

The Owner's Manual

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

Volume Two:
What Maimonides Missed

By

Ken Power

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Volume II—What Maimonides Missed	Page	Precept
Introduction.....	518	
1 The Human Condition.....	521	614-652
2 A Holy God, A Holy People.....	563	653-687
3 A Land Set Apart	602	688-705
4 The Tabernacle of God	624	706-729
5 Yahweh's Team	658	730-750
6 Consecration and Dedication	690	751-766
7 Levitical Lessons	718	767-798
8 Offering Advice	760	799-820
9 Dates of Destiny: Past Perfect.....	794	821-843
10 Dates of Destiny: Future Tense.....	830	844-864
11 Loving Your Neighbor.....	866	865-887
12 Learning From Experience	903	888-923
13 Messianic Messages I: From Eden To Israel	948	924-942
14 Messianic Messages II: The Egyptian Experience	982	943-963
15 Messianic Messages III: Do This in Remembrance of Me... 1015		964-982
16 Messianic Messages IV: God as King	1046	983-1000

Introduction

What Maimonides Missed

Filling in the gaps

We've reached the end of Maimonides' list of 613 *mitzvot*, or Torah precepts—supposedly the complete picture of God's instructions transmitted to us through Moses in the first five books of the Bible. If you're like me, you're feeling a little disappointed, maybe even a bit angry, that the Rambam and the sages upon which he relied missed so much that's patently obvious to even the casual observer this side of Calvary. In light of what we've discovered by paying close attention to the Torah, a quick survey of Maimonides' list reveals that it contains nowhere near 613 unique points of agreement with Yahweh's instructions. By my count, there are 86 pointless duplicates or corollaries which clearly don't deserve to be listed separately, 70 misstatements, twisted quotes, or outright perversions of the Torah's text, 78 significant omissions, misinterpretations, or unwarranted extrapolations, and 74 blatant instances of missed or ignored significance (and I was extremely generous here—the evidence of rabbinical cluelessness is ubiquitous). In other words, Maimonides dropped the ball in half the precepts he covered.

But by examining the Torah's actual text, we've been able to identify the broad sweep of God's instructions in the areas Maimonides assumed he'd covered. And with the benefit of twenty-twenty hindsight in the light of Yahshua's finished work, we should now have a new appreciation of the Torah's prophetic revelation of His role in achieving our redemption, atonement, and cleansing. The question is, now that we can perceive the rabbis' failure to discern Yahweh's plan and purpose as revealed in the passages they *did* cover, can we trust their claim to have identified all of the issues raised in the Torah? I, for one, doubt it.

And that, my friends, is the *raison d'être* of this present work, *The Owner's Manual, Volume 2: What Maimonides Missed*. Here's my *modus operandi*. First, I scanned the entire Pentateuch for instances where Yahweh was telling somebody—*anybody*—to do something. (This includes the places where Moses is seen issuing instructions that clearly originated with Yahweh, though the text doesn't say "And Yahweh said..."). Next, I reviewed the Torah passages that were quoted previously in the context of Maimonides' 613 Mitzvot, and removed the overlaps from my working list. Repeats of precepts we've already seen were deleted as well. What's left is a compendium of scripture passages to which Maimonides did not refer and that did not arise in the course of our exploration of his list. Some of this is small snippets of scripture that fell between the cracks;

some broader subjects Maimonides skipped altogether; whether out of carelessness or an agenda of obfuscation remains to be seen. I tried to be scrupulous in my perception of God's instruction, however. I did not restrict myself to passages that begin, "And Yahweh commanded Moses, saying...." However you slice it, the number of Torah prescriptions that were overlooked in Volume I is prodigious. The raw scripture in my working file (before I formatted it and added any commentary) filled 85 pages. That ought to tell us *something*.

What can we expect to see? Having covered so much of the Torah already, we should have a reasonably good feel for the general mindset of Yahweh, and we're going to see more of that—more instruction about the human condition, our failures and what to do about them, and the connection between a holy God and His people. Maimonides glossed over quite a bit of information about the priesthood, the Levites, and the temple. So we'll go back and review what he missed in those areas. And there is a whole body of scriptural instruction defining the promised Land—a confusing and seemingly contradictory maze of geographical description that the Rambam, a Spanish Rabbi who settled in Cairo, scrupulously avoided.

Maimonides covered quite a few of the scriptures concerning the offerings and sacrifices described in the Torah, and we will endeavor to finish that job. He skimmed over much of the instruction concerning the symbolic appointments Yahweh scheduled with His people throughout the year—and he missed their significance entirely. So we will revisit the seven *miqra'ey* and other events God set apart for our edification. There are things he missed concerning man's relationship with his fellow man; we'll pick up the slack there. And finally, there is a significant amount of warning and admonition, especially in Deuteronomy—promises of blessing or cursing that depend solely upon how seriously God's people regard His word.

When we're through, we will have discussed virtually everything God said to do in the first five books of the Bible. As we've already established, however, most of Yahweh's instructions are symbolic: He is telling His people to rehearse, to act out as if on stage, the various elements or details of His plan of redemption. The Sabbath *means* something. Circumcision *means* something. The formula for making the priestly incense *means* something. Practically every facet of the Torah's beautiful gemstone reflects something external, something beyond the jewel itself. They reflect the light of Yahweh, His love, His glory, His purpose, His plan. If we look no further than the precepts themselves, we rob ourselves of a beautiful, fulfilling experience—the experience of knowing God.

A word about format: you'll recall that in Volume One, I listed the precepts by number (1-613, the order being provided by Judaism 101). A mitzvah summary, based on Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, was then given (set in *italics*), and this was followed by the actual Torah text from which the mitzvah was derived (set in **boldface** type). Only then did I wade in with my commentary.

For this present volume, the format will look similar, but of necessity, some things will have changed. The numbering system is totally without significance this time. It's only there so we can easily reference other precepts. I will begin at #614, not because Maimonides' 613-mitzvah system had any real merit, but simply to avoid confusion. As before, a summary statement in italics for each numbered observation will be provided. But this time, the synopsis is my own, and thus should be taken no more seriously than we did with the Rambam's mitzvah statements. Indeed, I intend to use the summary statements as an opportunity to get to the heart of each precept or principle in a nutshell, not to merely restate the obvious. The *real* information, as before, will be in boldface type—the salient passage from the Torah. And as before, my commentary will follow.

Though my purpose is to provide as comprehensive a survey of the Torah as possible, I am fully aware that I'm going to miss some things. Forgive me; I'm only human, seeing things "through a glass, darkly." I pray that Yahweh's *Ruach Qodesh* will teach you where I've failed, making God's Word "a lamp to your feet and light to your path."

Ken Power

The Human Condition

We'll begin by revisiting Yahweh's instruction concerning the basic human predicament—our mortality, our fallen state, our motivational triggers. From our rocky beginnings in the Garden of Eden, the experiences of Cain and Noah, and the wilderness wanderings of Israel, there are valuable lessons for us to learn—insights for us to discover—even today.

IN THE BEGINNING

- (614) *Don't desire the knowledge of evil.* "Then Yahweh, God, took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And Yahweh, God, commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" (Genesis 2:15-17) Adam and his bride were given an enclosed, protected environment called Eden (from the Hebrew root *'adan*, meaning enjoyment or pleasure) in which to live. It was quite literally "paradise"—a word that means "a walled garden." Here, sheltered and provided for in every way, they were set apart from the animal kingdom (including any proto-hominids Yahweh had introduced into the biosphere) by God's gift of the *neshamah*—the "breath of life" (Genesis 2:7). This made humans unique: in addition to having a soul (*nephesh*) which made our bodies alive (like all animals), the *neshamah* gave us the capacity for *spiritual* life, that is, the ability to be indwelt by and respond to the eternal Spirit of God.

In this perfect environment, Adam and Chavvah (Eve) already had the knowledge of good—it was *all* they knew, for evil was kept at bay by God's provision and presence. Yahweh had provided this paradise for them because of His love: in fact, we were unique among His creatures in having been created for no other purpose than to share a loving relationship with Him. But having created animals and angels, Yahweh knew that love came with a catch: in order for love to be given, it must be possible for it to be withheld. Love requires choice; in order for the concept to have any meaning, it must be possible to choose *not* to love.

Animals have no capacity for real spiritual love. Without a *neshamah*, they operate purely on instinct, emotion, and intellect, no matter how

much devotion, loyalty, or affection they might display. On the other hand, though angels do have the requisite spiritual nature, Yahweh created them without the privilege of choice. They're like soldiers in an army who, though capable of autonomous action, are not given the prerogative of disregarding their commander's instructions. Like any soldier, of course, they have the *capability* to disobey, but not the legal right. If they do, they become rebels, outlaws, *demons* whom Yahweh will incarcerate when it suits His purpose. Without the privilege of choice, the concept of love is meaningless for angels; and for animals without the capacity for spiritual life, it is equally meaningless. Man is the *only* created being with both the capacity and the privilege of choosing to reciprocate God's love. It is what we were made for.

Which brings us back to Eden. Why did Yahweh place the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the center of the garden if He didn't want Adam and Eve to eat from it? Because He wanted to give them a simple, binary way to demonstrate their trust. *If you trust Me to provide for all your needs, then obey My voice in this one small matter. Your choice will reveal your love for Me, for it will reveal your understanding and acceptance of my love for you.* Chavvah thought she was trading innocence for wisdom. In reality, she was exchanging her innocence for mere experience—a bad bargain however you slice it. As we would learn much later, **“The reverence for Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding [*binah*: discernment, insight].”** (Proverbs 9:10) Experiential knowledge of evil, on the other hand, leads only to death.

We shouldn't gloss over the apparent contradiction of the warning, **“In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”** Adam and Chavvah both went on to live very long lives—Adam lived to be 930 years old! So did God lie? No. Physical death (the separation of the soul/*nephesh* from the body) was only a metaphor for the more serious sort of death about which Yahweh was warning them: spiritual death, the separation of His Spirit from their *nephesh*. That happened immediately, and life could only be restored, it turned out, through the shedding of innocent blood.

- (615) *Recognize your enemy.* **“I will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”** (Genesis 3:15) Prophetic information like this always has instructional value, if only written between the lines. I find it fascinating that Yahweh was addressing the serpent here, not Eve. He was telling Satan what his role was going to be—he would “bruise the heel” of the seed of the woman. (The verb *sup*, to bruise or crush, can also mean to

strike or snap at, and also to envelop, overwhelm, or engulf—B&C.) The woman’s promised “seed” (Hebrew: *zera*, offspring, descendent, child) would ultimately prove to be the Messiah, Yahshua, as prophesied more directly by Isaiah: **“Yahweh Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”** (Isaiah 7:14) The fulfillment was recorded in Luke: **“Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Yahshua. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and Yahweh will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.’”** (Luke 1:3-33)

While not discounting the fact that the heel of Yahshua’s foot was literally bruised in the process of crucifixion, the word “heel” (Hebrew: *aqeb*), gives us insight into a more far-reaching truth. *Aqeb* also carries the derivative connotation of anything in the rear, such as a rear guard or the target of an ambush, as well as one’s footsteps, one’s trail, as it were. Therefore, Satan’s expanded role in this world would be to strike, to snap at, those following in the Messiah’s footsteps—to ambush His rear guard, so to speak. We all bear bruises that show how successful the serpent has been.

But the woman’s Seed also had a role to play: He would strike, bruise, crush, and overwhelm the head of the serpent, Satan—He would inflict the wound that would eventually incapacitate him for all eternity, making the world safe for those who follow in the footsteps of the promised Messiah. (Note: spirits like Satan are immortal beings. Once created, they cannot be killed, only incarcerated.) Meanwhile, however, there would be enmity, hostility, between her seed and the seed of the serpent.

Who? Yahshua explains who “the seed of the serpent” is as He chastises the false religious teachers of His day, calling them the devil’s children: **“If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”** (John 8:42-44) Children do their father’s bidding. Children of the “father of lies” lie to people in order to prevent them from coming to Yahweh, from reciprocating His love. And that’s serious: Yahshua characterizes the blocking of access to God as *murder*. The surprising thing for many is that the people to whom He was speaking so

harshly were the most religious people in town, the elite, the powerful, the influential. Do not be deceived. God has warned us that *religion is our enemy*. Blind submission to the rules and traditions of men will separate us from God, not draw us closer. Yahweh seeks our love and our fellowship, not our mindless obeisance.

- (616) *Know that rebellion has consequences.* **“To the woman [Yahweh] said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception. In pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’”**

(Genesis 3:16) The lessons of the fall continue. Eve, by her sampling of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, had chosen experience over innocence. Here, Yahweh simply gives her what she’d asked for. She had perceived the forbidden fruit as something “desirable to make one wise,” something that would allow her to discern between good and evil. The catch was that first-hand knowledge of evil would separate her from intimate fellowship with Yahweh—it entailed sin: the falling short of His glory. It’s axiomatic that personal knowledge of evil would “multiply her sorrow.” But what does “conception” mean, exactly? The Hebrew word is *herown*, which denotes not only the birth process itself, the pregnancy, gestation period and act of childbirth, but also the sensory pleasure of the sex drive that led to it. The word encompasses all of the pain and pleasure of the experience of reproduction—all these sensations would henceforth be intensified. Eve had craved experiential knowledge; that’s precisely what she would receive. Good *and* evil.

The next sentence describes where the quest for the knowledge of evil would inevitably lead: to frustration. The “desire” Chavvah would feel toward her husband was more than sexual attraction. The Hebrew word *teshuqah* means “desire, urges, longing, i.e., a very strong emotion or feeling to have or do something. Note: this strong desire may refer to sexual urges or desires, or a desire to dominate.” (*Dictionary of Bible Languages with Semantic Domains*) Adam and Eve had been created as partners, as equals. But Eve’s newfound unnatural desire to rule over her husband would be met with utter frustration. The same word, *teshuqah*, is used to describe the insatiable desire a personified “sin” had for the domination of Cain in Genesis 4:7—and we all know where *that* led.

The universal principle we should draw from this vignette is obvious. Do not desire, and most certainly do not grasp at, that which Yahweh in His wisdom has not given to you, even if it looks good, even it holds the promise of some benefit. What He provides and what He withholds are for our own well being. We are finite in our wisdom, and there *is* such a thing

as “the law of unintended consequences.” His gifts are bestowed at His discretion. In short, be careful what you wish for. You just might get it.

- (617) *Heed God, not people.* “Then to Adam He [Yahweh] said, ‘Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, “You shall not eat of it,” cursed is the ground for your sake. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:17-19) Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit. And now Adam had a second choice to make, even tougher than the first one (to eat or not to eat). Now he had to choose between abandoning his wife—leaving her alone to face an unknown fate—and disobeying a clear command of God. It was the original lose-lose scenario, as far as Adam could see. He knew Yahweh’s instruction hadn’t been a mere “suggestion.” The verb “commanded” (Hebrew: *tsawah*) means “ordered or decreed with force and authority.” One can’t be sure, but I get the feeling that Adam finally chose to eat the fruit not because he wanted it, but because his beloved wife had asked him to. Thus Yahweh’s primary point in chastising Adam was that he had “heeded” (*shama*—to hear and obey, to consent, to yield to) the voice of his wife instead of the voice of God.

We need to remember that Eve meant no harm. But never having been exposed to the virus of evil, she had no natural defense against it, and was therefore easily deceived. The truth is, our best intentions are of no consequence when compared with the word of Yahweh. Sincerity of opinion, pure motives, and human intellect are of no weight when measured against God’s precepts. Written between the lines here is the Bible’s first warning against practicing religion in lieu of cultivating a relationship with Yahweh. We are not to heed even our most trusted and loving companions if what they’re telling us is contrary to God’s word. (And all the more so with self-serving teachers harboring transparent satanic agendas.) The rub is, in order to follow this precept, we need to actually know what God’s Word says. Yahweh declares, and it bears repeating, “**My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.**” (Hosea 4:6)

Note also that choosing to heed the word of man (or woman) over God’s instructions carries a penalty. As with Chavvah, the consequence to be endured by Adam was not some evil punishment dreamed up by an angry and vengeful God in order to “get back at him” for screwing up. Rather, it was the natural outcome of choosing to trust something other than Yahweh. In the paradise of Eden, food was provided and predators

(excuse the snake) were kept at bay. But (as we shall see) Yahweh's love for Adam forced Him to evict him from Eden, from the place of provision and protection, to precisely what Adam's choice had ever-so-eloquently declared that he wanted: a world where he could be self-sufficient.

This attitude is still evident today in mankind's insistence on practicing religion instead of following Yahweh. By doing so, we are saying, *We must toil all the days of our life to make ourselves worthy of God's love. Dealing with the thorns and thistles of life are a penance we perform to earn our place in heaven. God will surely be impressed when he sees the sweat of our brow.* Meanwhile, Yahweh is shaking His head and saying (and I paraphrase), "What're you thinkin'? I gave you *Eden* to live in, you morons. If I wanted you to work and suffer to earn my love, I wouldn't have given you all that low-hanging fruit. And let's be honest, guys: when you sweat, you stink."

- (618) *Realize that nothing good comes from evil. "Then Yahweh, God, said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'—therefore Yahweh, God, sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life."* (Genesis 3:22-24) There was another tree of note in the Garden, one called the "tree of life." Though it hadn't been declared off limits like the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it was now, in the wake of Adam's and Eve's sin, deemed a hazard to them, something from which they had to be kept isolated for their own good. (It is pretty obvious that seeing the fallen couple live "forever" in their sinful, mortal bodies wouldn't have done Yahweh any harm at all. This move was made for Adam's benefit.)

This was harder for me to understand when I was in my twenties than it is now, forty years later. Although attaining eternal life is still one of my goals, I can no longer pretend that I'd like to live forever in *this* body. Truth be told, it's falling apart—and it's going to get worse, not better, before I finally die or get raptured. This mortal frame I inherited from my father Adam is not built to last. In I Corinthians 15, Paul describes the solution God has devised: we will leave behind these old, mortal, corruptible bodies and inherit new, immortal bodies—bodies designed and built to endure for eternity in fellowship with our Creator.

The world as we know it is a lame duck—it's on it's way out. But transitioning between this doomed environment and the eternal state, Yahweh speaks of a one-thousand-year long period in which mortal man

will once again be given an Eden-like world in which to live—certainly in Zion (and most likely everywhere else Yahweh is honored). The world will be healed by a “river of life” (actually, Zechariah mentions *two* of them) emanating from beneath the Millennial Temple. There are trees growing alongside this river: **“Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.”** (Ezekiel 47:12) The prophets speak of a time when longevity—as in the days before the flood—will be restored. It is clear that these rivers and the trees that grow on their banks have something to do with that. But it is not said that these are “trees of life,” though they bear a family resemblance. Longevity is not remotely the same thing as eternal life—mortal men will still grow old, for that’s the curse they’ve inherited from Adam. But as the Millennial Kingdom draws to an end, every child of Yahweh will have received his or her immortal body. Death will have been rendered obsolete.

It is only *after* we have received these immortal, “spiritual” bodies that the tree of life could cease being a curse to us. And so it is that it reappears in the last chapter of the Bible as John describes the post-Millennial heavenly state—an eternal “place” called the New Jerusalem. **“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”** (Revelation 22:1-2) In the New Jerusalem, every soul who has chosen to be made alive by the indwelling of Yahweh’s Spirit will discover that the tree of life no longer poses a danger. The sustenance and healing it provides will go on forever. Because of Adam’s sin, mankind was evicted from the Garden: nothing good comes from evil. But the converse is also true. Through Yahshua’s atonement, mankind can regain paradise: nothing evil comes from good.

CAIN AND ABEL

- (619) *Don’t presume that Yahweh doesn’t see your sin.* **“And He [Yahweh] said, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.’”** (Genesis 4:10-12) Yahweh never asks questions because He

doesn't know the answer. He asks them because *we* don't know—or at least we *act* like we don't. After Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, Yahweh asked, "Where are you?" Here he demands of Cain, "What have you done?" He asks those same questions of us today. How we respond to his "questions" has eternal consequences. They are framed to elicit a response leading to repentance. **What have you done?** *We have sinned, and fallen short of Your standard of holiness. Our deeds have cursed us, made us fugitives and vagabonds in the earth. Only Your mercy can remove the curse; only Your grace can bring us back into your presence.* **Where are you?** *We are hiding from Your glory, naked and ashamed of our sin. Please help us: clothe us in your righteousness, O God.*

Our sins are not hidden from Yahweh, nor can we justify our crimes and shortcomings in the light of His holiness. Snappy comebacks like Cain's famous retort "Am I my brother's keeper?" don't impress God—they only demonstrate our arrogance. We can't work our way back, buy our way in, or talk our way out. All we can do is ask for His forgiveness. All we can do is fall upon His mercy. We should not presume that just because Yahweh doesn't punish our crimes immediately, He never will. We remain alive for one reason only: He wants us to turn back to Him. As Paul put it, asking yet another question to which God already knows the answer: **"Do you despise the riches of [Yahweh's] goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"** (Romans 2:4)

- (620) *Don't exact vengeance (without Yahweh's express authorization).* **"And Cain said to Yahweh, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear! Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me.' And Yahweh said to him, 'Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And Yahweh set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him."** (Genesis 4:13-15) There would come a time when Yahweh's instruction for dealing with murder would be for an "avenger of blood" to be appointed from the victim's family. Upon verification of the facts of the case, the avenger would be authorized to track down and slay the slayer, thus cleansing the land of the sin of murder. To ensure that justice was done (and not mere revenge), Yahweh set aside six "cities of refuge" in Israel, where a manslayer could flee for protection until his case was decided—that is, until it was determined whether the death had been purposeful or accidental, and who, in fact, the guilty party was. (See Mitzvot #260, 292-295.)

This was all an outgrowth of a principle Yahweh laid down right after the great flood: **“Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.”** (Genesis 9:5-6) At that time, human government was authorized by God (**“I will require it”**) to exact capital punishment, a life for a life. But until this instruction was given (if we may extrapolate from the Genesis 4 passage above), the murderer of a murderer was to be considered a *murderer*—not an avenger. If Cain had been slain for his crime, his killer would in turn have been subject to retribution, and so on until no one was left alive. The vendetta has never been Yahweh’s pattern. The law of God has always favored restitution over retribution. But since one’s mortal life cannot be restored (making restitution impossible), payment in kind for the crime of murder is mandated—life for life. Note that the unrepentant Cain knew intuitively that his crime, whether punished in this life or not, had precipitated his demise—not physically, but spiritually: **“I shall be hidden from Your face.”** That, my friends, is a fate worse than death.

NOAH

- (621) *Follow Yahweh’s directions when trying to save the world. “And God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood....’”* (Genesis 6:13-14) The human race has been plagued for thousands of years by people who recognize that the world has problems, but who insist on solving them *their way*, not God’s way. But look at how specific and detailed Yahweh’s instructions were to Noah: **“‘Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch.’ You couldn’t possibly understand why this is yet, Noah, but this thing is going to have to be completely waterproof. ‘And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits.’ It’s going to have to be huge to get the job done. Naval architects four thousand years from now will confirm that these proportions are the most stable a large vessel can have in high seas. ‘You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above; and set the door of the ark in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks....’ The design is practical. I’ve calculated the needed capacity and provided for access and ventilation.**

Yahweh also told Noah *why* he was to do all this. **“‘And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in**

which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, of animals after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the earth after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive. And you shall take for yourself of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather it to yourself; and it shall be food for you and for them.' Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did." (Genesis 6:14-22)

I'm not suggesting these instructions to Noah are there for us to perform. I *am* suggesting that we should treat Yahweh's instructions *to us* with the same sense of urgency and obedience that Noah did. He didn't say, "God said to build a boat, but I think I'll just move to higher ground instead. Far more efficient." He didn't waste time rounding up animals, but waited for them to come to him, as Yahweh had promised. He did, however, gather food for himself and his passengers, as instructed. And although he was a "preacher of righteousness" (II Peter 2:5) he didn't force his neighbors to get onboard the ark. In short, he paid attention to what Yahweh had told him to do—and what not to do.

This principle is, if anything, more important today than ever. Yahshua warned us about this *specifically*: "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matthew 24:37-39) God has told us exactly what the days before his return would be like, what events would transpire, and what we were supposed to do about it—or not, as the case may be. He told us in such great detail, in fact, it took me over 900 pages to explore it all in my book on prophecy. Today, more than ever, we need to be following Yahweh's instructions, not the cultural consensus, not our own moral compass (however well-intentioned), and not our precious religious traditions. Only Yahweh's instructions will guide us to a place of safety.

- (622) *Go where Yahweh tells you to go, when He tells you to go there.* "Then Yahweh said to Noah, 'Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation.... For after seven more days I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made.' And Noah did according to all that Yahweh commanded him." (Genesis 7:1, 4-5) We aren't told how long it took Noah and his sons to build the ark. It had to have

taken several decades, minimum. But with pinpoint timing, Yahweh is now seen calling his servant into the place of safety. Verses 2 and 3 hint that the last seven days before the flood were mostly spent getting the animals situated on board. The point is that Noah didn't have a clue when the flood would come, while Yahweh knew precisely—and not just as the time drew near, but decades before this, when he first told Noah to build the ark, knowing just how long the job would take. The survival of the human race, it turned out, rested on one man's willingness to do what Yahweh told him to do, when He told him to do it.

In 2005, Dallas Abbott, an adjunct research scientist at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory in Palisades, N.Y., determined the date of a massive meteorite strike 900 miles southeast of Madagascar to have occurred within the lifetime of Noah, “around 2800 B.C.” The “Burckle Abysmal Impact Crater” left by this impact measures eighteen miles wide, which is *huge*, considering it's some 12,500 feet beneath the surface of the Indian Ocean (and we all know what water does to muzzle velocity). The mega-tsunami it generated would have easily displaced enough water to account for forty days of rain over much of the earth's surface. Enthusiastically seizing upon a golden opportunity to trash Yahweh's reputation, a scientist featured on the History Channel's treatment of the Burckle Crater remarked, “We no longer need God to explain the multiple flood legends.” No, what this idiot needs God for is to explain how Noah (or any other flood-legend hero—there are at least 175 local versions that parallel the Genesis account) knew to build a big boat twenty or thirty years before a mega-tsunami flooded his world. *Duh!*

When it was all over, Noah was still listening to Yahweh. **“Then God spoke to Noah, saying, ‘Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you: birds and cattle and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.’”**

(Genesis 8:15-17) How do you know when it's safe? When Yahweh tells you it's safe. You can't possibly get yourself in trouble by following the instructions of such a God.

- (623) *Be fruitful.* **“So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.’”** (Genesis 9:1) We saw a similar precept once before, in Genesis 1:28 (See Mitzvah #63) That time it was given to Adam and Eve; here Noah and his family are being instructed. In both cases, the future of the entire race of *neshamah*-equipped mankind hung in the balance—one generation of non-fruitfulness at either of these junctures and it would have been all over for the human race. We need to remember

that what is true in the physical realm is also true in the spiritual: we *as believers* are never more than one generation away from extinction. Indeed, it seems we've spent most of our 6,000-year existence on the "Endangered Species List."

The "great commission" restates this precept in spiritual terms: **"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."** (Acts 1:8) Our walk and witness are to transmit God's truth—our spiritual DNA—to the next generation. We are still supposed to be fruitful; we are still commanded to multiply. The Hebrew word translated "fruitful" above is *parah*, which means "to flourish, i.e., produce an offspring or harvest of the same kind in a successive generation, implying an abundance." (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*) As with physical procreation, our spiritual life is reproduced in the next generation not through our rules, rituals, or beliefs, but by our love. That's why Paul reminded us, **"The fruit of the Spirit is love—joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."** (Galatians 5:22-23) This is the fruit we are to bear into successive generations of believers.

- (624) *Eat meat.* **"And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs."** (Genesis 9:2-3) Ooh! A *manly* mitzvah. Yahweh never contradicts Himself, but occasionally He must give us new instructions based upon a changing world. This is the second "phase" of His dietary guidelines. The first was given in the Garden of Eden, where Yahweh **"commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.'"** (Genesis 2:16-17) At that point, mankind could live quite nicely on a vegetarian diet. After the flood, however, the world had changed, so the precept at hand was issued, broadening the spectrum of man's dietary choices. Apparently, the nutrition available in a meatless diet would no longer be sufficient to maintain optimum human health, so animals, including birds and fish—a rich source of protein—were added to the menu. About fifteen hundred years later, however, Yahweh again changed man's recommended diet, this time *restricting* the types of land animals, birds, and sea creatures His people could safely eat. Between Noah and Moses, we had gradually lost the ability to process the inherent toxicity of certain meats—pork, for example. These instructions are discussed at length in *The Owner's Manual*, Chapter 5: "Dietary Laws."

Speaking of toxicity, though, one wonders at the new challenges human “civilization” has wrought in the past few decades. Between pesticides, GMOs, and the addition of artificial chemical ingredients to so many foods, very little really looks “safe” anymore. At the very least, restricting oneself to an organic, vegan diet (like the one Adam and Eve ate) once again seems prudent, at least for a growing minority whose bodies have become intolerant of “normal” food. The pollution of the world’s food supply may prove to be a cause of the famines predicted for the last days. But whatever we see going on, it won’t last long: Yahweh has promised to heal the planet—presumably including its food supply—during Christ’s Millennial reign. And if the prophecies concerning the renewed temple rites are any indication (see Ezekiel 42:13), meat will still be on the menu during this time.

Although a definitive answer might prove elusive, it may be instructive to ask ourselves what caused this three-stage shift in dietary instruction. God didn’t change: His goal remained to provide sound nutritional health guidelines for mankind. But something changed in man’s environment that made these changes necessary for our well-being. Our first clue is in the timing of our precept: it was given right after the great flood. The typical recorded lifespans of men dropped gradually over the next millennium by some ninety percent, eventually settling at about seventy or eighty years (cf. Psalm 90:10). Some environmental factor was inexorably shortening our normal lifetimes, and doing it, apparently, at the molecular level—in our DNA. In other words, our genetic predisposition for longevity was being compromised by mutations in the collective human genome. The most likely culprit? Gamma rays.

There is a persistent theory that in the antediluvian world, a water vapor canopy shielded the earth, moderating global temperatures and filtering out harmful rays—a canopy that collapsed during the flood. Whether it was this or some other atmospheric condition, *something* changed at the time of the flood to (1) allow accelerated degradation of our gene pool, (2) prompt Yahweh to categorically promise that never again would such a flood destroy the earth, (3) allow rainbows to form for the first time, and (4) cause Yahweh to forecast regular and significant seasonal weather cycles that would never cease as long as the earth remained (apparently something Noah was not used to). Whatever it was, it proves that even in times of judgment and wrath, Yahweh never forgets His people. His tender mercies extend even to issuing new instructions, when they’re needed, about what to eat.

Funny, though: He never said *anything* about chocolate.

TRYING GOD'S PATIENCE

- (625) *Heed the voice of Yahweh.* **“So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’ So he cried out to Yahweh, and Yahweh showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet....”** (Exodus 15:22-25) I’ll never understand why the Israelites complained against *Moses*. They’d seen the plagues of Egypt that had effected their liberation; they’d witnessed the way Yahweh had delivered them at the Red Sea. Oh, sure, Moses had announced the plagues and stuck his rod out over the waters before they’d divided, but nobody in his right mind thought that *he* was doing the miracles.

Did Yahweh know the waters to which He’d led them were bitter? Of course He did. And after all that sound and fury back in Egypt, was it possible that God was so incompetent He’d let His people die of thirst in the desert? Not likely. So why did Yahweh do this? I think the whole scenario was an elaborate multi-level object lesson for His people. First, “If you’ll trust me, I’ll provide everything you need.” **“There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them, and said, ‘If you diligently heed the voice of Yahweh your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am Yahweh who heals you.’”** (Exodus 15:25-26)

Yes, if they would “diligently heed the voice of Yahweh their God,” He would heal Israel. And the second lesson? Ask yourself: what did Yahweh have to heal *first* in order to heal Israel? The bitter waters. Note the symbols being employed here. Water, or the sea, is a ubiquitous scriptural metaphor for the nations—the gentiles—just as “the land” is a symbol for Israel. And the tree that made these bitter gentile waters sweet is, in the end, none other than a metaphor for the cross of Christ. The “waters” are us—the mostly gentile *ekklesia*—who have been “sweetened” through Yahshua’s atoning work at Calvary, and it is therefore our job it is to sustain Israel until she learns to heed the voice of Yahweh. Makes you wonder if it’s possible to be a Christian *and* an anti-Semite. I kind of doubt it.

Moses later explained why the gentiles would have to be “sweetened” before Israel could finally be redeemed. **“Truly, as I live, all the earth shall be**

filled with the glory of Yahweh. Because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.” (Numbers 14:21-23) That’s right. Because Israel had not heeded the voice of Yahweh, they would not see the truth until “all the earth” had been filled with the glory of Yahweh. Don’t look now, but that time is almost upon us.

- (626) *Keep physical reminders of God’s provision.* “Then Moses said, ‘This is the thing which Yahweh has commanded: “Fill an omer with it, to be kept for your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.”’ And Moses said to Aaron, ‘Take a pot and put an omer of manna in it, and lay it up before Yahweh, to be kept for your generations.’ As Yahweh commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept. And the children of Israel ate manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.” (Exodus 15:32-35) How quickly we can forget the provision of God. You know how it goes: when times are good, we ignore Him. But when adversity strikes, we complain as if He’s not doing His job. We need to remember that if we are Yahweh’s children, *everything* He lets into our lives is for our ultimate good—even the “bad” stuff. Poverty teaches us to rely on Him. Sickness reminds us that He is the Great Physician. Stress tells us that Yahshua is the Prince of Peace. Hunger instructs us to assimilate the Bread of Life. Even death has an upside: it reminds those left behind of their mortality, while bringing eternal life in its wake to the deceased—if he has been made alive with God’s Spirit.

In this life, however, we tend to forget. So the Torah is peppered with ways to remind ourselves of Yahweh’s steadfast goodness. The tsitzit (see Mitzvah #18), with its single blue thread, is a visual reminder of the Messiah. The mezuzah (Mitzvah #21) helps us to keep the Word of God before us at all times. The Israelites treasured Aaron’s rod that budded, a testimony of Yahweh’s leadership (see Precepts #627-628). And here we see God’s instruction for remembering how He miraculously provided food for the rebellious Israelites for forty years in the wilderness.

In our lives, we tend to keep significant mementos of family and friends, photos and the like. I’m thinking it would be a good idea (based on scriptural precedent) to do the same thing with God. I don’t mean collecting idols, icons, or relics, you understand—religious talismans we imbue with quasi-magical powers—but rather ordinary things that remind

us of Yahweh's provision at critical junctures in our lives. A personal example from my own life: I keep on my desk a small limestone pebble. I picked it up in Jerusalem, a few feet from where Yahshua was crucified (in a vacant lot behind the main bus station, a stone's throw from the Garden Tomb). I can't look at it without being reminded of the Messiah's sacrifice, of course, but it also reminds me of Yahweh's protection. On that trip, you see, my friends and I interviewed a dozen *bona fide* Islamic terrorists—deep in Muslim-controlled territory—only three months after the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001. Very enlightening. And probably a really stupid thing to do. But Yahweh protected us, and gave us some invaluable insight for our book, *Tea With Terrorists*. (It's linked free from this site, by the way. Check out chapter 17 for a fictionalized account of what actually took place there. I kid you not.)

- (627) *Accept Yahweh's choice of leaders.* **"Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to the children of Israel, and get from them a rod from each father's house, all their leaders according to their fathers' houses—twelve rods. Write each man's name on his rod. And you shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi. For there shall be one rod for the head of each father's house. Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you. And it shall be that the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you.'"** (Numbers 17:1-5) At this point, folks were coming out of the woodwork claiming to be just as qualified to lead Israel's masses as Moses and Aaron were. While that may have been true if based on strictly human terms (leadership ability, charisma, speaking ability, etc.), Yahweh made the point that only the two Levite brothers had been *called*. And then He proceed to *prove* his point by gathering shepherd's rods (symbols of authority—over sheep at least) from the leaders of each of the twelve tribes. The next morning, Levi's rod, belonging to Aaron, **"had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds."** (Numbers 17:8) You've gotta love Yahweh's sense of humor. *Ripe almonds?*

The point is that Yahweh reserves for Himself the right to call whomever He wishes to whatever task He chooses. And His choices sometimes surprise us in our limited, ill-informed world view. He chose David—the runt of the litter, as it were—to be Israel's mightiest king. He selected Mary—a dirt-poor teenage peasant girl—to be the mother of Yahshua the Messiah, the prophesied King of Kings. He chose Saul of Tarsus—a narrow-minded Pharisaic legalist—to communicate His message of grace to the world. The Messiah's closest earthly companions—by His choice—were rough fishermen, not princes or

priests. They, not the royal family or the religious elite, would lead the world into the Kingdom of Heaven.

We cannot choose to be leaders in God's economy. We can merely make ourselves available for whatever task He requires. That being said, it is not smart to refuse such a call. Just ask Jonah.

- (628) *Heed and treasure whatever evidence Yahweh provides.* **"And Yahweh said to Moses, 'Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die.' Thus did Moses; just as Yahweh had commanded him, so he did. So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, 'Surely we die, we perish, we all perish! Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of Yahweh must die. Shall we all utterly die?'"** (Numbers 17:10-13) A significant subset of Precept #626 (keeping mementoes of God's provision) is that when Yahweh goes out of His way to provide evidence for us, we are to retain that evidence and use it to substantiate His claims or doctrine—to "argue his case in court" using the forensic data He has made available.

When Aaron's rod was used by Yahweh to validate and confirm His choice of Israel's leadership, there was no question as to what had been said—there was no doubt, reasonable or otherwise, as to what God had intended to say. Still, the shaken but unrepentant wannabe usurpers whined (and I paraphrase), "All this religious hocus pocus of yours is dangerous, Moses. You're going to get us all killed!" To which Yahweh reiterated (in chapter 18) "Yes, you *will* die, if you keep trying to commandeer the calling I've made upon the tribe of Levi, its priesthood, and the leadership of this generation under Moses" (again, a loose paraphrase). "That's the way I've set things up, and I've given you proof by making Aaron's rod come alive." The rod, then, was to be **"kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me."** And why did the rebels need a sign to be kept against them? So Yahweh wouldn't have to slay them (**"lest you die"**) for their complaining, rebellion, and arrogance.

- (629) *Don't grumble. Come to Yahweh with your problems.* **"Then Moses spoke to Aaron, 'Say to all the congregation of the children of Israel, 'Come near before Yahweh, for He has heard your complaints.'" Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of Yahweh appeared in the cloud."** (Exodus 16:9-10) Like I said, problems happen. We need to learn to look at them as challenges or teaching aids—and more to the point, reasons to talk with our Heavenly Father. But usually, our first instinct is to grumble,

complain, *whine*. The fact that we hate it when our kids do that to us ought to be our first clue as to how God feels about it.

As far as I can tell, attaining human fellowship was Yahweh's entire reason for becoming The Creator. Seems to me He's gone to an awful lot of trouble for a pitifully insignificant result, numerically, at least. I mean, creating matter and energy in a matrix of space-time so that life might have a place to happen, then creating millions of life forms, narrowing the focus of His attention down to one species (us), only to watch the vast majority of the individuals of that species choose to ignore or reject Him, and then, manifesting Himself as a member of that species in order to save it, setting aside not only His heavenly glory but even *dimensions* in order to do so—well, it all seems awfully, shall we say, *inefficient*. But hey, it's Yahweh's nickel, so He gets to call the tune: He's apparently interested in quality, not quantity. Anyway, my point is that if the Creator of the universe went to this much trouble to make us and redeem us, the least we could do is talk with Him. It must be terribly frustrating (if that were possible) to watch us ignore Him as we stumble through our lives, moaning and whining when things seem less than ideal. Yes, I realize that our free will necessitates that He refrain from forcing us to reciprocate His love. But we ought to realize that our Maker made us for a reason: He wants us to have a relationship with Him—a two-way association: creation, provision, and perfection on His part, and trust, respect, and reverence on ours, all coming together in a matrix of mutual love. Those of us who choose to have such a relationship with our Creator, He adopts as His own beloved children. Amazing!

Here, then, are the facts: (1) Yahweh, being omniscient, knows our needs. (2) Presuming we're His children, He wants to meet those needs. (3) If we're not His children and have no desire to be, there's no particular reason He should do anything for us. (4) He hears our cries, our pleas, and our complaints, but He'd rather hear our conversation. (5) He wants us to come straight to Him with our problems, not to someone else, and that includes *ourselves*: self-reliance is overrated. (6) There is nothing He can't fix, nothing He can't provide. And (7) if Yahweh withholds something from us, it's either because it will harm us in some way, or because we haven't asked Him, or because we don't even *know* Him. James explains: **"Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a**

friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (James 4:1-4) We have to live here. We don’t have to like it.

- (630) *To obtain water, strike the Rock.* **“Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.’”** (Exodus 17:5-6) There are three things essential to the maintenance of our mortal lives, all of which are pressed into service as metaphors for Yahweh’s provision: *air* (i.e., wind, breath—hence spirit); *water* (a newborn baby’s body is about 78 percent water, hence the phrase John uses to describe mortal life—“born of water”); and *food* (e.g., the “bread of life”). The rule of thumb is: three minutes without air, three days without water, or three weeks without food, and you’re done for.

The Exodus 17 incident, early in Israel’s wilderness experience, is clearly a Messianic prophecy—it speaks of Yahshua’s crucifixion, which was necessary in order to quench our spiritual thirst. As Peter put it, **“Those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of Yahweh.”** (Acts 3:18-19) And in case you’re still in doubt, we have more scripture to interpret scripture, this time from Paul: **“...All drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.”** (I Corinthians 10:4) But does this mean that every time we need to be refreshed with the water of life, the Messiah must be struck again, crucified anew? No, it doesn’t: read on...

- (631) *To obtain water, speak to the rock.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.’ So Moses took the rod from before Yahweh as He commanded him.”** (Numbers 20:7-9) It’s like *déjà vu* all over again. A bunch of thirsty, complaining Israelites, a frustrated Moses with a shepherd’s rod in his hand, and a big rock from which Yahweh was promising water would gush forth. But this time, God didn’t tell Mo to strike the rock, but to *speak* to it. As we saw with His dietary instructions, Yahweh reserves the right to change the instruction to fit a new paradigm. The Rock had already been struck once. That’s all that would ever be needed. From this point on, all we’d have to do to get the spiritual refreshment we need is *ask for it*.

Alas, by this time, Moses had reached his breaking point. And in his anger and frustration, he forgot for a moment Who was providing the water in the first place. **“And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, ‘Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?’ Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod....”** By doing so, of course, he goofed up the beautiful picture Yahweh was painting, one we can see clearly through the lens of hindsight: after Yahshua our Rock was struck at Calvary, spiritual refreshing could be obtained by merely *asking* Him to provide the living water. Remarkably, Yahweh provided what the Israelites needed, even though Moses had done everything wrong. But that didn’t mean there weren’t going to be consequences. **“And water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.’”** (Numbers 20:10-12) Fortunately for us, the recorded instructions of Yahweh are sufficient to explain the object lesson.

- (632) *Take Yahweh’s threats seriously.* **“When He [Yahweh] had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.... And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!’” And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them.’”** (Exodus 31:18, 32:7-10) When is a command of God *not* a command? When it’s a backhanded way of teaching us something—or reminding us of something we knew but might have forgotten. Yahweh is suggesting here that if Moses actually *does* what He says and “lets Him alone,” He will toast Israel to a fare-thee-well. They certainly had it coming. Moses (who knew Yahweh pretty well by this time) took His “threat” at face value, and was sufficiently horrified to put his own neck on the line to intercede for his people—technically disobeying Yahweh in the process: Moses did *not* “let Him alone.” Quite the contrary: he “pleaded” with Yahweh (32:11), reasoned with Him (v.12), and reminded Him of His previous promises (v.13), all of which required incredible temerity on his part. So how did Yahweh respond to Moses’ impudence? **“Yahweh [no doubt smiling wryly to Himself] relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.”** (Exodus 32:14)

What would have happened if Moses had not taken Yahweh's "threat" seriously? Perhaps he would not have bothered interceding for them, leaving God with no logical alternative but to wipe them out and start all over with his eighty-year-old prophet. That would have been something neither Yahweh nor Moses (nor the witless Israelites, for that matter) wanted. Strange as it may seem, Yahweh *wants* us to "get in His face," to remind Him of His character, to challenge Him to do the "impossible" in defense of His own holy name. We must do this in faith and with reverence, of course. But remember what James said a few paragraphs back: **"You do not have because you do not ask."**

- (633) *Don't bear burdens alone.* **"Yahweh said to Moses: 'Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone.'"** (Numbers 11:16-17) Yahweh, having created us, knows our frailty. Seems the first thing He noticed about Adam when He put him in the Garden was that he was hopelessly inadequate for the task set before him—he needed a woman to help him. Here we see that although Moses had been the one specifically called and prepared for the job of leading Israel, he was not expected to do everything all by himself—or bear all the responsibility of leadership upon his own shoulders, broad though they might be.

Note, however, that the task of choosing suitable helpers was given to Moses himself. They did not appoint themselves, nor did Yahweh tell him who to pick. Their public reputations and Moses' personal experience dealing with them were to be the criteria. Therefore, if we find ourselves in a similar situation, we should use the same sort of wisdom: select people who have proven their spiritual maturity (they're "elders," after all) and leadership skills. The word translated "officers" (Hebrew: *shoter*) is a general designation for overseers or rulers. Its root means "to write," implying literacy or education at a level above the norm.

That being said, if you haven't yet donned the mantle of Yahweh's servant, if you haven't begun the work He has given you to do, then don't expect help to be forthcoming. We don't have to bear our burdens alone, but we *do* need to bear them. Nor should we jealously covet our own perceived place in Yahweh's service—if He raised us up, He is perfectly capable of raising up others as well. As Moses chastised young Joshua a few verses later, when some of these designated assistants began showing

signs of God's anointing, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all Yahweh's people were prophets and that Yahweh would put His Spirit upon them!"

- (634) *Be careful what you wish for.* "Then you shall say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of Yahweh, saying, "Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt." Therefore Yahweh will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised Yahweh who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?"'" (Numbers 11:18-20) The whole previous precept is inextricably intertwined in the text with a discussion about Israel's whining about their monochromatic diet (again), and what Yahweh planned to do in response. The manna He had given them to eat (miraculously, I might add) was nutritionally balanced, was completely sufficient for their dietary needs, looked appetizing, and was rather tasty (vs. 7-8). But it lacked variety. I mean, what could you make with it? Manna bagels, manna patties, manna-cotti, manna pancakes, ba-manna bread? They remembered the perks of the slave life in Egypt—leeks, onions, garlic, fish—and they began to long for something that could make their breath stink.

I'm not saying a little variety is necessarily a bad thing. But the Israelites didn't come to the One who was providing for them and ask for it. Instead, they complained—verse 10 says they stood around and wept. *Oh, for some meat!* You'd think they were spoiled Americans, not former slaves. So after providing Moses with seventy elders to share the "heat" with him, Yahweh sent huge flocks of quail flying through the area about waist-high off the ground—so easy to catch a child could do it. And the inevitable happened: everybody gorged themselves on quail until the very sight of it made them sick.

The moral of the story has nothing to do with low-flying quail. It has everything to do with our recognition and thanksgiving for what Yahweh has provided. I don't care what it is—our spouse, financial circumstances, job opportunities, dwelling, or even diet—whatever it is, God has provided it and we should receive it with grateful acknowledgement of His goodness. If there's room for improvement, then work for it—within the context of Yahweh's provision—and come before Yahweh in reverence with your requests. But don't complain, whine, and weep because somebody, somewhere, is better off than you. Be careful what you wish for—God just might give it to you. Until it comes out your nostrils.

(635) *Don't question God's motives or ability.* **"Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 'How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me. Say to them, 'As I live,' says Yahweh, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above.'"** (Numbers 14:26-29) In Numbers, it sort of sounds like spying out the Land was Yahweh's idea, but in Moses' recounting of the story in Deuteronomy 1:21-23, it becomes clear that the concept originated with the Israelite tribal leadership, Moses agreed that the plan was sound, and Yahweh allowed it. We all know the disastrous outcome: twelve spies went in. Two, Caleb and Joshua, came back describing "a land of milk and honey," populated by people whom "we are well able to overcome." But the other ten bore horrific tales of "a land that devours its inhabitants," peopled by warriors so big, "we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight." A disgusted Yahweh then threatened to "strike them all with pestilence and disinherit them," at which point Moses interceded again (see Precept #632), "persuading" Yahweh to relent, sort of.

God's final solution for this generation was this: **"Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection. I Yahweh have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die."** (Numbers 14:30-35) What would cause such suicidal disbelief in the minds of a generation who had seen with their own eyes the mighty hand of Yahweh effecting their deliverance from Egypt?

I don't know, but maybe a better question to ask is: how is that generation any different from our own? We've seen with our own eyes (or at least our fathers and grandfathers did) Yahweh's deliverance of Israel from the clutches of Nazi genocidal tyranny, transforming an unprecedented disaster into a national homeland for His people. We've seen Him defend them against blind Islamic rage time and time again—1948, 1955, 1967, 1973—and *still* neither the Jews nor the vast

preponderance of the gentile world seem to be able to do the math on this thing. Yahweh's prophets predict that He will keep upping the ante—allowing stronger and nastier enemies to afflict Israel—until they can no longer ignore or deny His presence, protection, or sovereignty. To this very day, Yahweh's motives and ability have been called into question by a disbelieving world. But the day is coming when, like it or not, they *will* believe.

- (636) *Do not arrogantly defy God or despise His Word. “But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on Yahweh, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of Yahweh, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him.”* (Numbers 15:30-31) There is sin, and then there is *sin*. The whole passage just previous to this dealt with what to do (in a ritual-symbolic sense) when an individual or the whole congregation came to the realization that they had sinned. Such sins (literally, missing the target) are characterized as being “unintentional.” They're still sins, of course. They must be atoned for, dealt with, cleansed; but at least there is a remedy. For the fault spoken of in this passage, however, there is no remedy; it therefore behooves us to determine precisely what it is Yahweh is describing.

The keyword is “presumptuously” (translated “defiantly” in the NIV and NASB, and “brazenly” in the NLT). The Hebrew is two words: *ruwm*, a verb meaning “to rise up, exalt, be lofty, or lift up,” and *yad*, meaning “hand”, thus figuratively, “strength or power.” A direct translation would therefore be “high-handedly.” But the connotation is even stronger. The phrase speaks of arrogance, pride, a lifting up of one's own position of strength in the face of (and in defiance of) Yahweh's Law. It is saying, “I don't care what God says; I recognize no authority but my own. I will do as I please, without regard to the Word of Yahweh. And I will never show remorse or entertain a sense of guilt for my actions.” *Ruwm yad* reeks of insolence and rebellion.

A different word is rendered “presumptuously” in this parallel passage, but the message is nearly identical: **“Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before Yahweh your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously.”** (Deuteronomy 17:12-13) Here “presumptuously” is the Hebrew word *zadown*, a noun (the parallel verb *zyd* is also used) meaning pride, insolence, presumptuousness, or arrogance. The *Theological Wordbook of*

the Old Testament notes, “The basic idea is pride, a sense of self-importance, which often is exaggerated to include defiance and even rebelliousness...having pride in view as opposed to God, which is a major sin. Persons so characterized are paralleled with those who ‘work wickedness’ and ‘tempt God,’ and with ‘all who do wickedly.’ As a result, they will be burned like stubble in the day of God’s impending punishment. Frequently, such people are depicted as opposing those who try to do the will of God.”

Ordinary “sin” is missing the mark in the archery tournament of life—something even the best of us do. But at least we’re aiming at the target. The one who “acts presumptuously” is not aiming at the target at all, but is, rather, lobbing arrows at the tournament’s Judge. As we have seen before, those in Israel responsible for leading their fellow men to their spiritual deaths were to be executed. By tolerating such defiance of Yahweh, Israel was courting a deadly evil indeed.

- (637) *Know that your mortal days are numbered.* **“Now the children of Israel, the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor. And Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying: ‘Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up to Mount Hor; and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; for Aaron shall be gathered to his people and die there.’”** (Numbers 20:22-26) Only a fool thinks he’ll live forever in his mortal body. But it’s surprising how many of us live out our lives as if we believed that. The very young don’t think about their mortality at all. When we reach our teens, we somehow get the idea we’re indestructible, so we take outrageous risks with our bodies. If we’re lucky enough to live through puberty, the end looks so far away we’ll never have to face it. Then, just when you’d think we ought to start getting serious about our lives and legacies, we get distracted. Raising a family, pursuing our calling, and finding our place in God’s creation somehow degenerate into getting the kids to soccer practice, paying the mortgage, and accumulating *stuff* (that is, if we’re “lucky” enough to suffer such affluent distractions). By the time the nest is empty, arthritis and hardening arteries are whispering in our ears: “You blew it, didn’t you? You spent your whole life chasing an illusion, and now it’s almost over. It’s too late to fix your life: you can’t even read the writing on the wall without bifocals.”

Death didn’t sneak up on Moses or Aaron. They *knew* they wouldn’t be entering the promised land, and they knew why. What’s more, they

knew it for the better part of forty years. Being confronted with our own mortality can be liberating, if we stop and think about it. If we candidly face the fact that nobody gets out of here alive, we gain the incentive to think beyond the cares and responsibilities of this world, and instead lay up treasure in the next. I personally think it would be a very healthy thing if every believer knew (or lived as if they knew) that they only had two years, eight months, and seventeen days yet to live—long enough to fix some of our mistakes and finish the race we were given to run, but short enough to keep the finish line clearly in sight. No distractions, no detours, no wasted effort. Let us run our leg of the relay with everything we've got, and then pass the baton to the next generation.

- (638) *Don't despise God's provision.* **"Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.' So Yahweh sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died."** (Numbers 21:4-6) Is there an echo in here? We've heard these same complaints before. So had Yahweh. They moaned, "There is no food or water," and yet we read of no Israelites—not one—dying of hunger or thirst in the wilderness. Their very next statement demonstrates their propensity for exaggeration: "Our soul loathes this worthless bread." So the "no food" complaint wasn't precisely accurate, was it? They had all the manna they could eat. They didn't lack food; they only lacked *variety*. And since you can't survive very long without water, it seems that this grievance wasn't quite true either. Okay, there wasn't enough to bathe or go fishing in, but there *was* enough to drink.

This time the means Yahweh employed to get their attention was to send a plague of snakes among them. I guess it's logical, in a metaphorical sort of way: since the sting of sin had entered the world through tempting by a serpent in the Garden, the sin of tempting God would be met with stinging serpents in the wilderness. Thus although nobody died of actual hunger or thirst, lots of folks died because they *complained* about these things. The moral to the story is obvious: don't grumble to God when His provision doesn't meet your expectation. Don't call His gifts "worthless." If He has allowed tribulation into your life, He's done so to teach you some valuable lesson about life—even if that lesson is merely to **"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."** (Philippians 4:6)

(639) *Trust Yahweh's cure.* "Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against Yahweh and against you; pray to Yahweh that He take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. Then Yahweh said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.' So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived." (Numbers 21:7-9) The story of the snake-bitten Israelites doesn't end with lessons about grumbling. Yahweh used the repentant sinners' pleas as an occasion to articulate a remarkable prophecy concerning His plan for our ultimate salvation. Moses was directed to make a bronze serpent in the image of the ones that were biting the Israelites, put it on a pole or standard, and direct the people to look upon it if and when they were bitten.

At first glance, it seems Yahweh is telling Moses to violate the second Commandment: **"You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."** That is, until you read the rest of it: **"You shall not bow down to them nor serve them."** (Exodus 20:4-5) He was *not* telling Moses to make an idol—something to worship and bow to. Quite the contrary: this was an object lesson, one that wouldn't be fully understood until the first-century advent of the Messiah. Yahshua explained it to Nicodemus: **"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."** (John 3:14-15) Yahshua wasn't comparing Himself to a snake. Rather, He was revealing that by being "lifted up" in crucifixion, He would be taking upon Himself the sins of mankind (represented by the serpent).

We should compare the Hebrew for "look at" with the parallel Greek word translated "believe." Two Hebrew verbs are used in this passage to denote "look at." The first, *ra'ah*, means "to see, look, view, i.e., use the perception of sight to view objects and make judgments based on these perceptions." The second is *nabat*, which carries a very similar connotation: "look at, observe, gaze, i.e., use the perception of sight to see or detect objects, implying interpretation and understanding of what is observed, to consider, have regard—to see, i.e., think about an object, implying an appropriate, caring response." (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*) In the John 3 passage, the verb "believe" is the Greek word *pisteuo*, meaning, "to think to be true, be persuaded, place confidence in, to entrust something to someone." (*Strong's*) Putting these concepts together, our instructions are to observe what Yahshua accomplished on Calvary's pole (specifically, taking our sins upon Himself), make a well-informed judgment based upon what we

have perceived, understand its significance, and respond appropriately to it. Having been convinced by our senses that our observations are true, we are to place our confidence in that fact, entrusting our souls to Him. Note that no “blind leap of faith” is required by Yahweh. Quite the contrary.

By the way, the Greek word we errantly translate “cross” (*stauros*) is actually more correctly rendered “upright stake.” It is thus a poignant parallel to the Hebrew word translated “pole” in our Numbers 21 text. *Nes* means “something lifted up, a standard, signal, signal pole, ensign, banner, sign, or rallying point.” (S) The wilderness “pole” is prophetic of Calvary’s “cross” in its use *and* its effect.

- (640) *Be blameless before Yahweh.* **“You shall be blameless before Yahweh your God. For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, Yahweh your God has not appointed such for you.”** (Deuteronomy 18:13-14) There are echoes of Yahweh’s instructions to Abraham here: **“I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.... Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”** (Genesis 17:1-2, 8) Yahweh has tied walking blamelessly before Him to two things: (1) possession of the promised Land (a metaphor for our rest in Yahweh’s care), and (2) being the God of Abraham’s spiritual offspring (all believers, Jew and gentile alike). He’s using general terms, bestowing temporal as well as spiritual blessings on “the blameless.” The salient question, then, is: how in the world can one walk blamelessly before Yahweh? On the surface, it sounds impossible. We are all personally cognizant of the truth of Paul’s statement, **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** (Romans 3:23) And Isaiah’s lament hits home as well: **“All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned, every one, to his own way.”** (Isaiah 53:6) If we have all missed the target of God’s glory, if we have all strayed and gotten ourselves lost, then how can we be blameless?

First, we need to realize that *Yahweh* was fully aware that neither Abram nor the Israelites were humanly capable of “walking blamelessly” when He told them to do so. The key to the conundrum is stated most succinctly in Genesis 15:6 (quoted in Romans 4:3): **“And he [Abram] believed in Yahweh, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”** The key word here is “believed.” This concept goes far beyond mere assent to the fact, admission of the reality of Yahweh’s existence (something that, as James points out, even the demons do, and tremble because of it).

No, the word rendered “believed” is *’aman* in Hebrew, a verb meaning (in the *niphal* stem, or voice) “to be faithful, be trustworthy, loyal, i.e., pertaining to reliability, thus a state or condition of being dependable and

loyal to a person or standard, and so not fail; trust, rely; to be true, verified, i.e., to be in a state that conforms to a real situation, and so is certain and reliable; to be established, i.e., confirm a relationship with another; to have enough, i.e., pertaining to having sufficient supply; lasting, enduring, i.e., pertaining to a duration of time.” Thus in the *hiphal* stem (as the word is being used in our text, *'aman* means “to believe, put faith in, trust, have confidence in, i.e., have faith as a believer in what God has revealed; to believe to be true, to be confident of.” (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*) This is the kind of belief that Yahweh “accounts as righteousness”—the thing that makes us “blameless” before God: our trust in Him to be reliable, dependable, true, sufficient, eternal, and incapable of failure as He operates within the relationship we share.

THE ERROR OF BALAAM

- (641) *Don't prophesy falsely.* “Then the Angel of Yahweh said to Balaam, ‘Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak.’ So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.” (Numbers 22:35) The story of Balaam (Numbers 22 through 25) is exceedingly strange. The guy functioned as a *bona fide* prophet of God in that he could (and did) deliver messages from Yahweh. But when we first see him, he’s described as a pagan “diviner,” a fortune teller or sorcerer of some local repute. He seems willing enough to do what Yahweh tells him to do, though—at first refusing to go with the envoy of Balak (a Moabite king in league with the Midianites) or accept the fortune he was being offered to curse Israel. Only after Yahweh *reversed* His instructions and added the caveat above did Balaam agree to go. But then, it seems, it was all Yahweh could do to restrain Himself from killing the guy (presumably because of what he *would* do later)—going so far as to give his *donkey* prophetic powers and the gift of human speech to underscore his warning: “Only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak.” I *told* you it’s a strange tale.

Twice Balaam sought to use the tools of his trade—sorcery—in order to find a way to curse the Israelite hordes, but Yahweh wouldn’t allow it, turning the cursing for which Balak would have paid so handsomely into blessings upon Israel. The third time, the very Spirit of Yahweh fell upon the wannabe wizard, compelling him to say some really nice things about his would-be victims. Balak was not amused. Balaam’s fourth oracle prophesied Israel’s ascendancy in the latter days over Moab, Edom,

Amalek, the Kenites, and Assyria. This passage even includes a very early Messianic prophecy (Numbers 24:17).

In all of this, Balaam seems relatively guiltless. Though he didn't consider himself a prophet of Yahweh, the God of Israel condescended to speak through him: Balaam did as he was told and spoke as he was instructed by God. I'll get into what Balaam *did* do to run afoul of Yahweh in the coming precepts. For now, let us take note of a few counter-intuitive phenomena: (1) The message of Yahweh *can* come through people who have no relationship with him. (2) Even if God chooses to use an ass to get His message across, the message remains true. (3) The truth of a matter bears no correlation to the amount of money we are willing to spend to obtain it. I can't help reflecting on the function and fate of some of the white-shoe televangelists that grace our cable TV channels these days. Some of them are obviously in it for the money (or power, or some other improper motivator). Does that mean God can't use—can't speak through—these avaricious preachers? Surprisingly, it does not. (See Philippians 1:15-17.) Yahweh doesn't penalize honest searchers for their lack of discernment. He does, however, hold the purveyors of doctrine accountable for their motivations. For those who listen, truth is where you find it. For those who teach, God judges both message and motive.

- (642) *Don't tolerate spiritual harlotry.* “Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of Yahweh was aroused against Israel. Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before Yahweh, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of Yahweh may turn away from Israel.’ So Moses said to the judges of Israel, ‘Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor.’” (Numbers 25:1-5) Balaam the diviner had been offered big bucks to curse Israel for King Balak of Moab, but Yahweh had made it painfully clear that if he did, he'd never live to spend a shekel. But there's more than one way to skin a cat, as the proverb goes. Balaam apparently decided that he could still earn his fee—not by cursing God's people himself, but by giving *Yahweh* reason to curse them! How? Since we're spouting homilies here, we have a saying that goes, “The way to a man's heart is through his stomach.” Balaam knew a more reliable route—a few inches to the south. If the Moabite women could seduce those studly young Israelite warriors—inviting them to participate in the overtly sexual ritual worship of Ba'al (*Hey, when in Moab, do as the Moabites do, right guys? What happens here stays here.*)—then Yahweh would burn their biscuits *Himself*. It's sheer genius, in a perverse sort of

way. Balak wouldn't have to lift a finger to defeat them. We're given evidence that the plan was Balaam's idea in a later chapter: **"These women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against Yahweh."** (Numbers 31:16)

Amazingly, his ploy almost worked. The men of Israel (some of 'em) scampered after the Moabite temptresses like kittens after catnip. Sex was merely the bait: it was characterized by the locals as one of the many perks of the religion of Ba'al. But it didn't stop there: the Israelites made sacrifices to the dead (see Psalm 106:28) and **"ate and bowed down to their gods."** This was a wholesale and purposeful abandonment of Yahweh's Law—something far more serious than succumbing to a momentary lapse in moral judgment (though even *that* could have gotten you stoned to death). Yahweh's remedy for this sorry situation was first to hang the ringleaders—not only execute them, but make a public spectacle of their fate as a warning and example to the other Israelites. The individual participants were also to be slain, though not necessarily "out in the sun." The subsequent record also speaks of a "plague" breaking out because of the incident. It's my guess this happened because the avenging judges of Israel weren't moving fast enough to suit Yahweh. The plague was halted (after killing 24,000 men) only after Aaron's grandson Phinehas personally skewered an unrepentant Israelite man and his Midianite trollop with a javelin.

"C'mon. There's not a lot of Ba'al worship going on these days," you may be protesting. True. So is this a relevant cautionary tale, or is it merely a pointless bit of historical trivia? I believe it's teaching an important principle, still germane for us today. The errant Israelites were using *religious practice* to get something they wanted in this world (in this case, socially acceptable extra-marital sex). How is this materially any different from someone who goes into "the ministry" because he wants the respect of his fellow man and a steady paycheck (instead of having received the calling of God and a burden for lost souls). How is it any different from a business person who attends church primarily to troll for new clientele? Absolution, mindless habit, social contact, peer pressure, or economic opportunity are all tantamount to Ba'al worship if they're our principal motivation for gathering in a religious setting. If we're "worshipping" for some reason other than honoring Yahweh, studying His Word, and edifying each other in the context of God's love, we're in danger of practicing spiritual harlotry.

- (643) *Identify and condemn those who would seduce you into spiritual error.*
"Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'Harass the Midianites, and attack

them; for they harassed you with their schemes by which they seduced you.”

(Numbers 25:16-18) Yahweh didn't pussyfoot around with politically correct diplomatic responses. He realized, even if we tend to miss the significance of Balaam's treachery, that the **“schemes by which they seduced you”** were an act of war—a military offensive. The Moabites and Midianites had had every intention of destroying Israel with their sexual sneak attack. Balaam was all the more dangerous because he knew the Israelites couldn't be defeated through conventional warfare. The “error of Balaam,” then, is that even though he should have known that Yahweh was all-powerful, he chose instead to honor his own short-term financial interests. Being a successful pagan “diviner,” Balaam was conversant with occult powers, demonic forces. His mistake was assuming that Yahweh was just another local god, a demon like Ba'al, Chemosh, or Dagon that could be appeased, and maybe outsmarted. He didn't realize that Yahweh was *qodesh*—holy, set apart, unique, fundamentally different from the cosmos He Himself had created. It was the worst mistake one could possibly have made.

