9; cf. Mark 9:43-47) Marriage is one of the symbols Yahweh uses to picture His relationship with people who love Him. He is on record as hating divorce (see Malachi 2:16), but He allows it to make a point. Adultery dissolves a marriage—divorce merely makes the dissolution public. He Himself is pictured as having had to “divorce” Israel for her infidelities (Jeremiah 3:8, Isaiah 50:1, Hosea 2:2, etc.) and the Torah makes it clear that a man who has divorced his adulterous wife may never take her back (Deuteronomy 24:4). Yet the most oft-repeated prophecy in the entire Tanakh is that Israel *will be* restored and redeemed. Since the Law is inviolable, there is only one way for this to be possible: she must be made a “new creation in Christ” (See II Corinthians 5:17).

What Yahshua is saying here, then, is that a man who divorces his wife for any reason other than her infidelity has ruined the illustration He so carefully prepared for us—one of His undying love and mercy toward us. God is very serious about His pictures. Remember Abraham, whose faith was counted as righteousness because he was obedient to act out Christ’s crucifixion through the almost-sacrifice of Isaac—or Moses, who was barred from entering the Promised Land because he goofed up Yahweh’s redemption metaphor by striking the rock the second time to get living water, instead of speaking to it (Numbers 20:7-13), a picture of prayer.

Christ elaborated on the whole “marriage” metaphor elsewhere: **“Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate....”** Symbolically, marriage was designed by Yahweh to illustrate the relationship He enjoys with His people—one of mutual love, understanding, fruitfulness, and life-long faithfulness. For an extensive study of this crucial metaphor, see *The Torah Code*, Volume 4 (“The Human Condition”), Unit 1, chapters 1-3 and 8-10, elsewhere on this website. No pressure or anything, but husbands, your part in the marriage is a picture of God’s role, and the wife is a metaphor for the church—the bride of Christ.

It’s little wonder Satan works so hard trying to destroy the institution of marriage, promoting instead either cohabitation without commitment, unfaithfulness within it, or perversions of it (like homosexual marriage). And divorce? **“Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”** (Matthew 19:4-6, 8-9; cf. Mark 10:1-12; cf. Luke 16:18) In case there was any question about it, adultery is a euphemism for idolatry—of the veneration of some “god” other than Yahweh and His Messiah. The thing itself is bad enough—what it *means* is even worse: treachery against God Himself. Adultery, then, is the most direct and intimate example of our failure to love one another.

Walk in God’s Path; Grow in Grace

The things we do—the works we perform—do not in themselves save us. And yet there is a path in which Christ directs us to walk that defines us as being His. As we have come to expect, this is not a list of “rules” to follow, exactly, but rather a mindset, a habitual heart’s attitude to adopt and live by. Nor should we be surprised to learn that much of Yahshua’s instruction is couched in symbolic or

metaphorical terms, leaving it up to us to figure out how, precisely, to apply these subtle directives to our lives. Much of what he taught us in this regard has less to do with “what to do” than “how to be.”

The most profound and fundamental of these concepts was revealed to a Pharisee named Nicodemus, that rarity among men—a religious leader who sought the truth regardless of where it took him. Yahshua told him, **“Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.... Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”** (John 3:3, 7-8) It is obvious that only people who have been born can do things in this world, good or bad. (Don’t get me started on the atrocious waste of life and potential caused by the abortion of 45 million innocent lives *every year* in this lost world.) But Yahshua was informing Nicodemus (and us) that there is another, entirely separate, mode or manifestation of life into which one must be born if he wishes to “see the kingdom of God.” Physical life—the sort of existence we share with geese and garden slugs—is not enough.

Although this is a second birth, subsequent to our physical entrance into the world, Yahshua didn’t actually call it being “born again.” The phrase He used (in the Greek) was *geneao anothen*, meaning “born from above.” In layman’s terms, then, in addition to being born “of the earth,” we must also be born “of heaven” if we wish to partake of heavenly life—*eternal* life. The evidence of an earthly life is the body in which one walks around, doing earthly things. But heavenly life, like the wind causing leaves on trees to move, is apparent in this world only by the evidence it leaves behind—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control.

The imperative here is a proposition: *if* you wish to see the kingdom of God, you *must* be born from above, born of (indwelled with) the Spirit of Yahweh. Conversely, if you *don’t* wish to have a heavenly life (and for some unfathomable reason, most people in this world do not), then you don’t have to: God won’t force the issue—the choice is ours. Just be aware that in verse 18, Yahshua made it clear that those who do not believe (the process by which one is born of the Spirit) are “condemned.” (In the Greek, this word—*krino*—means separated, decided, judged according to a legal standard). It’s not that God will kill you if you aren’t born from above in His Spirit—it’s that you’re *already dead*, in the spiritual sense (or put more precisely, you don’t exist, and never did).

Yahshua clarified the issue a bit later. **“On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”** (John 7:37-39) What

was characterized in John 3 as desiring to “see the kingdom of God” is presented here as having a thirst for a personal relationship with the Almighty. The commandment here is “Come to Me and drink.” Spiritually, this is equivalent to “being born again in the Spirit of God.” It is one more way for Christ to say, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

John’s note here about “the Holy Spirit not yet being given” resolved itself on the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), 33 AD, when, ten days after Christ ascended bodily to heaven in the presence of numerous witnesses, the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples, as recorded in Act 2. From that day forward, the Spirit of Christ, though no longer “with us,” was now “in us” (i.e., within those who believe on Him), permanently and irrevocably.

To the world, the Christian life looks like societal suicide. In exchange for what looks to them like “pie in the sky when you die,” we are told to maintain a very loose grip on this present world and whatever inducements it offers. Rather, we are instructed to follow Christ, even to death if it comes to that. **“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me....’** Face it: that does *not* sound like the path to glory, honor, and riches—things that any sane person would prefer to dishonor, humiliation, and poverty. These are, however, attributes of Christ (see Revelation 5:12), and we will share in His glory. So once again, we are being shown a contrast between being “born of earth” and “born of heaven.” As Yahshua’s life so poignantly demonstrated, whatever our biological carcasses endure has no correlation to that which our *real* life—our spiritual life—is destined.

It’s not that the roles are automatically reversed: scripture and history are replete with examples of people who honored God and prospered as a result. But only our priorities, our motivations, our *choices*, follow us from one life to the next. Our circumstances do not. **“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?...”** If our object in this mortal life is to seek first the kingdom of Heaven (as God defines it), then we will be rewarded in our immortal bodies with the blessings of citizenship in the kingdom. (That being said, Christ promised us (in Matthew 6:33) that if we do this, our needs will be met in *this life* as well. I can personally attest to the amazing veracity of this promise.) But if our focus in this life is solely on the things of this world—power, pleasure, or prosperity—then our afterlife will be, shall we say, a big disappointment.

“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.” (Matthew 16:24-27; cf. Mark 8:34-37; cf. Luke 9:23-26) If we desire permanent rewards, we must pursue something permanent. But there is a counterintuitive twist here: Paul reminds us (in Romans

6:23) that while the wages of sin is death, the *gift* of God (i.e., not the remuneration) is eternal life in Christ. That is, though we can earn condemnation, we *can't* earn everlasting life. So what are these “works” for which Yahshua promises to reward us? Alms? Penance? Self-Sacrifice? Not in any direct sense, but only as the result of what He defines as God’s work: **“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”** (John 6:29) “Good deeds” outside of the context of our reliance upon the saving grace of Christ’s finished work are at best their own reward. Our proper “work” is simply to trust in God.

The distinction is hard to see, but I get the feeling God is more interested in blessing us than He is in rewarding us. Yes, Yahshua speaks often of our good deeds being rewarded, but the Christian life is not a job we do for the paycheck; it is, rather, the result of what we believe. And our beliefs are reflected in the attitudes and motivations that drive us. Apparently, God is not nearly as “impressed” with our ambition, determination, strength, or piety as He is our love and our willingness to simply trust Him.

So back in the Sermon on the Mount, He commands us (in so many words) to “be blessed”—and then tells us how to achieve this state. **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven....”** The Greek word for “blessed” here is *makarios*, an adjective meaning happy, fortunate, well-off, or enviable. It is from the root *mak-*, meaning “to become long or large—the idea being that God *extends* his benefits and advantages to the one being blessed. The word expresses “a permanent state of felicity, rather than the passive reception of a blessing bestowed by another.” (*Ellicott*) Being “poor in spirit” has nothing to do with actual poverty, but an attitude of ambivalence toward wealth, meaning even rich men can be “poor in spirit.” It is the opposite of pride, an attitude of humility before God and man alike.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted....” It sounds like an oxymoron: “Happy are those who are unhappy.” But the idea here is the ultimate vindication of those who lament in distress over the sinful state of the world—including the sins in their own lives. I am reminded of the vision received by the prophet Ezekiel (9:4), in which a mark or seal of protection was placed on those “who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in the city,” while those who did not mourn were to be unceremoniously slain.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth....” This is practically a direct quotation from Psalm 37:11, where David writes, “The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” “Meekness” here (the Greek *praus*) is “not weakness but rather refers to exercising God’s strength under His control—i.e. demonstrating power without undue harshness.”—*Helps Word-Studies*. Another synonym would be “gentle.” How does one “inherit the earth?” By being around when Yahshua reigns over it as King of kings and Lord

of lords—during His Millennial kingdom. So for all intents and purposes, this is a promise of bodily resurrection for the followers of Christ.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled....”

This is another amazing promise for Christ’s followers. As we walk through the world, we witness a drought and famine of righteousness, for the vast majority choose “the broad highway that leads to destruction,” not the narrow gate that leads to eternal life. Worse, we (or is it just me?) are constantly chagrined at our own inability to lead perfect, sinless lives before our God, as desperately as we want to. So Yahshua assures us that our craving for righteousness will indeed be met—but only when He reigns Personally on the earth.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy....” This is a restatement of the premise we saw above: “Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6:37-38) Mercy is the engine that powers grace. It runs on unconditional love.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God....” His immediate audience was familiar with Torah-style ritual purity, covering such unavoidable situations as sexual contact, touching dead things, menstruation, or sneezing. But purity in heart is an entirely different matter. It describes the attitude of one who truly wishes to remain morally pure in a filthy world. It is the essence of holiness—remaining separate from society’s corrupting influence, and separated instead to reverence for Yahweh and His Messiah.

“Seeing God” employs the Greek verb *horao*, meaning “to see with the mind, i.e., to perceive with inward spiritual perception” (*Helps Word-Studies*). *Strong’s* adds that in addition to seeing with the eyes, *horao* means to behold or perceive, to discern clearly, to see with the mind; to become acquainted with by experience. Ironically, the aorist form of the verb, *eido*, is used in Matthew 24:36 to point out that *none of us* will perceive or appreciate the timing of the rapture—until it takes place, of course. Paul (in I Corinthians 13:12) puts it all into perspective for us: “Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.” This intimate knowledge of God is that to which the pure in heart can look forward.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God....” Peacemakers are not only those who love peace themselves, but who endeavor to help others find peace—including personal peace of mind. Peace is an attribute of God’s love (not to mention being defined as “fruit of the spirit” in Galatians 5). Spirit-indwelled children of God naturally tend to exhibit their Father’s defining characteristics. And vice versa: in our world, one would be tempted to declare the

converse of this Beatitude to be true as well: “Miserable are the warmongers, for they shall be called the children of Satan.”

Yahshua ends the series with an extended—and counterintuitive—precept: **“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”** (Matthew 5:3-12; cf. Luke 6:20-23) Oh, yeah, I just *love it* when people hate and persecute me. It all depends on why you’re being persecuted, of course. If you’re the Grand Muckity-Muck of the Ku Klux Klan, on your way home from a lynching, you *ought* to be reviled and persecuted, for your hated for your fellow man has rightly singled you out for condemnation.

But being persecuted “for righteousness’ sake” is an entirely different matter. Christians have endured this sort of thing since the Day of Pentecost—being censured, berated, and sometimes murdered—simply because they honor God and love their fellow man. Christ says, “You’re in good company: every outspoken believer from Moses to Malachi was hated by somebody for his stand. Prophets aren’t popular. If they’re lucky, they’re merely ignored; if they’re not, they get sawn in two like Isaiah, or beheaded like John the Baptist. And don’t forget what they did with *Me*. But rejoice! Your trials are temporary, but your vindication is permanent.”

In Luke’s recounting of Yahshua’s teaching on the subject, He contrasted these blessings with potential cursings, much as Yahweh did in Deuteronomy 28. **“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep....”** He is once again comparing being “born of earth” with being “born of heaven.” But He is not really being critical of wealth, or security, or mirth *per se*, for such things are often enjoyed by believers. What He is condemning is the *pursuit* of these things to the exclusion of the kingdom of God. What are we seeking *first*?

And what is the converse of being “persecuted for righteousness’ sake?” It is pursuing popularity for all the wrong reasons. **“Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets.”** (Luke 6:24-26) I still cringe when I recall the messianic fervor with which Barack Obama was greeted when he first emerged from the shadows to become America’s president in 2008. It is hard to remember now, after eight years of dystopia and malaise on his watch, that many of the things he said *before* he was elected sounded moderate, reasonable, and even intelligent. Well did Yahshua warn us that “false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” (Matthew 24:24) Obama wasn’t the first, nor will he be the last of whom “all men will speak well.” The ultimate example of this type of person will be the

Antichrist, of whom we read, “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 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 13:3-4, 7-8) Just remember, “woe” is pronounced on these people.

It is up to us to choose which path, and which “Messiah,” to follow. Several of Christ’s disciples were fishermen, so He used a focused metaphor to “reel them in.” **“Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’”** (Matthew 4:19) Fish in scripture are symbolic of “God’s quarry,” lost humanity swimming in a sea of turmoil and uncertainty. According to Yahshua’s parable in Matthew 13:47-50, the “fish” might be good (i.e., alive—with the potential to feed the world), bad (Greek *sapros*—dead, rotten, and putrid), or even wicked (Greek *poneros*—causing pain, peril, and trouble, someone who is evil, morally corrupt, or vicious). His point was that the same message—the same “net” as it were—must be cast in order to bring in the fish. Some of the lost will respond to the truth, some will not, and others will actually attack the fishermen (like the shark in the movie “Jaws”), but there is only one net: the gospel of Christ. Furthermore, the purpose of *all* followers of Christ is to “catch fish”—to seek the lost.

Following Christ is not something we do at our convenience, for it is often anything *but* convenient. As we saw above, we can expect opposition, persecution, and slander from people who have chosen another path (identified by Yahshua as “the broad highway that leads to destruction”). **“Then another of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’”** Burying his father didn’t mean his father had died and he had to attend to the funeral. It meant his father wasn’t happy about the prospect of his son being “caught up in some strange new cult,” and he didn’t want to be ostracized in his own family or (the cynic in me suspects) run the risk of being disinherited. **“But Jesus said to him, ‘Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.’”** (Matthew 8:21-22; cf. Luke 9:59-60) In other words, you can’t sit on the fence: you’re aligned either with the living or with the dead. If you *believe*, then act like it.

It is interesting to me that Yahshua didn’t call “religious professionals” like scribes (i.e., Torah lawyers) or Pharisees to His inner circle, but ordinary lower-class working stiffs—or worse. **“As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he arose and followed Him.”** (Matthew 9:9; cf. Luke 5:27-28) Matthew was a publican—a Jew licensed by the hated Roman occupiers to collect their taxes for them—padding the take with a healthy cut for themselves on the side. Publicans could grow quite rich, but they were (understandably) considered traitors and thieves by their countrymen—

the lowest form of scum in the community. Yahshua's point in calling Matthew was that repentance, salvation, and subsequent service are possible even for the outcasts of society. Of course, Matthew didn't have to respond, but he did, leaving everything behind to follow Christ. Choice is always our prerogative.

So religious rectitude won't get you into heaven. Nepotism won't get you there, either. **"While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, 'Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You.' But He answered and said to the one who told Him, 'Who is My mother and who are My brothers?' And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.'" (Matthew 12:46-50; cf. Luke 8:19-21)** The implied precept here is to know that your own beliefs and choices—not those of your family or friends—determine your relationship (or lack of it) with God. Being in church every time the doors are open earns you no Brownie points, if the only reason you were there at all is that you've got a "drug problem" (that is, you were "drug" to church by your parents, kicking and screaming).

As I said, it's not so much *what* we do, but *why* we do it, to which God responds. Good works are fine, but bear two things in mind: (1) for the believer, they are only what's expected of us by our Master; and (2) for the unbeliever, they are, at best, their own reward—they do not buy favor with God. As Christ reminded us, **"You, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done [only] what was our duty to do.'" (Luke 17:10)** Of course, if you have no relationship with Christ, His commandments may be ignored—and they invariably are. Atheistic secular humanists, you'll find, will convince themselves of some positively idiotic premises—like the spontaneous generation of life from non-living elements, followed by steady improvement and diversification through undirected evolution alone—all to avoid being told what to do by the "elephant in the room," the Intelligent Designer (who, if not "God," looks, thinks, and works just like Him). Even infidels can comprehend that a Creator would naturally and inevitably exercise moral authority; so (since they wish this not to be true) atheists declare that He must not exist. Madness.

What of those things about which we were given no instructions, no commandments? Scripture (God's Word) is our sole source of authority, but our world is filled with questions that never would have occurred to anyone prior to our time. (e.g. Should we use drums and electric guitars in church? What does God think about coffee?) Yahshua addressed these issues by empowering the

disciples of the church age to think for themselves. **“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven....”** He had previously told this to Peter (**“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”**—John 20:23), and now He included all of His disciples.

But what does it mean? Let us consult *Barnes’ Notes*: “The phrase ‘to bind’ and ‘to loose’ was often used by the Jews. It meant to prohibit and to permit. To bind a thing was to forbid it; to loose it, to allow it to be done.... When Jesus gave this power to the apostles, he meant that whatsoever they forbade in the church should have divine authority; whatever they permitted, or commanded, should also have divine authority—that is, should be bound or loosed in heaven, or meet the approbation of God. They were to be guided infallibly in the organization of the church: (1) by the teaching of Christ, and, (2) by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. This does not refer to persons, but to things—‘*whatsoever*,’ not whosoever.”

So the precept does not give people the authority to forgive sins (sorry, Catholics), but only to determine what is right and proper (within scriptural and Spirit-led parameters) in matters of procedure or “style.” And I get the feeling that what is “permitted” in New Jersey might be “prohibited” in Nepal, or *vice versa*. Let’s face it: many issues are culturally driven, and providing some local latitude makes sense. **“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.”** As long as we’re Spirit-filled and Scripture-led, we won’t go too far wrong. **“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”** (Matthew 18:18-20) The “two or three” number is evocative of the Torah’s formula for establishing a matter by the testimony of multiple witnesses. When we “agree” about God’s grace by gathering to honor Him, we are bearing witness to the world that His Word is true, for we have witnessed His faithfulness with our own eyes.

At Yahshua’s “trial,” the Chief Priests had to collude to bring multiple false witnesses against Him (breaking the Ninth Commandment) in order to secure a conviction. Yet when He had been crucified, He uttered the most amazing prayer imaginable: **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,”** (Luke 23:34) even though His antagonists were not in the least repentant. Thus we learn that even in the worst circumstances, love and forgiveness are two sides of the same coin. Yahshua, of course, had taught His disciples a great deal about forgiveness, because it was so crucial to our walk and witness before Him. Here on the cross, He provided the ultimate example. So for us, belief requires forgiveness.

His commandment was, **“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him....”** This is precisely in line with Torah teaching. In the famous “love your neighbor” passage in Leviticus 19, Moses had

told Israel that “rebuking” one’s neighbor was a condition of loving him. That is, we are not to willingly allow our brothers to wallow in ignorance and error, but are to dispute, reprove, refute, plead with, or argue with him (Hebrew: *yakach*) in an effort to encourage repentance leading to life. American liberals today (for instance) defend homosexuality and gender ambiguity, abortion, and Islam—all things that lead to death or dystopia. And then they call Christians “unloving” when we try to point out the error of their ways. But according to God’s word, *not* rebuking them for their error is tantamount to hatred (See Leviticus 19:17).

Here, however, Yahshua was talking about *private* affronts—as when someone sins against you personally (stealing from you, for example). The “if he repents” line seems to be offering us a loophole (i.e., “If he *doesn’t* repent, I don’t have to forgive him”), but I don’t think that’s the case. It would appear (based on other passages that have no such provision) that the sense is “when” or “as soon as he repents, forgive him.” In other words, don’t hesitate to forgive someone who has offended you and apologized. And do it as often as it needs doing. After all, our Heavenly Father forgives us in the same way. **“And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.”** (Luke 17:3-4)

This is not a mathematical formula. Elsewhere, Yahshua put it like this: **“Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’”** (Matthew 18:21-22) Peter wasn’t being given permission to be unforgiving on the 491st instance. The number seven is symbolic of perfection or completion. The idea is to forgive without keeping score.

Technically, it is not in our power to “forgive” people who have not sinned against us personally. We saw above that “loving our neighbor” includes—actually, *demand*s—that we warn them about their sinful practices. For example, getting an abortion is clearly counter to God’s agenda of life and love. But I can’t technically forgive an abortionist or a woman who has had an abortion, for they haven’t sinned *against me*, but “only” against God.

What I *can* do, however, is what Yahshua did in this scene: refuse to condemn them for their sin. **“So when they continued asking Him [what should be done with the woman caught in adultery], He raised Himself up and said to them, ‘He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.’”** The letter of the law—and the red tape that goes with it. **“And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, ‘Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.’”** (John 8:7-11)

The reason none of her accusers tried to stone her in Yahshua's presence was His reminder that they too were sinners, condemned under God's Law and convicted by their own consciences. They too were deserving of stoning, were it not for God's mercy and grace (provided, until that time, by the Levitical sin offerings). What no one knew (yet) was that Yahshua Himself would soon fulfill the Law by offering Himself up for the sins of the entire world. He (being sinless) was the only one present who was actually qualified to stone the adulterous woman, but He declined to denounce her.

There was no question about her sin. Today, they might have said, "*What* sin? It was merely 'consensual sex.' Not good form perhaps, and I feel bad for her poor, dumb husband, but there's nothing here worth throwing stones over." But on that day, everyone—the woman, her husband, the crowd, the weasel she was caught having sex with (who had apparently slithered out the back door in his underwear), and Christ—*everyone* knew that she was guilty under the Law—the Seventh Commandment, to be precise. Yahshua's instruction to her had nothing to do with stoning (or being crushed by guilt for the rest of her miserable life). He simply told her to "Go and sin no more." *That* is the whole point of forgiveness. It's not that sin isn't wrong, or isn't serious, but that Christ has come to save us from the death to which it inevitably leads.

Yahshua told a parable about a servant who had been forgiven a great debt, but then refused to "pay it forward" by forgiving the relatively small debt owed him by a fellow servant. The bottom line was: **"Then his master, after he had called [his unforgiving servant], said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him...."**

Christ doesn't always draw the conclusion to His parables for us, but in this case He did—presumably so we couldn't miss the serious consequences of harboring an unforgiving spirit. **"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."** (Matthew 18:32-35) Do not gloss over the revelation that the unforgiving servant was to be *delivered to the torturers* until he could pay his own impossible debt. That's a picture of hell, in case you missed it. By being unwilling to forgive, the wicked servant had demonstrated that he considered the forgiveness he himself had been shown to be worthless. Christ died for the sins of the entire human race (no matter what the Calvinists may say). But this grace is only efficacious if we choose to receive it—and we are to demonstrate our gratitude by being willing to forgive the sins of others toward us. If someone has wronged us—even if they don't care, even if they don't even *know*—it is up to us to forgive them.

Why should we forgive unrepentant people? Is mercy not a breach of justice? Yes, but it's a question of authority and timing. *We* are to forgive because we (being sinners) have no right to pass judgment on others (not to mention the fact that the forgiveness is more for the forgiver's benefit than for the forgiven). God, on the other hand, has the right, the authority, and the ability to punish wrongdoers—and yet He still doesn't usually do so in what we would consider “a timely fashion.” How easy would it have been for Him to “take out” Adolph Hitler in 1933—*before* he had the blood of fifty million souls on his hands? He allows all of us to make our own choices—and He always has.

That being said, vengeance belongs to Yahweh alone—in His own time, and in His own way. Yahshua offered this bit of insight on the matter: **“Then He said to the disciples, ‘It is impossible [because we live in a fallen world] that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.’** (Luke 17:1-2) “Offending” someone doesn't mean insulting them or hurting their feelings. The Greek verb *skandalizo* (from which we get our word “scandal”) means to cause or entice them to stumble or sin, to “hinder right conduct or thought” (*Helps Word-studies*), or to set a trap. To my mind, the whole “politically correct” liberal agenda is an example of *skandalizo*. It is purposely designed to diminish God's influence and replace it with man's (i.e., Satan's) program.

The “little ones” of whom He speaks sound like children, and they would certainly be included. But no children are mentioned in the narrative. The Greek adjective *mikros* speaks not only of small stature, but also of lesser rank or influence, such as “he that is inferior to the other citizens of the kingdom of heaven in knowledge of the gospel.”—*Thayer*. If I may paraphrase this, “A horrible physical death would be preferable to the hell that awaits someone who intentionally entices a new believer (or merely an honest searcher after truth) to sin.” But note: Christians are not tasked with “tying on the millstone” themselves. That's God's job. We are merely to prevent the “offense” if we can.

Though judging others is not our job, we in the church age are up to our necks in that which judgment *means*: not condemnation, but separation. We are called to be holy (i.e., set apart from the world, set apart instead for Yahshua's honor), for our God is Holiness personified. Fire is a metaphor for judgment, for it can separate that to which it is applied into its component parts (for example, raw ore into pure metal and worthless dross). So Christ said, **“I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!”** That is, His mission would separate those who were His, the redeemed, from everyone else. **“But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!...”** This “baptism” (literally, immersion) was His death on the cross and His subsequent

resurrection—the very thing we emulate when we are baptized in His name. It is what we do with *that* that separates the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the tares, or the grain from the chaff (to use three of Christ’s own metaphors).

Isaiah called Christ the “Prince of Peace,” and He’ll be that very thing quite literally after He returns in glory. But at the moment, during the church age, we are *not* called to peace with the world, but rather disunion, separation—holiness. **“Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”** (Luke 12:49-53) It’s not that we believers are not to endeavor to live in harmony with our neighbors—including our enemies. We are. But the fact is, we *will* be hated and distrusted by those who choose not to honor our God—count on it. Even within families, the salvation of one can feel like a threat to the others. Put in blunt terms, the reason for the tension is that we refuse to affirm spiritual suicide. As we try to “talk them off the ledge,” all they hear is intolerance—bigotry toward the death they’ve chosen. We may live in the same house, but we’re no longer on the same planet.

Part of the “problem” is that a new believer’s love for Yahshua tends to run infinitely deeper than anything they’ve ever known. Christ’s counterintuitive comparison sheds light on the issue: **“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple....”** This is obviously exaggeration for rhetorical effect. The point is that although we, as believers, are to love one another with an unconditional *agape* sort of love, if we’re seeing things clearly, our love for our Savior will be so much deeper than that, the difference will make our ordinary loves seem like hatred in contrast. It’s like this: a flashlight may enable us to see where we’re going in the darkness; but the sun on a cloudless summer day will render it virtually pointless.

If you’re not prepared for this sort of intensity of affection toward Yahshua, if you think He’s some sort of religious hat you can put on for a while and then take off again, then real Christianity is not for you. **“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish’? Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace....”** Counting the cost of genuine belief may not seem too intimidating in countries like America. But in places like *dar al-Islam*, where “conversion” can earn you

the death penalty, one follows Christ with his eyes wide open, or not at all. Yet in these Last Days, people *are* coming to faith in countries where it can be physically dangerous to do so. Hallelujah!

Christ finishes the thought with a sobering assessment. **“So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”** (Luke 14:26-33)

“Forsaking all that we have,” of course, is a slippery proposition. Only when we become disciples of Yahshua do we really begin to realize that there is nothing in this world that we can take with us—neither possessions, nor experiences, nor relationships, nor life itself. However, we gain something by following Christ—something that is immutable, indelible, and of incalculable value. They don’t call it “treasure in heaven” for nothing. As missionary-martyr Jim Elliot put it, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

That’s why grasping power and glory for ourselves in this life is a fool’s errand. **“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”** (Matthew 20:25-28) We like to think of our elected representatives as “public servants.” But they seldom are: once in office, they tend to think of themselves as leaders—nay, *rulers*—whose mandate is to enrich and entrench themselves in their positions of power. As President Harry S. Truman once (allegedly) said, “You can’t get rich in politics unless you’re a crook.” In God’s world, the higher you rise, the more responsibility for the welfare of your fellow man rests upon your shoulders.

Man was created “a little lower than the angels” (or the demons, as the case may be). And yet, Yahshua’s disciples were given the authority to cast them out, freeing their victims from bondage. That kind of power can go to your head, but Christ warned us not to taking pride in such things: **“Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”** (Luke 10:20) It’s all a gift, no matter how great our devotion might be. The repentant thief on the cross next to Yahshua was just as “saved” as Billy Graham.

In the Kingdom of God, we believers are said to be “kings and priests” (or a least, a kingdom of priests—Revelation 1:6). But in our mortal state, we are to assume the same mindset as our Messiah: that of a servant. **“So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.’** What we are instructed to do is serve others—and not just those who we deem “greater” than ourselves, but everyone. The servant whose job it was to wash the guests’

feet was the lowliest of the whole household. **“Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”** (John 13:12-17) We believers are comfortable with the idea of serving Christ, for He is our Master. But when Christ “washes our feet,” we have our first clue that there is *no one on earth* we are justified in considering inferior to us. I realize that saying it is one thing, while living it is another. But now at least we know what the goal is.

These things were done and said just before Yahshua’s passion, at the last supper. His summation included these words: **“A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you....”** The next forty-eight hours would be the most disheartening, most confusing time the disciples would ever experience, because as far as they could tell, Yahshua *didn’t* live, and they *couldn’t* see Him—He had been crucified and laid in a borrowed tomb. Did that mean that *they too* no longer lived? Actually, in a way, it did. As Paul would later explain, they (and we) *had* “died with Christ” (see Romans 6:1-14), allowing us to live in the world free from the bondage of sin. But the ramifications of this revelation would take decades to sort out.

In the meantime, Yahshua boiled it down to its essentials: **“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.”** (John 14: 19-21, 23-24) It’s not that our works, our obedience to Christ’s commandments, save us. But they do reveal our soteriological status, our spiritual condition. Yahshua had explained that the work of God is to “believe on Him whom He sent”—i.e., Himself. Our love for Christ is shown by our willingness to trust Him, which in turn is demonstrated by our obedience. God “making His home” in us is the same thing Yahshua explained to Nicodemus in John 3: we must be “born from above in the Holy Spirit” if we are to experience everlasting life.

And in case you missed it, these “commandments” of which He speaks—the things we are to have and keep—comprise the subject matter of this essay.

Be Salt and Light in the World

Even though we’re instructed to be “holy,” separated from the world and set apart for God, the fact remains that we must live here during our mortal lives. The idea is to be “*in* the world, but not *of* it.” God intends that we have an effect on

the world, while we resist its influence on us. Christ used two metaphorical entities to symbolize how we affect the world around us—salt and light.

Both of these have entire chapters dedicated to them in *The Torah Code*, elsewhere on this website. Salt is covered under “The Staff of Life,” (3.1.5), while Light is one of the seven symbols Yahweh uses to describe His very nature (see 1.3.1). So for a deeper study on Salt and Light, I would suggest starting there. It is my purpose here to simply note how Yahshua uses these two elements to describe how we believers are to comport ourselves in the world.

He has a great deal more to say about light, so let’s start with salt. **“For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.”** (Mark 9:49-50) Since Yahshua was teaching His disciples at this point, the “everyone” here (Greek *pas*) means “all of you,” i.e., all believers. The Hebrew concept of “seasoning” something pictures salt being absorbed and assimilated, as when you sprinkle it into your soup. “Fire” symbolically indicates the sort of judgment brought about through separation (as when you melt metal in a crucible). So in the case of believers, this is a picture of becoming holy, set apart from the world as pure gold is separated from dross. Being “seasoned with fire,” then, is symbolic of the Holy Spirit’s convicting and purifying presence within the life of every believer: the Spirit is absorbed into our being, becoming part of us, just as salt permeates and vanishes into our food. Our character is changed from within; we are given flavor the world can taste and the ability to preserve what we touch, just like salt. Thus “having salt in yourselves” and “being at peace with one another” are related concepts—both brought about in our lives by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Elsewhere, He stated, **“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men....”** He’s got a point: if salt isn’t salty, what good is it? If we believers don’t do for the world what salt does for food—flavoring it and preserving it—then there’s no point in our being here. Whether or not they’ll admit it, men need and desire what believers bring to the party. They may say, “I don’t like to use salt—it might raise my blood pressure or cause water retention.” But the fact is, salt (in moderation) is a dietary necessity. Let’s face it: having *no* blood pressure is called “being dead.” Someone *totally* dehydrated is called “a mummy.” Without the “salt” believers bring to the world, this is a flavorless, rotten place to be. If you don’t believe me, wait until every believer on earth is suddenly removed—at the rapture of the church.

Without taking a breath, Yahshua shifted to the metaphor of light: **“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let**

your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:13-16; cf. Luke 14:34-35) Light does good things for the world other than the sorts of things salt provides—and Christians are instructed to be both. Again, a contrast is implied: where salt improved the "flavor" of our mortal lives, preserving food in addition to being essential for our health, light enables perception—the recognition of the truth. Whereas the body's need for salt is subtle, God made our need for light as plain as the eyes on our faces. Vision and light are a symbiotic system: without eyes, there would be no need for light, and without light, eyes would be pointless. But the same Creator who said, "Let there be light, and there was light" also created animals with the capacity for vision, as well as plants that make their food from light. Sorry, atheists, but that's *Intelligent Design*, no matter how you slice it.

God intended light to be useful, beneficial to men, and a brilliant metaphor for our good works (which are therefore meant *not* to save us, you'll notice, but to attract the lost to our Savior). Not surprisingly, evil abhors the light: **"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."** (John 3:19-21) "Condemnation" here refers not to vindictive disparagement or damnation, but rather to the separation of good from evil, brought about by a verdict rendered according to a legal standard. Our affinity to the light (both symbolically and literally) is therefore a clue to our spiritual condition: if we've got nothing to hide before God or man, we will be quite comfortable walking in the light of day. But if our consciences condemn us, we will naturally seek the shadows to hide the shame of our deeds.

So time and again, Yahshua returned to the same comparison—hiding the light vs. hiding *from* the light. **"Also He said to them, 'Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand?'"** There is no reason to conceal our light by refraining from doing good works. That being said, our motives must be pure: as we shall see, giving to the needy (for example) should be done in secret, not to gain the accolades of men. When our works "shine light" upon someone, it should be Christ in the spotlight, not us. **"For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear..."** Both our good works and our evil deeds will be revealed eventually. God knows what we are doing, and why.

"Then He said to them, 'Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." (Mark 4:21-25; cf. Luke 8:16-18) The Greek word "hear" here (*akouo*) is

parallel to the Hebrew *shema* (as in “Hear O Israel, Yahweh your God is One). That is, it goes beyond the simple acoustics of hearing, but implies attentive listening, comprehending, heeding, and taking action based on what was said. So don’t hearken to fools or the ungodly, but filter any information you receive through the truth of God’s Word. When practiced as a discipline, it will become easier and easier for you to spot falsehood, whereas listening to every voice you hear will eventually result in the inability to discern when someone is lying to you. This, of course, explains why so much falsehood passes for truth (or at least *fact*) these days. As Ronald Reagan once said, “The trouble with our Liberal friends is not that they’re ignorant; it’s just that they know so much that isn’t so.”

Yahshua made it clear that there was more to our perception than merely what we saw with our own two eyes. Our vision is a metaphor for spiritual insight. **“The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”** (Matthew 6:22-23; cf. Luke 11:33-34) As we saw above, if we have “seen” falsehood and taken it on face value, if we have listened to lies and received them as truth, we have brought darkness into our world.

The Pharisees of Yahshua’s day were masters of presenting darkness as light, “teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” So He warned us not to heed them: **“Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.”** (Matthew 15:13-14) We don’t have to make a life’s work out of debating and refuting their darkened understanding, He says. Rather, just leave them alone. They will fall soon enough. But the Pharisees were the most respected religious leaders of their time. How are we to *know* what’s darkness and what’s light? The same way Yahshua did: compare what they said with the truth of God’s Word. This, of course, necessitates that we know what God’s Word actually says. Fortunately, today we needn’t take anyone’s word for it: we can read and study the Word for ourselves—and we must, if we wish to avoid being led astray.

It’s not that every commentator or pundit is automatically wrong. It’s that we can, and should, compare their thoughts against what God actually says. If their words are useful, thank God; if they’re not, disregard them. Few are wrong all the time, and *nobody* is right about everything. Oh, and by the way, that includes my writings as well. Again: **“Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light.”** (Luke 11:35-36) Godly men will never purposely lead you toward the ditch, for they are led by the light; but blind men are destined to fall. By their fruits—the fruit of the Spirit, or lack of it—you shall know them.

Yahshua is the ultimate source of the light by which we walk. If we follow in his footsteps, we will never get lost or trip over obstacles lurking in the darkness. He 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) That’s an interesting phrase—“the light of life.” Dead men may have perfectly good eyes, yet they can’t see anything, much less make decisions or take action based on what is right in front of them. Only the living can observe their surroundings and exercise the free will God gave them. In fact, it is my considered opinion that the *only* reason we humans have been given life at all (in the mortal sense) is so we might observe God’s love and respond to it. The “light of life,” then, is that which enables us to choose good and reject evil—to elect to dwell in the kingdom of God, and not the world. Without Christ (or, before His advent, some other manifestation of Yahweh’s presence) we would not be able to see well enough to choose life over death.

The original disciples had to endure an unanticipated but inevitable paradigm shift—from the physical presence of Yahshua’s light *among* them to the Holy Spirit dwelling *within* them. **“Then Jesus said to them, ‘A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.’** He said this knowing that within a week, He would be tried, crucified, entombed, and resurrected, leaving the disciples alone and confused for a little while. **“While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.... He who believes in Me, believes not in Me [alone] but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.”** (John 12:35-36, 44-46)

That “whoever” extended beyond the twelve disciples, of course. It would apply to every subsequent believer. As He explained a couple of days later, **“If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”** (John 14:15-18) The Light would continue—in the form of the indwelling Holy Spirit—who became a visceral reality to them on the Day of Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks on Yahweh’s prophetic calendar. It is no coincidence that olive oil—that which fueled the lamps of the day—was employed as a symbol of the operation of the Holy Spirit. (See *The Torah Code*, 3.1.2.)

Yahshua made a habit of proving His authority in spiritual matters by demonstrating His power in the physical realm. **“Then Jesus said to [the blind man], ‘Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.’ And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.”** (Luke 18:42-43) There are at least five instances recorded in the Gospels in which

Yahshua restored sight to blind men. Note several things here: (1) Yahshua *commanded* the man to see; we are similarly required to acquire spiritual insight. (2) It was the man's faith—his trust in Yahshua's power and love—that made him well. (3) The cure was immediate: sight is not something we have to wait for the coming immortal state to attain. (4) The formerly blind man glorified God—exactly the right response for one who has been shown the light. And (5) those who had witnessed the restoration of the man's sight, though neither blind nor healed themselves, praised God as well: we are to rejoice when God's love is manifested in the world—even if we aren't the direct recipients. We're all in this together.

In the most expansive narrative concerning the restoration of sight, John 9 describes Yahshua's healing of a man *born* blind. The unbelieving Pharisees refused to praise God for his healing, because Yahshua had made a great show of making mud with dirt and saliva and anointing his sightless eyes with it *on the Sabbath!* The healed man, unimpressed with the Pharisees' questionable theological nuances, slapped them in the face with the unvarnished truth: "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.... Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing."

Faced with such unimpeachable logic, the Pharisees repented. Oh, wait: *no, they didn't*. They instead demonstrated their own spiritual blindness by persecuting the man because he'd had the temerity of being healed on the Sabbath—proving Yahshua's point. **"And Jesus said, 'For judgment [read: separation] I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made [i.e., shown to be] blind.' Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, 'Are we blind also?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.'" Therefore your sin remains.**" (John 9:39-41) Here's another remarkable development: our unwillingness to acknowledge the truth in the face of indisputable evidence—claiming instead that because we wish something to be true, it actually is—defines us as sinners, spiritually blind despite our ability to see the truth. This underscores what is to me a frustrating fact: one cannot argue or persuade someone into the Kingdom of Heaven. Neither logic nor facts have any effect on one who is willfully blind. He has to *want* to enter—he has to *be willing* to see. That being said, God never leaves an honest searcher in the dark.

It may seem obvious, but the light is there (by God's design) so that we may walk uprightly in His presence. **"Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks**

in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” (John 11:9-10) “Stumbling” is a euphemism for sin. We don’t (usually) sin on purpose. But falling into iniquity doesn’t make it acceptable before God, just because it’s not *purposeful* rebellion. Remember, sin (in both Hebrew and Greek usage) is a marksmanship term: if we hit the target, we have done as was intended by both God and ourselves. But if we miss—even by a little bit—we have “sinned.” What Christ is saying here is that it helps greatly to be able to see what we’re aiming at.

Being “salt and light” in this world is often just a matter of bearing witness of the grace that has been shown to us. On one occasion, after Yahshua had cast out a man’s demons, his all-too-logical desire was to follow the Messiah everywhere He went, listening with rapt attention to every word He said and sitting at the Master’s feet in worshipful awe. But Christ’s instructions were (somewhat counterintuitively) to go home and be salt and light. **“And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, ‘Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.’ And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.”** (Mark 5:18-20; cf. Luke 8:26-39)

What? No seminary degree? No airtight doctrinal position? No retreat to a monastery cloistered from the corrupting influences of the world? No. Just tell your friends and neighbors what happened to you—that you were once demon possessed, held in bondage, and blind to the truth—and God delivered you via the compassion of Christ. You don’t have to browbeat people about their sins; you don’t have to do penance and give alms; you don’t have to build a megachurch and gather a huge following. Just bear witness to whoever God places in your path of the love you’ve been shown. The Holy Spirit will take it from there. In other words, don’t ignore or conceal the gift that has been given to you—hiding your lamp under a bushel basket, as it were. **“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”** (Mark 8:38)

Granted, we don’t all have the same job to do. But we are all instructed to open our eyes to the dire condition of the world—people who are waiting, aching to receive some good news about how they too can be released from their chains. **“Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.”** (John 4:35-38) Maybe you’re primarily salt. Maybe

you're mostly light. The point is that we believers all need to be part of the solution, not part of the problem, and not merely taking up space.

Perhaps the most direct instruction Yahshua gave concerning how to be “salt and light” is expressed in the Great Commission—recorded, with variations, several different places in scripture. The heart of it in every case is that we are to be witnesses of what God has done for us—just like the healed demoniac above. In Mark, it looks like this: **“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned....”** The “gospel” is simply the good news of our deliverance available through Christ’s sacrifice. The criteria for salvation is belief in this good news. Baptism is one’s public profession of his belief. “Condemned” means “judged to be guilty according to a legal standard.” Thus it is our belief in the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice that secures our acquittal before God. As with Abraham, our “faith is accounted unto us as righteousness.”

“And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” (Mark 16:15-18) Certain Pentecostal traditions notwithstanding, these acts are not meant to be performed before an audience to authenticate one’s calling. (The Epistle of I John makes it abundantly clear that our love for one another is the sole authorized mechanism for verifying the genuineness of our belief.) Rather, these things (many of which are recorded as having happened in the subsequent lives of the apostles) are signs demonstrating God’s anointing and protection. (See for example Paul’s encounter with the viper on the Island of Malta: Acts 28:1-6.)

Matthew’s recording of the Great Commission says, **“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”** (Matthew 28:18-20) There are five imperatives in our Commission:

(1) Go. Leave your comfort zone and venture to every corner of the globe in the name of Christ.

(2) Make disciples. A disciple (Greek: *mathetes*) is literally a learner, a pupil—from *math-*, the mental effort to think something through. The “nations” (i.e., gentiles) were comprised of people who were not steeped in the Law of God. They had never heard of Yahweh, and thus had no particular reason to heed His prophets. What they *did* have was nature and conscience, conspiring together to tell them there was a God. They became disciples when they learned that He had manifested Himself in human form as Yahshua to save them from their sins.

(3) Baptize them. In the Greek this literally means, “Immerse them.” To my mind, this implies more than just administering the ritual of water baptism, signaling one’s conversion from paganism to Christianity. Christians should be “immersed” in the *name*—the identity, character, reputation, and renown—of God, who would henceforth be primarily received in three forms, Heavenly Father, Messiah-Son, and Holy Spirit (though the pre-Christian believers had also had a long history with theophanies, shekinah-type manifestations, and divine apparitions) all of whom shared one identity: Yahweh.

(4) Teach them. Teach them *what*? All of the things I am attempting to list and examine in this appendix—Yahshua’s commandments.

His promise to “be with them always” would see its initial fulfillment ten days after His ascension—on the Day of Pentecost, reported in detail in Acts 2. But immediately before the risen Christ departed from the Mount of Olives (ten days prior to Pentecost) He issued the Great Commission, as reported here by Luke: **“And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority...’** The disciples had presumed that now that Yahshua had risen from the dead, He would immediately set up His Kingdom upon the earth. But although He didn’t spell it out, the fact (revealed in the Torah) was that this was only the dawning of the fifth day of Yahweh’s seven-day “week.” (The creation account had informed us that the “sun became visible” on the fourth day—and Christ indeed appeared at the end of the fourth millennium of fallen man.) The age of grace had just begun; the Sabbath-rest was therefore still two thousand years in the future. There was, therefore, still plenty of work left to do before the harvest—cultivating, watering, weeding, fertilizing, and pruning.

(5) Be witnesses. **“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”** (Acts 1:7-8) Remember the healed demoniac from Decapolis back in Mark 5? This is what he had been specifically asked to do—“Tell people of the compassion God has shown you.” This is still our job today: light up the world.

Do Not Worry or Fear

Throughout the Bible, one of the major themes is that we are to trust our God, believe Him (and believe *on* Him), and rely upon His gracious provision. The whole issue of obedience stems from the fact that by doing so, we acknowledge that Yahweh is worthy of this trust. Even if we don’t know *why* He told us to do something, if we really trust Him, we will comply. So when Christ said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments,” He wasn’t operating out of ego or insecurity.

He was simply repeating the theme: obedience indicates trust—“You can trust Me.”

Conversely, if we don't trust Yahweh, we will search for some sort of replacement deity upon whom we feel we *can* rely. Moldy Canaanite-style “gods” like Ba'al or Molech have fallen out of favor in these “enlightened” times, of course. Although Allah is worshiped by a billion and a half souls in today's world, nobody *relies* on Him, for He has never done one thing, good *or* bad, that anybody can attribute to him with a straight face. Rather, his worshipers—Muslims—do all the work, and 99% of it is destructive, hateful, or pointless.

But false gods still abound. Nowadays, the Number One “deity” in the world—if defined by who or what people rely upon—is man himself. Sometimes it is a charismatic individual, a political or religious leader perhaps. Sometimes it's a man-made system, like government or religion or cultural tradition. But most of the time, people live as if they assume they can't rely upon anybody but themselves. Even in the realm of religion (in which one or more deities are worshiped), the vast majority of adherents act as if they alone are the source of whatever it is the religion promises. It is *their* works, worship, alms, penance, sacrifices, or obedience that induces the deity of record to do what he's supposed to—give them prosperity, peace, a pleasant afterlife, good weather, health, or victory over their enemies. If the “god” doesn't deliver, it is presumed to be the fault of the worshiper—who “obviously” fell short of his “god's” expectations.

So the default condition for the typical man-reliant man is worry, fear, doubt, and trepidation. He compensates in several ways. (1) Some claw their way toward the top, where they presume their real-or-imaginary demons can't touch them. (2) Some retreat from the real world, pursuing diversions, activities, and pleasures designed to mask the pain of uncertainty, often using pharmaceutical assistance to one extent or another. (3) Some drop out altogether, lowering their expectations to the point where no outcome, no matter how grim, is worse than what they imagined. (4) Some immerse themselves in “causes,” buying into hollow promises of personal fulfillment through “saving the world,” without a shred of logic or evidence to support the position in which they're so heavily invested. And (5) some become professional victims, imagining that their problems must be somebody else's fault, so they hate without cause, destroy without conscience, and take without thanksgiving.

But what does Yahshua say to do in the face of trials or challenges? **“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?”** There's nothing wrong with working for a living, of course—but it is not our job to calculate, scheme, and stress out over our endeavors. **“Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you**

not of more value than they?...” This illustration didn’t have much impact for me as long as I lived in Southern California. But since I moved to a place with four actual seasons, it really hits home. The temperature can get down to zero here, and sometimes we deal with snow or ice, but the woodland creatures don’t freeze or starve to death. The funny thing is, I count it a privilege to act as “God’s assistant” by providing a feeding station for the birds. In really cold weather, we attract quite a crowd—all saying “thank you” in their own way. But the birds did just fine without us.

Americans spend billions of dollars annually in a vain attempt to avoid falling apart with age. We worry about everything from obesity to wrinkles to male-pattern baldness. Through the prodigious application of effort and resources, we may even be able to slow down the aging process a little, though time is a relentless adversary. But Yahshua wryly asks, **“Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?”** Face it: some things (in reality, *most* things) are beyond our power to control, for we are mortal and corrupt creatures. There are some things upon which neither worry nor wishing nor work have any effect. More to the point, worry betrays an attitude of ungratefulness toward God, who in His sovereignty made us one way rather than another.

This applies to material possessions as well: **“So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?...”** I realize that making clothing was a much bigger deal in the ancient world than it is now. But the lessons still apply. The world advises us to “Dress to impress,” or “Dress for the job you want,” so we tend to choose our wardrobe based on what we want other people to think of us, rather than what is actually appropriate. In other words, we worry about things we should leave in God’s hands. I would amend the maxim to say, “Dress with respect.” That is, our clothing should neither intimidate, mislead, nor provoke (whether to covetousness, anger, or lust) the people we meet. Our sartorial presence should project a quiet spirit, thoughtfulness, modesty, and respect. The same could be said for everything we own—our cars, houses, etc.

The instructions are the same whether we’re relatively prosperous, or flirting with poverty: *don’t worry*—that’s God’s job. As the saying goes, there are two rules: (1) Don’t sweat the small stuff; and (2) It’s *all* small stuff. Or as Yahshua put it, **“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles [in this case, shorthand for the godless] seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things....”** That’s the point most folks miss: Yahweh is aware of our needs, and He wants to meet them—just as any loving father delights in meeting the needs of his children.

The only reason, in fact, that a loving father with unlimited resources (the picture of God) would withhold something good from his children is that they're not ready for it—it is deemed deleterious to their well-being in some way, like buying them a Ferarri on their sixteenth birthday. (What could possibly go wrong?) What is necessary for life, health, and fulfillment, however, is always available, as long as the children aren't in open rebellion—i.e., if the father doesn't feel the need to somehow get their attention: **“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”** The bottom line is that if our priorities are aligned with God's, we need not worry about attaining the necessities of life. **“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”** (Matthew 6:25-34; cf. Luke 12:22-31) Note that Yahshua doesn't promise us a life without problems, but rather, that whatever trouble that *does* arise is not worth worrying about.

There is an old concept called *noblesse oblige* (French for “nobility obliges”). It means: “The moral obligation of those of high birth, powerful social position, etc., to act with honor, kindness, generosity, etc.” (*Dictionary.com*) It is unbecoming for princes and princesses to be stingy, selfish, and heartless toward people of more modest means, though alas, they often are. Yahshua wants us to remember that in whatever state we find ourselves financially, we are royalty—children of the King of Creation. **“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** (Luke 12:32-34)

He Himself was the perfect example (as usual), demonstrating in the physical realm what is true in the spiritual: His mother Mary and her husband (His adoptive father) Joseph were poor, working-class folks. And yet both of them were of David's royal lineage—Mary through Nathan (bypassing the curse of Coniah—see Jeremiah 22:24), and Joseph through Solomon. This made Yahshua a uniquely legitimate aspirant to Israel's throne—and we, as His spiritual children, are therefore “royalty” as well. What we spend in God's work is, after all, God's money.

The converse of depositing “treasure in heaven” is covetousness on earth (specifically prohibited in the Tenth Commandment). **“Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”** (Luke 12:15) I must confess, my natural inclination is to “count the cost” when doing “crazy things” for the Kingdom of God. (My wife is much more spontaneous in that regard than I am—so she is the one who handles the money in our house. Believe me: it's less counterintuitive than it looks.) But our youngest son (the last of eleven, nine of whom were adopted) takes the cake in this

department. When he was away at college, a fellow student was cold and broke, so our Josh gave him his jacket—only to realize later that it was the only warm coat he owned. Somehow, God prevented our son from freezing to death, a victim of his own generosity. But that’s kind of the way He works. Thank You, Lord.

Yahshua once sent the Twelve out on a “short-term mission trip,” as much to demonstrate to them His power of provision as to accomplish good works in the community. He told them, **“As you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.”** (Matthew 10:7-10; cf. Luke 9:1-5) “Not preparing” naturally rubs me the wrong way, but this was an exercise in trust: the disciples were going to be doing what Yahshua had specifically instructed. That is, they weren’t trusting God to bless some endeavor they’d invented themselves, like build a mega-synagogue, found a hospital, or run a Christian-themed television network. The Luke passage speaks of them being given Christ’s power and authority, not optimism and chutzpah.

Note too that with the exception of announcing the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, everything they were supposed to be doing required the specific power of God to accomplish. (How many lepers have *you* cured in the last week?) All of these things were signs, evidence that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. It was one thing to declare it—but something else entirely to demonstrate it.

This all begs the question: are we under the same directive? Are *we* to raise the dead and cast out demons? You may protest that these signs died out with the apostolic age, but I submit to you that the same power through which the disciples worked (and as Christ did, for that matter) is alive within us today: the Holy Spirit. And occasionally today, we hear stories of miraculous signs accompanying the introduction of the Gospel in dark, hitherto unreached corners. But generally these days, the leper-cleansing, the sick-healing, the demon-casting, and the dead-raising are spiritual metaphors: all of these things are accomplished quite literally *in the spiritual realm* when a lost soul is introduced to Christ—the One who is on historical record as having enabled all of these things. That is to say, if the eyewitness testimony from yesteryear is not enough evidence for you, no more confirmation will be forthcoming.

The point of sending the disciples out “unprepared” was to demonstrate to us that we don’t need large religious organizations, funding, equipment, and communications networks to introduce someone to the saving grace of Christ. All we need is the willingness to do it. If we don’t tell them, who will? If the spiritually dead demon-possessed blind leper (so to speak) is willing to listen, if he wants to be healed, then he can receive the life he needs.

Yahshua wasn't done with His instructions however. As He sent the Twelve out on their journey, He warned them of dangers that awaited: **"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles...."** Even though you're doing undeniably good things, He says, men will oppose you, because you represent a God they're not willing to serve.

As with logistical groundwork, your strategy should be: *don't worry about it*. **"But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you."** (Matthew 10:16-20; cf. Luke 12:8-12) Don't bother preparing a defense in advance against false accusations. The Holy Spirit will tell you what to say. Furthermore (if I may read between the lines), your response may be a bit different when speaking to the local police, the High Priest, the governor of the territory, or the emperor himself. (Right, Paul?)

Christ went on to explain, **"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household! Therefore do not fear them...."** Don't expect a fair fight, fought on the basis of facts, law, or even reason. Expect, rather, unfounded slander, groundless accusations, whispered innuendo, and bald-faced lies. When your accusers attack you, they're actually attacking Me, He says. All they've done is to reveal who they're really working for: Satan, the father of lies. For that matter, even if they *kill* you for your faith, don't fear them: you already possess eternal life, something no one can steal from you.

Followers of Christ will be vindicated—if not in this life, then in the next. In the eternal reality, Yahweh has already won this battle and exposed the slander for what it is—a transparent excuse for rejecting God's love. **"For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops...."** Politicians routinely promise "greater transparency" in order to garner votes—and then practice their evil deeds in the darkened halls of power, hoping their corruption will never come to light. This is the pattern we see whenever power or profit are worshiped as gods. But we believers are to fearlessly proclaim in public what God's Word has taught us in private—regardless of the consequences. Remember, this is still part of the discussion about venturing out into the world with no special preparation (other than the anointing of the Holy Spirit) in order to heal the sick and raise the dead. Yahweh's enemies are not going to like it when

we do that. After all, the truth will set us free, along with anyone else who receives it.

Worry, as I said, is a subtle form of idolatry—an admission that you don't really believe your God is capable of saving you. So Yahshua reminds His disciples to choose their god carefully: **“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”** (Matthew 10:24-31; cf. Luke 12:4-7) Men, influenced by Satan, are able to kill the body. They do it all the time. But they are not able to control or designate someone else's eternal destiny. Only God can do that. Therefore, God is the only one we are to “fear.” (That being said, false teachers often lead the gullible to their eternal doom. I would suggest “fearing” them as you would fear a rabid dog.)

But every shred of scripture conspires to inform us that although Yahweh *is able* to “destroy both soul and body in hell,” He doesn't want to—He is not willing that any should perish, but desires that all should come to repentance. So are we to “fear God?” Yes, but our knowledge of God's ability breeds more reverence and respect than it does dread or fright. Interestingly, in both Hebrew and Greek, the words usually translated “fear” invariably mean *both* (or all) of these things. The *emphasis* is determined by our knowledge, familiarity, and even intimacy with the God of the Bible.

Worry and fear are the kissing cousins of uncertainty. So Yahshua went out of His way to inform us what would happen if we kept His word. Alas, it's a good news, bad news story. **“These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them.”** (John 16:1-4) It's sort of like seeing a road sign that says, “Bridge out: hit the gas.” If we honor Christ, two things will happen. He will honor us in return, and the lost world will hate us because they comprehend neither Yahshua's identity nor His mission. Knowing the opposition is coming is half the battle. We are instructed to proceed in truth, regardless of the hostility of a lost world.

That “whoever kills you” line rings a very loud bell: it's the perfect description of a Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus, later known to us as the Apostle Paul. The “good news” here is that as long as we draw breath, repentance is possible. He wasn't just kidding when he referred to himself as the “worst of sinners” (I Timothy 1:15-16). He had enough blood on his hands to prove it—at

least to himself. That's how he came to understand God's grace so well—he was the living personification of how it could change a life.

We face more dangers in life than overzealous, misguided Pharisees, of course. The world is full of hazards, both natural and manufactured, but we are instructed not to worry about any of them: **“Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We are perishing!’ But He said to them, ‘Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?’ Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, ‘Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?’”** (Matthew 8:23-27, cf. Mark 4:35-41; cf. Luke 8:22-25) Is He telling us not to bother taking routine precautions, maintain our equipment, or plan ahead for adverse contingencies? No, of course not. He's saying, rather, that nothing can happen to us that is beyond His sovereignty.

But if this is true, why do bad things happen to good people? There are *so* many reasons: (1) There aren't any *fundamentally* good people; there are only *relatively* good people. We live in a fallen world populated by sinful men. We left the shelter of Eden's paradise a long time ago. (2) If God were to miraculously protect us believers from every hazard, we would be known in the world for our “good luck,” not our faithfulness or our love. (3) Taken to its logical conclusion, God's protection would prevent us from dying, or even growing old. You'd have 1,700 year old Christians walking around who look and feel like they're twenty—sending the world the entirely wrong message. (4) Sometimes God allows trials to flow through our lives in order that non-believers can see how our faith changes us and gives us peace. (5) Our suffering allows us a glimpse into what our Savior endured voluntarily for our sakes. (6) Our afflictions begin a chain reaction, producing in turn perseverance, then character, and then hope (see Romans 5:3-4, James 1:2-3). Hope in what? In God's ability to transform us, as He did Yahshua, into immortal beings. We will at last be free of our sin natures—we'll no longer “fall short of the glory of God.” (This—our transformation, not merely “timely escape from a world gone bad”—is the purpose of the rapture of the church.)

Some of our best lessons concerning worry took place on the Sea of Galilee, near which much of Yahshua's ministry took place. On one occasion, He sent His disciples on ahead in a boat, and this happened: **“Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid...”** To Christ, it was another demonstration of how God's glory could be manifested in a mortal Man: His sovereignty extended even over the laws of physics. To the disciples, it looked like a ghostly apparition. Remember, it was dark out; all they had was a bit

of moonlight to see by. And let's face it: they were not used to seeing people walk on water. But "immediately" after they had noticed the unexpected form walking toward them, Yahshua identified Himself. He is not in the habit of frightening us for His own amusement.

As usual, it was the impetuous Peter who took things to the next level: **"And Peter answered Him and said, 'Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.' So He said, 'Come.' And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus."** Peter's faith was childlike and unreserved, something Yahshua held in high regard. I'll bet he was the first kid on the playground to jump off the jungle gym into his father's arms. **"But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!' And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'"** Again, Christ's response was "immediate." He didn't give Peter reason to doubt—that was all the fisherman's doing. **"And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Truly You are the Son of God.'" (Matthew 14:25-33; cf. Mark 6:45-51)**

We tend to hear of episodes like this and conclude that the disciples responded to a few miracles with a declaration of Yahshua's deity. That's part of it, of course: the miracles revealed Christ's identity and validated His teaching. But we are warned elsewhere in scripture (e.g. Deuteronomy 13:1-5, Matthew 24:23-25, Revelation 13) that what look to us like miracles can be misleading. In order to be considered genuine signs from God, they must be done in accordance with His will and His word. "Magic tricks" can be quite entertaining, as long as we understand that they're *illusions*, with no particular spiritual significance. Here on Galilee, Yahshua's miracles were "performed" with but one goal: to teach us that we can trust Him. Put another way, I have no doubt that the coming Antichrist will be able to perform signs like walking on water and messing with the weather. But if there is a "Peter" in his life, he'll likely let him drown.

A few days before His passion, Yahshua explained the nature of the Last Days to four of His disciples, in a passage called "the Olivet Discourse" (so-called because they were on the Mount of Olives when He said these things). It is recorded in all three synoptic Gospels, Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Christ mentioned all sorts of things we would see. In Matthew's account, the division between the pre-rapture Christians and the neo-believers who come to faith afterward seems to be verse 8: **"All these are the beginning of sorrows."** The bottom line for the believers of the church age, then, is this: **"See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet."** (Matthew 24:6) For those of us living prior to the rapture of the church, our instructions are to neither worry nor fear, no matter what we see happening around us—false christs, wars and rumors of war, famines, epidemics, seismic events, and weather disasters.

The converse is an argument from silence, so I can't be dogmatic about this: there is no specific admonition "not to worry" for those who come to faith after the rapture but before the Second Coming (Matthew 24:9-31). Rather, there will be *every reason* to be afraid during this time, because the saints will be powerless against the Antichrist (Revelation 13:7) and the death toll of believers will be staggering (Revelation 7:9-14). This is a period of time in which "the power of the holy people has been completely shattered." (Daniel 12:7) The church that will come to faith after the rapture (Laodicea) was told by Christ, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." (Revelation 3:19) And we are told that two thirds of Israel will perish (Zechariah 13:8-9) as the nation is refined like silver in the crucible. So okay, once the rapture is past, *then* you can worry. (For an exhaustive study of the events prophesied to take place during this time, see *The End of the Beginning*, Volume 2, elsewhere on this website.)

But during the church age (from Pentecost until the rapture) we are *commanded* to be at peace. On the very day of His resurrection, Christ established this principle: "Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' ... Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" (John 20:19, 21-22) Since Yahshua has now ascended back to the Father, the peace that reigns within us is the result of the Holy Spirit's indwelling.

Decades later the risen Christ appeared to John, who was in exile on the island of Patmos, and gave him messages to deliver to seven churches in Asia Minor, which turned out to be (among other things) symbolic of seven phases or predominant profiles of the church's history throughout the age. Two of them (and only two) were given no rebuke, but only encouragement, and these two were told (whether overtly or between the lines) not to worry.

Smyrna was a town in which the Christians suffered for their faith. Indeed, Christ informed them that in all there would be *ten* intense periods of persecution under the Romans before that sort of thing had run its course—a fact borne out in subsequent history. To Smyrna, the second church on the list, He wrote, "**Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.**" (Revelation 2:10-11) The absence of fear would not result from compromise with the world resulting in a false peace, but rather through "being faithful until death." Our mortal vulnerability is the thing the lost fear most—not knowing what awaits them "on the other side," desperately hoping (as John

Lennon put it) there's "no hell below us, above us only sky." Followers of Christ, on the other hand, can rest assured that whatever happens to our mortal bodies, our eternal souls are secure.

The second-to-last church on the mailing list was Philadelphia—the faithful church of our present day. We see the signs that the Last Days are almost upon us, and we are all too aware that the world would love to wipe us out to the last man, for we are all that stand between them and total debauchery and corruption. Christ doesn't command us not to worry (in so many words), but He gives us several reasons for hope that naturally result in an absence of fear. To Philadelphia He writes: **"I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name...."** Some of the churches were powerful and influential, but not Philadelphia. But He informs us that as long as we're here, we'll still have a little strength, a little voice. That is, we won't be wiped out, a casualty of the world's irrational wrath. Of course, there *is* a church in the world today that wields a lot of power, with immense wealth and well over a billion adherents. By definition, they aren't Philadelphia. But God has given us a job to do, and we will be empowered to do it (in our own modest way) until He takes us home.

The next descriptor: **"Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you...."** The key to their identity is the word "synagogue." He's talking about Judaism (the Jewish religion) and Israel (the Jewish political entity). They are the "synagogue of Satan" because after two thousand years, they still haven't turned, as a nation, to recognize Yahshua as their Messiah, as we hopeless gentiles did (well, some of us). Today, Israelis instinctively appreciate that evangelical (Bible-believing) Christians are their only real ally in the world—they can't rely on Catholics, secular humanists, or Hindus to be in their corner. (They *can* rely on Muslims...to be their implacable enemies.) When we're gone (and we *are* going—see the next Philadelphian promise) they will finally begin to awaken to the truth: that *our* Christ was *their* Messiah all along. Before it's all over, they will "worship at our feet"—not worship *us*, but worship the One we worshiped—Yahshua the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The restoration of Israel is the most often-repeated prophecy in the Bible.

Now He promises to the Philadelphians that which keeps us free from fear, even in the most perilous of times: **"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth...."** The "hour of trial" of which He speaks is the 2,520-day (roughly 7-year) period commonly known as "the Tribulation." It is defined as the final "seven" in the amazing Daniel 9 prophecy (you know—the one that pinpointed the very day Yahshua came to Jerusalem to present Himself as "the

Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” Monday, March 28, a.k.a. Nisan 10, 33 AD—the day of His triumphal entry). The prophecy specifically refers to Israel’s destiny (i.e., not the church’s), which is confirmation that the church-age believers will not be God’s focal point on the earth when this takes place. In other words, “keeping us out of the hour of trial” is a description of the rapture of the church.

Note that Philadelphia (the church of the rapture) is defined as having “kept Yahshua’s command to persevere.” We have “kept His word, and have not denied His name.” That, I’m afraid, cannot be said of huge swaths of “nominal Christianity” today—who are known instead for their top-heavy self-absorbed religiosity, compromise with the world, love of money and power, and their betrayal of Israel—the very profile of ante-repentant Laodicea. Unless they repent, and soon, they *will* participate in the “hour of trial.”

So Christ encourages Philadelphia: **“Behold, I am coming quickly! [that is, suddenly.] Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.”**

(Revelation 3:8-12) Hold on, He says. It’s going to be a bumpy ride. The things that characterize “him who overcomes” are symbolic descriptions of one who has been transformed into the immortal state at the rapture. (See I Corinthians 15:35-58. As Paul says in verse 50, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”)

There are five more churches on Christ’s mailing list in Revelation—groups who are *not* specifically told not to worry. Why? Because within these spiritual profiles, they actually *do* have quite a lot to worry about. I will discuss them below, under the sub-heading “Repent.” But for those believers holding it together under persecution (yes, Smyrna is still with us today) and the “Philadelphians,” who keep Christ’s word, don’t deny His name, and persevere in the truth, we are commanded not to be afraid of what the world would like to do to us. Our lives will bear fruit, and our eternal destinies are secure.

Be Discerning; Be Wise

Because Christ told us to “learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart,” we sometimes get the feeling that Christians are supposed to be spineless mental marshmallows who believe everything we’re told, see the best in everyone, and take everything at face value—that basically, we’re expected to check our brains at the church door. But as we’re about to see, Yahshua’s actual instructions were very different from that caricature. Yes, we’re supposed to **“be wise as serpents and**

harmless as doves." (Matthew 10:16) That is, we're not to use our knowledge to hurt people. But closer to the heart of the matter is His Olivet Discourse admonition: **"Take heed that no one deceives you."** (Matthew 24:4)

Satan is not ordinarily given permission to directly, physically attack us. Rather, his primary tool is deception—and it has been ever since his encounter with Eve (rhymes with naïve) in the Garden of Eden. In her defense, she could hardly have been expected to know how discern good from evil (her instructions notwithstanding), because she'd had no experience with evil. We, on the other hand, are all too familiar with it; so Christ commands us to be discerning, to use wisdom. And how may we acquire wisdom (other than through bitter experience, like Eve)? Solomon explains: "The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Proverbs 9:10)

So Yahshua's advice is sound, but only if we accept the fact that He is God incarnate: **"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock..."** In *The Torah Code* (1.3.7) I pointed out that the "Rock" is one of the seven symbols through which Yahweh defines His own character (the others being Light, the Word, Life, Water, Air (breath or wind), and Bread). Building our "house" (our spiritual dwelling place) upon the solid bedrock of Yahweh's truth is the only wise course of action.

Anything else is guaranteed to be inferior in some way: **"But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."** (Matthew 7:24-27) The definition of your life's "foundation" is not your bank account or social status or influence over your peers. It is not even your "philosophy of life"—whatever you believe to be true. It is your adherence (or not) to Christ's instructions. A firm foundation is obedience, which will render your "house" safe and secure. Disobedience, on the other hand, will make us vulnerable to all sorts of hazards.

I'm not talking about salvation here (necessarily). I'm talking about doing things that tend to promote stability in your life, *vs.* doing things that invite turmoil, pain, and poverty. One silly but obvious example: you can be a genuine Christian, and still habitually consume unwise amounts of alcohol (instead of being filled with the Holy Spirit). Your lack of discernment can manifest itself in car wrecks, unemployment, divorce, and liver sclerosis—none of which is evidence of "the wrath of God" *per se*, but is merely your house falling apart because you built it on sand. Everything in this appendix to *The Owner's Manual* (and the previous one, for that matter) is a solid foundation upon which you can build a good life. And I might add, in the previous study the most often-repeated

Torah precept by far was “obey Yahweh’s precepts,” or words to that effect. The “rules” are given for our benefit, not God’s.

This world’s “flavor of the week” is democracy, heir to monarchy, heir to oligarchy, and heir in turn to anarchy. Somehow, we have gotten it into our heads that whatever the majority thinks must be true. This is why our satanically controlled media routinely *reports* that the majority favors one opinion over another—even if we don’t. Nobody, it would appear, wants to be on the losing side. But Christ warned us that being in the majority (on certain subjects) is virtually certain to define us as losers—wrong, errant, and lost. Speaking of life and godliness, Yahshua says, **“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)

If the statistics teach us anything at all, it is that mankind is a very religious species. That is, we like to gather in groups and decide amongst ourselves what (or who) is worthy of our worship. Demographically today, about 85% of the world is divided rather evenly between four broadly defined religious traditions (whether or not there is an actual “god” involved), each claiming 21-22% of the world’s populace. They are (according to my analysis in *The End of the Beginning*, Appendix 11, elsewhere on this website), (1) Eastern religious philosophies (the Religion of Despair), (2) Functional atheism (the Religion of Denial), (3) Islam (the Religion of Death), and (4) liturgical, mostly apostate, Christianity (the Religion of Compromise). Everyone else is lumped into the remaining 15% or so, including Evangelical (Bible-believing) Christianity, Judaism, animism, paganism, Wicca, Satanism, etc. My point in explaining all this is that Christ’s “narrow gate vs. broad way” declaration *defines* this four-lane highway of popular religion as the road to destruction. In spiritual matters, if you’re in the majority, you’re *automatically wrong*.

Of course, real Christians are to be working tirelessly to introduce the lost world to Christ. As we saw above, we are to be “salt and light” to others. So what are we to make of *this*? **“Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.”** (Matthew 7:6) “What is holy” is a reference to the animals sacrificed on God’s altar—but they in turn are *always* a picture of Christ in His sacrificial role. “Pearls” are shorthand for anything exceedingly precious. Together, then, these things represent the Gospel—the good news of our redemption through Yahshua’s sacrifice on our behalf. Who, then, are “dogs” and “swine”? Is He talking about lost souls—are we to hide the Gospel from them?

No. The “merely” unsaved are characteristically described by Christ as “lost sheep.” That is, although they have gone astray and will die if not rescued, they

are not themselves vicious predators (“dogs” are also a euphemism for male prostitutes in pagan temples) or swine—aggressive and indiscriminate omnivores who will devour anything from feces to dead people if given the chance. I have said time and again that God will never turn away an honest searcher. But the “dogs and swine” about whom Yahshua is talking here are neither honest nor searching. We are, then, to be discriminating about how, and to whom, we preach the Gospel. Look for opportunities where the “lost sheep” are likely to have gathered. You won’t usually find them in houses of worship, but they’ll be in “neutral” territory—in school, at work, the mall, restaurants, on social media, you get the idea. But, according to Christ’s warning, don’t bother trying to convert the crowd at your local biker bar or strip club, a gay-pride parade, or the annual Planned Parenthood awards banquet.

How are we to distinguish the dogs and pigs from the lost sheep? Discern what they do and say. Speaking of dogs (well, *wolves*), Yahshua warns us, **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”** (Matthew 7:15-20) Wolves dressed in sheep’s clothing are a constant problem, for they look a lot alike—by design. But sheep don’t bite the other sheep. Sheep may be naïve and easily led astray, but they are not vicious.

As long as we’re here, let’s look closer at the scriptural use of these canine symbols. A wolf or jackal (*lukos*) is figuratively a cruel, greedy, rapacious or destructive person (See *Thayer*). A dog (as in Matthew 7:6—the Greek *kuon*) was, if running around loose, seen as a despised scavenger, figuratively a spiritual predator who feeds off others, or worse, “a man of impure mind, an impudent man” (*Thayer*), even a sodomite. But dogs were also kept as working animals (especially by shepherds) and as pets, referred to in our next passage as *kunarion*, or “puppy dogs,” domesticated canine companions.

“Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.’ But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she cries out after us.’ But He answered and said, ‘I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Lord, help me!’ But He answered and said, ‘It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.’ And she said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.’ Then Jesus answered and said to her, ‘O woman, great is your faith!’

Let it be to you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed from that very hour.”

(Matthew 15:21-28; cf. Mark 7:24-30)

So while we’re not to “give what is holy” to impure scavengers or spiritual predators, it is perfectly acceptable to bring healing to those who might *become* “dogs” under other circumstances, but who are instead searching for the truth. The difference between a mangy scavenger mutt (a *kuon*) and a “puppy dog” (a *kunarion*) is that the latter is kept on a leash, shown love, and “fed scraps from the Master’s table.” I would submit to you that it is up to us believers to ensure that those table scraps—pieces of God’s truth—continue to be available to the “little dogs,” for if they have to forage for themselves, they could make life difficult and dangerous for everyone. And (to stretch this metaphor to the breaking point) if they begin running in packs like wolves (*lukos*), no one is safe.

The lesson to be learned for us, I think, is not to label people too quickly as “dogs or swine.” Don’t assume, for instance, that a Muslim or secular humanist who has been exposed to the Gospel cannot be receptive to Yahshua’s truth or salvation. As long as we draw breath, repentance is always an option. We too were lost—until we weren’t.

Being able to discern our own spiritual condition is essential. Yahshua told the story of a debtor and the man to whom he owed the money. This debt is a metaphor for the sin that puts us at enmity with our Holy Creator. **“Yes, and why, even of yourselves, do you not judge what is right? When you go with your adversary to the magistrate, make every effort along the way to settle with him, lest he drag you to the judge, the judge deliver you to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you shall not depart from there till you have paid the very last mite.”** (Luke 12:57-59) It is crucial for each of us to comprehend that we’re *all* debtors—we have all fallen into sin. It’s no good standing before the judge denying what is obvious and documented. The judge is *The Judge*—God Himself—who is not bound by silly artificial rules and procedures, but operates solely on the truth.

Note too that it doesn’t matter whether we owe a bazillion bucks or a single penny, we are still debtors (sinners) until it has *all* been paid. The least little infraction—that first tiny nibble of forbidden fruit—is enough to separate us from God, and it is beyond our power or resources to re-enter Eden. That is why, as we “go with our adversary to the magistrate,” it behooves us to come to some sort of “arrangement” concerning our debt. Surprisingly, the “adversary” (*antidikos*—the prosecuting attorney bringing formal legal charges against us) is willing to deal: the One to whom our crushing debt is owed (Yahweh) has offered to pay it off *Himself*. But there’s a catch (of sorts): we have to admit that the debt was genuine, and receive the payoff with gratitude. You’d think that would be a no-brainer, wouldn’t you? Astonishingly however, most debtors dig in their heels and

say the price of forgiveness is just too high, preferring either to deny that the debt was valid in the first place, or to attempt the impossible—pay it back themselves.

I don't get it.

Perhaps the problem is an unwillingness to discern who God is. After all, He doesn't give us *proof* of His existence or identity, only a mountain of incontrovertible evidence. We need only to open our eyes and look. One of the most amazing—and terrifying—verses in the Bible is this: **“And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven.”** (Luke 12:10) We're not required to somehow intuitively *know* that Yahshua was Yahweh's Messiah, even though His life, death, and resurrection are the most well-documented historical events of ancient times. But when the Holy Spirit bears witness in our hearts that something's wrong—that we need to be reconciled with our Maker, that we need a Savior—and we say, “thanks, but no thanks; I'm fine the way I am,” then forgiveness will elude us for eternity.

“Blasphemy” here isn't overt slander, necessarily. It's a transliteration of a compound of two Greek words: “*blax*, ‘sluggish, slow,’ and *phémē*, ‘reputation, fame.’ Properly, refusing to acknowledge good (worthy of respect, veneration); hence, to blaspheme, which reverses moral values.” (*Helps Word-studies*) So in effect, it means “to vilify—especially, to speak impiously or blasphemously, defame, rail on, revile, speak evil.” (*Strong's*) Basically it's considering God a liar. The outstanding Biblical example of this principle is the Apostle Paul, who (at first) “spoke words against” Christ and His followers (an understatement if ever there was one), but later repented, changing the course of his life in response to the Holy Spirit's prodding.

The most significant thing we can discern is the identity of Yahshua. The specific issue is, “is He God, or is He not?” There was, understandably, a lot of controversy about this before He rose from the dead (which sort of settled the issue once and for all). Yes, he was a popular rabbi, and many saw him as a prophet as well because of the miracles He did in their presence. Some even thought He was John the Baptist, raised from the dead (though John had had a personal relationship with Yahshua—they were cousins, after all: this was not the age of YouTube and Google). So Yahshua put the question to His disciples: **“He said to them, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon**

Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 16:15-17)

Yahshua congratulated Peter on his discernment and insight, but to modern ears, these titles still seem to incorporate a little wiggle room. First, “Christ” means “anointed” (as in the way a king or High Priest would be formally initiated into God’s service). It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew concept of “Messiah.” The Psalmist sets us straight: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Yahweh and against His Anointed [Messiah, Christ], saying, ‘Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us....’ Yahweh has said to Me [Messiah], ‘You are My Son; today I have begotten You.’” (Psalm 2:2-3, 7) The Messiah/Christ, then, is the “Son of God.”

So secondly, we need to figure out what the title “Son of God” actually means. Is He is a second-generation junior deity, or a mere follower of Yahweh? No, in this culture, a “son,” especially a *firstborn* son, shared the duties, the agenda, the authority, and in the end, the *identity* of his father. A prince bears this same sort of relationship with his father the king, for it is understood that when the time is right, he will *be* the king.

Isaiah sets us straight: “For unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given. And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will perform this.” (Isaiah 9:6-7) That is, the “Son,” the “Child born to us,” (Yahshua) *is* “Mighty God.” Lest there should be any confusion, the “Child” is equated with the “Everlasting Father,” Yahweh Himself. Furthermore, He is destined to rule from the throne of David as King over the whole earth. Forever. In the original languages, there is no question at all what Peter was attesting: Yahshua was Yahweh, Almighty God manifested in flesh.

Peter was able to see Yahweh in Yahshua because he was reverently familiar with both of them and could easily see the “family resemblance.” The Pharisees knew neither accurately: they were too busy manufacturing their “god” out of wishful thinking and self-interest to notice what Yahweh—the God who had revealed Himself to the Jews in the Tanakh—actually looked like. They had the “religion” thing down cold, but since they did not revere Yahweh, the wisdom and discernment displayed by a simple rough fisherman eluded them.

So the synoptics all record this revealing encounter between Yahshua and the religious elite of Judea: **“Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk.”** That’s right, guys. Don’t try to discern the truth. Concentrate

instead on how to make your adversary look bad in the public eye. You remind me of the liberal American mainstream media: clueless and corrupt. **“And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, ‘Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men....’** Butter him up with transparently insincere flattery, so he’ll look even worse when you ask him when He stopped beating his wife.

Their question was calculated to get Yahshua in trouble with *somebody*—either the Jewish populace or the Roman authorities; they didn’t really care which. **“Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, ‘Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.’ So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, ‘Whose image and inscription is this?’ They said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’ And He said to them, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.”** (Matthew 22:15-22; cf. Mark 12:13-17; cf. Luke 20:20-26)

Their “gotcha” question backfired: they weren’t able to generate any hatred or animosity with Yahshua’s answer. But we shouldn’t merely bask in schadenfreude and go our merry way. Rather, we should seriously consider the importance of what Yahshua said. Some things in this world *do* “belong to Caesar,” so to speak. Let us discern what they are and be prepared to let go of them. In the story, it was tax money—of which our current governments take far too much and then spend unwisely. Yahshua says, “So what? Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and He will meet your needs—regardless of what the godless steal from you.” Caesar’s realm is everything that’s “of the world,” the non-essentials of this life. If it has the world’s “image and inscription” on it, then don’t hang on to it too tightly. You don’t need it, and it may even be harmful.

On the other hand, we should consider what things we have that *are* God’s—that should be rendered unto Him. The Eden account informs us that we humans were “made in the image and likeness of God.” (Genesis 1:26, cf. James 3:9) So at the very least, we ourselves, our bodies and souls—the physical and mental components of our mortal existence—belong to God. And then consider the intangibles: our time, energy, interests, focus, our *raison d’être*, the words on our lips, our worship and devotion—all of these and more belong to God. We are not to give them to Caesar.

Many people today are wise enough to discern that Yahshua—Jesus Christ—is Yahweh’s promised Messiah. We should: we’ve had almost two thousand years to work out what happened, and why. At his birth, there were very few who had any inkling of what God was about to do in our world. Mary had, as required by Law, gotten the infant Yahshua circumcised on the eighth day of life. Thirty-three

days later, when the time of her purification was complete, she came with Joseph and the Child to the temple for the first time to offer a turtledove as a burnt offering, and another as a sin offering, again, as required in the Torah. (See Leviticus 12:1-4, 6-8. In one of God's humorous little twists, new mothers were supposed to bring lambs for the burnt offering, substituted with doves only if they were poor—which Mary definitely was. Little did she know that she *had* brought a lamb—and not only *a* lamb, but *The Lamb* who was to take away the sin of the world.)

But I digress. While they were at the temple for Mary's purification ceremony, they met two people, a Spirit-filled "just and devout" man named Simeon who had been "waiting for the consolation of Israel," and an elderly prophetess named Anna. Both of them acknowledged that the infant Yahshua was the One they had been awaiting, the One who would bring redemption to Jerusalem and the world. (See Luke 2:25-38.) Both Anna and Simeon were led by the Spirit, as were the Magi from the East (who caught up with the holy family a couple of months later in Bethlehem—with gifts, and a warning to flee to Egypt for a while). My question is this: was it *only* the whispering of the Holy Spirit into the ears of a few devout and receptive believers, or was there a general undercurrent of expectancy and anticipation among the populace of Judea at this time?