But Yahweh opted not to miraculously dispose of His people's enemies for them. Instead, He directed Israel to go to war with Midian, for it was them, not God, who had been harmed by the pagans' seduction tactic. **“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Take vengeance on the Midianites for the children of Israel. Afterward you shall be gathered to your people.’ So Moses spoke to the people, saying, ‘Arm some of yourselves for war, and let them go against the Midianites to take vengeance for Yahweh on Midian. A thousand from each tribe of all the tribes of Israel you shall send to the war.’ ...And they warred against the Midianites, just as Yahweh commanded Moses, and they killed all the males....”** The Midianites were not on the list of seven Canaanite nations Yahweh had slated for utter destruction. (See Mitzvot #352-353, #601.) Yahweh had no particular bone to pick with them. For that matter, Israel's leader, Moses, was the son-in-law of a Midianite priest, Reuel, a.k.a. Jethro. Nor was Moab, whose king had begun this whole paranoid process, on God's hit list. In fact, though he doubtless didn't know it, Moab's lands had been specifically declared off limits to the Israelites. The point is, they didn't have to die—they unnecessarily invited God's untimely wrath by unilaterally attacking His people.

And what about Balaam, who had counseled spiritual warfare through religious prostitution against Israel when it became clear that military action against them would be of no avail? **“Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword.”** (Numbers 31:1-8) Balaam might have protested (as in the gangster movies) “Nothing personal—it's just business.” It didn't

matter to Yahweh, for whom business is *always* personal. Balaam didn't live to spend a penny of his ill-gotten gains.

I should hasten to point out that just because Yahweh instructed bronze-age Israel to go to war against Midian, we should not feel obliged to “attack” and “harass” our own self-perceived spiritual enemies. We have noted how Yahweh's instructions sometimes shift due to changing conditions. In our present world, where the vast majority are antagonistic to Yahweh's truth, we are warned not to fight, but to flee: **“Flee from the midst of Babylon, and every one save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, for this is the time of Yahweh's vengeance; He shall recompense her.”** (Jeremiah 51:6) “Babylon” represents any and all systems of false belief, whether religious or otherwise—the things of this world that seek to seduce us into spiritual error. We still need to identify our enemies and condemn their falsehoods. But where Israel was once instructed to **“take vengeance for Yahweh on Midian,”** we are now informed that the time is coming when Yahweh Himself will exact vengeance on our behalf. The days are growing short.

- (644) *Do not value that which causes you to sin.* **“And the children of Israel took the women of Midian captive, with their little ones, and took as spoil all their cattle, all their flocks, and all their goods. They also burned with fire all the cities where they dwelt, and all their forts. And they took all the spoil and all the booty—of man and beast. Then they brought the captives, the booty, and the spoil to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the children of Israel, to the camp in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho. And Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the congregation, went to meet them outside the camp.”** (Numbers 31:9-13) At first glance it seems that the Israelites were following Yahweh's instructions to a tee. But a more careful reading of the passage reveals a fatal flaw in their execution of God's plan. **“But Moses was angry with the officers of the army, with the captains over thousands and captains over hundreds, who had come from the battle....”** Did you catch it? Why was Moses so upset? After all, they had destroyed the enemy's ability to wage war against them, hadn't they?

No, they hadn't. Think about it. What “weapon” had been brought to bear against Israel in the first place? What tactic had proved so successful in weakening Israel? It *wasn't* Moab's or Midian's military might. **“And Moses said to them: ‘Have you kept all the women alive? Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against Yahweh in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of Yahweh.’** Oops. **“Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man intimately. But keep alive for yourselves all the**

young girls who have not known a man intimately. And as for you, remain outside the camp seven days; whoever has killed any person, and whoever has touched any slain, purify yourselves and your captives on the third day and on the seventh day. Purify every garment, everything made of leather, everything woven of goats' hair, and everything made of wood.” (Numbers 31:14-20) It wasn't women *per se*, of course, but the fact that these pagan women had drawn Israelite men into the worship of false gods by offering them ritual sex. The conquering Israelites had conveniently forgotten what had dragged them out of fellowship with their God. They had mentally replaced the real enemy with a straw man.

Satan still puts enemies in our path, things that distract us from our relationship with our God. Defeating them requires honesty and discernment. We must identify our *real* problem, and we must not cherish these things that war against us. The Israelite soldiers thought their enemy was Midian. They had to be forcibly reminded that their real enemy was the thing within Midian to which they had been attracted—sex with pagan women. Remember, Satan's evil, not stupid. He'll use things you *like*—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—to ensnare you.

- (645) *The spoil of war must be purified before it can be utilized.* “Then Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone to the battle, ‘This is the ordinance of the law which Yahweh commanded Moses: Only the gold, the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin, and the lead, everything that can endure fire, you shall put through the fire, and it shall be clean; and it shall be purified with the water of purification. But all that cannot endure fire you shall put through water. And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day and be clean, and afterward you may come into the camp.’” (Numbers 31:21-24) Before the middle of the twentieth century, it was an unquestioned principle that whoever won a war would keep something as a prize—territory, booty, whatever. Spoils of war were a fact of life, notwithstanding the fact that God had commanded “You shall not covet; you shall not steal.” It was only after Yahweh restored Israel to their homeland in 1948 did the diplomats of the world go numb from the neck up. In the face of mounting Israeli territorial gains (resulting entirely from the aggression of their Muslim neighbors), we read this brain-dead clause in U.N. Security Council Resolution #242 (November 22, 1967): “The Security Council...emphasizing the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war...affirms that the fulfillment of Charter principles requires the...withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict.” The world community started getting all warm and fuzzy toward genocidal aggressors only when God's chosen people had gained some ground at their expense. I'd wager that after the 1967 Six-Day War, if somebody had given the whole shootin' match back to the

defunct Ottoman Empire (who had lost it to Britain and France by backing the belligerent Germans in World War I), he would have snagged himself a Nobel Peace Prize.

So today, folks steeped in political correctness look at those historic times when Israel was allowed by God to keep some of what they'd won in battle (a contingency that was by no means automatic), and they call Yahweh a barbarian. If we check the record, however, we find that God's people were never divinely authorized to be the aggressors in any conflict unless the nations they faced had become irretrievably corrupt. And in point of fact, this was only the case for a very short period of time, and against a very limited population—the seven nations polluting the land of Canaan in Moses' and Joshua's day. The conflicts that ensued in the wake of Balaam's treachery were not wars of aggression, but defensive engagements on Israel's part.

So how did Yahweh view booty and spoils? First, they belonged to Him (like everything else in creation) and were thus subject to His instructions. Sometimes (as in Jericho) He told His people to keep none of it—to destroy it all—and sometimes they were allowed to make use of it, subject to His will. (More on that in the following precept.) Second, as we see here, the booty was considered defiled, unclean. The metals were to be melted down and recast, and everything else was to be ritually purified in water. Third, those who had “liberated” the spoils from the pagans were defiled by contact with them. They, like the booty they had won, were to go through a ritual cleansing process before they could re-enter the fellowship of their people.

The bottom line is that in God's view, the wealth of the world is of no particular value in itself. It is only as it is set apart as holy to Yahweh that it gains acceptability and utility. Paul instructed Timothy about how we are to view the wealth of this world: **“Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”** (I Timothy 6:6-10) The “spoils of war,” then, are in Yahweh's view to be considered a *byproduct* of our righteous struggles in and against this world—they are not supposed to be the point of the struggle, the impetus for waging war. Thus (for example) when Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon threatened to engulf Israel in the 1967 Six Day War, the Jews' subsequent territorial

gains in the Sinai, the West Bank, Southern Lebanon, and the Golan Heights were all legitimate “spoils of war,” since they had been won not through Israeli aggression, but as a byproduct of their own defense. (The universal Muslim hallucination that merely *being a Jew* in “Palestine” is *de facto* an act of aggression is an absurd and self-serving proposition, but absurdities often pass for facts in Islam.)

There is an eschatological facet to booty and spoils that we should examine as well. The time is fast approaching when Yahweh will cleanse the earth in His righteous wrath, ultimately purging it of the vast majority of its rebellious population. He will preserve a comparatively small remnant of believing Jews and gentiles to rebuild a world shattered beyond recognition during the dark days of the Tribulation. The resources they’ll use could be construed as booty, the spoils of war, the rewards of battle. Once again, the battle belongs to Yahweh. And once again, the resources left behind are His to administer, and they (along with His faithful warriors) must be purified in the fires of judgment before they can be useful to mankind in the Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah. In the end, the meek *shall* inherit the earth.

- (646) *Give a portion of the spoils of war to Yahweh, via His priests and Levites.* “Now Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Count up the plunder that was taken—of man and beast—you and Eleazar the priest and the chief fathers of the congregation; and divide the plunder into two parts, between those who took part in the war, who went out to battle, and all the congregation. And levy a tribute for Yahweh on the men of war who went out to battle: one of every five hundred of the persons, the cattle, the donkeys, and the sheep; take it from their half, and give it to Eleazar the priest as a heave offering to Yahweh. And from the children of Israel’s half you shall take one of every fifty, drawn from the persons, the cattle, the donkeys, and the sheep, from all the livestock, and give them to the Levites who keep charge of the tabernacle of Yahweh.’ So Moses and Eleazar the priest did as Yahweh commanded Moses.” (Numbers 31:25-31) Here we see how the world’s goods which have fallen into the hands of His people through their defense of His Word are to be distributed. If you’ll recall, one thousand men from each tribe went out to do battle. That comes out to about two percent of the military manpower Israel had available at that time. These twelve thousand men were to receive half of the total booty, and out of that half, one fifth of one percent was to be given to the priests, who were to offer it up symbolically to Yahweh as a wave offering, and then use it for their own purposes. The other half of the spoils were to be distributed among the Israelites who had not personally participated in the battle, and two percent of that amount was to be set aside for the use of the Levites (who, like the priests, were employed in doing Yahweh’s work).

The breakdown by percentage is telling. (1) 12,000 Warriors: 49.9% of the total, or 0.004% each; (2) Three Priests (Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar): 0.1%, or 0.033% each; (3) The Congregation (591,550 strong): 49%, or 0.00008% each; and (4) the Levites (numbering 22,000): 1%, or 0.00005% each. So we note that if the numbers mean anything at all, God values most highly those who stand in His presence in an intercessory role, followed by those who invest life and limb in the battle itself. He also rewards the spectators, but not to remotely the same extent. At first I was puzzled by the fact that the individuals of the congregation would receive more per capita than the Levites did. But then I remembered that the Levites were exempt from warfare: they alone were risking nothing in this venture, and they would be mourning no loved ones fallen in battle. Yet because they were in Yahweh's service, they too received a reward. Note that there was nothing special set aside for the political leaders, neither Moses nor the seventy elders. They were merely counted as members of the congregation of Israel. That ought to tell us something.

BECOMING CLEAN

- (647) *There are limits and exceptions to how the carcass of an unclean animal defiles. "Nevertheless a spring or a cistern, in which there is plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass becomes unclean. And if a part of any such carcass falls on any planting seed which is to be sown, it remains clean. But if water is put on the seed, and if a part of any such carcass falls on it, it becomes unclean to you."* (Leviticus 11:36-38) As we saw in Mitzvot #561 and #562, contact with the carcass of an unclean animal defiled a person. And if it came in contact with food, both the food and its container were rendered unclean. Beyond the obvious hygiene applications, such defilement is a ready metaphor for the human condition—we become soiled by our walk through the world and find ourselves in need of God's cleansing. Here, however, we see that as a practical matter, some situations that might have seemed to be candidates for ritual cleansing, but would have been unnecessarily burdensome to the community, are exempted from the normal cleansing procedures. God seems to be saying, "You don't need to use a cannon to kill a mosquito."

Case in point: if said mosquito fell into your coffee cup, you'd ordinarily throw your drink out and clean the cup with water. But if the little bugger fell into the cistern where the water for cleaning (and drinking) was kept, you didn't have to throw the whole thing out and start over. (If a dead elephant fell in there, though, well, you get the picture.)

God gave us brains so we could figure out when we had a real problem and when we didn't. If a mouse got into your seed corn and ate himself to death, you didn't have to kiss goodbye to next year's crop. You were going to put the seed in the ground anyway—what you'd end up eating had no possibility of being tainted by contact with the corpse of the corpulent little rodent.

I think perhaps these “loopholes” were pointed out by Yahweh to remind us that we as believers aren't to cloister ourselves away from the world—adopt a monastic, insular attitude in order to avoid becoming defiled with contact with “sinful” people. Such an attitude is borne of pride and selfishness. We are, rather, to be light and salt to the world—bringing knowledge and preservation in our wake. To do that, we need to be *in* the world but not *of* it. Yahshua is our example; His walk is our goal. Though He knew no sin, He was willing to risk defilement to save us from ours.

- (648) *Male pattern baldness shall not be considered “leprosy.” “As for the man whose hair has fallen from his head, he is bald, but he is clean. He whose hair has fallen from his forehead, he is bald on the forehead, but he is clean. And if there is on the bald head or bald forehead a reddish-white sore, it is leprosy breaking out on his bald head or his bald forehead. Then the priest shall examine it; and indeed if the swelling of the sore is reddish-white on his bald head or on his bald forehead, as the appearance of leprosy on the skin of the body, he is a leprous man. He is unclean. The priest shall surely pronounce him unclean; his sore is on his head.”* (Leviticus 13:40-44) Perhaps one adult male in three has experienced some degree of hair loss. In light of the extensive instructions Yahweh provided for identifying and isolating leprosy (see Mitzvot #502, #565-568, and #577-580), it is comforting to note that He also covered what it is *not*. He points out here that male pattern baldness is not in itself a sign of leprosy (though it doesn't rule out the disease, either).

Since we have established that leprosy is a scriptural metaphor for spiritual sickness, we should apply the lessons we've already learned to this present revelation. One could characterize our hairs as gifts from God. Some of us are more gifted than others in this respect, but in any case, the hairs on our heads are all numbered (Luke 12:7)—in other words, God knows precisely what He's given to each of us to work with. My point is that it is no sin to be less gifted than some other person. Yet many look upon an apparent lack of gifts as a sign of spiritual inferiority: leprosy. *He's a lousy teacher; she couldn't prophesy her way out of a paper bag; he can't speak in tongues.* So what? We are all responsible to use the gifts God gave us, not the ones He gave somebody else. Being less spiritually

gifted is not a sign of spiritual sickness or apostasy any more than the parable of the talents teaches that the guy who got ten talents to work with was more “saved” than the servant who only got five.

- (649) *The priest shall re-examine a previously infected house for signs of “leprosy.”* **“Now if the plague comes back and breaks out in the house, after he has taken away the stones, after he has scraped the house, and after it is plastered, then the priest shall come and look; and indeed if the plague has spread in the house, it is an active leprosy in the house. It is unclean.”** (Leviticus 14:43-44) In Mitzvah #568, we looked at the procedure for examining “leprosy” (indicative of a spiritual plague) in a house, which is metaphorical of human society—the place we mortals live. There we learned that the whole “leprosy in the house” thing is a prophecy—that Yahweh will remove the offensive elements of our society during the “seventh day,” that is the Millennial kingdom of Yahshua. Here we have the sequel: what happens if the plague comes back after Yahweh has purged the house of evil?

“And he [the priest, symbolic of Yahshua] shall break down the house, its stones, its timber, and all the plaster of the house, and he shall carry them outside the city to an unclean place. Moreover he who goes into the house at all while it is shut up shall be unclean until evening. And he who lies down in the house shall wash his clothes, and he who eats in the house shall wash his clothes....” *What? During the Millennium, the perfect reign of the Messiah?* Yes, I’m afraid so. There will still be mortals upon the earth during that time, descendants of Adam and Eve, with the same sin nature. These, the offspring of the blessed “sheep” spoken of in Matthew 25:31-46, will still be faced with the same choice all of us have: to reciprocate God’s love or rebel against Him. Sadly, Revelation 20:7-9 reports that at the end of the Millennium, multitudes of mortals will follow the recently paroled Satan in rebellion against King Yahshua. And at that point, the King will have no recourse but to **“break down the house, its stones, its timber, and all the plaster of the house, and carry them outside the city to an unclean place.”** That’s the lake of fire, unless I miss my guess.

But at least this time, not the entire world will rebel. **“But if the priest comes in and examines it, and indeed the plague has not spread in the house after the house was plastered, then the priest shall pronounce the house clean, because the plague is healed. And he shall take, to cleanse the house, two birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop. Then he shall kill one of the birds in an earthen vessel over running water; and he shall take the cedar wood, the hyssop, the scarlet, and the living bird, and dip them in the blood of the slain bird and in the running water, and sprinkle the house seven times. And he shall cleanse the house with the blood**

of the bird and the running water and the living bird, with the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the scarlet. Then he shall let the living bird loose outside the city in the open field, and make atonement for the house, and it shall be clean.” (Leviticus 14:45-53) Those Millennial mortals who do not rebel will still need healing, cleansing, and atonement for their sins and trespasses, just as we do today. They, like us, must be cleansed of the world’s filth before they can assume their transformed immortal bodies—bodies that will endure in Yahshua’s presence for eternity. We mortals all become defiled just by walking through the earth—the “leprous house” in the present scriptural metaphor. The prescription for “pronouncing the house clean” is a reprise of passage we discussed in detail under Mitzvah #578, so I won’t go over it again here.

- (650) *Eating a clean animal that died naturally defiles a person.* **“Every person who eats what died naturally or what was torn by beasts, whether he is a native of your own country or a stranger, he shall both wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. Then he shall be clean. But if he does not wash them or bathe his body, then he shall bear his guilt.”** (Leviticus 17:15-16) In our chapter on the Mosaic dietary laws, we covered these contingencies from the point of view of Exodus 22:30 (Mitzvah #155) and Deuteronomy 14:21 (#156). Those passages, however, did not enumerate the remedy for having run afoul of the Torah in this respect; here in Leviticus, we see what must be done. It’s interesting that the cure for this offense is the same sort of cleansing we’d expect to see in the case of ritual defilement (as when a dead body had been touched)—in contrast to being a sin for which atonement had to be made.

On a purely practical level, once a person has eaten meat that died under questionable circumstances (from a microbiological point of view), the damage has been done—the microbes, if any, are already inside his body, and they’ll either make him sick or not. When the child of Yahweh realizes he has made such a mistake, he is to demonstrate his faith in the healing/cleansing power of his God by washing his clothes and bathing in water. It is axiomatic that neither of these things will in themselves affect his health in the slightest. Rather, they are in essence a prayer to Yahweh to undo the potential damage that has been done by eating possibly tainted meat. The man who refuses to perform these simple rituals, however, will “bear his guilt.” That is, he can expect to receive no special healing touch or protection from Yahweh, for he has demonstrated his lack of trust by his disobedience.

On the spiritual level, we are reminded of other lessons. The death of the clean animal is of no use to us unless it was *purposefully* slaughtered

for our sustenance and nourishment. Death in general does us no good at all, but Yahshua's death on Calvary's pole was purposefully orchestrated so that we might live. But remember: even the intentional death of the "Clean One" will do us no good if we do not "eat His flesh," that is, derive spiritual sustenance from it by assimilating His life into our own.

- (651) *Contact with death defiles a person. "This is the law when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who are in the tent shall be unclean seven days; and every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, is unclean. Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days."* (Numbers 19:14-16) This bit of Torah fell between the cracks in Volume I. It fits between Mitzvot #575 and #576. The context is the so-called "Law of the Red Heifer," which describes the cleansing process for one who has touched a dead body—or more to the point, has been metaphorically "touched by death" merely by living out his mortal existence. The first symbol introduced here is the "tent." We (or is it just me?) are immediately reminded of the seventh and final *miqra* of Yahweh, *Succoth*—the Feast of Tabernacles—in which God promises to "camp out" with men. This appointment was prefigured in the first-century life (and purposeful death) of the Messiah, and will be culminated in His soon-to-be-fulfilled thousand-year reign as King of Kings. We who know this earth is not our permanent home also camp out here, adopting a pilgrim mentality as we dwell within our tents—symbolic of both the world in which we sojourn and our mortal bodies. All of us dwell in "tents" defiled by death—we are all unclean "for seven days," that is, for the duration of our mortal lives. It is only through being sprinkled with the waters of purification provided through the sacrifice of the Messiah (see Mitzvot #574-#576) that we can be made clean.

And what of the "vessels" spoken of in our text? These too speak of our mortal bodies. The point here is that they are deemed defiled or not depending upon whether they are "covered." This is a variation on the theme of the garment of righteousness we must wear if we wish to stand in the presence of a Holy God—a covering that, once again, must be provided by Yahshua or not at all.

And the bones and bodies found slain in the open field? Their presence defiles the land, so they must be disposed of—but at the cost of our own temporary defilement as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. We are reminded of the coming Battle of Magog (Ezekiel 38-39) in which the corpses of the slain Muslim hordes will litter the Israeli landscape. Ezekiel 39:11-16 states that the dead will be so numerous it

will take the Israelis seven months to bury them. Yahweh is saying that the existence of death within Israel (in this case, personified by the armies of Islam) will cause their complete defilement, but in the end, the Land—and its people—will be cleansed.

NOT QUITE READY FOR PRIME TIME

- (652) *Don't enlist soldiers whose circumstances will distract them from the battle. "Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying: 'What man is there who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it.'"* (Deuteronomy 20:5) According to the world's wisdom, this kind of thinking is crazy. Our first instinct is to push hard with everything we've got to achieve our goals—or the goals we imagine our God to be pursuing. We feel an obligation to fight God's battles with valor and enthusiasm (feigned if necessary), seldom stopping to listen to His instructions, whispered to us in a still, small voice: "Trust Me." The principle that Yahweh's strength is made complete in our weakness is so counterintuitive, we all too often "go to battle" with divided loyalties, three steps ahead of our orders, naked and disarmed.

It's not just the "house-dedication" thing, either. There are any number of things that can distract us from whole-hearted service to the God we honor. How strangely comforting it is when we realize that Yahweh understands our human condition, the things of this world that hold our attention, even our natural fears and doubts. **"Also what man is there who has planted a vineyard and has not eaten of it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man eat of it. And what man is there who is betrothed to a woman and has not married her? [See Mitzvah #71] Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her.' The officers shall speak further to the people, and say, 'What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart.' And so it shall be, when the officers have finished speaking to the people, that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people."** (Deuteronomy 20:6-8) When will we get it through our heads that the battle belongs to Yahweh? He doesn't need our help to fight it. Rather, He allows us the privilege of participation, like a doting father letting his four-year old "drive" the family car up the driveway while sitting on His lap. Whether we realize it or not, He never really takes His hands off the wheel.

A Holy God—A Holy People

The relationship that should exist between God and man is laid between every line of the Torah. Maimonides—who approached the Law as a list of rules to be followed or an obstacle course to be run—didn't really comprehend this, I'm afraid. It can be a paradigm-bending epiphany when we finally realize that Yahweh doesn't want to be our opponent in the game of life, but rather our Father, the source of life—on every level. When He instructs us, it's not to impose His will upon us but to keep us out of harm's way, called out from the world and set apart for His pleasure. Knowing God by name, operating under His power, representing Him before the world, and following His directions in faith are all outgrowths of this epiphany.

SETTING GOD'S PEOPLE APART FROM THE WORLD

(653) *Don't fear God.* **"After these things the word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.'"** (Genesis 15:1) Sorry about that provocative topic summary: I couldn't help myself. While being told hundreds of times in scripture we are to "fear God," (See Mitzvah #8) here is a verse that clarifies the issue. The same Hebrew word that is employed here, *pare*, is used in the majority of "fear God" passages. So we would be wise to consider its range of meanings. *Pare* means "to fear, revere, be afraid; to stand in awe of, be awed; to reverence, honor, respect; to be fearful, be dreadful, be feared; to cause astonishment and awe, be held in awe; to inspire reverence or godly fear; or to make afraid, terrify." (*Strong's*) The *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* defines it: "be afraid, be frightened, i.e., be in a state of feeling great distress, and deep concern of pain or unfavorable circumstance; revere, venerate, i.e., show profound respect for one, that borders on fear of the object; be awesome, dreadful; respect, revere, i.e., show high status and honor to one in authority even bordering on fear, without necessarily worshiping as deity."

The bottom line, in the simplest of terms, is that while we are to revere, honor, respect, and even stand in awe of Yahweh, He does not want us to be afraid of Him, cringing like a whipped dog in His presence. Such obsequious obeisance is no fun—for us *or* for Him. I've used this illustration before, but it bears repeating: the relationship Yahweh wishes

to share with us is like that of a loving father with his small child. Papa is big and strong. He takes care of us, defends us, and teaches us. Even if we kids don't fully understand how he does it, he makes sure there's always food to eat and a roof over our heads. We wouldn't hesitate to jump off the jungle gym into his arms if he called to us, for we know his love, and we trust beyond reason that he is able to keep us from falling. In short, Papa is **"our shield, our exceedingly great reward."** Therefore we respect Him with a whole heart. The only reason we'd ever have to be afraid of Him is our recognition that we've disobeyed Him, but even then, He stands ready to forgive us, if only we'll ask.

- (654) *Remain under God's protection even in times of stress.* **"Now the Angel of Yahweh found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. And He said, 'Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?' She said, 'I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai.' The Angel of Yahweh said to her, 'Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand.' Then the Angel of Yahweh said to her, 'I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude.'"**

(Genesis 16:7-10) Nobody's guiltless in this scene (except for the Angel of Yahweh, of course). First, Sarai gets impatient waiting for the child of promise to appear; so she suggests a manmade alternative to God's revealed plan. Then Abram listens to the bad advice of his wife and sleeps with Hagar. (Anybody remember the lesson of Eden? See Precept #617.) Hagar parlays pregnancy into pride, making everybody's life miserable and bringing out the worst in Sarai. Then Abram wimps out on his leadership responsibilities. Sarai pushes Hagar to the breaking point. Hagar bolts. Abram shrugs. Sarai steams. And God's thinkin' (if I may read between the lines), "If this keeps up, these two will *never* have a kid."

The solution? Everybody needs to go back and remember what they were supposed to be doing in the first place. Hagar needs to humble herself and return to Sarai's service. Sarai needs to stop scheming and learn to wait upon Yahweh. And Abram needs to be responsible for the leadership of his family. He's eighty-five years old, for cryin' out loud; it's time to grow up. This entire domestic tempest can be traced back to one bad idea. But bad ideas are ubiquitous in our world, and their consequences plague all of us. What are we to do when evil surrounds us on every side and there seems to be no way out? Run from reality? No. Though we are to flee from spiritual falsehood—"Babylon," in the scriptural metaphor—we are not to allow temporal adversity to drive us from the place of Yahweh's protection. It's suicidal. We are, rather, to humble ourselves, look to Yahweh instead of man for answers, and remain in (or return to) the place of His provision.

(655) *Restore the Prophet's wife.* **"And God said to [Abimelech] in a dream, 'Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.'"**
 (Genesis 20:6-7) We tend to read these Bible stories as separate, unrelated incidents, so we often miss the significance of the larger context. The "Abimelech" episode is sandwiched between the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the birth of Isaac. If you'll recall, Abram (now called Abraham) had been visited by three angelic messengers (one of whom was apparently a theophany), with whom he bargained for the safety of his nephew, Lot. At that time, it was announced to Abraham that during the next year, his wife Sarah would bear a child—the son of promise who would carry on Abraham's line, through which the Messiah would come. Upon seeing all that smoke on the horizon in the direction of Sodom, Abe prudently packed up and headed south for a while, visiting, among other places, the city of Gerar, where Abimelech was king. And Satan saw a golden opportunity to make God a liar—cutting off the line of the Messiah before it even began.

Years before this, Abram had sojourned in Egypt, and at that time he had suggested that Sarai, a very beautiful woman, tell a half truth about her relationship with Abe—that she was his sister. That was true enough (same father, different mothers), but Abe figured that if they knew he was *also* her husband, they'd kill him to get to her. Now, in late middle age (Sarah was ninety, which is perhaps equivalent to fifty of fifty-five with today's shortened life expectancies) she was still good looking, and Abraham used the same paranoid prevarication to protect himself: "She's my sister." And—big surprise—the same thing happened in Gerar that had happened in Egypt: the king noticed her beauty and promptly added her to his harem. If she had been taken to the king's bed, God's promise to Abraham would have been sabotaged, so Yahweh warned Abimelech about Sarah in a dream, giving him the instruction in our text above. Abimelech was obedient, and restored Sarah to her "brother" Abraham. Perhaps absence *does* make the heart grow fonder, for shortly thereafter, Sarah became pregnant with Abraham's child. And Satan, like a black-caped villain in a melodrama, grumbled, "Curses! Foiled again!" Or words to that effect.

There's the background. Now we need to figure out if Yahweh's instructions to Abimelech still apply to us in some way today. I think they do. If I'm right, this is a prophetic dress rehearsal. Abraham plays the part of Yahshua the Messiah: *prophet* (identified as such in the vision), *priest*

(since he was asked to intercede for Abimelech and his people), and *king* (as evidenced by the homage and deference Abimelech showed to him). Sarah plays the role of Yahshua's bride, the called-out assembly of His people, called the *Ekklesia* in Greek—the “Church,” if you're willing to use a term laden with so much errant baggage. And Abimelech and his citizens represent the world and its leaders.

Early in the fourth century, the Roman Emperor Constantine looked at Yahshua's bride and noticed how attractive she was. And as emperors are wont to do, he brought her into his “harem,” a place already populated with the imperial cult, paganism (with more permutations than you can shake a stick at), Greek philosophies, rabbinical Judaism, Zoroastrianism, you name it. Only Yahweh can judge whether Constantine *meant* to usurp Yahshua's role as the Ekklesia's husband, but that was what transpired. And the bride? Not that she had much choice, but the church didn't put up much of a struggle. Did she realize what was going on? Did she comprehend that she was being seduced, or worse, raped? Sadly, the very first assembly in Revelation's prophetic mailing list to the seven Asian congregations was chastised for having “left her first love.”

Remember, the warning instruction is to the “king,” the one in charge. In every generation and every culture, every person who possesses some degree of temporal power crosses the same bridge: Yahweh says, “You're a dead man if you take the woman for yourself, if you don't restore my prophet's bride to him—*without touching her*.” And I'd resist the temptation to apply this only to governments. Popes, priests, and pastors, those directly involved in the leadership of “the Church” must become cognizant of their own guilt or innocence in the matter of her well being: has she been restored to her Messiah under your leadership, or has she been used for your own pleasure and profit? You've made mistakes; we all have. But can God truthfully say of you, “**I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart**”? Think carefully before you answer.

- (656) *Abandon man's plan while embracing God's. “But God said to Abraham, “Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called.”* (Genesis 21:12) Fast forward a few years. Isaac, the child of promise, has been born, and he's now old enough to be weaned. Sarah has come to terms with her disastrous plan to use Hagar as her surrogate. Ishmael, Hagar's son, is a teenager, proudly aware that he is in fact Abraham's first-born—and that the old man dotes on him. So when Pop throws a big party for little Isaac, Ishmael can barely contain his contempt for the toddler. Genesis 21:9 reports that Ishmael “scoffed” at

his half-brother, but we get a clearer picture in Galatians 4:29, where Paul uses the Greek word *dioko* to describe what happened. It means: to persecute, to cause to flee, to pursue in a hostile manner, to harass, trouble, or molest. Ishmael, in short, was mistreating the little guy, bullying him. And Sarah—fully aware that her folly had come full circle—knew it was time to separate the child of slavery from the child of promise: Hagar and Ishmael had to go.

The problem was that Abraham had grown quite fond of both Ishmael and his mom, and was reluctant to take such a drastic step. It took a memo from Yahweh to make him see the light. The lesson for us is that we, like Abraham, must be willing to abandon our own flawed plans and solutions—no matter how good they feel, how well they seem to be working, or how long we’ve been pursuing them—in the light of Yahweh’s provision and revelation. A building contractor must get the foundation signed off before he’s allowed to complete the house. The same rule should apply to our spiritual lives.

(657) *Return to the Land of Promise.* **“Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, ‘Jacob.’ And I said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, ‘Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks are streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.’”** (Genesis 31:11-13) We all take the occasional detour in our lives, sometimes on our own volition, and sometimes because God ordains it in order to teach us something. But every believer eventually needs to go back to the “Land of Promise,” the center of Yahweh’s will for our lives. Note three facts here: (1) No matter where we are, God is fully aware of our situation and is capable of amending it. (2) Yahweh gives us reminders of Who He is, what He’s done for us, and the relationship we share. And (3) the circumstances and timing of our return are at Yahweh’s discretion, not ours.

The process of “returning to the Land of Promise” is akin to repentance, but there are differences. Return is a physical act; repentance is a spiritual attitude. Returning requires God’s direction, permission, and enabling; repentance can (and should) be done *by us* any time we’ve fallen out of fellowship with our Creator—the sooner the better. Returning entails obedience; repentance requires choice. Return involves our walk through the world; repentance is concerned with our walk with God. Jacob was not free to return to the Land on his own schedule any more than the Israelites could have left slavery in Egypt or walked out of their captivity

in Babylon whenever they felt like it. The timetable, as I said, is strictly in Yahweh's hands.

The subject comes up again a few chapters later: **"Then God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother.' And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.'"** (Genesis 35:1-3) Jacob's response to Yahweh's call was precisely correct. *Before* he returned to Bethel (which means "the house of God"), he instructed his household to repent, separate themselves from the world's false doctrines, and "clean up their act"—live in purity before Yahweh. The changing of garments foreshadows the marriage supper of the Lamb, where the pure and spotless "bride" (that's us!) is seen wearing garments of **"fine linen, clean and bright—the righteous acts of the saints."** (Revelation 19:8)

All of this leads me to one inescapable conclusion: the ultimate "return to the Land of Promise" for today's believers will be the rapture of the church. What did Jacob say? **"Let us arise and go up to the House of God!"** The conditions characteristic of the rapture and its approach are identical to the three points I made above concerning Jacob's return to Bethel.

- (658) *Trust Yahweh's detour signs.* **"So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. Then God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, 'Jacob, Jacob!' And he said, 'Here I am.' So He said, 'I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes.'"** (Genesis 46:1-3) Jacob's travels are again being pressed into service to illustrate Yahweh's instructions to us. In the previous Precept, we saw Jacob's obedience in "returning to the Land of Promise." Here, many years later, Yahweh is telling him to take another detour—one that will take his people *430 years* off the main road. This begs the questions: was he not already where God had told him to go? Was Beersheba not in the Land of Promise? Was Yahweh not capable of staving off the famine in the land of Canaan? No, all these things were perfectly true. So why did He tell Jacob/Israel to go to Egypt?

It's because Yahweh was in the process of calling out of the world a holy nation—a people set apart for His name and His glory, a people through whom the entire human race would witness the power and love of God—in dramatic and unmistakable fashion. That much is abundantly

clear in our scriptures. What may not be so clear is that Yahweh uses the same process with us when He's calling us out for His purposes. (The reason it's not quite as clear these days is that we are all too often deaf and blind to His leading: we don't see where the journey was supposed to lead because we never take the first step.) My own life demonstrates the principle, and many believers could cite similar detours that all seem to lead in the same direction.

Like Jacob, I worked for Laban (if you know what I mean) for sixteen years, meanwhile serving Yahweh in whatever small way I could. I then left, under similarly strained circumstances, to work in the Promised Land (running my own small business) for nine more. After seven years of plenty, God sent a famine, so to speak, and with it a detour sign and a promise to take care of my family. But my detour, like Jacob's, ended up looking like an utter disaster in the world's eyes: three years after moving 3,000 miles from my home, the spectacularly successful dot-com I'd helped invent was toes-up, the laughing stock of the commercial world. Was God wrong to lead me here? No. I was right where He wanted me. At fifty-four, I found myself forcibly retired, unemployable, blessed with just enough money to live comfortably (if I was frugal), and burning with a desire to study God's Word as I had never had the opportunity to do before. The result is the book you're now reading, and several that preceded it. If you'd like to read about the fascinating but ill-fated roller coaster ride I experienced, check out *In the Company of Good and Evil*, co-authored with Craig Winn (www.InTheCompanyOfGoodAndEvil.com). It's a fascinating, horrifying tale of corporate seduction and betrayal.

RELEASING GOD'S PEOPLE FROM BONDAGE

- (659) *Investigate the Light with reverence.* **"Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.' So when Yahweh saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then He said, 'Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.' Moreover He said, 'I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God."** (Exodus 3:1-6) As far as we know, this is only the second time in history Yahweh had ever manifested

Himself before men in a form other than as a human. The first was when God spoke to Job (probably a near contemporary of Abraham) “out of the whirlwind.” But other than this, we are told of no other early face-to-face encounters between man and God in which Yahweh manifested Himself as something other than a man—until the *Shekinah* manifestations of the exodus era. We are told that Adam, Enoch, and Noah all “walked with God,” and that **“God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him.”** (Genesis 10:8) Abraham received Yahweh as a house guest in Genesis 18, accompanied by two angels, but all three figures are introduced to us as “men.” God spoke to Abimelech and Jacob in dreams. Audible instructions were given to Abraham, Hagar, and Isaac by an Entity enigmatically identified as “the Angel (Hebrew: *malak*—a messenger, representative, or envoy) of Yahweh.” And Jacob wrestled with a “man” who turned out to be God (compare Genesis 32:28 with 35:10). Theologians refer to these appearances of God to mankind as “theophanies.” (See *The Torah Code*, Volume 1, Chapter 2 for an in-depth study).

It’s patently obvious why Yahweh uses theophanies when He wishes to manifest Himself to us visually or audibly. If He allowed His full glory to shine through, we’d survive the encounter about as long as a daisy in a nuclear holocaust. God must “dial down” His glory if He wants us to live to tell the tale. That’s the whole point of manifesting Himself as a human being: *He wants us to live*. When Yahweh delivered the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai (a.k.a. Horeb), the folks down below were so terrified by the “thunderings, lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking,” He promised instead to appear to them in a form with whom they could relate without being frightened to death: **“Yahweh your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me [Moses] from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of Yahweh your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of Yahweh my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’”** (Deuteronomy 18:15-16) That “Prophet” would turn out to be the Messiah, Yahshua.

It is no coincidence that Moses’ first encounter with Yahweh had happened at the very same place, Mount Horeb (located in Midian, in today’s northwestern Saudi Arabia). At that time, God manifested Himself as a burning bush—something calculated to draw Moses’ attention, attracting him, intriguing him. Moses investigated the light, and when it became apparent that Yahweh, the God of Creation, was speaking to him through it, he showed appropriate reverence. Men are still attracted to and intrigued by the light of God. Whether they approach Him in reverence or in foolhardy arrogance (or ignore Him altogether) is a matter of personal choice and eternal consequence.

(660) *Relate to God by using His name.* “Then Moses said to God, ‘Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you,” and they say to me, “What is His name?” what shall I say to them?’ And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you.”’” (Exodus 3:13-14) It was not an accidental oversight on Maimonides’ part when he neglected to include this most basic of tenets in his compendium of 613 Mitzvot. He skipped this one on purpose, for it is not in the temporal interest of the rabbis to allow their people to be on a first-name basis with God. So they call Him *Elohim* (denoting deity in a generic sense) or “*Ha Shem*” (which means, “the Name”), or *Adonay*, the Hebrew word for “Lord.” The “Name” itself, however, is considered by the rabbis to be ineffable, unutterable, inexpressible. And that’s just plain weird: Yahweh saw to it that His Name was inscribed in the Tanach 7,000 times (6,868 of which survived scribal tampering, plus 132 instances where textual scholars have determined that YHWH has been *replaced* with ’DN—rendered *adonay*, or lord). If someone tells you their name 7,000 times, you can bet that they want you to know it, remember it, and use it to relate to them. They *don’t* want you to consider it “ineffable.”

Although Hebrew names invariably have meaning and significance, proper names should not be translated, but rather transmitted (and failing that, transliterated) into other languages. True to this principle, the translators here have rendered Yahweh’s words here as *explanations* of what His name means, though they’re not the Name itself. (*That* is something they’ll handle—and botch—in the next verse.) “I AM” is the Hebrew *’ehayah*, derived from the verb *hayah*, meaning to be, to exist. “I AM WHO I AM” is the Hebrew phrase *’ehayah ’asher ’ehayah*. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, this is probably more correctly rendered “I am He who is,” or “I am He who exists.” Being self-existent is an attribute God shares with no one. It is this element of His nature that above all makes Him holy—set apart from His creation.

God’s actual name was given to Moses in the next verse: “Moreover God said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: “Yahweh, God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.”’” This is where it becomes obvious that rendering YHWH (Yahweh) as “The Lord” (as in most English translations) is a colossal blunder, for God then said, “This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.” (Exodus 3:15) “The Lord” is not a name but a title, nor does it have any linguistic link to the “tetragrammaton,” YHWH (יהוה), that appears in the text. It’s a mistake, a lie, a *fraud* perpetrated upon generations of honest searchers in an attempt to obscure God’s name and

character. His “memorial to all generations” is *not* that He is Lord (though our desire to obey His precepts does in fact make Him our lord); rather, His “memorial” is that He is *self-existent*. He is the Source, the Creator, the One from which all things material and immaterial in earth and heaven are derived—a concept infinitely more majestic.

Unfortunately, there isn’t much scholarly consensus as to how God’s name is pronounced. I’ve been writing it “Yahweh” because that is the most commonly recognized form, but most agree that it should be pronounced with three syllables—stretching out the W as a vowel sound: “Yah-oo-weh.” The vowels, however, are also a source of controversy: it could be “Yahuwah” or “Yahoweh.” The ASV’s rendition “Jehovah” might be close *if* you pronounce the J as a Y and the V as a W—both shifts being endemic in the northern European languages from which modern English was derived: “Yehowah.” We need to remember that the letter “J” is a very late innovation—it didn’t even show up in the “Authorized” or King James Version of the Bible until the 1629 edition. “J” was unpronounceable in both Hebrew and Koine Greek. If you think about it, this fact would make the name *Jesus* “ineffable” in the original Biblical languages.

Jesus’ actual name, Yahshua (or Yahowsha’, Yahusha, Yahuwshuwa’, Yahushua, Yəhowsu’a, Yāhowshuwa`, Yāhowshu`a, Yᵉhowshu’a, Yehoshua, Yēhōšūā’, Yeshua, Yahoshua, Yeshuwa’, or Y’shua), contains the contraction of Yahweh found in so many Hebrew names: “Yah.” (It’s a component of Joshua, Elijah, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Obadiah, Zephaniah, and Zechariah, for instance.) Yahshua means “Yah is salvation.” And in an astounding confirmation that Yahshua *is* Yahweh, we read the words of the risen Christ in Revelation 1:8: **“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord** [Greek: *kurios*, a placeholder for Yahweh, a name that can’t be transmitted accurately in Koine Greek], **“who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”** Past, present, and future, the First and the Last: Yahshua has just described Himself as “I am He who exists.” Sound familiar?

At any rate, the name by which Moses was told to represent the true and living God to the world—both to Israel and Egypt—was Yahweh. **“Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, ‘Yahweh, God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me’... Then they will heed your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt; and you shall say to him, ‘Yahweh God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to Yahweh our God.’”** (Exodus 3:16-18) Nothing has changed in that respect:

we are still to relate to God—and represent Him before the world—using the name He has revealed to us: Yahweh.

- (661) *Know the name of Yahweh.* “And God spoke to Moses and said to him: ‘I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty [Hebrew: *El Shadday*], but by My name Yahweh I was not known to them. I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Therefore say to the children of Israel: “I am Yahweh; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.”’” (Exodus 6:2-6) I find it fascinating that Yahweh did not reveal His name until He purposed to release His covenant people from bondage in the world. If this (and virtually every other) translation is correct, not even Abraham, the one to whom the covenant was delivered, knew Yahweh’s name, although he most certainly acknowledged His deity. (It is possible, however, that the phrase “I was not known to them” should be rendered as a rhetorical question: “Was I not known to them?”.) Jacob, after his all-night wrestling match, even asked God what his name was, and got stonewalled: “Why is it that you ask about my name?” (Genesis 32:29) It is only when we find ourselves in bondage—to the world, to sin, and to our own fallen natures—that knowing God’s self-revealed *shem*, His name, character, and reputation, becomes of critical importance to us.

Once we have come to realize that we are in bondage, however, the significance of the name of Yahweh never diminishes. From this point on, we see the formula “I am Yahweh” punctuating the text of the Torah, incessantly reminding us that our Deliverer is the self-existent Creator, that He is holy—set apart from the worlds He has made—and that we are therefore to be set apart from the world as well. In reality, this setting apart, this calling out, is the essence of His promise, “I will rescue you from...bondage.”

- (662) *Use whatever tools Yahweh provides.* “Then Moses answered and said, ‘But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, ‘Yahweh has not appeared to you.’” So Yahweh said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ He said, ‘A rod.’ And He said, ‘Cast it on the ground.’ So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Reach out your hand and take it by the tail’ (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), ‘that they may believe that Yahweh God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.’” (Exodus 4:1-5) I’m not suggesting that Yahweh is poised

to invest the ordinary appurtenances of our lives with miraculous powers, as He did with Moses. But God used what Moses had handy for His own glory and purpose. Moses had only to make it available for Yahweh's use: what had once been a shepherd's rod was transformed into a tool perfectly suited for the job Yahweh had assigned to him. This, I believe, is a universal principle: God will condescend to use only those things in our lives that we surrender to Him in trusting reliance. He respects our choices: the things we reserve for ourselves will be left untouched and unused by God. That should be a sobering thought.

This principle applies not only to things, objects, but also to our own bodies: Yahweh will employ as tools only what we make available for His glory. **"Furthermore Yahweh said to him, 'Now put your hand in your bosom.' And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow. And He said, 'Put your hand in your bosom again.' So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his other flesh. 'Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign...."** If Moses had not trusted Yahweh completely, he never would have performed this sign before Pharaoh. *What if it stays leprous this time? No way! I won't risk it.*

"And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour it on the dry land. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry land." (Exodus 4:6-9) Even an ordinary glass of water can be a powerful tool if surrendered to the will of Yahweh.

- (663) *Respect God's schedule.* **"Now Yahweh said to Moses in Midian, 'Go, return to Egypt; for all the men who sought your life are dead.'"** (Exodus 4:19) We tend to forget that God spent *eighty years* preparing Moses for the job He had in mind—forty getting an education in the courts of Pharaoh, and another forty in the desert of Midian tending somebody else's sheep. Yahweh calls us to do the tasks He's ordained on *His* schedule, not ours. And as I pointed out before, He reserves the right to be "inefficient" with His use of our time, preparing and training us for years, sometimes, to serve for what seems like only a few moments. But those few moments, if played out on His schedule, can have far-reaching repercussions. I am reminded of the 1956 mission endeavor of Nate Saint, Jim Elliot, and company, who, after training for years in preparation for bringing God's light to the Auca Indians of Ecuador, were murdered by the very people they had tried to reach—only three months after making their initial contact. The world

would call that a dismal failure, but they were precisely on God's schedule. Because of the incident, the entire tribe eventually came to faith.

Another example from my own life: I have had a burning desire to get a handle on God's prophetic message for the last thirty-plus years. But having a family to provide for, I never had the time to explore the subject as deeply as I wished to, having to content myself with reading scripture and other people's opinions about it. But in 2000, after having been prepared professionally for many years to analyze a subject and communicate its core message, I found myself forcibly retired. The final piece of the puzzle fell into place on September 11, 2001. Without the Twin Towers disaster, I never would have fully appreciated Islam's pernicious role in the Last Days—though it's all over the place in prophetic scripture. I was finally ready to write the book Yahweh had been putting on my heart for decades: *Future History—a Comprehensive Guide to Biblical Prophecy*, linked free from this website.

- (664) *Work miracles and issue personal warnings at Yahweh's discretion. "And Yahweh said to Moses, 'When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says Yahweh: Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn."'"* (Exodus 4:21-23) *I'm going to kill your firstborn son?* That's a really stupid thing to say to a king if you're working in your own strength or upon your own volition. But if Yahweh is calling the shots, then telling the unvarnished truth—warning the world of the coming disaster—is the only logical or merciful thing one can do. As we have seen, Yahweh had given Moses a small repertoire of miraculous signs with which to validate his initial message to Pharaoh. All three signs declared, "Yahweh says, 'Life and death—the power to bless or kill—are in My hand.'" Only after Pharaoh refused to acknowledge the sovereignty of Yahweh would the final deadly sign be brought to bear. Some things never change.

The point is that Moses was working in the power of Yahweh, not the power of the world. His job was not to address injustice or free slaves—it was to implement Yahweh's plan. So human methods that could have been employed were not. The house of Israel numbered about 600,000 able bodied men at this time, plus women and children; they probably totaled around two million souls. Pharaoh's army was vastly outnumbered. But Moses didn't arm and train his people for battle; he didn't call for wildcat strikes and civil disobedience. Nor did he reason with Pharaoh, negotiate with him, lobby him, threaten him, plot against him, or form

alliances with his enemies. Moses merely passed along Yahweh's demands and communicated the penalty for noncompliance—ten times in a row, raising the stakes with each round.

The time would come when Israel would be allowed to participate in the battle of life. But their deliverance—the thing that made life worth fighting for—was God's affair alone. The miracles and wonders that Moses "worked" were not his idea, nor were they done in his power, and he knew it. He was merely the messenger. People are still being held in bondage in this world. They still labor under the lash of cruel taskmasters. And they are still powerless to effect their own release. Freeing them will take a miracle. Can we help? Yes, but only as Yahweh empowers us. "Onward Christian Soldiers" is a dangerous myth. We need to be singing "Onward Christian Servants."

- (665) *Tell the world that Yahweh demands the release of His people. "I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am Yahweh your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am Yahweh." So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel; but they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage. And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the children of Israel go out of his land.' And Moses spoke before Yahweh, saying, 'The children of Israel have not heeded me. How then shall Pharaoh heed me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?' Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them a command for the children of Israel and for Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt." (Exodus 6:7-13)* In our natural state, we are so oppressed by our "anguish of spirit and cruel bondage," we can't even imagine being set free—much less achieve our liberty through our own efforts. Nor is the world willing to free us from our chains—we are far too valuable as slaves to the system, "bearing the burdens of the Egyptians." Even our most visionary leaders are impotent to effect our freedom, stopped cold by our inertia and the world's agenda. Only Yahweh can help us, redeem us, buy our release—and He has.

Blood has been spilled on our account: the price of freedom has been paid. Now the choice of whether to leave our chains behind is up to us. Will lethargy, habit and tradition, misplaced loyalty, or the blandishments of a life of slavery in Egypt—the leeks and onions of our existence—prevent us from receiving our liberty? Yahweh has demanded our release. In the not-too-distant future, the world will be forced to comply. The question remains, will we whose fetters Yahweh has broken choose to linger in Egypt, or will we follow God to the Promised Land?

(666) *Speak that which Yahweh commands, but don't expect the world to like it.* **"So Yahweh said to Moses: 'See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you. And Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of his land. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.' Then Moses and Aaron did so; just as Yahweh commanded them, so they did."** (Exodus 7:1-6) *Oh, swell*, Moses must have thought. It's one thing to deliver God's message with some hope or expectation of its acceptance. But Yahweh flatly told Moses that His words would *not* be heeded, and that He would "harden Pharaoh's heart" because of his rebellious pride. This is where the concept of "I am Yahweh" becomes so vitally important. Yahweh wasn't "trying to free His people" or "negotiating a settlement with Pharaoh." He is self-existent, omniscient, and omnipresent in time. In His purview, the whole story was a *fait accompli*. It had already happened. The whole ten-plagues thing was to be a sign for the spiritual benefit of the children of Israel, not a ploy to achieve some temporal short-term objective. It would tell them in no uncertain terms that Yahweh effortlessly held ascendancy over the most powerful human government of their day, over the "gods" of the Egyptians, and over the very forces of nature itself. The process would supply evidence of Yahweh's character for all who were willing to look. **"Now Yahweh said to Moses, 'Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son's son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am Yahweh.'"** (Exodus 10:1-2)

Yahweh, of course, has the power to do things "the easy way," to provide instant, comprehensive solutions to our problems. But He almost never does this. Why? Does He derive some perverse pleasure out of making everything difficult? No, the answer is wrapped up in His love for us, and in His primary gift, that of free will. If God made the temporal circumstances of every believer safe, prosperous, fulfilling, and painless, while making those of the world dangerous, ugly, pointless, and brutish, what would happen? People would be coming to Him for all the wrong reasons—choosing not to reciprocate His love but merely to enhance their standard of living. He would, in effect, be *curtailing* their freedom of choice. (Remember, the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden looked as

tasty as any, and it wasn't hedged about by thorns or other impediments to procurement or enjoyment. The whole point was free will.) So Yahweh didn't deliver Israel the easy way (by squashing Pharaoh and his army like bugs), or the *really* easy way (by simply preventing the famine from touching Canaan in the days of Joseph in the first place). Rather, He allowed His people to endure hardship for a season in order to teach them (and ultimately, us) what it really meant to be released from bondage—how difficult, painful, and costly it is.

The world, then and now, doesn't want to hear it. Yahweh is fully aware of this. But we are to tell the truth anyway, popular or not; we are to reiterate God's command to set His people free, even though we suspect the world won't listen, nor will it heed God's warning.

- (667) *Demand spiritual freedom for the people of Yahweh.* “And Yahweh spoke to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh and say to him, “Thus says Yahweh: Let My people go, that they may serve Me.”’” (Exodus 8:1) “Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Go in to Pharaoh and tell him, “Thus says Yahweh, God of the Hebrews: Let My people go, that they may serve Me.”’” (Exodus 9:1) “So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, ‘Thus says Yahweh, God of the Hebrews: “How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me.”’” (Exodus 10:3) Note a few salient facts: first, Yahweh wasn't reluctant to issue His demands over and over again. After each plague, He gave Pharaoh a chance to repent and humble himself before the God of gods, and each time, the king refused (though his resolve was clearly shaken a couple of times).

Second, Yahweh demanded freedom only for *His* people, not the whole Egyptian populace. Nor did He demand to be worshipped by the Egyptians: He respected their prerogative to choose their own gods, poorly or not. He was introduced merely as “the God of the Hebrews.” I find it encouraging that when the Israelites finally left, they didn't leave alone: quite a few Egyptians, having witnessed the power of Yahweh on the Israelites' behalf, decided to join them and their God in their departure from the only world they knew, and they were welcomed. This “mixed multitude” became absorbed into the cultural fabric of Israel, worshipping their newly rediscovered God and joyfully accepting their new Laws.

Third, the reason given for the departure of Israel was that they might “serve Yahweh.” Pharaoh, in his pride, choked on the idea of his slaves “serving” anyone but him. So we see the pointed rebuke in Exodus 10:3, “How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?” Good question, one Pharaoh might have sarcastically answered, “Until You dry up the Red Sea,” meaning “never,” or so he thought.

(668) *Don't take the "safe" route when Yahweh leads elsewhere.* **"Now Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, "They are bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in." Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am Yahweh.' And they did so."** (Exodus 14:1-4) The popular fiction that the Israelites crossed nothing more formidable than a shallow marsh called the "Reed Sea" is destroyed by the text. Yahweh had Moses lead them down a wadi snaking southeast through the rugged and mountainous eastern Sinai Peninsula that empties out onto a large beach—the alluvial fan of this seasonal river emptying into the Gulf of Aqaba at about the 29th parallel. The beach, easily big enough to accommodate two or three million Israelites and their flocks, is located at the present seaside city of Nuweiba. "*Pi Hahiroth*" describes the egress point: it literally means "mouth of the cave," reflecting the high canyon walls that hem in the wadi. *Migdol* means "tower," referring to an Egyptian fortification, the ancient remains of which lie to the north of the beach, blocking the Israelites' escape in that direction. South of the beach, the mountains reach down to the shoreline, making passage impossible. So basically, the Israelites at this point were stuck between the devil (or at least the Pharaoh) and the deep blue sea. *Baal Zephron*, a Midianite fortress Moses knew well (having tended sheep on the east side of the Gulf of Aqaba for forty years) lay directly across the gulf from the beach—you could see it on a clear day, since the Gulf of Aqaba is only about ten miles wide at this point.

Yahweh, it seemed, had led them into a trap. Short of a miracle, no escape was possible. That's why I just *love* Yahweh's response: **"And Yahweh said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward.'" Oh, and I guess we'd better do something about all that water. "But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea."** Why didn't Yahweh take them on the "safe route," around the northern tip of the Gulf, the way Moses had gone when traveling back and forth between Egypt and Midian? Because He wanted to show these people that He was not a God who was intimidated by "impossible" situations. The Israelites feared Pharaoh—he was the ruling monarch of the most powerful kingdom on earth. Yahweh needed to show His people who held the *real* reins of power: **"And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh,**

when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.” (Exodus 14:15-18)

We naturally seek the “safe route,” don’t we? We plan, calculate, and scheme in our efforts to escape the world’s problems. We go the long way around if we see obstacles in our way. But Yahweh was taking His people back to Mount Horeb, to the place where He had revealed Himself to Moses, the place where He would soon reveal His instructions to Israel. Yahweh sees no obstacles. Armies and oceans mean nothing to Him. The moral of the story: when approaching the Law of God, one should always take the direct route.

- (669) *Comprehend the difference between faith and presumption.* **“Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen.’ And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it [Hebrew: *nus*—taking flight, driving hastily]. So Yahweh overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.”** (Exodus 14:26-29) The difference between opportunity and temptation lies in who is offering what to whom, and why. Yahweh parted the sea for the fleeing Israelites, and He told Moses to hold out his rod as a sign that this phenomenon was Yahweh’s doing and not merely a freak weather occurrence. Moved by something even more compelling than the terror of Pharaoh’s pursuing armies, Israel proceeded in faithful obedience to God’s word, fully aware that the parting of the waters was not just an oddity of nature, a happy coincidence. The Egyptians, on the other hand, simply presumed it was safe to follow the Israelites across the sea floor—*if they can do it, we can too!* Either they failed to see the hand of God in the obviously miraculous phenomenon, or they were trying to appropriate a gift that had been given to someone else—stealing God’s miracle for themselves, as it were. Either way, their error proved disastrous.

There is a rather obvious object lesson about our salvation here (but it’s not so obvious I won’t bother explaining it). Israel and the mixed multitude fleeing Egypt (a.k.a. the world) were following Yahweh’s direction and were under His protection. Further, they were putting their lives in His hands, knowing intuitively that the laws of gravity and hydrodynamics had only temporarily been suspended—the sea didn’t ordinarily behave like this. However, following Yahweh’s counter-

intuitive instructions didn't require a blind leap of illogical faith, for He had *already* demonstrated His power on their behalf on ten different occasions. Crossing the Red Sea is a picture of our stance as we accept Yahweh's grace toward us. He provides the miracle of atonement, and we—fully realizing that we did nothing to merit or achieve our salvation—move forward in faith, even if we can't fully comprehend the means by which God is providing our deliverance.

But what about the pursuing Egyptians? To all appearances, they did precisely the same thing the Israelites had done. They too were trusting unseen forces they didn't fully understand. They too moved forward, suspending reason and ignoring danger. They were brave, obedient, and loyal soldiers who were just trying to do what they thought was right, doing their duty, obeying their king. Why then was their fate so radically different from that of the Israelites? It's because salvation depends not upon *what we do*, but upon *Whom we trust*. The Egyptians had no relationship with Yahweh. It therefore did them no good at all to follow in the footsteps of Yahweh's people—doing the very same things being done by those who walked before them (or as Paul would later put it, “having a form of godliness, but denying its power”). The difference is that of religion versus relationship, of presumption versus faith, of yielding to temptation versus faithfully obeying Yahweh's instructions, and of seizing a temporal opportunity versus accepting God's eternal gift. “Good works,” symbolized by the Egyptians' foray into the Red Sea, are of no value at all unless they're done in the context of one's relationship with Yahweh.

WINNOWNING WHEAT FROM CHAFF

- (670) *Honor Yahweh even over your own brother.* **“Now when Moses saw that the people were unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies), then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, ‘Whoever is on Yahweh's side—come to me!’ And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. And he said to them, ‘Thus says Yahweh, God of Israel: Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.’ So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. Then Moses said, ‘Consecrate yourselves today to Yahweh, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother.’”** (Exodus 32:25-29) This was Israel's first civil war. A cynic might deduce that it was a move to consolidate power in the hands of the “ruling” Levite tribe (the one from which Moses and Aaron had come), but it was nothing of

the sort. At this point in Israel's history, the tribe of Levi had not yet been set apart for Yahweh's service from the other tribes. (Moses had received instruction concerning the Aaronic priesthood, but he had not yet delivered it to the people—he was on his way down the mountain with God's instructions when this incident—the golden calf debacle—occurred.) The issue, rather, was whether Israel was going to do things as Yahweh directed, or as the world did them. The Levites sided with Yahweh right here at the outset, setting aside the natural ties of blood and culture and slaying the three thousand ringleaders of the golden calf rebellion (but sparing their clueless pawn, Aaron). One wonders if perhaps Levi's faithfulness in this matter led to Yahweh's subsequent assignment of the tribe as honored keepers of the Tabernacle (Numbers 1:47-54).

Loyalty to family and nation are, in themselves, a good thing. But we must never lose sight of the fact that we as believers have a higher duty, a more pressing calling: to honor Yahweh. The essence of our walk is, in fact, an outworking of the spiritual choice we have made—to side either with Yahweh or the world—for we cannot side with both. As Yahshua Himself said, **“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”** (Matthew 10:34-39, cf. Micah 7:6)

- (671) *Prepare something for Yahweh to write upon.* **“And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke. So be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself to Me there on the top of the mountain. And no man shall come up with you, and let no man be seen throughout all the mountain; let neither flocks nor herds feed before that mountain.’”** (Exodus 34:1-3) In his anger at seeing the idolatry of the people with their golden calf, Moses (in Exodus 32:19) lost his temper and threw down the tablets of stone upon which Yahweh had written the Ten Commandments, shattering them to smithereens. (I've heard of breaking the law, but this is ridiculous.) Yahweh didn't chastise Moses for this, however. He merely told him to make two new tablets, upon which Yahweh would write the precepts anew—leaving us an object lesson.

We too are to prepare something upon which Yahweh can engrave His Word—not tablets of stone, but our very hearts, the home of our emotions

and affections. As Solomon put it, **“Let not mercy and truth forsake you. Bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.”** (Proverbs 3:3-4) And later, **“Keep my commands and live, and my law as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.”** (Proverbs 7:2-3) What is to be written there? Mercy, truth, and the Law of God—each of which defines the other.

And Yahweh wasn’t done with the metaphor. In a prophecy yet to be fulfilled, Jeremiah reports Yahweh’s incredible promise to the future spiritually restored nation of Israel: **“This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know Yahweh,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says Yahweh. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”** (Jeremiah 31:33-34) As this study has shown, the “Law” in the minds of Israel today is but a pale and twisted caricature of the Torah Yahweh actually handed down. They do not “know Yahweh.” They won’t even say His name. Jeremiah assures us that this is not a permanent condition.

In the same vein, Ezekiel explains the disconnect between the Old Covenant—written on tablets (and hearts) of stone—being replaced (or more precisely, *fulfilled*) with the New Covenant to which Jeremiah alluded—a covenant that can only be written on the soft, receptive hearts of living flesh: **“I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.”** (Ezekiel 11:17-20) That glorious day in Israel’s destiny is right around the prophetic corner. Note that the spiritual return of Israel must *follow* the physical return of the people to the Land of Promise—which establishes beyond the shadow of a doubt that the traditional Orthodox Judaism that Israel has practiced since the days of Rabbi Akiba is a “detestable abomination” to Yahweh, written on a “heart of stone.” Now that the regathering has begun, a new spiritual dawn for the nation of Israel is about to break. But neither Jews nor gentiles need wait for it. The day of God’s grace is here *today*. If we provide receptive hearts, He will write His Word there.

(672) *Record Yahweh's instructions.* **"Then Yahweh said to Moses, 'Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.' So he was there with Yahweh forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments."** (Exodus 34:27-28) The heart of the rabbinical claim to spiritual authority lies in the myth of an "oral Law" given to Moses to flesh out and explain the Torah. This oral Law was supposedly handed down intact from generation to generation until gathered and codified by the followers of Rabbi Akiba in the second century A.D. (See the introduction to Chapter 10 of *The Owner's Manual* for a more complete explanation.) On the contrary, Moses was told to *write down* whatever Yahweh told him. The human brain is an amazingly complex and capable organ, a miracle of creation, but it is far more adept at comprehension than rote memorization. Anyone who has ever played the parlor game where a secret sentence is passed from one person to the next around the room knows what can happen with oral transmission. The message invariably becomes hopelessly garbled. That's why God told Moses to create a written record of His instructions. An "oral Law" isn't worth the paper it isn't printed on.

Yahweh chose to communicate His plan of redemption to us using human language, which in itself is an imperfect tool. Languages are like living organisms, bending and shifting over time. They have a life cycle: they grow and mature, spawn children of their own, and eventually die from disuse. Along the way, words can lose their meaning or pick up new connotations. Worse, nuances (or even basic meanings) are lost when texts are translated into other languages. It helps a great deal that every major doctrine is repeated several times in scripture, approached from different angles, stated in different ways. But without the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Who teaches us the truth latent in our flawed texts and half-understood vocabulary, we would be hard-pressed to know who God is or what He wants. But at least we *have* texts—written copies of Yahweh's scripture that we can study and analyze. Oral traditions are nothing but a fleeting vapor, at best paraphrases and at worst prevarications.

But Yahweh is not issuing new instructions to His people today. So is the precept we've gleaned from this passage beside the point? From where I sit, the answer is no. There's still the little matter of testimony to consider, mentoring others, making disciples, bringing the joy of God's Word to a wider audience, and compensating for our own flawed memories. Speaking for myself, I write down what I've discovered because I want to remember what God has said *to me* through His Word. (At my age, I can't remember what I had for breakfast.) If somebody else

gets edified along the way, that's a good thing, but I'm primarily recording these things for my own enlightenment.