I'm guessing, but I believe it may have been the latter. The amazing prophecy in Daniel 9 had pinpointed the time of Messiah's coming, in an esoteric sort of fashion: "Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy." (Daniel 9:24) Two verses later, we learn that the Messiah would be "cut off" after the sixty-ninth week (literally, a "seven"). And the starting gun ("the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem") was a bit of ancient history by now. (Recorded in Nehemiah 2, it turned out to be Nisan 1, 444 B.C., but who could calculate such a thing?) Was a "week" seven days (no, we were well past that), or solar years, or schematic 360-day years? Even if some erudite folks had worked this out in theory, the target date (March 28, i.e., Nisan 10, 33AD—Palm Monday) was still several decades off. And yet, I can't help but wonder. After all, devout Christians have been sitting on the edge of their seats ever since Israel regained their prophesied national status in the Promised Land, on April 14, 1948. I myself have been aware of this expectation since the early 1950s, because my godly parents were so attuned to it.

All of that is meant to serve as an introduction to this vignette: "**Then He also said to the multitudes, 'Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming''; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say,**

“There will be hot weather”; and there is. Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?” (Luke 12:54-56) *“This time?”* Yes, the time of Messiah’s advent, when all of the Torah’s myriad symbols and a fair number of the visions of the age of the prophets would come to fruition. The demons are cast out; the lepers are healed; the blind see, the deaf hear, and the lame walk; and the dead live. How could you see all of this and not even *suspect* that God is at work among you?

We might ask the same thing of the majority of nominal “Christians” today: how is it that you do not discern *this* time? Not only is Israel officially back in the Land—a fact that mocks every shred of human logic and intent for the past two millennia—we are also seeing exactly what Christ predicted as “the beginning of sorrows,” the run up to the end of the age. **“Take heed that no one deceives you.”** There it is again: be discerning; be wise. **“For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.”** (Matthew 24:4-8)

This time, of course, there is a fair-sized minority of believers who are all too aware of the lateness of the hour—aware that Christ’s second advent must be very soon—within decades, if not years. (Actually, if my observations are correct, He gave us enough information to pin down *to the very day* when the Second Coming will take place. But it will still take the world by surprise, for the part of the church who actually studies God’s word enough to know these things will be raptured years before this, leaving those who come to faith after the rapture—the “Laodiceans”—pretty much in the dark.)

Luke’s account of the same speech blurs the lines a bit between pre- and post-rapture advice. But then again, it’s all pretty much the *same* advice: be discerning about what you see going on around you: **“And He said: ‘Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He,’ and, ‘The time has drawn near.’ Therefore do not go after them. But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately.”** (Luke 21:8-9) Just because you see the signs I have predicted, He says, it doesn’t mean you should follow people who claim to be “gods,” one way or another. Just know it’s going to get worse—much worse—before it gets better.

Back in Matthew, we learn why: **“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and**

flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together." (Matthew 24:23-28; cf. Luke 17:22-37) Christ won't come as a military leader, or as a politician, a rabbi, a diplomat, or even as a prophet. Be discerning: if you have to be told He's the Christ, then He's not. Believe me, you'll know the real thing when He shows up.

The reason so many believers hold the opinion (whether vague or not) that Yahshua's return is imminent, is that the signs He predicted concerning His advent are clearly upon us. **"Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it [or He] is near—at the doors!"** (Matthew 24:32-33; cf. Mark 13:28-31; cf. Luke 21:29-33) During winter, everything is bleak, barren, and apparently lifeless. When spring comes, we notice the signs—sporadic at first: new blades of green grass, buds on the tree branches, and so forth. But when the summer arrives, there is no doubt: forest and field announce the season with a riot of color, God's unmistakable annual symbolic preview of the Last Days. Don't look now, but the summer is almost upon us, and it looks like it's going to be a hot one.

The fig tree is often associated with Israel in scripture. As I mentioned above, the rebirth of Israel as a nation in 1948 was the first undeniable prophetically required sign that God was once again at work in our world. I was born in 1945, so the life of Israel has been the spiritual timepiece of my entire life, marking the hours until the return of my Savior. It boggles my mind to observe that so much of the nominal (read: apostate) church is anti-Israel. It is as if they have declared war on their own mother, before they're even born—like abortion in reverse, the baby killing mom. It won't end well.

In light of the signs of the coming season, Christ urges us not to blithely go about our lives as if nothing noteworthy is happening. **"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."** (Luke 21:34-36) The shift from winter to summer comes gradually—it takes months to achieve. So we are admonished to remain watchful and awake: **"Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.... Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."** (Matthew 24:42, 44; cf. Mark 13:32-37)

When Yahshua sent His disciples out to minister and witness—equipped with nothing other than the Holy Spirit—they fared well, despite their lack of logistical preparedness. But as He headed out the door on His way to the cross, He altered the instructions just a bit: **"He said to them, 'When I sent you without money bag,**

knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?' So they said, 'Nothing.' Then He said to them, 'But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: "And He was numbered with the transgressors." For the things concerning Me have an end.' So they said, 'Lord, look, here are two swords.' And He said to them, 'It is enough.'" (Luke 22:35-38) "Two swords" are not enough weaponry to start and win a war of aggression; but they are perhaps enough to defend yourself as you escape from a lynch mob. Christ knew that it would be the better part of two thousand years before He returned. We would need to be like Nehemiah—*both* working on the wall and remaining watchful, able to defend ourselves, at the same time. The Beatitudes notwithstanding, the world will kill enough of us without our volunteering to be slain. Part of the point of being "wise as serpents, but harmless as doves" is that God gave doves wings with which to make an escape in times of danger.

We can't witness when we're dead. Or can we? Actually, in the Internet age, that's not entirely true anymore. We have all seen horrible YouTube videos of ISIS terrorists executing Christians for the crime of believing in the True and Living God (instead of Allah). It is my understanding that these pictures and videos of Christian martyrs calmly submitting to death has done more to advance the cause of Christ in the Middle East than any other mode of witness in recent years. It's patently obvious to anyone who hasn't already lost his soul that the Christians are the heroes, and the Islamic thugs (and their god) represent pure evil—and are thus not worth following. In times of tribulation, Christ says, "**By your patience possess your souls.**" (Luke 21:19) Perhaps the ultimate expression of discernment and wisdom is knowing when to fight, and when to lay down your life gracefully in emulation of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.

During the Great Tribulation, the church of Repentant Laodicea (those who have come to faith in Christ after the rapture, who now face the wrath of Satan's Antichrist) will have learned this lesson well. John foresaw it: "**Behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' ... These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.**" (Revelation 7:9-10, 14-17) I stand in awe of your wisdom, discernment, and courage, my brothers.

Believe in God's Power, Mercy, and Grace

The fundamental error of “religion” (in the broadest sense of the word) is that it assumes we seekers after God (however we define Him) must *do something* to earn His favor. Typically, it’s something like alms or charity, good works, sacrifices, obedience to the priesthood, participating in the prescribed liturgy, rituals, and festivals, or things of this sort. Basically, it’s doing things you wouldn’t ordinarily do if you didn’t even realize there *was* a deity. It doesn’t matter whether you think there are 330 million gods (like the Hindus), or one (like the Muslims), or none at all in the traditional sense (like the Buddhists), or that *man* is “god” (and whatever he can’t do is achieved through blind chance and good luck, as the atheistic secular humanists believe). *All* religions rely to some extent on their devotees’ performance to impress, please, or placate whoever or whatever they have defined as their deity.

But Christianity (not the religion that goes by the same name, but a simple familial relationship with the God revealed in the Bible) prescribes no “works” whatsoever in order to attain this relationship—commonly called “salvation.” Yes, good works are encouraged, but not as part of the soteriological strategy; they’re merely evidence of that salvation—an outward manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit who resides within and empowers every real Christian.

How, then, does one form this relationship with God, if not through works? What does God want us to do? That very question was asked of Yahshua. **“Then they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’”** (John 6:28-29) Everyone knew that God had “sent” (or at least recruited) Moses and a plethora of prophets. John the Baptist had been the latest of these “sent ones.” But all of them, including John, had foretold One who would come from God—who (according to Isaiah and the Psalmists) would actually *be* God. The Tanakh was peppered from one end to the other with hints suggesting the identity of this “anointed One”—where He would be born, who His ancestors were, what He would do, and yes, how He would die. Over the course of Yahshua’s three and a half year ministry, it became clear to anyone who was paying attention that He Himself was the One God had sent. *He* was the One in whom we had to “believe” in order to “do the works of God.”

Okay, so what does it mean to “believe in” someone? The Greek word translated “believe” is the verb *pisteuo*, from *pistis* (faith), derived from *pietho* (persuade or be persuaded). *Thayer* defines *pisteuo* as “to think to be true; to be persuaded of; to credit; to place confidence in...to trust; to have a faith directed unto, believing or in faith to give oneself up to.” So to believe *in* (or *on*) someone implies more than mere ascent to the fact of his existence or mission. It means the

“believer” has placed his trust—has come to rely upon—whatever the scriptures have to say about “the One whom God sent.”

John the Baptist had put his finger on the heart of the matter when he introduced Yahshua as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” This was nothing less than a declaration that He had come to fulfill all of the symbols and parables presented in the Torah: all of the offerings, sacrifices, cleansings, and rituals. His work was what the tabernacle architecture had symbolized; His blood was the life that would restore ours. A few verses later, Yahshua said, **“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me [note that Yahshua was specifically identifying *Himself* as “the One” here], that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”** (John 6:38-40) He says that “doing the work of God by believing in the One whom He sent” results in everlasting life—something of which the Old Testament saints knew practically nothing. This is Yahshua’s doing: “*I will raise him up.*”

So “Believing in Him” is our trust in the efficacy of God’s perfect sacrificial Lamb, whether looking forward to it, or back upon it. That is, performing the Torah’s prescribed rituals (as Mary and Joseph had done, for example, by having their baby Boy circumcised on the eighth day) demonstrated one’s faith in the effectiveness of Law—even if you had no clue as to what it all meant. By being obedient, you were saying, “God knows what this means, even if I do not. That is enough for me.”

I find it comforting that we don’t have to “know what God is doing” in order to benefit from His love. We don’t have to be theological geniuses, understanding every nuance of the divine Mind, in order to be saved. In truth, some have been given the capacity for understanding some of this, and others, not so much. But Yahweh does not require of us what He has not provided. We can’t all comprehend, but we *can* all believe, if we want to.

What brought this truth home to me was a little girl my wife and I adopted many years ago. She was a brain-damaged and cortically blind quadriplegic—not expected to live out the year when we brought her home as an infant. She didn’t “know” much, but she knew she was loved—the sound of our voices, the laughter of her brothers and sisters, the song of the canary we got her so she’d know when she was home and safe. Jill made it to her tenth birthday before her broken body finally overcame her indomitable spirit. But after we lost her, I began to understand that our relationship with her must be a little like God’s relationship with us: He knows our weaknesses, that we’re profoundly handicapped (no matter how smart or talented we might fancy ourselves). He doesn’t insist on flawless

knowledge or sight or even behavior, any more than my wife and I expected those things from our Jill. But she *believed* in us. God asks only that we believe in Him.

The point is that what we experience here on earth is ordained to teach us something about the heavenly reality, for the former is a reflection, a shadow, of the latter. We must make our eternal choices based upon the temporal (and necessarily incomplete) information available to us as mortals. Let's face it: if God showed us heaven (or hell, for that matter) we would be basing our life-decisions on all the wrong things. God wants us to reciprocate His love—not calculate how to live forever in a place where the streets are paved with gold.

So Yahshua told Nicodemus, **"If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven."** I am an eyewitness to God's glory, He says. **"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life...."** During the wilderness wanderings, the complaining Israelites at one point were beset by poisonous snakes, and Yahweh told Moses to make a bronze serpent and place it on a pole. **"And so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived."** (Numbers 21:9) The only "cure" available was faith—*belief*—in Yahweh's remedy for sin. Some things never change.

Thus Yahshua spelled it out for the confused Pharisee (and us): **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."** Again, it's our belief—not our works—that gives us everlasting life. And conversely, it is *unbelief* that cuts us off from this life. **"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."** (John 3:12-18) Pay attention here: God is *not* saying, "If you don't believe in Me, I'll kill you." That's something you might hear from Allah or Kali (if they were real). What Yahshua is saying is, "If you don't believe in me, you are already dead—in fact, you never even *existed*, in any spiritual sense." The moment you choose to believe in Yahshua and receive His grace is the moment you begin to exist. In the beginning, God created; what happened before the beginning is immaterial—at least for us.

A bit later, Christ reiterated all of this. **"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."** Once again, notice that Yahshua is identifying Himself as the One whom Yahweh sent, and once again, belief—reliance on this truth—is what transports us from fleeting mortal existence into everlasting life. **"Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the**

dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.” Trust in the Creator was the basis of salvation even for those who lived before Moses, before Abraham, all the way back to Adam. **“For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man....”** Judgment (Greek: *krisis*) is not so much indicative of condemnation (like it sounds to us—mostly because we know we’re guilty), but of separation, making a distinction according to a standard of law. It is Christ who decides who among us “believes in Him,” and who does not.

“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” Once again (since we might have missed it): “doing good” consists entirely of “believing in the One whom Yahweh sent.” By the way, the word translated “condemnation” here is *krisis* again—the state of having been separated from others according to a legal standard. Most English translations render this correctly as “judgment.” The King James is highly presumptuous when it translates it as “damnation.” **“I can of Myself do nothing.”** That is, it is *our* belief (or lack of it) that comprises the basis of judgment. Christ can only judge the evidence presented by our lives. **“As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”** (John 5:24-30) If I may extrapolate a bit here, Yahshua (being the Son of Man) does not wish that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (See II Peter 3:9.) But what He *wishes* as the Son of Man must be sublimated to what His persona as the Son of God demands: absolute truth. Our eternal destiny is based not on what Christ wants, but upon what we believe—and in whom we believe.

Talk is cheap, of course. Normally, what we believe is revealed by what we do: our belief in Christ is demonstrated by our obedience. Consider this incident: **“When [Yahshua] had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, ‘Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.’ But Simon answered and said to Him, ‘Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.’”** Simon Peter was an experienced fisherman—a professional. He “knew” (from experience) that there were no fish to be caught that day. Yet his belief in Yahshua compelled him to obey, despite the vast disparity of knowledge about Galilean fish behavior that existed between Simon the fisherman and Yahshua the carpenter. **“And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink....”**

This event sheds light on an interesting phenomenon: belief leading to obedience precipitates stronger belief, leading in turn to greater obedience, in a recurring cycle. It explains why experienced believers can be so hard to rattle—

even under duress. They know from experience that Christ holds them in the palm of His hand. But Peter was a new believer at this point. He didn't know quite what to think. **"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.'** So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him...." Yahshua didn't say, "Oh, yes, I'd forgotten. You *are* a sinful man. I guess I can't use you after all." The very fact that Peter was aware of his faults before a holy God was crucial in his selection as a disciple of Christ. Guys like Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate, you'll notice, were not recruited.

"For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.' So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him." (Luke 5:4-11) What does obedience based on belief look like? It depends on one's calling. Simon, James, and John all saw the great catch of fish and responded by leaving their fishing careers behind to follow Yahshua. But if we read between the lines (here and elsewhere) we learn that Zebedee was also a devout man who believed in Yahshua, as was his wife. He, however, did *not* leave the fishing business, but from that day forward used its success to materially support his sons and their Master in the pursuit of God's work—even though he didn't know where it would all lead.

If God gives us skills, don't be surprised when He asks us to use them in ministry—even if they're no longer our "calling." For example, even though I was a graphic designer, and am now a writer (of sorts), I still get to use my "first love," music, in God's service now and then. Peter had become an evangelist, but that didn't mean he'd forgotten how to catch fish. So we read: **"When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, 'Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?' He said, 'Yes.'** And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, **'What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?' Peter said to Him, 'From strangers.'** Jesus said to him, **'Then the sons are free. Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money. Take that and give it to them for Me and you.'**" (Matthew 17:24-27)

It's not a question of who deserves to receive taxes here: in a fallen world, we occasionally find ourselves obliged to "render unto Caesar." But the real issue here was Peter's belief, and he did not disappoint. *We need money to pay the tax? Okay, go catch a fish and look in his mouth for a coin.* Not terribly predictable.

But Peter already had the skills needed to obey, and he did. Once again, belief led to obedience, leading in turn to greater belief. But notice something else. Though counterintuitive, Christ's command wasn't stupid or impossible to keep. He didn't ask Peter to build a hot-air balloon and fly it to the top of the tallest tree, where he'd find a hundred-dollar bill that had blown there from Kansas. His instructions always make sense in the real world—and they're always doable, if we will simply believe in Him.

As we saw above, Peter's first introduction to Yahshua's power had been through a miraculous catch of fish—transforming him from a devout tradesman to a disciple of the Messiah. After the resurrection, it was a case of *déjà vu*, all over again: **“They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus....”** A bit of background: Yahshua had risen from the dead on Sunday, Nisan 16, the Feast of Firstfruits, and several people had seen Him that day—the women, the two men on the road to Emmaus, Peter, and finally all the disciples together (except Thomas). On resurrection morning, an angel, and later Christ Himself, had told the women that He would meet the disciples in Galilee (see Matthew 28:7, 10). One week later, still in Jerusalem, He again met with all the disciples (this time, including Thomas). It was after this meeting that the disciples, at least seven of them, traveled north to Galilee, where Peter, not knowing what else to do, decided to go fishing. But as on that first fateful meeting three years before, they caught nothing all night.

The Master—now inhabiting an immortal body—was still cloaking His identity, as He had done on several previous post-resurrection encounters. **“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Children, have you any food?’ They answered Him, ‘No.’”** Several post-rez meetings involved food. Can I get an amen? **“And He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’ So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved [apparently, John] said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea....”** He knew he couldn't walk on water, but he didn't care—he'd run, or fly, or if it came to that, swim. All he knew for sure was that he had to get close to Yahshua once again.

“But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits [the length of a football field]), dragging the net with fish. Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish which you have just caught. Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, ‘Come and eat breakfast.’ Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, ‘Who are You?’—knowing that it

was the Lord. Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish.” (John 21:3-13) There are several lessons here, swimming just beneath the surface.

(1) Cast the net where Yahshua says to—on the “right side” of the boat. The fish, you’ll recall, represent “God’s quarry,” those whom He seeks to save. The boat, you might say, is the local church—the place from where we disciples carry out the great commission. The boat has a “right side” and (if you’ll pardon the pun) a *wrong* side. That is, we are being instructed to be sensitive to God’s leading in where to concentrate our efforts. Bear in mind that the lake is fluid—what’s unproductive for me at the moment could well be on “the right side” of *your* boat.

(2) The size of the catch—the harvest of fish—is God’s business, not ours, though we may well stand awestruck at His provision. We are told there were 153 fish in the net. I’m not sure if the number has symbolic significance, but on the theory that there’s nothing accidental or pointless in scripture, note that the Greek uses the three numerals (hundred, fifty, and three) separately. For what it’s worth, a “hundred” symbolizes “the whole intact substantial unit” as in the herd of a hundred sheep from which one has gone missing (Matthew 18:12). Fifty is the number of the celebration of liberty—as in Jubilee and Pentecost (the beginning of the church, signaling our freedom from the burden of the Law). And three is the numerical symbol of accomplishment, of significance or finality (as with Peter’s denial of Christ—and the subsequent three-fold repentance scenario). Together, these comprise a pretty good description of what (or is that *who*?) we’re supposed to catch in God’s net: the whole, complete household of faith, set free from bondage, comprising the accomplishment of the most significant paradigm shift imaginable—of death into life.

(3) Although Yahshua asked the disciples about the food they’d caught, He didn’t need it. He already had a nice breakfast prepared and waiting for them on the shore. Because He loves us, He allows us to participate in the redemption process by preaching the Gospel, witnessing to others, and living holy lives that honor Him. But He doesn’t *rely* upon us. If we ceased casting our nets, the fish would simply jump into the boat. Or as Yahshua put it when folks began to worship Him during the triumphal entry, “If they remain silent, the very stones will cry out.” (Luke 19:40)

(4) Even with so large a catch, the net did not break. I think we may safely extrapolate that there is no logistical limit to the Kingdom of God. (If only Muslims knew that according to Muhammad in the Hadith, the total capacity of paradise is only 70,000 souls.) Yahweh’s family isn’t reserved only for the best, brightest, richest, most gifted, or most pious. Everyone is welcome, and it is presumed from the outset that none of us are perfect. The instructions for the

Feast of Weeks (a.k.a. Pentecost)—indicative of the birth of the church—specified that *leavened* bread was to be offered (leaven or yeast being symbolic of the corruption that permeates our mortal lives—the reason we need salvation in the first place). It’s a “come-as-you-are party,” but none of us goes home unchanged. Christ makes us new creations—pure and spotless.

(5) We may not “recognize” the risen Christ as he walks through our mortal lives, but we’ll know Him by the nourishment He provides. If it is truly Him who has cooked us breakfast on the beach, it will taste like “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness, self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

This brings up an interesting point. How are we to believe what we have not seen with our own two eyes? In His glorified resurrection body, Yahshua was not physically recognizable, even to those who had known him best in His mortal state, except as He willed it. In several post resurrection instances, He “cloaked” His identity for a time, only to reveal it after a short conversation. For that matter, He showed Himself to no one who had not *already* believed before He had been crucified. So there are multiplied millions of us who, throughout the past two millennia, have not been eyewitnesses to Christ’s miracles or teaching. But this is the essence of faith, is it not?—to believe something on the basis of evidence and testimony, not personal experience. With only a handful of exceptions, every follower of Christ has “believed in Him whom God sent” because they were told of what He did, took it on faith that the accounts were substantially true, and came as a result to rely upon the efficacy of Yahshua’s mission.

The “poster child” for believing only what you can see was Thomas. **“Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ So he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe....”** Thomas (like the other disciples) had been for a ride on the emotional roller coaster: first, three years with the Master, then the mock trial, crucifixion, and entombment, then the wild tales of Yahshua’s resurrection—flying in the face of what the “mainstream media” was saying (i.e., that His body had been stolen by the very men who were swearing He had risen from the dead). How could one *know* whom to believe?

“And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing. And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God! Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:24-29) Thomas had to ask himself, “Who do you trust, the eyewitness testimony of

men you know to be trustworthy, or your own eyes, which until now saw nothing because you *weren't there* when it happened?" Being an eyewitness is a privilege—and a responsibility. But believing the testimony of an eyewitness (or in this case, scores of them) is a *blessing*.

The world mocks us for putting our trust in people and events that happened such a long time ago. But think about it: virtually everything in our lives requires "faith" to one extent or another. You drive across a bridge—trusting an engineer you never met to have done his job properly. You read about Christopher Columbus, and it never occurs to you to doubt that he once actually lived. You close the door to your refrigerator, and assume that the little light goes out—even though you didn't see it happen. Then you protest, "But these things are *plausible*: other cars have crossed the bridge; we live an ocean away from Spain—somebody had to come first; and as long as the refrigerator light comes back on when I open the door again, and doesn't burn out in a month, I'm happy.

But in the case of Christ, such plausible belief has consequences, significance, eternal ramifications. It isn't just that He rose from the dead under His own power. It's that such power reveals divine authority: to believe in the resurrection of Christ is to admit that we owe Him our gratitude and obedience. But in our fallen state, we are rebels. We don't want to obey *anything* other than our fleshly lusts. So we live in a state of cognitive dissonance: we have no reason to doubt the whole historical account of Yahshua's resurrection, but we find it hard to bear the spiritual baggage that comes with it.

Of course, it only gets "worse" when we dig an inch beneath the surface. It doesn't take much study or insight to discover that the reason Yahshua lived a perfect life, was slain, and then rose from the dead had been defined in scripture a millennium and a half before He was even born. God's Law had declared that our sins could be covered (that's the good news). But only innocence could atone for guilt (that's the bad news). Since we aren't innocent, a blameless animal would have to die to cover our transgressions against a holy God. Only life could overcome death. So when confronted with the historicity of Yahshua's life, death, and resurrection, we must face the fact that He comprised God's plan—He was in Yahweh's mind—from the very beginning. It was Yahshua who would fulfill what the Torah's animal sacrifices predicted.

This leaves us rebels with what can be an uncomfortable proposition: if we accept that Christ died (and rose) for our sins, it means we also admit to being sinners in the first place—fallen, corrupt, and separated from God. **"You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."** (John 8:23-24) The actual text reads "...that I am," not "that I am He." "I Am" would be a direct translation of what God's self-revealed name, Yahweh,

meant. This is therefore a claim to deity. The alternative to “believing that Yahshua is Yahweh,” then, is to “die in your sins.”

In other words, our trust in the “cure” implies that we realize we are “sick.” The atheist might protest, “If everybody’s sick, then sickness is normal—thus even though it kills us in the end, this illness (what Christians call ‘sin’) is an illusion. Death is just part of life.” To this, Christ would reply, “Death need *not* be the end. I have proven by My own resurrection that life beyond death is not only possible, it is something I am prepared to bestow upon all who believe in Me. But to access this life, you must admit that you’re sick and turn to Me for the cure: believe in Him whom God has sent.”

Perhaps this explains why so many of the instances illustrating practical belief in the Gospels involved physical illness or infirmity of one sort or another. For example: **“Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked....”** The man knew he was crippled—he had been this way for thirty-eight years. But although he showed up at the Pool of Bethesda every day hoping to be cured, he also knew that he couldn’t get into the healing waters without help. When asked if he wanted to be cured, all he could do was express his frustration. So Yahshua simply cured him, without preamble, permission, or fanfare. I would submit to you that He has cured *all of us* in roughly the same way: He didn’t need our permission to die for our sins—He just did it. It is our response that matters. Do we “rise, take up our beds and walk,” or do we just lie there protesting, “No, I’m fine, I don’t need Your help. Leave me alone”?

Being a paraplegic half your life is bad, but there are worse things—like remaining lost in your sins forever. **“Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, ‘See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.’”** (John 5:8-9, 14) It’s kind of funny, if you read the whole story. After Yahshua had healed the man, the scribes caught him walking around with his “bed” (just a rolled-up mat), and accused him of sinning by “working” on the Sabbath—doing precisely what his Healer had commanded of him. *Somebody*, it would seem, was confused about what the Sabbath meant. Yahshua had effectively demonstrated that as far as God was concerned, “resting on the Sabbath” was a euphemism for receiving—finding respite in—His grace. In other words, it was allowing Yahweh to provide whatever we needed (whether manna, or restored health, or eternal life) without working to attain it ourselves. If the man was healed, there was no further reason to lie down hoping for a cure: removing his bed was a statement—a testimony of Yahshua’s power to provide the “rest” we seek.

One might wonder: how much trouble could a paralyzed guy get into? But Yahshua pointed out (several times) that just being *human* necessitated forgiveness from sins; we are born fallen and defiled. Since sin is a universal

condition (thus practically invisible until it gets inconvenient for others), physical maladies (since they're *not* the norm) were often used as a “conversation starter” with Yahshua. Matthew reports another instance of healing a crippled man: **“Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed.”** (Luke’s account mentions that the patient’s friends actually had to tear a hole in the ceiling and lower him down to Yahshua by ropes, because so many people were pressing in about Him.) I think it can be safely said that the paralytic’s friends, at the very least, had faith that Yahshua could—and would—heal him. Why don’t more of us go to such lengths to introduce our friends to Christ?

The man’s physical problem was self-evident. So Yahshua used the occasion to address the *real* issue—that which troubles us all, whether we realize it or not—our sin. **“When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.’ And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, ‘This Man blasphemes!’ But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk’?...”** Good point. Although only God can forgive sins, *anybody* can wave their hand and declare someone’s sins to be absolved. Catholic priests do it every day. But it’s something else entirely to prove you have the authority (read: *power*) to forgive sins by healing the sinner’s physical body.

So that is precisely what Yahshua did. **“But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic, ‘Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.’”** Again, “taking up your bed” is a testimony that you no longer need it—you have been made whole. **“And he arose and departed to his house. Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.”** (Matthew 9:2-8; cf. Luke 5:17-26) It was right and proper for them to glorify God for the man’s healing, of course. But we should constantly keep in mind the far greater miracle—that through belief alone, the man’s sins had been forgiven. His mortal body had been repaired; his soul had been *transformed*.

This wasn’t some sort of “Jedi mind trick,” a bit of psychosomatic sleight of hand. Because His authority to heal was genuine, Yahshua didn’t even have to be near the afflicted person to heal him. On one occasion, a devout Roman centurion (a gentile—*gasp!*) believed in Yahshua’s power, and begged Him to heal his servant, who was lying at death’s door some distance away. **“Then Jesus said to the centurion, ‘Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.’ And his servant was healed that same hour.”** (Matthew 8:13) This is fascinating. The *servant* didn’t believe (that we know of); he was in no condition to inquire about Yahshua or ask for help. It was the centurion’s belief to which Yahshua responded. As James wrote, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (James 5:16) Am I saying that we can pray our friends and neighbors into the Kingdom of God? No, not exactly. But our belief can provide opportunities—open doors, if

you will—for the lost to respond to the Gospel. Like the centurion’s servant, many of the lost are so ill (spiritually speaking) they can’t even ask for help. It is within our power (and responsibility) to *help them* ask for the help they need.

The Jews, being fiercely independent (that is, not accustomed to the “chain of command” like the Roman centurion was) assumed that the healer needed to be near the patient to do any good. So when the opportunity arose, Yahshua demonstrated His divine power to them as well. **“Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum.”** That’s about sixteen miles away—the better part of a full day’s walk. **“When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, ‘Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe....’”** He wasn’t wrong, but one gets the feeling He was merely trying to prod folks into believing in Him for the right reason—not the signs and wonders, not the free bread or wine, not even the miraculous healings, but simply because He was God Incarnate.

These fine points were lost on the frantic and desperate father. **“The nobleman said to Him, ‘Sir, come down before my child dies!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go your way; your son lives.’ So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way....”** Many of us would have continued urging the Rabbi to begin the journey—saying (in our hearts, anyway) “You must not only heal my son, you must do it according to my expectations—in person, with all the requisite religious hocus pocus.” But this man actually believed—he took Yahshua at His word, even though he had never heard of a healing being done at a distance like this.

And his faith was rewarded—sooner than he had expected. **“And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, ‘Your son lives!’ Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, ‘Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.’ So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, ‘Your son lives.’ And he himself believed, and his whole household.”** (John 4:46-53) It was one thing to believe that the charismatic young rabbi could heal people using the power of Yahweh; it was something else altogether to come to the realization that He was actually the Messiah, the Son of the Living God—someone you could *believe in*. It was this epiphany that changed the life of the nobleman and his entire household. Note too that Christ’s healing (read: salvation) doesn’t take place when we can see its effects with our own two eyes; it happens the instant we ask for it. The “time-space continuum” is not a problem for our God: He invented it, after all.

Since none of us understands everything there is to know about how our God thinks or operates, it is comforting to know that He doesn’t expect a perfectly performed religious ritual when petitioning for help, but only simple faith. In one

incident, Yahshua was on his way to heal the daughter of a man named Jarius, the ruler of the local synagogue. (We'll get to him in a moment.) But along the way, a woman who had suffered from a debilitating (and ritually defiling) issue of blood for twelve long years—though she was afraid (or perhaps ashamed) to ask Yahshua for help directly—convinced herself that merely touching His garment would heal her. Though her methods were far from scriptural (or even logical), her faith was absolutely genuine, just as Jarius' was.

So she snuck up behind him in the throng and touched His garment, perhaps the *tsitzit*-tassel that all Jews attached to their clothing in observation of the Torah (Numbers 15:37-41). It is as the prophet Malachi had said: “But to you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings.” (Malachi 4:2) Could those “wings” be symbolic of the *tsitzit* Christ wore? Anyway, she was healed—*immediately*. She knew it, and He felt it as well. **“And He looked around to see her who had done this thing. But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. And He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.’”** (Mark 5:32-34; cf. Luke 8:42-48) It wasn't the act of touching His garment that had healed her; it was the faith she had placed in Yahshua. Not to state the obvious or anything, but *our* affliction—sin—is healed in exactly the same way: through believing in Christ. We too may “Go in peace.”

There was just one slight problem. While all of this was going on, Jairus' daughter died. Messengers were sent to inform the rabbi that He was no longer needed—He was too late. Or was He? When you're the Son of God, how far does your power extend? **“He said to the ruler of the synagogue, ‘Do not be afraid; only believe.’ ... When He came in, He said to them, ‘Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping.’ ... Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise.’ Immediately the girl arose and walked.”** (Mark 5:36, 39, 41-42; cf. Luke 8:50-55) Jairus truly believed that Yahshua could heal his daughter. Now he was told—and then shown—that not even death is an obstacle to recovery if Yahshua is in charge. But once again, our part in all of this is only to believe—have faith in God. *His* job (part of it) is to stretch the limits of our comprehension. Once we've been in his presence for a while, we come to understand that there's nothing He can't do (other than nonsense). He may choose not to grant our every wish, but *nothing* is beyond His power.

This is basically what Yahshua told a man whom his disciples had met (and failed to help) when He was up on the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John. The man's son was demon possessed (even worse than the average teenager, I'm guessing), and he had all but lost hope, telling Yahshua, **“If You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”** It sounds like unbelief, but

Yahshua in compassion took it as frustration—*desperation*. So He turned the proposition on its head: **“Jesus said to him, ‘If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.’ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’”** (Mark 9:22-24)

Our God knows that sometimes this world beats us down so badly we can’t even summon up enough faith to have faith. But here’s where His unfathomable love rises to the surface: when we *want* to believe but can’t quite get there, He provides even that for us. A little bit of faith is enough to enlist God’s awesome assistance: **“If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”** (Luke 17:6) **“Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”** (Matthew 17:20) Faith doesn’t “move mountains.” God does that—in response to our belief in Him.

In other words, He doesn’t want us to fake it, retreat into a fantasy world of irrational optimism, or pretend our all-too-real problems don’t exist. But even when we can’t see well enough to believe, we can always cry out for help. And that’s what this distraught father did here. The demon didn’t go quietly, but he did go (since he had no choice)—leaving the boy apparently dead. But Yahshua restored him to life and returned him to his father. Again, is this not pretty much what He does for us on the spiritual level? Satan molests our souls and leaves us for dead, but Yahshua lifts us up, gives us life, and returns us to the loving arms of our Maker. Note that God is every bit as happy about this reunion as we are.

As I mentioned, Yahshua had been absent when his disciples had first met the demon-possessed boy and his father. He had gone up to a nearby hilltop with His “inner circle,” Peter, James, and John, where He was “transfigured” before them—transformed temporarily into a being of indescribable glory, brilliant in luminescence. While Yahshua was in this state, Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Him. (We aren’t told how the three disciples knew who they were.) Peter, never at a loss for words, began jabbering about building three tabernacles for Christ and His two distinguished guests, but the voice of Yahweh cut him short. **“While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!’ And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, ‘Arise, and do not be afraid.’ When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.”** (Matthew 17:5-8; cf. Mark 9:2-13; cf. Luke 9:34-36)

The imperative here is to “hear” what Yahshua was saying. It was spoken by a magnificent shekinah-like theophany to the disciples—who in turn represent all subsequent believers. The word translated “hear” is the Greek *akouo* (where we

get our word “acoustics”). It means to hear or listen, of course, but also implies “to attend to, to consider, to understand, comprehend, or perceive the sense of what is said; to get by hearing, to learn, to be taught; to hearken, yield, have regard for something that is said, and to yield in obedience.” (See *Thayer*.) Thus it is equivalent to the Hebrew *shema*—as in “Hear, O Israel, Yahweh your God is One.” The whole point of this appendix is to do precisely that—to identify what He said, so we can believe, hearken, and obey.

The opposite of “hearing” Yahshua’s word is for us to attempt to figure out what God wants us to do without reference to who He is. That is precisely what the Jews of Galilee tried to do in the wake of His miraculous feeding of the five thousand. They really liked the free food, and some of them were even ready to make Him their king (see John 6:15). But they weren’t prepared to receive Him as their God. So He told them, **“Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.”** (John 6:43-47)

While perfectly true, this wouldn’t make much sense to folks until after His sacrifice, burial, and resurrection. Remember, this was before He had taught much on the prospect of eternal life: all most people knew for sure about the afterlife at this point was Sheol—the grave. This mortal life—and the food that made it possible—was to them more important than it would have been if they had understood everlasting life. And this explains their reaction to the loaves and fishes. So Yahshua gently tried to shift their focus from the temporal to the eternal: **“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him....”**

He completely lost them at this point, since they had no frame of reference for “everlasting life” or the “food” that sustains it. Nor did they comprehend what the “seal of God” might entail. But they did understand labor. Working to attain God’s favor was all they’d been taught for as long as they could remember—and not just the Torah’s precepts, but also the impossibly complex “oral law” that the rabbis had added to it—just in case. So, **“Then they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’”** (John 6:27-29) This is the fundamental (though counterintuitive) truth with which we began this discussion so many pages back. He was telling them that *He* was this “food that endures to everlasting life.” *Believing in Him* was tantamount to “laboring” to attain this sustenance. But think about it: if He had never gone to the cross—if He Himself had not

personally fallen to the earth, died, and risen again in new life like a stalk of wheat—then none of the rest of this could have been true. We would still be in our sins, forever hungering for righteousness we could not attain.

It probably didn't help matters that Yahshua spoke to them in figurative, symbolic language, even though it was all perfectly factual. But what else could He do? **"And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.... 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....'"** The symbol is clear enough, in a mind-blowing sort of way: we must put Christ into our lives if we wish to live forever. This is an unequivocal claim to deity, if you think it through.

"The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, 'How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?'" That would be the rub: like any Levitical sacrifice, He would have to die in order to become "food" for those who believed in Him. **"Then Jesus said to them, '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....'"** As God had repeated incessantly, the life is in the blood. If Yahweh had not been communicating with symbols from the very beginning, this would have been really hard to understand. But the Jews, of all people—the keepers of the Torah—should have been able to sort this out.

"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever." (John 6:35, 48-58) Israel had been "rehearsing this play" for the past fifteen hundred years. Every detail of the sin offering, the peace offering, the trespass offering, the burnt offering, the grain offering, the drink offering, and more—*all of it* had pointed directly and unambiguously toward Yahshua. To be talking about it now—before He was offered up as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"—had to have been a bit confusing, but then again, the people weren't being asked to make a big leap of faith here: His miracles and healings were indisputable evidence that He was (at the very least) *from* God, if not God Himself.

Food “abides in” the one who eats it, so to speak—it works within him, changing him building him up, and sustaining him. But our spiritual life works the other way around as well: we are to abide in Yahshua. **“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.... Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.’”** (John 8:31-32, 34) The word translated “abide” is the same in both passages—*meno*: to remain, abide, continue, last, stay, await, sojourn, or tarry—not to depart or perish.

If I may, allow me extrapolate the thought a bit (drawing a distinction that scripture didn’t overtly do). If *Christ lives in us* (as in the “food” metaphor), it is within the context of our mortal lives: He, through His word, nourishes us, making us as good as we can be as human beings dwelling on the earth (i.e., healthy, growing, flourishing, etc.). If we “cheat on our diet,” of course, we run the risk of picking up “illnesses” and suffering “injuries” that make us less effective as disciples, if you catch my drift. Our sin—and our resultant slavery to it—is directly proportional to our failure to assimilate Christ into our lives. Our sin *natures* will be with us until we die, but we don’t have to feed them in the meantime.

When *we abide in Him*, however, it is in the context of our spiritual lives—the eternal existence that will (or can) endure long after our mortal bodies have returned to dust. If we are in Christ, if our souls are part of Him, it is axiomatic that He is in charge. In the immortal state, we will no longer sin, because our sin natures will have been left behind with our mortal remains. That being said, this abiding in Christ begins here, now, in the mortal state. As Yahshua explained it to the Samaritan woman at the well, **“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”** (John 4:14) This “spring” within us is the inevitable result of both Christ living in us *and* us abiding in Him.

But we’ll have no relationship at all with God if we don’t believe in “the One whom He sent,” Yahshua the Messiah. Without this faith, He won’t live in us, and we can’t live in Him. Goodness will prove impossible, and eternal life will be a non-starter. It is as Christ told the scribes and Pharisees: **“If I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore [if] you do not hear, [it is] because you are not of God.”** (John 8:46-47) “Hear,” again, is the Greek *akouo*—to consider, understand, hearken, and yield in obedience to something that is said. The scribes couldn’t comprehend Yahshua’s words because they refused to believe Him, believe *in* Him, or admit the fact that His power was that of God Himself.

So a few verses later, he gave them the straight truth: **“Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.... Before Abraham was, I AM.”**

(John 8:50, 58) “I Am,” is what God’s self-revealed name (Yahweh) means, so to say “I Am before Abraham was” is a clear claim to deity, even without the statement about being the One who provides eternal life—something only God can do. No wonder the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees tried to stone Him. If not true, these words *would have been* blasphemy. But if they were not true, how could one explain all the unprecedented miracles of healing and provision that Yahshua was doing? He wasn’t asking anyone to take His word about His identity, but only to open their eyes to the undeniable truth. **“Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.”** (John 14:11) There was more than enough evidence available to enable an honest man to believe in Him.

Once more, He challenged the Pharisees to consider this evidence: **“Do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.”** (John 10:36-38) Atheists like to characterize a Christian’s belief as “a leap of faith in the darkness,” but considering the evidence—the eyewitness testimony—to which we’re responding, it is actually just a small step toward the light. These eyewitnesses were willing to *die* rather than recant their stories—they had nothing to gain by lying. Meanwhile, atheists insist without evidence or reason that nothing created everything, that life sprang spontaneously from non-living matter, and that all life on this planet (and billions of other ones) evolved from non-existent to simple to complex without the benefit of a Designer—though the evidence points instead toward a process of inexorable *devolution*, of the steady degradation of the genomes of life. Atheism, in short, requires boatloads of *blind faith*, where a Christian’s faith is simply belief in what his eyes, heart, and logical mind are already telling him.

Yahshua picked up the theme again and again: **“The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me....”** In other words, “I am the Son of God, and the good works I do prove this.” The Pharisees had accused Him of being empowered by demonic forces, but the character of the works He did—healing, forgiving, bringing life, etc.—were things demons *never* did. They bore witness, rather, of Yahweh’s involvement.

Another of Yahshua’s many metaphors is that of a shepherd with His sheep. **“But you [Pharisees] do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one.”** (John 10:25-30) Sheep are a picture of innocence, even helplessness. It’s not so much that we sheep *obey* our Shepherd;

it's that we know His voice, and because we truly believe that He has the desire and ability to care for us, we follow where He leads.

The cynic might respond that sheep are gullible, even stupid. And the shepherd only looks after them so he can fleece them later. And he'd have a point about our relative inability to look after our own needs. But what the skeptic is missing is that domestic sheep *need* to be sheared periodically, and they can't do the job themselves. In New Zealand in 2004, a sheep (subsequently named Shrek) was found to have been hiding out in a cave for six years. By the time he was found, he was carrying around sixty extra pounds of wool—a third of his normal body weight. Shrek's little rebellion earned him celebrity status for a time, but the fact remains, his "sins" weighed him down to the point where he could barely walk.

The dichotomy between our temporary mortal existence and the eternal life that believers enjoy is doubtless the hardest belief-bridge we have to cross. Our bodies—the vehicles through which we walk through this life—all die, sooner or later. With only two thinly witnessed exceptions (the raptures of Enoch and Elijah) in all of recorded history, physical death is as close to a universal human phenomenon as there is—it's even more certain than taxes. But we see only our own mortality: the immortal life that follows is something we must take on faith, if at all.

But faith in what? In whom? To be plausible, any scientific theory (including the existence of an afterlife) must present evidence that can be tested, and if false, demonstrated to be false. But most of humanity believes in afterlife theories that cannot be falsified. Most Eastern religions (Hinduism and its spin-offs) believe in reincarnation—a process in which a soul, upon death, will return to inhabit another body or life-form. A cockroach may be reincarnated as a cat, and later as a man; or conversely, a man (if he did not do well in this life) might be reincarnated as a dung beetle. Because this is all so pointless and frustrating, the goal becomes to escape the cycle into nirvana, nothingness. But there is no empirical evidence for any of this—it is all mere human speculation.

Muslims believe that there is "life after death," but for the vast majority, it consists of eternal torment in hell. The Hadith, however, insists that 70,000 jihad fighters will attain a paradise with free flowing wine, low hanging fruit, and multiple sex-starved virgins. Of course, this is all based on the opinion of one man, Muhammad, who had a vested interest in motivating his troops to suicidal frenzy in search of booty and sex slaves *for him* (he took a 20% cut off the top). Not exactly an unbiased witness.

Secular humanists believe only what they can see. The body dies, so since they can perceive nothing beyond this, they presume the soul (that force which made it alive in the first place) has died as well. It's an argument from silence, but

still, if there were no plausible alternative theories, it would seem logical, I suppose.

The ancient Hebrews believed that the souls of the dead rested in a place called Sheol—the grave. Scriptural hints of the possibility of resurrection, though few and far between, did exist, like this tantalizing snippet from Hosea: **“I [Yahweh] will ransom them from the power of the grave [Sheol]. I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Sheol, I will be your destruction! Pity [for death] is hidden from My eyes.”** (Hosea 13:14) So there was hope for a blessed afterlife in Israel (as fuzzy as it was), though no tangible evidence. Still, considering the 100% accurate track record of Yahweh’s promises in historically verifiable matters, such hope was not at all unreasonable.

If you think about it, the only plausible evidence one could offer of his sure knowledge of an immortal afterlife would be authority over life and death in the *mortal* sense. Yahshua raised the dead on several occasions—and these things were not done without eyewitnesses. Doubtless the most spectacular of these was the resurrection of His friend Lazarus—who had been dead for four whole days—so long, the process of decomposition had already begun.

Speaking with his bereaved sister, **“Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’”** This is a reference to that which Hosea (and other prophets) had so cryptically revealed in the Scriptures. **“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.’”** (John 11:23-27) Her belief was not in Yahshua’s ability to raise her brother from the dead. She had no idea what He intended to do at this point. But she believed with every fiber of her being that Yahshua was God’s Anointed One—He who held the keys of immortality.

That would have been sufficient, of course, but Yahshua now proved His authority over *immortal* life by restoring the *temporal* life of His friend Lazarus. **“Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.”** That is, it was not unlike the tomb that He Himself would occupy for a few days a bit later. **“Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, ‘Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days....’”** Martha was still fixated on the resurrection at the Last Day—what we refer to as “the rapture.” It never occurred to her that her brother’s rotting corpse could be brought back to life—even by the Son of God. Too much time had gone by, right? Miracles and healings were swell, but *this* was asking too much.

“Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?’ Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know

that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.' Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth!' And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Loose him, and let him go.'" (John 11:38-44) Ironically, Martha had believed in Yahshua's power to bestow everlasting life to her brother—something no one could see. But Yahshua had validated that belief by restoring Lazarus' mortal life—something *everyone* could see.

The cynical nitpicker might complain, "Raising a man from the dead does nothing to prove the principle of eternal life—immortality. Lazarus eventually died 'for real.' All this proves is that Christ's power to heal was genuine and unprecedented." Yes, okay, there was only one way to demonstrate the reality of the immortal state—but Yahshua did *that*, too. The only reason we still celebrate Him after two thousand years is that, having been cruelly executed on a Roman cross and laid in a tomb, He rose bodily from the dead under His own power. Then, over the next forty days, He showed Himself alive to some five hundred people who had believed in Him before His death.

His resurrection body was *nothing like* the mortal human body in which He had ministered among them for so long. In this new body, He could cloak or reveal His identity at will, "teleport" Himself from one location to another instantly, pass through walls or locked doors, ascend leisurely into the heavens, etc. And yet His flesh felt "real" to the touch. He could interact with physical objects in this world (for instance, He still liked to eat); in other words, He was not a ghost or phantom (as we imagine them to be).

Yahshua's immortal post-resurrection body proved that life after death was not only possible—it was something He was prepared to bestow on us who believe in Him. As the Firstfruits of God's harvest, Yahshua was demonstrating what sort of "crop" we'd be when we too were raised as He was. As His eternal body differed from His former mortal shell, so will ours. As He told His disciples on the night He was betrayed (the night before His crucifixion), **"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe."** (John 14:27-29) The original disciples believed because of what they witnessed with their own two eyes. We believe (at first) because of their testimony, and later because we have discovered through personal experience that the promise of God's Holy Spirit dwelling within us is absolutely true.

Have Honest and Godly Motives

In these pages, we have established beyond the shadow of a doubt that one's "good works" do not save him, atone for his sins, or reconcile him with the Father. That being said, good works are still *good*—we should be doing them. They are a right and proper response to God's saving grace, even if they're of no value whatsoever in attaining it.

Good works are often taken as evidence of one's devotion to the kingdom of God. But this is where we venture out onto thin ice, for it is possible to perform good deeds for all the wrong reasons. So Yahshua said, **"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward...."** We rarely see this sort of thing in houses of worship anymore. "Tooting your own horn" is considered (at least among Evangelicals) to be "bad form."

On the other hand, it was common in my youth to see little plaques on the ends of church pews or on the frames of stained-glass windows, honoring the generosity of individual parishioners. And I remember being disgusted to hear that "positive-thinking" TV preacher Robert Schuller was "selling" glass panes with the donors' names inscribed on them to be used in the construction of his monstrous Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California (not far from where I worked) in the early 1980s. It is ironic that thirty years later, they were so far in debt they had to sell this 2,700-seat monument to religious pride to the Catholics for \$57.5 million—who then spent another \$72 million renovating it. The news articles didn't mention the sounding of trumpets, but the building does house the world's fifth-largest pipe organ.

Of course, it is debatable if building fancy houses of worship should count as "charitable deeds" at all. Christ never instructed us to do so. But He did say, **"When you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."** (Matthew 6:1-4) It's all a question of motivation: are we giving in order to receive the congratulations or respect of men, or is it because we truly care about the welfare (spiritual or otherwise) of the recipient? You'll notice that many of Christ's healing miracles were done without fanfare or expectation of glory. For example, upon healing two blind men, we read, **"Their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, 'See that no one knows it.'"** (Matthew 9:30)

Just because we have Christ's assurance that **"Your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly,"** it does not follow that we can "engineer" a prosperous

life by being a generous giver. God not only sees our charitable deeds, He also perceives our motives for doing them. If our reason for performing some good work is to blackmail God into rewarding us materially, we've missed the whole point. We believers are instructed to love one another—that is, to reflect our God's defining attribute for the world's benefit. *Love alone* is to comprise our motivation. Besides, God didn't define "rewards" as being strictly materialistic. While doing good deeds can earn you "treasures in heaven," they won't necessarily enhance your bank account here on earth. They could just as easily be manifested as an overabundance of the "fruit of the Spirit"—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—things that people with pure motives would actually value. Notwithstanding that our basic human needs will be met if we put God first ("**Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.**"—Matthew 6:33) God knows that earthly riches are more often an impediment to the Christian life than they are an inducement to holiness.

The principle applies to anything we might do that has the potential to enhance our "religious reputation." Yahshua mentioned fasting, for example—something that, though never commanded in scripture, was a technique often used (even by Himself) to sharpen the senses and focus the mind on God. "**Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance.**" Keep your devotion private. Let its evidence be a holy life. "**For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.**" (Matthew 6:16-18) As the old saying goes, some people are so heavenly minded, they're no earthly good. Being pious is commendable; *looking* pious is its own reward.

Public prayer is another area in which we are admonished to pay heed to our motives. Are we really praying at all, or merely shining a spotlight on our own piety? "**And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.**" (Matthew 6:5-6) Our next section will deal with prayer, so I'll defer my discussion of this most-important of subjects until then. Note here, though, that God prefers us to converse with Him quietly, one on One in our own idiom, clumsy though it may be. He's not interested in polished, public lectures to heaven intended primarily to elevate us in the eyes of our peers. If you wouldn't use that tone with your own earthly father (especially if you're in trouble), then don't try it on God.

Yahshua once told a story to get that point across, loud and clear: if you're going to pray, remember Who you're talking to—the Lord of Glory, not one of your gullible peers. **“Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess....’”** For one thing, God never told you to fast, so examine your motive for doing so. For another, He commanded everyone in Israel to tithe. So why do you think you're so special? Note that technically, the Pharisee was telling the truth about his own behavior. Yahshua's point was that in “praying” this way in public, he wasn't really giving thanks to God; he was merely trying to elevate himself in comparison to other people—it was an exercise in arrogance.

“And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’” If you're going to compare yourself to someone, compare yourself to Christ—God's perfect example, the only one who could *not* honestly pray, “Be merciful to Me, a sinner.” **“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”** (Luke 18:9-14) If you're doing well, God already knows it—pray that His will is done, and that you might be a blessing to others. If you're screwing up, God knows that as well—pray for mercy and cleansing. Humility is our duty; exaltation is God's prerogative.

Considering the fact that the Pharisees were the most “religious,” most overtly Torah-compliant people in Judea, it comes as something of a shock that Yahshua so often lambasted them as examples of “how not to do it.” The sect was so strict, there were never more than 6,000 Pharisees at any one time, for it took herculean effort and colossal self-control to even pretend to be as disciplined as they were. They were held in high esteem, bordering on awe, by the common folk of the day, for they were scrupulous to a fault—and they made sure everyone knew it.

However, the “Law” they followed wasn't the Torah, exactly, but rather the “oral law,” the traditions that had grown up around the Torah in the intervening centuries—mostly during the Second Temple period. (One example: In Exodus 16:29, God had instructed the Israelites not to leave their tents to go out and gather manna on the seventh day. Later rabbis turned this into the oral tradition of the “Sabbath day's journey,” in which you could travel no further than 2,000 cubits (about a thousand yards) on the Sabbath. It was a complete fabrication that totally missed the point. But this rule—along with thousands of other “hedgies about the Torah”—became part of Jewish culture.) The Pharisees were masters of this oral law—and how to find loopholes around it. (For instance, they first

redefined one's "home" as the entire city in which he was living, and then said you could put a bit of bread on a rock or tree and declare, "This is my residence," in effect redefining their "Sabbath day's journey" to whatever distance they found convenient.) In the end, the closer one adhered to the strategies of the Pharisees, the farther away he drifted from the true meaning of the Torah.

But even if it had been the actual Torah that the Pharisees had endeavored to keep, Yahshua's fundamental disagreement with them would have remained. They relied upon themselves—their own efforts—for salvation, whereas He had come in order to be God's redeeming sacrifice. He had come to atone for our sin, but they said, "*What sin?*" In the end, the Pharisees hated Yahshua because he saw right through their pretensions, their loopholes, and their total disregard for the spirit of God's Law while making a show of keeping its letter.

His tirades against them exposed their errant motivation. It wasn't so much what they did, but why they did it, that God despised. **"A certain Pharisee asked [Yahshua] to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not first washed before dinner."** The oral law prescribed a complicated cleansing ritual that was pointless and silly, so Christ ignored it. **"Then the Lord said to him, 'Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also?...'"** It wasn't that Yahshua was unfamiliar with what the rabbis had added to God's Law. It was that He saw what was really wrong with men, and it had nothing to do with clean dishes.

"But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you. But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone." It was relatively easy to make a show of tithing of what grew in your herb garden, while devising clever and covert workarounds for withholding mercy from God's children. Yahshua pointed out that if their motives had been pure, their almsgiving would have been second nature. **"Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces...."** They craved—made an idol of—the affirmation of their peers, while wanting to be recognized as "being better" than the common folk.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them." (Luke 11:37-44) By putting their piety on display while concealing their inward wickedness, the religious elite were like unmarked graves—sources of spiritual impurity that stealthily defiled those with whom they had contact. In this, the Pharisees were as a class not unlike that about which Paul (ironically, a Pharisee himself) warned Timothy in these last days: "Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” (II Timothy 3:2-5) Taken together, these aren’t the sorts of sins you’d expect from “godless heathens.” From *them*, you’d expect to see lust, murder, theft, drunkenness, debauchery, and the like. But these are stealthy, sneaky sins that are all too often perpetrated by latter-day Pharisees—religious pretenders whose impressive façades don’t match their corrupt inner lives.

In many ways, this all matches the spiritual profile of the final church on Christ’s Revelation 2-3 mailing list—that of pre-repentant Laodicea, those whom Yahshua feels like “vomiting out of his mouth.” While presenting themselves to the world as rich, pious, ecclesiastically powerful, and a light to those in darkness, God sees them as “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.” Like the Pharisees of old, they want desperately to be honored among men, even if they have to fake their goodness and hide their wickedness. Yahshua told them, **“I do not receive honor from men.”** No, He received honor from Yahweh, the Heavenly Father. **“But I know you [Pharisees], that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?”** (John 5:41-44)

Again, He speaks of sinful motives—seeking honor from other men, from one another, instead of from God. This is actually a potential pitfall for anyone who endeavors to do God’s work—like me, for instance. I hope my writings are helpful to folks, of course. But I quite naturally find affirmation more fun than criticism—even if it is constructive. I have to constantly ask myself, am I doing this because God gave me a job to do, or am I doing it for “Facebook Likes,” so to speak?

There is an ominous prophecy Yahshua placed in there sideways. Who is this person who will **“come in his own name,”** whom the “Pharisees” will receive? I can see (at least) two candidates for the role. The first was Rabbi Akiba, a Pharisee who wrested control of Judaism from the priesthood early in the second century A.D., who managed to separate Christianity from Israel, codified the oral law into written form (giving it, in Jewish minds, authority equal to the Tanakh), passed off a brutal warlord named Simeon Ben Kosiba (a.k.a. Bar Kochba—“son of a star”) as the Messiah, fomented another Jewish rebellion against Rome, got Israel expelled from the Land for a couple of millennia, and got himself and his phony Christ killed. Busy boy. Akiba did more damage to Israel (in the wake of their “Let Yahshua’s blood be upon us and our children” prayer) than any Jew since Rehoboam.

The second candidate for this dubious honor is yet future. After the rapture of the church, a man commonly referred to as “the Antichrist” will manage to impose a long-sought “peace” in the Middle East, apparently giving the “Palestinians” a state of their own (carved out of Israeli land, of course), while “guaranteeing” Israel’s sovereignty—probably using United Nations muscle. This treaty is the starting gun for the seven-year worldwide horror known prophetically as “the Tribulation.” I expect this peace to last maybe a year before the whole thing falls apart. Although Israel will eventually reject him (bringing on the “Time of Jacob’s Sorrow,” a.k.a., the *Great Tribulation*), they will begin by buying into his lies, along with the rest of the left-behind world: **“him you will receive.”** I realize the *literal* Pharisees will have been extinct for millennia by this time, but their legacy lives on in the religious elite described by Paul above in II Timothy 3—and not just Jews, but every godless belief system on earth. They will all receive and worship the Antichrist (see Revelation 13:4, 7).

Frequent allies of the Pharisees of Yahshua’s time were the lawyers or scribes—those who took it upon themselves to reinterpret the Torah and apply the oral law. **“And He said, ‘Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.’** These scribes were also the source of the loopholes and workarounds of which the Pharisees took advantage. **“Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs.... Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.”** (Luke 11:46-48, 52) It’s one thing (and bad enough) to be made a slave through false teaching. It’s infinitely worse to be the holder of the chain, the keeper of the key, the purveyor of the lie. Nor was this problem a new one—it had been going on for over a thousand years, throughout the age of the prophets.

The imperative here is to refrain from tinkering with God’s word. Explore it, yes; ponder it, by all means. Comment on it; do what you can to make it clearer to folks by connecting the dots. But neither add to nor subtract from it. As Moses had told the Children of Israel, “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of Yahweh your God which I command you.” (Deuteronomy 4:2) And just because the church age has now mostly run its course, the admonition hasn’t become obsolete—it has only gotten more urgent, more specific. Near the end of the last chapter in the Bible, we read, “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” (Revelation 22:18-19)

How do modern-day “scribes and lawyers” run afoul of this admonition? The obvious place to start is by watering down the scriptures. There are a plethora of Bible translations out there today, and most of them are honest attempts to render the Word of God in language accessible to the reader. The fact that the Roman Catholics kept most of their world in the dark for hundreds of years by keeping the mass in Latin, when nobody understood it but the priests, was a perverse and underhanded way of “taking away from” the scriptures. But that’s not what I’m talking about. I have no problem with loose, “thought for thought” translations that have arisen in recent years (examples: the Living Bible, the Message, etc.), as long as we understand that some of the wording is a *guess* as to what the original writer was trying to communicate—and that our guesses are sometimes off the mark. “Dynamic equivalence” is (or can be) a noble goal, but it is a slippery slope to perdition in the hands of people with an apostate agenda and impure motives.

So beware of “versions” that have been purposely tinkered with to push a non-Biblical point of view. The granddaddy of them all is the New World Translation (from the Jehovah’s Witnesses), tweaked to subtly present Jesus as something less than God incarnate. And nowadays we’re beginning to see new “politically correct” versions, such as gender-neutral The New Inclusive Translation, from the Oxford University Press. I understand that even the venerable New International Version is being “rewritten” to be more “feminist friendly.” At least they changed the name to *Today’s* New International Version (TNIV), as if to warn us not to touch this version with a ten-cubit cattle prod.

All of this might be characterized as “the leaven of the Pharisees,” the systemic, creeping culture of corruption eating away at the faith upon which we rely. I realize that there is no such thing as a “perfect” English translation. But if “we” begin publishing Bibles purposefully rewritten to avoid offending liberals, homosexuals, secular humanists, and Muslims, we have already lost the battle. God’s word doesn’t change—only our willingness to receive it. But if we can no longer pick up a Bible and expect it to somewhat accurately convey God’s truth, can the end of the age be all that far off?

So Yahshua warned us: **“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy....”** Two words play off of each other here. Leaven (yeast) is the ingredient in bread that makes it rise. In bread-making, it proliferates and becomes impossible to remove, hence its metaphorical use in scripture as a picture of sin. Hypocrisy is play-acting, pretending, feigning a role, deceit. It is said that actors (sort of like the lawyers mentioned above, I guess) “lie for a living.” Yahshua here is equating the false self-image presented by the Pharisees (pious, scrupulously Law-keeping, godly, etc.) with an insidious fungus that invades a lump of bread dough and changes its character from within. Once again,

motive is in view, for if we are honest before God, man, and ourselves, we will admit that the best we can be in this life is “sinners saved by grace.”

So we are to be wary of the sinister thought processes by which we tend to deceive ourselves. **“For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.”** (Luke 12:1-3) Nothing is hidden from God. Therefore, it makes little sense to try to hide our fallen condition from our fellow man—and especially from ourselves. God has provided the remedy for our “human condition,” sin. It makes no sense to refuse the cure, just because we’re *all* sick.

Yahshua gave us some clues as to how to recognize the false teachers: **“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; cf. Luke 20:45-47) In a nutshell, their attitude is “Me first,” rather than “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But their self-centeredness is disguised with false piety, generosity for show (masking a lack of any real compassion), and a pathological need for personal affirmation. Their sartorial proclivities are designed to keep the focus on them, not on God.

This wouldn’t be as dangerous as it is but for one thing: they are (by their own design) considered arbiters of truth and knowledge by those who are themselves less well-informed. The false teachers have said “trust me” so often, many have concluded that they must, therefore, be trustworthy. Today (though no longer called “scribes”), they’d often be the ones with cable TV “ministries,” best-selling books, and pulpits in mega-churches. Yahshua had them pegged: **“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they 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....”** They are, He says, the very personification of hypocrisy. If we find ourselves listening to “religious experts,” it is incumbent upon us to differentiate what they say (which won’t be *all* lies) from what they do. The most compelling lies, after all, are 90% truth. Thorough knowledge of (and reverence for) the scriptures is the surest way to avoid being deceived.

The hypocrisy factor looms large: **“But all their works they do to be seen by men.”** Motivation again. If they’re teaching, the goal should be the dissemination of truth, not achieving fame and fortune. **“They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments....”** Phylacteries are evidence of their love of loopholes. God had told them in the Torah, “Keep My precepts on your mind at all times.” So they made little boxes, put scraps of Torah-inscribed parchment in them, and *strapped them to their foreheads*. I kid you not. The “borders” of their garments

apparently refer to the *tsitzits* or tassels that Yahweh commanded them to sew onto the corners of their clothing (see Numbers 15:38-40). Each *tsitzit* was supposed to have a single cord of blue among the undyed white ones—indicative (I’m guessing) of the coming Anointed One. Since the Torah didn’t specify a source for the blue dye (which normally would have been extracted from the Cerulean Mussel), the rabbis assigned a source (adding to the Torah), and then made their tassels *without* the blue thread (subtracting from the Torah) because they couldn’t be sure they were using the *right* blue dye. Well had Moses written, “It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of Yahweh, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot.” It was as if the scribes had said, “Well *that* seems simple enough. Let’s see how many ways we can screw this up.”

For the scribes and Pharisees, it was all about how they could gain respect (and profit) among their peers. **“They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi.’”** Rabbi literally means, great (or numerous), hence, “my great one, my master, my honorable sir.” It’s derived from *rab*, meaning captain, so it is applied to revered teachers—leaders of their students. **“But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi,’ for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.”** And how do Catholic priests not blush when they read *this*? **“Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.”** The bottom line is this: **“And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”** (Matthew 23:1-12)

You didn’t have to be a Pharisee to fall into the trap of self-exaltation, of course. Pride is the most common—and the most destructive—of human foibles. It seems we can always manage to find somebody “lower” than we are in the natural order of things—a “worse” sinner, or someone less prosperous or beautiful or intelligent than we are. But at the Last Supper (right before the crucifixion, when most of His disciples had already come to terms with His divinity), Yahshua performed the service of the lowliest household slave—He washed their feet. And He explained to them, **“The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.”** (Luke 22:25-26) If God Incarnate could humble Himself like this, washing the feet of His rough-hewn disciples—including Judas Iscariot, whom He knew was about to betray Him—then self-exaltation among ourselves is

revealed to be the silliest of sins. Not only does it betray a lack of love, it also violates the Tenth Commandment: you shall not covet. And as for “he who governs,” though *somebody* has to run things, I suppose, he is to be in fact what we call him euphemistically: a public *servant*. Those who govern are not to imagine they’re our rulers or our lords. We have but one ruler: Christ.

On the other hand, it is possible for us to lie to ourselves (and others) about who our “ruler” actually is. The scribes and Pharisees would have told you their Lord is Yahweh (well, they might have if they didn’t refuse to utter His name out of feigned respect), or perhaps they’d say that the Law was their lord. Here in the church age, the pretense sometimes extends to our attitude toward Yahshua Himself: **“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’”** Today we might say, “Have we not built great cathedrals in Your name, and collected millions of dollars for charitable works?” **“And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”** (Matthew 7:21-23) What is the will of the Father? That we love one another. What is the work of God? That we believe in Him whom He sent. We can “accomplish” an awful lot in this world without getting anywhere near either of those things. It’s all a question of our motives. Are they honest and godly, or are they actually self-serving?

We need to examine who we’re really serving. Is it God, or ourselves? **“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”** Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. And He said to them, **“You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”** (Luke 16:13-15) John once summarized the false gods of this world as “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” (I John 2:16) Put another way, fallen man’s worship is the pursuit of pleasure, profit, and power. Yahshua’s admonition about “justifying yourselves before men” is the key to the problem. Neither power, sex, nor money are bad things in themselves—they are spiritually neutral, and can even be gifts from God. But if we “serve” them, if we make them our goals, especially while feigning pious religiosity while vindicating our true worldly objectives, we’re in trouble. We all sin. The question is, are we ashamed of it—or do we deny or even defend it?

Ungodly motives are revealed clearly in what we say. Have you ever heard somebody say, “I swear on a stack of Bibles that this is true”? Would that make it more likely to be true than if he swore on only one Bible, or on Webster’s Dictionary, for that matter? I think not. Yahshua admonished us, **“Again you have**

heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to Yahweh.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." (Matthew 5:33-37, quoting Leviticus 19:12, cf. Matthew 23:16) If your motives are straight, you will have no reason to bend the truth—whether “under oath” or otherwise.

I just cringe when I hear politicians being sworn into office, putting their hand on a Bible and saying things like, “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter: So help me God.” (That's the oath for the United States Senate.) Half of them saying this have little working knowledge of what the Constitution actually requires, and judging by their subsequent performance, the whole “purpose of evasion” line is nothing but a bad joke. As a class, politicians can seldom say, “My yes means yes, and my no means no.” But would we ever elect anyone who swore he intended to “do whatever it takes to advance my own political agenda, enriching myself and my financial backers behind the scenes while I render lip service to the noisiest segments of my constituency and the leftist media that fuels their hate”? Sometimes, the only place the truth “flies” is *right out the window*.

Does *anybody* display consistently honest motives? There is one group who does: “Jesus called them to Him and said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.’” (Luke 18:16-17, cf. Matthew 19:14) Little children aren't sinless by any means; but they are (generally speaking) without guile. Even when they're being selfish and greedy, they're honest about it (unlike us grown-ups). What makes kids the prototype for people entering the kingdom of God? Children believe what their parents say, and trust us to tell them the truth—making it incumbent upon us to scrupulously avoid telling them plausible lies. If their parents can't be trusted, the children will eventually conclude that God can't be trusted either. No pressure or anything.

That's the pattern: as parents teach their children, God teaches us. And we are justified by believing (trusting in, relying on) what He said, whether by word or deed. “My doctrine [Greek *didache*: that which is taught] is not Mine, but His who sent Me.” That is, if you can trust Yahweh (and you *can*), you can trust His Messiah. “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or

whether I speak on My own authority. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.” (John 7:16-18) Search the record. Yahshua never said or did anything that was out of sync with what Yahweh had revealed in the Tanakh. Rather, His life and doctrine revealed God’s glory—in very unexpected ways.

As far as salvation is concerned, there is only one way to God—through Christ. But there are many ways to Christ. I imagine no two of us have identical salvation stories to tell. Some of us (like Paul) have blinding epiphanies; others see the truth glowing only dimly at first, seeing the light more clearly as we walk toward it step by step in faith. But know this: in the end, the whole salvation issue is binary—on or off, yes or no. Look at it this way—if you don’t have a mother who conceived you, you don’t exist, and never did. The same sort of thing is true on the spiritual plane: if you haven’t been “born from above” by the Holy Spirit, you—by definition—are not “alive” at all in the heavenly sense: Yahweh is “the God of the Living” (see Mark 12:27).

Yahshua put it like this: **“He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.”** (Luke 11:23) Spiritually, we are “with Him” if we are alive, born of His Spirit. But does that really mean we are “against” Him if we are not born again? Perhaps, but *kata* (rendered here as “against”) has a broad range of meanings. *Thayer* defines it as “a preposition denoting motion or diffusion or direction from the higher to the lower.” So a more direct translation might be “down upon,” “underneath,” “after,” or “behind.” That is, if we are not with Yahshua, we are *beneath* Him, on an entirely different spiritual plane, whether or not hostility (on our part) is present. And the implication (stated plainly elsewhere in scripture) is that if we are “with Him,” if we are born from above in His Spirit, then He elevates our status, lifting us up to be children of God and co-heirs of Christ.

But we should guard against confusing style with substance. Just because others don’t express their beliefs in exactly the same way we do, it doesn’t necessarily mean they’re lost, nor does it mean their motives are less than honorable. **“Now John answered Him, saying, ‘Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.’ But Jesus said, ‘Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”** (Mark 9:38-41; cf. Luke 9:49-50) Judging the motivation of our brothers (or those who claim to be our brothers) is not our job. If they call upon the name of Christ, we are to give them the benefit of the doubt, and let God sort it out. False teaching (something we *are* to call out) will reveal itself soon enough.

The bottom line is this: **“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”** (John 12:20) We will never see Yahweh (in His undiminished glory) face to face, and Yahshua, His mortal human manifestation, has been physically absent from among us for almost two thousand years now. So at the moment, there are only three sources of divine revelation and testimony available to us—the Scriptures (transmitted by people), the Holy Spirit (dwelling within people), and people themselves (who, let’s face it, are far from perfect). For reasons of His own, God has chosen *people* to pass the baton of faith from one runner to the next in the human race. Let us endeavor not to drop it.

The counterintuitive fact is, we can’t successfully run the race if we’re motivated by our own interests. Toward the end of his life, Paul equated his “finishing the race” with having “kept the faith.” (See II Timothy 4:7.) And looking forward to His own death by crucifixion, Christ revealed His own motivation: to achieve far greater things through his death (and subsequent resurrection and glorification) than would ever have been possible walking the earth in a mortal body—no how many good deeds He did. **“Jesus answered them, saying, ‘The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain....’** If He had not gone to the cross on our behalf, and if He had not risen from the dead under His own power, Yahshua would have been but an obscure footnote in history. But as it is, the whole world knows of Him today, two thousand years later—and a fair number of us trust Him with our eternal destinies as well.

But for us, godly motivation is crucial: **“He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”** Love and hate here are comparative terms, of course. We’re not talking about embracing clinical depression to counteract our narcissistic tendencies. But at the end of the day, what motivates us? Is it our own temporal wellbeing, or God’s kingdom? **“If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.”** (John 12:23-26) This very morning (as I write these words) I heard the news of the death of evangelist Billy Graham at ninety-nine years of age. What better contemporary example could we have of one who has served Christ his whole life with godly and honest motives, and who was subsequently honored by God and man alike? He lived his entire adult life in the glare of the spotlight, preaching the simple gospel of grace to millions of people, while never once forgetting who he served, or why. I pray that his passing will precipitate a much-needed revival as we approach the Last Days of the church age.

Pray in God's Will

Let's face it: much of our experience as believers is based on what we perceive God can do for us. Many of these objectives are lofty and commendable, of course—salvation, forgiveness, cleansing, and so forth—and some are more prosaic—like meeting our temporal needs, protecting us from our enemies, healing us, etc. These things may seem self-centered, but they're simply a response to what Yahweh has told us to do all the way through scripture: rely upon Him. The unavoidable fact is, God wants to take care of us. Even when He admonishes us to “obey Him,” it is with our well-being in mind, not His.

This all makes more sense if we see ourselves as small children, and Yahweh as our “Father,” or His Holy Spirit as our “Mother.” The real relationship between us is not as equals, as peers. Nor is it as a master to a slave, a teacher to a student, or a boss to his worker. It is, rather, as a parent to his beloved child. Yes, “daddy” tells us to eat our vegetables and treat our siblings with kindness, and “mommy” tells us to tidy up our rooms and brush our teeth. But doing these things does not *make us* their children. We are *already* their children. Our parents' instructions merely help us learn how to grow up “in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.”

Our human parents (presuming they love us) don't want us kids to hide from them in terror, cringing in anticipation of being punished for some incomprehensible infraction of their “rules.” They're not looking for obsequious obeisance, appeasement, or paranoid trepidation from us. No, our parents want us to *talk with them*, laugh, cuddle, vent our frustrations, feel safe in their arms, tell them we don't like carrots, say we're sorry for hitting Billy, ask them why the sky is blue, admit that we're afraid of the storm outside, that our tummy hurts, and that we want a puppy. That sort of open communication, when it happens between us and God, is called *prayer*.

Communication between man and God in the Old Testament took many forms we aren't personally familiar with today—conversations with theophanies, scary encounters with the Shekinah, dreams and visions, revelation through prophets, and so forth. But even then, prayer was available to us. One researcher (Finis Dake) found 176 recorded prayers in the Old Testament, and 46 in the New, for a total of 222 (not including mere *references* to prayer), most of them asking for specific positive outcomes (healings, blessings, victories, etc.). They stretch from Abraham in Genesis 15, to John in Revelation 22. But by far our clearest, most comprehensive *instruction* concerning prayer is recorded in the Gospels, coming straight from the lips of Yahshua Himself.

For example, **“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him**

who knocks it will be opened.” We are God’s *children*, after all. Like four-year-olds, we aren’t expected to be self-sufficient. Self-reliance, in fact, can be a subtle form of idolatry. **“Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!...”** I believe the family structure (fathers, mothers, and children) was ordained by God to be a metaphor for humanity’s parallel relationship with Him. (See *The Torah Code*, Volume 4.1: *Relationships*, elsewhere on this website.) I suppose that’s why Satan works so hard trying to break up families—especially by trying to remove the father from the picture: if we don’t see “father” as a wise and loving provider and protector, we won’t have a clue as to how Yahweh would like to relate to us. If “dad” is a spineless, absent weasel—or worse, a pig who gets drunk and beats up mom and the kids—they will have no positive point of reference for the benign “Heavenly Father” presented in the Bible—the One who gives good things to His beloved children. Satan is evil, but nobody ever said he’s stupid.

Remember, the context here is asking (of God) and receiving. In a lost world, we believers are God’s ambassadors: we can provide the only glimpse of His character some folks will ever see. So we are to treat them with the same love and respect with which our Heavenly Father treats us, for it is, after all, how we *like* to be treated. It’s the Golden Rule—**“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”** (Matthew 7:7-12) That is, it’s the second-greatest commandment: love your neighbor as you do yourself.

Christians are not the only people who pray, of course. The “why” of it is axiomatic: we all want something from our deity. But is revealing to note how and to whom prayer is performed. Catholics are told to repeat formula prayers (“Our Fathers” or “Hail Marys”) as penance for their sins—as if Christ hadn’t already atoned for them. Head-bobbing ultra-orthodox Jews gather in minyans (groups of ten) at the Wailing Wall to offer up canned, rabbinically pre-approved prayers to Ha-Shem. Muslims line up in rows facing Mecca, bow with their faces in the dirt and their butts in the air five times a day, and mindlessly recite prayers somebody else wrote. (Allah is said to have demanded *fifty* prostrations a day. Maybe *that’s* why he never answers.) Hindus give food offerings upon household shrines to their choice of gods among 330 million of them, ignoring the rest. They’re afraid that if they do not do this, their deity will lose focus and cease doing whatever it was that he was supposed to be doing in the first place. Tibetan Buddhists suspect there is no god, but just to be on the safe side, they still pray—automating the process with prayer wheels so they can get the job done without wasting any more time than necessary.

Yahshua apparently had all of these in mind when He said, **“When you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them, for your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him....”** The “heathen” do not speak with their gods as children do with their parents—the way Yahweh wants us to relate to Him, with familiarity and respect. God (the real One) doesn’t need to have His ego stroked—He *knows* how great He is, and how puny we are in comparison. Rather, He wants us to tell Him what’s on our minds, to share our troubles, joys, needs, and desires, to intercede for others who need His help, to thank Him for what He has done in the past, or just to say we love Him. Yahweh knows what we need, but He still wants to hear us ask Him for it. After all, if we don’t put it in words before God, how are *we* going to differentiate what we really need from our frivolous fantasies? If we can’t honestly say (without blushing), “I want *this* to happen, so I’m going to ask Yahweh for it,” it’s a good bet that we don’t actually need it.

It’s sadly ironic that probably the most oft-*recited* passage in scripture—the very *definition* of “vain repetition”—is Yahshua’s instruction concerning prayer that immediately follows the warning not to mindlessly rehearse canned prayers to God. His “model prayer” was intended to teach us *how to pray*—to inform us as to what subjects to broach and what tone to take when speaking with our God. (1) **“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name....”** Acknowledge that our heavenly Father’s name—His character and identity—is holy: it is sacred, unique, matchless, and utterly beyond anything we experience upon the earth. Yahweh (meaning “I am”) is a name we dare not speak except upon our knees—that is, in an attitude of humility, reverence, and respect.

(2) **“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven....”** We are instructed to petition God to fulfill His myriad promises concerning His future kingdom upon the earth. This “kingdom” is the last of seven millennia ordained for fallen man upon the earth—the long awaited Sabbath day of rest, a prophetic principle revealed in the very first chapter of the Bible and repeated in scores of forms in its subsequent pages. It’s no surprise that whatever Yahweh wants is done in the heavenly realm. Here on the earth, however, the free will He gave us has made man’s will predominant—for the moment. But during the final Millennium—the kingdom of God—we will see this prayer answered: God’s will actually *will* be done on earth as it always has been in heaven. Yahshua—God incarnate—will reign in perfect peace for a thousand years, showing mankind what we could have had all along if only we had loved our God as He loved us.

(3) **“Give us this day our daily bread....”** God tells us to ask Him to provide what we need. Since the “work of God is to believe in Him whom He sent,” (John 6:29) trusting Him is something we’re supposed to be doing: we are to rely upon His bounty, not our own efforts or cleverness. Yes, as a fallen race, we have to “work

for it” (See Genesis 3:17-19), but as long as we (in the broader, societal sense) are relying on God, He will reward our efforts with enough to live on. Ordinarily, famines don’t happen in times and places where God is honored, though alas, such societies are few and sporadic, and always have been. I would understand “daily bread” to mean not only food, but whatever is necessary to sustain our mortal lives—shelter, clothing, water, air, and fuel. The provision of anything beyond this is strictly at God’s discretion, but I can bear personal witness that our Father can be *very* generous with his temporal gifts.

(4) **“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors....”** He’s not talking strictly about monetary debts here (since God has no use for money), but debts of a moral nature, specifically, sin. When we fall short of God’s target of perfection (and we all do) we have sinned—not only against our fellow man and sometimes ourselves, but also against the keeper of the standard, Yahweh Himself. Thus we owe Him a “debt” that we cannot pay, since the only thing that can atone for sin is innocence. This explains the recurring metaphor of the Torah sacrifices—animals have no free will; thus they cannot be said to have sinned. Christ *was* innocent, so His self-sacrifice atoned for (i.e., covered) our sins, permanently and completely. But this fact behooves us to “pay it forward.” He once told a scary parable (Matthew 18:21-35) about a servant who was forgiven a huge debt, only to turn around and be unforgiving toward another who owed *him* a relative pittance. The Master, not surprisingly, was livid, asking rhetorically, **“Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant?”** When people sin against us, offend us, cheat us, and lie to (or about) us, we are to forgive them. Period. It isn’t “fair,” I know, but neither is God’s forgiveness of the vast debt of sin that was owed to Him by us. I’ll take mercy over justice any day of the week.

(5) **“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one....”** James says, “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.” (James 1:13-14) While this is true of enticement to sin, the predominant scriptural meaning of the word “temptation” (Greek: *peirasmos*) is testing, or “trial of man’s fidelity, integrity, virtue, or constancy...or adversity or affliction sent by God sent to test or prove one’s faith, holiness, character.” (*Thayer*) It does *not* usually evoke allurements to pleasure which tend to lead us into evil. Christ was tested in every way as we are (see Hebrews 4:15), yet He remained sinless, proving Him to be the spotless lamb required for the atoning sacrifice. We, on the other hand, have the opportunity and duty to ask our God to spare us from these trials and tests. It is amazing how seldom it occurs to us to resort to this privilege. Satan loves to see us screw up, for it provides an opportunity for him to drive a wedge between us and our forgiving God. But we are instructed to ask for God’s protection against the devil’s evil machinations. This is a spiritual battle—one we are ill-equipped to fight in the flesh. More on this in a moment.

(6) **“For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen....”** The model prayer ends as it began—with acknowledgment of Yahweh’s authority, wielded through the risen Yahshua, and backed by His omnipotence and splendor. “Amen” (derived from a similar Hebrew word, pronounced *ah-mane*) literally means “firm or steadfast,” thus verily, truly, may it be fulfilled, most assuredly, so be it, etc. *Thayer* notes, “It was a custom, which passed over from the synagogues into the Christian assemblies, that when he who had read or discoursed had offered up a solemn prayer to God, the others in attendance responded ‘Amen,’ and thus made the substance of what was uttered their own.”

Having finished instructing His disciples about how (and what) to pray in God’s will, Yahshua went back to reiterate one extremely important point: **“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”** (Matthew 6:7-14; cf. Luke 11:2-4) Point #4 was a deal breaker. It’s not a “salvation issue,” because we’re talking to people to whom Yahweh is “your heavenly Father.” But if we want to be forgiven of our incessant little sins against God and man, we must be prepared to forgive the things people do to us. In other words, an unforgiving attitude on our part can and will hinder our prayers.

It was an issue Yahshua raised time after time. Two days before the crucifixion, He said, **“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”** (Mark 11:25-26) As it had been in the Sermon on the Mount, this admonition to forgive was the punch line to one of Yahshua’s teachings on prayer. It would transpire that for the next two thousand years, Christians would be asked to forgive *a lot*—we would be hounded, harassed, and persecuted simply because of our faith. It’s the prophetic profile of the church at Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11), something that is still with us today. The “natural” response would be to hate those who hate us and attack those who attack us—the Crusader mentality. (It’s not as if the Muslims didn’t “have it coming,” but it was never our job to take the battle to them. Vengeance is Yahweh’s—He will repay.) But Christ told us to do the *unnatural* thing: love our enemies, bless those who curse us, and forgive everyone who does us wrong. This strange behavior was intended to be the one thing, above all others, that set us apart from the world.