- (673) *Be set-apart to Yahweh. "For I am Yahweh who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy."* (Leviticus 11:45) This is about as basic as it gets. Four facts are being brought to bear to support the precept: (1) The One issuing the instruction is Yahweh, whose self-revealed name indicates that He is the self-existent Creator-God without whom nothing—especially us—would exist. (2) He brings us “up out of the land of Egypt.” Egypt, as we have seen, is a consistent Biblical metaphor for the world and its values. Thus to be brought out of Egypt implies a spiritual paradigm shift, a new world view, a radically revised value system. (3) He intends to be our God. That is, the reason He has brought us to this new place is so that we might revere Him alone as deity, without competing for our affections with the things of this world. (4) He Himself is “holy,” an adjective (Hebrew *qadosh*) that implies a state of being set apart (its root verb means “to separate”). *The Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* defines *qadosh*, as it refers to Yahweh: “Pertaining to being unique and pure in the sense of superior moral qualities and possessing certain essential divine qualities in contrast with what is human.” Being “holy,” then, is a component of Yahweh’s very nature (being self-existent). He is not part of space/time or matter/energy, but exists beyond them, outside of them, independent of them—unique and pure.

That makes “being holy” for us an extremely tall order, for as we have seen, it is the very antithesis of our natural state as human beings. We tend to think of it as being “well behaved,” but that is a pale and shallow reflection of the word’s true meaning. “Set-apart” is closer to the heart of it: we are brought “out of Egypt” to be set-apart for Yahweh’s pleasure and purpose as we are set-apart from the world. Thus there are connotations of consecration, dedication, sacredness and devotion in the word *qadosh* when applied to us.

There are further hints as to how “being holy” works: **“And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am Yahweh your God. And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I am Yahweh who sanctifies you.”** (Leviticus 20:6-8) “Holy” here is a term related to *qadosh*. It’s *qodesh*, a noun meaning “Apartness, holiness, sacredness, separateness.” (S) The interesting new wrinkle here is how this “apartness” is to be achieved: it is Yahweh’s doing. The word translated “sanctifies” is the Hebrew verb

from the same consonant root: *qadash*. It is defined: “To consecrate, sanctify, prepare, dedicate, be hallowed, be holy, be sanctified, be separate; to be set apart.” (S) The point is that we cannot really make ourselves “holy.” But if we honor Yahweh and obey His instructions, *He* will make us holy.

How? I believe that He will in the end *absorb* us who love Him into Himself, in nature if not in physical reality. (I said I *believe* it; I didn’t say I *understand* it.) Remember, the holiness of God consists in His being “unique and pure.” Listen to the words of John: **“He who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life... Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”** (I John 2:23-25, 3:2-3) Becoming “like God,” seeing Him “as He is,” requires a type of perfection we will never attain on our own. But that is not cause for despair; it is cause for hope—a hope that encourages us to “purify *ourselves*” in anticipation of our being made pure by God. In other words, **“Be holy, for I am holy.”**

- (674) *Stone a medium to death.* **“A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood shall be upon them.”** (Leviticus 20:27) In Chapter 8 of *The Owner’s Manual*, Maimonides touched on several possible modes of capital punishment in the Torah, focusing not on the offenses that would engender such punishment, but on the erroneous idea that the Council, the Sanhedrin, was to make the call. In our next few precepts, we’ll review some specific instruction from Yahweh on the matter of capital crimes. First we see the case of mediums and those with familiar spirits—necromancers and ghost conjurers. We saw the prohibition against them in Mitzvot #337 and #338. Here we see the penalty for committing this crime: death by stoning.

It’s never explained in scripture, but we should ponder the method of execution and how it relates to the crime. The unifying factor for these crimes seems to be that, one way or another, they are perpetrated against the entire nation; they’re an attempt to undermine and circumvent the authority of Yahweh within Israel. Thus the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes, “This method of capital punishment [*ragam*, stoning] is specified for idolaters, soothsayers, and a blasphemer of the sacred name. The legal act of stoning was a corporate one.... It is the

participation of all members of the society which is important; since all persons regardless of sex or age could throw stones, it became the total act of the whole population in obedience to God's command." An act against the holiness of the nation demanded the nation's unified response.

Capital crimes of a sexual nature (see Precept #676) were punished by burning at the stake. So it is with interest that we note that rapists of betrothed or married women (Mitzvah #288) were to be executed not by fire but by stoning. This, to my mind, demonstrates that rape is not really a sexual crime at all, but rather the brutal imposition of one's domination upon another, forcing their submission. And in the case of a betrothed woman, it is also the usurpation of her husband's role. Since the human family is a picture of our relationship with Yahweh (He is the Husband, and we believers are the "bride" or wife) rape is a symbol of the religions, governments, or societies of man usurping the authority of God. Such "rape" is, in point of fact, a crime against humanity at large. It is not a crime of passion; it is treason.

- (675) *Stone to death one who curses Yahweh.* **"Now the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel; and this Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel fought each other in the camp. And the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the name of Yahweh and cursed; and so they brought him to Moses... Then they put him in custody, that the mind of Yahweh might be shown to them. And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. Then you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. And whoever blasphemes the name of Yahweh shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of Yahweh, he shall be put to death.'" (Leviticus 24:10-16)** The crime for which the man was condemned had nothing to do with the fight, but rather with his blasphemy against Yahweh—which, being an affront to the nation which was under Yahweh's protection, was punishable by stoning—the whole congregation was to participate. It thus behooves us to review what it means to "blaspheme" and "curse." "Blaspheme" is from the Hebrew word *qabab*. It means "To curse: invoke an oath, i.e., speak a verbal wish of ill-will toward another, with the force of invoking divine retribution of evil upon the object." (*Dictionary of Bible Languages with Semantic Domains*) The word connotes uttering a magical formula designed to do harm to its object, so it is akin to sorcery. The supposedly "divine" retribution in this case was actually an appeal to demonic forces.

The word we see translated “cursed” is one we’ve seen before: *qalal*: “To be slight, be swift, be trifling, be of little account, be light; to be insignificant; to be lightly esteemed; to make despicable; to curse; to treat with contempt, bring contempt or dishonour.” (S) The guilty man had spoken of Yahweh with contempt, while calling upon Satan to be the undoing of his foe. If I may be allowed to extrapolate a bit, the man’s genealogy suggests that he had a foot in both worlds—one in Israel and one in Egypt. Unlike the faithful “mixed multitude,” gentiles who had left their old life behind to follow Yahweh, this fellow was trying to straddle the spiritual fence, so to speak. He had not turned his back on Egypt but rather was trying to drag it with him into the Promised Land. Such an attitude is a deadly cancer if allowed to fester and grow among God’s people. Thus Yahweh directs us to take it “outside the camp” and kill it. As John reminds us, **“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”** (I John 2:15-17)

- (676) *Burn at the stake a priest’s daughter who has become a harlot. “The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, she profanes her father. She shall be burned with fire.”* (Leviticus 21:9) We first explored burning at the stake as a mode of punishment in Mitzvah #287. There I noted, “Every single mention of execution by fire in the entire Bible (whether advocated by Yahweh or not) is associated in some way with either sexual sin, the worship of false gods, or both. In God’s economy, one is a picture of the other.” (It should be noted that the word “burning,” the Hebrew: *sarap*, stresses destructive burning, consuming or destroying something by fire, not necessarily the actual execution, though it doesn’t preclude it, either.) Here we see an example rich with symbolism—the daughter of a priest becoming a ritual prostitute in one of the pagan temples of Canaan. As usual, Yahweh’s metaphor far outweighs the temporal reality. In the end, a “priest” is one who serves Yahweh and who intercedes for His people—and thus is symbolic of a true believer. He in turn represents God the Father in the family structure.

His “daughter,” then, is one to whom the close familial relationship of the priest has brought an expectation and responsibility of faithfulness—one in the priest’s household and under his protection, yet not a priest. The “priest’s daughter” is physically in the household of faith (that is, she purports to be a believer) whether or not her life bears witness of this relationship. At issue here is whether or not she honors her father (and respects herself) or whether she treats their relationship as a common or

profane thing. The ultimate evidence of the latter case, of course, would be to join herself—and by extension, her family—to false gods. “She,” of course, need not be somebody’s *daughter* at all, but could be anyone or anything in this position. Christianity as a religious institution did this wholesale at the time of Constantine (early in the fourth century), though she had been specifically warned to flee such compromise with paganism in Revelation 2 and 3. We are still dealing with the legacy of that betrayal.

We should once again explore what this particular mode of execution had to do with the nature of the crime. Unlike stoning, fire represents judgment, that is, a judicial separation of good from evil, of the valuable from the worthless, of the pure metal from its useless or toxic dross. The precept is teaching us that mere proximity to the household of faith is of no consequence. If one embraces falsehood, judgment—separation from God—awaits.

- (677) *Do not tolerate the falsehood of Molech.* “Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given some of his descendants to Molech, to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name. And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives some of his descendants to Molech, and they do not kill him, then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people, and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech.’” (Leviticus 20:1-5) As we saw in Mitzvah #286, the punishment specified for Molech worshippers was death by stoning. And as we have recently learned (Precept #674) stoning implied a crime against the entire nation, and it therefore required a response from the whole congregation. *Who* was to stone the worshipper of Molech? “**The people of the land!**” Thus it is with a great deal of chagrin that I observe that it does very little practical good for a tiny minority to denounce such falsehood. The whole community must rise up in defense of the truth. Note that Yahweh will “set His face against” the defenders of falsehood and idolatry—and *their families*. Theirs is a national—a *universal*—crime; the consequences transcend personal punishment.

So what was Molech? Also known as Chemosh, Ba’al, Milcom, and Kronos, among others, this brutal god of fire was the national god of the Ammonites. His name simply means “king,” just as Ba’al means “lord,” betraying a legacy derived from the first self-deified king, Nimrod. His image was a large, hollow bronze figure with a bull’s head and

outstretched arms which were designed to receive its victims when it was heated to a glowing red state. Molech's human sacrifices—preferably first-born children—were roasted alive in the idol's outstretched arms in an attempt to appease his insatiable blood lust, inducing him to grant bountiful harvests or victory in battle. The wails of the doomed children were drowned out with drums and flutes, while their parents were forbidden to openly mourn for them.

Yahweh mentioned Molech by name four times in these few verses. But my research indicates that “Molech worship” is actually far broader in scope than the homage a few Semitic tribes paid to one moldy Canaanite deity. A century ago, Alexander Hislop, exploring the unbiblical Roman Catholic doctrine that insisted that “every man must be punished for his own sins, and that God *cannot be satisfied* without groans and sighs, lacerations of the flesh, tortures of the body, and penances without number on the part of the offender, however broken in heart, however contrite the offender might be,” (in other words, justification by works, not grace) ties the origins of this error to, you guessed it: Molech (also spelled Moloch). Hislop goes on to say, “Now, looking simply at the Scripture, this perverse demand for self-torture on the part of those for whom Christ has made a *complete* and *perfect* atonement, might seem exceedingly strange; but looking at the real character of the god whom the Papacy has set up for the worship of its deluded devotees, there is nothing in the least strange about it. That god is Moloch, the god of barbarity and blood. Moloch signifies ‘king,’ and Nimrod was the first after the flood that violated the patriarchal system, and set up as a ‘king’ over his fellows. At first he was worshipped as the ‘revealer of goodness and truth,’ but by-and-by his worship was made to correspond with his dark and forbidding countenance and complexion. The name Moloch originally suggested nothing of cruelty or terror; but now the well-known rites associated with that name [which I have briefly described above] have made it for ages a synonym for all that is most revolting to the heart of humanity, and amply justify the description of Milton: ‘First Moloch, horrid king, besmeared with blood / Of human sacrifice, and parents’ tears, / Though, for the noise of drums and timbrels loud, / Their children’s cries unheard, that passed through fire / To his grim idol.’” (Quoted from *Paradise Lost*, Book I. Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, pp.150-151. Italics his.)

Hislop erred only in that he saw no further than the flawed doctrine of Roman Catholicism in tracing Molech's legacy. But I detect the echoes of Molech worship in any religion or philosophy that demands self sacrifice as a condition for god's blessing (and that includes such “religions” as atheistic secular humanism, whose “god” is man). At its core, Molech

worship is any system that holds that the grace of Yahweh is insufficient to effect our salvation—that works, preferably painful or costly to us in some way, must be added to the equation. God says of the man who teaches such things—and his family, *and* the people who tolerate his disastrous heresy—**“I will set my face against that man.”** I think we’re in trouble, world.

- (678) *Keep Yahweh’s statutes.* **“You shall therefore keep all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them, that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out.”** (Leviticus 20:22) In a heavy handed hint that tells us the entire Torah is really only about one thing—being set apart from the world as Yahweh’s people—Moses here is being told *why* Gods statutes and judgments were to be kept. What is the “therefore” *there* for? The entire passage leading up to this conclusion is a litany of abuses and their corresponding punishments: (1) stoning for Molech worship, (2) the “cutting off” of occultists, (3) death for those who curse Yahweh, and (4) death for certain sexual sins—adultery, homosexuality, bestiality and incest—all of which symbolize, one way or another, man’s betrayal of his relationship with Yahweh.

The things Yahweh warned about were the very things that were, in His colorful parlance, causing the Land to “vomit out” its Canaanite inhabitants. His caution to Israel was designed to prevent them from sharing the same fate—a caution that ultimately fell on deaf ears: Israel would be “vomited out” of the Land not once, but twice.

- (679) *Distinguish between the clean and the unclean.* **“But I have said to you, ‘You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey. I am Yahweh your God, who has separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore distinguish between clean animals and unclean, between unclean birds and clean, and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. And you shall be holy to Me, for I Yahweh am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.’”** (Leviticus 20:24-26) It’s so easy to focus on the practical aspects of God’s dietary laws (see *The Owner’s Manual*, Chapter 5) that we miss the foundational lesson contained there: we, like Yahweh, are to be judgmental about the world in which we live. We are to discern what is “clean” from what is “unclean,” distinguishing that which is good for us from that which is harmful. And having identified the difference, we are to avoid the unclean.

It is revealing that Yahweh ties our discernment of good from bad, clean from unclean, with His own purpose of separating His people from the world. One is a picture of the other. His metaphor centers upon what

will nourish us, as opposed to what will poison us—thus we may eat cows or sheep, but not pigs or horses. We often miss the significance of the metaphor: God will bring into His “body,” that is, His fellowship of believers, only those things that will benefit the body, nourish it, edify it, and strengthen it—not the things that will make it weak, ill, or ineffective. The wisdom of God must be brought to bear here, for just as bacon and shrimp can be deceptively delicious, so can certain poisonous doctrines (for example, that good works or penance can be efficacious in securing our salvation) seem attractive to our logic, intellect, and ego. Looks can be deceiving, and deceit can be deadly.

The bottom line? We are to be holy—set apart from the world and consecrated instead to our walk with Yahweh. We can’t bring the attractive toxins of the world in with us. God is holy: He won’t allow it.

ENTERING THE LAND OF PROMISE

- (680) *Respect Yahweh’s judgment.* **“No person under the ban, who may become doomed to destruction among men, shall be redeemed, but shall surely be put to death.”** (Leviticus 27:29) **“Also you shall destroy all the peoples whom Yahweh your God delivers over to you; your eye shall have no pity on them; nor shall you serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you.”** (Deuteronomy 7:16) I don’t know where we got the odd idea that a loving God ought to have unlimited and indiscriminating mercy, patience without end, and benign tolerance for all beliefs. (He’s *God* already, not some clueless cosmic mushroom.) On the contrary, the Scriptures picture Yahweh as a God of inflexible standards, whose patience is long but not without limits, but whose love *is* unlimited—causing Him to go to incredible lengths to reconcile our fallen race to Himself. Even though He leaves to us the choice of whether to accept His gift of reconciliation and redemption or reject it, this love remains the central fact of His character.

And tolerance? Through no fault of God’s, the human race is dying. But “Doctor Yahweh” is offering us the capsule of life, the one and only cure for the human condition. He even paid for it Himself, though it was preposterously expensive. Now, all we have to do is trust Him, accept it, and swallow it (along with our pride). It is not His fault if we refuse to be healed, if we choose to believe either that we’re not really sick or that the cure lies elsewhere. Believe it or not, He is perfectly tolerant of that disastrous opinion (which is not to say He’ll overrule our choice and force salvation upon us in spite of our foolishness). But Yahweh becomes intolerant—downright angry—when we attempt to prevent *other people* from receiving the cure for our mortal state.

That's where the conquest of Canaan comes into play. The liberal establishment today looks at "politically incorrect" passages like our present precept and says, "How hateful God is; how unloving." They fail to see that Yahweh was perfectly happy to let any number of neighboring nations—Phoenicia, Assyria, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Midian, Amalek, and Philistia (listed geographically clockwise)—go their own way, make their own mistakes, live with their own choices. But the seven Canaanite nations within the Land of Promise had reached a level of depravity that precluded rational thought and freedom of choice. They had crossed the line. After four hundred years of extending mercy to them in hopes of seeing their repentance, Yahweh reached the end of His patience. He allowed the land to "vomit out its inhabitants"—using the sword of Israel as an emetic. In the larger sense, wiping them out—placing them "under the ban"—was the most merciful, loving thing He could have done for the human race as a whole.

- (681) *Know your own strength—or lack thereof.* **"Now Yahweh spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: 'Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above—all who are able to go to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies. And with you there shall be a man from every tribe, each one the head of his father's house.'" (Numbers 1:1-4)** Considering the fact that King David—hundreds of years later—would get in trouble with Yahweh for attempting to take a military census, it may seem a bit odd that Yahweh ordered not one, but two of them, among the just-freed Israelites. The first was shortly after they left Egypt, and the second was just before they entered the promised land forty years later: **"And it came to pass, after the plague, that Yahweh spoke to Moses and Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying: 'Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel from twenty years old and above, by their fathers' houses, all who are able to go to war in Israel.' So Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying: 'Take a census of the people from twenty years old and above, just as Yahweh commanded Moses and the children of Israel who came out of the land of Egypt.'" (Numbers 26:1-4)**

The stated purpose of both countings was to ascertain the military strength of the nation. In addition, the second census was supposed to be used to equitably distribute the conquered Land among the tribes and families of Israel (vs. 53-56; see Precept #686). Yahweh, of course, already knew how many men Israel had to call upon. The reason He told

Israel to number themselves was that He wanted *them* to know how large their army was. Before the first census, He had fought all of their battles for them. But the time was coming when they would be allowed to participate in their own destiny. Yes, Yahweh would still defeat their enemies (if Israel followed His instructions), but now they would be wielding the weapons of war themselves. A military census was thus a much needed confidence builder. Yahweh wished to wean the infant nation off miracles and put them instead on a diet of providence.

There are some interesting nuggets of truth hidden among the statistics. First, the Israelite army entering the Land was practically the same size as the one that had died off in the wilderness: 603,550 in the first census, vs. 601,730 in the second. And that number is even closer than it looks, for the Levites (who were not numbered among the warriors) had increased by one thousand men (though the census numbers are evidently rounded off) in the interim. Thus the numerical strength of Israel after forty years in the wilderness was virtually identical to that before the wanderings began. So much for **“You have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.... Why is it you have brought us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”** (Exodus 16:8, 17:3)

Second, if you’ll recall, the tribe of Joseph had been promised a double portion, and thus it was divided in two, according to his sons’ families: Ephraim and Manasseh. (So with Levi set apart to Yahweh, there were still twelve tribes comprising Israel’s military force.) By the second census, the ten tribes other than Joseph’s averaged out at 51,650 men each, while Ephraim and Manasseh together added up to 85,200, so “Joseph” was well on his way toward numerically achieving an actual “double portion.” If you take Judah (who was blessed on different grounds) out of the equation, Joseph was very nearly there already. But because the details of David’s unwise census (II Samuel 24, I Chronicles 21) were not recorded, we’ll never know if the reality caught up with the symbol. I don’t suppose it matters. What *does* matter is that David, who had a personal relationship with Yahweh, who knew His provision and providence first hand, had no business assessing the military strength of Israel. He of all people should have known that it’s not the size of the army that counts, but rather whether it is fighting with Yahweh’s help or without it. A handful of men empowered by Yahweh are more powerful than an innumerable horde of His enemies. God’s strength, in point of fact, is made perfect in our *weakness*.

(682) *Exempt Levites from battle.* **“Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor take a census of them among the children of Israel; but you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its furnishings, and over all things that belong to it; they shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they shall attend to it and camp around the tabernacle.”** (Numbers 1:49-50) There were several levels of “set-apartness” in Israel. First, the entire nation was set apart from the world to be Yahweh’s people, tasked to bear His signs, His instructions, to the gentiles. But within Israel, one tribe, Levi, was set apart from the others to serve Yahweh personally—attending to the maintenance and conveyance of the Tabernacle. And among the Levites, one family, that of Aaron, was further set apart to intercede directly between God and man as priests within the Tabernacle.

None of the Levites were counted among the warriors of Israel. Their duties were elsewhere: **“And when the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up. The outsider who comes near shall be put to death. The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp, everyone by his own standard, according to their armies; but the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony.”** (Numbers 1:51-53) Not only were the Levites tasked to be the custodians of the appurtenances of Yahweh, they were to encamp closer than anyone else to the Tabernacle—in the very front yard of God, as it were. They served as a buffer against irreverent trespassing, inadvertent or not, by the other tribes; thus by their very presence they preserved the lives of the greater community.

Was being a Levite a “good thing?” It depends on your point of view, for there were (from a strictly temporal perspective) ups and downs, plusses and minuses, to being a Levite. On the plus side (as our present precept points out), they were exempt from the military service to which *all* other Israelite males were subject. The Levites were recipients of the tithes of Israel (from which they in turn tithed to the priests). And they enjoyed a certain element of respect or deference as the keepers of “God’s stuff,” as it were.

But the perks came with a downside. They, unlike the other tribes, were given no territorial inheritance in the Promised Land, only a few scattered cities in which to live. The lack of land ownership precluded the possibility of earning a living in the traditional agrarian manner. (This explains why Yahweh instituted the tithe, rendered *to Him* through—and for the benefit of—the Levites.) Instead of waging war with the world,

they were tasked with the care of God's house. And although this was a great responsibility, there was no corresponding increase in temporal power or influence. The Levites—and even the priests—were given no authority as political leaders in Israel. Though Moses was a Levite, Joshua his successor was not (he was an Ephraimite), and the royal line—still half a millennium removed—would, as prophecy demanded, come to rest not with Levi, but with Judah.

Since practically everything in the Torah is symbolic of some greater truth, we should pause to reflect on the role of “Levites” in the modern world. Whom do they represent? Remember, the duties of the Levites were assigned by Yahweh—it was a calling, not a vocation. One could not aspire to become a Levite or a priest; he had to be chosen by God—born into the chosen tribe. I see in the Levites echoes of those today whose calling to serve Yahweh and His people precludes them from earning a living (“fighting battles,” as it were) or pursuing a normal gain-oriented career (the land-ownership metaphor). They *might* be pastors, but this is by no means automatic, for many “religious professionals” today are “called” more by the paycheck (or the power or prestige), than by God.

Still, we should not forget that the Israelites were given specific instruction as to what to do (and not to do) concerning Levites: exempt them from battle, and support them with tithes. It is no stretch at all to see in this a call to seek out those who are indeed called by Yahweh for his work and support them by whatever means is at our disposal. I'll leave it to you to figure out who the “Levites” in your life are.

- (683) *Respect tribal affiliations.* **“And Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: ‘Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard, beside the emblems of his father's house; they shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting.’”** (Numbers 2:1-2) Judging by His creation, Yahweh enjoys variety. Diversity makes our world a fascinating place, and separation fosters diversity. At the same time, He commands that we love one another, no matter how different we might be physically or culturally. (Loving one another, I hasten to add, is not remotely the same thing as embracing each others' errant beliefs and false doctrines.) All through the Torah's historical record, we see Yahweh relating to Israel by their tribes and families. Since (as we've observed) nothing Yahweh does or says is accidental or pointless, we should examine why this is so—why would God want to keep separate groups separate, everyone “camping by his own standard?” (Beside the issue of holiness, that is—the twelve tribes were *all* set apart to Yahweh.)

I believe the answer can be seen most clearly when we look at the converse: why do men who are dominated by Satan invariably seek power? The recurring dream of ungodly men is to rule the world—creating a homogeneous universal slave class under their control, existing for their benefit alone. From Nimrod to Caesar to Muhammad to Hitler, with a thousand stops in between, top-down control of as many people as possible has been the aim of despots since the dawn of time. Their agenda and Satan’s is identical: the subjugation, enslavement, and forced submission of others. Empire building is precisely the opposite of what Yahweh’s precept here suggests: political independence.

There is a prophetic component to all of this. The Last Days will at last see realized the twisted dream of fallen man—a one-world government ruled by a single charismatic individual. But as I pointed out in *Future History*, taking over the world one country at a time is like herding cats: just when you get one cornered, another one escapes. What modern megalomaniacs need is a mechanism whereby nations can be convinced to yield their independence, defense, and economies *voluntarily* to a higher power—benign, democratic, and relatively clueless—which can then be taken over from within: world revolution without firing a shot. Thus we’ve seen the League of Nations and the United Nations, as well as smaller regional super-nations like the E.U. The behind-the-scenes ruling elite have similar confederations on the drawing boards for North America, Asia, and Africa. *Dar al-Islam*, of course, functions in many ways like a single (if not unified) nation already. All of this is leading to a world where the following prophecy can become a black reality: **“And authority was given him [the Antichrist] over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb.”** (Revelation 13:7-8) Mankind will have forsaken the practice of “camping by their own standards,” but in a twisted sort of way, every man will still be encamped **“beside the emblems of his father’s house.”**

- (684) *Make two silver trumpets.* **“And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Make two silver trumpets for yourself; you shall make them of hammered work; you shall use them for calling the congregation and for directing the movement of the camps.’”** (Numbers 10:1-2) We discussed these silver trumpets under Mitzvah #454, in Chapter 11 of *The Owner’s Manual*. Unlike the ram’s horn trumpets—the *shofar*—that were indicative of God’s call upon our lives, these silver *’hasoserah* trumpets were man-made, and used to communicate between men when going to battle or rejoicing on feast days. They functioned much like bugles would in later times, with one important difference: Yahweh promised to “remember” the children of Israel whenever the *’hasoserah* was blown (verse 9). In a way then, this meant

the use of the silver trumpets was a prayer, for Israel was aware that God would be listening when they were blown.

Two lessons come to mind. First, they remind us that Yahweh is privy to our human communication. He listens to what we say to each other—not just to what we say to Him. Would we say the things we do if we really understood that? Do we speak in love, seeking to edify and encourage our brothers, or are we just telling people what to do? Second, Yahweh's instructions here were to *make* the trumpets: He wants us to initiate conversation, even with Him. Yahweh is not a God who says, *Shut up and do what I tell you*. Rather, He is the God who says, *Come now, let us reason together; ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; pray—converse with Me—without ceasing*.

Specific instructions were issued concerning the use of the silver trumpets: **“When they blow both of them, all the congregation shall gather before you at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. But if they blow only one, then the leaders, the heads of the divisions of Israel, shall gather to you. When you sound the advance, the camps that lie on the east side shall then begin their journey. When you sound the advance the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall begin their journey; they shall sound the call for them to begin their journeys. And when the assembly is to be gathered together, you shall blow, but not sound the advance. The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets; and these shall be to you as an ordinance forever throughout your generations.”**

(Numbers 10:3-8) Note that the trumpet blasts (like bugle calls) *meant* something. This was communication, not entertainment. The sound would vary, depending upon the message and its intended audience. And the designated trumpet blowers were priests—those who were by definition and calling tasked with interceding between God and man. The lessons again seem obvious: we should listen for messages delivered by men who are in communication with Yahweh, discerning which instructions are meant for us, and which are meant for our brothers. At the same time, we need to draw a distinction between the world's meaningless noise—music, entertainment, ear-tickling auditory amusements—and what Yahweh might be saying to us through the voices of Spirit-led people. The popular entertainers of our day like to voice their opinions, but they seldom blow the *'hasoserah*.

(685) *Preview God's blessings.* **“And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.’”**

(Numbers 13:1-2) As I pointed out in Precept #635, the pre-invasion foray of the twelve spies into the Land was done with Yahweh's permission, not

upon His orders. Nevertheless, He had some instructions for them: **“Spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel.”** This “land” had been defined previously as **“from the river of Egypt [i.e., the Wadi El Arish] to the great river, the River Euphrates”** (Genesis 15:18), and **“from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines [the Mediterranean], and from the desert to the River [Euphrates]”** (Exodus 23:31).

They were starting out in the Wilderness of Paran, which is some distance north of the Gulf of Aqaba, the northeastern “finger” of the Red Sea. Moses told them first to go south (Numbers 13:17), for the Red Sea was supposed to mark their southern boundary. Instead, the twelve began their spy mission in the Wilderness of Zin (13:21), miles *north* of where they’d been encamped. We aren’t told how broad a swath the spies covered, but they didn’t get anywhere near the Euphrates, stopping a hundred miles short of it. Their lack of obedience (or is that faith?) was reflected in Yahweh’s subsequent detailed description of the boundaries of the land they would occupy, delineated in Numbers 34 (see Precepts #699-702). It pares the borders down to pretty much what the spies were actually willing to go and look at. What did they lose? Only a Red Sea port, which would have given them access to Eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean in the south, and in the north, Lebanon—the jewel of the Eastern Mediterranean. All this was theirs, if only they’d go and receive it.

So where does that leave us modern-day explorers of the Torah? What are we to learn from this? I believe that we, too, have been given permission to “spy out the Land of Promise.” No, not Canaan, but rather the place *we* have been promised as believers in Yahweh’s grace: the Kingdom of Heaven. Okay, it’s not exactly a *place*, but a state of being, one in which Yahshua rules supreme, where Satan can’t touch us because he’s been incarcerated in the abyss, where we finally *get it*: we no longer feel like we have to sin against our God. I realize that we can’t live there full time yet, but there’s no reason we can’t go in and “spy out the land.” The only question is: will we, like the ten faithless Israelites of old, merely take a quick peek, make note of the obstacles looming before us, and run back to our comfortably familiar lives in the wilderness with our tails between our legs? Or will we, like Joshua and Caleb, look forward with eager anticipation to settling in this strange, wonderful new world?

- (686) *Divide the Land on the basis of participation in battle.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘To these [those counted in the second census—See Precept #681] the land shall be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names. To a large tribe you shall give a larger inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a smaller inheritance. Each shall be given its inheritance**

according to those who were numbered of them. But the land shall be divided by lot; they shall inherit according to the names of the tribes of their fathers. According to the lot their inheritance shall be divided between the larger and the smaller.” (Numbers 26:52-56) At the time of the second census, the smallest tribe, Simeon, numbered 22,200 men, while the largest, Judah, boasted three times that strength, 76,500 warriors. It was the epitome of fair play that the larger the tribal army, the larger the parcel of land that would be deeded to the tribe. The location of each tribe’s parcel would be determined by casting lots (Joshua 18:10), a process in which Joshua, the High Priest Eleazar, and the tribal patriarchs all participated (19:51). But the amount of acreage would depend on the size of the tribe, or more specifically, its army.

The Canaanites, of course, didn’t just roll over and play dead. They put up a fight. This posed no problem for the Israelites as long as they trusted in Yahweh rather than their own strength to win their battles for them—He had promised to “go before them.” The reason I bring this up is that the *second* strongest tribe in Israel—Dan, boasting 64,400 valiant warriors—apparently didn’t care much for Yahweh’s leadership, and as a result found fighting for their allotted inheritance an impossible task. So what did they do—repent and seek Yahweh’s assistance? Nope. They picked up the tribe, lock, stock, and barrel, and moved it to the very northern border of the Land. Remember what I said about the twelve spies stopping a hundred miles short of the Euphrates? They only made it as far as Rehob (Numbers 13:21). Judges 18:28-30 reports that Dan took over a town in the same valley as Rehob, named Laish, renamed it Dan, and promptly dropped all pretense of the worship of Yahweh. Needless to say, Dan was the first tribe to go when the Assyrians invaded Israel in 722 B.C.

But the bad news isn’t quite over for the apostate tribe of Dan. First, their name is missing from the list of tribes being represented among the prophetic 144,000 witnesses of Revelation 7 and 14. Could it be that Yahweh couldn’t find the requisite 12,000 descendants? While you ponder that, note that the tribe of Dan *will* still exist when the Millennial reign of Christ begins a few years later, for Ezekiel records their newly allotted territory—right where they wanted it, at the far northern end of Israel’s tribal territory, up at the Entrance of Hamath (Ezekiel 48:1), that is, near Rehob. Yahweh, then, while keeping His word to restore *all* of Israel in the Last Days, also respects Dan’s ancient wish to distance themselves from Him as far as possible. So what did Dan give up? Only downtown Tel Aviv, which will certainly be among the most valuable pieces of real estate in the world during the thousand-year reign of Yahshua. Oops.

In a way, our “holdings” in the Kingdom of Heaven will also be predicated upon our participation in battle—the battle of life. When we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ (II Corinthians 5:10), we will be rewarded based upon the things we did in this world. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 should give us all pause.

- (687) *Be aware of your insignificance in the light of Yahweh’s love.* **“For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God; Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. Yahweh did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because Yahweh loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, Yahweh has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”** (Deuteronomy 7:6-8) One gets the distinct impression that the nation of Israel, beginning with its patriarch, Abraham, was chosen by Yahweh as a “worst-case scenario.” God seems to have said to Himself, *If I can take a complete nobody, a stubborn and insecure pagan living in a pagan land, a man so insignificant he’s not even the head of his own household, and build of him a great nation that will come to know and love Me, then there is hope for the whole human race.* The Jews have often had the mistaken impression that because God chose them, they must be special, somehow better or more worthy than the gentiles. Yahweh here states that the opposite is true: “If I can make it here, I can make it *anywhere*.”

Of course, there wasn’t an imperative anywhere in there. That comes in the next sentence: **“Therefore know that Yahweh your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them.”** (Deuteronomy 7:9-11) Did you catch the counterintuitive connection? *Because* Yahweh chose to love us even though we were insignificant—*because* of His own oath and covenant (and not for anything we’ve done)—we are to know, comprehend, and embrace the fact that Yahweh is God. If we know He is God, we must deal with the reality of His deity: faithfulness, love, and mercy for those who reverence Him, and certain destruction—retribution in kind—for those who hate Him, whether they think He’s God or not. The “commandments, statutes, and judgments” that Moses handed down are for our own benefit. We who accept and acknowledge the deity of Yahweh know that and act accordingly.

A Land Set Apart

Yahweh called out Abram from the mass of humanity to create of him a separate people through whom He would reveal His plan for the salvation of the whole world. That part is relatively easy to comprehend. What's less obvious is why God, from the very beginning, set apart a piece of *land*—a tiny piece, as these things go—as a stage upon which to play out this drama. Why did he tell Abram to go to a place he'd never even heard of, and then say, **"All the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.... Arise, walk in the land?"** (Genesis 13:15, 17) Even more puzzling, why did God move Abraham's descendants in and out of the land like chess pieces over the centuries if this place was their permanent possession, their inheritance? Careful reflection leads us to the inescapable conclusion that the Land of Promise is a symbol of something much more fundamental and far reaching than it appears on the surface. It is a metaphor for something universal in mankind's spiritual experience.

The key to understanding what the Promised Land signifies is latent in the story of the exodus. After spending four hundred years in bondage in a land not their own, Israel was led through miraculous means out of that world and toward another. But moving into their new home—the same land originally promised to their father Abraham—wasn't expected to be a picnic. Canaan was populated by seven evil and warlike nations, all of them prepared to defend themselves. The Israelites had been slaves; now they would have to be soldiers. Egypt for Israel had been metaphorical of something we all experience: slavery in the world—living in bondage to sin. But the Promised Land doesn't represent heaven—a place beyond sin's reach. There are giants in the Land, leading armies fierce and innumerable. Yes, it's a land "flowing with milk and honey," but there are also pitfalls, temptations, and battles to be fought. To one unprepared to trust Yahweh completely, it looks like a "land that devours its inhabitants." The Promised Land represents the life we face as believers.

And so it is that Yahweh teaches through example and command what we are to do in the "Land," this new battleground we face as we begin to trust Him. This place is fundamentally different from the world we left. We are no longer slaves here: our chains (and our defeatist mentality) must be left behind. Our Emancipator has made astonishing promises to us, some of which we can envision in our mind's eye and some that are too wonderful for the human imagination. Amazingly, our willingness to believe these promises, to choose to unreservedly trust in Yahweh's ability to bring them to fruition in our lives, is

what He considers virtue—perhaps the only righteous act we are capable of on our own. It is this righteousness, borne of trust, that keeps the lines of communication open between us and our Creator.

This ability to communicate is essential if we are to be successful in the wars we must constantly wage here in the Land of Promise. The enemy is as sneaky as he is strong: we need the best intel we can get. Yahweh is happy to provide it, and happier still when we follow His instructions. Our adversary, of course, would like to confuse us, distract us, or turn us from the truth, and his agents of disinformation can seem attractive and credible if we lose our ability to communicate with our God—our Commander in Chief. His perfect and unobstructed view of the battlefield will be of no use to us if we don't follow His orders, and it makes no difference whether our disobedience is due to lack of clear communication or to rebellion or laziness on our part. The consequences are the same: we'll lose ground on the front line. If we wish to gain ground in this war, we must stay in constant contact with "headquarters," praying without ceasing, studying to show ourselves approved. We must also be very careful to transmit our orders precisely as we received them, neither editing nor embellishing them, for our fellow soldiers' lives depend upon accurate communication just as much as ours do.

It bears repeating: the Promised Land represents the life we face as believers. Strangely enough, this battleground of ours isn't very big. It has well-defined borders, beyond which we have no mandate for waging war: we are neither equipped, trained, nor authorized to fight other peoples' battles for them. Nor is it our job to force our neighbors in the world to obey the orders we've been issued in the Promised Land by our Commander in Chief. We may (and should) invite them to follow our Leader, but only after they've chosen to do so are they to be welcomed as allies and brothers. Our battle, however, lies before us: eliminating the false gods that seek to deceive us, cleansing our lives of the things that defile us, and slaying the forces that would drag us back into bondage.

FAITHFUL PATRIARCHS

- (688) *Forsake your old life in favor of Yahweh's new life.* **"Now Yahweh had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" (Genesis 12:1-3)** God *didn't* tell Abram, "Honor me with sacrifices and offerings and I'll make you the richest man in Ur." No, the promised blessing was predicated upon separation, a total break with his

past. Abram was asked to leave the only world he knew, trusting in a God whose name he didn't even know to keep His end of the bargain. We rightly laud Abraham as a man of faith, but often forget that he dragged his feet for years before he finally did what God had told him to do. He didn't actually "leave his father's house" until papa Terah was toes up, and even then didn't make a complete break: he took his nephew Lot (the son of his deceased brother Haran) along with him. Though Lot was also a worshipper of the true God Abram was following, he never quite left the world behind him. His failure to disengage (as uncle Abe finally did) precipitated one disaster after another throughout his life—and beyond.

We, too, are instructed to disengage from the world, to leave it behind, to separate ourselves from its influence. If separation to Yahweh entails "getting out from our father's house," forsaking our family, then we need to do so. Of course, some (myself included) are fortunate enough to have been born to godly parents who tried to raise me in the nurture and admonition of Yahweh. Abram was not so lucky. But even under the best of circumstances, our love for our earthly families must fade to insignificance in comparison to the brilliance of God's love. As Yahshua put it, **"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."** (Luke 14:26) This "hate" is only in contrast to our overwhelming love for Yahweh, of course. The reality is that in our love for Him, our comparative "hatred" for our families becomes, in fact, the deepest bond of human compassion imaginable.

- (689) *Look at God's promises from where you are. "And Yahweh said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: 'Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.'"* (Genesis 13:14-17) It was only after Abram's final break with his old world—his separation from his nephew Lot, who was really more like a son to him—that Yahweh told him, "Okay, *now* you can open up the gift I've got for you." You can sense the eager anticipation in Yahweh's words, like a doting father giving his only child something really wonderful—I think God was more excited about this than Abram was. Yahweh wasn't content to merely give Abe the deed to the land and call it a day. He wanted him to experience the whole thing, to walk through it, to comprehend its scope, to know what his descendants could look forward to.

At this point, of course, Abram had no children, making the gift of promised Land a good news-bad news story. So in the same breath, Yahweh also promised him that there would indeed be somebody to whom he could leave this wonderful inheritance—and not just a few, but eventually an innumerable multitude.

This is where faith entered the picture. The Land he could see. There it was, laid out before him, as far as the eye could see. It wasn't much of a stretch to envision the scattered peoples living there displaced before the inroads of Abram's ever expanding family tree. No, what took faith was visualizing this family tree itself. Abe and Sarai had been trying to have a child for decades. Now he was getting along in years, and her biological clock was winding down. Yet God said, "Trust Me," and Abram did. His faith consisted in being grateful for what he could see and honestly trusting God for what he could not. His personal reality had less to do with his perceived circumstances than with the Word of his God. And so it should be with us.

- (690) *Live in the land of promise.* **"There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar. Then Yahweh appeared to him and said: 'Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.'"** (Genesis 26:1-5) Fast forward one generation. Not much progress has been made in the "great nation" department. Abraham's son Isaac has fathered twin boys by this time, though his wife Rebekah had been barren for the first twenty years of their marriage. So in language very similar to the promise He had made to Abram, Yahweh repeats the promise to his son Isaac. We have already seen that Yahweh sometimes asks us to take detours (see Precept #658), but these side trips never change the ultimate goal—living in the Land of Promise. And where is that? Somewhere other than Egypt (a.k.a. the world). It's the land of which Yahweh has "told us." The Land of Promise is *being in communication with Him*.

Note something remarkable at the end of this passage. Yahweh tells us why He has made these promises to Isaac: **"because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."** Wait a minute! Abraham preceded Moses, the "great lawgiver," by half a

millennium. How then could he have kept Gods commandments, statutes, and laws? (And yes, in case you were wondering, the word translated “law” here *is* “torah.”) Abraham never performed ninety-nine percent of the deeds required in the “Torah” (that is, the “Law of Moses”), and the other one percent was mostly kept out of sheer coincidence. Even the rite of circumcision was performed only *after* Abraham had been declared “righteous” by virtue of his faith. Clearly, Yahweh had something else in mind when He said this.

As I’ve said until I’m blue in the face, virtually the entire Torah is an elaborate picture of Yahweh’s plan for our redemption, ultimately to be fulfilled in the sacrifice of His Messiah, Yahshua. That’s why Maimonides and his ilk have so much trouble seeing past the letter of the law, which is inherently un-keepable—they refuse to open their eyes to the larger truth. But what did Abraham do to earn these lofty accolades—being hailed as a keeper of God’s commandments, statutes, and laws? It wasn’t obeying Yahweh’s original instruction, **“Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.”** As we have seen, Abe took half a lifetime doing this, and even then he messed it up by bringing Lot with him. He also botched God’s “child of promise” prediction by taking matters into his own hands with Hagar.

No, it was his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, the very son of promise, at God’s command on Mount Moriah (recorded in Genesis 22). It was his stubborn and unyielding trust in God, his unreasonable, counterintuitive faith that even if he slew Isaac as instructed, Yahweh would somehow restore the boy to life. It was the ultimate dress rehearsal of the crucifixion of the Messiah precisely two thousand years later—at the very same location—and Abraham played his part to perfection. *This* was how Abraham could be said to have “kept the torah” five hundred years before Moses delivered it. In fact, this one statement, that **“Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws,”** *proves* beyond a reasonable doubt that Yahshua is Yahweh’s Anointed One. The Torah, at its core, says exactly the same thing Abraham’s actions did.

CREATING A HOMELAND

- (691) *Heed Yahweh’s messenger.* **“Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the**

Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off.” (Exodus 23:20-23) An “angel” (a word transliterated from the Greek *aggelos*—Hebrew: *malak*) is a messenger sent from Yahweh. These are often spirit beings, created to implement Yahweh’s directives on our behalf in the world. We are given rare glimpses of their activities throughout scripture, but I get the feeling their presence is far more prevalent than we realize (e.g. II Kings 6:17). Yahweh assigned one of these messengers (*one* was apparently enough) to lead 600,000 Israelite soldiers into battle against the Canaanite tribes. He makes it quite clear here that angels speak in Yahweh’s name and with His authority—we are to obey them as they obey God. But Yahweh has not directed them to “pardon our transgressions.” That’s not their job; it’s His. Therefore, it’s a really bad idea to “provoke” an angel by willfully flouting the instructions he has been tasked to carry out by Yahweh.

There is a preview here of the famous line, “The enemy of my enemy is my friend” (Sun Tzu: *The Art of War*). This may be quite true when the enemy of your enemy is an angel of Yahweh, but I hasten to point out that there is no universal, causal truth to the maxim. It is altogether possible—even probable—to have two enemies at the same time who also hate each other. American foreign policy is a total shambles because we have systematically pursued this patent prevarication, supporting the lesser of two evils as if they were our friends. We feared Hitler, so we supported Stalin. Then we hated the Soviets, so we supported Osama Bin Laden’s Afghan Mujahideen rebels. We despised Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini, so we supported Iraq’s dictator Saddam Hussein. On a more personal level, we distrust Democrats, so we vote Republican, or *vice versa*. When are we going to learn that we can’t effectively fight evil by supporting an opposing evil? Yahweh calls us to be set-apart from the world—to *flee* from Babylon, not to fight it by throwing in our lot with Nineveh.

- (692) *Follow Yahweh while leading His people.* “**And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin.’ So Yahweh plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made.**” (Exodus 32:33-35) I love a parade: Yahweh leads, followed by His angel, followed by Moses, followed by the people. A parade is supposed to follow a route and direction and pace set by the leader. But Moses discovered early in the game that the people don’t always follow the parade plan. They’ve been known to stop dead in their tracks, duck down alleyways, even turn around and go in the wrong direction. Moses told Yahweh that he was willing to

take responsibility for those who refused to follow Him, but God, as always, let each individual choose his own fate—Moses couldn't pay for the sins of the others. His job was to lead in the footsteps of Yahweh, not to force people to follow.

This passage contains the first Biblical mention of a “Book of Life” that contains the names of Yahweh's redeemed. Note that our names are all apparently written there to begin with; they are only “blotted out” because we sin against Yahweh, that is, we fall short of His standards, we miss the target of perfection. The rub, of course, is that we've all done that, we've all fallen short of the glory of God. But notice the future tense: “I *will* blot him out; I *will* visit punishment upon them.” They had already sinned, but punishment had not yet fallen and their names had not yet been removed. We have our whole lifetimes (admittedly unpredictable in duration) in which to figure things out. If during that time we elect to receive the garments of righteousness Yahweh freely offers us—garments of light that obliterate our sins—then our names remain in the Book when we die. In the end, one has to *choose* to be taken out of Yahweh's register of the living. If we elect not to avail ourselves of His grace, or worse, if we align ourselves with the spirit of the adversary, then the end of mortal life also marks the end of the privilege of remaining in the Lamb's Book of Life, the *Who's Who* of heaven.

- (693) *Don't be a stiff-necked people.* “Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Depart and go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, “To your descendants I will give it.” And I will send My Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.’” (Exodus 33:1-3) Here we see why Yahweh assigned the angel to go before Israel into the Promised Land. It's because they were stubborn and “stiff-necked,” prone to rebellion and ungratefulness. It was as if Yahweh said to Himself, “If I remain in close proximity to these people, I'm going to lash out at their ridiculous antics until they're all dead. And that won't do: they're my covenant people.” So He assigned to an angel the task of leading them into Canaan. One wonders if angels secretly groan when they get jobs like this.

We should ponder what Israel gave up by their disobedience. Yes, they were still Yahweh's chosen people, the recipients of the unilateral promises of God, but for their own sakes, He distanced Himself from them. One wonders how different the conquest of Canaan might have been

if the entire nation had approached the task with the enthusiasm of Caleb and the faithfulness of Joshua—following Yahweh directly instead of getting their directions via their angelic middleman.

Ancient Israel had nothing on today's believers in the "stiff-neck" department, I'm afraid. Here we are, with the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, and we *still* stumble our way through life, seemingly powerless to win the slightest skirmish with the world. We can't force the world to love Yahweh as we do, of course, but with all that power available to us, you'd think we could at least stand up to the occasional temptation. Our failures are good for one thing, though: they teach us what we've been saved *from*. Yahshua, who knows what we're up against, wrote these encouraging words to this final generation: **"I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.... Behold, I come quickly (i.e., suddenly). Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown."** (Revelation 3:8, 11)

What's the real problem with having a stiff neck? It's the inability to look around us, to see what's going on. If we remain stuck in our traditional religious ruts, eyes forward, neck rigid—if we never look up to see how close we are to the Kingdom of Heaven—we'll never appreciate or utilize the power we possess as Spirit-indwelled believers.

- (694) *When Yahweh promises miracles, expect miracles.* **"And He said: 'Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of Yahweh. For it is an awesome thing that I will do with you. Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I am driving out from before you the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.'"** (Exodus 34:10-11) Twice here, Yahweh tells us to "Behold!" The Hebrew word *hinneh* is an interjection demanding attention: *look at this, see what I'm showing you, pay attention!* Pay attention to what? To Yahweh's promise to do the impossible for Israel: allow them to defeat seven nations (these six plus the Girgashites) who were all militarily superior to the Israelites and well entrenched in the land (see Mitzvot #601 and #602). He Himself describes this feat as an unprecedented "marvel," an "awesome thing." Those familiar with the conquest of Canaan tend to focus on the failures of Israel, their unfaithfulness and compromise that in the end got them thrown out of the Land like their predecessors. While that's true, we often forget that the seven nations disappeared so completely that "scholars" in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries declared for sheer lack of physical evidence that such mighty nations as the Hittites never existed except in the minds

of Jewish fictioneers. Archeology has since proved their foolishness in doubting God's word. Meanwhile Israel, against all odds (if you don't countenance Yahweh's covenant), is back in the Land as a nation. That indeed is an "awesome thing," something we all need to "behold."

The other imperative here is, **"Observe what I command you this day."** We'll take a closer look at the specific commands in the following precept. Note for now that the verb "observe" means more than merely looking at something. The word is *shamar*: "To keep, guard, observe, give heed; have charge of, to watch for, wait for; to retain, treasure up (in memory); to celebrate (sabbath or covenant or commands), or perform (vow), to preserve, protect; to be on one's guard, take heed, take care, beware." (S) This definition makes it a pretty good match for the Greek verb *tereo*, used in a passage referenced in the previous Precept: **"Because you have kept (*tereo*) My command to persevere, I also will keep (*tereo*) you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."** (Revelation 3:10) The ekklesia at Philadelphia is being told that because they have heeded Yahweh's instructions (like the one in Exodus 34, explained below), they will not be required to endure the crucible of the Tribulation.

- (695) *Make no covenants with evil.* **"Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for Yahweh, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods."** (Exodus 34:12-16) As He has so many times in so many ways, Yahweh is telling us to remain separate—Holy—set apart from the world and its influences. Since we today are not mandated to physically make war on Canaan, we can't physically "destroy, break, or cut down" the appurtenances of the false gods that plague our world. But that doesn't mean we should make peace with them, either. The core principle remains: we are to make no covenants with the idolaters where we live. We are not to make deals with the devil.

This can be more complicated than it looks. It entails more than merely refusing to participate in overt idolatry, like sacrificing a goat to Satan in the rotunda of the capitol building. The adversary's inroads are subtle and ubiquitous in our society. They permeate our educational, governmental, commercial, and even religious institutions. Our most basic

cultural traditions are either pagan or secular; they almost never honor Yahweh unless we make a conscious effort to make them do so, and even then we are invariably clumsy and inept in our efforts to honor God in our public institutions. That's because belief is a personal matter. It is as individuals that we must maintain a state of constant vigilance, filtering everything we see and hear through the lens of the knowledge of Yahweh, sifting out the worthless chaff and accepting only the truth.

I'm not calling for a monastic existence, however. We are supposed to be part of the solution, an impossible task if we never face the problem. The Israelites had to go into Canaan in order to deal with its evil, and we in turn are counseled to be "*in* the world but not *of* it." Yahshua's instructions were to "Occupy till I come," and "Feed my sheep." Yes, we are to "flee from Babylon," that is, avoid any compromise with the world's counterfeit schemes promising "salvation." But we are not to retreat from the world until Yahweh Himself takes us out of here. We still have a job to do. The timing is His alone.

- (696) *Know that disobedience carries consequences.* "Now Yahweh said to Moses: 'Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel. And when you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered. For in the Wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes.' (These are the waters of Meribah, at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin.)" (Numbers 27:12-14) In Exodus 17, Moses had been instructed to strike the rock to bring forth living water, and he had done so. But later, in similar circumstances (Numbers 20, the incident being referred to here), having been told by Yahweh to *speak* to the rock, Moses instead angrily struck it twice with his rod, ruining the picture God was so patiently painting for us.

The meaning of the metaphor, this side of Calvary, is easy to see: Yahshua the Messiah (the Rock) would be struck down once for our sins, and His death would bring life to a thirsty, dying world. But after that singular sacrifice, further atonement would never be necessary. From that moment on, the waters of life and cleansing would flow from Christ our Rock—and all we'd have to do is *ask for it*. Moses' angry action was, as Yahweh put it, a "rebellion" that left the impression that God was something less than holy—that He, like the false gods of Egypt and Canaan, required constant and repeated appeasement. The truth, which Moses had obscured, was quite the opposite: Yahweh would require *one* perfect sacrifice (one that He Himself would provide), and that sacrifice would thenceforth enable open communication between God and man.

It's true that Yahweh's instructions on the matter are sufficient to tell us what He meant to happen. But (and this is the lesson here) that doesn't let Moses off the hook: his "rebellion" would have personal consequences; in this case, his permission to enter the Promised Land to which He had led the Israelites was rescinded. Bear in mind that he was 120 years old at this point: he couldn't have been a particularly effective warrior—or farmer, for that matter. Even his "young" protégé Joshua was now one of the oldest guys left in the nation. So Moses' death on the east side of the Jordan (instead of the west) was for all intents and purposes symbolic. And that makes perfect sense. That is, if Yahweh had said and done nothing when Moses goofed up the metaphor at Kadesh, we might never have figured out what His picture was supposed to have shown us. For that matter, we might not even have realized that it *was* a picture.

Lest we yawn and conclude that this is all historical and theoretical minutiae, I hasten to point out that we today are still tasked with acting out Yahweh's pictures. For their part, Israel was supposed to keep the precepts and statutes of the Torah for all time, because these things are invariably symbolic of the eternal Messiah and the redemption He provides. Thus we see the introductory formula repeated over and over again: "And Yahweh said to Moses, speak to the children of Israel, and say to them...." And the inevitable conclusion is every bit as significant: "...It shall be a statute forever, throughout your generations." Israel, in other words, was to continue rehearsing the symbols Yahweh instituted in the Torah as long as they walked the earth—symbols that are precise, focused, and detailed snapshots of Yahweh's plan for our salvation. Like Moses, Israel failed in their task, and like Moses, their disobedience has brought symbolically significant consequences—no less real because we can still figure out from the instructions themselves what Yahweh wanted to teach us.

And what about the Ekklesia, the called-out assembly of Yahshua? What pictures are we to reflect in our lives and walks? They are far less detailed or specific, and more fundamental, even visceral, but they exist nevertheless. We, as human beings who honor Yahweh through His "Son," humbly appreciate that we are "made in the image and likeness of God." This is the key to the symbolic role we are to play in His world. God is love; we too are to love—unconditionally, unreservedly. Yahweh is holy; we too are to be set apart, called out from the world. His Spirit dwells within us, comforting, consoling, and convicting; we, then, are to walk the earth as salt and light, preserving and illuminating mankind. Yahshua gave His life for the Church; thus we are to pick up our crosses daily and follow Him.

(697) *Dispossess idolatry.* **“Now Yahweh spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places; you shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess.’”** (Numbers 33:50-53) “Crossing the Jordan” is often mistakenly seen as a metaphor for “going to heaven.” It is nothing of the sort, but rather a picture of leaving the world’s bondage to enter a new life under Yahweh’s sovereignty. We are no longer slaves: now we are soldiers. We have been freed from oppression, but we still have enemies, adversaries, those who would separate us from God’s love, endeavoring to repeal the holiness to which we have been called.

The appurtenances of spiritual falsehood are no longer obvious, physical artifacts like “engraved stones” or “molded images.” We can no longer attack its “high places” with weapons of war. These days, the inroads of satanic influence are so subtle and pervasive, we won’t even recognize them unless we are firmly grounded in Yahweh, and at the same time mentally set apart from the world. Speaking for Americans, our entire culture is based on what Paul called “having a form of godliness but denying its power.” That is, we are constantly told by our media, politicians, educators, scientists, commercial interests, and even some of our clergy that we can (and will) build a “perfect” society without paying heed to Yahweh.

Our media subtly promotes a philosophy of “if it feels good, it must *be* good,” which quite by accident aligns our actions (if not our motivations) with God’s word occasionally. Our politicians publicly extol “doing the right thing” while carefully avoiding any specific reference to the One who set the standards of righteousness in the first place. Our educators teach our children that we are just animals—highly evolved beings that are only at the top of the food chain because we happen to be more “fit” to be there than other species. Ironically, they get upset when bullies advance their theories on the playground. Our scientists, who witness evidence of an omnipotent Creator in every new discovery, nevertheless refuse to acknowledge Him, whether out of pride, shortsightedness, or fear of losing their funding. Our commercial interests blatantly advertise that life will become wonderful if only we’ll buy their products—drive their cars, use their deodorant, drink their liquor, and clean our impossibly expensive homes with their gadgets, all procured with money we’ve borrowed from them. And our clergy, as often as not, are busy encouraging us to do good works and write large checks instead of introducing us to Yahweh (who

sees our best works and most charitable contributions as pointless rubbish if done without a personal relationship with Him). The myth of “good without God” is as deceptive and damning as any pagan idol.

What will happen to us if we fail to identify and eliminate the influence of these ubiquitous wolves in sheep’s clothing? **“But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell. Moreover it shall be that I will do to you as I thought to do to them.”** (Numbers 33: 55-56) Yeah, that sounds bad. So how can we “drive out the inhabitants of the land” these days? Basically, by doing the same things the Israelites were instructed to do: (1) Honor Yahweh alone, for He alone has freed us from our chains; (2) Worship and serve nothing other than Him; (3) Don’t associate anything worthless or harmful with the name of Yahweh; (4) Celebrate Yahweh’s timeline for the redemption of mankind, revealed as scripture’s ubiquitous six-plus-one pattern; (5) Give Yahweh’s instruction all the weight it deserves, and be receptive to the voice of the Holy Spirit within you; (6) Never prevent another person from establishing a personal relationship with Yahweh; (7) Love Yahweh with all of your heart, soul, and mind, and receive His Messiah, Yahshua; (8) Trust Yahweh to provide for your needs, including providing the means to provide for your own needs; (9) Be truthful; and (10) Be content with what Yahweh has given you, without regard to what others may possess. Does all of that sound vaguely familiar? It should: it’s a paraphrase of the Ten Commandments, fine-tuned for Yahshua’s ekklesia at the end of the age. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying.

- (698) *Divide the Land equitably.* **“And you shall divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families; to the larger you shall give a larger inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give a smaller inheritance; there everyone’s inheritance shall be whatever falls to him by lot. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers.”** (Numbers 33:54) Once we get past the obvious underlying principle that “Yahweh is fair-minded,” we need to figure out what He’s telling us today, since at this late date the division of Canaan under Joshua is but a distant and hazy historical footnote. If, as I have proposed, crossing the Jordan is a metaphor for leaving the world’s servitude to dwell in Yahweh’s kingdom, then our “inheritance” there, our temporal circumstance in this mortal life, is a matter of chance, history, and expended effort in an overall matrix of God’s sovereignty. Whether we happen to come from a big, powerful “tribe” or find ourselves a citizen of a small, weak one—in other words, whether we find ourselves privileged and materially blessed in this life or humbled by our

circumstances—our opportunities for *spiritual* success are fundamentally equal. God is no respecter of persons. Put into modern terms, a poor inner city kid may not have the same temporal advantages as an Ivy League blue blood scion, but their *spiritual* opportunity—their potential for greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven—is identical. That is why we are warned throughout scripture to pay no heed to differences in wealth, influence, or status in this world. Yahweh doesn't measure greatness the way men do. Yahshua admonished us: **“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.... Indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last.”** (Luke 13:24, 30)

How, then, are we to “divide the land equitably” in today's world? By loving people, not things. By using things, not people. By heeding truth, not peer pressure. By rewarding character, not clout. By being fair minded, not calculating. By dispensing mercy, not justice. By loving our neighbors as ourselves. In short, by learning to see things through the eyes of God.

BOUNDARIES AND BORDERS

- (699) *Know Israel's boundaries: the southern border.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Command the children of Israel, and say to them: “When you come into the land of Canaan, this is the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance—the land of Canaan to its boundaries. Your southern border shall be from the Wilderness of Zin along the border of Edom; then your southern border shall extend eastward to the end of the Salt Sea; your border shall turn from the southern side of the Ascent of Akrabbim, continue to Zin, and be on the south of Kadesh Barnea; then it shall go on to Hazar Addar, and continue to Azmon; the border shall turn from Azmon to the Brook of Egypt, and it shall end at the Sea.”’”** (Numbers 34:1-5) I can't figure out why the world has such a hard time figuring out where the borders of the Jewish state of Israel ought to be. No less a personage than Almighty God told us where their borders are, with landmarks as precise as if He had given us GPS coordinates. Put another way, if asked where the Palestinian state should be, the answer according to Yahweh is: somewhere outside these borders. I realize nobody wants to hear it, but the Palestinian Arabs already have a state of their own, one in which they are the majority ethnic population. It's called Jordan.

I covered the whole subject of Israel's permanent borders in some detail of Chapter 6 of *Future History*: “Ground Zero.” So I'll just hit the high spots here. Israel's southern border forms a curve dipping about twenty miles south from the southern shore of the Dead Sea, arcing south, then west, then north, and finally ending at the Brook of Egypt (today's

Wadi el-Arish), which empties into the southwestern corner of the Mediterranean Sea. Note that because of the faithlessness of the spies sent into the promised land right after the exodus, the tongue of the southern Negev reaching down to the Gulf of Aqaba (including the port of Eliat—the ancient Ezion Geber) was not included in Israel’s tribal territory (though the original promise extended all the way from the Red Sea to the Euphrates River).

- (700) *Know Israel’s boundaries: the western border.* **“As for the western border, you shall have the Great Sea for a border; this shall be your western border.”** (Numbers 34:6) Nobody seems to dispute this one, except of course for a billion Muslims who would like to see the Mediterranean as Israel’s *eastern* border. For the geographically challenged, this means they’d like to see the Jews pushed into the sea, and they’ve been working toward that goal off and on ever since Israel’s May 1948 declaration of independence. They’ve already negotiated the gullible Israelis out of the Gaza Strip, which according to Numbers 34 should never have been surrendered. Politicians today who would like to carve up Israel into “Jewish” and “Palestinian” states ought to listen more carefully to the Palestinians themselves: their published maps of the Middle East show no Israel at all, only Palestine. They have no intention of “sharing” the land. The Muslims will not be satisfied until they can finish what Adolph Hitler started. (No, that’s not right: they will *never* be satisfied. But ridding the world of Israel is their primary goal.)
- (701) *Know Israel’s boundaries: the northern border.* **“And this shall be your northern border: From the Great Sea you shall mark out your border line to Mount Hor; from Mount Hor you shall mark out your border to the entrance of Hamath; then the direction of the border shall be toward Zedad; the border shall proceed to Ziphron, and it shall end at Hazar Enan. This shall be your northern border.”** (Numbers 34:7-9) Allow me to quote from *Future History*: “This is obviously not the famous Mount Hor on the border of Edom where Aaron was buried. It is rather the mountain known later as Tavros Umanis, mentioned in Song of Solomon 4:8 as Amanah. It is located near the ancient seacoast town of Byblos—slightly north of the 34th parallel, near Lebanon’s northern border, midway between Beirut and Tripoli. The entrance of Hamath is the southern end of the valley between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains that leads north to the present Syrian city of Hama. It’s about forty miles inland from Byblos. Zedad I take to be the town of Sadad, about the latitude of modern Tripoli, perhaps sixty miles inland. Northeast of Damascus lies a mountain called Djebel Sefira, whose name is likely derived from Ziphron. The border then moves west a bit: Hazar Enan is probably the Arab village of Dar Anon (the Arabic *Dar*, or

Hebrew *Hazar*, means “dwelling;” *Anon/Enan* means “spring”), about twenty-five miles northwest of Damascus.”

In other words, almost all of Lebanon belongs to Israel, along with a big chunk of western Syria, north of Damascus. If you don’t like it, don’t blame me; take it up with Yahweh. And note as well that these borders are still over a hundred miles shy of reaching the northern border of the original promise: the Euphrates River.

- (702) *Know Israel’s boundaries: the eastern border.* **“You shall mark out your eastern border from Hazar Enan to Shepham; the border shall go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain; the border shall go down and reach to the eastern side of the Sea of Chinnereth; the border shall go down along the Jordan, and it shall end at the Salt Sea. This shall be your land with its surrounding boundaries.”** (Numbers 34:10-12) Quoting again from *Future History*: “The line continues south. Targum Jonathan identifies Shepham with Aphmia, which is Baniyas, about four miles east of Laish, a.k.a. Dan. Ironically, this area was traditionally reckoned as the northern tip of Israel: the idiom ‘from Dan to Beersheba,’ meant the whole country.... Ain is apparently *Ein al Malcha*, or ‘salt spring,’ located between Kedesh and the Sea of Semechonitis, the small body of water upstream from the Sea of Galilee later known as Lake Huleh. Riblah must have been just east of this, i.e., on the northern shore of Lake Huleh. The Sea of Chinnereth, or Galilee, was included in Israel’s territory. The rest of the borderline simply follows the Jordan River south to the Dead Sea.”