But this time, His instruction was a bit harder to grasp, for in context, prayer for destruction (quite uncharacteristically) is in view. On the walk into Jerusalem from Bethany on Tuesday morning of the Passion week, (the day after the Triumphal Entry), Yahshua cursed a fig tree for having no fruit on it, even though it wasn’t exactly “fig season” yet. Mark’s account makes it clear that the cursing took place on one day, and that the lesson was given on the next. But Matthew

summarizes: **“And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, ‘Let no fruit grow on you ever again.’ Immediately the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it [the next day], they marveled, saying, ‘How did the fig tree wither away so soon?’...”**

On the surface, Yahshua seems petty and vindictive here—cursing a poor defenseless fig tree for not doing what nobody expected it to do anyway—bear fruit out of season. But the circumstances and the symbology conspire to correct our errant impression. (1) The fig tree (usually in combination with the grapevine) is a common Old Testament metaphor for Israel, and it’s a symbol made quite clear on the lips of Yahshua (see Matthew 24:30, Luke 13:6-6, etc.). (2) This was during the week leading up to Passover. If you’ll recall, the Passover Lamb was to be brought into the household of Israel on Nisan 10 (not coincidentally, the date of the Triumphal entry in 33AD), and slain on the afternoon of the 14th. So at this very time, Israel was supposed to be “examining and approving” the Lamb. (3) Finding fruit on the fig tree would have been prophetic that the nation of Israel would have been ready to receive Yahshua as her Messiah at this time. (4) Alas, Yahweh knew it was not to be, placing the Day of Atonement sixth on His list of holy convocations, not fourth—thereby indicating the nature of the hiatus of God’s plan for Israel described in Daniel 9:24-27, a gap that would be occupied by the church age. The length of this break, from the Day of Pentecost until the Feast of Trumpets—that is, from the beginning of the church age until its practical end after the rapture—was pinpointed in Hosea 6:1-2 as two “days,” that is, two thousand years, after which Israel would once again be “lifted up.” So (5) the barren, withered fig tree foretold Israel’s plight in the wake of its national rejection of Yahshua’s Messianic claims.

But Christ didn’t explain any of that to His disciples. Rather, He went on to teach them about the efficacy of prayer—something that would be far more practical in the centuries to come. **“So Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, “Be removed and be cast into the sea,” it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”** (Matthew 21:20-22; cf. Mark 11:22-24) Again, He’s not talking about beating up on poor, defenseless vegetation or geological features. Symbolically, a “mountain” is a temporal stronghold, a seat of earthly authority and strength. He’s saying, then, that prayer in unshakable faith will allow you (us, the church) to break down barriers and obstacles not considered humanly possible—like the pagan culture of the Roman Empire, for example. Suddenly, I feel ashamed of my doubts that satanic monoliths like *dar al-Islam* or Hinduism or atheistic secular humanism can be moved by the Gospel of Christ in the short time we’ve got left to work. God forgive me.

On the night of the Last Supper, Christ once again encouraged His disciples to pray. **“Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”** (John 16:23-24) Don’t get all avaricious on me, now. His intention was not to put a loaded gun into the hands of a child—or a Lamborghini in every garage. Twice here He used the phrase “in My name,” and that changes everything, if you were tempted to consider Yahweh some sort of celestial ATM machine. David once wrote, **“Delight yourself in Yahweh, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.”** (Psalm 37:4) The “trick” is that when we delight ourselves in Yahweh, He *changes* our desires to align with His.

This hearkens back to the “Lord’s Prayer,” where we saw that our prayers are to focus on *His* kingdom—we are to pray that *His* will is done (for a change) on earth. Yes, we are to rely upon God for our daily bread, recognizing that if we seek first *His* kingdom, our basic needs are taken care of (since He knows that it’s harder for us to advance the cause of His kingdom if we’re homeless, hurting, and hungry). That’s why he specifically instructed us to pray that God would spare us from trial and testing. **“Pray that you may not enter into temptation.... Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation.”** (Luke 22:40, 46)

Of course, our own vigilant attitude has a part to play as well: **“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”** (Matthew 26:41) Notice how watching and praying go hand in hand: prayer isn’t just another word for the abdication of our spiritual responsibilities. It’s more like a soldier on the front lines getting on the radio and checking in with Headquarters for specific instructions, as if to ask, “Now what?” The General, after all, has a far better grasp of the overall battlespace than we do.

In the model prayer, we were also told to pray for the coming of Christ’s kingdom. Although it won’t arrive *visibly* until the arrival of the King (soon, by all appearances), the kingdom of God actually exists among us now, today, as we walk the earth as fallen mortals. How? As with any nation, we are citizens of the kingdom of God if we have been born here—born again (technically, born *from above*) in the Holy Spirit, as Yahshua explained in John 3:5-8). But if I may borrow a couple of terms from American immigration policy, we Christians are supposed to function as “Anchor Babies.” That is, once we have been born into the kingdom of heaven, we are to facilitate the arrival of others—“chain migration” into the Kingdom of Heaven, so to speak.

There are any number of metaphors for this. Another example or two: **“When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.’”** (Matthew 9:36-38) When we pray “Your kingdom

come,” we are doing this very thing—praying for God to send out laborers to reap His harvest of souls. Just don’t be surprised if *you*—the one praying—is recruited to be an answer to your own prayer.

There is one final facet to Yahshua’s instructions on praying in God’s will: persistence. **“And He said to them, ‘Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him,’ and he will answer from within and say, ‘Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you’? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs....”**

Note the comparisons God is setting before us: (1) God is definitely our friend, not our adversary, and certainly not our enemy. (2) He never sleeps, so we don’t have to worry about “disturbing” Him. In fact, being omniscient, He is expecting our visit. (3) Our concern for our unexpected guests pleases God. (4) Even if we’re not prepared for them to show up on our doorstep unannounced, it is good that we know who we can rely on to help us meet their needs. (5) Unlike our human friends, God finds our pleas for mercy and provision to be no problem at all. He *expects us* to ask on behalf of others—several times, if it comes to that. (*Three* petitions seems to be the scriptural mandate for “persistence”: see II Corinthians 12:8, etc.) It is our proper function as priests to intercede on behalf of those we meet.

In this case, Yahshua didn’t just leave the parable hanging there for us to ponder. He drew the inevitable conclusions for us. **“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”** Not from men, necessarily, but from God, most certainly. **“For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”** The caveat, of course, is that we have to be asking in God’s will—good things, for the right reasons, in God’s perfect timing. **“If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?...”** God will never give us something worse than what we ask for. But then again, we don’t always know *what* to ask for, do we?

Fortunately, He knows exactly what we need. And our most fundamental requirement is life itself. So He concludes, **“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”** (Luke 11:5-13) We’re way beyond bread, fish, or eggs here. We’re talking about God giving us the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit—the source and sustainer of eternal life. And if we’re already believers—if we already have the Spirit dwelling within us—then we are encouraged to persistently petition God to fill us anew with the Spirit’s power, again and again, as necessary. Face it, folks: *we leak*.

Lay Up Treasures in Heaven

Unlike quite a few preachers today (who shall remain nameless), Yahshua had very little to say about giving—and virtually nothing to say about tithing. We should not read into this that it's not an important subject; it's just that the guidelines had been laid down in the Torah, and nothing much had changed. The core of the doctrine was still (1) recognize that God has given you a superabundance, (2) that which you have over and above what you need is meant to be used to help people less fortunate than you, and (3) our gratitude toward God should manifest itself in generosity to others.

Outside of theocratic Israel, the tithe doesn't actually function as it was designed to. That's because of the role Yahweh assigned to the Levites. This tribe was given no territory of its own in the Land of Promise, but was rather to receive ten percent of the increase from each of the other tribes. After the doubling of the tribe of Joseph (into Manasseh and Ephraim) there were thirteen tribes, but the land (that which represented the potential for generating wealth) was split only twelve ways. Thus each of these twelve tribes were entitled to only 92.3% of their increase, the remaining 7.7% being rendered to the Levites in remuneration for their God-ordained service. Another small amount was added to this (bringing the total to an even 10%), to enable the Levites to take care of the poor, the widows, and the orphans in Israel. So the "charity" portion of the tithe was only 2.3%. That hardly seems onerous to me.

With the advent of the largely gentile church, then, the Torah's rationale for the tithe disappeared. Or did it? Are there still people in our lives whose service on God's behalf precludes them from earning a living in the ordinary way? Do you meet with other like-minded believers for worship and study in a place you don't personally own? Are there still charitable needs to be met in your community? I would be greatly surprised if any of us could honestly answer "no" to any of these propositions. So tell me this: does God's system of rendering approximately 4% of your paycheck so your ministers can feed their families, 3% to pay for the worship facilities you use, 2% for mercy to the poor, and another 1% for mission outreach seem excessive to you? It shouldn't. The church merely took the training wheels off the Levitical system of tithing.

But as I said, Yahshua had nothing much to say about it (except a brief mention when berating the Pharisees for getting their priorities all wrong: **"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."** Matthew 23:23) As we have come to expect, His teaching on the subject centered more on our attitudes and objectives than on amounts and procedures. Like everything else, our giving is to be an expression of our love for Yahweh and our fellow man.

Christ's definitive statement on proper priorities is found in the Sermon on the Mount. **"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal...."** It had to be something of an epiphany to His original audience that such a thing was even possible. Now, two thousand years into the church age, we have an easy familiarity with the concepts of everlasting life, treasures in heaven, and so forth. But pre-Christian man knew very little about the afterlife. Despite a few tantalizing hints in Job, the Psalms, and the Prophets, the only thing they knew for sure was Sheol—the grave. Our understanding of eternity and our place in it is due almost exclusively to Yahshua's teachings and subsequent New Testament revelation.

As He did so often, He referred to what we know in order to teach us through contrast about the unknown. Anybody with his eyes open can see that earthly riches are fleeting, vulnerable, and unsure. At best, we leave them to our heirs, taking nothing with us when we die. At worst, we see our wealth evaporate before our eyes, up in smoke (or taxes), leaving us little to show for our pointless labors. But because there is a life after death in store for Yahweh's children—and not mere existence, but sentient fellowship with God and His redeemed, lived out forever in new bodies built for eternity—it is possible to invest in *that* blessed life while we still walk in this one. As missionary-martyr Jim Elliot famously wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Yahshua's parting thought on the subject reveals a two-way street: **"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."** (Matthew 6:19-21) If we "invest" in heavenly things, we will find ourselves increasingly concerned with the kingdom of God, rather than this world. But it also works the other way around: we can develop a heart for God by being obedient to Him in temporal matters—the most fundamental of which is loving our neighbors as we do ourselves.

The obvious question, then, is *how* may one lay up treasures in heaven? What does "heavenly treasure" look like? Although money is where our minds naturally go first, it is far more than that: our "treasure" is anything we value, anything that we have a finite amount of. It could be our time, our energy, our focus, or our relationships. What do we obsess over; and conversely, what could we just as easily live without? Anything in our lives that we place in order on a mental list of priorities is "treasure."

Money, of course, is the easiest of these treasure-types for us to comprehend, so Yahshua used it to teach us about treasure in heaven. **"Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you that this poor**

widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.” (Mark 12:41-44; cf. Luke 21:1-4) The point is obvious—that in proportion to what she possessed, this poor woman had been more generous than any other giver that day—some of whom had been quite generous—though it’s not a competition, of course.

But the story doesn’t stand alone: the context is enlightening. In both Mark and Luke, it is told immediately after Yahshua condemned the scribes for their pride and greed, noting in both recountings how they “devour widows’ houses.” The implication is that because of the scribes’ shady business dealings, widows such as this poor lady would have even less to live on than was ordinarily available through the Levitical system of alms (discussed above). Throughout the Tanakh, Yahweh had repeated *ad nauseum* that widows and orphans were to be shown mercy—that they were not to be oppressed. Yet these admonitions fell on deaf ears among the religious elite.

The wealthy scribes and Pharisees would have made a great show of putting large sums in the treasury, for they were seeking the admiration of their countrymen. Their legacy, however, consists of the lambasting Yahshua gave them in passages like Matthew 23, making them forever the poster children for hypocrisy and arrogance. How deliciously ironic it is that the one person most remembered in scripture for generosity and sacrifice—whose monetary exploits have been celebrated among the faithful for almost two thousand years now—was a poverty stricken woman with nothing to her name but a couple of pennies. She had deposited truckloads of treasure in heaven.

Earthly treasure can be amassed two different ways—either through human pursuits, or through God’s blessing. (There is no reason it can’t come through a combination of the two, of course, as revealed by the “blessings” verses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28: in societal terms, honoring Yahweh is the most direct way there is to ensure general prosperity.) But when earthly riches become *the goal*, we have run afoul of the First Commandment: worship Yahweh alone. As Yahshua says, **“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”** (Matthew 6:24) Put in terms germane to our present topic, you can’t gather *the same* treasure in heaven that you do on the earth.

Part of it is a willingness to sacrifice—to give up—what folks normally value in order to further the cause of the kingdom of heaven. **“Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”** (Matthew 19:29-30; cf. Mark 10:28-30; cf. Luke 18:28-30) I recently saw a Facebook post contrasting aerial views of the homes of Joel Osteen

and the late Billy Graham. Joel's was a 17,000-square-foot mega-mansion that cost \$10.5 million. Billy's house was a nice but modest two-story brick home with a nearby barn, nestled in the woods. The contrast, considering the ministry "footprint" of both men, couldn't be more striking.

Another example: I once heard the story, told by a Christian financial planner, of an aging minister, who his entire adult life had moved from one unpromising location to another planting churches. When his new "plant" had gotten established, he'd move on and do it all again—ten or twelve times, over a long career spent in God's service, never making much of a salary. He came to the financial planner, saying, "I've got a little problem." The planner thought, "Uh-oh—the guy hasn't put away one cent for retirement, and he's reached old age with nothing to live on." "No, that's not it," the pastor explained. "Every time I moved to a new spot, I bought a house to live in, and over the years the real estate market kept going up. Now I've reached my mid-seventies, and although I never earned much, I have more money than I know what to do with. Please help me invest it." I can personally attest that God has taken care of my wife and me in similarly unexpected ways. A nice surprise at the end of a lifetime of service.

But we were talking about treasures *in heaven*. What about the afterlife? Although our information is sketchy at best (since God apparently didn't want us cozying up to Him just for the perks), we were told enough to assure us that the kingdom of God won't be some dystopian slum, but everything we would have hoped for, if only we'd had a big enough imagination for it. Christ told His disciples, **"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."** (John 14:1-3) The best part of all that is that we'll get to be with Him. But what about the "place"?

"Mansions" here is an overly grandiose translation—the word (Greek: *moné*) simply means a lodging, an individual dwelling place, or abode. On the other hand, John's Patmos vision includes the following narrative: "Then one of the seven angels...talked with me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.' And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.... The city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones.... And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass." (Revelation 21:9-11, 18-19, 21) There's a lot more to it, of course. I only want to note here that our heavenly abode, the "New Jerusalem," is like a bride on her

wedding day—as pretty as God knows how to make it, which considering how beautiful this fallen earth can be, surely implies something spectacular.

But to be part of this eternal destiny—to experience the beauty of the abode God has planned for us first hand—we have to be “doing the work of God.” That is, we can’t be trying to reach heaven through our own efforts—through religion or some other human-derived strategy. For the umpteenth time, the “work of God is to believe in Him whom He sent”—Yahshua the Messiah. His righteousness alone is sufficient to atone for our sins, redeem us from the curse of death, and reconcile us with the Father. **“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”** (Matthew 10:32-33) Our words and walk declare one of two things to the world: either (1) we are relying upon Christ for our eternal destiny, or (2) we are trusting ourselves—our own efforts, strategies, and philosophy. The first is treasure in heaven; the second is rubbish in the landfill. The choice is ours.

Repent

At the beginning of His ministry, Yahshua went to John to be baptized, fasted for forty days, and then submitted to a grueling series of temptations from Satan himself. **“From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”** (Matthew 4:17) Even before He had called His first disciples, before He had done a single miracle, Yahshua was preaching about the necessity of repentance.

The Greek word from which “repent” is derived here is *metanoeo*, basically meaning “to change one’s mind or purpose.” It is derived from two roots: *meta* (“changed after being with”) and *noieo* (“to think”). So “repent” here means “to think differently afterwards” or “to change one’s mind.” Based on the Greek, there is an *impetus* to the change of mind—an idea or experience that suggests a new course of action, a new way of seeing something. Furthermore, the change is in a positive direction. *Thayer* notes that the word implies “to change one’s mind for the better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins,” hence the idea of repentance as we commonly understand it. I hardly need point out that the concept of “better” necessitates an inviolable standard by which truth or good behavior may be measured. Whether God’s Law or revelation, or simply the operation of the consciences He placed within the human soul, that “standard” invariably originates with Yahweh.

The reason we were told to repent at that moment was (obviously) the presence of God incarnate among the people for the first time in His role as Messiah—“the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.” God

had revealed Himself many times and in several ways before this, of course—through theophanies, the Shekinah, and in dreams and visions shown to prophets—but He had never before come with the express purpose of redeeming mankind through an act of Self-sacrifice. (See *The Torah Code*, Volume 1, Unit 2, elsewhere on this website, for an in-depth study of the seven-fold nature of God.) The “Kingdom of Heaven” was at hand because the *King* of Heaven had arrived—albeit “incognito” during this first advent; the next time He comes, there will be no mistaking His identity, purpose, or glory.

In a world in which most people serve “gods” who (they’ve been led to believe) are as grumpy, vengeful, and demanding as they are useless, it would doubtless come as quite a shock to discover that the *real* God, Yahweh, rejoices with His angels when a lost sinner chooses to change direction and walk toward Him. One illustration Yahshua gave: **“What woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!’ Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”** (Luke 15:8-10) There is no shortage of unrepentant sinners in this world. But God doesn’t want *any of them* to perish. Yahshua’s sacrifice is sufficient to redeem every human being who ever lived, or ever will. The choice, however, is strictly up to us: do we want to be found? Do we choose to reciprocate God’s love (that is, change our mindset from one of antagonism against God to fellowship with Him—a.k.a. repentance)?

A few dozen pages back, I mentioned a sheep named Shrek who hid out in a cave from his shepherds for six years, choosing not to be found. Yahshua once told His own “Shrek” story: **“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”** (Matthew 18:11-14; cf. Luke 15:4-7) Unlike Shrek’s owner, Yahshua knows every sheep in the world by name, and He notices if we’re missing from His flock. He’s pleased with sheep who never stray, of course, but He actively seeks those who are lost. A lost sheep may choose to continue hiding in his cave, but that’s no way to live. The food, water, and sunshine are all out in the meadow, where the Good Shepherd guides His flock “beside the still waters.” Although “remaining lost” is the sheep’s prerogative, it is also a not-so-subtle form of insanity. Repentance, on the other hand, is tantamount to joining the flock and enjoying the bounty the Shepherd provides. The epiphany here is the *Shepherd’s* extreme reaction to our repentance—His inordinate rejoicing upon finding that which had been lost.

We'd *expect* the lost sheep to be happy and relieved to be rescued, of course. Wolves are scary, and water is hard to find. But that begs the question: how, precisely, does repentance benefit the lost person? While Yahshua had a great deal of information to impart concerning what the saved could look forward to (especially in passages spoken privately to His disciples, such as the Last Supper discourse recorded in John 14-17), His instructions concerning repentance mostly focused on the consequences of failing to do so. Surprisingly, repentance *wasn't* to be seen as a strategy for securing a better, safer, or more prosperous life in this world. It's a spiritual issue, designed to come to fruition in the spiritual realm: **"There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish....'"** Everyone dies. Nobody gets out of here alive. So repentance won't shelter you from accidents, illness, or other men's treachery. That is not its function.

"Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:1-5) The word "perish" here (*apollumi*) means to destroy, lose, abolish, or die; to be blotted out, to vanish away. Since our mortal lives are not in view here (because everybody dies, the saved and lost alike), this definitely speaks of the loss of true or eternal life. In the Greek, two different word for "life" are employed to differentiate the concepts: *bios* is mortal life, the sort of life we share with amoebas and orangutans—technically, a body indwelt with a soul. *Zoe*, on the other hand, is animated, active, vigorous, and essential life—a word used in the New Testament as a technical description of a believer's eternal spiritual state in Yahweh. I'd characterize it as a soul indwelt with God's Spirit, whether or not a body is present.

But (and this is as important as it is misunderstood) *apollumi* does not suggest, or even *allow*, the eternal, waking torment in hell of which the Bible (mostly Christ Himself) so clearly speaks—a state expressed as *Gehenna*. To be in hell/Gehenna, you must be sentient, conscious, and aware of your surroundings (and more to the point, able to suffer unending remorse). *Apollumi* speaks rather of utter destruction, of ceasing to exist, even annihilation. The only conclusion I can come to is that there is a difference between death and damnation—a difference that finally explains how God can be both just and merciful at the same time. (There is a huge amount of scriptural evidence supporting this concept, by the way, if you consider what the many Greek and Hebrew words describing death actually mean. For further study, read *The End of the Beginning*, Chapter 29: "The Three Doors," elsewhere on this website.) The bottom line is that failure to repent (to change direction, to think differently about God's gift) will, at the

very least, separate you from Christ's grace forever. In light of the blessed eternity that's so freely available to us, that's a terrible tragedy.

Under another heading above, we read, **"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) This brings up another facet of the repentance process. If we're to "think differently" than we used to, that invariably entails coming to think differently from the way the world around us does. Blessed is the person (like me) who was raised by believing parents. Yes, we still have to repent, but at least we can perceive what we're repenting from, and to whom we're turning. To most of the world, however, the process requires an extreme spiritual epiphany—the shocking realization that your whole philosophical outlook was based on a lie of one sort or another.

Elsewhere, Yahshua elaborated. **"Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able...."** To enter what? In context, the discussion was about "How many will be saved?" So we're talking about entering the Kingdom of Heaven. Salvation by grace through faith is available to any honest seeker as long as he draws breath, but you can't attain it if you're not willing to leave the broad highway of manmade religion and "conventional wisdom," and pass instead through the "narrow gate" of God's truth.

Why won't "many" *be able to* enter the Kingdom of Heaven? Because the broad highway upon which they're travelling doesn't go on forever. It "dead ends" into a couple of hard realities. First, there's the issue of our own limited longevity. And second, God has placed a limit on the tenure of fallen man (and subsequently, our opportunity for repentance). The Sabbath Law plainly states that we only have six days to work, followed by the day of rest, the Sabbath, the day upon which no one may work. It may all seem pretty esoteric until we realize that (1) the "work" of God is to "believe in the One whom He sent" (Yahshua—see John 6:29), (2) "entering the narrow gate" is a metaphorical description of this belief, (3) with God, one day is equivalent to a thousand years (II Peter 3:8), and (4) we have blown through most of our allotted six thousand years since Adam's fall: we have only a very short window of time left before the sun sets on this age, after which the Sabbath (the thousand-year reign of Christ) will begin.

And what will happen to the unrepentant at that time? **"When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity....'"** Between the separation of the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:31-46) and the Great White Throne judgment

(Revelation 20:11-15), there will be a lot of this sort of thing going on: people presuming, for one reason or another, that they're "good with God," only to be reminded—far too late—that they never repented.

The Jews especially have had a tendency to assume that they're automatically citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, because they are (biologically, anyway) God's "chosen people." But Yahshua informs them, **"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. They [the gentiles—*gasp!*] will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."** (Luke 13:24-30) It will turn out that the Jews were not (as they presumed) "chosen" to be the exclusive recipients of Yahweh's salvation, but chosen rather to be tasked with rehearsing God's plan of redemption through keeping the rites of the Torah, so the rest of the world (we gentiles) could observe, understand, and praise God. But who will be welcomed into the Kingdom? Those who entered by the narrow gate, who believed in Him whom Yahweh sent—who *repented*.

We began this section by noting that Yahshua "began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" As His fame (and the numbers of His followers) increased, He sent out "advance teams" so that His message of repentance wouldn't come as a complete shock. **"After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. Then He said to them, 'The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest....'"** Once again, we see that God prefers to use people—flawed and inadequate as we are—to spread His word of hope and salvation. And He specifically directs the people who are spreading the word to ask Him for *more people* to help them reap His harvest.

It is revealing to contrast this "campaign" against the conquest of Canaan under Joshua and the Judges. Then, it was "Don't worry about your own strength or numbers, for I, Yahweh, go before you into battle against My enemies." But this time, the quarry were not enemies but potential brothers, invited to become fellow citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. God didn't want to drive them out, but invite them in. So He gave His followers the privilege of *going before Him*, announcing His coming. This pattern would persist throughout the church age, giving way to angelic messengers (e.g., Revelation 14:6-11) only after the rapture of the church—i.e., when there was nobody was left to labor in the fields.

This is not to say we harvest laborers wouldn't encounter any opposition. Quite the contrary. Yahshua warned us of what awaited: **"Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves...."** The target audience would have been characterized as "lost sheep." The "wolves," then, are those who would

proactively attempt to prevent people from hearing, receiving, and benefitting from the Gospel of Christ. The laborers, meanwhile, are called “lambs,” indicating that they are (and are to remain) innocent, harmless, and incapable of self-defense. Why? Because the Good Shepherd is nearby, looking out for their interests. He—Yahshua—will take care of the wolves.

He continues: **“Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road. But whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. And heal the sick there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you....’”** “Preparedness” for these lamb-laborers was to consist solely of trust in the Shepherd’s provision. His reputation and Spirit would open doors and hearts as the disciples traveled from place to place. It must be noted, however, that as the Shepherd prepared to become the Lamb of God Himself (thereby depriving His disciples of His physical presence), Yahshua altered the instructions: while continuing to trust Him, the disciples *were* to prepare ahead of time, for both provision and defense. It was going to be a long, rough, two-thousand-year mission trip for us. (See Luke 22:35-38, quoted above). The message, however, was not to change: “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.”

And what were they to do if their message was rejected? Go to war? Call down fiery curses from heaven? No, just move on to the next likely destination, the next flock of lost sheep. **“But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ‘The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.’ But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city.... He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.”** (Luke 10:1-12, 16; cf. Matthew 10:11-15; cf. Mark 6:10-12) In the recounting of these instructions in Matthew 10, it is pretty clear (at least to me) that He means these instructions to apply especially to the 144,000 Tribulation witnesses of Revelation 7 and 14, as they canvass Last-Days Israel in anticipation of Christ’s *second* coming. (Verse 23 is the key to this notion, where He talks about “not reaching all of the towns in Israel before the Son of Man comes.”) Whether past, present, or future though, the message is to repent—plead with people to think differently about Yahweh and His Messiah.

Yahweh’s aim has always been to keep His people holy, separate from the world. But during my lifetime, and probably for much longer, it has been a common goal among men to “fit in,” to compromise, to be a bit cagey about what they believe for fear of paying the price for having taken an unpopular stand.

“Politically correct” fence-sitting has become a fine art. Never mind that this “Laodicean” mindset—being neither hot nor cold in matters of faith—makes Yahshua want to puke (see Revelation 3:16). But as we approach the end of the age, it appears that God is once again actively “dividing the sheep from the goats,” separating those who are His from those who are of the world. **“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things?...”** Part of repentance for the believer is to honestly and unabashedly proclaim his faith in Christ, rather than hedging his bets, hoping he won’t be noticed, singled out, or ostracized.

What we believe—that which drives us, inspires us, and orders our footsteps—invariably finds an outlet in our speech and behavior. So Yahshua says, **“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”** (Matthew 12:33-37) Do our words honor the God we say we follow, or do they sound harsh and hateful, even if they’re true? “Talking trash” about the perceived enemies of God is a bad habit that’s very easy for a Christian to fall into, especially in this era of social media. These are people for whom Christ died. Should we be telling them to “go to hell”? No. We should be inviting them to join us in heaven.

So He says, **“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”** (Matthew 7:1-5) Yes, we may be “better” than habitual murderers and child molesters—or at least less lethal to the society in which we live. But before God, we are *all* sinners, and one sin is as efficacious as any other in separating us from Him.

Note that repentance isn’t only for the lost. We who rely upon Christ are also called upon to repent. In terms symbolized by the layout of the wilderness tabernacle, we must first visit the altar (indicating salvation through Christ’s sacrifice), and then avail ourselves of the bronze laver of cleansing (where a believer’s works and walk are cleansed), before we can enter the Holy Place, where the light shines, God provides, and fellowship with God takes place.

The provocative question, then, is “What impresses God?” What does He consider “great” qualities in people? Remarkably, Yahshua addressed that very issue: **“At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who then is greatest in the**

kingdom of heaven?” They were no doubt thinking in terms of piety, obedience, alms, self-sacrifice, perseverance, or faith—the sorts of things the patriarchs and prophets were known for. But His answer was quite unexpected: **“Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven....”** The “humility” of little children comes naturally. They know intuitively (or maybe just because they’re shorter) that they are not equals with their parents, but are subject to them. They are not peers, but dependents; not order givers, but instruction receivers. And if things are as they were meant to be, they rely upon their parents, knowing that they are loved, cared for, fed, clothed, taught, and yes, disciplined.

I have no doubt that the majority of children in this world are loved (and all the rest) by their parents, for it is only natural to do so—to follow the impulses for the care of our offspring that God hard-wired into us. That being said, child abuse of one sort or another has become endemic in these Last Days. And I’m afraid it’s not just more thorough news reporting, either, nor is it limited to the “obvious” travesties like physical or psychological abuse, neglect, and sexual exploitation. It’s also the hidden factors we seldom consider. The most heinous, of course, is the practice of abortion, in which one out of four children in this world are murdered in the womb before they even get the chance to breathe God’s air—*45 million souls* butchered every single year. If they do make it into the world, we give them dozens of semi-poisonous vaccines—most of them entirely unnecessary—causing an epidemic of autism and other neurological disorders. If they survive that, we feed them junk food laden with sugar and GMOs, bereft of the nutritional value that would have been “automatic” a couple of generations ago. We relinquish our responsibility for their education to “professionals,” who often teach them nothing but how to be cogs in the socialist machine. We let society blur the distinction between the sexes. We abdicate our spiritual duties when scripture plainly teaches that *we* are to train up our children. Need I go on?

We are called to proactively raise our children in the nurture and admonition of Yahweh, starting them on a lifelong path of spiritual awareness, reverence for God, respect for all people, confidence, honesty, justice, mercy, and love. Yahshua said, **“Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.”** (Matthew 18:1-5; cf. Mark 9:33-37, Mark 10:13-16; cf. Luke 9:46-48) To “receive” here (Greek: *dechomai*) means to welcome or accept, to be receptive. Literally, it means “to take by the hand,” hence, to show hospitality, to embrace, take upon oneself, endure, not to refuse contact or friendship, etc. (See *Thayer*.) To do this “in Christ’s name” implies recognition that He has done this very thing for us, despite our shortcomings, despite the inconvenience we represent to those around us.

You needn't take this hyper-literally, as my wife and I did when we adopted nine of our eleven children—several of whom had been abused or neglected or abandoned before we got them, or were suffering from profound handicaps that no one (especially their birth parents) wanted to deal with. We were all too aware that by receiving them, we were receiving Christ Himself into our home. But at its foundation, this precept simply means to go out of your way to support and receive those displaying childlike faith—whether they're your own children or not—being very careful not to lead them astray. As the Psalmist says, “Yahweh preserves the simple.” (Psalm 116:6)

More on the subject: **“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!... Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.”** (Matthew 18:6-7, 10; cf. Mark 9:42) It's bad enough to sin ourselves, though we all do so. It is a special kind of bad to purposely lead an innocent away from God's path. A few random examples: (1) Strapping a bomb vest onto a youth and sending him into a crowded street to die for the “glory of Allah.” (2) Suggesting to a child that he or she is not really of the gender that his or her genitalia would indicate. (3) Engaging in pedophilia (I can't even believe there's a word for it). (4) Teaching children that there is no Creator, that the universe came into being by accident, and that life nevertheless automatically evolves steadily upward. The list of abuses could be extended practically forever, but I think we all get the point.

Yahshua told several parables contrasting “two sons” to demonstrate the nature of repentance. **“What do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went....”** The word translated “regret” here is similar to the word for “repent” we saw earlier (*metanoeo*, meaning “to change one's mind or purpose,” derived from *meta*, “changed,” and *noieo*, “to think.”) This time the word is *metamelomai*, from *meta* again, plus *melo*, meaning “to care or be concerned with”—so the word means “to change what you care about.” Not surprisingly, *metamelomai* is another way of looking at repentance.

Meanwhile, back in the parable, **“Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go.”** This reaction would be best described as hypocrisy. **“Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said to Him, ‘The first.’”** Precisely. Even though the first son was slow and reluctant to do his father's will, in the end, he did as he was asked. So Yahshua drew the conclusion for his audience, who, like the second son, were only pretending to serve Father Yahweh. **“Jesus said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter**

the kingdom of God before you [scribes and Pharisees]. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent [*metamelomai* again] and believe him.” (Matthew 21:28-32) Whether repentance is characterized as “changing one’s mind” or “changing one’s heart” (and in truth, it’s invariably a bit of both), we must turn from self-reliance to God-reliance if we expect to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

A second parable demonstrating repentance is the lengthy and familiar story of the “Prodigal Son.” This time, they’re identified as the younger and the elder. The oldest son in this culture had certain privileges—a double portion of the inheritance and *de facto* leadership of the family upon the father’s demise. It wasn’t exactly the primogeniture practiced in Renaissance Europe (in which the eldest son got *everything*) but it was a step in that direction—a custom designed to keep the family inheritance lands intact, while avoiding impoverishing the younger sons in the process. In Europe, younger sons—being cut off financially—typically left home and pursued their prospects elsewhere, typically becoming knights or soldiers of fortune in the employ of royalty, even in distant lands.

“A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’” This was allowed, but considered “bad form” prior to the father’s death. **“So he divided to them his livelihood.”** There were only two sons, so one third of the estate went to the youngest, who “cashed out.” Everything else, including the land, fell to the eldest. **“And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living....”** Because fortune hadn’t smiled on him with “eldest-son” status, the younger son felt “underprivileged.” This might be an unwarranted extrapolation, since we aren’t told, but it’s possible that the elder brother was arrogant and insufferable, never passing up an opportunity to remind the younger of his “second-class” status. There isn’t a hint of animosity between the younger son and his father, but the eldest son’s proud attitude leaks into the narrative later in the story. There was clearly no love lost between them. I would venture that repentance—from *both* sons—was indicated, even before the kid took off.

His inheritance seemed like a small fortune to him, and perhaps he even invested some of it so he could live on it indefinitely. In a rising “bull” market, it seems like a sound strategy. Or maybe he didn’t plan ahead at all, and spent his money like there was no tomorrow. Between my generation and my children’s, that seems to be the trend: my wife and I learned frugality and prudence from *our* parents—who were children of the Great Depression. But *our* children perceived none of the struggle and hard work we did, seeing only the prosperity that resulted from it. And they are therefore less able to weather financial adversity than we

were, no matter how much, or how little, they earn. Anyway, in the parable, hard times finally hit (as they invariably do), catching the free-spending younger son flat-footed. **“But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything....”** He had fallen from having the illusion of prosperity to the harsh reality of poverty, which is not nearly as much fun as doing it the other way ’round.

Sometimes, we have to hit rock bottom before it occurs to us to look up. And that’s what happened here. **“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’”** And he arose and came to his father....” Here is the first point of the parable: repentance. He was *still* comparing himself to others, which under any circumstances is not a healthy practice. But at least it got him thinking. He was (he presumed) no longer qualified to be his father’s son: that bridge had been burned. The pigs he had been hired to feed were eating better than he was: that had to sting a bit. But then he remembered what he used to consider “fly-over country” in his world, not worthy of a second glance—the servants and hired help in his father’s house. They didn’t have much money or status, no lands or cattle of their own, and yet they were gainfully employed, had a steady paycheck, good working conditions, and job security. Suddenly, in light of his recent setbacks, that sort of life didn’t look so bad. So “Plan D” (after presumption, profligacy, and poverty) was to return home and apply for a job.

If the repentance of the younger son had been the only point of the story, it would have ended right there. But there are others whose reactions we must consider. First, the father: **“But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”** He had rehearsed that little speech a hundred times, hoping against hope that his father would accept his apology. **“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found....”** The point here is that you can’t lose your relationship through bad behavior. The son would remain a son. What had been broken was fellowship, contact, intimacy—but not the familial bond with the father that defined who the son really was. Fellowship *can* be restored, but only through the mechanism of repentance.

Note that the father was actively looking for his son—he spotted him coming from a long way away. But he hadn't left his estate to chase after him, to drag him back against his own free will. The choice to repent—to change his mind and turn around—was the prerogative and privilege of the son alone. But once the son had made that choice, the father was overjoyed—more that eager to welcome him back into the household—not as a servant, but as a son. Yes, he had squandered his inheritance, and that would not be magically restored to him, for to do so would have been to rob the elder brother of what rightfully belonged to him. But the younger son was home, safe and sound, and he would share a seat at his father's table. Today, that was enough: it was time to celebrate his return. Tomorrow, he would work for his father, for their interests aligned. As one of the “arrows in his father's quiver” (see Psalm 127:5), he would represent the family once again before the world.

The father held no grudges, but for some reason, the elder son did. **“And they began to be merry. Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’ But he was angry and would not go in....”** The son's reaction was totally different from that of his father. Forgiveness, it turns out, is an indicator of love—and we are *required* by God's law to love our fellow man. The father, who *had* been offended, was willing to forgive his repentant son. But the elder son, who had *not* been wronged, was nevertheless unwilling to forgive. Was it misplaced zeal for the father's interests? Or was it a subtle way of usurping the father's authority? One thing is clear: if God is willing to forgive someone's trespasses against Him—if He loved the world so much that He was willing to die to atone for our sins—then we dare not judge the sincerity of repentant souls who apply to Him for forgiveness, even if they're covered in tattoos, don't know how to dress for church, are fighting off addictions, or slip into vulgar language patterns now and then.

It is at this point that the allegorical aspects of the parable begin to make themselves evident. It would appear that we're not just talking about individuals being repentant or forgiving. I'm not alone when I notice a subtle prophecy here: the father is Yahweh; the elder brother is Israel; the prodigal son is the gentile world—we who would largely comprise the church that Israel (as a nation) refused to enter; and the servants are the prophets and apostles. The narrative continues: **“Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends....”**

Okay, so the Jews are not exactly being honest with themselves. This is a blend of wishful thinking, revisionist history, and an ungrateful attitude. Did they think Yahweh had hauled them off to Assyria and Babylon for no good reason? Did they think the occupying Romans were stronger than their God? A quick review of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 reveals that the predicted consequences for “not obeying the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes” had come to pass in every grim detail. If Israel thought they had “never transgressed the Father’s commandment,” they were hallucinating—and calling Yahweh a liar.

The parable concludes: **“But as soon as this son of yours [note the eldest’s seething contempt] came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.”** (Luke 15:11-32) Israel was incensed at the idea that *their* God would have anything to do with the gentiles—these pagan sinners who had rejected Him for so long. Never mind that the Tanakh is peppered with prophetic references to the coming redemption of the nations. The father (i.e., *The Father*) did not deny that the younger son (the gentiles) had behaved badly. He did not ignore our transgression—He *forgave* it. Our repentance—our change of mind and heart toward God—was the mechanism that made our spiritual resurrection and reconciliation possible.

So there are three parallel epiphanies here: (1) That we gentiles (well, some of us) would repent and return to our Creator God—forming the church, the ekklesia, the called-out assembly of Christ. (2) That our sibling Israel would react to our repentance so negatively, especially during the centuries between Rabbi Akiba (ca. 130 AD) and the restoration of the Nation of Israel (in 1948), when they began to wake up to the fact that Evangelical Christianity was the only real friend they had in this world. It’s worth mentioning that the Song of Songs allegory pictures the “daughters of Jerusalem” (the Jews) as being enthusiastically *in favor* of Solomon’s (i.e., Yahshua’s) love match with the Shulamite maiden (the church) when their union is finally consummated, during the kingdom age. (Granted, the imagery is pretty esoteric.) And (3), that Yahweh (the Father) would so enthusiastically and generously welcome us sinners back into His family, especially after our foolish betrayal. Most “belief systems” envision God as their adversary, someone whom they must appease and mollify if they want to be blessed. But the truth revealed here is that Yahweh, the one True God, is longing to redeem and restore us fallen mortals—*all of us*, not just those who fancy themselves worthy of his mercy. His awesome love is surely the greatest epiphany of all.

As witnessed by the equipment specified for the tabernacle courtyard, there are actually *two* types of repentance in God's view—both of which are necessary for a successful spiritual life. Before one could enter the tabernacle proper, he would first come upon the altar of sacrifice, where the innocent would be slain to atone for the sins of the guilty. This is a picture of our salvation through God's grace—the transition from lost to saved. But then he would encounter the bronze laver, holding water with which he was to wash his hands (symbolic of his works) and his feet (his walk). Only then could he enter the sanctuary, the Holy Place, metaphorical of the believer's life, where light, provision, and prayer leads to the very presence of God.

So in addition to the repentance that leads to salvation for the lost, repentance for cleansing is also necessary for people who are already believers. It would be great if salvation instantaneously brought with it a state of lifelong sinlessness, but alas, it doesn't work that way. The Torah lists all sorts of unavoidable factors that can "ritually defile" someone. The remedy is usually something like "wash your clothing and remain unclean until evening." "Clothing" is symbolically indicative of "how God sees us," and "evening," I'm afraid, is a thinly veiled euphemism for physical death. In other words, although we're truly saved by the blood of the Lamb, and although God chooses not to see our sins because we're dressed in clean, white robes of imputed righteousness, we aren't going to *actually* be sinless as long as we inhabit these fallen mortal bodies. Praise God, our new resurrection bodies, patterned after Christ's, *will be* sinless—incapable of corruption: see I Corinthians 15:35-58 for the specs.

Repentance for cleansing is a recurring theme in Christ's letters to the seven churches recorded in Revelation 2 and 3. There are valuable lessons to be learned from each letter, and they should be pondered individually. But considered in retrospect, the profiles of these seven local assemblies seem to trace the broad history of the church from the apostolic age to the present—and beyond. The sad fact is that five of the seven were admonished to repent—to think differently about how they were practicing their faith. There were serious flaws endemic in their approach to Christianity which if not dealt with would destroy their witness in the world—making the church in that place irrelevant, and eventually non-existent.

Of the seven, only two were *not* admonished to repent. The church at Smyrna was suffering great persecution for their faith—both from the Romans and the Jews—and they were encouraged to be fearless and faithful, even unto death. But Christ mentioned nothing that called for repentance. Smyrna represents the post-apostolic age, basically the second and third centuries, although it still exists

wherever Christians are systematically persecuted for their faith. The second church that did not need to be admonished to repent was that of Philadelphia—essentially the faithful guardians of the Word of God during these Last Days (although, as I said, all seven of these profiles existed in John’s day and throughout the church age). Philadelphia too was troubled by unbelieving Jews, but was encouraged to persevere and overcome. If you’ll recall, we discussed both of these profiles under the heading “Do Not Worry or Fear.”

The other five, however, had fallen into patterns of malaise, compromise, or outright apostasy—things from which they needed to repent if they were to continue being counted among the called-out assemblies of Christ. In the first three of these (Ephesus, Pergamos, and Thyatira), Yahshua makes a point of encouraging them to continue doing what they’re doing right—their works, love, service, faith, and patience—while pointing out where they’ve swerved off course, requiring repentance. Sardis was on life support—in a spiritual coma, so to speak. All they had was a lingering reputation of good works, one that was no longer applicable, truth be told. And Yahshua had nothing good at all to say about Laodicea, the last church on the list—though He still held out hope for her repentance and restoration. I haven’t quoted the whole letters, only the parts in which Christ admonishes the churches to repent.

(1) To Ephesus: **“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent [*metanoeo*] and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.”** (Revelation 2:4-5) The church of the apostolic age fought off heresy and false teachers—not an easy thing to do during a time when Christian doctrine was as fresh as the writings of the New Testament. But they had grown so busy “getting it right,” they had forgotten why it mattered. The “first works” consisted of the epiphany of Christ’s finished work: “The work of God is to believe in Him whom He sent.” The believers at Ephesus were not in danger of losing their individual salvation, but their assembly was at risk of ceasing to be the light to the world that they had once been. Modern churches who exist solely for the purpose of doing good works in their communities—while ignoring the saving work of Christ—run the same risk. Feeding the poor is of little permanent value if you fail to mention that Christ died for their sins.

(2) To Pergamos: **“But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.”** (Revelation 2:14-16) Here we see the first hints of compromise between the church and the pagan world. Pergamos was a city given over to idolatry and

lasciviousness (think: *San Francisco*), making it hard enough to live like a Christian there under any circumstances—holy, godly, and unsoiled by the practices of the world.

Balaam, you'll recall (Numbers 22-25), was the “prophet” who was hired by Balak, king of Moab, to curse the Israelites during the wilderness wanderings. But Balaam found that he could not curse them, so he used another means to earn his fee: he suggested that the Moabite women be sent in to seduce the Israelite men by joining them in Ba'al worship—in effect getting Israel to curse Yahweh. And the ploy worked, after a fashion. The Nicolaitans (followers of Nicolaus of Antioch) were a group who, like Balaam, recommended compromise with pagans. His idea was to make it easier for Christians to participate in the cultural life of their communities, heading off persecution and isolation. Of course, this invariably led to doctrinal compromise and a loosening of morals—not to enhanced opportunities for ministry. It is also suggested that the Nicolaitans promoted the concept of an ecclesiastical hierarchy in church structure, rather than the simple servant-based pastoral arrangement described by Paul and Peter. This sort of top-heavy church government has led to untold abuses and apostasy within the Roman Catholic Church over the centuries.

(3) To Thyatira: **“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. 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.”** (Revelation 2:20-22) The slide toward apostasy continued with Thyatira, where a woman (or perhaps a faction) pushed the pagan program outlined in the letter. It's worth noting that in the Torah, sexual immorality is used as a euphemism for idolatry; whether that is *literally* true or not here is immaterial. The church is (at the very least) taken to task for their timid, politically correct deference to “Jezebel's” corrupting influence in their midst. *Ellicot* notes, “It seems best to view the name as symbolical, always remembering that the Jezebel spirit of proud, self-constituted authority, vaunting claims of superior holiness, or higher knowledge, linked with a disregard of—and perhaps a proud contempt for—‘legalism,’ and followed by open immorality, has again and again run riot in the churches of God.”

(4) To Sardis: **“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.”** (Revelation 3:1-3) Sardis represents the church at its spiritual nadir—virtually dead as a witness to the

world of the saving grace of Christ. They had the scriptures, but they followed their own rules and traditions instead, substituting dead religion in place of a living familial relationship with God. They still named the name of Christ, but only out of habit and custom; they still did good works, but had forgotten why—they were done not out of love, but out of duty and cultural pressure.

That last sentence is intriguing. Looking ahead to the faithful Church of Philadelphia, it is clear that they (we) will comprise the profile of the church of the rapture (see Revelation 3:10). We are looking forward to it, expectantly awaiting the return of our beloved Savior. But the rapture will catch Sardis totally by surprise. They are not watching, for they have neglected their scriptures in favor of a “social gospel” that is largely manmade. Their ranks will be thinned by the rapture, for there are still some genuine believers there, but the remainder will be caught flat-footed, scratching their heads.

(4) To Laodicea: **“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”** (Revelation 3:15-21) Laodicea is the only church on the list about which Yahshua didn’t have one good thing to say. If I’m seeing this correctly, at the time of the rapture Laodicea will have no believers at all. So the *type* of repentance to which they’re being called, in terms of the tabernacle courtyard, is that of the altar of sacrifice, not the laver of cleansing.

And yet, I expect the Church of Laodicea to be the most populous of them all in the end. Why? Because these will come to faith *after* the rapture of the church. In fact, I believe the rapture itself—in which hundreds of millions of people (I hope) suddenly disappear from the face of the earth without leaving a trace—will speak to them more eloquently about God’s saving grace than any theological argument ever could. The world, after all, will be a very different place after the Philadelphians are gone—taking with them the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit. *Why*, they’ll muse, *is everything suddenly so nasty and dangerous in the post-rapture world?* It’s because the Christians are gone, leaving no one on earth who’s motivated purely by love and indwelled with God’s Holy Spirit. Darwin’s “survival of the fittest” theory will now be the rule, but alas, it will manifest itself as the “survival of the most brutal, violent, selfish, and corrupt.”

Another epiphany: I don't expect the Laodiceans to be comprised primarily of repentant pretend-Christians. Sure, there will be some shocked and dismayed Sardians and Thyatirans among them. But I expect the ranks of the Church of Repentant Laodicea to be filled with ex-atheists, former agnostics, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists—anyone and everyone who suddenly realizes that in the post-Christian world, they are “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked,” and that they are in need of salvation, something only Christ can provide.

This mass repentance is a good-news bad-news story, I'm afraid. On the “good” side, it means these folks have taken Yahshua's advice to **“buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.... Be zealous and repent.”** Their repentance, though belated, has given them what every believer of every age has had: immutable purity, imputed righteousness, and clear spiritual vision.

The bad news is that they'll be living during a time when the “whole world” has sold its soul to the antichrist and his false god—Satan. The Laodicean believers will have no power against the forces of evil: the antichrist will have authority over “every tribe, tongue, and nation.” (See Revelation 13:7-8; Daniel 12:7.) The new saints will be martyred in the millions—“a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’... These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:9-10, 14)

So although the Church of Laodicea is comprised entirely of people who will come to faith *after* the technical end of the church age (i.e., the rapture), they are still called a “church”—Greek: *ekklesia*: an assembly, congregation; from *ek* (out of) and *kaleo* (to call), hence literally “the called-out.” By the way, the English word “church” is derived from the Greek word *kyriakos*, meaning “belonging to the Lord” (*kyrios*), but this is not the word the Greek scriptures use. The point is that the Repentant Laodiceans, whether martyred or not, *will* be counted among the saints of the Millennial age.

Observe God's Timing

One of the greatest surprises I got when studying Yahweh's prophecies (a work presented elsewhere on this website: *The End of the Beginning*), was that God is on a schedule—a fact that becomes pretty obvious when you consider the heavy-handed symbolic hints He laid down in the Torah: the Sabbath Law, the

seven “Feasts of Yahweh,” etc. Until I opened my eyes to these truths, my thinking on the subject (like yours, no doubt) had been shaped by a couple of half-verses taken out of context, like “No one knows the day or the hour....” Sound familiar? But Yahshua was *not* telling us that we were not to inquire about God’s schedule, nor was He saying that we can’t know anything about it ahead of time. He was referring (in this instance) specifically to the date of the rapture—something hidden for our own good.

As we shall see, Yahshua was always aware of what time it was—and what needed to be said or done at the precise moment. His advent *had to* take place during the fourth millennium of man. (Compare Genesis 1:14-19 to Malachi 4:2 and ask “When is the sun supposed to become visible?”) The triumphal entry *had to* take place on the 10th day of Nisan (see Exodus 12:3); the crucifixion *had to* conclude at twilight on Nisan 14 (Passover, a.k.a. Preparation Day—see Exodus 12:6), our sins *had to* be removed on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the 15th, and Christ *had to* rise from the dead on the 16th, the Feast of Firstfruits. He was, after all, fulfilling prophecies that had been built into Torah Law—even if nobody else on earth understood what was going on.

And what about His second advent? Most of Christ’s actual *instructions* concerning the timing aspects of the Last Days (and there isn’t much) are contained in the Olivet Discourse—a lesson delivered to four of His disciples on Wednesday or Thursday of the Passion Week (i.e., right before His crucifixion). He begins by saying, “You’ll *know* when the time is growing close.” **“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!...”** The “all these things” statement refers to what He’d just told them about conditions on earth that we’d see as the end approached: false christs, wars and rumors of war, famine, disease, seismic turbulence, hatred toward believers, betrayal, false prophets, lawlessness, and universal awareness (which is not to say universal *acceptance*) of the Gospel—all things we’re seeing today.

The “fig tree” is an oft-used metaphor for Israel, so His next statement helps us pin down the timeframe a bit more closely: **“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away....”** It’s not much of an extrapolation to see “this generation” as the generation that sees the rebirth of Israel as a nation after the better part of two millennia in exile. That happened in 1948, so I think we can state with some certainty that the last person on earth born on or before May 14, 1948 will not have died before God’s Last-Days program is complete. I’ll leave it to you to do the math. Just note that our imperatives here are to (1) learn the parable of the fig tree, and (2) know that the time is near.

So far so good. But here is where Yahshua threw in that disconcerting little wrinkle. **“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.”** Note the Greek: the word is *eido*: to perceive. He didn’t really say we wouldn’t “know” the hour, only that we wouldn’t see it coming. But what event was He referring to? Let’s face it: the whole process will take seven years to complete, *plus* whatever gap there is between the rapture and the commencement of the Kingdom age—which could be several years. So without taking a breath, He goes on to describe “that day.” **“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left....”**

He’s describing business as usual. Yes, the days of Noah were totally corrupt, in which “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Genesis 6:5) But (like today) people got used to it and went about their lives, while the gap between godly and wicked widened and became ever more distinct. Based on the information provided concerning the coming Tribulation, especially the unprecedented events prophesied in the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments of the Book of Revelation, this *cannot* be describing the Tribulation, a.k.a. the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, during which well over half of the earth’s population will die. No, this describes the period of corrupt normalcy that will precede the rapture of the church. The Holy Spirit will still be restraining evil; and the church of Philadelphia will still have “a little strength” (see Revelation 3:8). The rapture will change all of that, even if the Tribulation *proper* (which starts with a specific sign) doesn’t take place for a while.

So what are we instructed to do? **“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming [that is, coming for His church, His bride]. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into....”** It’s a study in role reversals. Satan, not Yahweh, is called the “prince of this world.” (See John 16:11.) *He* is the “master of the house” that Christ is “breaking into” here at the rapture. Yahshua is the “thief in the night” who’s coming back to retrieve what’s His. **“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”** (Matthew 24:32-44; cf. Mark 13:28-37; Luke 21:29-36) It is as if we, the Bride of Christ, are being held against our will in this world, and our Husband Yahshua is coming back suddenly and unexpectedly (at least to our captor) to rescue us from his evil intentions. We know He’s coming; we just don’t know when, for He can’t tell us without informing our kidnapper. Think of Him as a one-Man SWAT team with a no-knock warrant. We need to stay awake and alert, resisting the

temptation to cooperate with our abductor out of a misplaced sense of self-preservation.

But what about the Jews, who have not come to faith prior to rapture day? Scripture is replete with promises that Israel *will* be redeemed and restored—it is the single most oft-repeated prophetic theme in the entire Tanakh. Yahshua had some instructions specifically for them as well: **“But when you [remember—the disciples to whom He was talking represent both Christians *and* Jews] see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.”** (Luke 21:20-22; cf. Mark 13:14-18; Matthew 24:15-22) There are actually two timeframes in which this admonition is germane.

First, a Judean revolt against Rome in 67AD precipitated a siege against Jerusalem that ended (in 70) with its total destruction—including the razing of the temple. Tens of thousands of Jewish Christians heeded the Christ’s warning and left town at the first sign of trouble. Those who stayed either died or were captured and sold as slaves. Even before His crucifixion, Yahshua knew what would happen to Jerusalem in the wake of their unbelief: **“Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, ‘If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”** (Luke 19:41-44) Knowing exactly what will happen, when, and why, is more a curse than a blessing. I’m glad I don’t have the gift of prophecy: it would be far too painful.

Second, during the Tribulation, Jerusalem will be the focus of everyone’s attention—a “cup of trembling,” as Zechariah calls it. It will be surrounded by armies several times during the Time of Jacob’s Trouble. Yahshua’s commandment is to flee to the hills, for God’s vengeance is about to descend on the place. The Jews will be able return to the city during the last few days of the Tribulation, for they (some of them) will be present to witness the return of Christ—the King of Glory—to the Mount of Olives (see Zechariah 14:4, Acts 1:11-12).

An essential part of “being watchful” is scouring the scriptures for the information God meant for us to have concerning His schedule. It’s a big job, for there are thousands of Last Days references, both blatant and subtle. I have done the heavy lifting for you. I’ve tracked down every yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecy in the entire Bible (along with the background material necessary for our proper understanding) and published it all free in a four-volume work elsewhere on this

website: *The End of the Beginning*. For the specifics on God's *schedule*, see the appendix section, Volume 4—especially Appendix 1: “Biblical Chronology.” (Hint: read fast—you're running out of time.)

That being said, the specifics of God's schedule (once the resurrection was behind us) were a very low priority for most of the church age. Knowing *what* God would do was important; knowing *when*, not so much. So just before His ascension, Yahshua told His disciples that there were more important things to attend to: **“And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’”** (Acts 1:7-8) Ten days later, on the Feast of Weeks (a.k.a. Pentecost), that power was received, as the Holy Spirit came upon the assembled believers, as recorded in Acts 2. To the extent that we believers have allowed it to function in our lives, that same Spirit empowers us today.

During His entire first-advent ministry, Yahshua kept an eye on the clock, so to speak. That is, He knew that certain things would be appropriate (or required) at one point in time that would not be either earlier or later. The first hint we have that He knew exactly what was going on (and when) is an incident recorded at the end of Luke 2, in which Yahshua, as a twelve year old *bar mitzvah* boy, remained in Jerusalem after the Passover celebration in order to discuss the word of God with the teachers of the Law. He stayed there in the temple for three whole days, blissfully unaware that His parents were searching frantically for Him, as He asked the rabbis question after insightful question about the scriptures. When Mary and Joseph finally found Him, it was as if He just assumed they'd know He had to “be about His Father's business,” a reference to Yahweh's work, not Joseph's. I have no doubt that Joseph, the boy's adoptive father, understood immediately what Yahshua was saying: He was twelve years old now—practically a full-grown man. His Father Yahweh was the One whose “business” He had to pursue from this time forward. It wasn't an insult or slight to Joseph; it was just reality.

When He turned thirty (the age at which a priest's “apprenticeship” ended and his full-time duties began), Yahshua took the appropriate steps to inaugurate His own ministry: **“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?’ But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him.”** (Matthew 3:13-15) John the Baptist

was a priest himself, in addition to being the first prophet to show up in Israel in the past four centuries. His mother and Yahshua's were close cousins, so John was well aware of the miraculous family "back story," as well as Yahshua's uniquely sinless character. John was baptizing people to demonstrate their repentance; he knew that Yahshua had nothing from which to repent. But it was time for Yahshua to provide a physical sign associating Himself with sinful humanity—we whose sins He would take upon Himself. From this point forward, baptism meant less about "washing our sins away" than it did "dying to them and rising from this death as a new creation."

Immediately after this, Yahshua allowed Himself to be tempted by Satan, and John, being a prophet, began saying things that got him in trouble with the "wrong people." **"Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.'"** (Mark 1:14-15) "The time is *fulfilled*"? What did that mean? (1) The "fourth day" of creation had been marked by the appearance of the sun, and Malachi (in 4:2) had informed Israel that the "Sun of Righteousness would appear with healing in his wings." Though nobody had done the math, the fact is, they were rapidly approaching the end of the fourth millennium since the fall of Adam—the starting gun for Yahweh's plan of redemption. Christ's subsequent (and numerous) healings would validate His identity as the Sun of Righteousness. (2) The Daniel 9 prophecy had pinpointed the very date of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem—Nisan 10, in 33 AD, after which "Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself." (Daniel 9:26) That date was now only about three years off—though again, nobody had done the math on it. But Yahshua knew.

Due to His teaching and His miracles, it is not surprising that over the next three years there would be many who would conclude that Yahshua was indeed sent from God, and should therefore be declared Israel's king so He could overthrow the hated Romans. But Yahshua knew two things they didn't: (1) His time had not yet come, and (2) His mission (this time) was not to rule, but to be the sacrifice that would redeem the world. Yes, there had been a plethora of prophecies describing a reigning King, but those were for another time, another advent. First things first.

Even His brothers (well, *half*-brothers, the children of Mary and Joseph: James, Joses, Jude and Simon) got into the act, urging their admittedly special older brother to "take the bull by the horns," so to speak. **"Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. His brothers therefore said to Him, 'Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.'** For even His brothers did not believe in Him." That is, they weren't

trusting Him for their salvation, not having recognized (yet) that Yahshua was the actual Son of God, with all that entailed. **“Then Jesus said to them, ‘My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come.’”** (John 7:2-8) Come Passover, 33AD, you wouldn’t be able to hold Him back. But He had no choice but to adhere to Yahweh’s timetable. His brothers didn’t understand. But Yahshua knew.

Again: **“Therefore they sought to take Him.”** In this instance the crowd wanted to take and stone him for His temerity. **“But no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.”** Several times during His ministry, Yahshua was miraculously protected so He could die later, at the right time, in the right way, for the right reason. **“And many of the people believed in Him, and said, ‘When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?’”** (John 7:30-31) Confronted with Yahshua, folks invariably came to one of two conclusions: they either wanted to crown Him as King, or execute Him for blasphemy. It all depended upon what they knew and believed concerning the Messiah as recorded in the scriptures. Ironically, *both groups* were mistaken, sort of. The “let’s-make-Him-King” group were right about the goal, but wrong about the timing. The “let’s-kill-Him-for-blasphemy” crowd were wrong about His identity, but right about His mission: to lay down His life. *Nobody*, however, was trembling with guilt, saying, “Because this man is the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (as John told us), He must be slain to atone for our sins, even though He has done nothing wrong.” No, nobody would figure *that* out for quite some time. But Yahshua knew.

And again: **“Jesus answered [the Pharisees], ‘You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.’”** This was about as close as He ever got to declaring equality (actually, *identity*) with God among the ecclesiastical elite. The Pharisees had their religion and all the perks that came with it: they just had no use for God Himself. **“These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come.”** (John 8:19-20) The religious elite had figured out that they couldn’t *legally* kill Yahshua without Roman collusion, and the *appearance* of legalism was vitally important to the Pharisees. The privilege of exercising capital punishment had been taken away from Israel by the Romans several decades prior to this—as if to say, “You’re nothing but a slave-nation, here only to pay your taxes and do as you’re told.” The scribes and Pharisees would not be able to pique the Romans’ interest with Yahshua’s claims of deity, and they knew it. But Rome *would* have to respond to claims of a new “King of the Jews.”

This explains why Yahshua is recorded on multiple occasions to have told people whom He’d helped *not to* tell the world about what He had done. It seems

counterintuitive to us. We live in a day and age in which *any* publicity is good publicity, for everybody, it seems, is looking for their “fifteen minutes of fame” (as Andy Warhol put it). But taking the throne of Israel would not have achieved Yahshua’s real mission—quite the contrary. Knowing He had to go to the cross, Yahshua had to do what He could to ensure that He wasn’t killed at the wrong time, by the wrong people, for the wrong reason. There was prophecy to fulfill, and He knew it.

Let us, then, examine the circumstances of His admonitions for anonymity (or at least discretion). **“Two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, ‘Son of David, have mercy on us!’ And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ They said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord.’ Then He touched their eyes, saying, ‘According to your faith let it be to you.’ And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, ‘See that no one knows it.’ But when they had departed, they spread the news about Him in all that country.”** (Matthew 9:27-31) They (like us) believed in Yahshua solely on the basis of His reputation—spread by eyewitness testimony. And their belief was the foundation of their healing. Spreading the news surely made it harder for Yahshua to attend to others in need, since these encounters required access—something such notoriety tended to overwhelm. But still, I doubt if I could have kept this sort a thing secret for a nanosecond.

But there was more to it: the reason for the low profile that Christ was trying to maintain is explained here: **“But when Jesus knew [that the Pharisees were plotting against Him], He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all. Yet He warned them not to make Him known, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will declare justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, till He sends forth justice to victory; and in His name Gentiles will trust.’”** (Matthew 12:15-21) Isaiah (in 42:1-4) had prophesied that the Messiah wouldn’t characteristically waste His time bickering and disputing with self-appointed “Jewish religious experts,” when the time could be better spent healing the multitudes. No one ever got “quarreled” into the Kingdom of Heaven. If Yahshua’s miracles and teaching weren’t enough for Israel (and in the end, they weren’t) then the salvation message would be offered to others. Note that twice in this one short passage, the prophet mentions that the primary focus of the witness of the Messiah’s service would be to *the gentiles*. It was they (*us*) who would respond to the testimony of His work, after Israel largely rejected Him.

We’ve seen Him heal the blind. A similar thing happened to a certain leper, an outcast from society. **“Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him**

and saying to Him, 'If You are willing, You can make me clean.' Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I am willing; be cleansed....' Don't miss the significance of this: nobody *ever* touched lepers—it was a good way to spread their contagious disease to yourself. But considering the fact that leprosy was a symbolic picture of sin, it suddenly makes perfect sense: Yahshua came for that very reason—to take our sins upon Himself. We should *all* be saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." Yahshua *is* willing. He always has been.

"As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once, and said to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.'" (Mark 1:40-44; cf. Luke 5:12-16) This time, there were Torah requirements to deal with (see Leviticus 14). Though the leprosy was obviously gone immediately, the leper would not be "officially" clean until the priest had declared him to be cured—a process that took eight days. There were examinations to endure and sacrifices to offer. The whole procedure was a symbol-rich portrayal of what happens when we are cleansed of our sin. If God's plan for man's redemption occupies His "week," ending with the Millennial Sabbath, then the eighth day indicates the eternal state: we believers won't *actually* be sinless until then, though Christ's touch has declared us clean—now and forever. Note too that the ritual was to be done as a "testimony to *them*," that is, to the priests. No one had ever healed lepers before this, so it is no coincidence that we later read "And a great many of the *priests* were obedient to the faith." (Acts 6:7)

What about when He cast out demons? This time, He didn't specifically tell the witnesses (or the former victims) not to announce what He had done for them. But He did tell the *demons* to sit down and shut up. **"And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, 'You are the Christ, the Son of God!' And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ."** (Luke 4:41) The demons, being fallen angels—had no choice but to obey a direct command from Yahshua (their Creator, though cloaked in flesh). But God neither needs nor wants a testimonial from the devil. As it was, the spiritually comatose scribes and Pharisees couldn't tell the difference between the demons being subject to Christ's commands because He was God, and His being in league with them—as Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Just because the demons' testimony was true (in this case), it did not follow that this was the right time, place, or circumstances in which to let them speak.

For that matter, Yahshua didn't need *anyone* to vouch for Him. Angels and demons are not gifted with free will, and men are finite in their understanding, apt to make bad choices or do the right things for the wrong reasons. So even early in

His ministry, Yahshua kept His focus on the cross before Him—not the acclaim that would naturally result from His miraculous works. **“Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name [which means “Yahweh saves”] when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.”** (John 2:23-25) The prophet had reported, “I, Yahweh, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.” (Jeremiah 17:10) The only testimony of His deity that Yahshua deemed suitable was His own resurrection from the dead. Anything other than that was merely somebody’s opinion. And opinions are like noses: everybody’s got one.

Even when we get it right, we never comprehend the whole picture. Toward the end, Peter finally saw it, and blurted out the truth: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Perfectly true. But Yahshua’s response included this admonition: **“Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.”** (Matthew 16:20) Everybody knew His *name*, of course. Jesus, a.k.a. Joshua, a.k.a. Yahshua was a rather common moniker in Israel. What they didn’t know (yet) was that He was *the Christ*, the Messiah, the Anointed One of Yahweh—the literal Son of God. *That* information was meant to be announced publically only when it was time to sacrifice Himself on the cross for our sins in fulfillment of the Torah, on Passover, 33 AD, a year in which the Feast of Unleavened Bread would fall on a *natural* Sabbath (as if Yahweh were telling us, “I’m not making this stuff up as I go—I planned it from the dawn of time.”) It should come as no surprise that this Passover was only four days after the conclusion of the first sixty-nine “sevens” predicted in Daniel 9:25—the date *after which* “Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself.” (Daniel 9:26) More on this in a bit.

About a week after Peter intuitively came to the conclusion that Yahshua was indeed the Messiah, he, James, and John were invited to accompany their Master to the top of a high hill, where He was temporarily transfigured before their eyes into a being of indescribable glory—glowing as brightly as the sun in their midst. No further intuition was necessary here: He had visibly demonstrated His deity—though only to men who already knew and believed that He was God incarnate. But because His rendezvous with the cross was still several months away, Yahshua again cautioned them to keep the news concealed for the time being: **“Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, ‘Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.’”** (Matthew 17:9) Until the very end, until His mission to fulfill the Torah was complete, He was willing to provide evidence—*but not proof*—of His divine power to the people. After all, the “work of God was to believe in Him whom He sent.” If undeniable proof of

His divinity were presented, there would have been no way *not to* believe, making the whole exercise of free will irrelevant.

Besides, the purpose of His advent was not to gather a following, but to be a sacrifice. So not even the ultimate healing—raising a dead person back to life—was something Yahshua was inclined to “put in His portfolio” with an aim toward gathering disciples to Himself. Raising the dead was something He did several times during His ministry, as here with the daughter of Jairus: **“But He commanded them strictly that no one should know [that He had raised the girl from the dead].”** (Mark 5:43; cf. Luke 8:56) We aren’t told why He commanded secrecy here but not at the funeral procession in the town of Nain, where He raised a widow’s only son from the dead (see Luke 7:11-17). Perhaps it’s because He wished to reassure John the Baptist of His credentials (Luke 7:18-23). Perhaps it’s that Nain (near Nazareth), was a backwater town far removed from the religious gauntlet of Jerusalem that He would have to endure on His way to the cross.

Such was not the case with Bethany, a mere two miles away from the temple, where Lazarus (see John 11:1-44) was raised from the dead. I believe the reason Yahshua didn’t forbid making His friend’s resurrection public this time, but rather melodramatically had the stone removed from His tomb, shouting “Lazarus, come forth,” was the proximity of time. This took place within weeks of His Passover sacrifice: the time had come to “poke the bear,” to bring things to a head. He *knew* He had to be crucified on this Passover, according to the scriptures. The “fallout” from the raising of Lazarus is reported in John 11:45-57. The bottom line is that “from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death.” But it is clear that Yahshua wasn’t executed against His will. Rather, He orchestrated the whole thing, playing the scribes, Pharisees, and Roman authorities like a Stradivarius.

There was a time when Yahshua restricted evangelism to Israel alone. For example: **“These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’”** (Matthew 10:5-6) It’s not that He didn’t love gentiles or Samaritans, or wish them to hear and respond to the Gospel. It was simply a question of timing: He felt it only appropriate to offer salvation *first* to those who had been entrusted with the Torah, for the Law of Moses spoke of Him and His mission between every line. As Isaiah put it, “Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that

You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6) We gentiles may have had to wait our turn, but we were never an afterthought to God.

Indeed, Yahshua Himself is on record as having visited gentile regions like Tyre and Sidon, and Decapolis east of the Jordan. Samaria, of course, lay between Galilee and Judea, so northern Jews had to walk through it (or around it) on their way to Jerusalem. One of the most enlightening discussions on record took place between Yahshua and a Samaritan woman—in her home town. **“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. The woman said to Him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When He comes, He will tell us all things.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am He.’”** (John 4:21-26)

It’s fascinating that Yahshua so readily claimed to be the Messiah to a Samaritan woman, whereas He would have been less than forthright about that fact to a Jewish Pharisee or the High Priest. But the Jews, picking and choosing what they wanted to hear from the prophets, were expecting a conquering king, while Yahshua had come—this time—to sacrifice Himself. The Samaritans, on the other hand, revered only the Pentateuch; they were expecting “a prophet like Moses,” whom they held in the highest regard—not a warrior. Yahshua had just demonstrated Himself to be that Prophet.

The whole discussion of “where to worship” (i.e., Mount Gerizim or Mount Moriah—Shechem or Jerusalem) would be rendered moot in the wake of the Romans’ decimation of Judea and Samaria in 70 AD—the direct result of Israel’s rejection of their Messiah (something Yahshua knew was coming). Since the temple and its service would no longer be available for worship, Jerusalem would be rendered irrelevant for the better part of two millennia. But the temple had served its purpose: it was a complex dress rehearsal for the work of Christ—His sacrifice (at the altar), cleansing power (at the laver), light (at the menorah), provision (at the table of the bread of the presence), and access through prayer (the altar of incense) via the inner curtain (the body of Christ, torn for us at His crucifixion) to Yahweh’s very presence (between the cherubim on the ark of the Covenant). With the temple gone (or at least rendered redundant through Christ’s fulfillment), worship would henceforth take place in the hearts of believers, facilitated by the indwelling Holy Spirit—that is, “in spirit and truth.”

Once the crucifixion and resurrection had taken place—once Israel had *officially* rejected its Messiah—the doors to worldwide evangelism were opened wide. **“And [the risen] Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing**

them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20) If you’re still upset that Yahshua had originally sent the twelve out with instructions to avoid talking to the gentiles and Samaritans, note that the gap between these two directives was only about three years: nobody was “lost” in the exercise of giving Israel the first right of refusal. Note too that “**all things that I have commanded you**” are the topic of this appendix: not religious tradition, but what *He* specifically said to do. The first task of “teaching” is to identify the subject matter in the syllabus. You can’t say, “I presume Jesus would have commanded ‘this’ if He had been smart enough.”

Looking forward to the coming of the Messiah had to have been frustrating for generations of pre-advent believers. They pieced together prophetic clues from all over the Tanakh (missing three quarters of it, of course), and came up with a rather self-contradictory picture of what Yahweh’s Messiah would be like—a servant *and* a king; a gentle healer *and* a mighty warrior; God’s atoning sacrifice *and* the high priest of the order of Melchizedek. Yet it occurred to practically no one that the Messiah’s two roles could be fulfilled in two separate advents a couple of thousand years apart.

And then there’s the disconcerting fact that hundreds of years passed between the utterance of the prophecies and their fulfillment. Yahshua Himself addressed the longings of those who awaited God’s Anointed One, only to die before anything happened: “**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 13:16-17; cf. Luke 10:23-24) What His hearers were “seeing and hearing” was only half of the prophetic picture, of course—the necessary but painful first step toward mankind’s reconciliation with our Creator. As “blessed” as the witnesses to Yahshua’s first advent were, I can’t help but reflect that we who long to see His *second* coming—His everlasting advent—will be blessed a thousand times over when our Lord returns in glory, for His coming will complete the story that never ends.

At His birth, the angels announced “peace on earth.” They weren’t wrong, but they were a bit premature. What Christ would do would indeed bring peace to the earth—but not during His mortal lifetime, or for millennia afterwards. He cautioned us: “**Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword....**” He is not suggesting that Christianity (like Islam, for example) was to be spread through violence and bloodshed. Rather, He is warning us that our devotion to Him—our appreciation for the grace He made available to us—would turn people who *didn’t* believe into our adversaries: they would attack us with every weapon at their disposal. Why? Because by thanking God for

saving us from our sins, we were admitting that we were in need of salvation. So what's the problem? By doing this, we were implying that *they too* are less than perfect before God. That's right: the world takes our joy and gratitude as an insult. How *dare we* call them "sinners"?

It would be bad enough if this animus were only a national or cultural thing—if the Muslim Turks hated the Christian Armenians for their faith, for example. But Christian belief is a personal, one-on-one matter: the battle lines are drawn much closer to home: **"For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."** (Matthew 10:34-39, quoting Micah 7:6)

Remember, we're talking about God's *timing* here. These truths became reality with the advent of Christ, and they will persist throughout the church age (i.e., until His return in glory). They were meaningless (or at least purely theoretical) during the previous age, and they will become obsolete anachronisms during the kingdom age when Yahshua reigns Personally among us. But for the moment, "the work of God is to believe in Him whom He sent." Sometimes that belief entails making hard choices.

It helps (well, a little bit) to know that the animosity the lost world holds toward us believers is temporary. It won't persist past the end of the church age, nor can their hatred separate us from the love of God in the meantime. **"Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes."** (Matthew 10:21-23) This world is not our home; these mortal bodies are not all there is to life. Time is a gift we've been given to be used for God's glory here and now, but the time is coming when time itself will be irrelevant.

In the meantime, I find it a great comfort to observe that our God is on a very tight schedule, and He is always aware of where (or when) we are within it. If we were all paying attention to God's timing, would we still be doing whatever it is we're doing? Don't look now, but we are living within the sixth day of God's allotted "work week," and the sun is rapidly approaching the western horizon. The Sabbath is almost upon us—the day in which no one can work.

Recognize that Christ Fulfills the Law and the Prophets

Reading the writings of Paul or the Book of Hebrews, one might get the mistaken impression that the Torah, the Law of Moses, has become obsolete, outdated, and of no further use whatsoever. But this is only because we misconstrue what the purpose of the Torah was in the first place. It was never meant to save people—it was “only” designed to point to the One who *would* save us. Its precepts were not to be kept in order to attain perfection; they were there to make us realize how far from perfection we actually were.

283 times in the Torah we read, “And Yahweh said to Moses, speak to the Children of Israel, and say...” or words to that effect. That is, Israel *alone* was instructed to keep the precepts of the Torah (a word which, not coincidentally, *means* “Instruction”). Yahweh never issued a comprehensive code of Law to the gentiles, nor were the gentiles asked to keep the Torah (unless, of course, they wished to live as Israelites in the Land of Promise). And yet, the Tanakh itself incessantly informs us that gentiles (i.e., non-Jews) will share in Israel’s blessing. (See Deuteronomy 32:43, Psalm 46:10, Psalm 47, Psalm 102:15, Isaiah 49:6, Zechariah 2:10-13, etc.)

Christ put the issue to rest, once and for all (or He would have, if we had been willing to listen to Him): **“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled...”** Luke records this: **“It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.”** (Luke 16:17) Jots and tittles were the smallest strokes in the written Hebrew language, so He was informing us that (1) the Law and Prophets—every little detail of them—would continue to be relevant and useful for as long as mortal man walked the earth. (2) Christ’s mission would not destroy the meaning of the Torah, but would explain it—in a word, *fulfill* it. (3) When heaven and earth pass away (something blatantly predicted elsewhere in scripture), *then* there will be no more need of the Torah’s truth. But it is axiomatic that all believers will have received their immortal, spiritual bodies by that time, for we will be living in the eternal state—in the new heavens and new earth. (4) The “jot and tittle” reference also appears to be a dig at the so-called “oral law” with which the scribes had attempted to hogtie Israel—over and above the written Law of Moses. Since these traditions were not supposed to be written, but were transmitted *orally* (a convention finally jettisoned almost a century later with the creation of the written Mishnah), there were no “jots and tittles” to preserve. In other words, Christ did *not* include the “oral law” in His declaration that the Law would stand.

Matthew’s recounting continues: **“Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of**

heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:17-20) The good news is, the Torah continues to be an invaluable window into the mind of God. The bad news is, none of us is able to keep it—even the most obsessive and meticulous of us. As I said, the Torah looms above us as a silent witness that we have all “sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

I was casting about for a good metaphor for what the Torah is, and how it operates, and this popped into my head. When I was five years old, my family moved to Downey, a suburb of Los Angeles, California. Our home was near the corner of Florence and Paramount Boulevards. As a child, I imagined that Paramount went on forever. It was breathtaking, had more lanes than I had ever seen, and had what seemed like a never-ending flow of cars and trucks on it. Also, it seemed to be the route our family took whenever we wanted to go anywhere important. In my metaphor, then, Paramount Boulevard is the Torah. It would take us wherever we wanted to go.

It wasn't until I grew up, got my driver's license, and went exploring, that I realized that Paramount was not all it had seemed when I was a small boy. It had limitations. If you drove north on it a bit, you'd pass under the Santa Ana Freeway and go only a few more miles before it petered out into a residential neighborhood in Pico Rivera. You could go farther if you went south, but eventually it dead-ended at the Long Beach airport. So Paramount, as it turned out, wasn't the infinite highway it seemed to a wide-eyed kindergartener. It was big, but it wouldn't take you remotely *everywhere*.

But it *would* take you to the Santa Ana Freeway—Interstate 5. This, in my geographical metaphor, is the Gospel of Christ. If you got on the “5,” you could drive from Downey south to the Mexican border, or travel north the whole length of California, continuing into Oregon, and then through Washington State, all the way to Canada—the entire country, north to south. Awesome!

So when I discovered Interstate 5, did Paramount disappear? Did it become obsolete or useless? No. It was still there, just as it always had been, still available for service. More to the point, it was the only practical way to get to the Freeway—that road that would *really* take you places. Yes, you could go the long way around, if you had time and gas to waste (just as it's possible to comprehend the Gospel from simply heeding one's conscience). But for me, Paramount was the most direct route to the highway that led to the rest of the world. That's the way I see the Torah: it's the most obvious, intuitive, undeviating pathway we can take to the Gospel—the real roadway through our mortal life. The Torah is indeed “Paramount.” It was *designed* to take me straight to the onramp of the “5,” that “narrow gate” that leads to the Kingdom of heaven. (And hey, don't blame me if

5 is the Bible's consistent numerical symbol for *grace*. I'm just reporting what's there, though I do love it when a metaphor comes together.)

To hear some people talk, you'd think that the Torah and the New Testament were opposed to each other, at cross purposes. But Yahshua put that notion to rest as well. Speaking to people who claimed to be living by the Law, He said, **"Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you [Pharisees]—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"** (John 5:45-47) Beside the thousands of symbolic references that comprise the fabric of the Torah, and beside the incessant undercurrent of Yahweh's agenda of love and forgiveness presented in its pages, we read this: "Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, 'Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which Yahweh has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. And Yahweh, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.'" (Deuteronomy 31:7-8) *Joshua*? Moses' protégé (not coincidentally) had the same name as the Messiah—Yahshua, the one the world knows as Jesus. It means "Yahweh is salvation." What Joshua did physically for Israel, Yahshua is in the process of doing spiritually for the whole world. Yahshua is the One who causes Israel to inherit the Land. Yahshua is the One who "goes before you"—who goes before all of us.

In telling the story of "the Rich Man and Lazarus," Yahshua pointed out that even the most spectacular miracles do not outweigh the testimony of scripture. **"He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"** (Luke 16:31) Again, it was no coincidence when someone whose name actually *was* Lazarus (which means, "God has helped"), who had been dead for four days, came back to life at Yahshua's command. Were the scribes and Pharisees impressed? Did they praise God because of Yahshua's authority over death itself? Were they persuaded that He was indeed the promised Messiah? Not even remotely. Yahshua's story was a left-handed way of declaring that the scribes and Pharisees *did not* "hear Moses and the prophets" as they claimed to. What they "heard," rather, was the sweet sound of the deferential greetings they received in the marketplace, the rustle of their fine silk robes as they walked to the temple, but also, off in the distance, the faint noise of their whole phony religious scam crumbling down around their ears if folks ever concluded that God Himself—in the person of Yahshua—was now walking among them.

Nor were the Pharisees "persuaded" when Christ Himself rose from the dead. Those who *had been* persuaded of His divine credentials were understandably confused by His death. How was it even *possible* to kill God incarnate? Yes, the

Tanakh had spoken of a “suffering servant,” but those prophecies didn’t mesh at all with the “reigning king” passages in which everybody was so invested. How could both things be true? But as Christ explained to two disciples on the Road to Emmaus the very afternoon of His resurrection, **“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”** (Luke 24:25-27) The implied imperative here is to trust the scriptures—all of them, even those that seem counterintuitive at first. What nobody seemed to understand was that His suffering was the doorway to glory, or as the Torah had demonstrated, the death of innocence was the key to life through atoning forgiveness.

Later that same day, He explained further, this time to the eleven: **“Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’”** It was all there, albeit in esoteric, often symbolic terms, if only we’d had the eyes to see it. It makes me wonder how much information we miss that’s equally obvious (or will be, in retrospect) in yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecy—of which there is an awful lot (see *The End of the Beginning*, elsewhere on this website). **“And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.’”** (Luke 24:44-48)

Note several important things in this statement. (1) It was *necessary* for the Messiah to suffer. It wasn’t optional. As far back as the Garden of Eden, Yahweh had established that only innocence could atone for iniquity. (2) The “third day” requirement was revealed in the first three of the Torah’s “feasts of Yahweh.” Christ had to be crucified on Passover, the 14th day of Nisan; He lay in the tomb on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the 15th (by law, a Sabbath—which it *was* in 33AD); and He rose from the dead on the third day, the Feast of Firstfruits, on the 16th of Nisan. (3) The whole point of the passion was the “remission of sins,” achieved through our repentance, which was in turn prompted by Christ’s finished work. (4) This atonement was available not just to Israel, but to the whole world. And (5) this good news was to be spread (“preached”) by the witnesses of God’s power and grace—first by the original disciples who saw the risen Christ, and then by us who believed them and subsequently experienced His transforming love for ourselves.