The obvious bone of contention here is what’s erroneously known as the “West Bank,” that huge bite of Israel’s backside that was “occupied” by Jordan from the 1948 war until Israel was able to win it back in 1967. Yahweh *didn’t* deed it to Ammon (the northern component of modern Jordan). Every geographical description of the Land in Scripture names the Jordan River as Israel’s eastern border at this latitude. I believe that this territory (along with the disposition of Jerusalem) will be the heart of the issue that’s “settled” with the Antichrist’s “covenant with many,” the confirmation of which is the starting gun for the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, a.k.a. the Tribulation.

Israel’s persistent disobedience for the last couple of millennia has not abrogated Yahweh’s promise of territorial sovereignty over these lands. Note that the lands described in Ezekiel 47:13-20—clearly a prophetic passage describing the boundaries of Israel and how the land is to be distributed between the twelve tribes during Yahshua’s coming Millennial reign—are virtually identical to those given in Numbers 34. I am further convinced that the original promises to the patriarchs, that the Land would

stretch from the Red Sea (perhaps meaning only the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba) to the Euphrates, and from the Great Sea (the Med) to the desert, will become a literal reality during the Kingdom age. The outlying areas—those beyond specific tribal boundaries to the north and south—will apparently be held in common trust, perhaps like our American national parks are to us. This theory is admittedly not spelled out specifically in scripture, but I have never known Yahweh to abrogate His promises, even really old ones that haven't been mentioned for a few millennia.

KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

- (703) *The inheritance of a wife is that of her husband.* **"Now the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near and spoke before Moses and before the leaders, the chief fathers of the children of Israel. And they said: 'Yahweh commanded my lord Moses to give the land as an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel, and my lord was commanded by Yahweh to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters. Now if they are married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and it will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so it will be taken from the lot of our inheritance. And when the Jubilee of the children of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so their inheritance will be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers.'" (Numbers 36:1-4)** This is in reference to a situation that was discussed in Numbers 27:1-11. Zelophehad had fathered five daughters but no sons, begging the question of what was supposed to happen to the family lands. There Yahweh had declared, **"You shall surely give [the daughters of Zelophehad] a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them."** (Numbers 27:7)

So far, so good. The principle has been established that a woman is not a second-class citizen or a possession to be owned by a man in God's economy (the antithesis of the way things are in Islam). She as a child of her father has property rights. The fact remains, however, that in the normal order of things, the *sons* of a family would inherit the land, not the daughters. Why? Because when a woman married, her husband's inheritance in effect became hers, since they were now "one." Thus though the inheritance followed the male line, no one was left high and dry. Hence the concern voiced here in Numbers 36: if a woman who had inherited her father's estate married outside her tribe, the land would

change hands to her husband's tribe when it was left to the next generation—something Yahweh never intended. I'll have more to say about that in the following precept, but first let's pause and reflect on the issue of whose inheritance goes where, and why.

Practically every facet of normal life, if it's mentioned in the Torah, has some symbolic counterpart in Yahweh's plan for our redemption. Thus we see that men and women were ordinarily expected to marry and raise families, taking upon themselves the roles God assigned them to teach the human race about His own nature: the Father is the authority, protector, and provider. The Mother (corresponding to the Holy Spirit) is the One who comforts, consoles, guides, and convicts. People who grow up in functional households (an increasingly rare circumstance, I'm afraid) know this intuitively. The love within this union produces offspring—humanity, the preeminent “firstborn” of which is Yahshua. We who follow Him into the family have an example, a mentor, One who has gone through everything we will as we grow up—yet without sin against the Father, Yahweh. In one respect, then, He is like our big brother. But in another way, He is like our betrothed husband, and we are His bride. (As if to confirm this symbolic duality, the “Beloved” in the Song of Solomon repeatedly refers to his bride as “my sister, my spouse.”)

This is where the inheritance comes into play. Being the “Son of God,” our beloved Yahshua is heir to, well, *everything*. We, by contrast, are able to bring nothing to the marriage but ourselves. Furthermore, while we can see our own faults well enough, our betrothed sees nothing but beauty in us: love is blind. He has not espoused us in order to gain anything we have or do; on the contrary, upon consummation of our vows, everything He owns—the whole universe—will become ours as well. And there's no “pre-nuptial agreement.” Our marriage, you see, is not a partnership. It is a corporation: we are becoming one entity. (Our “vows,” I surmise, will be consummated at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb described in Revelation 19, apparently taking place in heaven while the Tribulation is raging on earth.)

- (704) *The inheritance must not leave the tribe.* “Then Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of Yahweh, saying: “What the tribe of the sons of Joseph speaks is right. This is what Yahweh commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, ‘Let them marry whom they think best, but they may marry only within the family of their father's tribe.’ So the inheritance of the children of Israel shall not change hands from tribe to tribe, for every one of the children of Israel shall keep the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel shall

be the wife of one of the family of her father's tribe, so that the children of Israel each may possess the inheritance of his fathers. Thus no inheritance shall change hands from one tribe to another, but every tribe of the children of Israel shall keep its own inheritance." (Numbers 36:5-9) Yahweh's solution to the problem was simple: the five daughters of Zelophehad who had inherited their father's land would have to restrict their marriage prospects to the tribe of Joseph—not a big sacrifice, since there were fifty-two thousand able-bodied men in Manasseh (Zelophehad's tribe) and another thirty-two thousand in Ephraim at the time. A target-rich environment, so to speak. Problem solved.

We, however, need to ask a more fundamental question. Why was it so important to keep the inheritance within the tribe? I believe the answer becomes a bit clearer if we think of "the inheritance" as more than just a plot of land or a few sheep. In a larger sense it is the individual destiny of each tribe, their prophetic heritage. On his deathbed, Jacob/Israel called his twelve sons together and gave them his "blessing," telling each of them what, in his words, "**shall befall you in the last days.**" (Genesis 49:1) Each son—through his progeny—had a distinct prophetic destiny.

Reuben was "unstable as water," and would "not excel." Simeon and Levi were grouped together, and both, in different ways, were to be "divided in Jacob" and "scattered in Israel." Judah, in contrast, would have the "praise" of his brothers, ultimately being the tribe from whom the scepter of Israelite royalty would never depart. (Thus keeping Judah set apart was critical to Yahweh's unfolding plan of redemption, for the Anointed King, Yahshua, would descend from this tribe.) Zebulun would become a seafaring people, while Issachar would become "a band of slaves." Dan would be known for its satanic proclivities: "a serpent by the way, a viper by the path." Gad would enjoy military success, Asher would prosper materially, and Naphtali would "give words of beauty." Joseph (since Jacob did not distinguish between Manasseh and Ephraim here) would be blessed of God. (It's therefore significant that the daughters of Zelophehad were told to marry within the tribe of *Joseph*; they were not restricted to their own semi-tribe of Manasseh.) And finally, Benjamin was predicted to become a predator. (Saul of Tarsus, a Benjamite, fairly leaps to mind.) The twelve tribes yielded almost that many utterly diverse prophetic destinies, which, as far as we can tell from the historical record, came to pass just as predicted. No wonder Yahweh desired to keep their inheritances distinct from one another. There was far more to this than a bit of acreage changing hands over time.

(705) *Do not add or subtract from God's Word.* **"Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which Yahweh, God of your fathers, is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of Yahweh your God which I command you."** (Deuteronomy 4:1-2) More than any single precept in the Torah, this one indicts rabbinical Judaism, pinpointing the *modus operandi* whereby it twists scripture into a bloated and misleading caricature of itself. It was no "mistake," no mere oversight, that Maimonides failed to list this among his 613 mitzvot. He purposely avoided this one, for it's a scathing indictment of his own methods.

If you'll recall the "blessings and cursings" passages, the blessings were predicated upon obedience: **"If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them..."** (Leviticus 26:3) or **"If you diligently obey the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all His commandments..."** (Deuteronomy 28:1). Here we discover that the key to being able to **"keep the commandments of Yahweh your God"** is to neither add to nor subtract from them. We make enough inadvertent mistakes without purposely tampering with God's Word. This principle is so important, it was repeated (and given teeth) at the end of the very last book in the Bible: **"For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."** (Revelation 22:18-19) It therefore behooves us to consider carefully what it is to "add to" or "subtract from" scripture.

I, for one, walk on eggshells around passages like this. After all, it is my job to examine the Word and explain what's there—what it means, what its significance is. There's a very fine line between explaining something and embellishing it. Exegesis can, with very little effort, morph into eisegesis. And although I'm careful to put scriptural quotes in a contrasting font so folks can distinguish what Yahweh said from what I said, it's all too easy to equate my ramblings with God's wisdom. Please resist the temptation to do that.

On the other hand, I know for a fact that I miss stuff, even if I'm looking really hard for it. I can't count the number of times I've written about a passage, only to later hear my pastor cover the same territory and come up with a completely different application, no less valid than my own. Have we both therefore "subtracted" from scripture? No, I don't think so, for three simple reasons: (1) We weren't purposely trying to

conceal anything; (2) God's word is an incredibly rich treasury of truth, whose lessons can often be of benefit to us on many different levels; and (3) the Holy Spirit reveals Biblical truths to us as we need them, as we become ready to receive them, and until that happens, they're just words on a page. A classic example: before the signs heralding the end of the age began appearing, the Book of Revelation was a baffling mystery to people (and it still is to many). No less a scholar than Martin Luther was so puzzled by Revelation, he is said to have remarked, "Even if it were a blessed thing to believe what is contained in it, no man knows what that is." The truths of this enigmatic book were opaque in Luther's day. They are becoming more lucid by the minute in ours.

But scriptural subtraction does go on today. Rabbinical Judaism, most significantly, has subtracted the underlying reality that supports and explains the entire Tanach: that Yahweh's Messiah—Yahshua of Nazareth—would fulfill the Torah and become the atonement for our sins, reconciling us to God. But "Christian-dumb" is guilty too. Catholicism subtracts the principle of salvation by grace alone, insisting that works and alms and penance are required as well. Protestants tend to subtract whatever they don't understand, like the Torah's role, God's undying devotion to Israel, scriptural precepts that no longer line up with today's pathetic societal mores, or anything requiring a miracle. There are whole denominations that have subtracted such basic pillars as the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, or His bodily resurrection from their theologies—gutting the Bible in the process. Even Evangelicals can fall prey to the subtraction trap. For them, it's usually in the form of concentrating on one or two narrow doctrines (valid or not) to the purposeful exclusion of everything else in scripture. It could be prophecy, finances and giving, the gifts of the Spirit, praise and worship, or whatever. We need to learn to take the *whole* counsel of God, not just the parts that tickle our fancy.

And what about adding to it? The rabbis have historically made a contact sport out of this. Yahweh says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it set apart." The rabbis say that you can therefore lift only a certain weight or walk a certain distance before you become a lawbreaker. Yahweh says, "Don't boil a kid in its mother's milk." The sages conclude that you can't eat meat and dairy products in the same meal, or you've broken the Law of God. No, you've broken the law *of the rabbis*—which is not at all the same thing. They've added to the instructions that Yahweh gave to Moses, doing precisely what he told them not to do. Christians too add dumb and destructive things to our faith, transforming a personal relationship with Yahweh into a pointless religion. We hold onto our traditions for dear life while clinging to our questionable doctrines out of

sheer institutional stubbornness. And when someone points out where we've erred, we look at him with suspicion and hostility.

As in politics, a revolution in spiritual matters now and then is a healthy thing. We need to shake off the cobwebs of complacency, examine the Word for ourselves, and take action based on what *we* find there—not on what somebody has told us about it (and that “somebody” includes me, folks). We need to be honest with ourselves: does what we find in scripture align perfectly with what we're being taught by men? Does it align with the way we live our lives? If we find that we're doing or believing something that's not supported by the Word, or conversely, if we discover that something we *don't* do or believe is commanded of us in scripture, we need to have the courage to repent, turn around, go the other direction. We need to drop what's been added, and restore what's been taken away from our scriptural experience. Why? So that we **“may live, and go in and possess the land.”**

The Tabernacle of God

A hundred years ago when I was in college, I studied art (much to my father's chagrin). Besides my own narrow field of specialization, the curriculum required classes in a broad range of quasi-related subjects, designed (I presume) to teach us to think conceptually—to look at the broad picture, not just individual pieces of the human puzzle. So I not only studied painting, drawing, illustration, and sculpture. There was also industrial design, materials technology, biology and chemistry. Ceramics, metal-smithing, printmaking, and fabric design courses taught valuable lessons in craftsmanship. Architectural design (without the math), graphics, advertising, interior design, and theater/set design were buttressed by studies in psychology, anthropology, and art history.

I didn't realize until years later that my higher education had done far more than prepare me to hold down a job (which was, truth be told, where it had essentially failed). It had taught me to see the world as something more than the sum of its parts, as a living organism, all of which was connected in some fundamental way. My college professors would have been horrified, of course, to learn that I had further observed that this organism, the cosmos, was so complex and so well balanced that its very existence required a Creator. The craftsmanship, the planning, the aesthetic nuance, the *rightness* of it all demanded that Somebody Really Smart had invented it. The painting required its Artist. The building revealed its Architect. The machine demanded its Engineer. The book presupposed its Author. The thought necessitated its Living Mind. But it was even better than that (or worse, depending on one's viewpoint). The very existence of the cosmos (of which I was a part) told me something stunning and unforeseen about its Creator: it told me He must have had a *reason* for creating it.

I'm a trained designer, yet I've never "designed" anything without having a purpose in mind, a goal to meet, a need to fill. It needn't be weighty and earth-shattering, like "designing" a cure for cancer or a rocket to fly to the moon. It might be as insignificant as wadding up a piece of paper to amuse my cat. But there's *always* a purpose in design—and the grander the design, the more important the purpose (at least in the mind of the designer). The universe we perceive around us is the grandest design of all—immense beyond imagination, infinitely beautiful, perfectly balanced, and deeply mysterious. Though we don't yet know precisely *how* it was designed, we do know roughly *when*: science has pinned down the date of the creation of time, space, matter, and energy to about

13.7 billion years ago—not even *remotely* long enough for life to have been spontaneously generated through mere chance. The more secrets we discover about our universe, the more we ought to be in awe of the One who created it—and the more we should be asking ourselves, *why did He make all this?* How can we look at the stars and refuse to see that there is purpose in their design, in their very existence? How can we look at ourselves and fail to see that we too have been created for a purpose?

Here's the rub. The Designer who created the universe is the same One who made us. He told us so, and I for one am inclined to take His word for it. (Who'd make up a story like that?) Indeed, from all the evidence He's provided so far, it appears that His *primary* purpose for creating the universe is so that the elements comprising our physical environment, including our bodies, would be available. He, personally, doesn't need them; He existed very nicely *forever* without them. It's no accident that the Designer's self-revealed name is Yahweh: "I Am," the self-existent One. Because Yahweh's purpose for creation (at least as far as He's told us—there may be more to it) is to share a loving relationship with mankind, we should not be terribly surprised to find that He didn't restrict His creative impulses to designing "big" things like space/time, matter/energy, or organic life. He also designed things on our scale (mental as well as physical)—His idea of nanotechnology, I imagine.

This chapter and the next describe one such architectural design project, the temple, first revealed as the Tabernacle or the Sanctuary. As with all of Yahweh's designs, this one is purpose-driven, but unlike some of His "projects," (such as making a nice galaxy for us to live in), the Tabernacle and its appurtenances are described in excruciating detail in Scripture. The reason, of course, is that a human construction crew (Israel) was tasked to build and operate the place, following the Architect's blueprints to the letter. We have already seen some of these instructions in *The Owner's Manual*, notably in Chapters 10 and 11.

The Tabernacle/Temple in its earliest form is just a fancy tent with some portable furnishings, not particularly big or awe-inspiring. It's a fair question to ask, then: *why?* What did the Creator of the universe wish to accomplish by designing such a structure? What was its intended purpose? It was obviously not calculated to impress us: the thing just wasn't all that impressive, as manmade structures go. From the outside, the thing just looked like a large gray box with a fence around it sitting out in the middle of the desert. Its purpose is latent in the wealth of detail we were given concerning its construction and function. The tabernacle and its service entail by far God's most detailed set of instructions about any material entity in the entire Bible. If the sheer volume of instruction is any indication, it was intended to be a meticulous and comprehensive object lesson representing something extremely important to the Architect. The

Sanctuary symbolized some reality He wanted us to discover, ponder, and remember. In short, the purpose of the Tabernacle was to reveal the Plan of God.

And so, like my educational odyssey so many years ago, the plethora of disparate elements comprising the body of instruction concerning the Tabernacle/Temple form a reality far greater than the sum of its parts. It was designed to teach us to think conceptually about the means Yahweh planned to employ to reconcile a fallen human race to Himself, undo the damage we did to ourselves in the Garden of Eden, and restore the Designer's primeval purpose for creating the universe in the first place—fellowship between God and man.

SITE PLANNING AND INITIAL CONCEPT

(706) *Embrace Yahweh's tests.* **"Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then He said, 'Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.'"** (Genesis 22:1-2) After failing several of Yahweh's tests and getting varying marks on others, Abraham was suddenly faced with his "final exam," the one test that, beyond all others, would either define him as a man of faith or relegate him to the ranks of normal clueless humanity. His faith had been crafted by a series of events over the years, each one proving a little more convincingly than the last that Yahweh was a God who could be trusted to keep His word. The most compelling of these, of course, had been the miraculous birth of the very promised son whom Abraham was now being told to sacrifice as a burnt offering.

There was only one thing that could have compelled Abraham to obey Yahweh in this most difficult of tests: he *believed*, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that God would bring the son of promise back to life—that the promise would be kept somehow even if Isaac died. Yes, the command was counter-intuitive. It didn't matter. Abraham had walked with the God who was delivering these bizarre instructions for a lifetime, and He had never let him down, never led him astray, never lied to him. That's why Abe, when he began the final ascent to the place of sacrifice, could tell the two servants who accompanied them, **"The lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you."** (Genesis 22:5) Abraham truly believed they would both return. And his unshakable belief was demonstrated by his obedience.

Though it's relatively easy for us to see this side of Calvary, I doubt if Abraham could have known he was being asked to perform an elaborate dress rehearsal of the pivotal event in Yahweh's plan for the redemption of

mankind, the sacrifice of *His own Son*, Yahshua. The son of promise was to be sacrificed by a loving father, and he went willingly. A donkey was recruited for transportation. It was a three-day journey. The son would carry the wood needed for the offering on his own back as he approached the place of execution. Even the place was prophetic. Abe was told to go to the “mountains of Moriah.” Moriah is one of several mountains upon which the future city of Jerusalem would eventually be built, though there was nothing there at the time. Significantly, the two servants were asked to stay behind while Abraham and Isaac journeyed on toward the specific spot to which Yahweh directed them. If I may be allowed a bit of plausible speculation, I believe that the servants remained at the place where the Temple would eventually be built—on Mount Moriah, but not at the actual summit. Abraham and Isaac continued on, stopping a few hundred yards further up the hillside at a place that would someday be known to the world as Golgotha.

- (707) *Be alert to God's leading.* **“But the Angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ So he said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.’ Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, Yahweh-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, ‘In the Mount of Yahweh it shall be provided.’”** (Genesis 22:11-14) The parallels between type and antitype continue: a substitute offering was provided by Yahweh. This substitute was a ram (that is, a fully mature male sheep—a grown-up lamb, a clean animal). The “thicket” is prophetic of the crown of thorns fashioned by the Roman soldiers at Yahshua’s mock trial, and the “horns” are symbolic of the authority, the power of Yahshua. Something stunningly significant is being revealed here: it was not through His human vulnerability that Yahshua was bound and delivered into the hands of His executioners, but rather through the very power and authority of the Son of God. He realized that no one other than Himself could serve as the “burnt offering” that would atone for the sins of mankind. If *He* didn’t do it, it wouldn’t get done at all. We would still be dead in our sins.

We can be reasonably certain that Abraham had convinced himself that God would raise his son back to life after he had been slain. He certainly wasn’t counting on being provided a substitute sacrifice. So there is a lesson for us latent in Abraham’s unexpected discovery of the ram. As far as Abe could tell, Yahweh had changed his plan at the last minute—first He’d told him to sacrifice his son, and later He’d told him not to, to

use the ram instead. If Abraham had been like a lot of Christians, he would have said, *“No, my doctrine is sound according to everything I’ve been taught. My religious traditions are inviolable. God (defined by my opinions) doesn’t change. Sparing Isaac now would be too easy, so this must be a trick. I’m just being tempted to ignore my original instructions. After all, it’s only logical: if we’re supposed to be “Christ-like,” then God surely requires sacrifices from us.”* At which point he would have gone ahead and slit Isaac’s throat, ram or no ram.

The lesson is this: Yahweh doesn’t give us all the answers up front. He wants us to learn by experience, study, observation, and interaction with Him. There are surprises in God’s word that aren’t immediately apparent to the casual reader. I’ve been studying it for over half a century, and I still learn new things ’most every day. Maybe I’m just slow, but the Holy Spirit seems to reveal things to me when I’m ready to receive them, and not before. We therefore need to be habitually alert to the leading of Yahweh in our lives. The caveat, of course, is that although Yahweh never contradicts Himself, He often reveals His truth piecemeal. Even in Abraham’s case, the *real* instruction was not, “Go and kill your son Isaac,” but “Be willing to sacrifice him.” That being said, comprehending God’s Word is not remotely the same thing as formulating new doctrine diametrically opposed to the plain reading of scripture based upon one’s dreams, visions, or insights. One can receive some very unscriptural “insights” by eating anchovy-jalapeno pizza at two o’clock in the morning.

FUNDING AND MATERIALS REQUISITION

- (708) *Rely upon Yahweh to fund His own projects.* **“And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out of here altogether. Speak now in the hearing of the people, and let every man ask from his neighbor and every woman from her neighbor, articles of silver and articles of gold.’”** (Exodus 11:1-2) I’ve never been able to read this passage without blushing. God told His people to go to their Egyptian neighbors and ask them for gold and silver articles. Maybe it’s just that as an American, one too many scams have been foisted upon me and my neighbors—to the point that I never even let my daughters go door-to-door to sell Girl Scout cookies (I always just bought their quotas myself, much to the detriment of my waistline). The tenor of the times was very different back then, of course, as explained in verse 3: **“And Yahweh gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in**

the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people." This was after nine of the ten plagues had been visited upon Egypt. By this time it had been effectively demonstrated that Moses' God (and by extension, the God of the Israelites) had vanquished the gods of the Egyptians, the most recent of which was the top dog in their pantheon, Ra, the sun god, who had been put in his place during the latest plague—darkness. So the request for gold and silver trinkets was couched in these terms: "Yahweh, the God of Israel who has proven His power over your local deities, requires that you honor him by providing us with gold and silver, for in a short time, He intends to free us from our bondage."

The "why" of it isn't too hard to figure out, of course. The Israelites, having been slaves for four centuries, had very little of this world's wealth. Yahweh wanted to give them the means and opportunity to show Him their gratitude for freeing them from their chains. But what does the man who has nothing have to give to God? *Nothing*, unless God Himself provides it first. Some things never change.

What the gold and silver was intended to be used for will become evident in the next precept. For now, I merely wish to point out the truth of the old saying, "Where God guides, God provides." I just cringe at pastors who incessantly hound their congregations for increased contributions, or television evangelists who spend half their air time begging for money. *If we don't receive a generous donation from you, dear listener, we won't be able to continue this ministry.* Oh really? If that's the case, maybe your "ministry" *needs* to be discontinued. In my experience, Yahweh provides whatever resources your ministry is going to need before you even know you need them—in my own personal case, a big house (*before* He asked my wife and I to adopt nine kids), a moderately successful small business (*before* the expense of raising those kids got out of hand), and—counter-intuitively—a bloody and premature end to my professional career as a designer, coupled with an unexpected stock windfall and my wife's modest inheritance (*before* being given the privilege of researching His Word full-time). There's a very good reason for the notice on the home page of TheOwnersManual.net that says, "I have nothing to sell you. Everything on this website is absolutely free...just like God's love."

- (709) *Use whatever Yahweh has provided as He directs.* **"Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering. And this is the offering which you shall take from them: gold, silver, and bronze; blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats' hair; ram skins dyed red, badger**

skins, and acacia wood; oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate.” (Exodus 25:1-7) The very next words out of Yahweh’s mouth explained why He wanted the Israelites to contribute all this stuff: **“And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.”** (Exodus 27:8-9. See Mitzvah #428.) The “pattern” of the tabernacle, its furnishings, and its service, would be a multi-level metaphor for the Plan of God.

Scripture also records Moses’ relaying of Yahweh’s words to the people: **“And Moses spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, ‘This is the thing which Yahweh commanded, saying: Take from among you an offering to Yahweh. Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as an offering to Yahweh: gold, silver, and bronze; blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats’ hair; ram skins dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood; oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate.’”** (Exodus 35:4-9) How refreshing it is to see that Moses didn’t alter Yahweh’s instructions one whit when passing them on to the Israelites. We’ll look at each of these items in turn as they’re discussed in the Tabernacle’s plan. At this point, they were just raw materials, like so much lumber and drywall and concrete. But as we shall see, Yahweh’s plan called for a very specific list of materials because He had a very precise story to tell.

This wasn’t a tax on the people. They weren’t required to bring anything. Nor were the Israelites told to hand over everything they had collected from the Egyptians on their way out of town (see Precept #708), though that’s obviously the source from which much of the funding for the Tabernacle was expected to be derived. God left it up to the individual Israelites to decide what (if anything) to contribute: **“Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it.”** He would have been perfectly justified in wording it a bit differently, of course: *“Whoever is the least bit grateful that I delivered them out of bondage with My mighty hand, signs, and wonders—whoever remembers or cares what I did for them at the Red Sea—let him bring an offering.”* Yahweh never twists our arms or makes our choices for us. But that doesn’t mean He doesn’t have the right to. It occurred to me as well that the Israelites who decided to keep the gold for themselves were doomed to lugging it around the wilderness with them for the next forty years. There was nothing to spend it on and no practical way to protect it from thieves. If not used for God’s glory, the gift-gold became both a pointless burden and a stress-inducing temptation.

- (710) *Don't use a double standard. "All your valuations shall be according to the shekel of the sanctuary: twenty gerahs to the shekel."* (Leviticus 27:25) In Mitzvot #526-528, we saw that the priests were to assign a value to certain things that might be offered to Yahweh to aid the priesthood, specifically, unclean but utilitarian animals like donkeys or horses, and houses or land. These things could later be redeemed, bought back by their former owners, but one fifth of their assigned value was to be added—the point being that redemption (that which Yahweh was doing for mankind) was expensive: God was prepared to pay more than we were worth to secure our release, even though we were “unclean beasts.”

Here we see that the value the priests assigned to the offered donkey (or whatever) was to be measured in the same currency as the redemption price. There was to be no double standard. Taken to its logical conclusion, this tells me that the priests (who, if you'll recall, represent all believers) and the people (the general population) are held to the same standard and are responsible to keep the same Law, whether Torah or Conscience. In other words, we believers cannot insist that the lost “work their way to heaven” by becoming “good people” while excusing ourselves from living holy lives on the basis of having been “saved by grace.” No, the reality is that we have *all* fallen into sin; we have *all* become unclean beasts, offered up in service (or servitude) in this world. There is no “privileged” priesthood who is above the Law. No matter who we are, our Master wishes to redeem us, and He is prepared to pay an inordinately high price for our release from bondage. The only difference between “saved” and “lost” people is which side of the redemption equation we're on.

DETAIL DRAWINGS

- (711) *Follow Yahweh's plan when constructing the Sanctuary. "According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it."* (Exodus 25:9) Not only were the Israelites commanded to build a sanctuary for Yahweh (verse 8; see Mitzvah #428), they were told to make it in a very specific manner, according to a plan Yahweh had shown to Moses up on Mount Sinai. Its plan, dimensions, materials, and furnishings weren't specified for their practicality, style, or function. On the contrary, every detail called for in Yahweh's plan *meant* something. Each piece, one way or another, explained His provision for our redemption, purification, and reconciliation with Him.

We'll examine these details in turn as we reach them in the scriptural narrative. But let us first survey the Tabernacle's overall plot design, the

“site plan.” As you approached the Tabernacle courtyard (Precept #728) from the outside, all you’d see was a white fence made of linen fabric, too tall to see over. You could, however, see the top of the Tabernacle proper. It wasn’t very impressive: just a dull, shapeless gray shroud poking up from the desert floor toward the western end of this modest rectangular enclosure, about the size of a suburban lot. The courtyard had only one entrance, a broad opening in the cloth fence on the eastern side, with an elaborate curtain (Precept #729) for a gate.

Upon entering through the courtyard’s portal, you’d see two prominent items standing between you and the Tabernacle. The first was an altar (Precept #726), a big barbecue—the largest single item in the Tabernacle environs. Considering the buzz of activity centering on the altar, you may reflect that they could use an even larger one, until you remember that everything had to be portable, carried about by groups of Levites whenever Yahweh directed Israel to pick up stakes and move (Precept #747). Beyond the altar, between it and the door of the Tabernacle, was a bronze wash basin or laver (Mitzvah #435) sitting on a bronze pedestal. This was to be used for washing the hands and feet of the priests before they entered the Tabernacle.

We’ll defer our explanation of the layout of the furnishings within the Sanctuary itself. But even before we’ve entered the Tabernacle, we’ve learned some important truths. (1) Yahweh has provided only one way to reach Him. (Though functionally omnipresent, He can symbolically be characterized as dwelling “within” the Most Holy Place, the inner room of the Tabernacle, defining it as the final objective of man seeking God.) As Yahshua explained, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”** (John 14:6) Therefore, the single entrance symbolizes Yahshua the Messiah. (2) One must get past the altar in order to reach God. That is, innocent blood must be shed as atonement for sin. There’s no way around it. The blood of a “clean” animal would suffice as a temporary symbol, but the permanent reality that’s represented by this symbol is Yahshua the Messiah—the only truly Innocent One. (3) Once beyond the altar, the seeker-priest must wash his hands and feet before approaching God. The blood of the innocent sacrifice shed at the altar had atoned for his sin, its true, but his works and walk must be subsequently cleansed—every time he approached his God. As Paul puts it, **“Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.”** (Ephesians 5:25-26) So once again, we see Yahshua our Messiah as the object of the metaphor: the sole agent of reconciliation between man and God. The bronze laver was the only thing within the Tabernacle for which no specific dimensions were given. We

can only conclude that Yahweh meant to imply that there is no limit to the depth of cleansing the laver made possible or to the number of washings it affords.

- (712) *Make the linen covering curtains as directed. “Moreover you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine woven linen and blue, purple, and scarlet thread; with artistic designs of cherubim you shall weave them.”* (Exodus 26:1) The Tabernacle was basically an elaborate tent with rigid walls. Here we see the innermost of four layers comprising the ceiling and roof. This embroidered linen layer is what one would see when he entered the Tabernacle and looked upward. Ten strips of linen cloth were to be laid side by side across the width of the Tabernacle.

The white linen, as we have seen, speaks of righteousness, and specifically, that imputed to us by a holy God. Thus the pure white linen was to be embroidered with “artistic designs of cherubim.” This is a bit puzzling, for the Second Commandment forbids the making of “**any likeness of anything that is in heaven above,**” etc. (Exodus 20:4) Cherubim were winged angelic beings such as those whom Yahweh had stationed at the entrance to Eden after the fall, blocking access to the tree of life. The instruction to weave images of them into the Tabernacle’s linen curtains (not to mention fashioning them into golden statues atop the mercy seat) leaves me no choice but to conclude that the prohibition of the Second Commandment implied making images *for the purpose of worshiping them*. (This is a great comfort to an old ex-graphic-designer like me, whose whole career revolved around “making images” of things, mostly with an eye toward helping consumers make informed purchasing decisions.) Here, the images of cherubim were reminders of Yahweh’s constant watchfulness over Israel. These cherub-angels were His ever-present agents of provision, protection, and—if need be—correction.

Being agents of the Almighty, it was only fitting that the embroidery of the cherubim was to be wrought in the rarest, most costly of materials—thread dyed “blue, purple, and scarlet.” Blue (Hebrew: *tekelet*) and purple (*argaman*) were derived from the same source—the secretions of various Mediterranean mollusks such as *Murex brandaris* and *Murex trunculus*. *Tekelet* ranged from blue, to deep purple or violet, to brilliant red. *Argaman* varied from a deep red-black to violet. If you’ll recall, a single strand of the ubiquitous Hebrew tsitzit (Mitzvah #18) was to be dyed blue (*tekelet*)—a constant reminder of the royalty of the coming Messiah. Scarlet (Hebrew: *sani*) was a costly dye obtained from the eggs of cochineal scale insects which attached themselves to kermes oaks. It was a

deep blood-red in color, making it a ready metaphor for the blood shed by the atonement sacrifice—ultimately, Yahshua.

The passage goes on to explain, **“The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits. And every one of the curtains shall have the same measurements....”** We shall soon learn that the width and height of the Tabernacle were each ten cubits; therefore as the linen curtains draped over the frame (Precept #715) they would have reached to within a cubit (probably about eighteen inches) of the ground, but would not have touched it. The lesson: our imputed righteousness, interwoven with God’s provision and protection, cannot be soiled by contact with the world in which we live. We are separated from it, made holy, called out—kept, quite literally, at arm’s length from it.

“Five curtains shall be coupled to one another, and the other five curtains shall be coupled to one another. And you shall make loops of blue yarn on the edge of the curtain on the selvedge of one set, and likewise you shall do on the outer edge of the other curtain of the second set. Fifty loops you shall make in the one curtain, and fifty loops you shall make on the edge of the curtain that is on the end of the second set, that the loops may be clasped to one another.” The loops of blue yarn once again, like the tsitzit, remind us that Yahshua the Messiah, the coming King, is the One who holds our righteousness together. These loops are used to tie the linen strips into two great “sub-assemblies” of five curtains each. Why? I believe each set of five curtains represents a distinct but equally important piece of Yahweh’s Kingdom: to wit, Israel and the ekklesia—the “Church.” (They can’t signify the divided kingdom of Israel—the ten tribes of Ephraim and the two of Judah—for the simple reason that Yahweh’s Plan sees them as one nation, composed of twelve tribes, who would eventually be restored under Yahweh’s rule. Prophets like Ezekiel described them that way long after the Northern kingdom had been scattered to the four winds. Compare Ezekiel 37 to Chapter 48.)

Although these “sub-assemblies” are distinct entities, they work together side by side. *Both of them* are necessary for the integrity of the Tabernacle. These in turn are to be joined together as one, but not with the usual blue cords (and it’s this crucial difference that tips us off to the metaphor): **“And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains together with the clasps, so that it may be one tabernacle.”** (Exodus 26:2-6) The gold of these clasps that hold Israel and the ekklesia together speaks of a purity achieved through the crucible of judgment, a purity that is indestructible, enduringly beautiful, and exceedingly precious. Again, that can signify only One thing in the final analysis: our Messiah, Yahshua. It

is He alone who can join Israel and the ekklesia into one cohesive unit, sharing a common purpose, woven of the same imputed righteousness, and able to stand together as sinless children before Yahweh, distinct yet united. Of course, this prophecy requires that *both* sides are held by the golden clasps—that *both* sides of the curtain assembly accept Yahshua as their Messiah. Israel isn't quite there yet, so God's Plan, the Tabernacle, isn't completely finished: it "leaks." But the day is not far off when Israel and the Church can and will join hands and rejoice together in the Tabernacle—the Plan—of Yahweh.

- (713) *Make the goats' hair curtains as directed. "You shall also make curtains of goats' hair, to be a tent over the tabernacle. You shall make eleven curtains. The length of each curtain shall be thirty cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; and the eleven curtains shall all have the same measurements."* (Exodus 26:7-8) Same song, but a radically different verse. Taking our cues from the two goats who play their respective parts on the Day of Atonement (see Mitzvot #133-#136), we can surmise that the black goats' hair curtains that rest on top of the linen ones symbolize the atonement for sin. Each individual curtain is the same width as before, but their length is now thirty cubits, that is, long enough to touch the ground when draped over the Tabernacle's framework. Sin is like that: contact with the world defiles us, but *our* shortcomings impact the earth as well. Note that because the goats' hair curtains are longer than the linen curtains they cover, the imputed righteousness that the linen represents cannot be seen by anybody standing outside the Tabernacle. In fact, the *only* way one can see a believer's righteousness is to go into the Tabernacle and look up. There's a lesson there somewhere, one that I think will become apparent as we continue our study.

"And you shall couple five curtains by themselves and six curtains by themselves, and you shall double over the sixth curtain at the forefront of the tent." In this layer, there are eleven curtain sections, one more than the linen layer had. As before, they are grouped in two sub-assemblies (again, indicative of the ekklesia and Israel—both of whom have seen the atonement of their sins). Apparently, the six-curtain unit is positioned in the front, indicating Israel's position. **"You shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain of the second set. And you shall make fifty bronze clasps, put the clasps into the loops, and couple the tent together, that it may be one...."** No golden clasps here. This time they're bronze, indicating judgment. Remember, the clasps (symbolic of Yahshua) are what joins Israel to the Church. In the context of dealing with our sin, the judgment endured by the Messiah on Calvary is our sole point of contact. Yahweh is subtly declaring that the sins of

both Jews and gentiles are atoned in the same manner—the judgment borne by God’s Anointed—or not at all. Rule-keeping or traditional observance by devout Jews cannot provide atonement for sin any more than wishful thinking or philosophical maneuvering can for gentiles.

“The remnant that remains of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remains, shall hang over the back of the tabernacle. And a cubit on one side and a cubit on the other side, of what remains of the length of the curtains of the tent, shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle, on this side and on that side, to cover it.” (Exodus 26:9-13) Here we see that the goats’ hair curtains were to be positioned symmetrically side-to-side atop the linen set, verifying what I hypothesized concerning the fact that these touched the earth on either side of the tabernacle. We’ve already seen how the front half-curtain would have been folded back upon itself. In the back of the Tabernacle, however, the two-cubit half-curtain would extend beyond the final linen panel for the same reason as the goats’ hair curtains were made longer: so that the righteousness of the believer can be seen only from within the Tabernacle. Those outside should never be given the impression that we are saved because we are good. Those on the inside know that the converse is true: we are good because we are saved.

One detail pertaining to the assembly of the curtain sections should not be overlooked. Every time one curtain is attached to another, there are *fifty* attachment points, whether loops of blue yarn or clasps of gold or bronze. Why fifty? The number is immediately reminiscent of the period of Jubilee—fifty years, seven sabbatical phases plus one. Jubilee (see Leviticus 25; Mitzvot #170, #171, #190-193, #199, #216, and #221-226 in Chapter 6 of *The Owner’s Manual*) represents our salvation, a once in a lifetime chance to be released from our bondage, to reclaim our inheritance, and to have our debts removed. In short, it’s a picture of God’s grace. So the lesson of the Tabernacle coverings is that whether we are being linked to other believers within Israel or within the ekklesia, the One who joins us together is Yahshua the Messiah, and *the way* He connects us to each other is through grace. No wonder Yahweh rails against the twin abominations of anti-Semitism among “Christians” and Jews who pervert, distort, and wage war against the good news of Yahshua the Messiah.

- (714) *Make two additional coverings from ram skins and “badger” skins. “You shall also make a covering of ram skins dyed red for the tent, and a covering of badger skins above that.”* (Exodus 26:14) Moses didn’t repeat the details that remained the same from one Tabernacle covering layer to the next. So it appears that the specs for the last two layers remained the same as those

for the goats' hair level: eleven curtains, thirty cubits long, with two sub-assembly sets arranged six in the front and five toward the back, attached with bronze clasps, etc. Thus the last two layers, like the first two, indicate that Israel and the ekklesia are side-by-side beneficiaries of whatever symbols are latent in their respective descriptions.

The third layer consisted of "ram skins dyed red." It would be hard to miss the reference to the ram caught by its horns in the thicket that had served as the substitute sacrifice in place of Isaac on Mount Moriah (see Precept #707). The ram represents the Messiah in His sacrificial role. In the prototype, the ram's skin had been dyed red by its own blood as Abraham had cut its throat. Unlike the "scarlet" thread used in the linen layer, no particular dye source is implied in the word chosen for "red" in this passage. What we see, rather, is a play on words with a lesson attached. The word is *'adem*, simply meaning red, ruddy, or dyed red. It has the same consonant root as *'adam*, a man (male as opposed to female), or a human being—the same word pressed into service as a given name for our proto-ancestor Adam. Thus in retrospect, the substitutionary sacrifice (ultimately Yahshua) is seen as being dyed red with His own blood, and at the same time is identified as a man—a male human. Further, the symbol this One represents is part of the covering of the Tabernacle, which tells us it's part of the Plan of Yahweh for mankind—but one that won't be obviously apparent to the world, being covered by yet another curtain assembly.

The fourth and last layer was to be made not of "badger" skins, as in the unfortunate King James translation, but of *tahas*, an unspecified aquatic mammal—a porpoise, dolphin, dugong, or seal—indigenous to the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea and Gulf of Aqaba. Yahweh didn't ask the people to contribute anything that wasn't available. Among the 600,000 men who left Egypt, there would have been a fair number of cobblers—shoemakers—who would have brought their stock of materials with them when they departed. Bedouin craftsmen in that part of the world still make sandals from dugong and porpoise hides. It was these hides—enough to make shoes for half a million Israelites for several years—that Yahweh was asking for in Exodus 35:4-9 (see Precept #709). The cobblers of Israel responded with a faithful and willing spirit, though it left them nothing with which to make shoes in the wilderness. So it is with great admiration for Yahweh's grace that we read Moses' observant reminder of God's provision *after* the forty years of wilderness wanderings were behind them: **"Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet."** (Deuteronomy 29:5) Aside from the practical aspect of providing a tough, weather-resistant protective outer layer for the

Tabernacle, what, then, might the outer layer of porpoise skins represent? I believe it speaks of Yahweh's miraculous provision, protection, and preservation through the trials of life. It is this layer that the world would see, if only it cared to look.

We've been looking at the Tabernacle roof from the inside out, since that's the order in which the instructions were given—the order from God's point of view. But we should really stop and consider what this all means to one on the outside, looking in. What he *sees* is nothing but a dull, gray box with but one way into it. But someone who knows how the Tabernacle (read: the Plan of God) is built can explain its structure: Yahweh is offering to protect us from the storms of this life by providing something that is not readily apparent. His substitutionary sacrificial Ram, dyed red through the shedding of His own blood, will atone for—will *cover*—the sins of all mankind, if only we will choose to avail ourselves of this gift by entering the Tabernacle through its one door: Yahshua. For those who do, He has provided what we need in order to stand in the presence of a Holy God—imputed righteousness.

- (715) *Construct "walls" for the tabernacle. "And for the tabernacle you shall make the boards of acacia wood, standing upright. Ten cubits shall be the length of a board, and a cubit and a half shall be the width of each board."* (Exodus 26:15-16) Though covered with layers of cloth and leather, the Tabernacle wasn't, strictly speaking, a tent—at least not as most of us would understand the term. It was to have walls made of multiple wooden boards standing upright on three sides of the structure. (The fourth side, the portal facing the east, was to consist of a woven screen, or curtain—see Precept #725.) The species of tree to be used was the acacia, also known as Umbrella Thorn or Israeli Babool, the familiar canopy-shaped tree indigenous from the savannahs of Eastern Africa to Egypt and throughout the Middle East. The Hebrew designation is *shittah*, the plural of which is *shittim*, as it's called in the KJV. The acacia can grow as high as sixty feet, though it reaches only a third of that height in extremely arid regions. This was the only wood type specified for the Tabernacle and its furnishings; it was used in the construction of the altar, the table of showbread, the altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant.

The acacia tree yielded a beautiful, dense, close grained wood with an orange color that darkened with age. It was prized for its insect resistance, making it a popular choice for mummy cases in Egypt. Although relatively abundant, the acacia didn't grow remotely big enough to mill single planks of the size required for the Tabernacle walls—ten cubits by one and a half, or about fifteen feet long by twenty-seven inches wide. The boards would

have had to be assembled from many smaller pieces, planed smooth and glued together. A great deal of labor and skill went into making these boards. Each finished board was to be covered in pure gold (see Precept #716, #717). There were a total of forty-eight of them, not including the five gold plated acacia pillars at the front of the Tabernacle. I can't help but reflect that these carefully crafted boards are metaphorical of us believers—all of us together, the whole household of faith which Yahweh has gathered, shaped, and assembled from living wood, and then overlaid with pure gold refined in the crucible of judgment that His Messiah endured for our sakes. **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”** (Ephesians 2:8-10) After all, **“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (I Corinthians 3:16)

How were these wall sections to be held together, upright? **“Two tenons shall be in each board for binding one to another. Thus you shall make for all the boards of the tabernacle. And you shall make the boards for the tabernacle, twenty boards for the south side. You shall make forty sockets of silver under the twenty boards: two sockets under each of the boards for its two tenons....”** The foot of each board had two tenons (for you non-carpenter types, these are posts sticking out that would fit into holes known as mortises). Each of the tenons was made to fit a corresponding silver “socket,” or foundation pedestal. The silver for these sockets had come from the half-shekel “ransom” described in Exodus 30:11-16 (cf. Exodus 38:25; see Mitzvah #404), leading many commentators to observe that silver is a symbol for the blood of Christ, paid as a ransom for our sins. Each socket pedestal weighed in at a hefty one talent (Exodus 38:27), somewhere between 75 and 90 pounds.

Now here's where it gets really interesting. The Hebrew word translated “socket” (*'eden*) has the same consonant root (*'dn*) as the word we render “lord” or “master” (*'adon*). Remember too that vowel pointing wasn't added to the Hebrew text until well into the Christian era, by Masorete scribes who had a vested interest in obfuscating anything that might diminish the influence of the rabbis. Thus while *'eden* (a base, pedestal, or socket—something used to hold something else upright) was no doubt the primary meaning of the word in the immediate context, the linguistics of the thing further suggested that the “Master” (*'adon*) was holding the Tabernacle's boards upright. In other words, the gold-covered boards (which, as we have seen, represent us, the assembly of the faithful) were being upheld by the ransom-blood of *our* Master, the Messiah,

setting us apart from the earth, anchoring us, lifting us up, and enabling us to stand upright.

The instructional narrative continues: **“And for the second side of the tabernacle, the north side, there shall be twenty boards and their forty sockets of silver: two sockets under each of the boards. For the far side of the tabernacle, westward, you shall make six boards. And you shall also make two boards for the two back corners of the tabernacle. They shall be coupled together at the bottom and they shall be coupled together at the top by one ring. Thus it shall be for both of them. They shall be for the two corners. So there shall be eight boards with their sockets of silver—sixteen sockets—two sockets under each of the boards.”**

(Exodus 26:17-25) The numbers, if I’m not hallucinating, are indicative of something significant. We aren’t given totals (i.e., 48 boards) because the *way* they’re specified is what’s important: twenty boards per side, plus six for the back, plus two “corner” planks. Forty, you’ll recall, is the number of trial, or testing. And each side of the Tabernacle is supported by forty solid silver ‘*eden*’ pedestals—representing the blood shed for our ransom by God’s Messiah. This was His trial, one He passed perfectly. But (and I realize I’m going out on a limb here) the two sides of the Tabernacle *together* totaled forty boards. I believe, as with the joined sub-assemblies of the roof, that one side represents Israel, and the other represents the ekklesia. (We haven’t seen the last of this recurring “same-but-separate, side-by-side” illustration, either.) Together, then, these forty boards indicate the trials we believers endure in this world. **“In the world you will have tribulation. Be of good cheer; I [Yahshua] have overcome the world.”** (John 16:33) Notice, however, that *His* trials are double ours. He is doing all the supporting work, keeping us set-apart from the earth.

And the six boards in the back? They represent humanity—the segment of unregenerated humanity that *will* come to faith, but hasn’t yet. (This group would include the saints that will be born during the Millennium.) Why do I say this? Because a portion of the inner linen curtain—the one representing the imputed righteousness that clothes the saints—covers the boards at the back of the Tabernacle. (Do the math: the structure is thirty cubits long, and there are ten linen roof panels, each of which is four cubits wide, for a total of forty cubits. The foremost linen panel is doubled over at the entrance, meaning that the last panel, like the sides, stops short of reaching the ground. Thus, the six boards at the far western end of the Tabernacle are “covered” just like the rest of them.) Who, then, do the two “corner” pieces represent? If my take on this metaphor is at all valid, these may symbolize those within Israel or the ekklesia who reach out to the world with the good news of Yahweh’s plan of redemption. They’re “Moses” and “Paul” if you will, along with those

of us who follow in their footsteps. If we don't reach out to them, the lost will remain lost. Remember: the Tabernacle as a whole represents the Plan of God for *all* humanity. That Plan includes those who have yet to obtain their citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven. **"The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."** (Luke 19:10)

As long as we're scratching this far beneath the surface, allow me to digress a bit. If we add up all the measurements, we find that the Tabernacle was to be thirty cubits long (divided between twenty for the Holy Place and ten for the Most Holy), ten cubits wide, and ten tall. The dimensions of the Most Holy Place (ten by ten by ten cubits, or one thousand cubic cubits) have led not a few commentators to see a reference to the one-thousand-year Millennial reign of Yahshua the Messiah. I agree, but if it's true, they haven't gone far enough. If the dimensions of the Most Holy Place are a chronological metaphor, then the whole Tabernacle complex should present a timeline of what the Tabernacle represents: the Plan of Yahweh. And I believe it does.

Backing up one step, we find that the Holy Place, the room through which the Priest must pass in order to reach the Most Holy, is to be twenty cubits long, ten cubits wide, and ten cubits high, or 2,000 cubic cubits. This room is the home of *God's provision* (the table of showbread), *light* (the seven-branched golden lamp), and *prayer* (the altar of incense). Chronologically, it represents the age of Yahshua's called-out assembly, the ekklesia, comprised of every believer since His resurrection, both Jew and gentile. We are those whose sins have been atoned at the altar and whose works and walk have been cleansed at the bronze laver standing just outside the Tabernacle. (I realize that according to another metaphor, the Holy Place represents the Law through which we must pass to reach the Most Holy Place, signifying grace. But here, we're talking about *chronology*—a very different thing. God's symbols don't necessarily have to mean one thing to the exclusion of all others.) Using the same formula as before, we're led to the conclusion that the Holy Place in this context represents a time duration of precisely 2,000 years, beginning at 33 A.D., the date of the passion. That means that the Millennial Kingdom (indicated by the dimensions of the Most Holy Place) will commence in 2033, only a quarter century away as I write these words. If you've read my previous books, you probably won't find this surprising. I've arrived at the same stunning conclusion from several different lines of inquiry—although I'd never stumbled across this particular one before. There's *so much* evidence, in fact, that I've gotten to the point where I ask myself, "Am I just seeing what I want to see? Am I subliminally manipulating the data to achieve a predetermined result?" Then, as if in answer to these troubling

self doubts, Yahweh provided yet another confirmation of this chronological theory elsewhere in the Tabernacle specifications. If you can't stand the suspense, scan down to Precept #728.

- (716) *Construct bracing bars for the walls.* **“And you shall make bars of acacia wood: five for the boards on one side of the tabernacle, five bars for the boards on the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the boards of the side of the tabernacle, for the far side westward. The middle bar shall pass through the midst of the boards from end to end. You shall overlay the boards with gold, make their rings of gold as holders for the bars, and overlay the bars with gold. And you shall raise up the tabernacle according to its pattern which you were shown on the mountain.”** (Exodus 26:26-30) A “bar” (Hebrew: *beriach*) is the heavy timber that would have been used as a “lock” on a city or castle gate, crossing the grain of the other wooden components at right angles to add strength—far more strength than its added mass would suggest. (It’s the same principle that makes plywood strong.) Each of the three assembled walls of the Tabernacle were to be braced with five such bars—at least one of which (the middle one) was to extend the entire length of the wall. That meant it would have been thirty cubits (about forty-five feet) long in the case of the north and south walls—again, suggesting some sort of “glue-lam” construction, since acacia logs don’t grow that large.

Five seems to be the Biblical number of grace. If this is true, the lesson is that the comprehensive human experience—that of Israel, the ekklesia, and lost humanity as well—is held together through God’s grace, His unmerited favor toward us. **“Surely God will never do wickedly, nor will the Almighty pervert justice. Who gave Him charge over the earth? Or who appointed Him over the whole world? If He should set His heart on it, if He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.”** (Job 34:12-15) Without grace, we would simply fall apart. Without grace, we would be unable to stand upright and function in this world, no matter how good we looked, no matter how firm our foundation.

INTERIOR DESIGN

- (717) *Construct the ark of the covenant.* **“And they shall make an ark of acacia wood; two and a half cubits shall be its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height. And you shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and shall make on it a molding of gold all around. You shall cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in its four corners; two rings shall be on one side, and two rings on the other side.”** (Exodus 25:10-12) The ark would prove to be the very centerpiece of Israel’s ritual worship as directed in the Torah, the only piece of furniture to be placed within the Most Holy Place.

Whereas a man-made religion would no doubt have insisted on something grandiose, like the big statue of Zeus at Olympia or that of Diana/Artemis at Ephesus, Yahweh's focal point is downright modest—only about forty-five inches long and twenty-seven inches tall. It wasn't supposed to awe anybody; for that matter, only one person in the whole nation would even see it under normal circumstances (that is, when the Israelites were not on the move), and then only once a year. This was no idol. Like everything else in the Tabernacle, it was a symbol. The ark of the covenant represents Yahshua the Messiah—the personification of God's covenant with mankind. Thus, as we discovered in Mitzvah #429, the carrying poles (*baddim*: “extensions of the One who stands alone,” i.e., us believers—the limbs or branches of Yahshua) must never be removed from the ark.

The “rings” through which the ark (Yahshua) are carried by the poles (the believers) are described as being arranged in two sets, one on each side of the ark. Once again, we see a subtle indication that Israel and the ekklesia/Church are to function side by side in carrying the good news of Yahshua's salvation through the world. The difference? Israel is positioned “before” the mercy seat (upon which the blood of atonement was sprinkled), and the ekklesia is positioned “after.”

Note too the materials Yahweh specified. The chest is made of acacia wood—living tissue (metaphorical of Yahshua's mortal humanity) cut down in service to man upon God's instructions. But it is then covered inside and out with pure gold, symbolic of the deity—the immutability—of our Savior. This precious, beautiful, and indestructible metal has achieved purity by enduring the fires of judgment. But it is not Christ who is purged of impurities—it is us. *We* are purified through the judgment Yahshua suffered on our behalf. Subsequently, it is the “pure gold” of *our* lives—the evidence of God's Spirit dwelling within us—that the world sees when it seeks salvation. We must not alloy or adulterate the gold of Yahshua's sacrifice with the impurities of this world.

- (718) *Place the tablets of the Law into the ark. “And you shall put into the ark the Testimony which I will give you.”* (Exodus 25:16) *“And in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.”* (Exodus 25:21-22) The word “ark” (Hebrew: *'aron*) denotes a chest, box, container, or even a coffin; it's a different word than that used for Noah's “ark” (*teba*). It was to contain (1) the stone tablets upon which Yahweh had inscribed the Ten Commandments (Exodus 10:1-5), (2) a pot of manna (see Precept #626), and (3) Aaron's rod, the one that

had been used to demonstrate Yahweh's power in the sight of Pharaoh, and had later come to life and budded with flowers and ripe almonds (Numbers 17:8; see Precepts #627 and #722), confirming Aaron's divine anointing (and by extension, predicting *our* High Priest's impending resurrection from the dead, which in turn confirmed *His* divine anointing). Analysis of these contents reveals the ark's symbolic antitype: it is the One who embodies the fulfillment of Yahweh's instructions, represents His ultimate provision of life and sustenance, and functions as His anointed implement—Yahshua the Messiah.

But there was a second stated function for the ark. Its "lid," called the "mercy seat" (see Precept #719) would feature images of two cherubim, facing each other. One may rhetorically ask, "What did these two angels find so fascinating—what determined the direction of their unwavering gaze?" They weren't "looking" at each other. They were attending to the Shekinah, the cloud-like manifestation of the glory of Yahweh (see Precept #723, Exodus 40:34) whom He said would "meet with you" from within the Most Holy Place, specifically, *between* these two cherubim atop the mercy seat. If angels (even fake gold ones) pay that much attention to Yahweh, we should do no less, I'm thinking.

- (719) *Construct the mercy seat.* **"You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half cubits shall be its length and a cubit and a half its width."** (Exodus 25:17)

The translation of the Hebrew noun *kapporet* as "mercy seat" is quite a stretch. Its root is the verb *kaphar*, meaning to cover, to purge, to make an atonement or make reconciliation. *Kaphar* is the root of the name of the sixth miqra, *Yom Kippur* (rendered more correctly as the plural, *Yom Kippurim*), the Day of Atonement. Although the *kapporet*, sitting atop the ark of the covenant, was about chair-height, the word "seat" is not remotely implied. A better rendering would be "the place of atonement," or "the site of reconciliation." This, it would transpire, was where the blood of the sacrificial goat was to be sprinkled by the High Priest once a year on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16; see Mitzvah #505), ceremonially covering or purging the sins of Israel temporarily, in anticipation of Yahweh's definitive and permanent sacrifice.

We have already spoken briefly of the two cherubim that graced the "place of atonement." **"And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat...."** If

you're willing to accept his eyewitness testimony on face value (as I am), a devout amateur archaeologist actually discovered the resting place of the ark of the covenant in the early 1980s. I told his story in detail in *Future History*, Chapter 13: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem." Ron Wyatt described the mercy seat's configuration somewhat differently (and more in line with the scriptural instructions) than it's usually pictured. He reported that the two cherubim figures stood, one at either end of the ark of the covenant, facing inward toward each other. Their wings on the "back side" of the ark reached out above the ark, touching in the middle, while the wings facing forward rested at their sides. Thus for all practical purposes, it *did* look like a seat or throne (though the King James translators couldn't have known this).

And although Yahweh didn't physically "sit" upon it, the ark and its solid gold covering *functioned* as God's throne: **"You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you [Moses] in commandment to the children of Israel."** (Exodus 25:17-22) What kind of God condescends to have intimate chats with His people so that they might not go astray—so that they might be able to comprehend the depth of His love? You'd never catch Ba'al or Molech or Allah behaving like this.

- (720) *Construct the table of showbread.* **"You shall also make a table of acacia wood; two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its width, and a cubit and a half its height. And you shall overlay it with pure gold, and make a molding of gold all around. You shall make for it a frame of a handbreadth all around, and you shall make a gold molding for the frame all around. And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and put the rings on the four corners that are at its four legs. The rings shall be close to the frame, as holders for the poles to bear the table. And you shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, that the table may be carried with them."** (Exodus 25:23-28) We saw in Mitzvah #430 what the twelve loaves of the "showbread" symbolized. If you'll recall, it's something we've seen several times recently: Israel and the ekklesia side by side. They're both sprinkled with frankincense (indicative of the purity we attain through the sacrifice of the Messiah). Here we see the instructions for building the table upon which they were to be placed every Sabbath day (indicating that Christians are probably ill-advised to choose Sunday instead of the Sabbath as their primary day of corporate worship). As with the ark of the covenant, it was to be made of acacia wood covered completely with pure gold (that is, "mortal" matter overlaid with the immutable glory of God). Also like the ark, it was equipped with gold

rings and carrying poles (see Mitzvah #429), though here we are given no instruction about leaving the poles in place).

The frame of the table was to be a “handbreadth” tall—one sixth of a cubit, three or four inches. Dimensions such as cubits (the distance between the elbow and the fingertips), spans (from the thumb to the outstretched little finger), and handbreadths were, of course, based upon human anatomy. It is noteworthy that King Yahshua’s Millennial Temple, described in Ezekiel 40, used a larger “royal” cubit, defined as “a cubit and a handbreadth.” This is a subtle application of Yahweh’s ubiquitous “six-plus-one” theme: the “six” component is the normal human-based cubit, but with the added handbreadth in the Millennium, we’re given a whole new way to measure things: God’s way.

Both the table of showbread and the ark of the covenant were to have a “gold molding” all around them. When Ron Wyatt discovered the cave in which the ark had been hidden, the first object he found was the table of showbread. He reported that this molding was decorated with a repeating pattern: bells interspersed with pomegranates. Though not called for here, this *was* a specified design feature of the High Priest’s robe (see Exodus 28:33), leading us to the conclusion that Yahweh allowed Bezaleel and his artisans some latitude in executing His instructions. As long as they followed the basic pattern He had shown Moses on Mount Sinai, Yahweh didn’t micromanage the details. Rather, He let us freely exercise the creative nature He’d built into us. If this doesn’t amaze you, you need to get out more: there are 1.4 billion Muslims on this planet whose god Allah won’t let them blow their noses or relieve themselves without following precise (and pointless) guidelines. But Yahweh isn’t particularly interested in our submission (which is what “Islam” means); He’s more concerned with respectful fellowship, communication, and sharing a loving relationship with us. We dare not take that for granted.

- (721) *Construct the utensils to be used with the table of showbread. “You shall make its dishes, its pans, its pitchers, and its bowls for pouring. You shall make them of pure gold.”* (Exodus 25:29) Nothing in the Tabernacle was to be “good enough.” Rather, everything, even the most mundane utilitarian items, were considered special, holy, set apart for God’s service—which in this case was the revelation, in symbolic terms, of what Yahweh’s plan entailed. So all of the utensils needed for making and presenting the ritual loaves—things that would have been cheap pottery, wood, or base metal in the average Israelite household—were made of solid gold within the Tabernacle (and bronze if used outside—see Precept #727).

(722) *Construct the golden lampstand.* **“You shall also make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be of hammered work. Its shaft, its branches, its bowls, its ornamental knobs, and flowers shall be of one piece.”** (Exodus 25:31) The function of the golden lampstand (Hebrew: *menorah*) was discussed in Mitzvah #431. We see here God’s instructions concerning its construction. No dimensions are given (tradition says it was about five feet tall and three feet wide) but otherwise its design is quite specific. The first thing Yahweh emphasizes is its unity: it is to be made of a single piece of beaten gold—the decorative parts as well as those that were functional.

“And six branches shall come out of its sides: three branches of the lampstand out of one side, and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side....” The menorah had a center stalk or trunk, from which “grew” six branches, three on either side—the familiar six-plus-one theme again, which we’ve seen prominently in the creation account, the six-day work week plus Sabbath, and the seven annual “feasts” or convocations (*miqra’ey*) of Yahweh. Besides the prophetic chronological ramifications—fallen man’s tenure of six thousand years to be capped by a final Millennium of perfect Messianic government—the *arrangement* of the lampstand leads us to another, now familiar, observation: three branches on one side represent Israel, and the other three represent the ekklesia or Church—all of which grow from, and are dependent upon, the center trunk: Yahshua the Messiah. Indeed, these three entities together in balanced unity—Christ plus Israel and the ekklesia side by side, grafted and anchored into Him—form a perfect picture of His Millennial Kingdom.

“Three bowls shall be made like almond blossoms on one branch, with an ornamental knob and a flower, and three bowls made like almond blossoms on the other branch, with an ornamental knob and a flower—and so for the six branches that come out of the lampstand. On the lampstand itself four bowls shall be made like almond blossoms, each with its ornamental knob and flower. And there shall be a knob under the first two branches of the same, a knob under the second two branches of the same, and a knob under the third two branches of the same, according to the six branches that extend from the lampstand....” Almonds. Sound familiar? It should. Aaron’s rod budded with flowers and *ripe almonds*, confirming Yahweh’s power to bestow High Priestly authority—and life itself—on whomever He chose: ultimately, Yahshua, and through Him, us. The word for the almond tree (Hebrew: *saged*) is derived from the verb *saqad*, meaning to watch, awaken, or be alert. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* explains: “The idea of watchfulness which is basic to the root affords the key to the explanation of the Hebrew name for the almond tree. This tree, which in Israel blooms as early as January and February and is

affectionately looked upon as the harbinger of spring, is appropriately enough called *saged*, ‘the waker.’” All of this makes the almond tree, its blossoms and fruit, a natural metaphor for resurrection.

On the living tree, five-petalled blossoms (five being the number of grace) develop into knob-like bowls where the fruit, the almond, grows and matures. Each of the six branches on the menorah were to have three knob-and-flower decorative devices. In addition, the center stalk was to display four such knob-and flower units, plus three more—one directly beneath the junction of each pair of branches—for a total of seven. The lesson seems to be that among the watchful, alert believers of both Israel and the ekklesia, grace will develop, mature, and bear fruit—a process that’s made perfect and complete in our Messiah, our Center and Support. Six is the number of man, but our understanding of this fact has been fine-tuned somewhat here: three branches represent the redeemed of Israel and the other three the ekklesia. In the end, as far as Yahweh is concerned, we’re *all there is* of mankind. Just as our Messiah was raised from the dead, both the church (in the rapture) and Israel (See Ezekiel 37:1-14) will follow suit: all seven branches of the menorah are defined by the almond tree: the “waker.”

“Their knobs and their branches shall be of one piece; all of it shall be one hammered piece of pure gold.” We are reminded again of our intended unity, having been forged in the image of the pure and immutable God. And lest we forget, there is a function to all of this: **“You shall make seven lamps for it, and they shall arrange its lamps so that they give light in front of it.”** (Exodus 25:32-37) The lampstand (indicative of Yahshua and we who are grafted into Him) is to give its light within the Tabernacle (i.e., the Plan of God). Those outside the Plan cannot see the light. Moreover, it is the *only* light source in the Holy Place (which as we have seen, chronologically represents the Church age). Each of the six branches and the center trunk were to be equipped with an oil lamp, and the light was never to be extinguished or allowed to go dark. The priests (read: believers) were to make sure that olive oil (symbolic of the Holy Spirit) was always available to feed the flame of enlightenment. *What?* It’s up to *us* to ensure the Spirit’s availability to the world? Yep. Remember, the Ruach Qodesh dwells within us. Yahshua told us what we are to be doing: **“You [believers] are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”** (Matthew 6:14-16) But how does Yahshua, the center of all this, fit in? John explains: **“In Him [Yahshua] was life, and the life was the light of men.”** (John 1:4) He was “the true light

which gives light to every man who comes into the world.” (John 1:9) If men don’t see the light of God in *our* lives, they won’t see it at all. No pressure or anything.