The “opening of the disciples’ understanding” didn’t happen all at once, as a blinding flash of insight. Rather, it dawned on them piece by piece—mostly after the resurrection, which tended to force things into focus for the disciples. Many of

the things Yahshua had done were actually signs, whether or not He explained them in the moment. To the extent that Israel had kept the Torah's rituals, they had been rehearsing these covenant signs since the exodus, without really knowing why.

For example, they didn't comprehend the significance of the triumphal entry until after His resurrection. **"His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him."** (John 12:16) At some point, they noticed that Christ had been crucified—subjected to judgment on their behalf—on Passover—the 14th day of the month of Nisan, fulfilling the complex prophecy that the day represented. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, the very next day (the Sabbath) was when Yahshua "rested" in the tomb, demonstrating that our sin (represented by yeast) had been removed. And He rose from the dead on the next day, the first day of the week, the Feast of Firstfruits. Then, doing the math, they counted back to the previous Monday, Nisan 10, the day of the triumphal entry, and realized that this was the very day the Passover Lamb was to be brought into the household of Israel for inspection (see Exodus 12:3). God had worked the whole thing out and codified it into "Torah Law" some 1,500 years before it took place—going so far as to ensure that the Convocation that was *designated* a Sabbath (the Feast of Unleavened Bread) fell on a *natural* Sabbath in the year of its fulfillment (33 AD).

What the disciples almost certainly *didn't* know was that the very Nisan 10 also fulfilled another prophecy. The prophet Daniel had written "From the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.... And after the sixty-two weeks, Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself." (Daniel 9:25-26) The whole amazing story is related in detail in *The End of the Beginning*, chapter 7, so I won't repeat it all here. Suffice it to say that Christ entered Jerusalem *on the very day* Daniel's prophecy had pinpointed, though it was apparent only if you had all the historical data at your fingertips. Counting from Nisan 1, 444 BC (see Nehemiah 2:1-6), the prophecy's "sixty-nine sevens," i.e., 483 "years," times 360 days (the length of the Hebrew prophetic-schematic year), comes out to 173,880 days, or 476 solar years and 25 days inclusive—to Monday, the 10th of Nisan (March 28), 33 A.D., the very day on which the triumphal entry took place.

The signs were there, if you were but willing to open your eyes. When John the Baptist, from his prison cell, sought reassurance about Yahshua's divine identity, he was told, "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them." (Matthew 11:5) These very signs had been prophesied in such passages as Exodus 4:11, Isaiah 29:18-19, 35:5, and 61:1.

This sort of scripture-based confirmation wasn't enough for the unbelieving religious big-wigs though. **"Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.'**" I suppose they were looking for something like a rain of fire and brimstone on the Antonia Fortress—vengeance against the Romans. **"But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.'**" (Matthew 12:38-42; cf. Luke 11:29-32) The scribes and Pharisees were unwilling to accept the signs Yahweh had put before them in the Torah and prophetic writings. As during His testing from Satan, Yahshua refused to take the bait. Confirmation provided by the Law and the Prophets would have to do.

That "Sign-of-Jonah" thing has caused more confusion than it should have, for many have jumped to the conclusion that Yahshua was saying He would spend three days and three nights *in the tomb*, though His time there (in perfect accordance with the scriptures) only lasted from late Friday afternoon to early Sunday morning—maybe 36 hours. Every time He had predicted His resurrection, He had said, "I will rise *on the third day*," which is precisely correct. The problem (as usual) is our English translations. The Greek word for "earth" (*gē*) is equivalent to the Hebrew *eretz*, or the Aramaic *ara*. It has a broad range of meanings: earth, soil, land, region, country, ground, world, land (as opposed to sea), the Promised Land, or even the people inhabiting a place. Yahshua was actually saying that during the Passion Week, He would spend three days and three nights—no more, no less—in *Jerusalem*, the "heart of the Land" of Israel.

We can track the schedule in the Book of Mark. After the triumphal entry on Monday, the 10th of Nisan, He left the city, staying overnight in Bethany, a village about two miles away. He came back Tuesday morning, but left again overnight (Mark 11:12, 19). He entered Jerusalem again on Wednesday (v. 20, 27) but again, left to sojourn in Bethany, where Mary anointed Him for His burial. But returning to Jerusalem on Thursday morning, He never again left the city until the Passion was complete. He instructed His disciples to prepare for the Last Supper, and that night He was betrayed and arrested as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Then—still in Jerusalem—He endured several "trials," was scourged within an inch of His life, was crucified, died, and was entombed on Friday afternoon. He "rested" on the Sabbath, and rose from the dead sometime before dawn on Sunday. Only then did He leave the "heart of the Land,"

Jerusalem. That's the morning and evening, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday—three days and three nights: the sign of the prophet Jonah.

This “asking for a sign” tactic was a favorite ploy of the scribes and Pharisees. They apparently used it on several occasions, hoping to undermine Yahshua's credibility when His “sign” didn't measure up to their expectations, so they could reject Him without looking like the fools they were. Here's another instance: **“Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, ‘When it is evening you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’; and in the morning, ‘It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.’ And He left them and departed.”** (Matthew 16:1-4; cf. Mark 8:11-12) His point was that they knew how to read signs—they just refused to do it.

Again, I must compare them to our present generation who, faced with a plethora of prophesied “signs” of the impending return of Christ, refuse to wake up from their self-induced spiritual stupor. As Yahshua said (in Matthew 24:37-38), His coming will be met with conditions “as in the days of Noah.” Business as usual. It wasn't as if they hadn't been shown any signs: Noah had been building a huge boat for decades, preaching that God was going to send a flood if they did not repent. But there had never been a flood like that before, so they ignored and ridiculed him—until the door was shut and the waters swept them all away.

If you think about it, a sign (if predicted in scripture) is a promise from God—a covenant, if you will. The caveat, of course, is that you can't perceive “signs” under every rock and behind every tree and declare them to be omens from God. Just because you see a cloud that looks like a Volkswagen, it doesn't mean the Germans are coming. But we should all be aware of Yahweh's extensive use of symbols and metaphors, and be attuned to their potential meaning. I have cataloged many of these in *The Torah Code*, elsewhere on this website.

For example, Yahshua used two prominent symbols at the Last Supper: **“And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.’”** (Luke 22:19-20; cf. Matthew 26:26-28; cf. Mark 14:22-25) Bread represents “that which God provides,” that which sustains us and maintains life. By comparing the broken bread to His own body, Christ was declaring that He would be broken on the cross for our benefit—and that if we assimilated Him into our lives, our souls would be sustained for eternity. In the same way, wine represents blood—that in which the life of the mortal body flows, for “the life is in the blood.” Christ's blood poured out for us must, like the bread of life (His body), be made part of us if we wish to

share in His life. Both bread and wine figure heavily in the rites of the Torah, and have symbolic roots going all the way back to Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek (see Genesis 14:18; cf. Hebrews 7).

Holy Communion, then, is not some semi-pointless religious ritual, but rather a picture of what happens when Christ becomes part of us through our belief and the subsequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives. His body provides life, and His blood is the promise that this life will endure forever. Paul expands the thought: **"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."** (I Corinthians 11:23-26)

Christ's commandments, then, are fourfold: (1) We are to "eat" the bread that represents His body—that is, we are to absorb Him into our very being, allowing Him to empower and sustain us. (2) We are to "drink" the wine that represents His blood, taking His eternal life into ourselves. (3) We are to specifically remember Him as we participate in this symbolic ritual, for His sacrifice alone provides the atonement that reconciles us with a Holy God. And (4) we are to realize and acknowledge that Yahshua's death was merely the first step in the process of our salvation. It won't be complete until He returns, as He promised. The suffering Servant has departed; we now await the reigning King.

So we see that "keeping the Torah" is less about strict observance of a set of rules, and more about placing our trust in the One toward whom those precepts were meant to point. It most certainly was *not* about keeping an onerous set of manmade rules that were (ostensibly) designed to place a protective "hedge" around the Law of Moses—so we couldn't get within a mile of crossing the line. All the "oral law" really accomplished was to obfuscate the heart of God's Instructions, which were usually quite simple.

The Sabbath Law may be taken as a case in point. All Yahweh had said to do on the Sabbath was rest—to refrain from doing your regular job—that activity with which you ordinarily earned a living. To the exodus generation, that would have been gathering manna or picking up firewood; in later times, it would broaden to include whatever our regular occupation happened to be. God never said anything about gathering for worship on the Sabbath, though in the post-

exilic era, meeting at the synagogue on the Sabbath seemed a natural thing to do, because after all, you weren't shearing sheep or planting barley or catching fish that day, as you usually did. And Christ had no problem with this tradition, even though it had little to do with what the Sabbath actually meant—relying upon God (instead of our own efforts) to meet our needs, up to and including redemption and reconciliation with God.

In these last days, it has become clear (at least to me) that there is also another, more prosaic meaning to the Sabbath Law. It describes the very schedule of God—the outworking of His plan of redemption for our fallen race. If each “day” is a thousand years (as II Peter 3:8 and Psalm 90:4 indicate), then mankind is supposed to be “working things out with God” (that is, exercising our God-given privilege of free will) for six millennia, beginning with the fall of Adam. But after that period of time (during the seventh millennium, the Sabbath), we must rest in Christ's finished work, or not at all. It has been almost six thousand years since Eden. Any way you slice it, we are rapidly approaching sunset on the sixth day. Further, if each thousand-year period of time is a thousand years in duration (which seems pretty obvious when you say it like that), and if (as I have observed) there have been spiritually significant milestones marking each millennium, then the date of the passion (33 AD), is our key: the seventh “day” will begin in 2033.

All of this serves to make the rabbinical minutiae concerning Sabbath observance look pointless and silly. **“At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, ‘Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!...’”** Although the Torah had specifically allowed hungry travelers to pluck somebody else's grain to eat (as long as they didn't use a tool or container), the Pharisees accused them of “harvesting,” and “milling” when they rubbed the kernels between their palms to remove the chaff. But these guys were fishermen, not farmers, and besides, this wasn't their field. So the Pharisees were wrong. The disciples had violated the oral law perhaps, but not the Torah.

Rather than wrangle over fine points of the law, however, Yahshua appealed to what the Torah was actually about: mercy—specifically, God's mercy toward us. **“But He said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?...’”** Check the record: the priests are required to work their butts off on the Sabbath day.

“Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple.” He's speaking, of course, of Himself—the One whose life and mission the layout and

furnishings of the tabernacle and temple were designed to prophesy, in a hundred little details. **“But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”** (Matthew 12:1-8, quoting Hosea 6:6; cf. Mark 2:23-28; cf. Luke 6:1-5) Don’t gloss over that last astounding statement. In order to be “Lord of the Sabbath,” one must have the authority and ability to fulfill what the Sabbath means, to provide what the Sabbath requires—in a word: rest. As Adam discovered (see Genesis 3:17-19) his sin resulted in the constant toil that is man’s universal curse. The “Lord of the Sabbath,” must be willing and able to reverse that curse.

The Pharisees were too proud to admit that they didn’t know what Yahshua was talking about half the time. So He prayed, **“I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise [literally, skilled or clever] and prudent [i.e., intelligent or educated] and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight....”** People—even smart ones—who rely upon their own intellect to formulate their philosophies for living find themselves clueless about God’s truth, even though these things are transparent to folks who approach God as an innocent child does his father—in trust and respect. Pride will separate us from God’s fellowship faster than any other sin, it seems.

Yahshua went on to describe what it means to be “Lord of the Sabbath,” in practical terms. **“All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”** Yahweh, being Spirit, is more or less incomprehensible to us mortals, but we can come to know Him—to understand what He’s like and what He wants for us—by paying attention to the Son of God, Yahshua. That includes receiving the Sabbath rest He intends for us to enjoy: **“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 11:25-29) It isn’t that being God’s child doesn’t entail work. Even Adam had a job to do in the Garden. It’s that God’s idea of “work” is joyful, fulfilling, and satisfying—not the onerous, exhausting drudgery the world demands of us.

For further Sabbath insight, let us consider the example of Christ Himself. Since He was God incarnate, was not healing His “day job?” And yet, He healed people on the Sabbath on many occasions—apparently, just to make a point. **“Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue [the place where Jews met for worship and study on the Sabbath Day]. And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’—that they might accuse Him....”** It was a dare, of sorts. “You say you are God, but God rests on the seventh day (see Genesis 2:2-3). So if you heal folks on the

Sabbath, you must not be God.” They had forgotten, of course, that God desires **“mercy and not sacrifice,”** as we saw above.

And then there’s the other question: if you’re God, what’s “work,” and what’s not? Yahshua would go to the cross on a Friday, and rise again on Sunday, resting in the tomb on the Sabbath. So we could conclude that “sacrificing yourself to redeem the whole human race” was considered “God’s work,” while individual acts of mercy were merely “worship,” something that was supposed to go on continually. **“Then He said to them, ‘What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value, then, is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’ Then He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other....”** It has always amused me that (at least in this instance) no one could accuse Him of “working on the Sabbath” here, and yet they did. There was no possible explanation for the healing other than that God, through Yahshua, had been responsible for it. But it was not “work” to tell someone to stretch out his hand, nor was it work to comply. Yet when man was restored, rather than praise God and repent, **“the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.”** (Matthew 12:9-14; cf. Mark 3:1-5; cf. Luke 6:6-11) His only “crime” had been to prove them to be hypocrites.

Because the Law was largely symbolic, it contained precepts that occasionally conflicted with one other in some non-essential detail. For instance, **“If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”** (John 7:23-24) A male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day of life. So if he was born on a Friday, there was going to be a calendar conflict: he’d have to be circumcised on the Sabbath, which was “work” for somebody. But the two precepts pointed toward two separate (though related) facets of our redemption: circumcision pictured the complete and permanent removal of our sins from us (a process involving blood and pain), while the Sabbath indicated our rest in God—our willingness to trust Him with our salvation, not working to attain it ourselves. But in the end, both things instructed us to trust God.

Because it was so important, we are given multiple examples of Christ’s Sabbath healings. Here’s another: **“Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, ‘Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.’ And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God....”** It’s as if He were purposely correlating healing with the Sabbath day—making sure we’d associate the two things in our minds. But in truth, that is precisely what “rest in

God” is all about—being healed from our infirmities, the greatest of which is our sin. We cannot heal ourselves. Only our Maker can do it.

This was all opaque to the conventional works-based wisdom of the day, of course. Like Job’s “miserable comforters,” some thought the woman’s affliction was probably due directly to some heinous sin lurking in her life. **“But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, ‘There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day....’”** First, she had not come expecting to be healed, but only to worship and learn from God’s word. I’d say she got more than she’d bargained for. Second, Yahshua met affliction with mercy wherever and whenever He found it. The ruler of the synagogue could not have healed the woman if she came back on Wednesday, and he knew it. Third, healing was not “work” to Yahshua. He wasn’t practicing medicine. This was merely the outpouring of His divine nature.

So Yahshua answered his indignation with indignation: **“The Lord then answered him and said, ‘Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?’ And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.”** (Luke 13:10-17) Mercy trumps rectitude every time. It was only natural that the multitude rejoiced and praised God when confronted with Yahshua’s mighty works. Meanwhile, the proper response of His adversaries (which—let’s face it—is the condition in which we all begin) would have been to use their well-deserved shame as a launching pad for repentance. The idea is to move away from error and rebellion toward truth and reconciliation. But the choice is ours.

By the time of Christ, the oral law—the traditions of the rabbis—had all but eclipsed the actual Torah in Jewish practice. Having discovered over the centuries that it took a pure heart to even *begin* to keep the Law of Moses, they retreated into the relative convenience of manmade rules and regulations: it was easier to count out mustard seeds for the tithes than it was to show mercy and compassion to folks you didn’t particularly like. **“Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, ‘Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread....’”** Nowhere in the Torah was it commanded to wash one’s hands at mealtimes, even if it is a good idea. Ritual purity in the Law invariably had more to do with the symbology of cleansing—daily repentance before God—than it did with mere hygiene.

So Yahshua, as usual, skipped the answer and cut straight to the underlying issue—the scribes’ hypocrisy. **“He answered and said to them, ‘Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded,**

saying, “Honor your father and your mother”; and, “He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.” But you say, “Whoever says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God—then he need not honor his father or mother.’” Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men....”” The basic Torah precepts had said, “Honor your parents,” and “Love your neighbor.” But the rabbis had constructed a complicated alternate legal structure that allowed them to *look* holy while flouting God’s clear commandments. They weren’t fooling anybody, and Christ made sure they knew it. Meanwhile, by His life—and eventually by His death and resurrection—He demonstrated what *real* love looked like.

Then He pointed out the flaw in the rabbinical logic: “When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, ‘Hear and understand: Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.’” (Matthew 15:1-11; cf. Mark 7:5-16) The scribes thought the Law should attend only to the well-being of the mortal body, and it does that to some small degree. But its focus is our *spiritual* health—that which will (or at least can) affect us forever, in this life and beyond. So although what we eat may have a little to do with our overall well-being, what we *say* speaks volumes about our spiritual condition.

A few verses later, Yahshua explained: “Whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated. But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. [Mark adds, ‘covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, pride, and foolishness.’] These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.” (Matthew 15:17-20; cf. Mark 7:17-23) As the prophet had pointed out, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9) And what the corrupt inner being of a man conjures up is invariably revealed by his words and deeds. Put another way, a bad burrito can make you sick; an evil heart declares that you’re already dying.

It’s interesting that Yahshua, when asked about the path to salvation, invariably referred back to the Torah. “And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?’ So he answered and said, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’ And He said to him, ‘You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.’” (Luke 10:25-28) This may come as a shock to those of us who are depending on grace through faith for our redemption. Keep the *Law*? Well, yes, sort of: if anyone ever *did* flawlessly keep the Law of Moses, this

would define him as “not needing salvation.” Only Yahshua, of all men, ever managed to do this, of course. The rest of us must rely on what the Law *means*. All those sacrifices, rituals, and symbols conspired to inform us that Christ alone—innocence personified—is able to reconcile us sinners to a holy God. The two “greatest” (most fundamental) commandments of the Law, quoted here, define the evidence that we have indeed attained eternal life. The whole book of I John is a commentary on this truth.

The story was similar when Yahshua was asked basically the same question by a rich young ruler (who, unlike the lawyer above who was “testing Him,” sincerely wanted to know how to live guiltlessly in God’s presence. Yahshua told him (and us): **“If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.... You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honor your father and your mother, and, you shall love your neighbor as yourself....”** The devout young man thought he *had* kept all these rules, and yet he still felt the nagging presence of spiritual failure in his life. So Yahshua gently pointed out that there were still things in his life that were more important to him than a relationship with God, whether he realized it or not. **“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”** (Matthew 19:17-19, 21; cf. Mark 10:17-22; cf. Luke 18:15-23) If we’re honest with ourselves, most of us will admit that there’s this *one thing* preventing us from being “perfect.” This fellow was rich, so it’s not surprising that money was his stumbling block. For you or me, it might be something else. The point is, it behooves us to figure out what (if anything) in our lives is making us “imperfect,” and deal with it. Preaching to the mirror here, of course.

Perhaps the most universal failing we tend to share is something that was mentioned in both of the foregoing stories: we are to “love our neighbors as we do ourselves.” This can get tricky, because loving your neighbor doesn’t mean what a lot of people think it means: tolerating his iniquity or affirming his sin. Rather, it’s showing him how to overcome it—how to be forgiven and cleansed and made eternally alive. People don’t naturally like hearing that they’re flawed in some way, that they’re sick and dying, even though they feel just fine. But Yahshua said, **“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”** Let’s be honest here: we’re *all* sick. Some of us are willing to admit it and seek the cure, and some are not. **“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’”** In other words, God doesn’t want religious rituals from us; He wants us to show genuine love—mercy—toward our fellow man. **“For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”** (Matthew 9:12-13)

For one thing, there *are no* righteous people—only those who, like the rich young ruler, have deceived themselves into thinking they’re better than they really are. Nor are we supposed to try to make sinners feel good about their sin: that’s

not mercy, by any stretch of the imagination. Rather, we are to do what Christ did: call them to repentance. This is admittedly far more intuitive if we live in a constant state of repentance ourselves—facing our flaws head-on as they become apparent, and confessing them before God. Again, it’s tricky: how does one call a brother to repentance without judging him? Part of it is knowing what actually comprises sin, and what is simply a manmade religious or cultural tradition that your neighbor has violated. Scripture alone is the arbiter of such things: this behooves us to know what God’s word says—and what it does not.

Furthermore, if the one who is “being called to repentance” is a believer (or says he is), Christ Himself taught us how to deal with the situation: **“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.”** Chances are, he is not even aware of his transgression. **“But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’”** Once again, the Torah is brought to bear: see Deuteronomy 19:15. **“And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church [the *ekklesia*—the called-out assembly of believers]. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”** (Matthew 18:15-17) In other words, if a sinner (and we’re all in that category) is confronted and repents, he is to be treated with mercy and forgiveness. But if he defends his sin, declaring himself in effect to have greater authority than Yahshua, scripture, and the church, he isn’t really part of the body of Christ, is he? One caveat: just be absolutely certain the “heathen” is wrong and you are right, before expelling him. As I said, scripture alone is our final authority. Many (including myself) have been ostracized at one time or another because we clung tenaciously to scriptural revelation over ingrained religious tradition.

More thoughts on mercy in light of the Torah: **“Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off...”** Note first that a common debilitating malady was successful in forcing “natural enemies” to band together as allies. Jews and Samaritans in this culture usually shared a mutual animosity—though hardly anybody understood why, at this late date. But their leprosy basically said, “Who cares about ancient history? We’re all in the same leaky boat—we can help each other.” Why doesn’t the rest of the world perceive its dire spiritual condition and band together for the same reason?

Anyway, people tend to change when they encounter Yahshua. **“And they lifted up their voices and said, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’”** Showing mercy was what He was famous for—He had healed so many lepers and demoniacs, His reputation preceded Him. But what did He do? He told them to observe the Torah: **“So when He saw them, He said to them, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’”** No cure for leprosy was prescribed in the Law of Moses, but a complicated and symbolically pregnant

ritual was provided for people who *had been* healed (see Leviticus 13-15). **“And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed....”** Their obedience revealed their healing. It wasn’t until they followed Yahshua’s instructions that the healing miracle became evident. There’s a lesson for us in there somewhere.

But the story isn’t over. While the legalists were congratulating themselves that the Law was being observed, one of the ex-lepers couldn’t contain his joy: **“And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, ‘Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?’ And He said to him, ‘Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.’”** (Luke 17:11-19) Technically, the Samaritan leper was in violation of the Torah when he turned around and bowed at Yahshua’s feet. Yes, he *knew* he was cured, but he had not as yet gone through the cleansing ritual prescribed in the Law.

But this was one of those “Sabbath-is-made-for-man” moments: it is *never* improper to exuberantly and vociferously thank God. I used to think, “Oh, this was a Samaritan—he had no respect for the Torah, as the Jews in the company must have.” But I was wrong about that. Truth be told, the Law of Moses was the *only* part of the Tanakh that the Samaritans received without reservation. (See the chapter on “Samaritans” in *The Torah Code*, elsewhere on this website.) I have no doubt that he went on to finish the task as prescribed in the Law. But first things first. Credit must be given where credit is due: this cleansing was the work of God, and God would be praised. Hallelujah!

Speaking of Samaritans and mercy, we’re all familiar with the parable of the “Good Samaritan,” in which a Jewish man was beset by thieves on the road and left for dead, and no one would help him. (A priest and a Levite are mentioned—two classes who would have been expected—even required—to show mercy, given their Levitical job descriptions.) But the only one who stopped to help was a Samaritan—someone against whom a Jew in that culture might normally have held deep prejudices. The parable’s bottom line was, **“So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?’ And he said, ‘He who showed mercy on him.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’”** (Luke 10:36-37) The story had been prompted by a lawyer’s question: if I am to “love my neighbor as myself,” then who is my neighbor (and more to the point, who is not)? Yahshua’s parable pointed out that your “neighbor” is anyone God places in your path, anyone with whom you come in contact.

We are thus to show mercy to everyone we meet, to whatever extent the situation requires. American Christians have always been pretty good at stepping up, but it strikes me lately that the *Israelis* are now the world-class example of what it means to “Go and do likewise.” Whenever there’s an earthquake, disease

outbreak, or any sort of natural disaster that's not caused by man's inhumanity to man, anywhere in the world, you're likely to see a team of Israeli crisis specialists first on the scene, ready to help. I wonder if they realize they're following the Messiah's commandment when they do this.

It's not about receiving rewards in this world. The Good Samaritan didn't expect to be reimbursed for his out-of-pocket expenses, much less lionized in the *Jerusalem Post* (so to speak). And yet, God sees what we do, perceives why we do it, and rewards us with treasure in heaven. **"He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."** If you want to honor and obey Yahweh, you'll have to receive Yahshua as His Anointed Representative—the Son of God. **"He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."** (Matthew 10:40-42) I must reiterate that good works do not save us. But once we're trusting in Christ's finished work for our salvation—once we are His children—our good works are both appreciated and expected by Father God. We don't all have the same talents or the same gifts. What we do have is the freedom to choose between right and wrong. And God is on record promising to reward His children who choose to do the right thing when the opportunity presents itself.

Heed God's Symbols, Metaphors, and Parables

Christ was seldom direct and authoritarian when telling us what to do. In contrast with the Torah, there was no cut-and-dried compendium of "things Christians must do." Rather, His commandments were more often couched in terms of "how we ought to be." And even then, as often as not, we are given an illustration—a parable—and expected to think about it and draw the proper conclusion. His precepts, such as they are, are built into these stories. He who has an ear, let him hear.

This procedure puzzled the disciples, so they asked Him about it. **"And 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.'" The "mysteries" (those things which had not previously been revealed) were intended only for those of us who were willing to receive Yahshua as Yahweh's Anointed—not for people who were relying on themselves to find their way into the Kingdom of God. **"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...."**** He's talking about revelation or spiritual insight here—not material goods.

“Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.” It’s not a question of native intelligence; it’s a matter of the willingness to receive the truth when you hear it. **“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.’”** “This people” is Israel. Their hearts had “grown dull” because they had been in possession of the Law and the prophets for centuries, and yet had not (as a nation) taken God’s word to heart. **“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.”** (Matthew 13:10-15, quoting Isaiah 6:9-10; cf. Mark 4:10-12; cf. Luke 8:9-10)

At first glance, this may sound a bit mean-spirited—withholding the truth from people who don’t want to hear it anyway. But remember, we are built with free will, the privilege of choice. God, in my experience, never turns away an honest searcher, even if he has no idea how to enquire of a God whose identity he can barely discern. But people who have been told the truth, have rejected it, and are subsequently looking for something a bit more to their liking, will find God’s revelation opaque and mysterious. *Grace? That doesn’t make any sense! Just tell me what to do in order to impress the god that I’ve conjured up in my mind.* Meanwhile, Yahshua responds with compassion to repentant souls who artlessly cry out, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” It is they who will comprehend what God is teaching us through these parables.

The use of symbols and parables wasn’t an innovation on the part of Yahshua, either. God had used this teaching method a long time: **“All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: ‘I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.’”** (Matthew 13:34-35, quoting Psalm 78:2) The Psalm being quoted here begins, “Give ear, O my people, *to my law.*” That is, the Torah itself was said to have a parabolic nature: when God told Israel to keep the Sabbath, circumcise their male children, refrain from muzzling the ox who treads out their grain, or any of a thousand other things, something *beyond* the overt precept was being implied. It was up to us to ponder what Yahweh meant—to inquire into the very heart and mind of God. This is not “adding to the Torah.” It is endeavoring *not to subtract from it* out of sloth or indifference.

The scribes and Pharisees, on the other hand, had taken the literal letter of the Law, hedged it about with an impenetrable maze of manmade rules, and refused steadfastly to consider any deeper meaning. So naturally, they usually had no idea what Yahshua was talking about. **“And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And**

when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.” (Mark 4:33-34) The disciples didn’t often “get it” immediately, either, but at least they were open to the truth. Christ’s explanations to them, recorded in the Gospels, are our key to discerning how God thinks.

I might reiterate that I observed long ago (after studying the Torah for years) that Yahweh does not rely solely on human language to communicate with us. Language shifts with time and culture. Something is invariably lost translating texts from one tongue into another. And the meanings of common words often morph from one thing to another. (Met any gay people lately?) But the point of a *story* tends to survive the ravages of linguistic instability. And beyond that, God uses an extensive matrix of symbols and metaphors that conspire to inform us about God’s intentions. Once established, these symbols remain remarkably consistent within scripture. (For example, *lambs* always indicate innocence, and *olive oil* invariably points toward the Holy Spirit, etc.) Those symbols (and there are scores of them) are the subject of a (projected) seven-volume treatise on the subject called *The Torah Code*, elsewhere on this website.

We noted above that Yahshua told His disciples, **“It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.”** And we find the Gospels fairly peppered with parables describing what the kingdom of heaven is like. For instance, **“Then He said, ‘To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.’”** (Mark 4:30-32; cf. Luke 13:18-19) Mustard plants are normally humble shrubs, growing no more than a few feet in height. Under unusual circumstances, however, they can get out of control and grow to perhaps ten feet tall—making them more or less worthless as a cash crop, since the pungent seeds cannot be efficiently harvested from such an unwieldy, overgrown bush. The “kingdom of God” on earth in this present age is the church—the called-out assembly of Yahshua. And indeed, it has grown so large the “birds of the air” have come to nest in its branches.

Birds, in God’s symbol lexicon, represent the consequences of our choices, good or bad, clean or unclean. That is, in addition to the small, clean, innocent birds that might normally find shelter in mustard bushes, the “church” has grown so large and prosperous (mainly by usurping resources it had no right to) it has also attracted unclean crows, cowbirds, hawks, and vultures—opportunists, predators, and scavengers. Unlike the clean sparrows and finches you’d expect to find shelter in a mustard bush, these carnivorous hunters care only for themselves, and they don’t care who they hurt in the pursuit of their own agenda. For reasons of His own, the Master Gardener has allowed the mustard bush to grow out of

hand. But He has told us (in so many words) that when the time is right, He intends to get out His pruning shears and cut it back down to size.

Roughly the same truth is being taught here, but with a prophetic twist: **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”** (Matthew 13:47-50) The church is sort of like the sea: you’ll find all sorts of fish swimming within it. We just looked at the overgrown mustard bush, in which some birds with less-than-pure motives sought shelter and sustenance, even though they didn’t belong there. But sometimes the culture of Christianity is so prevalent, everybody behaves as if it was perfectly normal for them to be there—confusing style with substance. Such was the America into which I was born—one big homogenous slice of suburbia, where everybody either was a Christian, or acted as if they were.

Throughout the church age, God has allowed all the fish to swim together in the same sea—sharks and barracudas swimming alongside sardines and snappers. But at the end of the age, He intends to use a trawler, so to speak, to scoop all of us up, separating the good from the bad, the living from the dead. The kingdom of heaven will, in the end, be populated exclusively by those Yahweh deems “good,” those who have the Spirit of Life within them.

Another agricultural parable: **“And He said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.’”** (Mark 4:26-29) The point here is that the kingdom of God (the church) doesn’t grow here on earth for its own benefit—or at least, it isn’t supposed to. Like a grain crop in the field, there is always a purpose—an exit strategy. In the short term, we are to be like Christ—willing to be cut down, threshed, winnowed, ground up, and baked into loaves that can feed the world. Yes, okay, we are “leavened” (read: corrupted and sinful) while He was not. But we can still provide nourishment to a spiritually starving race if we’ll follow Yahshua’s metaphorical instructions: **“If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.”** (Matthew 16:24) And note something else: “the earth yields crops by itself.” That is, God designed it to work this way. It is up to us to “scatter seed,” and we get to harvest the crop. But God Himself is responsible for making it grow.

In the long term, we believers can all look forward to being “harvested” by God. It’s called the rapture of the church. Whether we’re dead or alive when it happens, we will all shed these outer husks (our mortal bodies) and be given a

new, immortal form—presumably like the body in which Yahshua walked after His resurrection from the dead. A believer’s “spiritual DNA” will remain intact from one body to the next, but his life—his soul—was not meant to be permanently confined to this earth, in this time, in this body.

Let’s shift our metaphorical gears and think about the guy scattering the seed on the ground. It is our privilege to work in God’s field (the world), planting seeds of truth, watering, or harvesting souls. But Paul reminds us, “It’s not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What’s important is that God makes the seed grow.” (I Corinthians 3:7 NLT) The “parable of the soils,” however, explains that God won’t *force* the seeds to grow. Acceptance of the truth remains our prerogative; it is up to us to be receptive. **“Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: ‘Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!’”** (Matthew 13:3-9; cf. Mark 4:2-9; cf. Luke 8:4-8) Here, the seeds are the words of truth, and the different environments that are exposed to these truths represent the varying willingness of the hearers to respond to what was said.

Yahshua Himself explained this one. **“Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside....”** The “wayside” is the path or road one travels—thus euphemistic of old habits or “business as usual.” It can be religion, or tradition, or cultural entropy, or the simple refusal to repent—turn around and go in the direction God is leading. All that “foot traffic” makes the ground hard, in turn giving the truth-seeds little opportunity to sink in. In the parable, the “birds” came and devoured the seeds, but in the explanation, it was the wicked one. As I mentioned, birds are symbolic in scripture of the consequences of our choices. Hardening our hearts to the Word of God is the poorest choice we can make, so it’s something Satan definitely encourages.

“But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles....” There are two similar Greek words that denote stones or rocks. *Petros* (the masculine form of the word, that from which Simon “Peter” got his nickname) is the sort of loose rock or pebble one might pick up and throw. But the soil here is described as *petrodes*—an adjective derived from *petra*, the

feminine form, meaning a solid native rock, massive boulder or cliff. The sort of soil being described here, then, is impenetrable bedrock covered with a thin layer of topsoil. In this case, no one “steals” the truth, nor does it wither because of any conscious choice the hearer makes. But it has a hard time enduring through any sort of trial he might encounter. The Book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who represented just this sort of soil—they needed encouragement and admonition because the persecution they were experiencing made them want to retreat from their faith in Christ into something “safer,” like the rote cultural Judaism they had once practiced.

“Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful...” Sometimes the soil is okay, but thorns and weeds are so well established within it, it’s hard for the truth to find any breathing room. The pressures of life, the pursuit of the almighty dollar, or the modern permutation of this—the unrelenting blitzkrieg of distractions from the media, entertainment, or electronic diversions of a thousand descriptions—all conspire to keep folks so busy and preoccupied they couldn’t hear the truth if God turned the volume up to ten. Alas, we who are receptive to such things know that He prefers to speak in a still, small voice, for we tend to find the lightning and thunder of the Sinai experience terrifying and unnerving. I’m not sure what to think of Christian performers who fill stadiums and proclaim His word at 140 decibels.

But sometimes the truth finds fertile and receptive soil. **“But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”** (Matthew 13:18-23; cf. Mark 4:13-20; cf. Luke 8:11-15) The word translated “understands” here is *suniémi*—to comprehend, consider, understand, or perceive: “properly, put together, i.e. join facts (ideas) into a comprehensive (inter-locking) whole; synthesize.” (*Helps Word-studies*). Thayer adds this definition: “to put (as it were) the perception with the thing perceived; to set or join together in the mind, i.e. to understand.” Paul, in Ephesians 5:17, contrasts *suniémi* with foolishness. So Yahshua is describing (and extolling) the one who “puts two and two together,” considering the evidence and choosing to “believe in the One whom God sent” (i.e., do the work of God). Such receptivity tends to bear fruit in the kingdom of God—lots of it.

“Another parable He spoke to them: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.’” (Matthew 13:33; cf. Luke 13:20-21) Normally, leaven (yeast) is taken as a symbol for sin or corruption, but perhaps that is not the case here. He doesn’t say the kingdom (the church) is leavened or full of leaven (implying that *it* is sinful or corrupt), but rather that the kingdom is like *leaven itself*—it mimics the properties and function

of yeast. That is, given enough time and kneading, a little bit of it spreads throughout the entire lump of bread dough, making the finished product soft, light, and easy to eat. The church has had plenty of time to “soften” the earth, and it has been “kneaded” within an inch of its life through persecution and animosity. But the persecution of the church has only tended to spread it farther—just like leaven.

And what does the “three measures of meal” remark mean? “Three” in scripture seems to be the number indicating significance or accomplishment. I’ve heard many guesses as to what these “three measures” might indicate, but they all seem to boil down to roughly the same thing. Are they the three sons of Noah? This would signify that the whole world would eventually be reached with the Gospel. The Jew, the Greek, and the Barbarian? Same thing: universal exposure to the truth. The three branches of Christendom? Catholic, Orthodox, and Evangelical-Protestant forms alike all have access to (and instructions to spread) the Gospel. This all dovetails perfectly with what Yahshua said concerning the Last Days: “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:14) Don’t look now, but thanks to the unceasing labor of the Church of Philadelphia for the past couple of centuries, and the recent advent of the Internet, virtually the whole world has now been exposed to the Gospel of the Kingdom—which is not to say they all like what is being preached. “The end” can’t be far off.

The kingdom parables continue: **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”** (Matthew 13:44) Let’s consider this parable together with the one immediately following: **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”** (Matthew 13:45-46) In both cases, something of immense value—the Gospel of Christ unto salvation—was found. In the first case, the man wasn’t really looking for it; in the second, he was. But in both cases, the finder realized how valuable a thing he had found, and deemed it prudent to invest everything he owned in order to attain such a precious thing. Thus the kingdom of Heaven—this personal relationship with God attained by grace through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ—is not to be taken lightly. It is not “part of” one’s soteriological strategy—to be supplemented with good works, alms, penance, and piety as needed, just in case. No, this is the whole thing, the *only* thing. Everything else pales in comparison.

Christ points out time and again that although good works (in the traditional sense: good behavior, piety, giving alms, etc.) do not save us, there *is* work to be done in the kingdom of heaven. The “work of God” described in the next parable is the fundamental, not to mention counterintuitive, job of “believing in the One

whom Yahweh sent.” **“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard....”** The work day here is one’s time spent in the service of the kingdom of heaven. Ordinary (and ideally) you would go to work first thing in the morning—that is, as soon as you were old enough to comprehend the nature of the job—believing in Christ. I am among this group, having come to faith at an early age—mostly because I was born to godly parents who taught me the way of truth.

Most are not so lucky. **“And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive....”** God gives us our entire lives to “find employment” in His vineyard. It is no sin *not to hear* of the opportunity being presented, though it is a given that everyone is “looking for work,” for heaven is in our hearts by God’s design. What *is* shameful is when someone hears of God’s “job opening” and is too lazy, stubborn, or rebellious to apply for the job. But infinitely worse is withholding or concealing the good news from someone who’s honestly seeking such “employment.” Read II Peter 2 for scripture’s scathing denouncement of such false teachers. The bottom line: “These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.” (II Peter 2:17)

Based on our human experiences, we might expect those who came to faith “late in the day” to somehow be considered second-class citizens in the kingdom of heaven. But this is not the case. **“So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.’ And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day....”** The counterintuitive truth is, “showing up for work in God’s vineyard” (i.e., coming to faith in Christ) during our mortal lifetimes is the only job requirement we are given. Yes, there are rewards in store for those who have served God faithfully, who have stored up “treasures in heaven.” But here in the vineyard parable, we’re talking about salvation issues—entering the kingdom of God—not gaining rewards for service once you get there. You can’t be a partial citizen of the kingdom: you’re either in or out. Nobody is more “saved” than any other redeemed soul.

In other words, God's mercy is tied to our faith (pictured here by going out to the vineyard trusting the owner to pay us at the end of the day), not our works (represented by how many pounds of grapes we picked—or even how many hours we worked). **“But he answered one of them and said, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?’ So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.”** (Matthew 20:1-16) Let us not confuse the gift of salvation with subsequent rewards for service: they are two completely different things. And let's face it: there is no benefit to be gained by postponing repentance until you've got stage-four cancer. Life without Christ is no picnic—no matter with the beer commercials say.

Now that we've brought up the subject of rewards for faithful service subsequent to salvation, let's visit Christ's parable on the subject. Here again, there are some potential surprises. **“For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey....”** The master here is Yahshua the Messiah. The “journey” to the “far country” is His sojourn in heaven between the ascension and the rapture. The servants are described as “His own.” That is, we're talking about people who are already saved—already servants of the Living God (in contrast with the “day-laborers” in the previous parable—folks who are still “looking for work”).

And take careful note of what the servants (that's us believers) had to work with. The talents (a measure of valuable metal somewhere between 75 and 90 pounds—a.k.a. “a lot”) were “given” to the servants as capital to invest, grow, or otherwise be used in the Master's service. The Master knew going in that some of His servants were more “talented” (if you'll pardon the pun)—that is, capable, worthy of trust, and astute enough to recognize promising opportunity when they saw it—and others were comparatively unimaginative, unambitious, and maybe a little dumb. My own eleven children offer a little personal insight on potential here: some were quite brilliant, some had average intelligence, some were a little slow, and two were profoundly mentally challenged. I must note, however, that of the able bodied ones, their successes depended less on high intelligence than on positive attitude and solid work ethic.

Anyway, **“Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me**

five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord....’” The “after a long time” reference is a clue that Yahshua is imparting information about what we can expect after His return—during His Millennial reign. The “smart one” who had been given five talents to work with doubled his Master’s investment. The Master was pleased of course, but not terribly surprised, for this servant was known for his intelligence, ability, and integrity. (You’ll forgive me for fleshing out the plot a little—I am admittedly reading between the lines here.)

What perhaps *is* surprising (considering that this parable is supposed to be revealing something about the kingdom of heaven) is that the “smart” servant was “rewarded” not with riches of his own (that we’re told of), but with added responsibility—the opportunity to serve his Lord at a higher level, with more at stake. This was not a position for the lazy or the faint of heart. A lesser man would have considered it a little scary: if the mailroom clerk makes a mistake, nothing very bad happens, but if the CEO screws up, the whole company suffers. Still, it’s nice to know the Chairman of the Board appreciates and trusts you. The implication is that during the kingdom age, we who have been faithful “servants of the Lord” during the church age will find ourselves “rulers,” whether of great or small matters. We *won’t* be sitting on clouds playing harps, like cherubs in some Renaissance painting.

What about the guy with admittedly less potential? He too did well. **“He also who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord....’**” He too doubled his Master’s investment. And he received exactly the same commendation. The surprise comes when we factor in his undeniably diminished potential. It seems to me this servant did *even better* than his gifted companion, for he had less to work with in the “talent” department, and yet achieved the same spectacular results, percentage-wise. I can only attribute his success to diligence and hard work (perhaps with a little insight thrown in), for he admittedly wasn’t quite as “clever” or as highly educated as his five-talent coworker. This guy simply did the best he could with what he had to work with—something we should all strive for.

The Master knew going in that his one-talent servant didn’t have much imagination or initiative. Still, He gave him a chance to prove Him wrong: he was His servant, after all. Alas, he lived up to his abysmal reputation. **“Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’ But his lord**

answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest....’ The one-talent wonder completely misread his Master. Yes, His standards were strict—impossible to keep, in point of fact. But that’s simply because He owned (or had created) everything the servant had ever seen, and Somebody had to decide what’s right or wrong. “The buck,” as Harry Truman put it, “stopped here.”

To my mind, this servant is like the genuine but misguided believers in Revelation 2 and 3 who were urged to repent. And if they did *not* repent, what would happen to them is described in the lot of the one-talent servant: **“Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.’ For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”** (Matthew 25:14-30; cf. Luke 19:11-27) Don’t read “hell” into this. The servant wasn’t fired, sold, imprisoned, or killed. He remained in the service of the Master. But he would “rule” over *nothing* in the kingdom age: he (and those like him) would have no responsibility, no status, and no honor—but they would still be there, experiencing remorse over their lost opportunities.

The church at Ephesus was cautioned, **“Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.”** (Revelation 2:5) Pergamos was told, **“Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.”** (Revelation 2:16) Thyatira was warned, **“Indeed I will cast [Jezebel] 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.”** (Revelation 2:22-23) And Thyatira was admonished, **“You are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief.”** (Revelation 3:1-3)

This is all a long, *long* way from “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Christ’s commandment in all of this is to serve Him faithfully with whatever gifts we’ve been given to work with. Whether you’ve earned a couple of PhDs or can barely tie your shoes, do what you can to advance the kingdom of heaven.

Another parable explains (sort of) why there is such a disparity of talent and ability in the Master’s service. In short, it’s because we “servants” are recruited from a much larger pool than just one culture (namely, Israel, who was blessed

with the scriptures for a millennium and a half before the Messiah even showed His face). In this parable, the King is Yahweh; the bridegroom is the Son of God; the wedding invitations are the Gospel; and the servants (this time) are the prophets and apostles—those sent out by the King to invite people to come to the feast. Potential believers are cast as invited “wedding guests.” (Counterintuitively, it would transpire that those who finally accepted the wedding invitation would find themselves in the role of the *bride*. But this is complicated enough as it is—the parable didn’t go there.)

“And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, ‘See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.’” But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them....” The invitation was sent first to Israel, but they (as a nation) refused to heed it, though the King was the one they called “God,” and they knew from their ancient scriptures that His Son would one day appear among them. Alas, Israel has a long history of mistreating and ignoring its prophets.

“But when the king heard about it, he was furious.” Historically, of course, the King was “furious” because the would-be “wedding guests” had the bridegroom *crucified*. **“And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city....”** This would happen in 70 AD, when the Romans sacked Jerusalem, killed 1.1 million Jews and enslaved another 97,000—so many the bottom fell out of the slave market in Egypt: they could barely give them away. The job was finished sixty-five years later, after the Jews revolted against Rome *again*. Emperor Hadrian wiped out the forces of the Jewish warlord Simon bar Kosiba (a.k.a. Bar Kochba—“Son of a star”), expelled the Jews from the Land, salted the fields to make them worthless, and changed the name of the place to “Palestina” after the long extinct Philistines—a name that stuck until 1948.

Meanwhile, back in the parable, the King was still trying to fill the seats at the wedding feast. **“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests....”** This is a parabolic description of the results of the Great Commission (“Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.”—Matthew 28:19-20). The nations—the gentiles (well, some of us)—received the Gospel, while Israel (after an initial surge in which as many as

one third of the populace accepted Christ) did not. Without going too far off into the weeds with the history, over the next century the Pharisees and rabbis wrested control of Jewish religion and politics from the Sadducees and priests. In the end, they managed to separate Christianity from Judaism in Israel—a job that would be finished a couple of centuries later when newly “Christianized” Rome declared all things Jewish an anathema. I realize it was all prophesied in broad strokes beforehand; still, it’s the worst thing that could have happened—to the Jews *or* the Christians.

The parable continues, and it isn’t pretty. **“But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless.”** No one had told him he needed a special garment to attend—he thought the engraved invitation should have been enough. **“Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”** (Matthew 22:1-14) We just read that the servants had gathered “both bad and good” to the wedding feast. And a few pages back, the parable of the mustard seed had revealed that the “church” would eventually grow much larger than its mandate would suggest—becoming the home of usurpers, opportunists, and pretenders in addition to genuine believers.

So we learn that it’s not enough to get invited to the party, or even to show up for the festivities. You also have to don the “wedding garment” supplied by the King to his guests. There were to be no independent (read: rebellious) sartorial statements to detract from the bridegroom and His bride on their big day. It’s not hard to figure out what these “wedding garments” represent. They’re imputed righteousness. As we read as the prophetic story draws near its conclusion, “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” (Revelation 19:7-8) The point is that none of us are worthy to stand before a holy God on the basis of our own righteousness—*all of us* have sinned. So God our King has provided righteous we can *put on*. The “catch,” of course, is that we have to choose to don the garment of “fine linen, clean and bright” through which God doesn’t “see” our iniquity: He won’t force us to “wear” Christ’s sinlessness, though we are commanded to do so.

Another parable with a similar theme goes like this: **“A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’”** This, again, is the outworking of the Great Commission: all are invited into the Kingdom of God. **“But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I**

must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So that servant came and reported these things to his master....” The Jews—and specifically, its leaders, those who knew the Torah and the Prophets, and should have known what to expect of Yahweh’s Messiah—were the first to be invited. But for one reason or another, most of them refused to attend God’s party.

The “rulers of the Jews”—the chief Priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and lawyers—weren’t all there was to Israel, however. **“Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind....”** These are the ordinary children of Abraham who—like Christ’s disciples—*were* receptive to the Gospel. The “leaders” of their society considered them naïve fools, *simmers* who appeared weak when they repented, faced with Yahshua’s holiness. (“You’d never catch *us* doing something like that.”) During the first few decades after the resurrection, a sizable minority of Israel’s population followed Christ, only to be ostracized by the ruling authorities.

“And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.” These “third-stringers” are us gentiles. The Torah, Psalms, and Prophets had all revealed (albeit subtly) that Yahweh’s salvation would be made available to *all nations*—not just Israel. The Book of Acts records how the process got started. And we *are* compelled—not by force or cultural pressure, but by the undeniable truth of God’s word. Meanwhile, the Pharisees and their ilk, the first to be called, found themselves summarily disinvented: **“For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.”** (Luke 14:16-24)

Speaking of blowing golden opportunities, this one ought to sting a bit: **“Hear another parable. There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.”** The Landowner is Yahweh, of course, and the vinedressers are Israel, charged with tending God’s Word in the Promised Land. **“Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit....”** This fruit is righteousness, defined here as the keeping of the Torah’s precepts. Because of the Law’s prophetic significance, Yahweh was very clear about what would happen to the nation of Israel if they did—or if they did not—keep these Instructions. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 contain horrifyingly accurate and specific prophecies describing what would happen to Israel if they turned their back on God—as Moses put it, “if you do not obey the voice of Yahweh your

God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you.” (Deuteronomy 28:15)

“And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them.” These “servants” are the prophets with whom Israel was blessed over the centuries—most of whom were ignored, ridiculed, or attacked. **“Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’”** You’d think so, wouldn’t you? But by the time Yahshua arrived, Israel (or at least its leaders) had forgotten who their God was. **“But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.”** The parable is merging into prophecy here. It’s a bit surrealistic to hear Yahshua speaking of His own death—and the motivation behind it—before it happened.

But at this point, it was “just” a story, so He asked His audience (identified in the text as the “chief priests and the elders” of Israel—the religious elite) the obvious question: **“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?”** They said to Him, **‘He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.’”** They had no idea they had just condemned themselves for something they hadn’t even done yet. Nor did they comprehend that the “fruit” of which they spoke was righteousness borne of obedience to Yahweh—something neither they nor their predecessors had been willing to bring forth.

Rather than congratulating them on getting the obvious answer right, Yahshua appealed to the Psalms to explain what was really going on: **“Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was Yahweh’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you [Israel, and specifically its chief priests and elders] and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.”** The “builders” (Israel’s leadership) were about to reject their own promised Messiah, characterized here as the “chief cornerstone”—the sinless One against whom everything else must align. **“And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”** (Matthew 21:33-44, quoting Psalm 118:22-23; cf. Mark 12:1-11; cf. Luke 20:9-19) By their own assessment, the Kingdom of God on earth would be removed from Israel’s custody and given (temporarily, if you can call two thousand years “temporary”) to “another nation,” the church.

I’m afraid we (the church) wouldn’t fare much better than Israel did. But that’s another story, another parable: **“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil**

with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps....” Olive oil (commonly used as lighting fuel back then) is a consistent Biblical metaphor for the Holy Spirit (see Zechariah 4:6). Not coincidentally, the indwelling of (or rebirth in) the Holy Spirit is the one thing that defines believers in the church age (according to Yahshua’s teaching in John 3).

I won’t go into the wedding customs of the day, except to note that what we see here was perfectly normal. Each of the ten virgins had the *capacity* for the Spirit (as all of us do), but only five of them (described as “wise”) actually had the Holy Spirit dwelling within them (having been “born from above,” as Yahshua described it to Nicodemus). So far, then, the lesson is “Don’t presume you can meet or have a relationship with the returning Christ without the Holy Spirit empowering and quickening you.

“But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.” Let’s face it: the bridegroom has been “delayed” a long time now—almost two thousand years. It’s no wonder some of us—even genuine believers—have fallen asleep on the job, even though our job was to remain awake and alert until His coming. You’ll note that even the foolish virgins knew He was coming: the information is freely available to everyone. **“And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!...’”** Alas, knowing the bridegroom is coming is not the same thing as being prepared for it. Even atheists know that Christ is expected to return in glory. They just don’t believe He will.

So what happened? **“Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”** (Matthew 25:1-13) This is a description of the difference between two of the churches on Christ’s Revelation mailing list—the last two, Philadelphia (the church of the rapture) and Laodicea (the belatedly repentant Tribulation saints). Allow me to reprise my own commentary on this passage from *The End of the Beginning*:

“The lessons are stunning. All of the bridesmaids knew the groom was coming. None of them knew when. All of them wanted to go to the party, and all of them were invited. None of them stayed wide awake, watching for His coming. They all had the same opportunity, that is, they all had oil lamps with them. (We all do. It’s called the *neshamah*, the ‘breath of life’ mentioned in Genesis 2:7. It gives us the capacity for spiritual indwelling, and it’s functionally what separates

men from the animals.) The only difference between them was that the wise had oil—the Holy Spirit abiding within them—and the foolish didn't.

“Now, here's the interesting part. All five of the foolish virgins went out and bought oil, and that meant they could still have a relationship with the Groom *after* the wedding feast. But the only time they could get this oil was while the party was going on. And they couldn't come into the party halfway through, because the doors were shut. They had to wait outside the whole time.

“This is all a picture of the rapture and the Tribulation that follows. But what does it mean to ‘buy oil’ after the party's started? The oil, as I said, is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit. Buying oil is thus a picture of receiving God's Spirit, of accepting His grace, for without it, there can be no relationship with the ‘Groom,’ Yahshua—they are One. The Laodiceans were told: ‘I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich.’ (Revelation 3:18) Those who take this counsel are characterized in the parable as the “foolish virgins” who waited to buy their oil until it was too late to be admitted to the party—the marriage supper of the Lamb. Their faith will be tested, refined in the coming crucible of trial known as the Tribulation. They will not escape this trial—in other words, they will not be raptured like the wise virgins—but rather, they will go through the fire—seven years of hell on earth. Many will be martyred, though some will manage to stay alive until the end. Turning to Yahweh during the Tribulation, of course, is better than never doing it, but it's better yet to avoid the trial altogether.”

Our final “kingdom of heaven” parable also describes the Last Days. **“Another parable He put forth to them, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.’** Tares are noxious weeds that look like wheat, but produce nothing you can eat. They're related to vetch, especially *vicia sativa*. **“So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this...’”**

Having discovered the problem, it remained only to determine what to do to rectify the situation. **“The servants said to him, “Do you want us then to go and gather them up?” But he said, “No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.””** (Matthew 13:24-30) The landowner was concerned first and foremost with bringing in his wheat crop safely. Getting rid of the tares was not his first priority, though everybody knew it would have to be done eventually. Dealing with the “enemy,” however, didn't even rate a mention,

because it was not the servants' job to bring him to justice. That task was something only the landowner could do—and do it he would, in his own time.

This is one of those relatively few parables Yahshua explained, so we wouldn't misunderstand: **“And His disciples came to Him, saying, ‘Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.’ He answered and said to them: ‘He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one.”** So the Son of Man is primarily concerned with the welfare of His believers. This should surprise no one, because He is love personified. **“The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels....”**

Once again, Yahshua has revealed that the kingdom (as we know it in this age) would eventually have people within it who have no business being here—who do not trust Him for salvation, but are rather using the church, attempting to gain some sort of temporal advantage: birds in the mustard bush, so to speak. But although they may “look” right, their lack of good fruit betrays them as imposters—sons of the wicked one, Satan. The “wheat” should have tasted like “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” But the tares tasted nasty: “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like.” (Both lists are from Galatians 5.) We find ourselves, growing together in the same field (the world). But God won't let this situation continue forever. The harvest is coming.

“Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Matthew 13:36-43) It is (again) made clear here that we “wheat stalks” are not to attack the tares ourselves. Yes, we are to identify sin as sin, but since we're all sinners, we are not to judge one another. Yahweh's angels, however, are under no such restrictions: they know who to bundle and burn, and who to welcome into the kingdom of God—and when. Christ Himself will deal with the “enemy” (Satan) who sowed the tares in the first place.

Technically, this does not describe the rapture of the church (in which the “wheat” would have been described as being harvested *first*), but the subsequent separation of the new believers from the rebels during and immediately after the Tribulation. Besides the logistics of the thing, the involvement of “angels” is the tip-off. In Matthew 25:31-46, we read of the “separation of the sheep from the goats,” in which the angels are mentioned in connection with determining the

disposition of all the still-living humans left on earth after the Great Unpleasantness. Clues from the Book of Daniel lead me to believe that this process will take place during the first forty-five days of the Kingdom age, the Millennial reign of Christ. What we know from Yahshua's parable explanation is that these "goats" will be gathered "out of His kingdom," at the "end of the age." That makes it pretty clear.

Quite a few of Yahshua's parables in the Gospels are *not* said to describe the "Kingdom of heaven" *per se*. These deal with issues such as priorities, fruitfulness, watchfulness, patience, repentance, and His own mission.

"Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, "What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?" So he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said to him, **'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.**" (Luke 12:16-21) There's nothing wrong with wealth, but take note: it was the "ground" that produced the man's riches. In other words, his wealth was a gift from God (the One who made the soil, and then made it fertile). The proper response would have been less self-congratulatory and more concerned for the welfare of those less gifted than he was.

This is an admonition not to rest on our laurels, but to "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," as Paul put it in Philippians 3:14. As my wife and I push further into old age, we try to keep this in mind. She is forever "taking care" of whatever needs doing, as she has done all her life, impatient with a body that no longer allows her to do as much as she used to for people. And although I could sit here and congratulate myself for the thousands of pages already published here on my website, all I can think of is how little time I've got left to finish the task God has put before me. It's becoming increasingly clear: there's no way I'm going to get the job done before death or rapture takes me. In the meantime, my idea of "eat, drink, and be merry" is snacking and sipping coffee as I type.

Speaking of fertile ground and getting things done, **"He also spoke this parable: 'A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, "Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?"**

But he answered and said to him, “Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.”” (Luke 13:6-9) First, let’s look at the symbols. *Fig trees* (especially in the context of grapevines) usually indicate that Israel is in view. *Three* is the number symbolizing accomplishment or significance. So Christ is saying that Israel has had all the time it should have needed to produce good fruit, but has failed to do so—why should it continue to be allowed to take up space in God’s world? The *vineyard keeper* (I believe that’s Christ) pleads for more time—one more year, making it a total of *four* years. And the vineyard owner (Yahweh) agrees to the plan.

Here’s the rub. “Fertilizer” in that day and age wasn’t some exotic petrochemical elixir. It was animal dung. Israel was about to have its roots messed with and be covered in bovine excrement, all with the idea of encouraging it to produce good fruit, for once in its life. Being covered in crap doesn’t sound pleasant, but the symbols (and the scriptures) reveal that the nation of Israel, in the end, *will* repent and become fruitful. Indeed, this farfetched eventuality is the most oft-repeated prophecy in the Tanakh (probably because it sounds so unlikely). *Four*, after all, symbolizes God’s design.

Nor is it much of an extrapolation to apply this principle to anything that belongs to God (that *us*, church) that isn’t producing good fruit. God is not reluctant to “cover us in crap” if it will help things to start working as they should. After all, “tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” (Romans 5:3-5) In other words, a little manure in our lives may not smell pleasant, but it just might help us grow. However, let us not ignore that ominous last line: **“But if not, after that you can cut it down.”** Bearing good fruit is, in the end, a choice *we* must make; it’s not the result of external forces being brought to bear. The “manure” is only there to remind us of our true natures.

So taking on the role of “Captain Obvious,” Yahshua said, **“A good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”** (Luke 6:43-45) Yahshua once told a rich young ruler, “No one is good but One, that is, God.” So we can only be “good trees” if we are rooted in Yahweh, and if His Spirit flows through us. Galatians 5 (quoted several times above) describes both the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc.) and the works of the flesh (uncleanness, hatred, heresy, and all the rest). And Paul counsels us, “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh

lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.... If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:16-17, 25) It’s not that we will automatically live sinless lives from the moment of our salvation: there are still two competing natures dwelling side-by-side within our mortal bodies. But when we choose to walk in the Spirit, God’s “good fruit” will predominate in our lives.

Part of “walking in the Spirit” is learning to discern truth from lies, even if the lies sound reasonable, judicious, and rational at first. Christians especially need to learn how to distinguish religious traditions from what Christ actually commanded of us. **“Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.’ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘It is because we have taken no bread....’”** Isn’t it interesting how our own mistakes (read: *sins*, if you like) tend to impose themselves into situations that are totally unrelated? It’s called *conscience*, and it comes as standard equipment on the human psyche. As Moses said (in a completely different context), “If...you have sinned against Yahweh, be sure your sin will find you out.” (Numbers 23:23)

“But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, ‘O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’” Christ had mentioned leaven, so they immediately were reminded of bread—and their apparent lack of it. But Yahshua reminded them that the basic needs of life would never be an issue for them if they “sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” His admonition, rather, had been to be aware and suspicious of the corruption that characterized the teachings of the religious leaders of the day—both the “conservatives” and the “liberals,” you’ll notice. **“Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”** (Matthew 16:5-12; cf. Mark 8:13-21)

Yahshua once told three parallel parables that, in the final analysis, said pretty much the same thing as “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees,” though we have to stay on our toes to catch His meaning. (1) **“Then He spoke a parable to them: ‘No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old.’** (2) **“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”** And (3) **“And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, ‘The old is better.’”** (Luke 5:36-39)

The point, in all three illustrations, is that the Good News couldn't be used in conjunction with the old religion of Judaism, for they were irreconcilable. The Gospel was something new, something unfamiliar and a bit disconcerting to those who assumed (because they'd been taught it all their lives) that the rabbinical system of manmade rules (their "hedge about the Law") was what Yahweh expected of them. Ironically, the Gospel was a perfect fit for the Torah itself, but nobody even *attempted* to keep God's actual Instructions anymore—although they revealed Christ between every line. Neither the pious restrictions of the Pharisees nor the cynical strategies of the Sadducees were in any way compatible with the freedom—the grace—provided by the good news of atoning salvation that became available through the sacrifice of Yahweh's Messiah.

So (1) you couldn't "patch" the gaping holes in the Oral Law with the Gospel. (2) You couldn't contain the Gospel within the confines of rabbinical tradition. And (3) once you were "used to" the bitter flavor of the old system of self-reliance, you were unlikely to prefer the sweet taste of grace through faith.

The same thing is true of other ingrained religious systems, too. If you try to "blend" Christianity with paganism, Hinduism, Islam, or secular humanism, all you'll get is something that looks all wrong, doesn't work as you hoped it would, leaks like a sieve as it attempts to contain the evil in the world, and leaves a bitter aftertaste to anybody who tries it. This is not to say that no one has attempted to do this very thing. The process of adulteration defines many religious traditions to this very day. There is still a strong undercurrent of paganism running through the Roman Catholic Church, some seventeen centuries after Constantine. Many formerly orthodox Protestant sects now enthusiastically try to blend Marxism with Christianity. The latest iteration is translating "Yahweh," "God," or even "the Lord" as "Allah" in Bibles meant for distribution in Muslim-infested lands. Don't even get me started on the abomination known as "Chrislam," a noxious blend of Christian style and Islamic substance. It's all a recipe for disaster.

I realize that there is a trend afoot in recent years to try to make Christianity more "inclusive," more "seeker friendly." But we were called to holiness, not popularity, not compromise. The Gospel is incompatible with—and infinitely superior to—anything the world can conjure up. So Christ asks, **"Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."** (Luke 6:46-49) He's saying that your "blended" faith

won't necessarily *seem* like the disaster it is until trouble comes—but trouble *always* comes.

It's not so much that faith in Christ is a "better house" that any conceivable alternative—built more substantially, or out of better, stronger materials, etc. In point of fact, real faith-based Christianity looks to many to be flimsy, counterintuitive, and even illogical. To them, doing "good works" to please a powerful and grumpy god makes far more sense—even if you yourself have to define what those good works might be. But the issue is not the "house" at all. It's what the house is built upon: the real difference is in the part that nobody sees—the foundation.

Two people, one anchored in Christ, the other operating out of political correctness, might do exactly the same thing (for instance, donating money to hurricane relief or mowing an injured neighbor's lawn). These "good works" are the equivalent of the "house" one has built. The one doing good things in the name of Christ can count on his assurance of God's love when he himself is faced with material loss or physical setbacks. Meanwhile, when the other man's fortunes turn against him (as they are apt to do in one's lifetime), he can only shake his fist at the God he swears doesn't exist, and shout, *It's so unfair*. Here's the problem: "fairness" (a.k.a. justice) is an attribute of the holy God he has rejected. Besides, what *he's* suffering is merely the inevitable inconvenience of the human condition. We are a fallen race, living in a fallen world. Christians and heathens alike are subject to death and disaster. Our foundations make the difference in how able we are to weather the storm.

Christ's parables often compare two people against each other. We are to notice how they differ, and choose the better path. **"And He spoke a parable to them: Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?..."** The lesson: don't follow blind people. Yahshua declared Himself to be the "light of the world" (see John 8:12, 9:5, 12:46, etc.), and subsequently identified His disciples as lights in the world as well (Matthew 5:14). The parable's principle, then, is that we may safely follow Christ—or *anyone* who is himself following after Him. People who are getting their "truth" from some other source, however, are by definition blind. Even if they get things right from time to time, we are not to trust them for leadership. Even a blind squirrel finds an acorn now and then.

Without taking a breath, He said, **"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher...."** Another way of looking at "leaders and followers" is to consider the relationship between "teachers and pupils." If our teacher is in fact "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6)—the only One who can lead us to Father Yahweh—then we will never outgrow Him as Master or surpass Him in knowledge, skill, or authority. But we are encouraged: we can (if we allow Him to train us perfectly) become *like* Him. Putting it into terms I

can actually comprehend, I still have fond memories of my guitar mentor half a century back—a talented and knowledgeable Los Angeles session player named Julian C. “Buddy” Matlock. I’ll never be the *musician* he was, but I’ve been using and developing what he taught me my entire adult life—not just classical and jazz guitar technique, but music theory, chord structure, and an attitude toward the craft that has somehow spilled over into every area of my life. I can only hope that my relationship with Christ my Teacher has shaped my existence in similarly indelible ways, for the life I’m enjoying through *His* influence will never end.

The parable series continues: **“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother’s eye.”** (Luke 6:39-42) Here the comparison is between two “brothers,” both of whom are potentially in a position to aid and support each other. Brothers are close enough to one another to know when something’s wrong—when the other brother has something in his life that needs to be dealt with, that’s holding him back from a closer walk with God. Christ’s admonition here is to examine your own life before presuming to provide the solution to your brother’s issues. We’re all sinners: don’t lecture your brother about his tendency to be dismissive or unresponsive toward others (for example) until you’ve repented of your own anger (or pride, or narcissism, or lust, or greed—the list could go on forever). The underlying fact here is that we all have something (or many things) from which we should repent. Don’t judge your brother until you’re perfect. (Oh, and by the way, you and I will *never* be perfect in this life.)

Recognizing our own shortcomings is a key to displaying the humility our Savior requires of us. If we *know* we’re flawed—that we’re “works in process”—then being prideful should be the least of our sins. Yahshua was once invited to lunch at the home of an important Pharisee. **“He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: ‘When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted....”** It wasn’t a “parable” in the usual “storytelling” sense, but it did provide food for thought. The “theoretical” here was that he was speaking of a “wedding feast” (while this was just lunch), but His lesson was perfectly transparent.

The admonition was to avoid self-aggrandizement—imagining yourself to be more important, or worthy, than you actually are. Sitting down uninvited in the seat of honor at a wedding feast (Christ’s example here) has hundreds of potential parallels in our everyday lives. But the bottom line is: don’t exalt yourself—let someone else do it, *even if it needs doing*. As Yahshua said elsewhere, “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:12) Ideally, this exaltation will come from God Himself. As Peter put it, “‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” (I Peter 5:6-7, quoting Proverbs 3:34) And Paul says the same thing: “Don’t think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.” (Romans 12:3, NLT)

Shifting gears, Yahshua gave his host some sound advice: **“Then He also said to him who invited Him, ‘When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.’”** (Luke 14:7-14) Think beyond the guest list at our dinner parties. This should apply to every facet of our lives. Our motivation in doing kindnesses for others should not be the prospect of *our own* eventual benefit. Don’t do “favors” for people in the hope that they will return the favor with interest. If you find yourself in “middle management,” don’t bribe your boss with coffee and donuts—such things are better used as a statement of appreciation to your staff. You get the idea. At the very least, don’t let the status of the recipient of your kindness have any bearing on what you do for them. If there is a need, fill it to the best of your ability, without calculating how your action might somehow turn ’round for your benefit.

Another parable, also recorded by Luke, *seems to* teach precisely the opposite lesson. But it’s an illusion: we need to stay on our toes here. **“There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward....’”** The steward was guilty of shady business dealings; he had been caught with his hand in the till, and was about to lose his high paying job. The writing was on the wall—no more fat expense account, no more Porsche, no more penthouse suite. He had to come up with a strategy for “landing on his feet,” and quickly.

“Then the steward said within himself, ‘What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.’ So he

called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty....' The steward's scheme was as clever as it was dishonest. He went to everybody who owed his master money, and gave them all a healthy discount—while he still had the authority to do so. Thus they were all indebted to him, to one extent or another.

Where the parable seems to go off the rails is the master's response to this ploy, when he found out about it: **"So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly...."** Note carefully: the master didn't applaud him *because* he was an embezzler, a thief, and a scoundrel. He did so because he had shown resourcefulness and insight in what was (for him) a desperate situation. The master didn't like what the cagy steward had done, of course, but he couldn't help but admire his brazen sagacity. Nor did he relent and keep him on the payroll. But we get the feeling that he didn't "send him to the torturers until he had repaid the last penny" either, like the unforgiving servant in another parable. Basically, what we have here is a clever squirrel who defeats every strategy we employ to keep him out of the bird feeder. He's so entertaining, it's hard to be angry with him.

But where does this leave us parable-readers? Yahshua's point was that we are to be similarly "shrewd" concerning the kingdom of heaven. One pundit writes, "Though the dishonesty of such a servant was detestable, yet his foresight, care, and contrivance about the interests of this life, deserve to be imitated by us, with regard to the more important concerns of another."—*Benson Commentary*. Or as Yahshua said, **"For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home...."** We are operating in a different theater, with different objectives, than the unjust steward. Like the thieving squirrel, he did whatever he felt he had to do in order to feed himself—thinking only of this mortal life. We are to use the same kind of "foresight, care, and contrivance" as he did, but with our objectives geared instead for the kingdom of God. We aren't to be deceitful, of course, but our "master" is *The Master*, Yahshua Himself—whose resources are unlimited. He won't really mind if we "divert" some of His riches to kingdom purposes *in this world*—laying up "treasures in heaven" for ourselves in the process.

Christ speaks of "when you fail," for we all do: our bodies are not built to last. This life, in the end, is here to prepare us for the next one. **"He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your**

trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?" (Luke 16:1-12) The practical application is to realize that your true character is revealed in everything you do, whether great or small. If you're willing to cheat on your taxes or expense account, you might cheat on your wife as well. But if you do the little jobs to the best of your ability ("as unto Christ," as Paul would put it) then God is justified in giving you more responsibility. In the last job I worked before I retired, the CEO was in the habit of giving folks bigger jobs than they thought they could handle—just to reveal their character. Sometimes we failed, but just as often, we surprised ourselves, learned new skills, and gained the confidence needed to tackle even greater things. (Pity he hired one too many "unjust stewards," sinking the entire company in the end.)

Persistence is the theme of another parable. **"Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: 'There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me....'"** As the old saying goes, "the squeaky wheel gets the grease." The point of the parable was to be persistent when petitioning God: "pray always and not lose heart." Based on Paul's "thorn in the flesh" example (II Corinthians 12), the preferred pattern of persistence seems to be "Ask God *three times* to grant your request. If He says 'No,' in so many words, then rely upon His grace to see you through your trial." God's power is revealed through our weaknesses.

Yahshua explained this parable: **"Then the Lord said, 'Hear what the unjust judge said.'" Basically, he "said" that the only reason he was granting the widow's request was her perseverance and tenacity—not the rightness of her cause. "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily...."** The particular sort of prayer in view in this parable is attaining redress against people who are unfairly attacking you (as in the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:11-12, etc.). Remember, vengeance belongs to Yahweh alone—He will repay. (See Deuteronomy 32:35.)

"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:1-8) Yahshua ends the story with a frustrated reference to His second coming (though I'm pretty sure nobody caught it at the time). The parable is about people persistently asking God to right the wrongs being done to them. But the Tribulation (at the end of which "the Son of Man will come") will be a time in which the forces of evil will be allowed free rein in the earth for three and a half years. As the angel told Daniel, "When the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished." (Daniel 12:7) Israel will

be living under a state of siege, and the belatedly repentant church of Laodicea will be suffering martyrdom in unprecedented numbers—“as gold is tried in the fire.” It will be hard to maintain one’s faith under such circumstances—when God will have to, *by His own word*, defer vengeance until the appointed time has run its course.

Christ’s ultimate mission was the focus of many of His parables and illustrations. It was a subject made that much more confusing by the fact that this mission would consist not of one advent, or even two, but would encompass the entire age from the passion until the conclusion of the Millennial Sabbath—the fifth, sixth, and seventh “days” of mankind’s “week” upon the earth. It’s no wonder He resorted to such sweeping symbols to communicate the nature of our spiritual reality. Language and culture would shift and twist, but His symbols and metaphors would mean pretty much the same thing no matter where—or when—you were living.

He often characterized Himself as “the Good Shepherd,” He who cares for Yahweh’s sheep (see Psalm 23), as reflected in the next couple of parables. **“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber....”** We believers are the “sheep.” The sheepfold is where the sheep are kept safe. It is the *ekklesia*—the called-out assembly of Christ. The “door” in this illustration is the “narrow gate” Yahshua spoke of elsewhere, the way of truth and trust that so few choose to employ—personified in the end by Christ Himself. Entering the sheepfold “some other way,” then, is a picture of unauthorized salvation strategies—religion, denial, apostasy, etc.

“But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper [this would be Father Yahweh] opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers....” The sheep don’t “live” in the sheepfold. That is, even though we are “safe” cloistered within the walls of the church, *life* happens outside. The green pastures, the still waters, and the paths of righteousness are all out in the world—where the wolves are. But we “sheep” can still be secure out there—*if* we follow the voice of the Good Shepherd.

But how are we to know this voice? There are a lot of shepherds, all calling to their own sheep. Yahshua, though, is the One who knows each of us by name. He speaks to us through His word, and we learn through experience that as long as we listen, as long as we follow Him, we’ll be safe and secure. It’s all an issue of trust—of belief. Initially, it’s a choice we make—to follow the voice of *this* Shepherd, to the exclusion of the others, the strangers. But once we learn what

His voice sounds like, once we have followed Him out into the world and watched Him provide for us and defend us from the predators, our faith, now tested and proven, becomes reliance. And at that point, we are ready to follow Him into pastures we've never seen before—even if we have to walk through the valley of the shadow of death to get there.

“Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.” (John 10:1-6) The “they” here was apparently a mixed crowd. Chapter 9 ends with a confrontation with some Pharisees, and the chapter breaks in our Bibles weren't part of the original text. Yahshua had just called the Pharisees “blind” (though they wanted everyone to believe they perceived all spiritual truth). But something tells me the *disciples* understood this perfectly before it was all over.

Without pausing to take a breath, Yahshua now shifts His metaphor ever so slightly, describing Himself as the “door” the sheep were to use. **“Then Jesus said to them again, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly....”** We are reminded that He later said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6) So we all intuitively understand that Yahshua is the door *into* the sheepfold—that is, into a relationship with the Father. But what some of us miss is that He is also the door that leads *out* into the wide world, where the pasture is. That is, although we believers must be *in the world*, the world (as we walk through it) is not to be *in us*. The fact is, there are other doors leading out of the sheepfold, but they lead to bondage, error, despair, and death—not green pastures and still waters. We who hear and respond to His voice are to both enter and egress through Christ alone.

Shifting back to the metaphor of the Good Shepherd, Yahshua explains what that entails. **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”** That is, He defends them to the death—because they're His own flock. Yahshua was aware how “extreme” this may have sounded, but He also knew that the parable was a prophecy—not poetic exaggeration. **“But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep....”** The “employee mentality” says, “I'll put in my time, but I won't stick my neck out. At the first sign of danger or distress, I'm out of here. They're not paying me enough to take personal risks.” That may be okay if you're flipping burgers for a living. But if your “job” entails ensuring the welfare of human souls, then you're held to a higher standard. The

Pharisees fancied themselves “shepherds” of God’s flock, but Yahshua was calling them hirelings who would cut and run at the first sign of trouble. They were simply in it for the paycheck. In this respect, the Pharisees are still around, I’m afraid.

“I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.” In the culturally based symbology here, the son (especially the firstborn) shared the agenda, and even the identity (i.e., his position as the family’s representative), of the father. What the father thinks, the son expresses. What the father owns, the son inherits. So Yahshua takes a personal—and deadly serious—interest in Father Yahweh’s sheep. **“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd....”** Since He was speaking to Jews (many of whom fancied that their nation comprised the sum total of God’s flock) He revealed that gentiles too, though not of the same “fold” as Israel, were also His beloved sheep. I must reiterate, of course, that unlike the case in ordinary animal husbandry, we human “sheep” get to *choose* whether or not we wish to be part of God’s flock.

Finally, He got more specific about what it meant for the Good Shepherd to “lay down his life for the sheep.” **“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”** (John 10:7-18) He had to have “lost them” at this point. Ordinary shepherds may defend their flocks to the death, but they don’t go out with the express purpose of sacrificing themselves to the wolves. Nor do regular shepherds have the ability to raise themselves from the dead. On Christ’s lips, this was all perfectly true, as subsequent events would attest, but it was all utterly without precedent in the real world. No parable would be able to do justice to the passion.

Note too that Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf was due to His obedience to the Father’s command. Again, we have to work through the imagery here: Yahshua was not only the literal “Son of God,” He was also *Yahweh Himself*, albeit revealed to us in a “less lethal” form. So the “diminished manifestation” of God is seen obeying the Almighty Father Yahweh. Don’t feel bad if you can’t quite get your head around it: nobody really does. But this is precisely what was prophesied by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-19. One could not experience the unfiltered presence of Yahweh and live to tell the tale. But Yahshua was (and is) Yahweh Himself—they share the same identity, just not the same form. The point is that we are to obey the commandments we have received from Yahshua, just as He did of the commandments of Yahweh.

Simon “Foot-in-Mouth” Peter clearly didn’t understand any of this—at least until after the resurrection. But while the rest of the disciples stood around

scratching their heads and exchanging furtive glances, Peter could be counted on to blurt out the first thing that came to mind. **“From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!...’”** Just before this, Peter had been the first of the disciples to make the connection: Yahshua was the Messiah—God’s anointed One. But this statement—uttered out of unfeigned love for the Master—revealed that the big fisherman didn’t have a clue as to what being “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” meant: laying down his life for the sheep. Perhaps he thought this was one of Yahshua’s many incomprehensible parables. But it wasn’t: this was prophecy—a clear statement (for all its horror) of what it would mean to be “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

So Yahshua’s response was harsh but necessary: **“But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’”** (Matthew 16:21-23; cf. Mark 8:31-33) He wasn’t really calling Peter “Satan,” as in “Lucifer, the fallen angel who aspired to be like the Most High.” (See Isaiah 14:12-15.) Satan simply means “adversary.” Ironically, however, Yahshua (in Luke 4) said exactly the same thing (and for exactly the same reason) to the *real* Satan as the devil tempted Him in the wilderness forty days after His baptism. “Bypass the cross,” they said. “It isn’t necessary,” they said. “Yes, it is. Get behind me, Satan.” The imperative for us here (as it was to Peter) is to “be mindful of the things of God, rather than the things of man.” Even though we’re built with Yahweh’s creative nature, our human solutions to the problems that confront us are seldom in perfect sync with God’s word. Of course, in order to be attentive to the “things of God,” we have to first know what these things are. We must read and heed the scriptures He was so careful to give us. We can’t just say, “I’m pretty sure God would have done it *this way* if He were as smart as I am.”

It was inevitable, I suppose, that Yahshua would have given us a couple of parables instructing us how to comport ourselves as we waited for His return. **“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning, and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants....”** The Master (that’s Christ) is pictured as being away from His estate, attending a wedding, while His servants (that’s us) are charged with holding down the fort in His absence. These soirees can last a few days or couple of weeks, and then there’s the travel time to consider: the bottom line is that the servants have only a rough

idea, but no precise information, about when the Master will return. But still, they are charged with being ready to receive Him home from His travels, night or day, rain or shine. We are “blessed” if we remain awake and alert, waiting expectantly for His coming.

This is good advice on general terms, of course—applicable throughout the church age: we are instructed many times to “watch.” But if we take it to a slightly more literal and specific level, some new data emerges. Maybe. If the “wedding” here is the actually “Marriage Supper of the Lamb” spoken of in Revelation 19:7-9 (and referred to in more esoteric ways throughout the New Testament) then the wedding is actually that of the Master; and it will take place in heaven while the seven-year Tribulation is raging here on earth. His bride is the raptured church of Philadelphia—who has been “kept out of this trial” (Revelation 3:10)—along with believers who lived throughout the church age. The “servants,” then, are the belatedly repentant saints of the church of Laodicea, who are commanded to remain faithfully watchful despite the great adversity they’re suffering—*knowing* their Master will return to them with His bride, but not knowing quite when. (In truth, the data is available, but they’re in no position to access it: Christ will return to earth with His bride exactly 1,285 days after the Antichrist takes power—but you have to get into the timing minutiae divulged ever so subtly in the Books of Leviticus, Daniel, and Revelation to figure it out. And the Laodiceans simply won’t have the leisure to do so. They’ll be hiding, hoping, and hanging on by their fingernails.)

The next part of the parable could also be applied with equal validity to both pre-rapture and post-rapture saints. **“But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”** (Luke 12:35-40) Yahshua has shifted gears here. The “master” in this case is not He Himself, but the devil—the one who (at the moment) is described by Christ as the “ruler of this world” (see John 12:31, 14:30, and 16:11). And the “thief,” so to speak, is Yahshua, who is coming at an unexpected and unannounced hour to take back from Satan what rightfully belongs to Him—*us*. Satan may be as clever as he is evil, but he’s not omniscient. The Son of God will catch him flat-footed and unprepared. This, of course, explains why Yahshua was so cryptic with His timing clues, and why the best advice He could give us was to remain watchful and vigilant.

“Then Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?...” Peter had no idea what Yahshua was talking about. But as usual, though Christ didn’t bother answering him directly, He got straight to the heart of the matter—that of which Peter *would have asked* had he understood enough to ask intelligent questions. (Is this not how our prayers are generally answered by

God?) I love Peter: he may not have known what to say, but he kept the conversation going—to our eternal benefit.

“And the Lord said, ‘Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has....” We’re back to considering normal master-servant relationships here—that is, where Yahshua is the Master and we believers are the servants—specifically, *stewards*: those who manage, administer, or act as agents for someone else; in other words, we who have been given responsibilities to attend to in the Master’s absence. We are commanded to be “faithful and wise,” characteristics further defined as *providing for* (read: *loving*) His other servants in the Master’s absence.

And what would the converse look like? **“But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers....”** Woe to that steward who doesn’t think highly enough of the Master to perform what he *knows* to be His will—even if He is not physically present.

“And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” (Luke 12:41-48) Our responsibilities in our Master’s absence are commensurate with what we’ve been given to work with—just as in the parable of the talents. I can’t help but reflect that in these Last Days, knowledge of God’s Word is available to us with fewer restrictions, and better study tools, than in any previous age. Will not our generation be held to a higher standard than any of those who came before us?

If we love Christ, we are to keep His commandments. And now that we know what those commandments are, let us no longer plead ignorance or shirk our responsibilities, for we are empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

God help us.