As with the table of showbread, even the mundane utensils were to be made of pure gold. **“And its wick-trimmers and their trays shall be of pure gold. It shall be made of a talent of pure gold, with all these utensils. And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.”**

(Exodus 25:38-40) Every detail recorded here was given for our edification. Every facet of this diamond reflects light on Yahweh’s Grand Plan for the salvation of mankind.

- (723) *Make a veil to separate the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. “You shall make a veil woven of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen. It shall be woven with an artistic design of cherubim. You shall hang it upon the four pillars of acacia wood overlaid with gold. Their hooks shall be gold, upon four sockets of silver. And you shall hang the veil from the clasps.... The veil shall be a divider for you between the holy place and the Most Holy.”* (Exodus 26:31-34) Here we see how the Tabernacle was to be divided into two “rooms.” Four pillars or columns (Hebrew: *ammud*, from the root verb *amad*, meaning to stand, remain, or endure) were to support a curtain, or veil, that ran the entire ten cubit width and ten cubit height of the Tabernacle interior. Each pillar was supported by an individual solid silver “socket” (*eden*), a foundation, base, or pedestal (See Precept #715). The pillars, like most large items in the Tabernacle, were to be constructed of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. We are not told how they were to be spaced across the room, how thick the columns were to be, or whether the curtain was to be hung in front or behind them, so apparently these details bore no symbolic significance.

The fact that there are to be four of them, however, *is* significant. Since it’s the number of sides in a square and the number of directions on the compass (as in “the four winds”), many commentators have concluded that four denotes totality, or completion. I agree, but with a twist. You see, the number seven *also* implies completion—in terms of the divine plan for mankind. Four connotes completion with a view toward restitution, payment, or giving—the completed transmission of something. If someone stole something, he was to pay back four of them in kind (Exodus 22:2, II Samuel 12:6, Luke 19:8). My take on the four pillars holding the veil, then, is that they represent the complete sufficiency of the Messiah’s atoning sacrifice, his restitution for our sin. Nothing must be (or *can* be) added to it in order to make us worthy to stand before a holy God.

The veil itself may have looked much like the inner layer of the ceiling, for it too was made of fine linen, embroidered or woven with

images of cherubim wrought in blue, purple, and scarlet (see Precept #712). Why was a divider needed between the Holy Place and the Most Holy? It's because of what we learned in Precept #718—the “Glory of Yahweh,” the Shekinah, was to “inhabit” the Most Holy Place, meeting mankind from between the two golden cherubim on the mercy seat atop the ark of the covenant. But Yahweh, even in this diminished form, was not to be approached by sinful men, for He is a holy God. As one prophet put it, **“You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness”** (Habakkuk 1:13)—not without toasting us evildoers extra crispy, is the connotation. Even the High Priest who made atonement for the sins of the people once a year first had to make atonement for his own sins. No one could enter God's presence in the Most Holy Place without the sacrifice of innocent blood. The veil kept us set apart from Yahweh's awesome presence until the ultimate innocent-blood sacrifice could be offered up. Thus the veil is a good news-bad news story, in a way. Though it isolated us from Infinite Good, that was only because *we* were fundamentally incompatible with it. In our sinful state, such contact would have destroyed us. That's why the veil was described as being **“for you.”**

We aren't told how heavy a fabric the Tabernacle's veil was, but we do have some historical insight into the corresponding curtain in the Temple that stood on Mount Moriah in Yahshua's day. Like Solomon's Temple, the floor plan of Herod's remodel of the Second Temple was scaled up double from the original Tabernacle, and its height was doubled again. The veil there was about thirty feet wide, sixty feet tall, and as thick as a man's hand—think not of “curtains” or “tapestry,” but of a huge hanging oriental carpet, thick, heavy, tightly woven and virtually indestructible. And so it is with awe that we read about what happened on the day Yahshua was crucified: **“Yahshua, when He had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”** (Matthew 27:50-51) What kind of force would it take to do that? There was an earthquake at the time, but the Temple survived it unscathed—the quake didn't rend the veil: it was torn by the hand of God.

And why would He do this? Because when Yahshua's sacrifice was complete, the impediment to our access to the throne of Yahweh—our sin—had been atoned, paid for, satisfied. We now had free access into the presence of the Almighty. As the writer to the Hebrews put it, **“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Yahshua, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”** (Hebrews 10:19-22) That's right: the veil represents the torn flesh of Yahshua. Until

His body was “bruised for our iniquity,” we were restricted from standing in the presence of Yahweh. Remember the sequence: to get to the Most Holy Place, you must first faithfully encounter the altar, where the blood of atonement—that which was to be “**sprinkled**” on the mercy seat for our “**evil conscience**”—was shed, and the laver, where “**our bodies [are] washed with pure water**,” that is, the Word of Yahweh. There is only one path to God—and that is through Yahshua the Messiah. You can’t sneak in the side door. There *is* no side door.

- (724) *Arrange the furnishings within the Tabernacle.* “**Then you shall bring the ark of the Testimony in there, behind the veil.... You shall put the mercy seat upon the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy. You shall set the table outside the veil, and the lampstand across from the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south; and you shall put the table on the north side.**” (Exodus 26:33-35) In Precept #711, we got a bird’s eye view of the outer courtyard and what it contained. We now continue our virtual tour of the Tabernacle. If you recall, we’ve entered the gate, passed the altar, and have been washed at the laver. We walk among the five pillars of grace (see Precept #725) on the east side of the structure, pull aside the outer curtain of the Tabernacle, and step inside. We are now within the Holy Place. Only priests (believers) are allowed inside this room. The walls to our right and left are overlaid with gold, making the room magnificent despite its modest dimensions, about thirty feet long, fifteen feet wide, and fifteen high. The far “wall” of the room is another curtain, this one supported by *four* ceiling-height columns (indicating the sufficiency of the sacrifice). This one is a stunningly beautiful tapestry of fine linen, intricately woven to picture winged angelic beings in costly blue, purple, and scarlet thread. As we look up, we see the same theme repeated on each of the six-foot wide ceiling panels.

There are no windows in the Tabernacle. The only light is provided by a menorah standing against the south wall to our left. It has seven olive oil lamps, one each atop the six branches and the center shaft. Being priests, it is our responsibility to replenish the lamps’ reservoirs with pure olive oil, so the lights never go out. We note that the gold covered walls reflect the light back and forth, bathing the entire room in a warm, golden glow. And we smile as we remember that our familiar shout of joy and praise, “Hallelujah,” literally means “radiate the light of Yahweh!”

Against the northern wall, the one to our right, is a small golden table, about three feet wide, with golden rings at its four corners. A solid gold platter rests upon it, and upon it two rows of six loaves of bread each sit side by side. Each row of loaves has been sprinkled with white

frankincense. These twelve loaves are replaced with fresh ones every Sabbath day, and are eaten by the priests.

Our gaze shifts to the back of the room. Another golden table, this one even smaller, stands directly in front of the veil. It too has rings at the corners, for like the table of showbread and the ark of the covenant, it is not to be touched directly, but is carried from place to place by the use of two poles (also acacia wood covered with gold). This little table is used for burning incense—an exclusive recipe used only in the Tabernacle. The sweet smell of the incense fills the room. It represents the prayers of the saints, and Yahweh therefore finds the fragrance delightful.

Since this is only a *virtual* tour of the Tabernacle, we may go beyond the veil into the Most Holy Place. In practice, however, this privilege was reserved for only one man, and then only one time per year—the High Priest, on the Day of Atonement. There is only one piece of furniture within this room, the ark of the covenant, with its covering, the “mercy seat” or place of atonement. We notice that the wooden staves used to transport the ark are left in place threaded through the golden rings at its four corners, a reminder that as we believers “carry” the good news of our redemption to the world, we are never to be disconnected from our Messiah, whose blood—sprinkled on the mercy seat—purchased that redemption.

The interior walls of the Most Holy Place are gold—left, right, and center. If my interpretation is correct concerning the meaning of the gold-plated boards comprising the outer walls of the Tabernacle (see Precept #715), then a stunning fact becomes self-evident as we stand within the Most Holy Place. If you’ll recall, I concluded that the back “wall,” comprised of six of these boards, represented the portion of humanity that has not yet come to faith (being neither part of believing Israel nor the ekklesia), though Yahweh in His perfect foreknowledge knows that they someday will. From God’s point of view (from here within the Most Holy Place) they’re *already* seen as pure gold: their mortality is already covered with the immutable glory of Yahweh, and their names are already written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

- (725) *Construct the portal of the tabernacle.* **“You shall make a screen for the door of the tabernacle, woven of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, made by a weaver. And you shall make for the screen five pillars of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold; their hooks shall be gold, and you shall cast five sockets of bronze for them.”** (Exodus 26:36-37) The instructions here are quite similar to those given for the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy (see Precept #723), and also reminiscent of what we’ll soon see

concerning the entrance to the Tabernacle courtyard (Precept #729). It's the little differences that are telling. Here we aren't told of any specific imagery that was to be woven into the design. Apparently the cherubim theme was only to be visible upon entering the Tabernacle—on the ceiling and upon the veil at the far end of the Holy Place. The lesson: God's watchful protection is extended only to those who have formed a relationship with Him, those who have entered His household.

Note next that there are five columns at the outer entrance of the Tabernacle, whereas the interior veil restricting access to the Most Holy Place was held by four. Four, if you'll recall, implied the completed act of restitution, symbolized by what happened within the Most Holy Place—the sprinkling of the blood of atonement upon the mercy seat. But *five* columns supported the curtain at the entrance to the Holy Place. Five is the number of grace; thus we are reminded that we may enter the household of faith only through grace. Standing at the Tabernacle entrance, we have encountered the altar and been washed at the laver—we are atoned and cleansed. The five pillars of grace tell us that nothing else is needed: our works, wealth, or penance have no place here.

As if to reinforce this fact, the sockets or bases for these five columns are made of bronze, reminding us that the grace we enjoy rests upon a foundation of judgment. In this court, we haven't been found "not guilty." Quite the contrary: we're as guilty as sin. Our crimes haven't been *pardoned*, exactly, either. Rather, they've been *paid for*. Yahshua the Messiah endured the judgment that was rightfully ours to bear: that's grace. By contrast, the four pillars holding the veil rested upon sockets of silver, emphasizing that a blood-ransom was the price of our restitution and redemption.

- (726) *Construct the altar.* **"You shall make an altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide—the altar shall be square—and its height shall be three cubits. You shall make its horns on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it. And you shall overlay it with bronze.... You shall make it hollow with boards; as it was shown you on the mountain, so shall they make it."** (Exodus 27:1-2, 8)
- We've been listing these precepts in the order they're presented in Exodus—from God's point of view, from the inside out. Man's point of view, of course, is just the opposite. *We* start from the outside, the wilderness of the world, and move toward the center, the Most Holy Place, where the glory of Yahweh abides. As this point then (since we've already discussed the laver or washbasin—Mitzvah #435, Precept #711), we come to the first thing a worshipper would encounter upon entering the courtyard: the altar.

The altar was a big square barbecue-like affair, its four equal sides denoting the completion of our atonement, and their dimension, five cubits, indicating the grace of God in providing the ultimate and permanent Sacrifice. Its height, three cubits, reminds us of the three primary ways Yahweh manifests Himself to us—as the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son of God—the Messiah. The “horns” protruding from the corners, which speak of the Messiah’s authority, are to be sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifices roasted upon this altar, for just as Yahshua’s acceptability as a Sacrifice is dependent upon His innocence, His right to rule is derived from His obedience to the Father, even unto death.

As usual, the underlying structure of the altar is acacia wood, indicative of mortality, living flesh as it were, that has given its life in order for the Plan of God to come to fruition. It speaks here of the humanity of Yahshua—God’s chosen representative for all mankind. The bronze with which the altar was completely covered is symbolic of the judgment the Messiah would endure in our stead. Because we, as mortal believers in Christ, are protected by this bronze barrier, we will not be consumed in the fires of wrath that burn within the altar.

- (727) *Make the accessories for the altar.* **“Also you shall make its pans to receive its ashes, and its shovels and its basins and its forks and its firepans; you shall make all its utensils of bronze. You shall make a grate for it, a network of bronze; and on the network you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. You shall put it under the rim of the altar beneath, that the network may be midway up the altar. And you shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze. The poles shall be put in the rings, and the poles shall be on the two sides of the altar to bear it.”** (Exodus 27:3-7) Whereas the lampstand and the accessories that accompanied the table of showbread and the altar of incense were to be made of pure gold, everything associated with the altar of offering was to be cast in bronze. The difference is a question of order, of timing: the bronze altar of judgment and sacrifice (as well as the bronze laver that follows) must be employed—outside the Tabernacle—*before* the pure gold of God’s illumination, provision, and fellowship may be enjoyed within His house. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin, for Yahweh won’t allow sin in His presence—He is a holy God.

We are told in Leviticus 6:13, **“A perpetual fire shall burn on the altar; it shall never go out.”** The bronze **pans... shovels... basins... forks and firepans** were designed to accommodate this instruction, making it possible to remove the ashes (See Mitzvot #441-#443) without letting the fire go out. A heavy bronze grate suspended within the altar provided a platform that allowed the ashes and drippings to fall through to the pans below—not

unlike a modern charcoal barbecue. When it had to be moved, the altar, like the ark of the covenant, ark of incense, and table of showbread, was not to be touched by the Levites who carried it, but was to be carried with acacia wood poles slipped through rings at the four corners. These, like everything associated with the altar, were to be overlaid with bronze—reinforcing the concept that judgment, sacrifice, and atonement must precede enlightenment, nourishment, and meaningful communication with God.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN

- (728) *Provide an enclosed court.* **“You shall also make the court of the tabernacle. For the south side there shall be hangings for the court made of fine woven linen, one hundred cubits long for one side. And its twenty pillars and their twenty sockets shall be bronze. The hooks of the pillars and their bands shall be silver. Likewise along the length of the north side there shall be hangings one hundred cubits long, with its twenty pillars and their twenty sockets of bronze, and the hooks of the pillars and their bands of silver.... All the pillars around the court shall have bands of silver; their hooks shall be of silver and their sockets of bronze.... All the utensils of the tabernacle for all its service, all its pegs, and all the pegs of the court, shall be of bronze.”** (Exodus 27:9-11, 17, 19) The Tabernacle didn’t just sit there all alone out in the desert. It was to be enclosed within a courtyard formed by erecting pillars of bronze upon bronze foundation pedestals or sockets, and suspending curtains of linen cloth between them with hooks and bands of silver. The well established symbology of the specified materials tells a story in itself. The linen represents righteousness—which is seen as a barrier that stands between the outside world and the plan of God. This righteousness is supported and upheld by judgment—the bronze pillars and sockets. This foundation of judgment is not wrath (necessarily) but rather judicial decision, the separation of the clean from the unclean, of the saved from the lost, of the inside from the outside. Holding the linen of righteousness in place between the bronze columns are hooks and bands of silver, which, you’ll recall, is indicative of the payment of a ransom, the price of blood. I found it fascinating that the word translated “bands” (*hasuq*) is derived from a verb (*hasaq*) meaning “to be attached to, to love.” Lesson: the love of God, demonstrated by the ransom He paid for our liberty, is what holds our righteousness secure in the face of judgment.

The dimensions of the courtyard are significant as well. **“And along the width of the court on the west side shall be hangings of fifty cubits, with their ten pillars and their ten sockets. The width of the court on the east side shall be fifty**

cubits. The hangings on one side of the gate shall be fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and their three sockets. And on the other side shall be hangings of fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and their three sockets.... The length of the court shall be one hundred cubits, the width fifty throughout, and the height five cubits, made of fine woven linen, and its sockets of bronze.” (Exodus 27:12-15, 18) The entire enclosure measured 50 x 100 cubits, or 5,000 square cubits. In Precept #715, we discussed how the dimensions of the Tabernacle had chronological implications—they literally defined the Kingdom age: the volume of the Most Holy Place, 1,000 cubic cubits, indicating 1,000 years for the earthly reign of Yahshua the Messiah; and that of the Holy Place, 2,000 cubic cubits, the two millennia preceding that, defining the age of His called-out assembly of Spirit-indwelt believers. Now we find that the courtyard’s dimensions tell us precisely how long the entire period of Yahweh’s covenant of blood with mankind will last, beginning with Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac and lasting through the end of Yahshua’s Millennial kingdom—5,000 years: grace, a thousand times over.

Note too the dimensions of the linen sections of the outer fence. Since there were to be twenty pillars each on the long sides, north and south, each measuring one hundred cubits, each linen section was to be five cubits wide. Same thing for the back side, on the west: fifty cubits divided by ten pillars—these too were five cubits in width. Then we’re told that the fence was to be five cubits tall. So each linen section measured five cubits by five (about seven and a half feet square). Since the number five connotes grace, here we see that our righteousness (linen) is a matter of grace *multiplied by* grace. Not only was our righteousness *not* achieved through our own efforts or sacrifice, it was imputed to us as a free gift, paid for by Someone else. Grace times grace equals reconciliation with Yahweh, if only we’ll do the math.

- (729) *Make a gate or portal for the court.* **“For the gate of the court there shall be a screen twenty cubits long, woven of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, made by a weaver. It shall have four pillars and four sockets.”** (Exodus 27:16) There was a gap between the two fifteen-cubit-wide sections on the eastern side of the courtyard, in which a twenty-cubit wide portal or entrance was specified. Its four bronze pillars and foundation sockets indicate, if you’ll recall, the totality, the completion, of the redemption to be found within these gates. This is the portal through which one must walk in order to pass from judgment’s wrath into judgment’s vindication. It is the *only* way into the court of God’s mercy.

The sole entrances of both the court and the Tabernacle itself were to be on the eastern side, facing toward the rising sun. So it's worth noting that ancient religious superstitions tended to center on "the sun god" in one permutation or another. The prototypical pagan religion of Babylon was based on the mid-winter birth of Tammuz—marketed as the son of the sun, conqueror of winter's cold, dark barrenness (*gimme a break*). Moreover, the head of the pantheon of Egypt, the land where the Israelites had just spent four hundred years as slaves, was named Amun-Ra, the "sun god." It was this pseudo-deity whose reputation had been so thoroughly discredited by Yahweh's ninth plague—darkness over the land of Egypt. So put yourself in the sandals of the average Israelite as he approached the Tabernacle courtyard. He would have found that to enter into Yahweh's plan, he had to face the west: he had to *turn his back* on the sun god if he were to draw near to the true and living Light of the world. As the worshipper faced his God, Yahweh would have been the One "facing" the east, as if to say, "You just concentrate on meeting with Me; *I'll* deal with the sun."

Yahweh's Team

In the previous chapter, we looked at the Tabernacle with an eye toward discerning the Master Plan that lay behind its design. Just as any company's facilities can be expected to reflect their purpose and mission, the physical Tabernacle reveals what its Designer meant for its function to be—in this case, an elaborate picture of Yahweh's Plan for the redemption of all mankind. And just as it's sometimes hard to figure out what companies do by looking at their buildings or factories from the outside, we discovered that God's Plan and purpose can be perceived only from a vantage point *inside* the Tabernacle.

The lessons continue as we now meet the staff: the priests, leaders, and key personnel of Yahweh's team—Israel. We've already discovered that this is a "family firm." Many of the positions are hereditary—not sinecures, necessarily, but meaningful jobs appointed on the basis of family and clan. Some—like royalty in a constitutional democracy—seem to be little more than figureheads. And yet, like the crown worn by a king or queen, the accoutrements of their position make a statement about their responsibilities, what their people expect of them, the symbolic roles they're required to fill—even though it's the office, not the officer, that's significant. This will be most markedly demonstrated in the clothing Yahweh required to be worn by the High Priest. Each article of clothing he wore had spiritual and prophetic significance, and we will endeavor to find out what the implications are for us.

We don't have to be born into Israel, of course, to benefit from the significance of the priestly symbols. Any one of us can choose to be adopted into the family of God—to become a vital part of this "family business." Israel was chosen by Yahweh to show us the way—to personify the world's "road map to peace" (to coin a phrase). It is sadly ironic that, having been selected to be the custodians of God's instructions, they themselves have largely chosen to ignore them, to wander off following their own path. I can assure you, it's a temporary situation—they *will* find their way again, and Yahweh has told us so to the point of ennui. In the meantime, we who choose to be adopted into a familial relationship with our Father Yahweh can learn all we need to know from what He told our Israelite brothers. What will our position be in the family business of God? That's for Yahweh Himself to decide. But whether assigned to the mailroom or the boardroom, none of us need remain spiritually unemployed for even one more day.

THE STAFF

(730) *Don't hesitate to play a supporting role. "And Yahweh said to Aaron, 'Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.' So he went and met him on the mountain of God."* (Exodus 4:27) We're not all called to be Moses, to lead the flock to the promised land, to hand down the Law of God. Truth be told, we're far more likely to be "chosen" to dig latrines in the wilderness. The differences between Moses and Aaron are a revealing study. Aaron (Moses' *elder* brother, a fact we can deduce from the historical record and from his being listed first in the genealogy of Numbers 26:59) was an ordinary Israelite who was "drafted" to play a supporting role in Yahweh's drama. But Moses was different: it was apparent from his birth onward that he had been chosen by Yahweh for his remarkable destiny. Miraculously spared during a period of genocidal persecution, he was raised and educated in the royal palace of Egypt, making him for all intents and purposes the adopted grandson of the most powerful monarch on the face of the earth. But after spending the first forty years of his life as the scion of privilege, Moses committed murder and fled the land. He found himself tending somebody else's sheep in a foreign country for the next four decades—in retrospect, another and equally valuable phase of his educational experience.

It was apparently Moses' reluctance to accept the mantle of responsibility God had asked him to bear that prompted Yahweh to appoint his brother Aaron as his spokesman before Pharaoh. But it's clear from Exodus 4:14 that Aaron had *already* been told to **"Go into the wilderness to meet Moses"** when Mo dug in his heels at the burning bush. So it is a matter of conjecture whether Aaron's intended role was expanded from merely being "liaison officer" with the elders of Israel at this time to being the prophet's front man in the court of Pharaoh. However, I have a feeling that Aaron's coming position as High Priest was always the heart of Yahweh's anticipated role for him—the High Priest ultimately being symbolic of Yahshua the Messiah. Aaron's metaphorical identity as the firstborn son of Amram (which means "a people exalted") destined him for the job, if nothing else.

The point of this discussion is simply that our roles, responsibilities, and gifts as children of Yahweh, whether great or small, are assigned to us—we do not choose them. Some of us are able to administer ten "talents," others only one. As in Paul's illustration of the "body of Christ," we cannot all be the right hand or the tongue, as glorious as that might be; some of us have to be the liver and kidneys—and some (let's face it) are

the appendix or the tonsils. Though it is up to us to choose whether or not *to be* part of the body, choosing *which part* is Yahweh's prerogative. Let us each endeavor to serve the body well wherever we find ourselves.

- (731) *Prepare to meet God.* **"Then Yahweh said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day Yahweh will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain.'"** (Exodus 19:10-13) Brace yourselves, folks. This is about to get heavy. Although the instructions to the Israelites of the exodus were plain enough, there are ramifications latent in the text that speak to us today.

We'll come back to the "third-day" thing. The imperative here is, **"Do not go up to the mountain or touch its base."** Let us begin by examining what it means to "touch the mountain." A mountain is a symbol of power, of majesty. In this case (Sinai) it represents the authority of the Law. Another mountain (Zion) indicates the potency of grace. A reference to a city on seven mountains in Revelation 17:9 speaks of unchallenged temporal power (while identifying Rome as the seat of the harlot of Babylon). Mount Sinai draws its power from Yahweh. That is, the authority of the Law is derived from the worthiness of the One who spoke it into being. We are therefore being instructed not to usurp Yahweh's authority.

A close look at several of these words in the original language will clarify the matter. To "go up" is the Hebrew word *'alah*, meaning primarily to ascend or climb, but with secondary connotations of exalting oneself, of lifting oneself up, to come up (as before God), or to go up over or extend (as in violating a boundary). To "touch" (Hebrew: *naga*) is to reach, strike, approach or extend to. (The noun with the same consonant root, *nega*, means "a stroke or wound," so it's clear that mere physical contact isn't remotely the whole story.) And "base" is *qatseh*, meaning a "limit, edge, outskirts, extremity, tip, i.e., the distant end of a space or defined area; an end, finish, i.e., a point in time marking the completion of a duration; or a foot, base, or foundation, i.e., the lowest point of an elevated place." (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*). So in addition to the plain meaning of the warning to its original audience, Yahweh is telling us, "Do not lift yourself up to usurp

My authority; do not strike or wound the foundation of the Law I am giving you.”

And who is that “foundation?” It’s none other than Yahshua, the Messiah. I know, you think I’ve stretched this beyond it’s breaking point—you think I’m merely seeing something I *want* to see. Don’t be too sure. The verse immediately preceding this informs us, **“And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever.’”** (Exodus 19:9) This is a description of the Shekinah, a form in which Yahweh would physically dwell within the Tabernacle (see Exodus 40:34-38). But let’s look closely at that phrase “thick cloud.” One of the meanings of the word translated “thick” (Hebrew: *abiy*) is “a casting mold, i.e., a matrix for holding and casting molten metal.” “Cloud” is the Hebrew *’anan*, a cloud of smoke or water vapor dense enough to be clearly visible. We have been given a description of a physical manifestation of God’s Spirit—something with corporeal form (“cast” as in a mold), yet composed of something ephemeral, spiritual. Further, this is an entity through which Yahweh Himself will speak to the people in a voice they can comprehend. That’s a perfect, albeit poetic, description of the Messiah, Yahshua. It’s another way of stating the “coming Prophet” promise recorded in Deuteronomy 18:15-19.

Still think I’ve gone round the bend? Then factor in what He said about the third day: **“Consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes.”** Our washed clothes are a picture of the cleansing made available by the Messiah’s sacrifice. We’re given garments of light that enable us to stand before a holy God. These garments will be available to us “today and tomorrow,” two days (that is, two thousand years, according to II Peter 3:8) *subsequent to* the coming of the “thick cloud” spoken of in the previous paragraph: Yahshua the Christ. **“And let them be ready for the third day.”** Since “today and tomorrow,” the first two days, began in 33 A.D. with the passion of Yahshua, the third day is therefore scheduled to begin precisely two thousand years later, in 2033. (See Hosea 6:2 for a stunning confirmation that Israel *will* “be ready for the third day.”) Further evidence of this timeline is provided through the dimensions of the Tabernacle (Precept #715) and of the courtyard (Precept #728).

“For on the third day Yahweh will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.” The actual site of the Messiah’s future “coming down” will be the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, not Sinai (in northwestern Arabia—see Galatians 4:25). But by doing so, Yahshua will have fulfilled the Torah down to the smallest detail: “Mount Sinai” *will* have been visited by Yahweh in the sight of all the people, once and for all.

An additional, and related, command is given in the same “third-day” context: **“And he said to the people, ‘Be ready for the third day; do not come near your wives.’”** (Exodus 19:15) Under normal circumstances, sexual contact between husbands and their wives is characterized as a good thing, its love and intimacy leading to fruitfulness. So what was different on the “third day?” I believe the lesson here is that for those of us who had been consecrated during the first two days of Yahshua’s ekklesia (the “Church age”), for us who have donned clean clothes (the **“righteous acts of the saints”**—Revelation 19:8), the time for us to bear fruit, i.e., reach lost souls with the Good News, will have come to an end when the “third day” commences. Clothed in our new resurrection bodies during the Millennial Kingdom, our roles, responsibilities, and capabilities will all have changed. For the better, I’m guessing.

- (732) *Warn the people not to approach Yahweh in their sinful state. “And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at Yahweh, and many of them perish. Also let the priests who come near Yahweh consecrate themselves, lest Yahweh break out against them.’ But Moses said to Yahweh, ‘The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for You warned us, saying, ‘Set bounds around the mountain and consecrate it.’ Then Yahweh said to him, ‘Away! Get down and then come up, you and Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to Yahweh, lest He break out against them.’ So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.”* (Exodus 19:21-25) Yahweh was very concerned about the people “breaking through” to Mount Sinai to “gaze” at Him. But there was more to this than keeping the curious at bay. The Hebrew word translated “break through” (*haras*) also means: “to tear down, break down, overthrow, beat down, break, destroy, pull down, throw down, or ruin.” (S) It’s a much more violent term than a casual reading might suggest.

Remember the context: Moses was about to be given the Law—specifically, the Ten Commandments—on the mountain. I think the warning here is basically the same as what we saw in Precept #731: we are not to usurp Yahweh’s authority; we are not to institute our own Law. The authority in question in this case was God’s right to make the rules, for those “rules” would contain within them the key to attaining life in Yahweh’s presence—not by defining human perfection, but by pointing toward the One whose mortal life would fulfill their promise. This life, death, and resurrection would define Him as our Savior.

Beside the obvious problem of an unconsecrated people coming into the presence of a Holy God—which would cause them to immediately “perish,” there was a more subtle warning. As we have seen, the “bounds” of the mountain—the foundation of Yahweh’s authority as it relates to

mankind—is in reality Yahshua the Messiah. If the people were to “break through” (*haras*: tear down, overthrow, and destroy) Him, Yahweh would have no choice but to “break out against them.” Alas, they did—so He did. This very thing happened in history: the same generation that crucified Yahshua witnessed the destruction of the Jewish state. And ironically, Yahweh used the same demolition tool they had: the Romans.

- (733) *Approach Yahweh only as He directs.* “Now He said to Moses, ‘Come up to Yahweh, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. And Moses alone shall come near Yahweh, but they shall not come near; nor shall the people go up with him.’ ...Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them.’” (Exodus 24:1-2, 12) The reaction of the congregation at Moses’ first meeting with Yahweh on Mount Sinai had been sheer terror: **“All the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”** (Exodus 20:18) It was clear that Yahweh was an awesome God; He was not to be approached flippantly, but only with the deepest reverence. But that doesn’t mean He *can’t* be approached. Here in chapter 24, we see Yahweh assuming a less frightening form for the benefit of the leaders of Israel, not only Moses, but also Aaron, his two eldest sons, and seventy of the tribal elders. Now, instead of warning everyone strictly to stay off the mountain, Yahweh is seen inviting the leaders to approach Him. There’s still some distance, but it’s clear that Yahweh doesn’t want to be isolated from His people, speaking to them only through the filter of an exalted prophet, a mortal representative. If He has to lay aside His glory in order to interact with us, then so be it. As strange as it may sound, communion with us is the whole point.

In stark contrast with Yahweh’s previous displays of power, we now read, **“Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank.”** (Exodus 24:9-11) They *saw God*? Not in His undiminished form, for they lived to tell the tale. But not in the humble humanity of Yahweh’s future Messianic manifestation, Yahshua of Nazareth, either. I imagine that the deity they saw was a bit like what Peter, James, and John saw on the Mount of Transfiguration—Christ in His glorified state, utterly, blindingly majestic but still identifiably “human” in form.

It's clear, then, that this kind of intimate communion with God is an invitation-only affair, but it's equally clear that the invitation has been extended to all mankind. We may approach God, but only as He directs—and there is but one path. Following that path is designed to be a life-altering experience. At first, I was puzzled by the fact that, having seen God, not one of the people invited up onto the mountain survived to enter the Promised Land. Nadab and Abihu are especially perplexing, for they soon showed their contempt for Yahweh's instructions and were subsequently slain for their disrespect (Leviticus 10:1-2). How could anyone have "seen God" only to turn around and treat Him with so little reverence? But then I realized to my shame, and the shame of my race, that we have all "seen God" in the person of Yahshua—and none of us respects His Word as we should, even the best of us. Were it not for His mercy, we would not survive ten minutes.

CORPORATE APPAREL AND GRAPHIC DESIGN

In the next few precepts, we'll explore the "uniform" the High Priest was to wear, an ensemble described in great detail in Exodus 28. This can get a little hard to follow, for we don't dress like this these days. (For me, anything beyond "jeans, sneakers, and a clean sweatshirt" requires research.) We'll follow the order of Yahweh's instructions as related in Exodus, though this passage won't tell us much about how the basic garments were worn. I mean, when's the last time you threw on an ephod? Fortunately, the order of dress was recounted in the record of Aaron's ordination in Leviticus: **"Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons and washed them with water. And he put the tunic on him...."** Well, we're already confused. As it turns out, the *first* article of clothing to be put on was a pair of linen trousers (think: boxer shorts) described in Exodus 28:42 as reaching from the waist to the thighs. But all the priests wore them, so they were not worthy of special note here. The "tunic" was a long, loose, shirt-like affair, sleeved or sleeveless, reaching to the knees. It would ordinarily have been tied at the waist with a sash.

This tunic was the basic common garment everybody would wear. Yahshua's tunic became the prize in a game of dice at His crucifixion (see John 19:23-24), in fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 22:18. And that's not the only sartorial prophecy that was fulfilled at the foot of the cross. The soldiers dividing their victims' garments among them were gambling for the tunic only because they didn't want to tear it. So we read, **"He who is the high priest among his brethren, on whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head or tear his clothes."** (Leviticus 21:10) Yahshua *was* our anointed High Priest—not of the order of Aaron, but of Melchizedek. Between the

crown of thorns He wore and the tunic that remained intact, its clear that Yahshua fulfilled the prophetic requirements of the Torah perfectly, even when matters were “out of His hands.”

Anyway, after Moses “girded him [Aaron] with the sash,” he “clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him and he girded him with the intricately woven band of the ephod, and with it tied the ephod on him....” We’ll discuss each of these garments in turn as they come up in the narrative. The ephod, an apron-like garment with shoulder straps, was worn over the robe and held in place around the waist with an integral decorative “band.” **“Then he put the breastplate on him, and he put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastplate.”** The breast-piece was to be secured to the straps of the ephod with an elaborate and symbolically specific assortment of cords and rings. It was actually a pocket, into which were placed two objects, the Urim and Thummim, that were somehow used to determine the will of Yahweh in certain situations. **“And he put the turban on his head. Also on the turban, on its front, he put the golden plate, the holy crown, as Yahweh had commanded Moses.”** (Leviticus 8:6-9) Lastly, the headgear was donned. We’ll explore each of these garments in turn. No footwear is mentioned in the account of the priestly garments, but that’s probably because the priest’s sandals would have been removed every time he entered the Holy Place, so his feet could be washed at the bronze laver stationed at the Tabernacle entrance.

(734) *Make the High Priest’s ephod.* **“They shall take the gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and the fine linen, and they shall make the ephod of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, artistically worked. It shall have two shoulder straps joined at its two edges, and so it shall be joined together. And the intricately woven band of the ephod, which is on it, shall be of the same workmanship, made of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen.”** (Exodus 28:5-8) In Mitzvah #372 we encountered Yahweh’s general instructions defining what the High Priest was to wear in his official role, including **“a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a skillfully woven tunic, a turban, and a sash.”** (Exodus 28:4) Here we are given more specific directions concerning the ephod, which was like a skirt or apron that covered the hips and thighs. The ephod had two straps or suspenders, which were worn over the shoulders. There were many layers to the ensemble, all telling the same story in slightly different ways (kind of like God’s Word, it’s turning out): the High Priest was to be a divinely appointed intermediary between man and God, an exalted servant. He is a living metaphor for the Messiah, and his wardrobe says a great deal about his divine antitype.

The ephod was, in a way, an echo of the inner curtain of the Tabernacle (see Precept #712) and the veil (Precept #723). It too was to be

made of fine-threaded linen cloth, woven or embroidered with costly blue, purple, and scarlet thread (Precept #712 again), indicating the righteousness, heavenly royalty, and shed blood of the coming Messiah. Remember, these dyes were extracted from sources the Torah defined as “unclean.” Therefore, like the *tsitzit* every Israelite was to wear, with its single thread of *tekelet* blue, they indicated the defilement caused by the human condition, defilement that was to be borne *in profusion* by the High Priest. Even then, it’s only a pale reminder of the actual defilement that would be endured for our sakes by the High Priest’s antitype, the Messiah. That Almighty God condescended to take upon Himself human form and dwell in a fallen world is a sacrifice so vast I have a hard time comprehending it. The crucifixion I can sort of understand. *This*, I can’t.

The shoulder straps indicate that this costly defilement was *purposely* borne on our behalf. Furthermore, the work, the lifting of this burden, was to be shouldered by the Anointed One alone. And what of the “intricately woven band,” made with the same materials but with the addition of gold thread (indicating immutable purity achieved in the crucible of judgment)? The designation is a single Hebrew word: *chesheb*, which denotes “ingenious work” as much as it does “a waistband, girdle, or sash to attach clothing around the waist.” The word is based on the verb *chasab*: to think, plan, make a judgment, imagine, or count. We are being subtly told that the Messiah’s role in our redemption was neither an accident nor an act of desperation, but rather the very plan of God—the ingenious product of His loving imagination—conceived in his mind before we humans had even demonstrated our need for salvation. The *chesheb* is what holds the whole thing together.

- (735) *Engrave two onyx stones for the ephod.* “Then you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: six of their names on one stone and six names on the other stone, in order of their birth. With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall set them in settings of gold. And you shall put the two stones on the shoulders of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. So Aaron shall bear their names before Yahweh on his two shoulders as a memorial. You shall also make settings of gold, and you shall make two chains of pure gold like braided cords, and fasten the braided chains to the settings.” (Exodus 28:9-14) The High Priest, in his role as intercessor, was to “bear” (Hebrew: *nasa*): lift up, carry, support, or exalt, the “names” (Hebrew: *shem*)—more than just the proper designation of someone, but also their character or reputation—of God’s people as a “memorial” before Him. This *zikarown*-memorial is based on the verb (*zakar*) meaning “to think about, meditate upon, pay attention to; remember, recollect;

mention, declare, recite, proclaim, invoke, commemorate, or confess.” (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*) In short, the High Priest was to represent the people before Yahweh, be their advocate, their spokesman, their ambassador. This is precisely the role Yahshua our Messiah fills on our behalf as He sits “at the right hand of God” today. Satan accuses us; He defends us.

This is all a two-way street, however. If you’ll recall, the Third Commandment put the shoe on the other foot: we are not to *nasa* (lift up, bear, or present) the *shem* (the name, character, or reputation) of Yahweh in a manner that is *shav* (empty, worthless, false, or futile). In other words, we are to be *His* advocates, spokespersons, and ambassadors before the world. He’s not asking us to do anything he hasn’t already done for us.

As usual, the material specified for the symbol is significant. Onyx, a stone soft enough to be engraved or carved, would soon be listed among twelve gemstones adorning the High Priest’s breastplate (see Precept #737). I believe they’re the same twelve stones (at least as far as what they signify) that are specified for the foundations of the New Jerusalem, listed in Revelation 21:19-20. In *Future History*, Chapter 30, I discussed each of them in turn. If I may be allowed to quote myself: “Listed fifth in the foundation stones, sardonyx was composed of two layers, sard, or sardius—a translucent deep red or red-orange form of chalcedony—and onyx, a white form of calcium carbonate soft enough to be easily carved. Onyx (Hebrew: *shoham*) was listed in the middle of the fourth row of the ephod. Sardonyx was prized for making cameos and signet rings—the soft onyx carving standing out against the red sardius background. Signet rings, of course, were used for impressing the owner’s seal into hot wax—a means of identification, proof of ownership, and exercise of authority. The sardonyx, then symbolizes our being “sealed” by Yahshua—the red of the sardius represents His blood, while the white onyx speaks of His purity.”

Finally, the two onyx nameplates were to be encased in pure gold settings and secured to the shoulder straps of the ephod with a braided chain of pure gold. It’s as if Yahweh is saying, *My people are precious to Me: I shall protect and honor them with My own character as their case is brought before Me.*

- (736) *Make the High Priest’s breast-piece. “You shall make the breastplate of judgment. Artistically woven according to the workmanship of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, you shall make it. It shall be doubled into a square: a span shall be its length, and a span shall be its width.”* (Exodus 28:15-16) When we hear the word

“breastplate,” we (or is it just me?) envision a heavy metal or leather shield-like affair covering the wearer’s entire chest, used to protect his vital organs in a battle, sort of like the Kevlar vests our law-enforcement officers wear for protection today. But that’s not what this is at all. It’s a *hosen*, a pouch, pocket, or envelope about nine inches square, made by folding a piece of cloth over upon itself and stitching up the two sides. In this case, the *hosen* was to hold two items called the Urim and Thummim (see Precept #739), used to discern the will of God in certain matters. That’s why this is called the “breastplate (or breast-piece) of *judgment*.” That’s the Hebrew word *mishpat*, meaning the act of deciding a legal case, the court where justice is rendered, the process of litigation, or the verdict itself. We tend to read “wrath” into judgment, but that’s only because we’re guilty. The word can actually lead either to wrath or vindication.

The same materials, craftsmanship, and design used in the ephod were to be used to make the breast-piece. Its finished shape was to be a square, reminiscent of the altar’s shape, its four equal sides indicating once again the completion of our redemption—this time stressing the comprehensive satisfaction of the legal *mishpat* requirements of the Law.

- (737) *Adorn the breastplate with gemstones.* **“And you shall put settings of stones in it, four rows of stones: The first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald; this shall be the first row; the second row shall be a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; and the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be set in gold settings. And the stones shall have the names of the sons of Israel, twelve according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, each one with its own name; they shall be according to the twelve tribes.”** (Exodus 28:17-21) The breast-piece was to be studded with twelve precious or semi-precious stones, each representing one of the patriarchs of Israel. They were affixed in order of their birth to Jacob, so the list started with Reuben (represented by the sardius) and ended with Benjamin (the jasper). Significantly, the onyx stone—which had been specified to bear the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the epaulets of the ephod—was the eleventh stone: Joseph’s. Of all the sons of Israel, Joseph became a living metaphor for the coming Messiah, his story prefiguring Christ’s in dozens of ways.

Once again, I would refer you to *Future History*, Chapter 30: “Heaven, Hell, and Eternity,” for a thorough analysis of what each of the twelve stones signify. If my take is valid, then they indicate twelve separate facets of Yahweh’s plan for our redemption (listed here in the order they appear in the foundations of the heavenly city): (1) *Jasper*: the blood of God’s perfect sacrifice, Yahshua, sprinkled upon the mercy seat to atone for our

sins. (2) *Sapphire*: heaven, our eternal destiny in Christ. (3) *Chalcedony*: mankind, the object of Yahweh's unfathomable love, and the humanity of Yahshua that enabled Him to rescue us. (4) *Emerald*: our need for the Holy Spirit—God's very presence living within us. (5) *Sardonyx*: our "sealing" by Yahshua. (6) *Sardius*: the blood of Yahshua, shed for our sins. (7) *Chrysolite*: the unfathomable riches of God's love toward us. (8) *Beryl*: Yahweh's loving provision for us—the exquisite balance of the whole created universe. (9) *Topaz*: Yahshua's work in us through the testing of this world, making us more useful, more beautiful, and infinitely more valuable. (10) *Chrysoprase*: the fruit of the Spirit in the believer's life—i.e., love and the things that grow out of it. (11) *Jacinth*: our glorious future in the "dwelling places" Yahshua has prepared for us. And (12) *Amethyst*: divine royalty, Yahshua—and through Him the status of the redeemed, described as a "royal priesthood."

I may not have gotten all of the symbols correct (or *any* of them, for that matter). But it's clear to me that they're each symbolic of *something* in Yahweh's plan for our redemption. Like the ephod's epaulets, the twelve stones of the breast-piece were to be set in gold, signifying (at the very least) that the twelve tribes of Israel were set apart and protected through Yahweh's immutable, imperishable character. They were each to be engraved with their individual tribal names. (Perhaps this was done on their gold settings, for some of these stones were quite hard.) I take this as a reminder that Yahweh knows each of us individually, not just by the group to which we belong, either by choice or genetic serendipity. Beyond that, against what seem like very long odds, each and every tribe of Israel will regain its place in the national heritage during Yahshua's Millennial reign (see Ezekiel 48). Makes perfect sense: **"They shall be set in gold settings."**

Lest we forget, the breast-piece was to be worn by Aaron, the High Priest, in his role as prophetically appointed intercessor for his people. **"So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel on the breastplate of judgment over his heart, when he goes into the holy place, as a memorial before Yahweh continually."** (Exodus 28:29) The twelve tribes of his people were to be literally *on his heart* as he ministered before Yahweh. No less so are all the saints on the heart and mind of Yahshua as he intercedes for us before the Father in heaven.

- (738) *Attach the High Priest's breastplate to his ephod. "You shall make chains for the breastplate at the end, like braided cords of pure gold. And you shall make two rings of gold for the breastplate, and put the two rings on the two ends of the breastplate. Then you shall put the two braided chains of gold in the two rings*

which are on the ends of the breastplate; and the other two ends of the two braided chains you shall fasten to the two settings, and put them on the shoulder straps of the ephod in the front.” (Exodus 28:22-25) Here we see how the breast-piece was to be attached to the High Priest’s wardrobe. If you’ll recall, the ephod was like an apron or skirt that was held up with two straps over the High Priest’s shoulders. The breast-piece was to be suspended between these two shoulder straps. Here we see the top attachment points. Golden rings were to be attached to both the “ends” (i.e., the edge, extremity, or selvedge—Hebrew: *qatsah*) of the breast-piece, and also to the two “settings,” that is, the gold frames into which were set the two onyx stones with the names of the sons of Israel, which perched upon the High Priest’s shoulders. These rings were to be joined by two braided cords of pure gold, which I would guess were five or six inches long.

The breast-piece didn’t just hang there loose, however. Its lower edge was attached in a similar way to the straps, just above the ephod’s “intricately woven band,” the *chesheb* we mentioned in Precept #734. **“You shall make two rings of gold, and put them on the two ends of the breastplate, on the edge of it, which is on the inner side of the ephod. And two other rings of gold you shall make, and put them on the two shoulder straps, underneath the ephod toward its front, right at the seam above the intricately woven band of the ephod. They shall bind the breastplate by means of its rings to the rings of the ephod, using a blue cord, so that it is above the intricately woven band of the ephod, and so that the breastplate does not come loose from the ephod.”** (Exodus 28:26-28) We covered this briefly in Mitzvah #432, where I noted, “It’s a picture of service and intercession. The reason the ephod and breastplate were to remain attached was that service without love is worthless, just as love without service is impossible.”

If you’re like me, you’re wondering why we were given such intricate and exacting instructions for the attachment of the breast-piece. Following the principle that Yahweh never tells us anything on a pointless whim, I was compelled to ask myself: why, if the breast-piece was never to be removed from the ephod, was it attached in such a convoluted manner? Why not just sew it on, or for that matter, why not make the whole affair out of a single piece of linen and be done with it? Yahweh’s trying to tell us something here, but He’s making us dig for it.

Let’s review the details. There were four points of attachment. The top two corners of the breast-piece were attached to the gold settings of the onyx epaulets with golden cords. At the bottom, it was attached to the straps near the ephod’s “intricately woven band,” but this time, the

attachment was done with a blue (*tekelet*) cord. In no case, however, was the cord affixed directly to the ephod or the breast-piece. Rather, it was attached to an intermediate ring, made of gold, which was in turn joined to the ephod. We might expect these rings, then, eight of them in all, to have significance beyond their mere attachment capabilities, since they weren't really necessary if all you wanted to do was connect the breast-piece to the ephod. So it's with some interest that we find that the Hebrew word for "ring" (*taba'at*)—a ring or signet ring—has far more to do with "signet" than it does "ring." The root verb *taba* means to sink, to penetrate, as a signet ring would sink into the hot wax of a ruler's seal. The use of the *taba'at* signet ring verified the authority of the one who used it. The round shape that allowed it to stay on his finger when not in use was pretty much beside the point.

What, then, is the symbolic significance of the unusual and counter-intuitive method of attaching the breast-piece to the ephod? Let's look at the individual pieces of the puzzle. (1) The High Priest, the one who wears these items, is metaphorical of Yahshua the Messiah. (2) The ephod speaks of the Messiah's service and sacrifice—His shouldering the burden of Israel's sin (on the one end) and (3) His "intricately woven band," the *chesheb*, signifying His sacrifice and voluntary defilement on behalf of everybody else (on the other). (4) The breast-piece with its twelve stones worn over the High Priest's heart symbolizes Yahweh's love as demonstrated by His multi-faceted plan for our redemption. (5) The gold cords between the breast-piece and the onyx epaulets inscribed with Israel's tribal names signify the precious and immutable promises of Yahweh toward them. (6) The blue cords running between the breast-piece and the ephod's *chesleb* band represent the direct line between the Messiah and His ekklesia (something not enjoyed by Israel as a nation—yet). And (7) the rings that appear at every juncture remind us that God's people—all of us—are sealed through the authority of Almighty Yahweh. In point of fact, then, the High Priest is *wearing* the story of our redemption upon his body.

- (739) *Provide for the Urim and Thummim.* **"And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before Yahweh. So Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel over his heart before Yahweh continually."** (Exodus 28:30) The breast-piece, you'll recall, was a doubled-over piece of cloth, with the "pocket" opening at the top. These two mysterious objects, the *Urim* and *Thummim*, were to be placed within that pocket. They were used exclusively by the High Priest to discern the will of Yahweh in matters of national importance, though the actual method or means he used has been lost to

history (which is probably a good thing). These weren't "divination" devices, like reading tea leaves or throwing dice. Such practices, in fact, were strictly forbidden. Rather, the idea and goal was to elicit guidance from Yahweh in the absence of a Torah precept covering the question, or a prophet like Samuel or Elijah with whom to consult. Neither chance nor occult knowledge was in view. It seems the *Urim* and *Thummim* were most often used to elicit a "yes or no" answer from Yahweh (e.g. I Samuel 23:9-12). But unlike "flipping a coin," the question could entail more than a simple binary decision (as in Judges 1:1). And the answer might even be, "I'm not going to give you an answer," (as in I Samuel 28:6).

Both of these words are plural forms. *Urim* is based on *ur*, a verb meaning "to be light, to shine; to give light, cause to shine; or to illumine." Literally, then, *urim* means "lights" or "illumination." *Thummim* (or *Tumim*) is derived from the verb *tamam*: to be complete, as in the related words *tom* (integrity or uprightness) and *tam* (perfect). Thus *thummim*, the plural of *tom*, literally means "perfections." It speaks of truth that is arrived at honestly, in a natural, non-calculating way, with a clear conscience and pure motives. The use of the word to describe the random, un-aimed arrow shot that killed Ahab almost by accident (I Kings 22) gives us a clearer picture of the underlying tone of *tom* and *thummim*.

We needn't get hung up on how the High Priest used the *Urim* and *Thummim* to discern the will of Yahweh. I realize that Josephus reported that the twelve stones of the ephod would shine when the Israelites were to be victorious in battle (*Antiquities*, 3.8, 9) and that the Talmudic rabbis suggested that the Shekinah would illumine letters within the engraved names of these stones to spell out secret messages (never mind the fact that they were five letters short of an alphabet using that method). These fanciful extrapolations on history and scripture ignore the fact that we never hear of the *Urim* and *Thummim* being used after the reign of David. Ezra and Nehemiah both mention their need, but not their use, at the time of the return of Judah's exiles from Babylon. It's quite possible that there was no physical property associated with them at all, but that their use in faith gave the High Priest prophetic insight into the question at hand.

We, rather, should consider what the *Urim* and *Thummim* mean as metaphors in Yahweh's plan for our lives. Because they are the exclusive province of *our* High Priest, Yahshua, we are blessed with the counsel they provide, for His Spirit dwells within us today. We need only to ask for guidance. We would be fools not to avail ourselves of this priceless resource: lights and perfections—illumination and truth.

(740) *Make the High Priest's robe.* "You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. There shall be an opening for his head in the middle of it; it shall have a woven binding all around its opening, like the opening in a coat of mail, so that it does not tear. And upon its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet, all around its hem, and bells of gold between them all around: a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe all around. And it shall be upon Aaron when he ministers, and its sound will be heard when he goes into the holy place before Yahweh and when he comes out, that he may not die." (Exodus 28:31-35) Worn over the linen tunic, the High Priest's "robe" was more like a sleeved poncho than a coat, in that it wasn't open at the front. Rather, it was slipped on over the head. The "neck" was reinforced so it wouldn't tear. It was customary in these times for one to rend his clothing in order to express profound anguish or deep mourning, but the High Priest was specifically prohibited from doing so (see Mitzvah #373). The reason, I believe, is wrapped up in what the robe represented: since it was made entirely of blue-dyed fabric, the ultimate High Priest's role as King is being stressed here.

Since kings and priests were supposed to come from different tribes (Judah versus Levi), only one candidate for fulfillment exists: Yahshua, both our King and our High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. On the other hand, there *was* one incident where a prophet was instructed to "crown" a High Priest and speak of him as if he were a king: **"Behold, the Man whose name is the branch! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of Yahweh. Yes, He shall build the temple of Yahweh. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne. So He shall be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both."** (Zechariah 6:12-13) This was all prophetic of the coming Messiah, of course. The name of the priest? Joshua (pronounced: Yahshua), son of Jehozadak (which, not coincidentally, means "Yahweh has justified"). You think maybe God was trying to tell us something?

The point of never tearing the royal robe was that although the Messiah in his role as the Lamb of God would be torn—slain to atone for our sins—His position *as King* was unassailable. It made no difference if billions of lost and rebellious people said, "We will not have this Man to rule over us." He *does* rule, whether they like it or not. The role of King of kings cannot be torn away from Yahshua.

And what of the "decorative" elements to be applied to the hem of the robe? Pomegranates embroidered in blue, purple, and scarlet were to ring the hem, interspersed with bells made of pure gold, sewn on in a way that would allow them to ring when the High Priest walked. The reason given

for the bells is a warning: **“Its sound will be heard when he goes into the holy place before Yahweh and when he comes out, that he may not die.”** That he may not *die*? This is apparently more serious than it looks. The key, I think, is once again the metal from which the bells were to be made: gold—precious, immutable, proven pure in the crucible of adversity. The golden bells announce to Yahweh that the High Priest is there in his role as a symbolic representative of the coming Anointed One—he is *not* standing before Yahweh pretending to be “good enough” to intercede for the people on his own. He is, rather, the emissary of the King.

The pomegranates mean something else entirely. But what? Rabbis have tried to make the case that pomegranates represent the Law of Moses, because they contain 613 seeds. Problem is, they don’t. These apple-sized fruits always have lots of seeds, it’s true: that’s what the Anglicized name of the plant means (Latin: *pomum* = “apple,” and *granatus* = “seeded”). But they range from under 200 to over 1,300 in number—hardly the precision you’d expect from a biblical metaphor, if that’s really what it was supposed to mean. And besides, I’ve convincingly demonstrated that there *aren’t* 613 “laws” in the Torah. That’s a Talmudic prevarication, nothing more. But the meaning *is* tied to the seeds, which when crushed yield a sweet-to-sour red juice (the basis of grenadine, for example) that is symbolic of the shed blood of Yahshua the Messiah. (No wonder the rabbis are scrambling for alternative explanations, lame or not.) I suppose you could say that whether the “blood” of the pomegranate is sweet to you or sour depends upon your relationship with the One who did the bleeding.

The “decorative elements” on the hem of the robe, then, are anything but merely decorative. They speak of the two functions of the Messiah, suffering servant and reigning king, repeated over and over again so we wouldn’t lose sight of one or the other.

- (741) *Make a golden plate for display on the High Priest’s turban. “You shall also make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet: HOLINESS TO YAHWEH. And you shall put it on a blue cord, that it may be on the turban; it shall be on the front of the turban. So it shall be on Aaron’s forehead, that Aaron may bear [i.e., carry away] the iniquity of the holy things which the children of Israel hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before Yahweh.”* (Exodus 28:36-38) The symbolism latent in the High Priest’s garments is like buried treasure—it’s exciting and rewarding to dig it out. But sometimes Yahweh just leaves nuggets of truth lying around on the ground for us to pick up—sometimes he literally spells it out for us. Like here. There was to be a golden sign

attached to the turban worn by the High Priest that read “Holiness to Yahweh,” or “Set Apart to Yahweh.” That is precisely the job description of not only the High Priest, but also the Messiah he represents—and indeed, all of us who are “in” him. Maybe if we all walked around with signs on our foreheads stating in no uncertain terms what (and Who) we’re about, we’d be less apt to behave the way we do.

Of course, even here, there are symbolic aspects we should address. The plate is made of gold, speaking of Christ’s precious, immutable purity. It is attached to the linen (read: righteousness) turban with a blue cord, symbolic of the Messiah’s royalty. And where is it placed? On the forehead, i.e., over the frontal lobe. As I pointed out before, the frontal cortex controls our emotions and personality, motor function, problem solving, spontaneity, memory, language, initiation, judgment, impulse control, and social and sexual behavior. If these things—what we do, think, and feel—were “covered” by our consecration to Yahweh, how far wrong could we possibly go?

(742) *Make the High Priest’s tunic, turban, and sash. “You shall skillfully weave the tunic of fine linen thread, you shall make the turban of fine linen, and you shall make the sash of woven work.”* (Exodus 28:39) We’ve mentioned all of these garments one way or another in the past few pages. Perhaps we should pause and reflect on the *verbs* being used here. There are three of them in this verse. “Skillfully weave” is the Hebrew *shabats*: to weave or plait, to interlock threads at right angles to make a fabric. “Make” (used twice) is *’asah*, a generic verb for accomplishing something: do, make, cause, bring about, work (i.e., expend labor or effort in a task or endeavor), behave or conduct oneself in a certain way—even to caress or fondle. Finally, “woven” is actually a verb, *raqam*, meaning to weave variegated cloth, thus to be formed, fashioned, or woven out of a variety of existing materials—including the formation of our own bodies and souls, as in Psalm 136:15: **“My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.”**

What, then, is Yahweh instructing us to do here (besides the obvious manufacture of the High Priest’s clothing)? We are being told to follow the creative instincts He built into us when He created us in His own “image and likeness.” Yahweh gave us the ability to do things, to make stuff, to take raw materials and craft them into something useful, beautiful, valuable, or significant. He gave us brains with which to think, fingers with which to manipulate our world, senses with which to perceive it all, and a spirit with which we can joyfully appreciate the result. We humans have the ability to grow flax, weave it into linen cloth, and sew it into the

High Priest's tunic. We have the ability to harvest wood, metal, and other materials, fashion musical instruments, learn how to play them, and proceed to praise Yahweh with a joyful noise. We have the ability to harness electrons, herd them across microscopic silicon landscapes, and use them to bring enlightenment and truth to literally billions of our fellow creatures. But what do we do? All too often, we squander our creative gifts or allow them to be stolen from us. We work for a paycheck (or worse, for *the weekend*) instead of "as unto our heavenly Father." We slouch in our La-Z-Boys watching mindless Hollywood drivel instead of using the time to sharpen our intellects or serve our fellow man. We take instead of giving, consume instead of creating, medicate instead of meditating, prey on people instead of praying for them, and complain instead of communicating. My friends, we need to get off our butts and "skillfully weave" something.

- (743) *Make tunics, trousers, sashes, and hats for all the priests. "For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics, and you shall make sashes for them. And you shall make hats for them, for glory and beauty. So you shall put them on Aaron your brother and on his sons with him. You shall anoint them, consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister to Me as priests. And you shall make for them linen trousers to cover their nakedness; they shall reach from the waist to the thighs."* (Exodus 28:40-42) The High Priest wasn't the only one who was to wear special clothing identifying his office and symbolizing some larger truth. The regular priests (all the male descendants of Aaron) were to be "uniformed" as well, though not as splendiferously as the High Priest. The thing that most clearly distinguished them was their "hats," or turbans. Different from the High Priest's turban (*mitsnephesh*), the word describing the ordinary priest's headgear (*migba'ah*) stresses its height or rounded summit. The priestly turban was supposed to impart "glory" (Hebrew: *kabowd*—glory, honor, reverence, or dignity) and "beauty" (*tiph'arah*—splendor, beauty, excellence, a mark of rank or renown) to the priests as a class. With such an unexpected twist—glory and splendor being bestowed *upon men* at God's instruction—I can't help but reflect on the "hats" said to be reserved for all believers—people for whom the priests of Israel serve as symbolic types: **"There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."** (II Timothy 4:8)

With the linen tunics (covering the short trousers) and identical sashes, the headgear helped to identify the priests *as* a priests, setting them apart from the average Israelite—even their brother Levites—when they were performing their priestly duties in the Tabernacle: **"They shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they come into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they**

come near the altar to minister in the holy place, that they do not incur iniquity and die. It shall be a statute forever to him and his descendants after him.” (Exodus 28:43) Again, there’s a warning attached: wear the special clothes when you minister within the Holy Place, or die for your disobedience. This is not a pointless tradition (like that observed by some American Christians who feel they *must* wear a coat and tie to church) but rather another of Yahweh’s object lessons. The linen from which the clothing was made was symbolic of righteousness—and *imputed* righteousness at that. Linen was made from flax, which grew up out of the ground—a picture of God’s miraculous provision. It “breathes” (like cotton does), making it not only comfortable to wear, but also an apt metaphor for receiving the Spirit of God, since the Hebrew word for spirit, *ruach*, also means wind or breath.

The corresponding opposite “fabric metaphor” would be wool, which symbolizes sacrifice and labor—and not surprisingly, is said to make the wearer perspire. The comparison is spelled out plainly in Yahweh’s instructions for the priestly wardrobe in the Millennial Temple. **“And it shall be, whenever they [the priests] enter the gates of the inner court, that they shall put on linen garments; no wool shall come upon them while they minister within the gates of the inner court or within the house. They shall have linen turbans on their heads and linen trousers on their bodies; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat.”** (Ezekiel 44:17-18) Since the priests as a class are a metaphor for believers in general, the lesson is clear: we may not approach Yahweh through our works (symbolized by wool). Only what He provides with which to cover our nakedness and shame (metaphorically, linen) is acceptable.

ARTISTS AND CRAFTSMEN

- (744) *Recognize and make use of God’s gifts of talent or ability. “All who are gifted artisans among you shall come and make all that Yahweh has commanded.”* (Exodus 35:10) It bears repeating: our eternal destiny is a choice that Yahweh leaves up to us—each one individually. But choosing our roles within the household of faith—once we have become part of Yahweh’s family—remains the prerogative of the Father. Each of us is given gifts or talents—potential that we are supposed to realize and develop to the best of our ability. But we are not all given the same gifts, the same proclivities and aptitudes, or the same degree of potential. Some servants are given “ten talents” to invest; others get only one. It’s no shame to be less gifted, only to be less willing to use the gift.

The construction of the Tabernacle provided a demonstration of this principle in microcosm. A wide variety of skills were needed to get the job

done, building “the tabernacle, its tent, its covering, its clasps, its boards, its bars, its pillars, and its sockets; the ark and its poles, with the mercy seat, and the veil of the covering; the table and its poles, all its utensils, and the showbread; also the lampstand for the light, its utensils, its lamps, and the oil for the light; the incense altar, its poles, the anointing oil, the sweet incense, and the screen for the door at the entrance of the tabernacle; the altar of burnt offering with its bronze grating, its poles, all its utensils, and the laver and its base; the hangings of the court, its pillars, their sockets, and the screen for the gate of the court; the pegs of the tabernacle, the pegs of the court, and their cords; the garments of ministry, for ministering in the holy place—the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests.” (Exodus 35:11-19) There are a score of different disciplines in there, and the Plan of God—a.k.a. the Tabernacle—required all of them, everybody working in harmony toward a common goal, according to a single master plan. Paul used a different metaphor: the “body of Christ,” to get the same idea across. Though we are united in purpose and destiny, we are quite different in function, one from another.

Yahweh has assigned to each of His children a task. Here in Exodus, one person cuts down acacia trees and mills them into lumber; another crafts those boards into furniture for the Tabernacle; another covers them with gold. One spins flax into linen thread; another weaves the thread into fabric; another fashions the fabric into the High Priest’s trousers. Nobody does it all, not even the master craftsmen Bezaleel and Aholiab, who were assigned the task of “art direction.” I can relate to these guys, for I held a similar position for most of my adult life. And along the way, God taught me a few things. (1) *You aren’t working to please yourself.* There’s always a client whose needs must be met, and he in turn is counting on using your work to meet *his* customer’s needs. Whatever you do has the potential to affect many lives. You aren’t working in a vacuum. (2) *Craftsmanship counts.* People are going to use your work as a resource in their lives. If you’re lazy or sloppy or careless, your mistakes will harm those farther down the line who depend on your part being right. Love demands that you do the best you can. (3) *You’re only one piece of the puzzle.* If you don’t “fit” those who must interact with you (whether above or below you on the food chain), you will leave a gaping hole in the overall picture, and someone is going to have to compensate for your shortcomings. (4) *What you do has value.* Even the smallest, most seemingly insignificant piece of the “big picture” has a reason for being there, a part to play. By doing your job well, you improve everything. But if you shirk your responsibilities, even small ones, you diminish the whole. (5) *You can be replaced.* It doesn’t matter how indispensable you think you are. Your employer or

your client has the right *and the power* to replace you, or simply opt to do without you. If you stop learning, you run the risk of becoming obsolete, of no use to anyone. Pride (in the sense of arrogance) has no place in our lives. (6) *Failure isn't fatal*. We all make mistakes. Learn from them. Anybody can live through success. It's how you handle disaster that defines your character. Accept responsibility; don't shift blame. Keep your word, even if it's painful or expensive to do so. (7) *Small tasks lead to bigger ones*. If we are faithful in the little things, we are more likely to be entrusted with greater responsibilities. Nobody starts at the top, and even those who have reached positions of leadership still have room for growth and improvement.

These things all have applications beyond the workplace, of course. They're true in our personal relationships too, and they have spiritual ramifications as well, for we are designed to be spiritual beings. A worker who doesn't use his gifts or talents finds himself unemployed. In our personal lives, disuse or misuse of our gifts will lead to estrangement and stagnation. It's really no different in our relationship with God. Use it or lose it.

- (745) *Set up the tabernacle on "New Year's Day."* "Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. You shall put in it the ark of the Testimony, and partition off the ark with the veil. You shall bring in the table and arrange the things that are to be set in order on it; and you shall bring in the lampstand and light its lamps. You shall also set the altar of gold for the incense before the ark of the Testimony, and put up the screen for the door of the tabernacle. Then you shall set the altar of the burnt offering before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. And you shall set the laver between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. You shall set up the court all around, and hang up the screen at the court gate.'"

(Exodus 40:1-8) A couple of things bear notice here. First, Yahweh has a schedule. He does things in order, on time, and according to His own plan. The first day of the first month (Abib/Nisan) wasn't one of the seven *mow'ed miqra'ey*, or "appointed convocations" that defined and prophesied the seven most significant milestones in His plan of redemption. Rather, it was about two weeks prior to the first of them. The lesson: Yahweh's plan of salvation was in place *before* He commenced the process of saving us. He's not making this stuff up as He goes along, reacting to unexpected emergencies and putting out fires, but is methodically pursuing a strategy and timeline He established and unveiled long before we—its beneficiaries—even realized what was going on.

And notice something else about the date: the first day of the month (when the Tabernacle was to be erected) coincided with the new moon. It was *dark* at night. But the first three *miqra'ey*—Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Firstfruits—were scheduled for the 14th, 15th and 16th, when the moon was full and everybody could plainly see what was going on, even after the sun had set. His plan, in other words, is designed to be obvious to anybody willing to look. If Yahweh is so obviously on a schedule, and if He's told us so much about that schedule, we would be idiots to disregard it, to take half a verse (**"But of that day and hour no one perceives"**—Matthew 24:36) out of context and conclude that we can't know anything about God's timing, and even that it's somehow a heresy against God's Word to pay attention to what He *did* say on the subject. He said a lot. We in this last generation ignore it at our peril.

Second, this "New Year's Day" came less than one year after the exodus—which got underway about two weeks after this date the previous year. Considering how much had to be done in the construction of the Tabernacle and its appurtenances, I envision this project to be the primary occupation of the entire nation of Israel during that first year. To get the job done, hundreds of thousands of Israelites had to be involved in one way or another. They were starting from scratch, and it was an immense undertaking. It required focus, unity of purpose, and cooperation from every sector of society. What could we achieve if all humanity came together under the banner of King Yahshua? Or perhaps I should ask, what *will* we achieve...?

Third, although it's not stated here, there were specific people assigned to setting up the Tabernacle. As we read in Exodus 40 we get the vague impression that Moses himself set everything up (making him one spry and overworked 81-year old), but we get the particulars in Numbers 3: of the Levite clans, Gershon was to handle the Tabernacle's "soft" components, curtains, veils, etc.; Kohath handled all the furnishings and utensils; and Merari was to take care of the "hard" structural elements like boards, pillars, socket-bases, and so forth. As in the previous precept, we see that our tasks are assigned by Yahweh. We are not to shirk our own duties, nor are we to covet or usurp the roles He has given to others to perform.

When viewed this way, it seems the Tabernacle was like a traveling circus: a thousand disparate pieces, from large swaths of linen and leather, to immense hunks of silver or bronze with mysterious holes in them, to small, solid gold spoons and wick trimmers. Separately, the parts suggest nothing. It is only when they come together under God's direction that

their significance unfolds—beautiful, even stunning, to those of us who dare to look beyond the material entity to discover the Plan of God implied in every detail—put together on the first day of the year to tell us what its Designer would accomplish during the time of mankind upon the earth. Like the circus, everybody has a job to do. But this, my friends, really *is* the Greatest Show on Earth.

- (746) *Consecrate the tabernacle and its components with anointing oil. “And you shall take the anointing oil, and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it; and you shall hallow it and all its utensils, and it shall be holy. You shall anoint the altar of the burnt offering and all its utensils, and consecrate the altar. The altar shall be most holy. And you shall anoint the laver and its base, and consecrate it.”*

(Exodus 40:9-10) As we saw in Mitzvah #436, the anointing oil was more than just olive oil—which by now we should all understand to indicate the Holy Spirit. Its special and exclusive recipe also included myrrh, cinnamon, sweet cane, and cassia. These ingredients fine tune our focus: the oil of Yahweh’s *Ruach Qodesh* is the primary ingredient, but the bitter sorrow of myrrh, the attraction of cinnamon, the mortal humanity suggested by the sweet cane (*qaneh*, a six-cubit unit of measure), and fragrant cassia’s role in preparing Christ’s body for burial all conspire to identify the anointing oil with the Anointed One, Yahshua the Messiah.

What, then, was to be consecrated with the Anointed One? *Everything*: “**the Tabernacle and all that is in it.**” And what was the objective of doing this? To “hallow it,” that is, to make it holy, to set it apart from the world for Yahweh’s glory and purpose. The bottom line, then, is that the Plan of God for the redemption of mankind is uniquely efficacious in achieving that goal: our salvation. Why? Because this Plan alone is based on the One who was anointed by God to redeem us. No alternative plan proposed by man—neither works, penance, sacrifice, submission, denial, hedonism, nor blatant ignorance—will suffice. God’s Plan *can* exist within the matrix of religion, but they are not at all the same thing. Indeed, religion is especially dangerous because it masquerades as the Plan itself. Knowing *about* something, even bowing down to it, is not the same thing as *knowing* it. Yahweh seeks children, not subjects—family, not a fan club.

Although the entire Tabernacle, all of its components and contents, were to be sprinkled with the anointing oil, three things are singled out here for special notice. (1) The utensils—spoons, shovels, trays, wick trimmers, and so forth—are the implements used to “get the job done.” Depending on their station, they were either solid gold (speaking of immutable purity) or bronze (indicating a function related to judgment). I believe these anointed implements are us, the believers—willing tools in

the hand of God to achieve His various purposes in this earth. (2) The altar of burnt offering is the focus of the entire Tabernacle compound—the first thing one encounters upon entering the courtyard, the “gatekeeper” of the Plan of God. It represents the sacrifice of Yahshua, of course, but it’s also the epicenter of our homage and thanksgiving. The altar is—pick a preposition: of, for, to, with, from, or about—our Anointed One. (3) The bronze laver is where the hands and feet of the priests—their works and walk—were to be cleansed with water (the Word of God) before they could enter the Tabernacle. Our text specifically mentions “its base.” The laver’s foundation pedestal—that upon which the Word is upheld—is none other than Yahshua (again), and the bronze from which it is made speaks of the judgment He endured in our stead.

THE PACE OF PROGRESS

- (747) *Move or stay put at Yahweh’s leading. “At the command of Yahweh they remained encamped, and at the command of Yahweh they journeyed; they kept the charge of Yahweh, at the command of Yahweh by the hand of Moses.”* (Numbers 9:23) The Tabernacle was the center of community life during the wilderness wanderings. The twelve tribes were to camp all around it, three of them toward each direction of the compass, in a particular God-ordained order. But they didn’t stay in one place for the whole forty years; every now and then, they packed up and moved to a new location. Yahweh made it His own prerogative to determine why and when they did this, and where they would go next.

Our text is the conclusion to a lengthy passage telling us how Israel knew where to go, and when: **“Now on the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the Testimony; from evening until morning it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire....”** In context, we learn that this “raising up” of the Tabernacle is the same inaugural event as that spoken of in Exodus 40—Precept #746—the first day of the first month of the second year of the exodus. When the Levites got the structure all put together, the Shekinah, the pillar of cloud and light that had guided Israel across the Red Sea, came and stood over the newly-erected Sanctuary.

This would be the pattern for the next thirty-nine years. **“So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents. At the command of Yahweh the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of Yahweh they would camp; as long as the cloud**

stayed above the tabernacle they remained encamped...." I realize Yahweh had a "captive audience" here, and one composed of former slaves at that. But we have nary a whisper of reluctance on the part of the Israelites to follow Yahweh's leading here. That's so refreshing. Most of the Pentateuch—most of the *Bible*—is a record of one Jewish rebellion after the other. "A stubborn and stiff-necked people," they're called. Why did they obey here? Was it that they got tired or discontented with where they were and were eager to move on? (But if that was the case, why don't we hear of groups striking out on their own before God told them to move?) Was it that they feared for their lives if they didn't follow the cloud as directed? Was it that the manna fell only where the cloud was? Was it merely a case of group dynamics, of "follow the leader?" Or was it that they genuinely desired to be close to their God's visible presence every hour of the day and night—that they felt secure there? Whatever the reason, follow they did, without murmur or complaint, as far as we know. Precisely what we should endeavor to do.

More details are given: **"Even when the cloud continued long, many days above the tabernacle, the children of Israel kept the charge of Yahweh and did not journey. So it was, when the cloud was above the tabernacle a few days: according to the command of Yahweh they would remain encamped, and according to the command of Yahweh they would journey. So it was, when the cloud remained only from evening until morning: when the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they would journey; whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud was taken up, they would journey. Whether it was two days, a month, or a year that the cloud remained above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would remain encamped and not journey; but when it was taken up, they would journey."** (Numbers 9:15-22) I don't know about you, but I find Yahweh's personal direction of my own life awfully hard to discern sometimes. He no longer provides a towering pillar of cloud and fire that we can watch and say, "Oops, the Cloud is on the move—pack up the camel and grab the kids!" Now He's quite a bit more subtle. He speaks not in the whirlwind, but in the still, small voice. We have to listen hard for it. On the other hand, considering (in hindsight) how my life has been blessed, perhaps I developed the knack of listening to Yahweh early in life, and with it the propensity to do what He was telling me without Him having to raise His voice. (I need to include my wife of forty-plus years in that observation: we don't do anything significant unless we're on the same wavelength—as we invariably are. If God announced the rapture was going to be next Saturday, Gayle and I would glance at each other, nod our heads, and say in unison, "Yeah, let's go!")

The point is, we *need* to listen to (and for) Yahweh's personal directions. They aren't written in scripture (e.g., **"Thou, O Ken, shalt forsake thy business and journey forth to Virginia in 1996."** Hezekiah 91:6) but the habits and attitudes we need to develop in order to make God's individual instructions "audible" to us are spelled out clearly in His Word. Things to remember: (1) If you're not Yahweh's child, He won't offer advice (beyond that one thing: "Become My child"). If we aren't willing to listen to Him on that issue, He won't waste our precious time. Choice is our prerogative. (2) God won't cut off communication with us, but strangely enough, He has given us the power to do that very thing: our sin can "quench" the influence of the Holy Spirit living within us. (3) If we don't trust Yahweh in the little things, He won't trust us to do the big ones. Remember, the parable's servant who faithfully administered ten talents was given exactly the same commendation as the one who did a good job taking care of only five. (4) There isn't a pot of gold lurking beyond every rainbow: occasionally, all that's there is some poor schlub who needs our help. (5) God runs things on His own perfect schedule, and our impatience (or foolishness) does not constitute an emergency on His part. (6) Yahweh's idea of "living well" doesn't necessarily line up with ours. Don't be surprised to find that a new bass boat or a bigger television aren't *nearly* as important as love among the brethren and close fellowship with Him. And (7) **"All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son."** (Romans 8:28-29)

APPOINTING THE C.E.O.

- (748) *Ask Yahweh to choose your leaders.* **"Then Moses spoke to Yahweh, saying: 'Let Yahweh, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of Yahweh may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.'" (Numbers 27:15-17)** In context, Yahweh had just told Moses that his time was about up—that he wouldn't lead his people into the Promised Land, but would be "gathered to his people" (that is, die). Moses was a hundred and twenty years old by this time—sixty years *older* than any living Israelite except for Joshua and Caleb. Yahweh reminded Moses that his sin at Meribah, where he'd struck the rock instead of speaking to it, was what had disqualified him. I suspect, however, that Mo was thinking, *That's alright, I understand. Frankly, I've been looking forward to this—I could use the rest.* He didn't whine and pout and beg for more time. Rather, the first thing that came into his mind

was, *These, my people, are going to need a good leader when I'm gone. Please select the right man for the job, O God.* Yahweh's response (see the following precept) indicates that Moses' concern had already been addressed. God had, in fact, been preparing Moses' successor for the last forty years. He chose one of the twelve original spies—one of only two who had given a good report—the one who had been Moses' right hand man ever since: Joshua.

All of this brings up an interesting question. How are we to select our leaders here on earth? There are three basic systems in operation in our world, though in practice they overlap to some extent. Human leaders come to power either through force, through heredity, or through acclamation. All three methods often involve some level of treachery. Here in America, we like to think democracy (i.e., organized acclamation) is God's gift to civilized man, but if we stopped to think about it for ten minutes, we'd realize that it's nothing but mob rule in a three-piece suit, just as susceptible to treachery as either of the alternatives (which is not to say it's not superior to its two rival methodologies, all things considered). But there's a fourth possibility, one that hardly anybody ever even considers: human leadership chosen by divine fiat.

I have no doubt that Moses, had he been asked, would have chosen Joshua for the job. (His second choice might have been Caleb, but since he was a Kenneztite—an Edomite gentile who had been “adopted” into the tribe of Judah—that might have been problematical.) But Moses didn't state his preference or his opinion. He didn't exercise what the average man in his position would have considered the least of his prerogatives—selecting his own successor. He didn't choose one of his own blood relatives for the coveted spot. He didn't poll the tribal leaders, asking them to put forth candidates. He didn't take the issue before the people so they could vote on it. He simply asked Yahweh to choose.

Why aren't we smart enough to do that? Before you answer my admittedly rhetorical question with a snappy comeback, remember this: the same God who appointed Moses, Joshua, and David to rule in Israel, also appointed Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar II, and Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Sometimes we need to be hauled off into captivity to purge us of our damnable pride. Sometimes we need to be oppressed within our own borders to teach us to honor the God who gave us this land.

- (749) *Anoint Joshua (Yahshua) as your leader. “And Yahweh said to Moses: ‘Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him, that*

all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before Yahweh for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him—all the congregation.” (Numbers 27:18-21) In answer to Moses’ request for Yahweh to select a worthy successor to lead Israel, Yahweh chose Joshua. This name, of course, is identical with that of our Savior the Messiah, who would appear some 1,500 years later: Yahshua, commonly known as “Jesus.” I trust that we all know by this time that the name means “Yahweh is Salvation.” In truth, this was a relatively common name in Israelite/Jewish society. Several other “Joshuas” were mentioned in scripture, all, I believe, with subtle (or not so subtle) prophetic implications connected with them: a resident of Bethshemesh on whose land the Ark of the Covenant came to rest after the Philistines released it; the governor of Jerusalem under king Josiah who gave his name to a city gate; and a high priest after the restoration who was crowned by Zechariah in prophetic anticipation of the Messiah’s building of the Temple (see Precept #740). So is Moses’ protégé Joshua a Messianic type as well? Let’s examine the text more closely.

Joshua was “the son of Nun.” *Nun* is a Hebrew verb meaning to continue, or to increase—as in **“His name [the subject here is “the king,” i.e., Yahshua] shall endure forever; His name shall continue (or increase—*nun*) as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him. All nations shall call Him blessed.”** (Psalm 72:17) The idea is perpetuity, but continually increasing in power or rightness. So you might say that “Joshua the son of Nun” embodies the Messianic concept of being the “Son” of the perpetually greater One, Yahweh, who is our salvation.

Joshua is described as **“a man in whom is the Spirit.”** His antitype, Yahshua, told His disciples, **“I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”** (John 14:16-18) He has just equated Himself, on some level, with the Holy Spirit who would indwell us.

Moses was to “lay his hand on him” and “inaugurate” or “commission” him. He was to “give him some of his authority.” Moses is playing the role of God here. Significantly, the laying on of hands was most often used as an indication of transference: the priest, for instance, would lay hands upon the head of a sacrificial offering to symbolically transfer sin and guilt from the people to the animal. Here, God was prophetically transferring authority to His Son, Yahshua. To “inaugurate”

(*tsavah*) is to command, give orders to, charge, appoint, or ordain. Without actually using the word, he is describing Yahshua's anointing.

Joshua was to be "set before Eleazar the High Priest," and "brought before the congregation." Eleazar's name means "God has helped." Yahshua too would be brought before those who were to be helped by God: we crucified Him. His presentation before the congregation was the commencement of this ordeal. As the Passover Lamb was to be brought before the congregation for inspection—brought into the household—on the tenth day of Nisan, so Yahshua was presented as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world at His "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem on the tenth day of Nisan, 33 A.D. Then, having been found to be without fault, He was offered up as a sacrifice on Passover, the fourteenth, according to the requirements of the Word of God.

Yahweh promised that the Urim (see Precept #739) would authenticate the selection of Joshua, and apparently it did, for Joshua did indeed go on to lead Israel. Though we don't know precisely how the Urim worked, we have a parallel historical record of Yahshua's "authentication" in Luke 3:22. **"And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.'"** Thus both Joshua and Yahshua received public acclamation from God as their ministries were about to begin.

Although Joshua was an effective political leader and military commander, he is perhaps best known for confronting Israel with a choice: **"Serve Yahweh! And if it seems evil to you to serve Yahweh, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve Yahweh."** (Joshua 24:14-15) Yahshua presented us with the same choice: **"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'"** (John 3:7) Believers are told incessantly throughout scripture that they are chosen by God. And it's true. But written between every line is the principle that we must first choose Him—believe in Him, trust Him, rely upon Him. But how does choosing to *serve* Yahweh relate to choosing to *believe* in Him? Paul explains: **"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."** (Romans 12:1-2) It would be pointless to "beseech" us if it weren't our choice to make.

(750) *Inaugurate “Joshua” when your death is imminent. “Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Behold, the days approach when you must die; call Joshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of meeting, that I may inaugurate him.’”*

(Deuteronomy 31:14) This, of course, is the same incident to which we’ve referred in the last two precepts, recounted here in Deuteronomy. We’ve been looking at this from the point of view of the congregation. Who would be selected to lead them (us)? But I’d like to look at this again from the point of view of Moses. After all, the instruction is addressed to him.

In a way, we’re all like Moses. One way or another, we’re all destined to leave our mortal earth-bound bodies behind—most of us through physical death. (Yes, some will be raptured, but the lesson applies to them as well). Yahweh first informs Moses that he’s about to die. Few of us get quite such a blunt warning, so allow me to break the news to you: *You’re going to die*. Maybe not today, maybe not a week from Tuesday, but you *are* on your way out: you’re not going to live forever as a mortal human. Sorry.

With this fact in view, what are God’s instructions? Moses was to do two things. First, he was to call Joshua, who, as we have seen, is a prototype of the Messiah of the same name, Yahshua, a.k.a. “Jesus.” We, too, are to call upon Yahshua, and do it in recognition of the same fact that confronted Moses: Yahshua is the One chosen by God to finish what we’ve begun. Moses had accomplished some great things in his life, but he hadn’t been perfect. He, like each of us, had fallen short of the glory of God (though truth be told, he came far closer to it than you or I ever did). Just as Joshua bridged the gap between Egypt and the Promised Land, Yahshua bridged the gap between our slavery to sin and the eternal relationship we seek with a Holy God who has created us for no other purpose. Moses was prohibited from crossing the Jordan River; the gap you and I face is more daunting—an unbridgeable chasm. But in both cases, the only way to get to the other side was through the work of Yahshua. Nor would we go as mortal men. It would be a journey in spirit, or not at all.

Secondly, Moses was instructed to present himself (with Joshua) at the Tabernacle of Meeting. If you’ll recall from our previous chapter, the Tabernacle represents the Plan of God for the salvation of mankind. That is the “place”—the *only* place—designated by Yahweh for the work of Yahshua to commence. It is not in His teaching, or in a grand religion built around His persona, or in His healing miracles, or even in the promise of his glorious earthly reign as King of kings. No, the Plan of God begins with the altar of sacrifice; it proceeds to the laver where our walk and

works are purified by the Word of God. Only then does one enter the Holy Place—set apart for fellowship between mortal man and his God. Here man is illuminated by the Spirit of Yahweh; here he is fed with the bread of God's provision. And it is here that the sweet communication of prayer rises like incense into the presence of Yahweh. But even then, the Plan is not complete until the blood of the Sacrifice is brought within the Most Holy Place and sprinkled upon the mercy seat—the place of atonement. Only then is the Plan of God finished. Only then has Yahweh inaugurated, consecrated, and commissioned Yahshua to lead His people into the Promised Land.

Consecration and Dedication

People today claiming to be “Torah observant” actually observe so little of the Torah, their declarations of faithful obedience would be laughable if they weren’t so sad. If I told you I was a “law-abiding citizen,” you’d be inclined to believe me, I suppose, since I’m not in prison. But if you then discovered that I haven’t filed an income tax return in a decade, I habitually drive twenty miles an hour over the speed limit, and I steal little old ladies’ Social Security checks out of their mailboxes to feed my drug habit, you’d begin to have reservations about my truthfulness on the matter, wouldn’t you? And *then*, if I were to explain to you that my definition of “law-abiding” means keeping only the rules that I like, the ones that are convenient, that don’t hinder my “pursuit of happiness” or run counter to my personal take on what the law *should* be (since I think Congress is full of idiots), you’d call me a fool as well as a liar. The fact that I’m not an ax murderer wouldn’t necessarily classify me as being “law-abiding.”

The problem with someone who thinks like this is their fundamental lack of respect for the authority behind the law—whether the Torah or the statutes of the land. They’re saying in their hearts, *I follow a higher authority*. The reason most people claiming to be Torah observant *aren’t* is primarily that they’re following not the Authority behind it (i.e., Yahweh) but someone they consider an even higher authority—the rabbis of orthodox Judaism, whose spokesman and figurehead is Maimonides. They would protest, of course, that they *are* obeying Yahweh (or they would, if they were willing to use His name). But facts and simple logic silence their protests: if Yahweh and the rabbis disagree (and they often do), then the one you follow is the one you *de facto* consider the higher authority.

There’s a catch, however. As we’ve observed, the Torah is more instructions than a list of laws or rules. Some precepts, of course, can be easily codified in legal terms easily appreciated by all men everywhere: “Don’t murder people.” “Don’t eat pigs.” “Don’t circulate false reports.” “Don’t marry your sister.” These are blatantly practical; their symbolic components are difficult to see and easy to ignore. Others are admittedly harder to get a handle on because their symbolism shares center stage with their overt practice: “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it set apart.” “Eat no bread made with yeast for a week every spring, starting on the 15th day of the month of Nisan.” These are our first clues that Yahweh is interested in something far deeper than our mere obedience, our submission to His

authority. He's asking His people to act out a scene, like a game of spiritual charades. Why? So that when we finally "get it," we'll never forget it.

Still other precepts—the vast majority—are purely symbolic. That is, though physically acted out in the generations to whom they were first announced, these have no "practical" application in the daily lives of most people today. I'd estimate that eighty to ninety percent of the Torah's precepts—most everything having to do with the Tabernacle, the Priesthood, and the sacrifices—fall into this category. These constitute the primary reason that outward Torah observance is an illusive myth. These symbolic mitzvot *cannot* be performed today, no matter how serious or devoted the worshiper is. The Sanctuary does not exist. The priesthood is scattered, unidentified, and ceremonially unclean. From the Torah's point of view, performing the Levitical sacrifices under these conditions would be just as illegal as *not* performing them.

Would-be observers of the Torah, then, have a serious problem if they're not willing to honestly consider the symbolic component of the "Law," for in truth, this is by far the largest part of it. The heart of the issue is the subject of our present chapter—Yahweh's incessant insistence that certain things be consecrated, dedicated, sanctified, and set apart to Him. If He merely wanted us to obey His rules and behave ourselves, if all He wanted to do was exert top-down control over our lives, then this would all have been quite unnecessary. The Torah, in that case, might have looked more like the Qur'an. And (to play devil's advocate) if this whole thing were actually a ploy by the Hebrew priesthood to grasp wealth and power for themselves (alas, the all-too-common pursuit of "priests" of many persuasions), they would not have begun by stripping themselves of all rights of inheritance in the Promised Land, nor by defining their role as hard-working servants of God rather than as exalted political leaders in Israel. No, all the internal evidence points toward authorship of the Torah by a God who wished to explain in ways both subtle and obvious His love for us, His concern for our well being, His plan for saving us, and His omniscient foreknowledge.

That being said, we should all be "Torah observant." I don't mean we should be looking for loopholes in reality, inventing ways to convince ourselves we're doing what can't be done. Rather, we should *observe* the Torah—look at it with an eye toward discovering what Yahweh actually said to us within its pages. Don't blame me if such a course of action leads you directly and unambiguously to Yahshua the Messiah. Blame Yahweh for that.

CONSECRATING THE PRIESTS

- (751) *Consecrate Aaron and his sons.* “And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments, the anointing oil, a bull as the sin offering, two rams, and a basket of unleavened bread; and gather all the congregation together at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.’ So Moses did as Yahweh commanded him. And the congregation was gathered together at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. And Moses said to the congregation, ‘This is what Yahweh commanded to be done.’” (Leviticus 8:1-5) Doing what “Yahweh had commanded to be done” was described in detail in the following verses, but the instructions themselves were given back in Exodus 29. We encountered one small facet of this passage in Mitzvah #473, where I noted that you’d have to “ramble on for pages” to get to the bottom of it all. My mandate for Volume I didn’t allow me to “ramble” then, but the time has come, I’m afraid. Our next thirteen precepts will explore the subject of the priests’ consecration in detail.

We should ask ourselves right up front: why did Yahweh direct that Aaron and his sons should be “hallowed” or “consecrated” with such exacting ritual? This wasn’t a coronation. They weren’t being invested with the trappings of political power. Moses was the current leader of Israel, and his successor would be Joshua, an Ephraimite—neither of them were priests. And kings in Israel were destined to come from the tribe of Judah, not Levi (cf. Genesis 49:10). Since our inherent talents are inconsequential (in the grand scheme of things), it is Yahweh’s prerogative to choose which of His people will be gifted and allowed to serve in which capacity. In this case, the priests were the chosen family (Aaron’s) of the chosen tribe (Levi) of the chosen nation (Israel), none of which were up to the task under their own steam. As we learned with the golden calf debacle and the fatal screw-up of Nadab and Abihu (a “Darwin-award” event if ever there was one), Aaron and his boys weren’t exactly “priest” material on their own. Nor had they asked for the job. Yahweh had simply said, “You’re it.”

So again, why all the fuss? Because Aaron and his sons were assigned to work on behalf of their nation in the very presence of God. They were to act as symbolic intercessors between Israel (a “stubborn and stiff-necked people”) and Yahweh Himself. Their workplace was to be the Tabernacle, where the Shekinah glory of Yahweh would “inhabit” the Most Holy Place. If the job was performed with something less than the proper reverence, it could be fatal. The point was that since Yahweh was “holy,” that is, set apart in all respects from any other entity that might be worshipped by man—unique, separate, and infinitely greater—then those

who ministered in His presence (even in that of the diminished divine manifestation called the Shekinah) must be “holy” as well: set apart from the world for His service, consecrated, dedicated, and totally focused. But Aaron’s family, though divinely selected for the job, was never the point. They were symbolic of something larger, something that pertained to the entire human race. They were to be the prototypes for God’s greatest invention: a way for fallen, sinful man to be reconciled to his Creator.

Here, then, is the summary of what Moses was to do to consecrate Aaron and his sons for the ministry set before them. The particulars will be covered in the precepts to come, found in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8. **“And this is what you shall do to them to hallow them for ministering to Me as priests: Take one young bull [Precept #752] and two rams without blemish [Precepts #753 and #754], and unleavened bread [Precept #758], unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil (you shall make them of wheat flour). You shall put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, with the bull and the two rams. And Aaron and his sons you shall bring to the door of the tabernacle of meeting [Precept #763], and you shall wash them with water. Then you shall take the garments [Precept #759], put the tunic on Aaron, and the robe of the ephod, the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the intricately woven band of the ephod.”** The priestly garments, you’ll recall, were discussed at length in our previous chapter. **“You shall put the turban on his head, and put the holy crown on the turban. And you shall take the anointing oil [Precept #762], pour it on his head, and anoint him. Then you shall bring his sons [Precept #760] and put tunics on them. And you shall gird them with sashes, Aaron and his sons, and put the hats on them. The priesthood shall be theirs for a perpetual statute [Precept #761]. So you shall consecrate Aaron and his sons.”** (Exodus 29:1-9)

As an overview, then, we see that the consecration of the priests involved three animal sacrifices, unleavened bread, cakes, and wafers (all made of wheat flour from which the chaff had been removed), olive oil, water for cleansing, specially prepared garments, specially formulated anointing oil, and the priests themselves—Aaron and his sons. This ceremony was to “hallow them,” that is, make them holy or set apart for “ministering” to Yahweh. That in itself is (or ought to be) astonishing. *Individual men* are being set apart to “minister” to the Creator of the universe? That’s like saying “this family of garden slugs are being consecrated to assist the Master Gardener.” There’s nothing we slugs can do to be worthy of the task set before us. Worse, we’re not even smart enough to know that. Why the Master would condescend to choose and enable us (among all the other backyard vermin) is beyond our ability to comprehend. Our race is so primitive, some of our brother slugs don’t

even believe the Gardener exists. But perhaps that's why He's so profuse and detailed in His instructions, and why they're so esoteric: we slugs aren't capable of inventing anything like this, not if we want it to make perfect sense in some larger context.

- (752) *Sacrifice the bull of sin offering.* **"You shall also have the bull brought before the tabernacle of meeting, and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands on the head of the bull. Then you shall kill the bull before Yahweh, by the door of the tabernacle of meeting. You shall take some of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and pour all the blood beside the base of the altar. And you shall take all the fat that covers the entrails, the fatty lobe attached to the liver, and the two kidneys and the fat that is on them, and burn them on the altar. But the flesh of the bull, with its skin and its offal, you shall burn with fire outside the camp. It is a sin offering."** (Exodus 29:10-14) The sin offering (Hebrew: *chata't*) was normally offered when an Israelite realized he had fallen short of Yahweh's standard in some specific way. Here it is offered preemptively. The bull was the normal sin offering for a priest (as was a male goat for a ruler of the people and a female sheep or goat for an ordinary citizen). Though all Levitical blood sacrifices ultimately point to Yahshua on Calvary, they also indicate specific subsets of our fallen nature for which His sacrifice atones: the bull, as we have seen, represents false doctrine or teaching. Thus this preemptory sin offering is the priest's pledge to renounce and guard against falsehood on his watch. The placing of the priest's hands upon the head of the bull symbolically transfers the sin of the priest to the bull—it is a picture of atonement. The bull is then slain in the Tabernacle courtyard, its proximity to the tent of meeting being an indicator that this is part of the Plan of God: innocent blood is being shed on behalf of the guilty—something that must occur before fellowship between Yahweh and man can be reestablished.

The Leviticus passage explains some of the other details: **"And he brought the bull for the sin offering. Then Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull for the sin offering."** One bull sufficed for all of the priests. One Messiah would be enough. **"And Moses killed it. Then he took the blood, and put some on the horns of the altar all around with his finger, and purified the altar."** Note that Moses himself killed the bull. In this scene, Moses is playing the part of Yahweh, Aaron the role of Yahshua our High Priest, and his sons represent us who follow Him in faith—those who are "born" into His Spirit. The altar was "purified" through the symbolic application of the bull's blood to the "horns" that adorned its four corners. This was done with Moses' finger, telling us that Yahweh Himself is doing the work of purification. **"And he poured the blood at the base of the altar, and consecrated it, to make atonement for it."** The "he" here is still Moses. It's

another reminder that Yahweh voluntarily offered Yahshua up as a sacrifice—we didn't "overpower God" when we slew His Messiah.

As usual, the inedible fatty parts were burned on the altar to honor Yahweh. **"Then he took all the fat that was on the entrails, the fatty lobe attached to the liver, and the two kidneys with their fat, and Moses burned them on the altar. But the bull, its hide, its flesh, and its offal, he burned with fire outside the camp, as Yahweh had commanded Moses."** (Leviticus 8:14-17) The rest of the bull was burned outside the camp. This is an obvious reference to the site of Yahshua's crucifixion—which took place outside Jerusalem's city walls. It's fascinating that atonement was achieved through the shedding of blood at the altar, but the judgment that made the sacrifice efficacious (the "burning with fire") occurred "outside the camp." In the final enactment of this prophetic rehearsal, the "altar" where Yahshua's blood was shed and the place of judgment "outside the camp" were *in the same location*: not at the Temple, but a few hundred yards away, probably the same spot where Abraham's almost-sacrifice of Isaac had taken place two thousand years previously.

It's worth noting that under normal circumstances the priests would have partaken of the meat of a sin offering (one that didn't involve their own sin, that is) and in the case of a trespass offering, they would have been given the hide as well (see Precept #773). But here, the entire offering (with the exception of the fatty parts given to Yahweh) was to be taken outside the camp and burned. The point? We cannot benefit or profit from our own sin.

- (753) *Sacrifice the first ram—of burnt offering.* **"You shall also take one ram, and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands on the head of the ram; and you shall kill the ram, and you shall take its blood and sprinkle it all around on the altar. Then you shall cut the ram in pieces, wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its pieces and with its head. And you shall burn the whole ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to Yahweh; it is a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh."** (Exodus 29:15-18) The second animal offering in the consecration process was an *olah*, or "burnt offering." This time, a ram is used—a preview of the **"Lamb of God"** (as John the Baptist would later phrase it) **"who takes away the sin of the world,"** (John 1:29) but one with horns, symbolizing the authority of the One being sacrificed. This messianic connotation is further confirmed by Yahweh's designation of Abraham's intended sacrifice of his son as an *olah* (cf. Genesis 22:2). Total dedication is implied in the *olah*, for the entire sacrifice was to be consumed by fire upon the altar. Cutting the body in pieces reminds me of what Yahshua said as He prepared to sacrifice Himself: **"The Lord Jesus on the same night in**

which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'" (I Corinthians 11:23-24) The washing of the entrails and legs indicates that the Sacrifice was clean, inside and out.

It's refreshing to see that Moses and Aaron could follow instructions. **"Then he brought the ram as the burnt offering. And Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, and Moses killed it. Then he sprinkled the blood all around on the altar. And he cut the ram into pieces; and Moses burned the head, the pieces, and the fat. Then he washed the entrails and the legs in water. And Moses burned the whole ram on the altar. It was a burnt sacrifice for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh, as Yahweh had commanded Moses."** (Leviticus 8:18-21) Again, every detail is significant. One ram was sufficient as an *olah* for Aaron and all of his sons, just as one Messiah would be a sufficient sacrifice to atone for the sins of all mankind. The laying of their hands upon the head of the ram again symbolized the transference of guilt from them to the ram. And the sprinkling of the ram's blood around the altar again demonstrated that innocent life had been sacrificed on behalf of the guilty.

Remember, this whole bloody ritual had but one objective—to consecrate Aaron and his sons as priests to minister in the presence of Yahweh on behalf of the people. Their own best behavior would not have been remotely enough to qualify them to perform the task God had called them to do. Righteousness was required, but Yahweh had to provide that righteousness Himself, for it was beyond man's ability to supply. The reason Yahweh found the smoke of the burning ram a "sweet aroma" was that it proved (in this instance, anyway) that these men were obedient and faithful—willing to let Him do whatever it would take to make them holy. What smelled so sweet to Yahweh was the scent of absolute trust.

- (754) *Sacrifice the second ram—of consecration.* **"You shall also take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands on the head of the ram. Then you shall kill the ram, and take some of its blood and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tip of the right ear of his sons, on the thumb of their right hand and on the big toe of their right foot, and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar."** (Exodus 29:19-20) The third and last sacrificial animal was another ram. This one, however, has very different symbolic significance, rounding out the picture of the "Lamb of God with Authority" that the ram represents, for there is more to Yahshua than His substitutionary death to atone for our sins. Much more.

For the third time we see Moses, playing the role of God, slaying the ram in order to consecrate the priests. This time, however, the blood

(metaphorical of life itself) is employed somewhat differently. As before, some is sprinkled at the base of the altar. But Moses was also to take some of it and apply it directly to certain body parts on Aaron and his sons. First, the tip of the ear represents what one hears. Why the *right* ear? Perhaps this indicates truth (while the left would indicate falsehood), the message being: heed only truth, not lies. Note that what one hears automatically includes what one speaks: we are neither to utter nor listen to false reports. This admonition implies a certain amount of discernment, wariness, even skepticism concerning the things of the world, and at the same time requires a depth of understanding in the area of God's revealed Word—our baseline standard of truth.

In the same way, the thumb of the right hand would indicate “doing the right thing,” and the big toe of the right foot would signify “walking in the right path.” It's no coincidence that the word the rabbis use to denote the “Jewish Law,” *halakhah*, actually means “the path one walks,” from the Hebrew verb *halak*—to go, walk, or travel. Again, the “right thing” and the “right path” are defined by the Torah—not by our appetites, desires, or best intentions. And remember what is being applied here. It's not water, which would have signified that our words, deeds, and walk need to be “cleaned up.” No, it's *blood*, telling us rather that in order for our words, deeds, and walk to be consecrated to Yahweh, innocent blood must be shed—a guiltless life must be sacrificed. Our own lives won't suffice, however: we're not innocent. We can't get to God on our own, no matter how hard we work to clean up our act. Only Yahweh can bring us to Yahweh.

And so we read of Moses' further compliance with the requirements of the law of priestly consecration. **“And he brought the second ram, the ram of consecration. Then Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, and Moses killed it. Also he took some of its blood and put it on the tip of Aaron's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. Then he brought Aaron's sons. And Moses put some of the blood on the tips of their right ears, on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet. And Moses sprinkled the blood all around on the altar.”** (Leviticus 8:22-24) Did Moses and Aaron understand the symbolism they were acting out? The ear, thumb, and toe metaphors are pretty obvious. But the blood of the innocent animal? I can pretty much guarantee that that's something *nobody* understood until Yahshua explained what He had accomplished on Golgotha—after His resurrection. When we finally *get it*—when we at last come to terms with Yahweh's grand plan of redemption, epicentered in the innocent life and sacrificial death of His Messiah, we can only echo the sentiments of the two disciples on the

Emmaus road: **“Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”** (Luke 24:32)

- (755) *Anoint the priests and their clothing with oil and blood. “And you shall take some of the blood [of the second ram] that is on the altar, and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and on his garments, on his sons and on the garments of his sons with him; and he and his garments shall be hallowed, and his sons and his sons’ garments with him.”* (Exodus 29:21) The process of consecration continues, and this time, it’s messy. I wonder what a good CSI could make of this. *Blood spatter—looks like blunt force cast off. This guy was close to whoever got killed. And there’s some kind of oily substance. We ran it through the mass-spec and came up with olive oil, myrrh, cinnamon, sweet cane, and cassia. It’s some kind of bitter-sweet anointing oil. All these priests had the same blood and oil sprinkle patterns on them. What do you think it means? Ritual murder? Human sacrifice?*

Yes, detective, it means all of that, and more. The High Priest and his sons not only wore the story of mankind’s redemption upon their bodies in the symbolic accoutrements of their office (see the previous chapter, Precepts #734-#743), they were also anointed—consecrated by Yahweh—to perform a specific task on behalf of mankind: to intercede between a holy God and sinful men. The ingredients used to make the exclusive anointing oil were discussed under Mitzvah #436. Again (briefly): olive oil is the Holy Spirit—the vehicle for everything else; myrrh is bitterness, the sorrows and suffering of the Messiah on our behalf; cinnamon speaks of the attraction between us and our Savior; cane indicates the measure of a man—the standard of which is Yahshua; and cassia is the sweet spice used to prepare Him for burial. These ingredients define who the Messiah was, what He did, and how He did it.

But there is one more substance with which the priests were “anointed”—the blood of the ram, signifying that innocent life had been sacrificed on their (our) behalf. Without that, the spiritual life of Yahshua, His sorrow on our account, His attractiveness, His moral perfection, and *even His death* would have availed us nothing. That should be a shocking revelation: the fact that He died does us no good if we don’t allow His death to atone for our sin. Our works, alms, and penance have no power to save us. Only Yahshua’s spilled blood and substitutionary death can do that. But its efficacy depends upon our trust.

So Moses did as he was told. **“Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood which was on the altar, and sprinkled it on Aaron, on his garments, on his sons, and on the garments of his sons with him; and he**

consecrated Aaron, his garments, his sons, and the garments of his sons with him.” (Leviticus 8:30) The “religious” component within us wants to scream, *Wait! You’re spoiling all the workmanship and skill that went into making these fancy garments! They’re going to be ruined. How’re we supposed to awe the sheeple if the priestly vestments have big stains all over them? What a waste.* Exactly Yahweh’s point. He was about to send a Perfectly Good Human into a lost world, watch Him be anointed with the spit of jeering Roman soldiers and stand by silently while He was sprinkled with His own blood as His flesh was shredded with a cruel flagellum and pierced with evil spikes. *What a waste*—if you and I reject this sacrifice in favor of some salvation scheme of our own invention.

- (756) *Eat the ram of consecration.* **“And you shall take the ram of the consecration and boil its flesh in the holy place. Then Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram, and the bread that is in the basket, by the door of the tabernacle of meeting. They shall eat those things with which the atonement was made, to consecrate and to sanctify them; but an outsider shall not eat them, because they are holy.”** (Exodus 29:31-33) We aren’t quite done with the second ram, the “ram of consecration.” So far, the priests have symbolically transferred their guilt onto his head, he’s been slain, his blood has metaphorically anointed their words, their work, and their walk, and then it has been sprinkled all over them, mingled with the richly significant oil of anointing. Now Aaron and his sons are to “eat the flesh of the ram” and eat the unleavened bread of consecration.

The provocative words of Yahshua still ring in our ears: **“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.... Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.... Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.’”** (John 6:35, 47-51, 53-58) If the scribes and Pharisees had comprehended the meaning of Exodus 29, they would have understood that Yahshua *was* the ram of consecration; He *was* the life-

giving bread. This was no pointless religious ceremony—it was a dress rehearsal for the redemption of all mankind.

It wasn't enough for Aaron and his sons to know about the ram, to kill him, or even to apply his blood to their appendages and garments. They had to assimilate him—*eat* him—take him within their very being as life-giving spiritual nourishment. The ram and the bread were described as **“those things with which the atonement was made,”** things that would have the effect of “consecrating and sanctifying” them. But physical food wasn't what Yahweh was talking about. Yahshua taught, **“Whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated. But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”** (Matthew 15:17-20) Food can't sanctify people any more than it can defile them. It's what the food *represents* that counts: assimilate Yahshua and you will have gained life. Assimilate nothing and you become nothing. Assimilate *Satan* and you will have attained a living death. You are what you eat.

Two more points need our attention. First, the meat was to be boiled, not roasted. We are being told that as believers, as consecrated “priests,” we will not partake of judgment. Then, Yahweh says, **“An outsider shall not eat them [i.e., the ram and the bread], because they are holy.”** What, precisely, is an “outsider?” In this context, it's obviously meant to primarily denote anyone who is not a priest. But the word itself has a more focused connotation. It's the Hebrew verb *zahr*, meaning to be a stranger, a foreigner, an enemy, one who is estranged or alienated from you. The broader meaning of our text, then, becomes clear: no one who is estranged from Yahweh, who is foreign to Him or alienated from Him, will find nourishment or sustenance in Yahshua—the Lamb of God, the Living Bread. Why? Because He is holy—set apart for God's glory and purpose. And what is that purpose? It's stated in His name, Yahshua: it means Yahweh is Salvation—our redemption is achieved not through our good works, penance, obeisance, alms, or sacrifice. *Yahweh* is salvation.

- (757) *Burn the left-overs of the consecration offering.* **“And if any of the flesh of the consecration offerings, or of the bread, remains until the morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be eaten, because it is holy.”** (Exodus 29:34) Though the meat of the second ram was to be boiled, that doesn't mean judgment—the application of fire—wasn't part of the picture. Anything left over when the day of consecration had passed—whether meat or bread—was to be consumed in flame upon the altar. We are being

informed that whatever isn't consecrated will be judged. Further, there is a window of opportunity in which we must act, if we are to act at all. The prospect for redemption lasts only for "today"—while we live on this earth as mortal humans. The window of opportunity does not remain open for eternity. As Paul reminds us, **"In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."** (II Corinthians 6:2, cf. Isaiah 49:8)

Both the ram and the bread were symbolic of the Messiah's sacrifice, not man's penance. So Yahweh is *not* saying that if we fail to partake of the sacrifice He has provided, we can later atone for our own sins by enduring judgment ourselves. Quite the contrary: the only acceptable sacrifice is Innocence—and *we aren't innocent*. No, only Yahshua is qualified to suffer judgment in our place. If we do not avail ourselves of the spiritual nourishment He provides while the day of opportunity remains, the wrath He endured on our behalf will (at least on a personal level) have been suffered for nothing. How do you think Yahweh feels about having sent His Son to Calvary only to hear the vast majority of His intended beneficiaries say, "We don't care. We will not have this Man to rule over us!" What would *you* do under those circumstances? I can guarantee that *I* wouldn't have shown the same restraint and patience Yahweh has.

- (758) *Perform the first wave offering of consecration.* **"Also you shall take the fat of the ram, the fat tail, the fat that covers the entrails, the fatty lobe attached to the liver, the two kidneys and the fat on them, the right thigh (for it is a ram of consecration), one loaf of bread, one cake made with oil, and one wafer from the basket of the unleavened bread that is before Yahweh; and you shall put all these in the hands of Aaron and in the hands of his sons, and you shall wave them as a wave offering before Yahweh. You shall receive them back from their hands and burn them on the altar as a burnt offering, as a sweet aroma before Yahweh. It is an offering made by fire to Yahweh."** (Exodus 29:22-25) The next two entries are instructions further explaining what's entailed in Precept #756—"Eat the ram of consecration." As usual in offerings to be eaten by the priests, the fat portions were to be set aside in homage to Yahweh. For whatever reason, these fatty pieces were culturally considered the "best" parts of the animal. Moses (whom, you'll recall, was playing the role of God in the priests' consecration process) was doing the butchering of the ram. He was to cut out the fat portions and hand them to Aaron and his sons, who were in turn to "wave" or "heave" them before Yahweh, that is, lift them into the air as a sign of their dedication to Him. They were then to be handed back to Moses, who would place them on the bronze altar, where they would be completely burned. The symbolic meaning of all this is evident:

Yahweh would deliver to mankind the best He had to offer—His own “Son”—who would be lifted up by those He had been sent to save in an act of atoning sacrifice (see John 3:14). But it wouldn’t be Man who slew the Sacrifice or subjected Him to judgment. You can’t steal something that is freely given. No, Yahweh provided the sacrifice—He provided *Himself*.

The fatty pieces of the ram weren’t the only items to be waved before Yahweh. The ram’s right thigh was His as well. Although we aren’t told why, we can guess easily enough. As with the priests’ earlobe, thumb, and big toe (see Precept #754), the *right side* was specified. The thigh was the biggest, strongest muscle the ram had for propelling itself. The meaning, then, seems to be that the “ram of consecration” (ultimately predictive of the Messiah) would be motivated by goodness, propelled forward by righteousness.

There was also an offering of grain products. Three different forms of “bread” were specified, so it behooves us to investigate what distinguishes them. First, the “loaf of bread” (unleavened, according to Leviticus 8:26) was *kikkar lechem*, literally, “round food.” This is a reminder that **“Man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of Yahweh.”** (Deuteronomy 8:3)

Second, the “cake” (the *chalah lechem*—literally “pierced food”) was a cake made of finely ground flour that bore characteristic perforations. The root of the word *chalah* is *chalal*, as in **“He was wounded (*chalal*: pierced, fatally wounded, bored through) for our transgressions.”** (Isaiah 53:5) The word also has psychological connotations—to defile, pollute, or profane. Thus Leviticus 22:31-32 instructs us, **“I am Yahweh. You shall not profane (*chalal*) My holy name.”** Also, this cake was made with oil, indicative of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Messianic ramifications of all this are hard to miss.

Third, the unleavened wafer (Hebrew: *raqiq*) was derived from the word for “thin” (*raq*) which also (and far more often in scripture) means “only.” The *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* defines it: “only, exclusively, i.e., pertaining to that which is unique and distinctive...implying a restrictiveness of kind, singleness of fact or instance.” Once again, if you know what you’re looking at, the Messianic implications are blatantly obvious: Yahshua is the way, the truth, and the life—He is the *only* way to the Father.

Moses again did as he was instructed. **“Then he took the fat and the fat tail, all the fat that was on the entrails, the fatty lobe attached to the liver, the two kidneys and their fat, and the right thigh; and from the basket of unleavened bread that was before Yahweh he took one unleavened cake, a cake of bread anointed**

with oil, and one wafer, and put them on the fat and on the right thigh; and he put all these in Aaron's hands and in his sons' hands, and waved them as a wave offering before Yahweh. Then Moses took them from their hands and burned them on the altar, on the burnt offering. They were consecration offerings for a sweet aroma. That was an offering made by fire to Yahweh." (Leviticus 8:25-28) At the risk of pointing out the obvious, Yahweh considers it a "sweet aroma" when we follow His instructions, even if we don't quite understand all that they mean. It is said that predators can "smell fear." Our loving God, on the other hand, "smells *trust*," and He really enjoys it.

- (759) *Perform the second wave offering of consecration.* **"Then you shall take the breast of the ram of Aaron's consecration and wave it as a wave offering before Yahweh; and it shall be your portion. And from the ram of the consecration you shall consecrate the breast of the wave offering which is waved, and the thigh of the heave offering which is raised, of that which is for Aaron and of that which is for his sons. It shall be from the children of Israel for Aaron and his sons by a statute forever. For it is a heave offering; it shall be a heave offering from the children of Israel from the sacrifices of their peace offerings, that is, their heave offering to Yahweh."** (Exodus 29:26-28) Not everything "waved" before Yahweh was supposed to be burned on the altar. There was to be a second wave offering of the parts of the ram Aaron and his sons were supposed to eat. These too were dedicated to Yahweh, though they would belong to the priests as their food, and this time, Moses himself was included. The ram's breast meat belonged to Moses: **"And Moses took the breast and waved it as a wave offering before Yahweh. It was Moses' part of the ram of consecration, as Yahweh had commanded Moses."** (Leviticus 8:29) And the other thigh (the left one) of the ram of consecration was to be eaten by Aaron and his sons.

This procedure should remind us that even the things that are "ours" are of no use to us unless they are dedicated to God's purpose. Our food should nourish us so we can serve Him and enjoy His company. Our cars, houses, clothing, the tools of our employment, even our "toys," should honor Him. (In my case, I habitually buy two things for "myself," books and guitars. Yet if the books didn't edify me—if they were light fluff that rotted my brain—then they wouldn't honor Yahweh. And if I couldn't play music with my brothers and sisters in God's presence a couple of times a week, my instruments would in my mind degenerate into an expensive and pointless indulgence.)

- (760) *Dress Aaron in the High Priest's special garments.* **"Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the door of the tabernacle of meeting and wash them with water. You shall put the holy garments on Aaron, and anoint him and consecrate him, that he may minister to Me as priest."** (Exodus 40:12-13) In the previous

chapter (beginning at Precept #734) we explored the special priestly garments as described in the Torah—what they were and what they meant. Here we see the donning of these objects of sartorial significance for the first time. Note first that the priests had to be clean before the garments could be put on. This is a fundamental cleanliness: Yahshua (whose role is being played by Aaron) was clean by virtue of his sinless life, and we believers (represented by Aaron's sons) become clean through the atoning power of His shed blood. The bronze laver that stood just outside the door of the Tabernacle would enable the priests to wash their hands and feet (symbolizing the daily cleansing of their deeds and walk), but clean hands and feet would be of little use if their bodies were encrusted with the filth of an unredeemed sin nature. Yahshua pointed out this very fact as He washed His disciples' feet on the night He was betrayed. He told Peter, **"He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."** (John 13:10) Yahshua's point was that Peter and most of the other disciples were "bathed," that is, their sin had been scrubbed off by their trust in Him. But there was one among them, Judas, who was not clean. Yahshua had washed Judas' hands and feet with the rest of them, but He knew that without first experiencing this fundamental cleansing, Judas would never "minister to Yahweh as priest," no matter how much he thought he knew about Yahshua. Good behavior to an unbeliever is like whitewash on a tomb—it's only a disguise masking the corruption that lies within.

Note also that Aaron did not dress himself in the priestly garments. Moses (who, you'll recall, was playing the role of Yahweh in this vignette) placed the clothing of consecration upon his brother. This is more significant than it may appear at first glance. It means that Yahshua, who is a diminished human manifestation of Yahweh Himself, did not *in His humanity* take for Himself the role of our redeemer and savior. Rather, being found as a Man among men, He humbled Himself and accepted the role assigned to Him by the Father. The odd idea held by so many, that "Jesus" was a teacher of innovative moral principles who started one of the world's great religions and got himself crucified for his trouble, might have been pictured by Aaron taking the priestly garments and putting them on himself. But that's not what God instructed: Moses was to clothe Aaron; and Aaron, for his part, was to obediently accept the burden they represented.

- (761) *Dress Aaron's sons in their special priestly garments. "And you shall bring his sons and clothe them with tunics. You shall anoint them, as you anointed their father, that they may minister to Me as priests; for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations."* (Exodus 40:14-15) In

the same way, Moses was to place the tunics of ministry upon the sons of Aaron—they were not to don the garments themselves. That means, in symbolic terms, that it is Yahweh who calls us to His service: we do not call ourselves. Our anointing—our consecration and dedication as sons and followers of our great High Priest Yahshua—is done at Yahweh’s discretion, not our own. At first glance, this sounds suspiciously like we are predestined to salvation (or conversely, to some other end), and that our free will has nothing to do with our destiny. But that’s neither what I’m saying nor what the scriptures teach. We who are believers *are* predestined to something, but it isn’t our salvation. Since this is an important and often misunderstood principle, please indulge me as I chase the rabbit.

Perhaps the strongest passage “supporting” the predestination, or “Calvinist,” position is in the introduction to Paul’s letter to the believers at Ephesus: **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”** (Ephesians 1:3-5) That’s all one sentence, demonstrating what I’ve always thought: eloquence in Koine Greek makes for incomprehensible English. So let’s break this down into its component parts.

First, consider who Paul is talking to. The “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” is Yahweh. So when He refers to *our* Lord—Yahshua the Messiah—and when he says God has “blessed *us*,” he is establishing that his audience is comprised *exclusively* of believers. He’s not talking to (or about) mankind in general. It’s important to understand that. Paul begins by thanking Yahweh for the heavenly blessings we derive from His Messiah, Yahshua. Calvinists read the phrase “He chose us in Him” as “He chose us *to be* in Him,” but we’ve just established that he’s talking exclusively to believers; so it actually means, “He chose us *who are* in Him” to receive something. *When* did he choose us? “Before the foundation of the world,” that is, before we were here—before mankind even walked the earth. This argues strongly that Paul is describing a foundational principle, not God’s dealings with individual souls who didn’t exist as yet. By the way, the clause makes no sense unless you remove the comma after “world” (which isn’t there in the Greek text anyway). I’d read it, **“Even before the foundation of the world, He chose those of us who are in Him to be holy and without blame...”** The point isn’t that He

chose us to be saved—it's that He ordained that we who *are* saved were to have a particular spiritual destiny.

And what is this destiny that Yahweh chose for us believers? It has two parts. First, that we would be holy (that is, set apart from the world) and blameless before Him. We believers get so used to the whole package of our salvation that we don't often comprehend that this destiny is by no means automatic or inevitable. It didn't have to be like this. Yahweh (theoretically) could simply have chosen to "live with" our sin, to peacefully co-exist, to let bygones be bygones. Of course, since *He* is holy, that would have meant He couldn't have had a close personal relationship with us (not in His undiminished form, at least), for His very presence would have destroyed us in our sinful state, like light annihilates the darkness. So Yahweh predestined those of us who trust in Him to become blameless. Our sins aren't forgiven—they're *paid for*! Big difference.

The second part of the believer's pre-determined destiny is our adoption as children into Yahweh's family. Again, there's no particular reason God *had to* do this as part of our salvation "package." It wasn't inevitable, or even particularly logical. My wife and I adopted nine of our eleven children. It would have been possible, I suppose, to simply raise them on a "foster" basis. We could have given them a good home, kept a roof over their heads and clothes on their backs, been nice to them—even *loved* them—and on their eighteenth birthdays, wished them well and sent them on their way. But we didn't do that. We *adopted* them—they became, legally and permanently, our family members with all the rights and privileges that entails. They are my *heirs*, just like their two home-made brothers. (Okay, so there's not much to inherit, but the principle's still valid.) Yahweh *predestined* this same kind of adoption to those of us who would trust in Him—a legally binding, permanent covenant. Why did He do this? The answer's right there in the text, though again, the comma is in the wrong place: it's *love*—not ours, but His. **"...We should be holy and without blame before Him, in love having predestined us to adoption..."**

Finally, He did these things "according to the good pleasure of His will." In other words, He did them because He wanted to. Seems obvious, but it's not. Yahweh doesn't do everything He'd like to. For example, He is not willing that any should perish; He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. And yet He lets us all choose our own fate—even death. He won't choose our destiny for us unless we have already chosen to love Him. Paul then says that it is God's grace that has made us "accepted." It's nothing we did (other than choosing to be His children). Further, this

acceptance by Yahweh is “in the Beloved,” that is, it comes through what “the Beloved” (Yahshua) did—not through our own good behavior, alms, penance, or sacrifice.

So when Moses placed the white linen tunics upon the freshly washed priests, it was a picture of Yahweh giving us two things we couldn’t get for ourselves: blamelessness—imputed righteousness, allowing us to stand in the very presence of God, and adoption into Yahweh’s family—or as Moses put it, **“anointing [as] an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations.”**

- (762) *Pass down the High Priest’s garments from generation to generation. “And the holy garments of Aaron shall be his sons’ after him, to be anointed in them and to be consecrated in them. That son who becomes priest in his place shall put them on for seven days, when he enters the tabernacle of meeting to minister in the holy place.”* (Exodus 29:29-30) As far as the Torah was concerned, there was always supposed to be a High Priest in Israel. And the special garments he was to wear in the execution of his office, garments laden with such prophetic and doctrinal significance, were to be passed down and worn by each succeeding generation. Yahweh, of course, knew that the priesthood (and nation) of Israel would eventually become so corrupt it would have to be removed from the Land. And His whole plan was based on the fact that His Messiah would one day fulfill every detail of the High Priest’s sartorial symbolism—rendering it for all intents and purposes beside the point, like a road map to a destination you’ve already reached. But there is a very good reason this precept was given.

That reason is latent in the timing: each new High Priest, as he was inaugurated into the office his father had filled, was to wear the holy garments for *seven days*. We’re going to see this same time frame appear in the next few precepts, and its significance (I hope) will be blatantly obvious by the time we’ve covered Precept #765. For now, however, let us merely note what the purpose of wearing the holy garments was supposed to be: the new High Priest was **“to be anointed in them and to be consecrated in them.”** “Anointed” is the Hebrew word *mashach* or *masah*, from which we derive “Messiah.” It literally means, “to rub with oil,” but often takes on the added connotation of consecrating its object. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes, “There is a fourfold theological significance of *masah*. First, to anoint an individual or an object indicated an authorized separation for God’s service.... *Masah*, while representing a position of honor, also represents increased responsibility.... Secondly, though the agent might be the priest or prophet, writers speak of anointed ones as those whom the Lord anointed. Such language underscores that it

is God who is the authorizing agent; that the anointed is inviolable; and that the anointed one is to be held in special regard. Thirdly, one may infer that divine enablement was understood as accompanying *masah* Finally, in the form *masiah*, *masah* was associated with the coming promised deliverer, Jesus.” All these things were true of the High Priest: he was separated (made holy) for Yahweh’s service, and enabled by Yahweh Himself to symbolize the coming Messiah.

“Consecrated” is the Hebrew verb *male’*. It means to fill, accomplish, be satisfied or complete. Thus to “consecrate” someone (in this context) is literally to fill them up (i.e., their *neshamah*, as in Proverbs 20:27—“**The spirit [or breath: *neshamah*] of a man is the lamp of Yahweh, searching all the inner depths of his heart.**”), to make them spiritually complete or whole. Only Yahweh’s Holy Spirit is capable of doing that. Being “consecrated” has nothing whatsoever to do with being religious, pious, solemn, respectable, or well-behaved. It means “Spirit-filled.”

- (763) *Consecrate the priests in the Tabernacle for seven days.* “**And Moses said to Aaron and his sons, ‘Boil the flesh at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and eat it there with the bread that is in the basket of consecration offerings, as I commanded, saying, “Aaron and his sons shall eat it.” What remains of the flesh and of the bread you shall burn with fire. And you shall not go outside the door of the tabernacle of meeting for seven days, until the days of your consecration are ended. For seven days he shall consecrate you. As he has done this day, so Yahweh has commanded to do, to make atonement for you. Therefore you shall stay at the door of the tabernacle of meeting day and night for seven days, and keep the charge of Yahweh, so that you may not die; for so I have been commanded.’ So Aaron and his sons did all the things that Yahweh had commanded by the hand of Moses.**” (Leviticus 8:31-36) What Aaron and his sons were to do is clear enough from the text. *Why* is not so obvious. Between this passage and the parallel text in Exodus 29, Yahweh says no fewer than six times that the consecration process is to take seven days. “**For seven days he shall consecrate you.**” This time period, of course, is one of the oft-recurring metaphorical themes of scripture: the creation week that ends with a day of rest, the work week that ends with a Sabbath rest, the Sabbatical cycle of seven years, ending again with a year of rest for the land. We have come to recognize this theme as a timeline. Yahweh is telling us His plan for the time of mortal mankind upon the earth: six thousand years of “working it out,” followed by the final Millennium, a day of spiritual rest under the perfect earthly reign of the Messiah, King Yahshua. The formula is given to us in both Psalm 90:4 and II Peter 3:8—one day in God’s plan is equivalent to one thousand years.

Here, though, we see the seven-day period not as the familiar six-plus-one scenario, but as a whole, reminding us of the definition of “to consecrate” (*male’*—to make someone spiritually complete) that we encountered in the previous precept. Let us review the symbols that are in play here: Aaron, dressed in the High Priestly garments, represents the work of Yahshua the Messiah. His sons, dressed in their clean white linen tunics, represent us who follow Him, the world’s believers, whose sins are covered by the garments of light Yahweh provides. And the Tabernacle indicates the Plan of God for our redemption, focused on the sacrifice of Christ and our response to it.

Here, then, is what’s being said: The work of Yahshua our redeemer as revealed in the Plan of God will be “consecrated,” filled up and made complete, over the entire seven-thousand-year course of fallen man. As long as mortals—people with Adam’s sin nature—walk the earth, the effect of the finished work of Yahshua will be an ongoing reality. It matters not on which side of Calvary a person is (or was): the basis of salvation is always the same. The sacrificial blood of God’s sacrifice is what cleanses us and atones for our sin, whether looking forward to it or back upon it. Our trusting response to that sacrifice is what defines us as believers. The principle was introduced even before Adam and Chavvah (Eve) left the Garden (Genesis 3:21), and it will continue until the last mortal makes his eternal choice at the end of the Millennium. A more complete explanation of how it all works can be found in the final three chapters (28-30) of *Future History*.

- (764) *Consecrate the altar for seven days along with the priests. “Thus you shall do to Aaron and his sons, according to all that I have commanded you. Seven days you shall consecrate them. And you shall offer a bull every day as a sin offering for atonement. You shall cleanse the altar when you make atonement for it, and you shall anoint it to sanctify it. Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and sanctify it. And the altar shall be most holy. Whatever touches the altar must be holy.”* (Exodus 29:35-37) The consecration procedure continues. While Aaron and his sons were fulfilling their seven days within the Sanctuary, Moses (still playing the symbolic role of God) was to continue his part by “cleansing,” and “making atonement for” the altar. He was to do this by offering up one bull each day for the seven-day period of consecration. Bulls, if you’ll recall, indicate falsehood—especially the religious deceptions of man. The sacrifice of a bull indicated the symbolic slaying of the world’s approach to its “gods”—appeasement, alms, penance, and self-centered sacrifice. All that’s left is Yahweh’s way: grace through faith in God’s sacrifice. A bull a day for seven days tells us that the consecration—the spiritual “filling-up”—of God’s people would entail

constant battle with falsehood for the entire seven-thousand-year tenure of fallen man upon the earth—starting with the serpent in the Garden of Eden and ending with the final deception of Satan at the close of the seventh Millennium—“Magog II,” as it’s alluded to in Revelation 20:7-9.

Moses was also to “sanctify” the altar by “anointing” it. This was done with the special (and symbolically significant) oil of anointing we explored in Mitzvah #436. There we saw that the oil (as revealed by its ingredients) represents “the Messiah, Yahshua, whose Spirit-filled life was the epitome of love, the standard of holiness, and sweet salvation achieved through bitter suffering.” **“Also Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. He sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the laver and its base, to consecrate them. And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head and anointed him, to consecrate him.”** (Leviticus 8:10-12) Everything within the Tabernacle courtyard was anointed.

“Everything” *includes* the High Priest himself. This reminds me of Psalm 133: **“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion. For there Yahweh commanded the blessing—Life forevermore.”** Considering how many features of the Tabernacle unmistakably depict all of God’s people—the Ekklesia of Yahshua *and* the nation of Israel—dwelling together side by side in unity (see Chapter 4 of this volume), the symbolism of Aaron’s anointing is a stunning indictment of both a “Christianity” that is for the most part antagonistic (or is that envious?) toward Israel and an Orthodox Judaism that resents us who embrace *their* Yahshua as *our* Messiah. Yahweh longs for our unity, and He will see our relationship as “good and pleasant” in the end. But alas, that day is not yet here.

- (765) *Prepare for Yahweh to appear on the eighth day.* **“It came to pass on the eighth day that Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. And he said to Aaron, ‘Take for yourself a young bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer them before Yahweh. And to the children of Israel you shall speak, saying, Take a kid of the goats as a sin offering, and a calf and a lamb, both of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering, also a bull and a ram as peace offerings, to sacrifice before Yahweh, and a grain offering mixed with oil; for today Yahweh will appear to you.’”** (Leviticus 9:1-4) This took place on the “eighth day,” that is, after the seven days of priestly consecration had been completed (prophetic of the seven-thousand year tenure of sin-natured man upon the earth, if I’m seeing this correctly).

Slightly dissimilar instructions were given to the newly consecrated priests and the Elders of Israel. Both groups were to provide sin offerings (*chata't*), and burnt offerings (*olah*), but the animals specified differed. As we saw in *The Owner's Manual*, Chapter 12, the first seven chapters of Leviticus outline several basic types of offerings to be made to Yahweh in the Tabernacle. Those directives are being followed here: the *chata't*, or sin offering, of the priests was to be a young bull (signifying repentance from false teaching); and that of the elders was to be a kid, a young male goat (indicating acknowledgment of their sin). The *olah*, or burnt offerings, varied as well. The priests were to bring a ram (a male sheep with horns, prophetic of the authority of the Lamb of God, the Messiah), and the elders were to bring a calf (speaking of service) and a lamb (indicating innocence). The *olah*, you'll recall, was to be completely consumed on the altar, a picture of total commitment and dedication. It was made as an act of homage to Yahweh.

In addition, the elders of Israel were to bring peace offerings (*selem*), a bull and a ram, as expressions of thanksgiving and to demonstrate their devotion to Yahweh. Also, a *minha*, or grain offering was offered, an acknowledgement of God's provision in this world—as always, mixed with oil, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. **“So they brought what Moses commanded before the tabernacle of meeting. And all the congregation drew near and stood before Yahweh. Then Moses said, ‘This is the thing which Yahweh commanded you to do, and the glory of Yahweh will appear to you.’ And Moses said to Aaron, ‘Go to the altar, offer your sin offering and your burnt offering, and make atonement for yourself and for the people. Offer the offering of the people, and make atonement for them, as Yahweh commanded.’”** (Leviticus 9:5-7) Atonement—the symbolic result of the *olah* and *chata't* offerings—was necessary because of what had been revealed in verse 4: **“Today Yahweh will appear to you.”** Yahweh is holy. The Israelites could not be in His presence and survive the encounter unless they had been cleansed and sanctified. God's instructions said this was to be achieved by the shedding of innocent blood. But why would Yahweh institute such a convoluted and counterintuitive procedure? Anyone can see that the shedding of the blood of animals *in itself* does nothing to effect our innocence. How can God say it renders us temporarily “holy” in His eyes?

The answer is easy enough to see this side of Calvary: the shed blood of innocent animals in the Old Covenant predicted the sacrifice of The Innocent Man, Yahweh's Messiah. Although we now know what it meant, that *still* doesn't explain how the death of one can bestow life upon another. There is no logical, causal reason why this should be so. We must consider the nature of life itself, for this whole sacrifice scenario purports

to be a case of the Giver of Life choosing to bestow it upon people who trust Him enough to do what He asks. If the Giver of Life is blind chance (which is taught as if it were established fact in our schools today), then there is absolutely no reason to do anything “he” says: there are no moral absolutes and no real rules of conduct other than “Don’t get caught.” There is no good or evil, but merely convenient or inconvenient, pleasurable or painful.

If, on the other hand, the Giver of Life is a conscious, eternally living, creative being, then He has the right (not to mention the intrinsic ability) to *assign* life to whomever He wants. And when He says (as He has here in the Torah) that He will preserve the lives of those who are sanctified through sacrifices of His design, we are presented with a choice: we can either believe Him or not. Most of us would agree that life is a good thing—preserving life is to be preferred to the alternative if at all possible. So if we reject Yahweh’s sacrifice scenario, the culmination of which is the death and resurrection of Yahshua the Messiah, we are simply saying that we follow something we consider to be a higher authority, whether religious teachers who disagree with God (even if they’re not overtly “religious”), our own animal instincts, or blind chance. In the end, it’s a question of who we trust, who we deem the highest authority in our lives.

“Aaron therefore went to the altar and killed the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself. Then the sons of Aaron brought the blood to him. And he dipped his finger in the blood, put it on the horns of the altar, and poured the blood at the base of the altar. But the fat, the kidneys, and the fatty lobe from the liver of the sin offering he burned on the altar, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. The flesh and the hide he burned with fire outside the camp.” (Leviticus 9:8-11) Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel were convinced that Yahweh was indeed the highest authority there was. So without really comprehending what it all meant, they trustingly did as He had instructed. **“And he killed the burnt offering; and Aaron’s sons presented to him the blood, which he sprinkled all around on the altar. Then they presented the burnt offering to him, with its pieces and head, and he burned them on the altar. And he washed the entrails and the legs, and burned them with the burnt offering on the altar. Then he brought the people’s offering, and took the goat, which was the sin offering for the people, and killed it and offered it for sin, like the first one. And he brought the burnt offering and offered it according to the prescribed manner. Then he brought the grain offering, took a handful of it, and burned it on the altar, besides the burnt sacrifice of the morning.”** (Leviticus 9:12-17)

Every detail, every component of God’s complicated instruction, was carried out just as Yahweh had ordained. **“He also killed the bull and the**

ram as sacrifices of peace offerings, which were for the people. And Aaron's sons presented to him the blood, which he sprinkled all around on the altar, and the fat from the bull and the ram—the fatty tail, what covers the entrails and the kidneys, and the fatty lobe attached to the liver; and they put the fat on the breasts. Then he burned the fat on the altar; but the breasts and the right thigh Aaron waved as a wave offering before Yahweh, as Moses had commanded." (Leviticus 9:18-21)

We have discussed each of these symbolic elements in their turn in the previous pages. Note once again that no one was a passive bystander in this process. Everyone had a role to play, telling us something of the spiritual dynamic of the salvation process. Moses played the part of Yahweh, directing the players in this drama, overseeing its "production." Aaron the High Priest played the role of the coming Messiah, anointed for his role as intercessor for the people. During the seven days of the priestly consecration process, Moses had slain the sacrifices; but here Aaron is seen killing the animals himself—a subtle indication that the Messiah (as God incarnate) would offer *Himself* as the necessary sacrifice. On the eighth day the necessary but often confusing distinction between Yahweh and His Messiah—between glorious God and the humble Son of Man—begins to blur, until we finally comprehend that they are indeed One and the same: a spiritual unity.

Aaron's sons—his followers, prophetic of the household of faith—were actively involved in the process. The passage mentions three times that Aaron's sons "presented the blood to him," but this obscures the true meaning of the text. The word translated "presented" is actually *matsa*, meaning to find, discover, secure, obtain, or acquire. Aaron's sons (read: us) *found and obtained* the blood, which was "poured out at the base of the altar" and "sprinkled all around the altar" by Aaron (read: Christ) in order to make atonement for it. The altar (Hebrew: *mizbeach*—literally, the place of sacrifice) is in this context metaphorical of the earth—the place to which Yahshua came to "give his life as a ransom for many." Taking this train of thought to the end of the line, then, we observe the following. We as "sons of Aaron" (whose name means Light Bringer) have found and obtained the blood (in which is life) of Christ, which He poured out upon the earth to sanctify it and all who live upon it. Conversely, those who are not sons of the Light Bringer have not discovered, secured, or acquired this blood (i.e., *life*), even though it was shed on their behalf as well, being citizens of the earth.

Speaking of the "citizens of the earth," two more groups of participants are mentioned in the sacrificial scenario: the elders of Israel, and their people—the children of Israel. The elders serve as representatives for the people: it is they who have the responsibility of

truthfully communicating what is happening to those who depend upon them for leadership. Metaphorically, then, I believe Israel and its elders play the role of the world at large—those for whom the blood of the sacrifice was shed, those who have the potential for responding to the love of Yahweh. These are the objects of Yahshua's Great Commission, the lost world He came to save. The key to this group is their promise, their potential. But note that their knowledge base rests largely in the hands of their "elders," those who sit in positions of leadership over them, capable of directing them either toward the truth or into error. Woe to the "elder" who seduces his people into falsehood. Yahshua (in John 8:44) called such people "murderers."

But the people *were* blessed—the sacrifices *were* made on their behalf. **"Then Aaron lifted his hand toward the people, blessed them, and came down from offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people."** So far, what they've been doing could be taken for mere religious observance, like a Muslim Imam circumambulating the Ka'aba or the Pope sprinkling holy water over the crowds gathered in St. Peter's square. All sorts of strange rites are performed in the name of religion. How are we to tell which ones are *bona fide* and which ones are bogus? How is offering sheep, goats, and bulls to Yahweh any different than spinning a prayer wheel to Shiva in Tibet? Do we have to take the priests' word for it? No. In His own time and in His own way, the true God responds: **"Then the glory of Yahweh appeared to all the people, and fire came out from before Yahweh and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces."** (Leviticus 9:22-23)

Yahweh does not perform cheap parlor tricks, you understand. We can't summon up "the glory of Yahweh" to wow the sheeple by slaughtering a few goats and splattering their blood around the place in the prescribed manner. But when our hearts are right before Him, Yahweh shows us His glory. Today His glory is revealed subtly and quietly to His children, for we live within an evil society. But the day is coming—and *soon*—when **"The Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works."** (Matthew 16:27) The day approaches when **"You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."** (Mark 14:62) **"Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him."** (Revelation 1:7) Yahweh responds to us and reveals Himself to us because *He can*. False gods and figments of the religious imagination cannot.

One loose end remains to be tied up. What does “the eighth day” signify? If my observation is valid that the seven days of priestly consecration represent mankind’s seven thousand year tenure upon the earth, then the eighth day can mean only one thing: the eternal state. This thought is confirmed by the promise of Leviticus 9:4, **“Today Yahweh will appear to you,”** and further validated by the fulfillment of that promise: **“Then the glory of Yahweh appeared to all the people, and fire came out from before Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 9:24) As we have seen, the artificial but necessary distinction between Yahweh and His Messiah will begin to blur somewhat during His glorious Millennial reign, and I believe it will disappear altogether as we segue into eternity—now clothed in our immortal bodies. As Paul put it, **“Each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.... Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.”** (I Corinthians 15:23-28) It’s not that there are two (or three, if you count the Spirit) “Gods” who operate under a hierarchy of descending authority. It’s that in the eternal state, when the believers have at last been given their immortal, spiritual bodies (described later in the same chapter), the separate, diminished manifestation of Yahweh’s human form will no longer have any practical use: we will finally be able to dwell with Yahweh in His undiminished glory, for we will have been consecrated, perfected, and made whole. We at last shall see God as He intended, and know Him as we are known. Until then, however, our instruction is to “prepare for Yahweh to appear on the eighth day.”

CONSECRATING THE SANCTUARY

- (766) *Offer daily sacrifices to continually consecrate the Tabernacle. “Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the first year, day by day continually. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. With the one lamb shall be one-tenth of an ephah of flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of pressed oil, and one-fourth of a hin of wine as a drink offering. And the other lamb you shall offer at twilight; and you shall offer with it the grain offering and the drink offering, as in the morning, for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh.”* (Exodus 29:38-41) We encountered this same precept back in Mitzvah #536, where we saw it from the point of view of Numbers 28:2-8. As usual, a skeptic would see this as a colossal waste of resources, the worst sort of religious pointlessness—if, that is, Yahweh didn’t have something really important to say through it. I mean,

on an annual basis, this adds up to 730 lambs, 180 gallons of wine, 47 bushels of fine flour, and another 180 gallons of olive oil—all either up in smoke (these were burnt offerings, *olah*, to be completely consumed) or poured out onto the ground. This was enough to feed all the poor people in Israel for months! What was God *thinkin'*?

He was “thinking” that He’d rather feed the whole world for eternity. (And besides, He’d already taken care of the poor through the law of the tithe.) The symbols employed here, if followed to their proper conclusion, would have ramifications far beyond temporal hunger or thirst. Yahweh explains, sort of: **“This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before Yahweh, where I will meet you to speak with you. And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory. So I will consecrate the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. I will also consecrate both Aaron and his sons to minister to Me as priests. I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am Yahweh their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am Yahweh their God.”** (Exodus 29:42-46)

Let’s review the symbols one by one. The lambs, of course, are predictive of “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” that is, Yahshua. But why are there two of them? There was only one Messiah. The answer, I think, is in the timing: the lambs were to be offered in the morning and at twilight—at the beginning and the end of each day. From the dawn of man’s sinful state until the death of death at the end of the Millennium, there is only one solution to his fatal conundrum: How could he regain the fellowship with Yahweh that he’d lost in the Garden? Only through the sacrifice of God’s Innocent One. It’s no accident that Yahshua described Himself in Revelation 1:8, **“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”** Nor should we find it strange that Yahweh described Himself in the very same terms: **“Who has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, Yahweh, am the first; and with the last I am He.”** (Isaiah 41:4) With the sacrifice of two lambs, at morning and twilight of every day, Yahweh is identifying the coming Messiah with Himself: they are One.

The grain offering (*minha*) that was to accompany each burnt offering was to be of fine flour—the useless chaff had been removed—permeated with olive oil, symbolic of the Holy Spirit. The oil is specifically said to have been “pressed,” that is, obtained from the olives through their being crushed. Together, the picture is that of the provision of our spiritual

sustenance through milling and pressing—the removal of our worthlessness and the indwelling of God’s Spirit in our lives through the brutal sacrifice of Yahshua. We’ve seen these metaphors many times by now; they should come as no surprise. Note that the amount of oil used was to be equal to the amount of wine in the drink offering (*neseq*). This should be a not-so-subtle reminder that the blood sacrifice of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell within us are linked—they are spiritually equivalent.

And what was the point of all this? As Yahweh put it, **“So I will consecrate the tabernacle of meeting and the altar.”** The Tabernacle, as we have seen, is an elaborate metaphor for the Plan of God for our redemption, centered upon the Messiah and encompassing our response to His love. The altar is the place of sacrifice, the place to which God would come to offer Himself up on our behalf: it represents the world and its inhabitants, the place that **“God so loved...that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”** (John 3:16) And what does it mean to “consecrate” something? This is our old friend *qadash*, meaning to sanctify, to make holy, to set apart. Once again we see that if the symbols are valid, then God’s message is stunningly significant—the most fundamentally, viscerally important thing in the entire world—but if they aren’t, the whole thing is a pointless waste, a costly fraud. So which is it? What do you think?

Levitical Lessons

God is impartial—He is no “respector of persons” (as it says in Proverbs 24:23 and Romans 2:11). That is, Yahweh is not impressed with what we have—our power, wealth, talent, or beauty, for these things are but gifts He has bestowed upon us (or, in some cases, things we have seized for ourselves in defiance of His statutes). In our natural state, God sees virtually no distinction between the richest, most powerful man on earth and the humblest slave. He is so far above us that there is no discernable difference between the best of us and the worst—it’s like trying to decide which of these six thousand ants at His picnic are the “good ones.” Who could tell the difference?

But that’s only in our natural state. From cover to cover, God’s Word informs us that He has provided a way for us to become “unnatural,” or if you will, “supernatural.” Yahweh has breathed into our race the “breath of life” (the *neshamah*, Genesis 2:7), something that fundamentally separates mankind from all other living things in His biosphere. We, in short, have a capacity for spiritual life that sets us apart from the animal kingdom. But since the fall of Adam, this capacity is unrealized at our births. As Yahshua put it, **“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit [both of them, is the connotation], he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”** (John 3:5-8) Our natural lives (being “born of the flesh”) get us in the door of human existence, but we aren’t truly “living beings” (in the same sense that Adam was when he received the breath of life) until (and unless) we have been “born from above,” that is, “born of the Spirit.” This, like the wind, is something that can’t be seen directly, but can be unmistakably discerned by the evidence the new birth leaves in its wake. It is at this point that we’ve left the natural state and have become *supernatural*.

Being “born” from above in the Spirit of God implies that we now have spiritual “parents.” Our “Father” in God’s metaphor is Yahweh, and our “Mother” is His Holy Spirit (a fact that lends perspective to the Fifth Commandment—see Exodus 20:12). To his human parents, a child isn’t just a child—one of a generation or a class, a nameless statistic or demographic “bean” to be counted. No, he is an individual, one of the family, the focus of his parents’ love, attention, and support. He has a name, a place in the world, a legacy, an *identity*. To his parents, he’s *somebody*. A “child” born from above of God’s Spirit is like that

too: he (or she) now has an individual identity; he is “known” to his spiritual “parents.” He is no longer just one of the ants at the picnic.

So at this point, it seems no longer strictly true that “God is no respecter of persons,” for in a sense, He “respects” and considers His child constantly and with great affection. But it is still not because of anything the child has brought to the family. He’s totally dependent, can’t do anything useful, cries a lot, and smells funny. Sure, his Father loves it when he smiles in recognition of His face and squeals, “Dada!” But God won’t love him any more when he’s able to solve differential calculus problems and run ninety-yard touchdowns for his high school football team. His love is complete and absolute the day His child is born. A “respecter of persons?” No, Yahweh is a respecter of His own character, something that gets passed on to every child “born” to Him.

Why is it, then, that Yahweh is constantly seen singling out people or groups and imposing destiny upon them, especially in the Torah? He selects a Chaldean nobody named Abram upon which to found his “chosen race,” and our boy takes half a lifetime learning to trust this God. His grandson Jacob turns out to be a scheming scoundrel who (poetically enough) gets tricked into jump starting the nation through means that would be specifically outlawed by his God four and a half centuries later (see Mitzvah #100)—a law delivered through Moses, a stuttering spoiled brat-turned-murderer who runs away from his disastrous screw-ups only to find himself enduring the terminal obscurity of tending somebody else’s sheep for forty years. Only then does Yahweh recruit him to shepherd the biggest flock of all—the nation of Israel. *Then* Yahweh chooses Moses’ brother Aaron as the father of Israel’s priesthood, and his tribe, Levi, as “His special possession,” all apparently for no other reason than that they happened to be related and breathing. It was as if God looked, shrugged, and said, “You’ll do, I guess.”

What was Yahweh *thinkin’*? Did He see some hidden heroic quality in this family, some underlying superiority, some reason to “respect” these people? *Au contraire!* When one looks at the qualifications of the people He chose—without wearing the rose-colored glasses of our traditional religious viewpoint—we find that they’re ordinary, flawed, weak, gullible, and venal—just like you and me. So how did Abram, the timid lad so slow to follow Yahweh’s instructions, become Abraham, universally respected Father of the Faithful? What transformed Jacob, usurper of his brother’s birthright, into Israel, the namesake and patriarch of God’s chosen people? How did Moses morph from outlaw to Emancipator, from

loser to Lawgiver? What makes the Levites special, or the Aaronic priesthood holy? It was nothing they did, I can assure you. It was, rather, what they allowed Yahweh to make of them.

The prophet Jeremiah was once given an object lesson. He went to the potter's workshop and saw him crafting a clay vessel. As he turned it on the wheel, however, it got lopsided and out of shape, so the potter simply smooshed it and started over. No big deal, if you're a potter. So Yahweh said, **"O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter? As the clay is in the potter's hand, so you are in my hand."** (Jeremiah 18:6) Yahweh went on to make the point that since Judah was behaving like a lumpy and lopsided bit of clay, He was perfectly willing to smoosh them and begin again, to make a proper, useful vessel out of them (useful for one thing above all others: the delivery of the Messiah to a lost world). Yahweh had actually been molding and shaping His nation from the very beginning, from the moment he called Abram out of Ur—forming and reforming them for that singular purpose, to be the vehicle for His Messiah.

The potter's art ranges from the mundane to the magnificent. It is found in both palaces and potting sheds, in museums and mud huts. And Yahweh's "pot," Israel, is both utilitarian and decorative. Yes, it was formed with the express purpose of bringing Yahshua to the world, but that doesn't mean the way it looks is of no consequence. On the contrary, God's glaze has been carefully applied and intricately layered. It's clear as crystal in places and practically opaque in others, exquisitely detailed, richly colored, and stunningly beautiful to those with the eyes to perceive its art. This "glaze" is the Law, the Torah. Its depth and meaning are fully appreciated by few of us, if any. But perhaps that's because although Yahweh has been working on this vessel *for eons*, He hasn't finished firing it. It's been in and out of the kiln of adversity for the last two and a half millennia, but the Potter still has one final step planned. The ultimate glaze, Israel's national salvation, will be set by the final—and hottest—firing of all: the Tribulation. That day is almost upon us. The kiln is heating up. A skeptical and envious world has mockingly predicted that Israel won't survive—that it will shatter under the intense heat. But the Master Potter had promised us that it will indeed emerge from the fire the most beautiful example of His art the world has ever seen. And it will "contain" the Messiah, as it was designed to do, for a thousand years.

But the underglaze, as I said, is still a bit hard to see in places. It consists largely of symbols and metaphors, parables and illustrations. Israel itself doesn't yet comprehend why it was formed or what these markings signify. The glaze? They've studied it, of course. They know they've got silica and alumina and a little copper oxide, and they're dazzled by its heavenly blue color. But they don't yet perceive that the glaze spells out a message crucial to their very survival: "Yahshua—Yahweh is Salvation." Those Jews who think about the Torah at all

seem to feel that if God has spent this much time and effort on them, they *must* be special—He surely *seems* partial toward them. But being the center of Yahweh’s attention is not the same thing as being in the center of His will. He’s still working on them because they *aren’t* finished! (The same could be said of us as individual believers, of course, but I’m speaking of Israel’s *national* redemption). If Yahweh seems to be a “respector of persons” in Israel’s case, it’s because of the extraordinary lengths He’s prepared to go to keep His own promises, not because of the intrinsic value of their raw materials.

Let us continue, then, to study what Yahweh the Master Potter has revealed to us through this glaze, the Torah, applied to Israel layer upon layer, precept upon precept, to teach us all what His masterpiece really means. And while we’re at it, let us strive to be pliable, sensitive to the Master’s touch, for we will be of no use to anyone until we have finally become what He meant for us to be.

ATONEMENT FOR PRIESTLY SINS

(767) *Sacrifice a bull to atone for the sins of the priesthood. “If a person sins unintentionally [i.e., through error] against any of the commandments of Yahweh in anything which ought not to be done, and does any of them, if the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer to Yahweh for his sin which he has sinned a young bull without blemish as a sin offering. He shall bring the bull to the door of the tabernacle of meeting before Yahweh, lay his hand on the bull’s head, and kill the bull before Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 4:2-4) We looked at the sin offering, the *chata’t*, back in Mitzvot #491 and #492. Here we see the specific case of a *chata’t* made necessary by the sin of an “anointed priest.” Notice first that the priest’s error was said to “bring guilt on the people.” Why is that? Why not just on himself? It’s because the priest is “anointed,” that is, he has been specially designated by Yahweh to be an intercessor for the people and a conduit of God’s truth to them. If the priests, those charged with communicating God’s Word to the world, are getting it wrong, then the people they are supposed to be serving will fall into falsehood. The congregation will become guilty through their ignorance (see Hosea 4:6), and it will be the *priest’s fault* for having fallen down on the job. Since the priests are a metaphor for all believers, the implications are quite serious.

That explains the sacrificial remedy: a bull was to be offered up, symbolizing our rejection of falsehood. As with all blood sacrifices, the bull’s symbolic function would be ultimately fulfilled in the death of Yahshua the Messiah. The priest’s guilt was to be transferred to the bull through the laying of his hands upon the bull’s head, just as our guilt (as believers) has been transferred to Yahshua. It is He who removes the error

and falsehood from our lives, if only we'll "lay our hands upon His head," that is, willingly acknowledge that we wish to transfer our guilt to Him. Make no mistake: the bull will die either way—with or without receiving our guilt upon himself. The transfer of guilt is not automatic. In fact, it is our prerogative, if we wish, to keep our sins, to attempt to deal with them ourselves through penance, denial, or rebellion. It won't work, you understand, but that doesn't keep the majority of mankind from trying, in their pride, to find another way to deal with the sin they know they bear. "It's too easy," they declare. "There must be a catch." *Of course* there's a catch: it's not easy at all for the bull. Man's sins cost Him his life!

"Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and bring it to the tabernacle of meeting. The priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before Yahweh, in front of the veil of the sanctuary."

(Leviticus 4:5-6) The anointed priest (the one for whom the sacrifice was made, and from whom the guilt was transferred) was to take some of the bull's blood (read: life) and take it into the Tabernacle (read: the Plan of God). There he was to sprinkle it seven times before Yahweh. He was to use his own finger to do this, not some inert implement, the point being that he—the priest—was personally, physically involved in the process of removing his own sin, though the blood that had been shed was not his own. No one else could do it for him.

And where was he to do this? In front of the veil. Think back: what stood there? It was the altar of incense—the place of prayer. That is why the spot is described as being "before Yahweh," whose Shekinah manifestation "dwelled" between the two cherubim atop the mercy seat, behind the veil. The whole thing is a non-verbal prayer, which if put into verbal terms would sound something like this: "I have sinned before you, O Yahweh, and I am guilty of leading my people in the wrong direction by my actions and words. Now that I realize my error, I repent of this falsehood and ask for your forgiveness. Innocent blood has been shed on my behalf, and that blood now cries out to You: cleanse your servant of his sin, and restore me to your service and fellowship. My obedient sprinkling of this blood before You seven times tells me that my sin is completely, perfectly forgiven. Thank You, Father Yahweh."

Here's the hard question. When did *you* last realize that you weren't in perfect compliance with God's Word? When's the last time you critically examined your conduct and creed in light of God's revealed Word (as opposed to traditional religious expectation)? Neither the Church nor the rabbis of Orthodox Judaism seem willing to countenance the possibility that they might not be in the center of God's will—and yet they're poles

apart in their belief and practice, not only from each other but also from the scriptures. Something's wrong here.

PRIESTLY DUTIES

- (768) *The sons of the High Priest shall oversee the Tabernacle. "The appointed duty of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest is the oil for the light, the sweet incense, the daily grain offering, the anointing oil, the oversight of all the tabernacle, of all that is in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings."* (Numbers 4:16) Knowing who the Torah's players represent is essential in figuring out what *our* "appointed duties" are in this world. As we have seen, Aaron the High Priest is a symbolic stand-in for the coming Messiah. His son Eleazar, then, represents Aaron's (i.e., Yahshua's) children, those who follow him—in other words, us. (It should be pointed out that not all of Aaron's sons followed him in truth: Nadab and Abihu represent, in this context, the look-alike forgeries, the "tares" in Yahshua's parable. Eleazar, though, is the real deal.) The things specified by Yahweh as Eleazar's duties should therefore be of great interest to us. Five things have been listed here.

First, he is to take care of the oil for the light. As we shall see in the next couple of Precepts, Aaron was to tend the menorah, but here we see that Eleazar was to be the custodian of the oil his father would use. Olive oil is a common scriptural metaphor for the Holy Spirit—defined perhaps most clearly in Zechariah 4:1-6. Yahshua told His disciples what their relationship with the Spirit would be. He said the Father **"will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, who the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."** (John 14:16-17) When Yahshua said "He dwells with you," He was referring to the state of affairs existing at that moment: He Himself was the personification of God's Spirit, living there among them. But after His impending crucifixion and resurrection, the Spirit would instead be "in" them—a change of address brought to fruition by the events of Acts 2. (By the way, because the word *Ruach* (Spirit) is a *feminine* noun in Hebrew, I have been referring to the Holy Spirit—Yahweh's *Ruach Qodesh*—as our "heavenly Mother," feminine in symbolic persona. So note that the male personal pronouns describing the Spirit in the John 14 passage are actually *neutral* in gender: God does not call the Spirit "He" or "Him," even in Greek.) Eleazar's first job, then, was to be a host or receptacle for the Holy Spirit of Yahweh. He was to take the oil of the Spirit wherever it needed to go.

Second, Eleazar was to take care of the sweet incense that was to be burned upon the altar of incense in the Holy Place, the small altar that

stood guarding the veil to the Most Holy, where the Shekinah of Yahweh abided between the cherubim. We discussed its exclusive formula in Mitzvah #439. Its five ingredients tell us that our prayers are to be fervent, communicating our most heartfelt pain and bitter sorrow to God, for we have been made righteous and are preserved through His sacrifice, even though we are in fact defiled, unclean creatures. As with the oil for the lamps, Aaron the High Priest (in His role as our Messiah) was to burn the incense upon the altar, and the two things were done together (see Mitzvah #433). So Eleazar kept the incense (as he had the oil) and Aaron presented them before Yahweh; that is, we Spirit-filled believers cry out to Yahweh, and our Intercessor pleads our case before Him on our behalf.

The third “appointed duty” of Eleazar was to take care of the daily grain offering (the *minha*). This, as we learned in Precept #766, was to accompany each lamb offered as an *olah* (burnt offering), morning and evening every day of the year. The *minha* was of fine flour, meaning the husks, the worthless, non-nutritive parts of the grain, had been removed by milling—a process painful for the grain (us) and laborious for the miller (God). The flour was permeated with olive oil, indicative (as usual) of the Holy Spirit. Since the root of the word *minha* means “to give,” it is evident that the grain offering indicates Yahweh’s provision for His people—especially our life (grain is from a living plant), godliness (achieved through the process of milling), and of course the indwelling of His Spirit within us. Is it just me, or do you too find that these aspects of the *minha* fairly scream the truth of which Peter wrote? **“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”** (II Peter 1:2-4)

Fourth, Eleazar was to administer the anointing oil, whose ingredients, as we discovered in Mitzvah #436, describe “the Messiah, Yahshua, whose Spirit-filled life was the epitome of love, the standard of holiness, and sweet salvation achieved through bitter suffering.” You may be thinking, “Then shouldn’t Aaron (the type of the Messiah in this context) be taking care of the oil of anointing?” No, for the simple reason that Aaron *was* the anointing oil. Eleazar was charged with making what it represented a present reality, available to the people. To put it bluntly, if we believers do not accurately present Yahshua the Messiah to the world—if we do not “rightly divide the Word of Truth”—then the job won’t get done at all. No pressure or anything.

The fifth and last “appointed duty” of Eleazar the son of Aaron was **“the oversight of all the tabernacle, of all that is in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings.”** As we discovered in such exquisite detail in Chapter 4 of this volume, the Tabernacle (and “all that is in it”) represents and reveals the Plan of God. Again, Eleazar—a metaphor for Yahweh’s true believers—aren’t in themselves the plan: we do not provide salvation, atonement, or cleansing. But it is nevertheless up to us to make the Plan accessible and comprehensible to the world in which we live. Aaron can’t do it—he’s *the central component* of the plan. Nadab and Abihu can’t do it—they’re clueless as to what the plan means (and besides, they’re dead). Only Eleazar—representing us as believers—can make the Plan of God efficacious and attractive to the people. If we fail in our responsibility, we will have failed people for whom Christ died. I for one don’t want that on my conscience.

One last thought on the subject. Eleazar was appointed five tasks. I’ve observed time and again that five seems to be the number of grace. And here, as expected, communicating God’s grace—revealing to the world Yahweh’s unmerited favor toward us—is the underlying theme of everything Eleazar was told to do.

- (769) *The High Priest shall be in charge of the golden menorah.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Command the children of Israel that they bring to you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to make the lamps burn continually. Outside the veil of the Testimony, in the tabernacle of meeting, Aaron shall be in charge of it from evening until morning before Yahweh continually; it shall be a statute forever in your generations. He shall be in charge of the lamps on the pure gold lampstand before Yahweh continually.’”** (Leviticus 24:1-4) In the previous precept, the first thing we learned was that Eleazar (symbolic of true believers) was to be the custodian of the olive oil for the menorah within the Holy Place. Here we see a further division of labor, so to speak. The children of Israel were to bring the pressed oil to Eleazar so Aaron could employ it. While “bring” is a perfectly reasonable translation of the Hebrew verb *laqach*, I should point out that several times in scripture, when applied to a person, it has the connotation of “summoning” him (as when Balak summoned Balaam in Numbers 23:11). So since we know that the oil is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit, the underlying meaning is clear: the children of Israel (representing the whole world) were they who would bring or summon the Spirit of God. How? By pressing, crushing, and beating the Spirit’s source. As Yahshua explained, **“It is to your advantage that I go away [by being beaten, crucified, entombed, and rising again from the dead]; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and**

of righteousness, and of judgment.” (John 16:7-8) Bottom line: it is the world’s sin that made necessary the indwelling of Yahweh’s Spirit in the lives of His people.

The lamps of the menorah were to “burn continually.” They were never to be allowed to go out. Moreover, this was to be something that was to go on forever—“throughout your generations.” The light represents God’s truth, the revelation of His grace, His love, and His mercy—things that were never to be extinguished through neglect or smothered with religious obfuscation. The key to making sure the light was always shining in the world was twofold. First, its fuel was Yahweh’s Messiah, the pure oil of His Spirit having been obtained by His being crushed on our behalf.

The second key is the same, though expressed with a different scriptural metaphor. Aaron (symbolic of Christ) was to **“be in charge of [the lamp] from evening until morning before Yahweh continually.”** Aaron was to make sure the supply of oil (the Spirit) that created the light was never cut off. Whether he fed the lamp himself, or had one of his sons do it, it was Aaron who was “in charge.” Twice in this passage is the fact mentioned that he was to do this “before Yahweh continually.” Our Messiah continuously stands “before Yahweh” because, in point of fact, He *is* Yahweh. When He condescended to take the form of a mortal man for our benefit, He did not relinquish His Spirit. Once again, we need to take a step backward and consider this: it was never inevitable, never to be automatically assumed that God would take personal charge of the dissemination of His truth. In fact, every religion in the world operates as if God has stepped out of the picture and turned over the “business” of faith to his “priests.” But relationship with Yahweh is not a religion, nor has He put mere men in charge of His truth. Christ is the head of this body.

Note also that Aaron was to supervise the lamp **“from evening until morning,”** that is, during the hours of darkness, when God’s light is needed most. The identity of Aaron as a type of Christ is made clear, then, in John’s eloquent observation: **“In [Yahshua] was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend [i.e., overpower, overcome, or gain control over] it.”** (John 1:5) Whereas **“men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil,”** (John 3:19) the truth of God’s love dispels the darkness. As Yahshua said a moment later, **“He who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”** (John 3:21) It’s no coincidence that the very first thing God made was light.

(770) *The lamps of the Menorah must cast their light to the front.* “And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Speak to Aaron, and say to him, When you arrange the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the lampstand.’ And Aaron did so; he arranged the lamps to face toward the front of the lampstand, as Yahweh commanded Moses. Now this workmanship of the lampstand was hammered gold; from its shaft to its flowers it was hammered work. According to the pattern which Yahweh had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand.” (Numbers 8:1-4)

Although orthodox Jews today realize that the menorah in the Tabernacle had seven branches, you’ll often see a nine-branched candlestick in synagogues today. The reason, as usual, is that Israel has substituted something they sort of understand for something they don’t remotely comprehend. The nine-branched model is designed in commemoration of the eight-day miracle (confused yet?) of the provision of oil when the Maccabees cleansed the Second Temple in 135 B.C., after the pagan Seleucid monarch Antiochus IV Epiphanes had defiled the place by sacrificing a sow on the altar. The center candle, the ninth, is called the *shammus*. It’s there to light the other candles, one night at a time, in the winter month of Kislev. Yahweh’s formula, though, was seven oil lamps, not nine candles. (See Precept #722 for a thorough analysis of the design of the Tabernacle’s menorah.) Once lit, they were to remain lit, for the light of Yahweh’s truth is eternal. The *last* thing Yahweh wanted to commemorate was the temporary triumph of one religion over another.

With candles, of course, there’s no way to arrange them so that the light is in the front—it’s on top, no matter what you do. But oil lamps are another matter, and as usual, the symbology is readily apparent, if we’ll only look for it. Oil lamps are probably the most commonly unearthed artifacts of middle-eastern antiquity—thousands of them have been found. Though they vary widely in style and materials, their function invariably dictates two design features: a reservoir for the olive oil, and a provision (a hole or notch) positioned off to one end to hold a wick. To get a constant and long-lasting light, you wouldn’t just set the oil on fire; rather, you’d let the wick absorb a small but steady supply of oil which would burn at a consistent rate—just like a candle’s wick burns liquefied paraffin at a controlled speed. The picture is that of the Holy Spirit supplying our lives in whatever measure we are prepared to absorb.

So in order to “**arrange the lamps to face toward the front of the lampstand,**” one would simply turn the oil lamps so that their wicks all faced one direction: toward the room, not the wall. The question, as always, is why? Why did Yahweh make such a big deal out of this? Between Exodus and Numbers, he mentioned this requirement at least three times, so it must be important. First, the lamps were to all point in *the same* direction. This

tells us (or at least *me*) that believers are to be unified in their outlook. In Precept #722, I theorized that the format of the menorah indicates that “three branches on one side represent Israel, and the other three represent the ekklesia or Church—all of which grow from, and are dependent upon, the center trunk: Yahshua the Messiah.” The two “sides” of belief in Yahweh, then, pre- and post-Calvary, may approach the world from different perspectives, but they should both be shedding their light in the same direction. And that direction is determined by the orientation of the Center Light, Yahshua the Messiah.

Second, the lights were all to “face” the room, not the wall. What went on in the Holy Place? Directly across from the menorah, the table of showbread commemorated God’s provision for us. And just to its left, positioned before the veil that restricted access to Yahweh’s presence in the Most Holy Place, the altar of incense stood as the venue of prayer. There were no windows in the Tabernacle—the light of the sun and moon were worthless here. The only way to perceive the sustenance and means of divine access provided by God’s Plan was by the light of the menorah—composed of the Messiah, the ekklesia, and Israel, all pointing in the same direction, all illuminating the same space.

REMUNERATION FOR THE PRIESTS

- (771) *Wave offerings, sin offerings, and trespass offerings shall belong to the priests. “And Yahweh spoke to Aaron: ‘Here, I Myself have also given you charge of My heave offerings, all the holy gifts of the children of Israel; I have given them as a portion to you and your sons, as an ordinance forever. This shall be yours of the most holy things reserved from the fire: every offering of theirs, every grain offering and every sin offering and every trespass offering which they render to Me, shall be most holy for you and your sons. In a most holy place you shall eat it; every male shall eat it. It shall be holy to you.’”* (Numbers 18:8-10) In light of today’s religious scams, it’s tempting to view the remuneration of the priests as a get-rich-quick scheme foisted by the ruling religious elite upon a cowed and superstitious populace. But it was nothing of the sort. Remember, the whole tribe of Levi, of which the priests were a subset, were specifically left without inheritance in the Promised Land. In an agricultural society, land for cultivation, grazing, orchards and vineyards was the basis of wealth, and the Levites—by divine definition—didn’t own any. That’s why the tithe was instituted: the people (who owned the land) gave a tenth of their increase to the Levites, who in turn forwarded a tenth of the tithe to the priests. Here we see that principle extended. All offerings that

weren't specifically supposed to be consumed in flame upon the altar (such as the *olah*) were to belong to the priests.

Let's look at this strictly from the point of view of the finances of the priests. Their job was to intercede between God and man—to prepare the offerings brought by the people, burn the incense of prayer, and provide the vehicle for the atonement of the sins of the nation. Their role also included communicating God's word to Israel—guarding and publishing the Torah. If you think about it, then, the better the priests did their job—the more they trained and encouraged their countrymen in the instruction of Yahweh's Word—the more “prosperous” they'd become. Not only would a faithful and holy populace be submitting tithes based upon having been abundantly blessed by God (see Leviticus 26:3-13 and Deuteronomy 28:1-14), but the people's heave offerings, sin offerings, trespass offerings, grain offerings, and peace offerings (all things that contributed to the priests' income) would have been forthcoming as the steady outpouring of a contrite and grateful national spirit attuned and attentive to the leading and admonition of Yahweh's *Ruach Qodesh*.

But what happened? The priesthood became corrupt and ineffectual (see for example, Judges 17:5, I Samuel 2:12-17), and as a result Israel fell into apostasy, a condition that persisted—relieved occasionally by the timely advent of one judge or another—until the time of King David. The financial and political fortunes of Israel were tied directly to the effectiveness and faithfulness of the Aaronic priesthood, for better or worse. And, poetically enough, the priests in turn suffered materially from the declining holiness of the nation. It was a vicious downward spiral, but one that could have been broken at any time by a High Priest who returned with a whole heart and strong hand to the Torah of Yahweh.

The instruction is given that these particular offerings were to be eaten by male descendants of Aaron (who were priests by definition). It's not that Yahweh didn't wish to provide for their wives and daughters; He did, but not with the sin offerings and trespass offerings. These were reserved for the priests themselves, who are a living metaphor for the assembly of true believers under the Messiah. We should therefore examine the symbolic or prophetic component to this precept. I believe the key is this phrase: **“This shall be yours of the most holy things reserved from the fire: every offering of theirs.”**

The world will soon experience Yahweh's judgment—a period of time commonly referred to as “The Tribulation.” During these seven years, God will go about separating the wheat from the chaff, the gold from the dross, the sheep from the goats. And when it's all over no one will be left

standing upon the earth except those who have turned to Yahweh in faith. These survivors, not coincidentally, are specifically called “priests of God and of Christ” in Revelation 20:6. During the Tribulation, a third of the world will burn (see Revelation 8:7) and something upwards of half its population (probably much more) will perish. What the godless of the earth leave behind will be their “sin offering.” And all that will be left standing after the wars and chaos of the Time of Jacob’s Trouble will be what Yahweh has “reserved from the fire.” The priests were instructed to eat their portions “in a most holy place.” That place, it transpires, will ultimately be the earth during King Yahshua’s Millennial reign—cleansed, renewed, and set apart for His glory. It was no pious platitude or sappy sentiment when Yahshua announced, **“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”** (Matthew 5:5)

- (772) *Only those within the priest’s household who are clean may share in the offerings. “This also is yours: the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel; I have given them to you, and your sons and daughters with you, as an ordinance forever. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it.”* (Numbers 18:11) In a continuation of the previous precept, Yahweh clarifies who is included in the remuneration picture, this time referring to the “heave offering of their gift,” which I take it would center around the *selamim*, or peace offerings brought to Yahweh (see Mitzvah #494). The “priest” himself could eat of these offerings, and his whole household were entitled to them as well, provided they were “clean.” Priests, of course, were defined as males who were descendants of Aaron, but Yahweh didn’t want to leave the impression that women and children were ineligible for salvation or sustenance. On the contrary, the offerings were to be shared with his entire family—those living under his roof related by blood or marriage to the priest. In metaphorical terms, the blood ties refer to Yahshua’s atonement, and marriage indicates our position as “the bride of Christ.” (Although the wife isn’t specifically mentioned here, her inclusion is understood, for she and her husband were considered “one flesh.” See Genesis 2:24. Also, the final description of the recipients was “*Everyone who is clean in your house.*”)

The fact that this ordinance is specifically described as enduring “forever” should be a clue that the symbolic aspect of the priest’s role is still in view. But the explicit inclusion of the priest’s children in the precept leads us to another observation about life in the coming Millennium. The sanctified survivors who enter the Kingdom after the Tribulation won’t be the last generation. Their families will continue for the next thousand years. And it is these mortal progeny that will be eligible to partake of the *selamim* heave offerings—if they are clean. As

we discovered in Chapter 15 of *The Owner's Manual*, there are any number of things that can ritually defile us, making us “unclean.” But they boil down to a common metaphor: contact with the world’s evil. Only Yahshua our Messiah can make us permanently clean—and that includes the mortal Millennial multitudes who will live their lives in His perfect society: they too must be born again, born from above into His Spirit.

- (773) *Firstfruits offerings are to be eaten by the priests. “All the best of the oil, all the best of the new wine and the grain, their firstfruits which they offer to Yahweh, I have given them to you. Whatever first ripe fruit is in their land, which they bring to Yahweh, shall be yours. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it. Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours.”* (Numbers 18:12-14) Three times per year, all Israelite males were to gather to appear before Yahweh in celebration. At each of these times, one or more crops were coming into season. At Passover/Unleavened Bread/Firstfruits in the spring, the barley crop would be just about ready. In the early summer, at the feast of Weeks (Pentecost), the wheat harvest was underway. And at the Feast of Tabernacles in the autumn, the bounty of the orchard and vineyard would have been ripening. And at each of these festivals, a sample of the crop was to be brought to Yahweh: **“The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of Yahweh your God.”** (Exodus 23:19)

Not only was the first of the crop offered to God (a sign of thankfulness and trust that Yahweh would bless the remainder of the growing season) but the best (literally, the “fat”) was to be offered up as well. This was to be a sign that the First Commandment (“You shall have no other gods before Me”) was being taken seriously: the Israelite farmer was to honor Yahweh even over himself and his family.

God, of course, doesn’t subsist on fruit, vegetables, and grain. He “needs” but one thing: our loving companionship. And until the advent of the Messiah, the priesthood was to be the vehicle—the conduit—for man’s fellowship with Yahweh (symbolically, at least). So the firstfruits of Israel’s crops that were brought in homage to God were in turn to be eaten by the priests who attended to the spiritual needs of the nation. On a symbolic level, it’s one more clarification of the principle that believers who consider themselves disinherited pilgrims in this world (like the priests and Levites were in Israel—see Precept #775) will not, in the end, be left with nothing. In God’s coming kingdom, His children will receive the best of what the world has to offer, and we’ll receive it first.

- (774) *No time limits or conditions are imposed upon Yahweh’s provision for the priests. “All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer to Yahweh, I have given to you and your sons and daughters with you as an*

ordinance forever; it is a covenant of salt forever before Yahweh with you and your descendants with you." (Numbers 18:19) Though we use it primarily as a flavoring agent these days, salt was valued most highly in the ancient world for its properties as a preservative. Curing meat or fish in salt was the only reliable way to extend its "shelf life" in the days before refrigeration. A "covenant of salt," then, spoke of the agreement's intended permanence, its binding obligation upon the one making the promise. The phrase is used three times in scripture: (1) here, where God is promising to provide for the priests (read: believers) and their sons and daughters; (2) in Leviticus 2:13, where (as we saw in Mitzvah #478) Yahweh commanded every *minha* or grain offering to be offered with salt—again, the sign predicted and guaranteed Yahweh's provision for His people; and (3) II Chronicles 13:5, where God's promise of David's dominion over Israel forever—clearly a Messianic reference—is recalled. So in every scriptural reference, the "covenant of salt" referred to something Yahweh unilaterally pledged to do for mankind—and in reality, it was all the same thing: the provision of salvation through the sacrifice of His Messiah. It was a binding, permanent, and obligatory pledge, one Yahweh didn't have to make, but freely did on our behalf.

- (775) *God Himself is a gift given in lieu of worldly treasure.* **"Then Yahweh said to Aaron: 'You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel.'"** (Numbers 18:20) It's not that God was saying all His children were going to be dirt poor while the rest of humanity prospered. His point is that whatever we have or don't have in this world, our *real* treasure is Him. Our roots and inheritance are not in or of this world. We are pilgrims here, just passing through. God has promised to supply all our needs, from salvation to supper; all we have to do is trust Him.

Yahshua put it in less symbolic terms for His listeners: **"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His**

righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (Matthew 6:25-34)

He’s not saying, “Don’t bother getting up and going to work in the morning, ’cause I’m in charge of providing for you.” Remember, the Israelites in the wilderness still had to go out and gather their manna—it didn’t just jump into their baskets. On the contrary, He’s telling us not to *worry* about obtaining the necessities of life. Trust Yahweh for those things. Sow your seed and trust God to make it grow. (Note that He said nothing about that new 50 inch high-def plasma screen home theater rig you’ve been coveting.) As John put it, **“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”** (I John 2:15-17) If we realize that we have no “inheritance” in the world, that we’re just passing through, then it all becomes clear. As you drive through the Colorado Rockies, you can admire and appreciate the view, but you can’t own it. The believer (ideally) recognizes that *everything* in this world is just scenery rushing past his window: enjoy it while it’s here, but don’t “love” it, don’t covet it, don’t cling to it. Our “possessions” in this world are like music: they’re here only for the moment, and then they’re gone. Yahweh, on the other hand, is our permanent inheritance.

- (776) *A priest may keep the skin of the burnt offering. “And the priest who offers anyone’s burnt offering, that priest shall have for himself the skin of the burnt offering which he has offered.”* (Leviticus 7:8-10) This one sort of slipped through the cracks of Mitzvah #475. There we learned that the *olah*, the voluntary burnt offering made in homage to Yahweh, was killed, skinned, and cut into pieces not by the priest, but by the worshipper. The priest would then sprinkle its blood about the altar and put all of the meat upon the altar to burn it—none of it was to be eaten. We weren’t told then (in Leviticus 1:1-9) what happened to the hide. Here that oversight is rectified. The animal’s skin is given to the priest.

The question, as usual, is *why*? The entire *olah* belonged to Yahweh: it was to be consumed in flames and its blood spilled out onto the ground. Why was the skin to be kept by the priest? I believe the answer goes all the way back to the account of the fall. **“For Adam and his wife Yahweh, God, made tunics of skin, and clothed them.”** (Genesis 2:21) The skins Adam and Eve were given to wear were in a way like *olah* sacrifices. The judgment deserved by the first family was borne instead by an innocent animal—and

the only thing that was made “useful” to mankind from that animal’s sacrifice was its skin. It wasn’t meant to cover the sinners’ shame; the fig leaves they’d sewn together worked fine for that. No, it was to cover their *guilt*—Yahweh knew that innocent blood had to be shed on their behalf. It was the first object lesson our race ever received predicting the substitutionary death of the Messiah. Now a choice had to be made: in order for Adam and Eve to once again be found guiltless before their God, they had to forsake their fig leaf clothes and don the leather tunics Yahweh had provided. They had to admit their guilt and accept the gift that would cover it. Just like us today. The priests, then, received the skins of the *olah* sacrifices as a memorial of the gift that had effected the redemption of our forebears in the Garden—and as a harbinger of the gift that would bring redemption to the entire human race on Calvary, if only we would put it on.

But *wait*, you say. Aren’t our new symbolic garments made of pure, white linen, not animal skins? It’s true that the “Bride of Christ” is pictured wearing “**fine linen, clean and bright...the righteous acts of the saints.**” (Revelation 19:8) For that matter, the priests themselves are seen wearing the same linen symbol (see Precept #743). But remember the layout of the Tabernacle: you can’t get clean at the bronze laver until you’ve first encountered blood atonement at the altar. The “skins” must be put on first; only then will the imputed righteousness of the linen garment be available to us. Or looking at it another way, the skins speak of the cause of our redemption; the linen speaks of the effect. The skins are the journey; the linen is the destination.

- (777) *The priests may keep part of the grain offering.* “**Also every grain offering that is baked in the oven and all that is prepared in the covered pan, or in a pan, shall be the priest’s who offers it. Every grain offering, whether mixed with oil or dry, shall belong to all the sons of Aaron, to one as much as the other.**” (Leviticus 7:9-10) The *minha*, or grain offering, spoke not of atonement (since no blood was shed) but of our sanctification—the process of making us “good.” The milling of the whole grain had removed the husks and chaff—the non-nutritive parts—picturing the removal of the worthless areas of our lives. When raw flour was brought, the portion to be burned upon the altar was to be sprinkled with frankincense, indicating purity attained through sacrifice. The priests were not to eat any of the flour with frankincense on it, for the task of providing our purity through His sacrifice fell to the Messiah. The *minha* offerings were usually made with olive oil, symbolizing the work of the Holy Spirit, and they were always to be salted—a picture of our preservation. In addition to a grain offering of flour, the worshipper had the option of bringing his *minha* in the form of

bread, whether baked in an oven, cooked in a covered pan, or prepared on a griddle. But whatever its form, none of the bread was to be made with leaven, a symbol of the pervasive nature of sin in our lives. (An exception to this was bread offered as part of the *selem*, or peace offering, where leavened bread indicated that we didn't have to wait until we were sinless to offer our thanksgiving and gratitude to Yahweh.)

In the wake of the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, slain because of their do-it-yourself religious presumption, Moses issued further instruction concerning the *minha* to teach the priests who remained the importance of remaining set apart and consecrated to Yahweh as they went about their priestly duties. **“And Moses spoke to Aaron, and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons who were left: ‘Take the grain offering that remains of the offerings made by fire to Yahweh, and eat it without leaven beside the altar; for it is most holy. You shall eat it in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons’ due, of the sacrifices made by fire to Yahweh; for so I have been commanded.’”** (Leviticus 10:12-13) They were to eat their grain offerings within the confines of the Tabernacle enclosure, i.e., in a “holy place.” This place was further defined as being “beside the altar,” that is, adjacent to the place of sacrifice. The point is that our sanctification—God’s provision of our holiness as symbolized by the *minha*—is linked to His sacrifice: they are side-by-side concepts. Indeed, the meat of any sacrifice that was the priests’ portion was to be eaten in the same place, in the same meal. Atonement and sanctification are two sides of the same coin: as far as God is concerned, we can’t be saved without being made good; nor can we become virtuous without having been redeemed.

- (778) *The priests may keep the wave offerings.* **“The thigh of the heave offering and the breast of the wave offering they shall bring with the offerings of fat made by fire, to offer as a wave offering before Yahweh. And it shall be yours and your sons’ with you, by a statute forever, as Yahweh has commanded.”** (Leviticus 10:15) When something was given to Yahweh as an offering, but was designated in the Torah as food for the priests, the priest was to “wave” or “heave” it toward heaven, that is, lift it in symbolic recognition that it actually belonged to Yahweh—and that it had been subsequently assigned to the priest. Portions of the *asham*, *chata’t*, *selem*, and *minha* offerings, as well as firstfruits offerings, were thus waved before Yahweh before they were enjoyed by the priests and their families (see Precept #772).

Keeping in mind that the priesthood represents the universal body of believers throughout man’s tenure on this planet, we are reminded that nothing we “own” is actually ours. Like the priests, we have no inheritance in this land. Everything that falls to us is in reality a gift from

Yahweh, no matter how hard we may think we've worked for it. So Yahweh made it a "statute forever" that we, His priesthood, should "offer as a wave offering" all of these good things we receive in this life—that is, gratefully acknowledge that they are in fact His, and that He has graciously assigned them to us for our enjoyment and sustenance. We are to gratefully "wave" our temporal blessings heavenward. You can't say we don't need the exercise.

- (779) *Things brought in restitution to Yahweh shall belong to the priests. "Every offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall be his. And every man's holy things shall be his; whatever any man gives the priest shall be his."* (Numbers 5:9-10) God's system of jurisprudence stressed restitution, not retribution. One who had been wronged was to receive back what the perpetrator's act had cost him, plus one fifth of its value. Crime was not to pay in Yahweh's economy; it wasn't even supposed to break even. However, the wronged party wasn't always still around when justice was served. If that was the case, the settlement would go to the victim's heirs. But what if he had no heirs? In that case, as we saw in Mitzvot #533, the six-fifths restitution amount was to belong to Yahweh, for in point of fact, it was He who had been attacked in the original crime anyway—an offense against the child is tantamount to an offense against the Father.

Here (picking up on the context of verse 8) we see that these admittedly rare restitution payments made to God were to be given to the priests in His stead, as was any offering brought to Yahweh that wasn't supposed to be burned on the altar or poured out as an oblation, a symbolic memorial of the Messiah's sacrifice. Yahweh had thus created a mechanism whereby temporal objects could be rendered to a God who was Spirit. Yahweh was saying, "If you want to give Me something, give it to My priests, and I will reckon it as if I had received it from your hand." This isn't some obscure or insignificant point of Jewish ritual law, but a fundamental principle of God's dealings with mankind: the way you treat Yahweh's children is seen as the way you treat *Him*. If you bless them, support them, and help them, God sees your actions as having been done to Him. But if you curse them, suppress them, and hinder them, God takes your hatred personally. As Yahshua told both the "sheep and goats" in His parable concerning their behavior under pressure during the coming Tribulation, **"Inasmuch as you did—or did not—do it to one of the least of these, you did—or did not—do it to Me."** (Matthew 26:40, 45, blended) Would we treat our brothers and sisters the way we do if we realized that every poke we made at them would be felt by God?

CONSECRATION OF THE LEVITES

- (780) *The Levites shall serve the congregation and do the work of the Tabernacle. “And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. And they shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of meeting, to do the work of the tabernacle. Also they shall attend to all the furnishings of the tabernacle of meeting, and to the needs of the children of Israel, to do the work of the tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are given entirely to him from among the children of Israel. So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall attend to their priesthood; but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death.’”* (Numbers 3:5-10) Yahweh’s metaphors work on various levels. They aren’t always restricted to precisely the same meaning, and you can’t extrapolate their lessons with impunity. For example, within His symbolic hierarchy of Israel, Yahweh often draws distinctions between one group and another to illustrate some point. So we see that the priesthood (as a group within Israel) normally represents believers in the sense that they—as sons of the High Priest—intercede between God and man. But that doesn’t mean that people outside the priesthood necessarily symbolize non-believers. We must take each example in its own context and on its own terms.

There are other places (as in the precepts rounding out this chapter) where the line of demarcation is drawn at the tribal level: the Levites are seen in the role of believers, leaving non-Levites, “outsiders” who usurp their God-ordained place (as Korah tried to do in Numbers 16), dead where they stand. In still other places, the whole nation of Israel is pictured as being set apart to Yahweh, leaving the world outside to play the role of strangers to God. But remember, these are all only pictures, symbols, or parables designed to teach us about the nature of Yahweh’s plan of redemption. The reality is that anyone, at any time, no matter where his family tree is planted, may become a child of God. The portrayal of the redeemed as priests, Levites, or Israelites merely teaches us different lessons about how we believers are to function within the Kingdom of God. Please don’t confuse God’s symbols with the truths they represent.

Here, then, we see how the Levites, as believers, are to function. Note first that they are “given” to Aaron (who represents the Messiah) to help with the work of the ministry. So who are the ordinary priests in this context? Paul tells us: **“He Himself [Yahshua] gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ till we all**

come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.” (Ephesians 4:11-13) The priests in this metaphor, then, are the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, and *their* job is to equip the saints (a.k.a. the Levites) to minister. But minister to whom? To the world at large or to the household of faith? It may come as something of a surprise, but both passages speak of ministering only *to other believers*, not necessarily to the world. Paul speaks of “edifying (building up) the body of Christ, that is, the ekklesia or Church. He tells us in this passage to grow up, leave our old corrupt conduct behind, live in truth, understanding, honesty, industry and forgiveness, and “be kind to one another.” Moses, meanwhile, says the Levites are to (1) attend to Aaron’s (read: Yahshua’s) needs; (2) attend to the needs of the whole congregation of Israel—which is by definition set apart to Yahweh; (3) do the work of the Tabernacle by attending to its furnishings (that is, the Plan of God—something we’ll address in more detail as we proceed); and (4) attend to the needs of the priesthood—the apostles, prophets, pastors, and teachers of which Paul wrote.

Does this mean believers shouldn’t participate in “worthy causes” such as soup kitchens, drug rehab clinics, and AIDS relief efforts? Believe it or not, if your only aim is to feed the homeless, get junkies off drugs, and relieve the suffering people have brought upon themselves through their sin, then yes, that’s exactly what it means. Don’t waste your time. If, however, your aim in doing these things is to demonstrate the love of God to people who desperately need Him—if your *modus operandi* is to fulfill the Great Commission by showing compassion to those who need it most, then by all means, proceed. My point is that if you give people food or medicine, you’ve extended their lives for a day. But if you give them God’s salvation, you’ve extended their lives for eternity. Call me heartless, but charity without Christ is a cruel joke, a leaky life raft. Our *primary* instructions as believers are to attend to the needs of other believers. **“A new commandment I [Yahshua] give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”** (John 13:34-35)

- (781) *The Levites belong to Yahweh.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I am Yahweh.’”** (Numbers 3:11-13) Considering the fact that Yahweh, as Creator of the universe, owns everything, He has reserved to Himself very little, it seems—one small city in all the world, Jerusalem, one nation, Israel, and of that nation, only

the firstborn of both man and beast. Here Yahweh explains why. In order to free Israel from bondage in Egypt, He had slain the firstborn of Egypt—both people and livestock (Exodus 12:29-32). So in a manner of speaking, He had purchased the firstborn of Israel at the price of the firstborn of Egypt. Or as it says here, by striking Egypt, He set apart Israel to Himself—He *sanctified* it. In reality, of course, this was all designed to be a symbol of God’s unfolding plan to rescue mankind from our bondage to sin in the world—by sacrificing His own “Firstborn,” Yahshua the Messiah, to purchase our freedom. That’s why Yahweh let his chosen people spend four hundred years in slavery in a foreign land—*before* they had ever rebelled against Him. The picture He was creating would have been incomprehensible if no one could see that Israel was being saved *from* something. Not recognizing their Messiah (yet), it’s *still* incomprehensible to today’s Jews.

So principle number one is that God has claimed Israel’s firstborn for Himself. Principle number two is that He has then *substituted* one tribe out of the twelve, Levi, for Israel’s actual firstborn sons. **“Then Yahweh said to Moses: ‘Number all the firstborn males of the children of Israel from a month old and above, and take the number of their names. And you shall take the Levites for Me—I am Yahweh—instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the livestock of the children of Israel.’”** (Numbers 3:40-41) This tells us beyond the shadow of a doubt that we’re dealing with divine metaphor. Yahweh isn’t really interested in the particular men and beasts that opened the womb. Rather, He’s defining Who would be called upon to sacrifice Himself to secure mankind’s ultimate freedom: His own “Firstborn” (in the sense that His Messiah would be preeminent among men). Yahshua would be substituted as a sacrifice in place of us men who deserved to die for our crimes, just as the tribe of Levi was substituted for the firstborn of Israel. Once again, if you don’t understand the Messianic connection, the whole thing looks like Israel’s God is a manipulative megalomaniac. No wonder so many Jews are functional atheists.

- (782) *Number the Levites.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, saying: ‘Number the children of Levi by their fathers’ houses, by their families; you shall number every male from a month old and above.’”** (Numbers 3:14-15)

There’s more to this than Yahweh merely wanting to know how many Levites there were (as if He didn’t know). They were to be categorized by their fathers’ houses, their clans. (We’ll see why in a bit.) Why were the males to be numbered from the age of one month, and not from birth? Again, because there’s more to this than numbers. Each male child was to be circumcised at eight days of age, which is it itself a picture: the barrier

that separates us from Yahweh at birth—sin—has been permanently removed, cut off and destroyed. It's a process that involves blood and pain, but one that makes us available for God's use. (See Mitzvah #17.) The child would have been named on the day of his circumcision. From this point on, he had his own identity (as opposed to merely being Yakob and Zibiah's baby boy). As a practical matter, however, the child was still considered vulnerable to a variety of post-natal health hazards until the age of about one month—at which point he was statistically “out of the woods.” A quick survey of each census taken by Moses reveals that baby boys were never counted in a population before the age of one month. In fact, even animals were left uncounted until they had reached the one-month milestone (cf. Numbers 18:16).

The point of all this is that once we belong to Yahweh, He “knows” who we are. He calls us by our names, knows what we're like, who we're related to, and what our background is, and recognizes our accomplishments and potential as well as our past failures and vulnerability. He knows what we want *and* what we need. We're not just a number to Him. We are His children. I have eleven kids, but I know more about my family than merely how large it is. I also know my children's names, their characters, their strengths and weaknesses, their handicaps and potential. I have a pretty good handle on what makes them tick. What kind of father would I be if I only kept track of *how many* children I had?

- (783) *Substitute the firstborn of Israel with Levites.* “Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of their livestock. The Levites shall be Mine: I am Yahweh. And for the redemption of the two hundred and seventy-three of the firstborn of the children of Israel, who are more than the number of the Levites, you shall take five shekels for each one individually; you shall take them in the currency of the shekel of the sanctuary, the shekel of twenty gerahs. And you shall give the money, with which the excess number of them is redeemed, to Aaron and his sons.’” (Numbers 3:44-48) Here is indisputable evidence that God's claim upon the “firstborn” of man and beast is symbolic of some greater reality. His command to number the firstborn of Israel, setting them apart for Himself (verse 40) was still hanging in the air when He turned around and said, in effect, “Oh, by the way, I'm not interested in the *actual* firstborn of Israel—only in their number. I want the tribe of Levi to stand in for them.” As it turned out, the number came out pretty close: there were 22,273 firstborn males in Israel at the time, and an even 22,000 Levite men (verse 39). The difference is a little over one percent.

Yahweh then provided a means to transfer “ownership” of even these few “leftovers” to the tribe of Levi. Each of the 273 men was to be “redeemed” by the payment of five shekels (about 1.8 ounces of silver) to the priests. (Five, if you’ll recall, is the number symbolic of grace.) These weren’t specific individuals, you understand. The number was simply a total of the overage, a statistic. The point is that the sacrifice of Yahweh’s firstborn, Yahshua, would be precisely “enough” to redeem *all* of mankind. No one would be left out of the offer because he was “too hard” or “beyond reach.” No one would fall into the cracks, so to speak. Anyone who chose to accept God’s gift of love would find that gift sufficient for his needs.

The percentage of firstborn to be bought back (as opposed to being directly substituted) was, as I said, slightly over one percent of the total. If I may indulge in a little blue-sky speculation, could this indicate the proportion of Israelites living today, as we approach the “time of Jacob’s trouble,” compared to the total population of earth? I honestly don’t know, because not every child of Israel knows his heritage—something that’s been a fact of life since the Assyrian invasion of 722 B.C. The Jews of which we are aware number somewhere in the neighborhood of two-tenths of one percent of the world’s population. So this hypothesis is suggesting that there may actually be *five times* that number. My gut is telling me that Yahweh may be drawing a subtle distinction between their mode of redemption and that of everyone else on the planet. Yes, I know it all boils down to grace through faith in the Messiah’s atoning sacrifice, but let’s face it: the path Israel as a nation will take in finally arriving at this conclusion will be—shall we say—*unusual*. For the gory details, see *Future History*, Chapter 22: “The Great Awakening.”

- (784) *The Levites shall encamp surrounding the Tabernacle. “The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp, everyone by his own standard, according to their armies; but the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony.”* (Numbers 1:52-53) The Tabernacle, as we have seen, is a detailed picture of the Plan of God for mankind’s salvation. The Israelites were told (in Numbers 2) where they were to encamp—by tribe—in relationship to the Sanctuary, the center of the national encampment. I find it significant that Judah (Yahshua’s tribe) is named first on the eastern side, “guarding” the only entrance to the Tabernacle compound, joined by Issachar and Zebulun. On the south side, Reuben, Simeon, and Gad were to camp. Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin took their places on the west, and Dan, Asher, and Naphtali were stationed on the north side. But the

tribe of Levi was to *surround* the Sanctuary on all four sides, forming a buffer between their brother Israelites and the Tabernacle.

I believe God's point to this arrangement is patently obvious. Wherever you are in the world, you'll need to "go through" Yahweh's true believers (represented here by the Levites) in order to enter and participate in the Plan of God. They functioned like a door or gate, blocking unauthorized entrance but admitting those who wished to enter according to Yahweh's provision. That is, since there was but one entrance to the courtyard, you couldn't just waltz up to the enclosure from any direction and force your way in—cutting through the linen fence or digging underneath it (pictures of heresy and false doctrine)—because the Levites were zealously watching. Rather, they would conduct you to the entrance—the only entrance—which in the long run turns out to be Yahshua the Messiah. Remember, the goal of visiting the Tabernacle was to approach Yahweh, who was metaphorically characterized as dwelling between the cherubim in the Most Holy Place. To get there, one had to first encounter the eastern gate, the altar, the laver, the table of showbread, the seven-branched lamp, and the altar of incense—each indicative of the Messiah's ministry in its own way. It was no flippant off-the-cuff remark when Yahshua told His disciples, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** (John 14:6) The Laws concerning the Tabernacle (like this one) had said exactly the same thing. And how does one "come to the Father through" Christ? By heeding the message of those carrying out the Great Commission, the witnesses of God's saving grace—in other words, by "going through" the Levites who surround the Tabernacle.

- (785) *The priests shall encamp nearest the entrance to the Tabernacle courtyard. **"Moreover those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east, before the tabernacle of meeting, were Moses, Aaron, and his sons, keeping charge of the sanctuary, to meet the needs of the children of Israel; but the outsider who came near was to be put to death."*** (Numbers 3:38) Continuing and refining the thought of the previous precept, we see that the family within the tribe of Levi who were to camp immediately outside the entrance to the Tabernacle, on the east side of the courtyard, were the priests (including Moses). That is, among believers in general tasked with conducting the world's seekers to God's "way, truth, and life," the "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers" whom Yahweh gave to the saints to "equip them for the work of the ministry" (as we saw in Ephesians 4—Precept #780) were to be the gatekeepers of the Plan of God. The priests were appointed—and anointed—for this very

responsibility: “keeping charge of the Sanctuary, to meet the needs of the children of Israel.”

Unfortunately, being seen as God’s gatekeepers has for some brought with it the lure of personal enrichment—the satisfaction of a lust for power or prestige, or even (strangely enough) wealth. So *self-appointed* “priests” of various stripes have, through the years, placed themselves in this role—granting (or so it was claimed) access to “god” on the basis of religious tradition or personal determination instead of the Word of Yahweh. These false priests positioned themselves in between their “Levites” (the laity they were supposed to be equipping) and the Tabernacle of Truth—blocking admission to any soul who didn’t submit to their vision. I’m not singling out any one religion here, but chastising *all of them*: Catholic priests and Protestant clergy, Jewish rabbis and Muslim imams, Buddhist bodhisattvas and Hindu gurus, Communo-fascist dictators, secular-humanist philosophers and technocrats, and a hundred other permutations of this evil. If they aren’t guiding seekers to Yahweh through Yahshua the Messiah—if they’re promoting some alternative solution to man’s hunger for truth, righteousness, and personal fulfillment—then they’re not true “priests.” Remember Yahweh’s order: His priests were not recruited—they were born to the position and anointed for the task. They weren’t merely zealous Israelites; they were sons of Aaron. The priesthood was not a station to be attained; it was a calling to be answered. We dare not ignore the warning to those tempted to usurp the assigned role of Yahweh’s priests: **“the outsider who came near was to be put to death.”**

- (786) *Symbolically cleanse the Levites.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them ceremonially.’”** (Numbers 8:5-6) In this permutation of the salvation metaphor, the Levites represent the redeemed, and Israel plays the role of the world at large. First, they are to be separated (read: made holy) from the rest of the congregation. Second, they are to be ritually cleansed. This is a picture of what happens to a seeker after righteousness when he or she embraces the grace of Yahshua’s sacrifice: first, separation from the world, and then cleansing, enabling the worshipper to stand in the very presence of God.

The instructions for the cleansing were quite specific. **“Thus you shall do to them to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purification on them, and let them shave all their body, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean....”** This isn’t an anointing, such as the priests underwent in Precepts #751-#762. Although the same ultimate group (the redeemed) are being pictured, a different set of images is being employed to point out a different lesson about them. What struck me immediately was that the

cleansing of the Levites was a great deal like the cleansing of lepers, especially as we saw in Mitzvot #577 and #579. The sprinkling of their bodies with the water of purification and the washing of their clothes are often-used metaphors for a believer's spiritual cleansing in the sight of a holy God, so there's no surprise there. But the idea of completely shaving one's body is unexpected, if not shocking. As we learned in the case of the cleansed leper, however, it is indicative of ridding ourselves of the things—usually *religious* things—that tend to cloud or obscure the true nature of our relationship with Yahweh. In the case of the leper, the shaving was done subsequent to receiving the cure, but prior to having been pronounced clean by the priest. The point, here as there, is that religious practice, if it exists at all in a believer's life, is to grow naturally from his relationship with Yahweh and his fellowship with his spiritual brothers and sisters. This relationship is never the *result* of religious ritual observance.

The instructions continue. **“Then let them take a young bull with its grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, and you shall take another young bull as a sin offering.”** The first bull, as will be made clear in verse 12, was to be an *olah*, that is, a burnt offering made in homage to Yahweh. **“And you shall bring the Levites before the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall gather together the whole congregation of the children of Israel. So you shall bring the Levites before Yahweh, and the children of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites.”** (Numbers 8:7-10) The laying on of hands indicates a purposeful transference of something, as in the conveyance of the sins of a man or a nation onto the head of a sacrificial animal. So what is being transferred here from Israel (symbolic of the world) to the Levites (the redeemed)? As we'll see in the very next verse, the Levites were to “perform the work of Yahweh.” I believe what's being said here is something quite profound: the unredeemed world *cannot* “perform the work of Yahweh.” That capacity and privilege has been transferred to true believers—exclusively. Good works done by non-believers are of no value in the eternal scheme of things. They earn the do-gooder neither a pat on the back from Yahweh (since such intimate contact would kill him in his natural state), nor lay up for him treasures in heaven (since that's not his eternal home, and he doesn't have an account at that bank). I must reiterate that these are only *pictures* God is painting. He's not saying that the Levites are saved and that everybody else is damned. But in this particular drama, Israel plays the clueless villain, and the Levites are playing the hero. Note that all this happened “before Yahweh.” He is the audience (and we're right there with Him).

(787) *Offer up the Levites as a wave offering to Yahweh. “And Aaron shall offer the Levites before Yahweh like a wave offering from the children of Israel, that they may perform the work of Yahweh. Then the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the young bulls, and you shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to Yahweh, to make atonement for the Levites. And you shall stand the Levites before Aaron and his sons, and then offer them like a wave offering to Yahweh. Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the children of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine.”* (Numbers 8:11-14) A wave, or “heave,” offering was a symbolic way of “giving” to Yahweh that which wasn’t physically going to be transferred to Him. For example, the grain offerings that were to be eaten by the priests were first waved before Yahweh in dedication to Him. So although Aaron couldn’t literally pick up the Levites and wave them before Yahweh like a sheaf of wheat, the principle was the same: the Levites could be of use to the priests in the service of the Tabernacle only because they had first been dedicated to God.

The Feast of Firstfruits puts this into perspective for us. At that time, the first sheaves of the spring barley harvest were waved before Yahweh in thankfulness and anticipation of the harvest that would eventually follow. The *miqra* is thus prophetic of the presentation of the risen Yahshua before the Father on resurrection Sunday (following the crucifixion on Passover and the removal of our sin by His sojourn in the tomb on the Feast of Unleavened Bread). If Yahshua was the Firstfruits, the “firstborn from the dead” (compare Colossians 1:18 to I Corinthians 15:20), then we who follow Him in faith comprise the harvest that follows. And just as He was presented as a wave offering, so too are we—dedicated for the work of the ministry of the Tabernacle, the working out of the Plan of God in this world.

“After that the Levites shall go in to service the tabernacle of meeting. So you shall cleanse them and offer them like a wave offering. For they are wholly given to Me from among the children of Israel.” Again, service starts only after cleansing and dedication. It is pointless to “work for God” in our own strength or in pursuit of our own agenda. Alms, penance, and abstinence from evildoing are only of value after one is cleansed. These things have no efficacy at all in *making* a person clean or sanctified.

Yahweh now reiterates who the Levites represent, and why He wants them. **“I have taken them for Myself instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the children of Israel. For all the firstborn among the children of Israel are Mine, both man and beast; on the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them to Myself. I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn of the children of Israel. And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and**

his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the work for the children of Israel in the tabernacle of meeting." So far, this is no surprise; we've seen these truths before. But hold onto your hat: "...and to make atonement for the children of Israel, that there be no plague among the children of Israel when the children of Israel come near the sanctuary." (Numbers 8:15-19) Whoa! Wait a minute! What does He mean by saying the Levites are given as a gift to Aaron to make atonement for the others? What about the bulls and goats of the Day of Atonement (as in Leviticus 16)? What about the altar, with all those burnt offerings and sin offerings?

Actually, all of these things are pictures of the same reality—the atoning work of the coming Messiah. Perhaps we should review what it means to “atone.” The Hebrew word is *kaphar*, a verb that means to cover (as with pitch), to purge, make reconciliation, pacify, or appease. The *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* also defines it as to “ransom, i.e., pay an amount of money as a gift, with a *quid pro quo* of so being allowed to keep one’s freedom.” The phrase *kaphar paneh* means to “pacify, give a gift, formally, cover the face, i.e., give a gift of tribute which will establish some level of relationship, possibly implying reconciliation.” So “atonement” is far less technical a concept than we ordinarily make of it. At its heart, it’s an action, prompted by a gift, that brings two parties together who were formerly estranged. Both parties have to agree on the terms of the arrangement; otherwise reconciliation would not result. The fascinating thing in the spiritual context is who is atoning for whom. Ordinarily, an act of *kaphar* would entail the exercise of humility: the weaker party would apply to the stronger, bringing a gift he hopes will cover the old animosity. But what do we see in scripture? Yahweh, the almighty, omnipotent Creator of the whole universe, is seen providing the gift He hopes will be accepted by us! Though we have estranged ourselves from God, He stands ready to heal the breach we have caused. It is He who seeks reconciliation with us (mostly ’cause we’re too dumb to know we need it, I think). I wonder what the Hebrew word for “Wow” is.

The ultimate expression of the *kaphar* gift, of course, is Yahshua’s sacrifice on Calvary. So returning to our original conundrum, what is the meaning of the Levites being given as a gift to Aaron to make atonement for the children of Israel? Yahweh, as it turns out, had explained it (sort of) in His recap of events earlier in the same paragraph. In order to extricate Israel from bondage in the world, He had “sacrificed” Egypt’s firstborn, both man and beast. Just as bulls and goats became symbolic substitutes for the reality to follow, God’s purchase price of Israel—the firstborn of Egypt—was substituted, first for the firstborn of Israel, and

then in turn for the tribe of Levi. But who was the ultimate firstborn son? Who did all of these illustrations point toward? To Yahshua the Messiah: Yahweh's symbolic "Firstborn" Son, the *kaphar* gift presented to humanity by God to reconcile us to Himself. That's right: the Levites in this context represent Christ. They are both defined as **"performing the work of Yahweh,"** and doing **"the work for the children of Israel in the Tabernacle of Meeting,"** in other words, doing the work on behalf of the people of the world in the Plan of God.

And what happens if Yahshua the Messiah is rejected, if Christ is not entrusted in our lives with the work of the Tabernacle? The Levites were put in place so **"that there [would] be no plague among the children of Israel when the children of Israel come near the sanctuary."** The only way into the Plan of God (for the umpteenth time) is through Christ. The alternative is a "plague."

- (788) *The Levites shall serve only between the ages of twenty-five and fifty. "Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'This is what pertains to the Levites: From twenty-five years old and above one may enter to perform service in the work of the tabernacle of meeting; and at the age of fifty years they must cease performing this work, and shall work no more. They may minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of meeting, to attend to needs, but they themselves shall do no work. Thus you shall do to the Levites regarding their duties.'" (Numbers 8:23-26)*
- Aside from being a practical rule to restrict the heavy lifting required in Tabernacle maintenance to men in their prime, I believe this is also a Messianic prophecy. As we saw in the previous precept, the Levites in their role as workers in the Tabernacle are metaphorical of Yahshua the Messiah, "performing the work of Yahweh" there. I believe we are being given subtle clues as to the outer limits of the Messiah's age during the years of His earthly ministry. From this precept, we know that He would be at least twenty-five when beginning His work, and He would have completed it before He turned fifty. And so we read the confirmation in the gospels. **"Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age."** (Luke 3:23) In a backhanded confirmation, we read in Numbers 4 that the first census of Levites (See Precepts #789-#798) would include only those men who had reached the age of thirty. Apparently, twenty-five year olds were still considered too green for this work unless supervised by their fathers. (On the other hand, you were considered old enough to fight Canaanites the day you turned twenty.)

And the upper limit? Yahshua's adversaries, disputing His timelessness (not to mention His deity), confirmed that he was within the requisite age parameters. **"Then the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years**

old, and have You seen Abraham?” (John 8:57) In Yahshua’s case, His earthly ministry lasted only about three and a half years. He was born in His mortal manifestation in the fall of 2 B.C., began His public ministry (putting pieces of the Plan of God into place) “about thirty” years later, in the fall of 29 A.D., and died three and a half years later, in the spring of 33, having declared, “It is finished.”

What were Levites supposed to do after they turned fifty? Retire, kick back, boss the younger guys? No, actually. They were to “minister” to the needs of the younger, stronger men. The Hebrew word is *sharat*, meaning to serve, to attend, to render assistance, the implication being to assume a lower status than the one being served. I can relate to this. I’ve been involved in worship music in some capacity or other since I was a youngster, and I assumed a leadership role in my thirties (or thereabouts—at my advanced age, I can’t remember, exactly). But when I hit my fifties, I took a back seat, so to speak: I began to *sharat* for younger musicians instead of leading worship myself. And now I can really see the wisdom in this precept. I no longer get wrapped up in the logistics of corporate worship, in the heavy lifting of preparation and execution. Now I just show up to worship, sing, and play my fingers off. I’m really *loving* this phase of my life. Of course, I didn’t realize until now that the Torah had been instructing me what to do all along. Sigh.

DUTIES OF THE LEVITES: KOHATH

- (789) *Number the working Kohathites.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: ‘Take a census of the sons of Kohath from among the children of Levi, by their families, by their fathers’ house, from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting.’”**

(Numbers 4:1-3) The work of the Tabernacle was further divided according to Levitical clan. The descendants of each of the three sons of Levi (Gershon, Kohath, and Merari) had separate job descriptions. In customary defiance of human wisdom, Yahweh lists Levi’s second son first. Kohath was the clan from which Moses and Aaron descended, so it was the family from which the priests would come. The census revealed that there were 2,750 Kohathites who fit the profile.

The name Kohath (Hebrew: *Qeath* or *Qahat*) is from an unused root meaning to ally oneself, and the name means “assembly.” To put things in perspective, a related word (*qahal* = assembly or congregation) is usually translated as *ekklesia* in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Covenant scriptures), which in turn invariably shows up in our English translations as “church.” In other words, the entity we know as the

“church” (and actually means “assembly”) is reflected in the name of Kohath. Reinforcing the thought, Kohath’s father’s name, Levi, means “joined to.” We too are an assembly, joined to Yahweh through faith in Yahshua.

- (790) *The Kohathites must wait for the priests to do their work before they can do theirs.* **“This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of meeting, relating to the most holy things: When the camp prepares to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come, and they shall take down the covering veil and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. Then they shall put on it a covering of badger [actually, porpoise] skins, and spread over that a cloth entirely of blue; and they shall insert its poles.”** (Numbers 4:4-6) When it came time to move the Tabernacle, the Kohathites were charged with the transport of the furnishings, fixtures, and implements employed there (a fact we’ll develop further in the following Precept). We begin with instructions concerning the most important thing they were to move—the ark of the covenant.

What was the first thing the Kohathites were supposed to do? They were told to *wait*. Before they could do their jobs, the priests (Aaron and his sons) had to prepare the way. Because the ark of the covenant with its two cherubim atop the mercy seat was the place where Yahweh’s Spirit—the glorious Shekinah—was said to dwell, it had to be handled with the utmost care and respect. You didn’t just throw it in the back of a pickup truck and drive off. It was to be carried by four Levites using poles that ran through four golden rings. First, the priests removed from its four pillars the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy (see Precept #723). They then covered the ark with it, or perhaps “wrapped” might be a better description, for the veil measured ten cubits (about fifteen feet) square all together. The ark was then covered with two more layers, first one of porpoise skin (as in the outer layer of the Tabernacle curtain—see Precept #714), and then one of solid royal blue (*tekelet*) cloth.

The remark about “inserting the poles” is counter to something we already know about them: these staves were *never* to be removed from their golden rings. (See Mitzvah #429, which explores Exodus 25:15, for the amazing reason.) We’ve run afoul of a Hebrew idiom here, something that, frankly, is so esoteric I can’t fault the translators for missing it. I checked at least a dozen English versions, and none of them caught it. The verb translated here as “insert” is the Hebrew *suwm*, which means to put, place, set, appoint, make, direct, determine, establish, or to set or make for a sign. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, the word is used of placing something in a location, appointing people to

positions, establishing a new relationship, assigning something to someone, to bring about a change, or to set aside something for a special purpose. So except for the fact that it makes scripture contradictory, rendering *suwm* “insert” makes perfectly good sense. But what it really means is that the poles, which were already in place (and which, if you’ll recall, represent the redeemed), were to be “established,” or invested with the nature of a sign, by the High Priest—ultimately, by Yahshua. It is He who appoints and directs us.

That’s why the Kohathites had to wait. Their (our) work is pointless and even dangerous if we “run ahead” of what our Messiah has established as our proper course of action. Since our strength—our ability to do good things in the world—is derived solely from Yahweh, we would be well advised to **“Rest in Yahweh, and wait patiently for Him.... For evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait on Yahweh, they shall inherit the earth.... Wait on Yahweh, and keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land.”** (Psalm 37:7, 9, 34)

- (791) *The Kohathites shall attend to the furnishings within the Tabernacle.* **“On the table of showbread they [Aaron and His sons] shall spread a blue cloth, and put on it the dishes, the pans, the bowls, and the pitchers for pouring; and the showbread shall be on it. They shall spread over them a scarlet cloth, and cover the same with a covering of badger [porpoise] skins; and they shall insert its poles. And they shall take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand of the light, with its lamps, its wick-trimmers, its trays, and all its oil vessels, with which they service it. Then they shall put it with all its utensils in a covering of badger [porpoise] skins, and put it on a carrying beam. Over the golden altar they shall spread a blue cloth, and cover it with a covering of badger [porpoise] skins; and they shall insert its poles. Then they shall take all the utensils of service with which they minister in the sanctuary, put them in a blue cloth, cover them with a covering of badger [porpoise] skins, and put them on a carrying beam.”** (Numbers 4:7-12) We’re still in the passage defined by the command, **“This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of meeting, relating to the most holy things.”** Again, the first thing the Kohathites were to do was wait for Aaron and his sons to properly prepare the Sanctuary furnishings for travel, which they, the Kohathites, would then transport. Each piece within the Holy Place was to be packed with the integral components that pertained to it. The “utensils of service” were to be packed in a similar way by themselves. Because all these things were considered “most holy,” nothing was to be picked up and carried “by hand.” Nor was it to be put on a cart or wagon for shipping. Rather, carrying poles like the ones used to transport the ark of the covenant were to be used. The bronze altar, the table of showbread, and the altar of incense all had rings through which these poles could be

inserted, but even the menorah was to be “put on a carrying beam” for transport.

All these things were to be covered, not only for their protection, but also to keep them from being seen by curious “outsiders.” All the ordinary Israelite would see as they traveled would be nondescript gray bundles being carried on poles by groups of Levites. The porpoise-skin coverings served the same purpose here as in the Tabernacle itself. They hid from profane view that which was reserved for the benefit of the redeemed: (1) the provision of Yahweh, represented by the table of showbread; (2) the access to God through prayer, symbolized by the altar of incense; and (3) the light provided through the Messiah, Israel, and the church by the Spirit of Yahweh, indicated by the golden lampstand.

The one exception (sort of) was the ark of the covenant, which, after being covered with the customary porpoise skins, was to be covered with an outer layer of blue-dyed cloth. This, of course, is because the ark and integral mercy seat was the place where the blood of atonement was sprinkled—salvation, after all, is not reserved for the saved; the doctor is sent to heal the sick, not the whole. So the blue covering indicated that among all the furnishings of the Tabernacle, this one piece was worthy of special attention. The royal blue covering indicated that this was the object—above all others—that represented the Messiah’s right to rule over Israel. This was where mankind could be reconciled to Yahweh, if only we would recognize His sovereignty.

- (792) *The Kohathites shall attend to the altar. “Also they [the priests] shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth over it. They shall put on it all its implements with which they minister there—the firepans, the forks, the shovels, the basins, and all the utensils of the altar—and they shall spread on it a covering of badger [porpoise] skins, and insert its poles.”* (Numbers 4:13-14)
- The bronze altar of sacrifice, the largest single item in the inventory, was to be prepared for transport in the same way, even though it was ordinarily standing in plain view in the Tabernacle courtyard. Covered first with purple (*argaman*—red-purple, a reminder of the exceedingly precious commodity that was spent here: the life-blood of innocence—not *tekelet* royal blue) the altar then received the usual porpoise-skin covering (which, if you’ll recall, indicates Yahweh’s provision for life’s journey). As with the other large pieces, the altar was equipped with rings at the corners, through which poles were inserted as a means to carry it from place to place.

“And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath

shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These are the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.” (Numbers 4:15) I’m not sure why, but the bronze laver was not mentioned in this passage. I think it’s a safe assumption that the Kohathites were to carry this piece as well (since they were to carry “*all* of the furnishings of the sanctuary”). I presume the laver would have been prepared for transport by the priests in the same way—covered with porpoise skins and then carried upon the shoulders of the Kohathites with the use of poles. But we aren’t told. At any rate, it is clear that the safety of the Kohathites depended upon the priests (the pastors, teachers, etc.) having done their job correctly. If the Tabernacle furnishings had not been properly covered, wrapped, and equipped with their carrying poles, the Kohathites could inadvertently perish through accidental contact. In fact, just such an incident is recorded in II Samuel 6. We dare not handle the holy things of Yahweh in an irreverent manner. And I’m *not* just talking about furniture.

- (793) *Protect the Kohathites.* “Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: ‘Do not cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites; but do this in regard to them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint each of them to his service and his task. But they shall not go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, lest they die.’” (Numbers 4:17-20) Being a Levite of the house of Kohath brought with it honor and responsibility, but it also brought potential danger, for no one in Israel had more intimate contact with the holy things of the Tabernacle except for their cousins, the priests. Yahweh made it clear that if the Kohathites did their jobs improperly—either by usurping the role of Aaron and his sons or doing their own jobs in an unworthy manner—they might die.

The same two-edged sword confronts every believer today. On the one hand, we are not to presume to do the things God has reserved for Himself. “Saving people” is not our prerogative. We can’t drag recalcitrant sinners kicking and screaming to the throne of grace and expect anything good to result from our efforts. We can’t legislate morality and then expect people’s good behavior to magically blossom into eternal life. We can’t play the role of inquisitors—“conversion enforcers”—and expect our victims to do anything but curse the God we say we serve. We can’t invent religions and traditions and expect them to have any efficacy in releasing our fellow man from his bondage to sin. We can’t decide what a holy God should or should not accept as an atoning sacrifice. When we prescribe penance, when we designate saints or angels as intermediaries, when we invest manmade rules with the power to

impress and placate God, we have overstepped our mandate—we have killed the Kohathites.

On the other hand, we are not to take our God-given responsibilities lightly, either. We are to revere Yahweh. We are to love one another. We are to be witnesses of God's saving grace at home and abroad. We are to rejoice always, remain watchful, be filled with Yahweh's Spirit, live in humility, pray without ceasing, search the scriptures, and trust Yahshua with every fiber of our being. If (or is it when?) we slide into apathy toward Yahweh, ambivalence toward our fellow man, distrust of God's willingness or ability to provide our needs, when we succumb to fear, isolation, laziness, or selfishness, we are once again guilty of killing Kohath.

DUTIES OF THE LEVITES: GERSHON

- (794) *Number the working Gershonites.* **"Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'Also take a census of the sons of Gershon, by their fathers' house, by their families. From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, all who enter to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting.'"** (Numbers 4:21-23) As with the Kohathites, their brothers the sons of Gershon were to work in the service of the Tabernacle between the ages of twenty-five and fifty, though only those who had reached the age of thirty would be numbered. There were 2,630 of them in this inaugural generation, just a few less than there were Kohathites.

The meaning of Gershon's name may come as a surprise if you're expecting something encouraging and affirming about the life of a believer (like Kohath—meaning "assembly"—was). Gershon means "Exile." It's based on the verb *garash*, meaning to drive out, expel, or drive away. If this seems like an odd moniker for people who "enter to perform the service," and who "do the work of the Tabernacle," remember that **"Friendship with the world is enmity with God."** (James 4:4) David, on the run from a murderous King Saul, asked, **"Why does my lord [Saul] thus pursue his servant? For what have I done, or what evil is in my hand? Now therefore, please, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant: If Yahweh has stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering. But if it is the children of men, may they be cursed before Yahweh, for they have driven me out [*garash*] this day from sharing in the inheritance of Yahweh."** (I Samuel 26:18-19) We too need to constantly consider whether the "exile" we endure in this world is because we are *not* at enmity with God—making outsiders uncomfortable—or whether there actually *is* "evil in our hands" from which we need to repent. In our mortal walk, we believers will invariably be held to a stricter standard than the

unredeemed—by both God and man. But believers should never forget that we are but pilgrims here, exiles in a world that irrationally hates us because they hate the God we serve.

- (795) *The Gershonites shall attend to the “soft parts” of the Tabernacle. “This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, in serving and carrying: They shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle and the tabernacle of meeting with its covering, the covering of [porpoise] skins that is on it, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting, the screen for the door of the gate of the court, the hangings of the court which are around the tabernacle and altar, and their cords, all the furnishings for their service and all that is made for these things: so shall they serve.”* (Numbers 4:24-26) The Levites in the family of Gershon were assigned the task of transporting the fabric and leather components of the Tabernacle and its courtyard. If you’ll recall, the Tabernacle proper had four layers of coverings, each layer consisting of either ten or eleven strips of embroidered linen, heavy woven goat-hair cloth, ram skins, or porpoise hides, six feet wide and up to forty-five feet long. Then, the linen panels making up the “fence” around the Tabernacle courtyard—fifty-six of them—each measured about seven and a half feet square. There were also substantial curtains at the entrances to the courtyard and the Holy Place. This all added up to thousands of square yards of heavy cloth or leather that had to be secured, packed, loaded, and transported—plus hundreds of gold and bronze clasps that held the curtains together at strategic places.

If you’ve ever packed up your closet to move, you may have some idea of what the Gershonites were up against every time Yahweh said, “Let’s go.” Even with almost three thousand guys, it was a big job. It was doable, but only if everyone pitched in and did his part. I can’t help but reflect that fulfilling the Great Commission (“**Go into all the world and preach the gospel.**” Mark 16:15) is (or at least *was*) also doable in the power of the Holy Spirit, if only every believer had done what he or she was supposed to be doing—if we had all been as faithful as the pilgrim exiles of Gershon were. Put another way, if the Gershonites had done their job like most “Christians” do these days, the Israelites would *still* be camped out there in Kadesh Barnea.

DUTIES OF THE LEVITES: MERARI

- (796) *Number the working sons of Merari. “As for the sons of Merari, you shall number them by their families and by their fathers’ house. From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, everyone who enters the service to do the work of the tabernacle of meeting.”* (Numbers 4:29-30) Slightly more numerous than the Kohathites and Gershonites were the

third and last Levite family, the sons of Merari. Their numbers totaled 3,200 men between thirty and fifty. If you were dismayed by the “negative” connotation of Gershon’s name, then take a deep breath: Merari’s is even worse. It means “bitterness,” but with a twist. Its root verb, *marar*, means “to be or make bitter, to show bitterness,” but it carries with it the connotation of having been strengthened through the trial. Thus Job says in the midst of his distress, **“As God lives, who has taken away my justice, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter [*marar*], as long as my breath is in me, and the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit.”** (Job 27:2-4) One gets the distinct feeling that Job wouldn’t have been quite so determined to honor God—so attuned to the issue—if he hadn’t been subjected to such tribulation. His adversity had brought his priorities into sharper focus. As the saying goes, “No pain, no gain.”

Contrary to some silly preaching that goes on today, Yahshua never promised us a bed of roses in this life. Rather, He said, **“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”** (John 16:33) Paul reminded the believers at Corinth that a life lived centered on Christ could be “bitter”: **“To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now. I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.”** (I Corinthians 4:11-14) Paul’s not complaining, mind you. He’s merely telling the truth about living a life honoring to Yahweh. It can be rough, but the adversity we endure has the potential to make us stronger. As he reminded the Romans, **“Tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”** (Romans 5:4-5) The sons of Merari, as we shall see, had some heavy lifting to do. But the “bitterness” of their task produced strength. Their path led from tribulation to perseverance to character to hope—and finally to love.

- (797) *The sons of Merari shall attend to the “hard parts” of the Tabernacle. “And this is what they must carry as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting: the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, and the pillars around the court with their sockets, pegs, and cords, with all their furnishings and all their service; and you shall assign to each man by name the items he must carry.”* (Numbers 4:31-32) If Gershon was faced with a big job, Merari’s was huge. The tonnage was daunting: the foundation sockets alone—ninety-six silver bases, a massive one talent each, plus fifty-six bronze

pillars and foundation pieces for the outer fence—weighed in together at almost seven tons. And the boards, bars, and pillars, made of dense, close-grained Acacia wood, would have been heavy as well. Unlike the Kohathites, however, the Gershonites and sons of Merari didn't have to physically carry their loads from place to place. When the children of Israel had donated their gifts for the building of the Sanctuary, they brought them to Moses and Aaron on six carts or wagons pulled by teams of oxen. **"Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Accept these from them, that they may be used in doing the work of the tabernacle of meeting; and you shall give them to the Levites, to every man according to his service.' So Moses took the carts and the oxen, and gave them to the Levites. Two carts and four oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon, according to their service; and four carts and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari, according to their service.... But to the sons of Kohath he gave none, because theirs was the service of the holy things, which they carried on their shoulders."** (Numbers 7:4-9)

God knows the limits of our strength. Having made us, He is all too aware that we are not omnipotent. So, as we see here with the Levites, He provides help for us—in proportion to the weight of the load with which we're faced. He doesn't do the work Himself (though He could), for He wants us to have the joy and satisfaction of having participated, of having made a real contribution. But if we'll supply the willingness, He'll provide the strength. As David observed, **"I will love You, O Yahweh, my strength. Yahweh is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon Yahweh, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies."** (Psalm 18:1-3) Your "enemy" might be the ninety-pound silver socket you're supposed to schlep from Kadesh to Mount Hor. It might be the economic pinch you're finding so hard to overcome. It might be the apathy, despair, or uncertainty you feel, or your frustration with the godlessness of the world you have to live in. It might even be the constant and unrelenting temptation you face. But even there, Yahweh provides help. **"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."** (I Corinthians 10:13)

It bears repeating that there is one thing Yahweh never asks us to carry—the burden of our own sin. That job was done for us at Calvary. It is finished. Now when we're told to "pick up our crosses" and follow Yahshua, the objective is to live as if we're dead to sin, but alive to God. The work we do in this life is supposed to be *in response* to our salvation, for no amount of work is sufficient to achieve it.

(798) *The Gershonites and sons of Merari shall be under the supervision of Ithamar the priest.* “Aaron and his sons shall assign all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, all their tasks and all their service. And you shall appoint to them all their tasks as their duty. This is the service of the families of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting. And their duties shall be under the authority of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.” (Numbers 4:27-28) “This is the service of the families of the sons of Merari, as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting, under the authority of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.” (Numbers 4:33) As we saw in Precept #768, Eleazar, Aaron’s oldest surviving son (and future High Priest) was tasked with “the oversight of all the tabernacle, of all that is in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings.” That means that it would naturally fall to him to supervise the Kohathites in their duties concerning the transportation of the Tabernacle’s furnishings—it’s “holy things.” Here we see that Eleazar’s brother, Ithamar, was to similarly supervise the Gershonites and the sons of Merari. As a practical matter, this division of labor made perfectly good organizational sense—two brothers supervising separate groups of Levites, working in harmony under the supervision of their father and their uncle, who in turn answered to Yahweh. But there may be more to it.

An implied symbolic distinction exists between Eleazar and Ithamar, and we need to figure out what this distinction is, for it affects our walk in this world. The Levites—who were given to Aaron (read: Yahshua) for the work of the Tabernacle (i.e., the Plan of God)—represent believers in Yahweh. And the priests (Eleazar and Ithamar) symbolize the pastors, teachers, evangelists, apostles, and prophets (see Ephesians 4:11-13, Precept #780) who would be given by Yahshua to these believers, to equip them for the work of the ministry. Eleazar, who was in charge of the operation of the Tabernacle, supervised the Kohathites. His duties, and theirs, were focused on the Tabernacle furnishings: the altar, laver, table of showbread, menorah, altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant. All of these things, in their own way, spoke of the means by which man could approach God. And they spoke as well of Yahweh’s response—atonement, cleansing, provision, illumination, communication, and ultimately, His personal presence in our lives. Eleazar, then, represents the relationship that exists between God and His believing children. Not coincidentally, Eleazar’s name means “God has helped.”

But if that’s true, who or what does Ithamar represent? His function was to supervise the Levites of the families of Gershon and Merari, whose job was concerned with the Tabernacle infrastructure—the “tent,” its walls, the foundation sockets, the pillars, veils, and the courtyard fence.

Taken together, these components describe the interface between believers and the world in which they live.

Looking in from the wilderness of the world, unredeemed man first encounters a barrier of righteousness (the linen fence) supported by bronze pillars—symbolic of judgment, the distinction between good from evil. Not only is he barred because he isn't righteous, he finds that his objective (reconciliation with God) can be approached from only one direction—it's a narrow, exclusive approach, one against which his innate fallen nature instinctively rebels. So he peeks over the fence, hoping to get a glimpse of the peace he craves. All he sees is a dull, gray tent. However, if he consults with someone who knows how the tent is constructed—Ithamar or a son of Gershon or Merari—he will learn that this is only the outside of *four* layers comprising the plan of God for his life. These porpoise skins tell him that God has provided shelter for him, if only he's willing to trust Yahweh by entering the Tabernacle through the Way He's provided. Beneath this layer, the seeker is told, is one of red-dyed ram skins: innocent blood has been shed on his behalf. Beneath that, a layer of goat's hair fabric indicates that this innocent blood has atoned for his sin—it has *already* been accepted as the sin offering Yahweh requires. And the result of this atonement is the inner layer—the one that can only be seen if the seeker enters through the narrow gate, makes his way past the altar and laver of cleansing, enters the Sanctuary, and looks up. This last layer is the pure, white linen of imputed righteousness, embroidered with images of the mighty cherubim Yahweh has tasked with our provision, protection, and correction.

Who is Ithamar, then? He represents the relationship we believers have with the lost world, just as Eleazar represents the relationship we share with God. As we have learned by studying his team, the Gershonites and sons of Merari, this is the “dirty job” of a believer's existence, but as they say of all dirty jobs, *somebody* has to do it. Somebody has to do the heavy lifting, get his hands dirty, take out the trash. Sure, we'd all like to sit around and bask in the glory of Yahweh's presence twenty-four/seven. And the day is coming when we'll all get to do that. But we haven't reached the promised land yet. So for now, Ithamar supervises Gershon (the exiles) and directs Merari (the bitterly oppressed) among Yahweh's children. Without their (our) faithful service in this world, an unredeemed but searching race will never comprehend God's love, grace, plan, or provision.

And what does the name Ithamar mean? It means “an island of palm trees,” or less literally, “an oasis.” *Huh?* Consulting the imagery of

scripture, we find that this isn't as weird as it sounds at first. Consider this: **"The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree [*tamar*]; He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of Yahweh shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that Yahweh is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."** (Psalm 92:12-15) The "bitterness" and "exile" of a life of faith and service in this world are but temporary hiccups. We who are "planted in the house of Yahweh" will flourish forever in the courts of our God.

Offering Advice

Yahweh, as Creator of the universe, owns everything. He subsequently *needs* nothing, and from what we can tell from scripture, *wants* only one thing: to share a loving relationship with us humans. It's pretty obvious (at least to me) that we were created for no other purpose—and that the rest of creation, from quarks to quasars, are only byproducts of Yahweh's quest for the one thing He doesn't possess within Himself: loving companionship.

We may therefore find it a bit surprising to find a large body of instruction in the Torah that tells man to give stuff to Yahweh. A dizzying array of offerings, sacrifices, tithes, and oblations are prescribed, each accompanied with a plethora of rules telling us precisely *how* to go about giving these things to God—and how not to. And as if to prove that this isn't some thinly disguised ploy foisted by a newly empowered priesthood upon a superstitious and gullible populace, the Torah's instructions on giving are often a bit counterintuitive. We are instructed to do apparently “wasteful” things like sacrificing the firstborn of our flocks and herds, or leaving the corners of our fields unharvested so the poor can earn a living there—and are told that these things are honoring to Yahweh. He does seemingly contradictory things like insisting that only the best—perfect, unblemished specimens—are good enough to be offered to Him, only to turn around and say to reserve for Him only the gross, unhealthful, fatty portions of the sacrificed animal, while the rest of it is to be eaten by the worshipper or the priest. He declares that waving things in the air will demonstrate that we've given them to Him, even though we are then free to turn around and use them for our own benefit. He delineates different profiles for seven distinct offering types (the *olah*, *mincha*, *chata't*, *selem*, *asham*, *nesek*, and *bekor*—see Volume I, Chapter 12). And we are forced to conclude that for a God who needs nothing at all, Yahweh sure asks for a lot.

The question that must be answered, as usual, is “Why?” Why did Yahweh issue such complicated instructions telling us to give Him things He doesn't really need or want? On the surface, some of what He told the Israelites to do may have looked a bit like the pagan religions of Egypt and Canaan, what with the specially garbed priestly class, facilities set aside for ritual purposes, and blood sacrifices. But the similarities were purely superficial. Pagan ritual was designed to reinforce the attitude of submission of the worshipper. It was calculated to enhance the power of the priests and the demon-gods they served by keeping the masses subservient. Hebrew rituals, by contrast, were designed to fulfill three functions.

They were (1) an elaborate prophetic dress rehearsal of the atoning sacrifice that Yahweh would make on behalf of man, (2) a means for individual worshippers to spontaneously demonstrate their thankfulness, and (3) a way to unify the entire nation under the banner of the One true God. As with the rest of the Torah, the rules are there for *our* benefit, not His. They're there to teach us about Him, about what He has done for us, about what He has given to us. By our giving, through our sacrifices, we are given a glimmer of understanding concerning what God did for us, beginning with creation and culminating in the provision for our salvation through the sacrifice of Yahshua. In fact, nowhere in God's instructions for giving is there a precept that doesn't originate with and help to explain what He has already done for us.

In the first volume of *The Owner's Manual*, mostly in Chapters 10 through 13, we saw the rabbinical take on offerings. Even when Maimonides wasn't twisting scripture to benefit the self-appointed religious elite of which he was a part, he restricted himself to listing the mechanical letter of the law, and to this day, orthodox Jews refuse to admit that the sacrifices and offerings delineated in the Torah could have had any bearing on the mechanism Yahweh would ordain for the salvation of mankind. But if they aren't prophetic of a coming Savior, then they degenerate into a pitiful attempt to bribe God. They become nothing more than watered down imitations of the ritual infanticide practiced by the devotees of Molech—something Yahweh specifically anathematized. And the even more anemic form such attempts at appeasement assume in today's world—tossing a few dollars into an offering plate—becomes downright insulting to God if one is trying to impress Him or buy Him off. We need to come to grips with the fact that our offerings can't logically be proffered as a bribe, a form of penance, or a means to drive our guilt back into the shadows. They are worthless as inducements to forgiveness, peace, or prosperity. Our offerings must be, rather, expressions of our love toward Yahweh, outpourings of thankfulness, reflections of the love He first showed to us. And our tithes should be a statement of our grateful trust in Yahweh's continued provision. Anything beyond that is blasphemy.

The Torah also teaches us something else. The mere act of giving, scattered and undirected, is *not* what we're called to do. It's object in the Law was always well defined, falling into three broad categories: (1) pure homage to Yahweh, including the offerings of atonement that prefigure *His* offering on Calvary; (2) the upkeep and advancement of the Tabernacle (which we should now recognize as a multi-level metaphor for the Plan of God; and (3) the support of the Levites and priests—who were precluded by Yahweh's calling from earning a living in the usual manner. The Levites, from the tithes they received, were also to provide for the poor among them. Though the Tabernacle and priesthood no longer exist, the principles remain intact. We should give first and foremost

because we love Yahweh, or more accurately stated, we wish to reciprocate His love for us. Then we should give out of a desire to see the Plan of God advanced in the world, that is, out of a desire to implement the Great Commission. Third, our tithes and offerings should support those who are called by God to minister to our spiritual needs or equip *us* for the work of the ministry, and to materially assist those among us—primarily believers—who have fallen on hard times.

It is at this point that I must offer a politically incorrect caveat. Not everyone who stands behind a pulpit is called of God or is doing God's work. We are instructed to be discerning—as wise as serpents, but as harmless as doves. Granted, if you're reading this book, you probably wouldn't knowingly put up with apostasy or outright heresy in the pulpit for very long. Most Evangelical pastors have the basics (e.g., salvation by grace, the deity of the Messiah, the reality and efficacy of the resurrection, the virgin birth, etc.) down pat, but all too often, longstanding Christian traditions pass for God's truth, and they're *not the same thing*. I'm not suggesting you stop supporting your pastor if he makes a mistake: he's human—it's going to happen now and then. What I'm saying is that you shouldn't be financially supporting a ministry that systematically denies (or sidesteps) the basic truths of the faith. And if you can't in good conscience give to such a church or ministry, why associate with them at all?

In the same way, not everyone who finds himself in need is a legitimate candidate for our alms. Poverty due to laziness, substance abuse, or a rebellious attitude is not to be rewarded. But although helping believing brothers and sisters in need should be a high priority for us, our giving need not be restricted to the faithful. For example, my wife and I are involved in the support of some folks who run a couple of free clinics in Bolivia. Medical care is provided for free (which is about all their clientele can afford) and everybody who comes into the place is presented with the good news of Christ's love. But it was discovered that some people in need were *still* going without essential medical treatment because they couldn't afford the expense of travel and lodging, or there was no way to provide for their dependents if they were laid up in the hospital, even for a few days. So a "mercy fund" was set up to take care of these hidden needs—things that had nothing to do with health care. From our point of view, it was ridiculously cheap—a few hundred bucks would help dozens of people get what they needed, both medically and spiritually. Bottom line: thousands of poor Bolivians who came in for free medical treatment went away with more than they bargained for—eternal life. To me, that makes way more sense than buying fancy stained glass windows.

In giving, as with everything else, we need to draw a distinction between perpetuating religion and fostering our relationship with Yahweh. That's not to say it is always easy sorting them out—one often masquerades as the other. But

when “religious professionals” ask us to contribute to a cause, it becomes our duty to examine just how directly the ministry correlates to Yahweh’s actual instructions on the matter. In short, where is the money going? To inflated salaries, bigger and fancier buildings, or air time on cable TV channels (so they can ask for even *more* money)? Or to more effectively teaching the Word at home and supporting missions abroad, to equipping the saints for the work of the ministry, and to extending practical mercies to people in dire need. Are the funds contributing to human pride or to God’s agenda? Call me a cynic, but I’ve observed that there is often an inversely proportional correlation between the time and energy spent raising money and the worthiness of the ministry doing the asking. It’s one thing to make needs known. It’s quite another to badger people into contributing to something they neither understand nor in which they perceive God’s leading. Woe to the man who says in effect, “Give me your money because I’m doing God’s work,” when all he’s really doing is building a monument to himself.

Another permutation of error in giving is to equate a human institution—*any* human institution—with the will of God, and to support it accordingly. Roman Catholicism is the most obvious purveyor of this evil, and they’ve grown bloated with wealth over the last seventeen centuries by telling the faithful, “*The Church and its leaders represent God on earth, so you must render unto us whatever you would render unto Him.*” Though the RCC leads the pack in this regard, they are by no means alone. Any concentration of ecclesiastical power, however localized, can lead to the same attitude. The problem for the worshipper, of course, is that it can be hard to see the difference. If in doubt (or even if you’re not), check the “plant” for fruit. If a “religious institution” is found, upon close scripturally based scrutiny, to be sprouting idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contention, jealousy, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambition, dissention, or heresy, then scream and run away. If, on the other hand, it fosters love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, then you can feel good about supporting them financially.

The vast preponderance of direct scriptural instruction concerning giving is found in the Torah, and in the course of our study we will have covered all of it. References to it in the New Covenant scriptures, by contrast, are rare but worthy of our close attention. Since the New Testament doesn’t replace the Old, but builds upon it, we find its teaching complementary to the Torah, clarifying and focusing God’s message.

For example, Yahshua taught us to be discreet in giving: **“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”** (Matthew 6:1-4) Yahweh is interested in attitude, not amount. He’s more concerned with *why* we give than *how much*. Our motives determine how the gift is perceived by our heavenly Father. A gift *could* be given primarily in order to elevate the status of the giver in the eyes of his peers. While reminding us that the glory such a hypocrite sought would be his only reward, Yahshua here establishes the fact that God does indeed reward us for acts of charity if done with the proper motive—to serve Him. Motive is key. There is a movement afoot these days that says that wealth can be turned on like a faucet by giving to God’s work. The error is obvious. If your motivation is personal greed, then you’re not really “giving” at all; you’re investing. (And if your faith is in your method, rather than in God, then you’re actually *gambling*.) The Father’s “rewards” of which Yahshua speaks *could* be financial, but they could just as easily be something else—something more appropriate to your own needs: peace of mind, health, or shelter from harm in this world—or a crown of victory in the next, awarded to you “openly” before your peers at the judgment seat of Christ.

As if to punctuate these thoughts, we read, **“And He [Yahshua] looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, ‘Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.’”** (Luke 21:1-4) Everyone He saw here, rich and poor alike, presumably wished to honor Yahweh with their gifts. Because the “treasury” in the Temple was a public place, one wasn’t expected to be particularly surreptitious about making a contribution, a fact that must be balanced against what we noted a moment ago in Matthew 6. What Yahshua saw—and remarked upon—was that the widow gave “out of her poverty.” Written between the lines is her attitude of utter, unshakable trust in the God she had come to worship with her “two mites.” It didn’t matter that the amount of her gift wasn’t going to accomplish much. God didn’t need her money anyway, but He valued her devotion above all human qualities, rewarding her “openly” through this glowing tribute in His scriptures. So, did she go home and die of starvation because she’d put her entire pitiful paycheck in the offering box? No. I can *guarantee* she didn’t miss it much.

There’s another factor that needs to be addressed here. The poor widow made her contribution at a time when the high priesthood of Israel was corrupt,

unbelieving, and politically motivated. The very Temple she had visited was an edifice erected as a cultural bribe—not an act of worship—by a corrupt and murderous gentile king, a vassal of a brutal, pagan, foreign overlord. So the question must be asked: did she waste her offering by giving it to the wrong people? Was her gift “thrown away” because those who received it in the name of God were less than worthy? Yahshua didn’t seem to think so. All He was concerned with was *her* attitude, *her* devotion. She did what she could do, and He honored that. The priests would be held accountable to administer her gift in accordance with His instructions. But even if they did not, she would not be held responsible for their faithlessness. All that being said, we today usually have more options available to us than she did: we are called to be discerning about where and to whom our gifts are given.

Giving “to God” is never discouraged in scripture. It is a good thing, something we should all do. But there are guidelines for godly giving. Giving Principle #1, then, is to give whatever you give without fanfare—let it be a matter between you and God. Principle #2 is the lesson of the widows mites: trust Yahweh in all things, for this honors Him. Principle #3 is in something Paul told the believers at Corinth: **“Now concerning the collection for the saints...On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.”** (I Corinthians 16:1-4) He reminds us that needs are constant and recurring; therefore, we should *plan* to give, setting aside our gifts—in proportion to our prosperity—even before they’re needed. The gifts weren’t for Paul’s use, however. They were for the needy saints: believers in other places who had fallen on hard times or were suffering persecution. Though he volunteered to play the role of postman, Paul made it clear that the gifts should be sent by means of the Corinthians’ own choosing. This wasn’t construed as a “Support Paul’s Ministry” telethon. In a later epistle, he reiterated the principle: be prepared in advance. **“Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.”** (II Corinthians 9:5) Some might object, saying that making our giving a “budget item” sucks all the spontaneity out of it, rendering it somehow less “spiritual.” But we were told in both the Old and New Testaments: the poor would always be with us. There would always be needs to meet. There is nothing unholy about planning ahead. Yahweh does it all the time.

The passage goes on to state Giving Principle #4: **“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always**

having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.” (II Corinthians 9:6-8) Our giving is supposed to be a reflection of how we perceive what God has done for us. If we are unthankful, if we count Yahweh’s grace and provision as a small thing, then we’ll tend to give parsimoniously. But if we really appreciate what He’s done for us, we will desire to reciprocate. We may not be rich, but we as God’s children really do have “sufficiency in all things.” And that is enough to make any thoughtful believer a “cheerful giver,” a cheerful disciple, a cheerful witness—even a cheerful martyr.

Paul used the occasion to brag on the believers in Macedonia. **“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.”** (II Corinthians 8:1-5) Giving Principle #5: if your heart is in the right place, you can do *more* than you can do. The Macedonians didn’t have a lot, but notice what Paul says they did have: (1) abundant joy in the face of trial and affliction; (2) liberal generosity in the face of temporal poverty; (3) a willingness to serve that enabled them to give *beyond* their intrinsic ability; and (4) a sense of urgency in the matter of meeting the needs of others in even worse shape than they were. How did they do all that? By first giving *themselves* to Yahweh, and then dedicating themselves to aiding and abetting fellow servants like Paul who were in “the will of God.”

Seems like every time we’re given an example of somebody doing it right, they’re poor, but every time we see an admonition or rebuke on the subject, the audience is wealthy. Here, Paul instructs young Timothy how to deal with rich folks in his congregation: **“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”** (I Timothy 6:17-19) Giving Principle #6: riches are given to the rich to enable them to do good works. The man who thinks he’s “self-made” is deceiving himself: even if he got his money honestly (which cannot be automatically assumed), it was only through God’s gift of fortuitous circumstances. It was Yahweh who gave him the ability to work hard, recognize and capitalize on opportunity, be in the right place at the right time with the right idea, and so forth. He could just as easily have been born in the wrong century, in the wrong country, on the wrong side of the tracks, with the wrong skin color, the wrong intelligence quotient, or with the wrong accent in his mouth instead of a silver spoon. Does hard work make a difference? Sure, but I can guarantee there

were slaves working on sugar or cotton plantations who worked every bit as hard as Donald Trump or J. Paul Getty.

Ever heard of Humphrey Monmouth? Me neither, until recently. He was a wealthy man who actually *was* “rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,” who not only stored up *for himself* “a good foundation for the time to come,” but for us as well. You see, Humphrey was a sixteenth century English cloth merchant who grew rich selling the fabrics worn by the nation’s high society. He also led a secret life as a member of an underground society of faithful London merchants known as The Christian Brethren. At a time of intense religious oppression under the Roman Church, these daring men smuggled Christian literature into England and supported men like William Tyndale, whose ground-breaking English translation of the Bible is the linguistic foundation upon which the venerable King James Version would be built a century later, retaining ninety percent of Tyndale’s wording. Monmouth provided Tyndale with room, board and financial backing as the scholar labored diligently on his common-language translation. The merchant-disciple then paid to have it printed in Europe, smuggling the Bibles—so hated and feared by the politico-religious establishment of the day—back into England in the very shipments of cloth that would grace the backs of the bishops and princes who were so determined to keep the Word of God out of the hands of the unwashed masses. Were it not for the likes of the faithful (and rich) Humphrey Monmouth, our scriptures might *still* be in Latin.

All of this brings us to Giving Principle #7: we can only give because Yahweh first gave to us. **“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”** (I John 3:16-17) Again, notice the scripturally specified recipient of our giving, the beneficiary of the “laying down of our lives.” It’s the brethren, our fellow believers who find themselves in need. We were never commanded (at least not by God) to provide lavish lifestyles for our clergy, fancy buildings for our assembly, or welfare payments to able-bodied people who refuse to work. It bears repeating, there are only three scriptural reasons for giving: to honor Yahweh, to spread His gospel, and to support His people who are precluded by their calling or circumstances from providing for themselves.

A GODLY ATTITUDE

(799) *Give as you are blessed.* **“Three times a year all your males shall appear before Yahweh your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before Yahweh empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of Yahweh your God which He has given you.”**

(Deuteronomy 16:16-17) The tithes and offerings that Israel was to render unto God through the priests and Levites were to be based upon past blessings, not future hopes. They were not to be thought of as bribes or appeasement or advance payment rendered for divine services, a means by which one might induce his god to show his favor by sending rain in its due season and making his flocks and fields fertile. This wasn't a bill to be paid, but a way to acknowledge the source of the blessings one had *already* enjoyed, an outpouring of thankfulness to Yahweh.

The commandment that "Every man shall give as he is able" is a challenge to be honest with yourself about what God has done for you and what you in turn are doing about it. A personal anecdote may shed some light on the subject. Several decades ago, my wife and I were agonizing as to why we were finding it hard—no, *impossible*—to tithe to our local church. I was making a decent workingman's wage, and we weren't living a flamboyant lifestyle, but there just wasn't enough money to give what we wanted to give. But then it hit us: we had adopted nine children, half of whom were handicapped to one degree or another. Our ministry (although we hadn't really thought of it in those terms, 'cause we were having so much fun) was making it impossible to "minister." We couldn't give ten percent to our church because we were *already* giving fifty or sixty to God's work—and had committed to continue doing so for well into the foreseeable future. So we settled on doing what God had said to do anyway: we would give as we were able, as we had been blessed.

- (800) *Recognize your blessings. "None shall appear before Me empty-handed."* (Exodus 34:20) We saw this same instruction in the previous precept, where it was tied to the three annual gatherings of Israel at the central place of worship—wherever the Tabernacle of God was at the time. Again, it is a back-handed admonition to examine your life and recognize the blessings you've received at the hand of Yahweh. God's point was that *nobody* had "nothing." Everyone, right down to the humblest bondservant, had *something* for which to be thankful, some tangible evidence of Yahweh's care and provision. All they had to do was look for it.

Is the glass half full, or half empty? We need to be aware that without the gracious provision of Yahweh, we would have neither container nor contents nor eyes to perceive our condition. This is not a call for blind optimism, however, but rather for sober realism: whatever we have, we owe thanks to God. Having lost "everything," the patriarch Job observed, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I turn back toward there. Yahweh gave and Yahweh has taken away; blessed be the name of Yahweh." (Job 1:21) I doubt if many of us today see things quite this clearly.

Americans are in for a rude shock. Having enjoyed “full glasses” for so long without recognizing or acknowledging Yahweh’s provision, we are about to lose our position of privilege. As the Last Days approach, Yahshua (in Matthew 24:6-7) warns us, expect **“wars and rumors of war...famines, pestilences, and earthquakes** (a term that in the original Greek would include ocean-borne storms—hurricanes, tsunamis, and the like) **in various places**”—that’s *before* the end: these are but the “beginning of sorrows.” As Isaiah warned us, **“For thus Yahweh has told me, ‘I will look from My dwelling place quietly, like dazzling heat in the sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.’ For before the harvest, as soon as the bud blossoms and the flower becomes a ripening grape, then He will cut off the sprigs with pruning knives and remove and cut away the spreading branches.”** (Isaiah 18:4-5, NLT) We are about to be—no, let me rephrase that: we are in *the process of being*—pruned back like an overgrown grapevine. And all of this is because we have for too long “appeared before Him empty handed.” May Yahweh forgive us.

- (801) *Thankfulness is not to be forced.* **“If you offer a sacrifice of a peace offering to Yahweh, you shall offer it of your own free will.”** (Leviticus 19:5) I know this sounds suspiciously like saying “The executions will continue until morale improves,” but it’s not the contradiction it seems. As usual, we have to look carefully at the actual text. He’s not talking about offerings in general. Some offerings in Israel *were* mandatory when the need for them arose: the sin offering (*chata’t*), guilt offering (*asham*), the Passover lamb, the Yom Kippur goats, and so forth, each with their requisite grain offerings (*minha*) and drink oblations (*nesek*). But others, notably the peace offering mentioned here (the *selem*) and the burnt offering (*olah*) made in homage to Yahweh were purely voluntary. God never said, “You must thank Me,” but He did stipulate ways we (i.e., Israelites under the Torah) could show our appreciation if we wished to. (Hint hint, nudge nudge.)

We cannot follow the letter of the Law in this regard today, for there is no Sanctuary and no priesthood. But the lessons of the *selem* are as valid as ever. If you’ll recall from Volume I, Chapter 12, the peace offering was the prescribed way someone could offer thanksgiving to God in Israelite society, underscore a vow (also voluntary) that he or she wished to make to Yahweh, or spontaneously demonstrate one’s praise or devotion. It was a blood sacrifice—cattle, sheep, or goats, either male or female. Since the sacrifice had to be without spot or blemish, we are reminded that it ultimately represented the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah, indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Both unleavened cakes and leavened bread were included, contrasting our sinless standing before God (the result of His sacrifice)

with the corrupt, sinful nature from which we are in the process of being extricated—and from which our deliverance should make us truly thankful. These *minha* blandishments were all to be prepared with olive oil, a picture of the Spirit of God that makes all of this possible in our lives (and without which, we’re just going through the motions).

The *selem* was not a dour, burdensome obligation. On the contrary, it was a party. The food was shared with the worshiper’s family and the priest. Yahweh was invited, too. In fact, He was the guest of honor. When’s the last time *you* threw a “Thank You” party for God?

- (802) *Offer sacrifices to Yahweh only.* **“The priest shall sprinkle the blood on the altar of Yahweh at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and burn the fat for a sweet aroma to Yahweh. They shall no more offer their sacrifices to demons, after whom they have played the harlot. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations.”** (Leviticus 17:6-7) This is one of those places where knowing the identity of our God—by name—becomes critically important. If we know Yahweh only as “The LORD” (as it’s mistranslated in every major English Bible version) we may be a bit fuzzy as to precisely Who our heavenly benefactor is. After all, the god the Canaanites worshiped—Ba’al—had a name that *meant* “lord” (as Yahweh’s name means “I am”). And today, 1.4 billion Muslims worship a god that shows up in their scriptures as “the Lord” (as in Qur’an 5:72—*“They are surely infidels who blaspheme and say: ‘God is Christ, the Messiah, the son of Mary.’ But the Messiah only said: ‘O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.’”* I beg to differ: Yahshua said no such thing.) It’s easy to get away with lies when the truth is buried with apathy, apostasy, or treachery.

Here in Leviticus, Yahweh makes it clear that sacrifices not made to Him—as demonstrated by adherence to the guidelines He set down in the Torah—are in fact offered to *demons*. The modern canard that “It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you’re sincere,” is utter hogwash. He whom you serve *is* your master, and the one to whom you offer sacrifices *is* your god, whether true or false. And lest it slip past you, that includes vague emotions and hidden agendas. If the “sacrifices and offerings” you’re making are done to assuage a guilty conscience, fulfill a perceived religious obligation, or they’re rendered in response to unrelenting pressure from pulpit or peers, then your god is your circumstances, your feelings, even your misplaced sense of duty—not Yahweh.

- (803) *Offer sacrifices only at the Tabernacle.* **“Also you shall say to them: ‘Whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of**

meeting, to offer it to Yahweh, that man shall be cut off from among his people.” (Leviticus 17:8-9) The practical ramifications of the letter of the precept are obvious: the pagan peoples being displaced by the Israelites had erected temples, shrines, and worship groves (“high places”) all over the countryside. Yahweh didn’t want the Israelites “re-tasking” the existing pagan worship facilities to His service, or recycling their religious practices to venerate Him instead of Ba’al. He was holy—fundamentally different (being *real*) from the gods worshiped by the pagans, and utterly unique. Therefore His people must also be set apart from the world in every aspect of their lives and culture, including their worship practices. Restricting the site of sacrifices and offerings to one central location went a long way toward establishing that principle.

But as we learned in such detail in Chapter 4 of this volume, the Tabernacle itself was an elaborate multi-level metaphor for the Plan of God for our redemption. Every element of its design, layout, ceremony, construction materials, furniture, decoration, even its dimensions, told us something about how Yahweh would reconcile us to Himself. Therefore, by telling us to make our offerings *only* at the “door of the Tabernacle,” He is telling us in no uncertain terms that everything we do “for Him” is to be done in the context of His revealed plan. That plan begins and ends with Yahshua and His sacrifice (the altar and the ark of the covenant). It involves our cleansing (the bronze laver), His provision for our every need (the table of showbread), our part in spreading the light of His truth to the world (the seven-branched lamp), and His desire that we would communicate with Him through prayer (the altar of incense).

- (804) *Understand the difference between defective and unclean.* **“All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to Yahweh your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock. You and your household shall eat it before Yahweh your God year by year in the place which Yahweh chooses. But if there is a defect in it, if it is lame or blind or has any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to Yahweh your God. You may eat it within your gates; the unclean and the clean person alike may eat it, as if it were a gazelle or a deer.”** (Deuteronomy 15:19-22) We saw (in Mitzvah #459) that Yahweh required the firstborn of “clean” animals and men alike to be set apart to Him, for the status of being “firstborn” was a symbol of the right to wield authority. The lesson is that the authority, power, and rights we possess by virtue of having been created in the “image and likeness of God” must be surrendered to Yahweh if we wish to share a relationship with Him. We *can* choose to retain this authority for ourselves, of course, but this will make us responsible for redeeming ourselves—something that God knows cannot be done. He would spare us

the consequences of this inevitable failure, for He loves us. But He will not force us to do things His way. The choice is ours.

However, defective animals were not to be sacrificed, even if they were firstborn males. These flawed beasts are analogous to the people who choose not to acquiesce their authority to Yahweh. If they could comprehend their condition, they might think, “I have escaped death! I may be blind or lame, deaf or diseased, but by golly, I’m free to live out my life the way I want to.” But they haven’t escaped death; they’ve only postponed it. What *have* they escaped? The “inconvenient” relationship their unblemished cousins share with God. The defectives might protest, “Some escape *that* is: they end up on the dinner table—as the main course.” I’ll admit, it’s counterintuitive. Paul explains: **“I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”** (Galatians 2:19-20) Huh? We become *alive* by *dying* vicariously in/through/with the Messiah? To the defective firstborn, it sounds like nonsense. But to us who have been made alive, the truth is self-evident (which doesn’t make it any easier to explain). Life (evolutionary hypothesis notwithstanding) originates with Yahweh. But we are not truly alive—in the eternal, spiritual sense—until and unless we have been absorbed, assimilated, become *part of* the God who made us.

And what was that about the firstborn sacrifice being available to **“the unclean and the clean person alike?”** Yahweh is telling us about what Paul called **“the life which I now live in the flesh.”** Although the firstborn sacrifice that redeems us (i.e., Yahshua) must be perfect, and we achieve perfection vicariously through association with His death, one need not first become “clean” in order to avail himself of the benefits provided to us by this sacrifice. The Hebrew word used so often to indicate a state of uncleanness, defilement, or personal impurity is *tame*. It indicates a state, not a behavior; that is, it describes our fallen position as children of Adam, not our guilt as individual sinners. Yahweh employed *tame* as a metaphor for the human condition, defining it in the Torah with a broad range of events (usually related to common biological functions) that would ceremonially “defile” a person, temporarily disqualifying him from participation in certain activities that spoke symbolically of fellowship with God. The point is that here in the law of the firstborn sacrifice, one needn’t be “clean” *already* when asking Yahweh to make him perfect—like my wife insisting the dishes be spotless *before* we run the dishwasher. God is willing to repair our defects, if only we’ll come to Him in faith. Remember, in the Tabernacle, we encounter the altar (where the blood of

sacrifice is shed) *before* we reach the laver (where cleansing occurs). When Yahweh is finished with us, we'll be both perfect *and* clean.

- (805) *Be consistent in the observation of Yahweh's precepts. "Thus it shall be done for each young bull, for each ram, or for each lamb or young goat. According to the number that you prepare, so you shall do with everyone according to their number. All who are native-born shall do these things in this manner, in presenting an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to Yahweh."* (Numbers 15:11-13) The "thus" refers to verses 4-10 (which we reviewed in Chapter 12 of Volume I)—where the principle was presented that grain offerings (*minha*) and drink oblations (*nesek*) were to accompany every burnt offering (*olah*) and peace offering (*selem*). These, you'll recall, were the two types of offerings that were completely voluntary, given as pure homage to Yahweh, as an outpouring of thankfulness, or to punctuate a vow being made before Him. A different amount of grain and wine was specified for each type of sacrificial animal, in rough proportion to its size. The instructions were precise and specific, meant to be followed consistently the same way every time a burnt offering or peace offering was made—for Yahweh's love for us is as constant and unchanging as it is varied in its manifestation.

The *minha* and *nesek* were prophetic of the coming Messiah, as were the blood sacrifices they accompanied. To review: the grain offering speaks of Yahweh's provision for our needs—the foremost of which is reconciliation with our Creator. The *minha* was always to be presented with a specific amount of olive oil, symbolic of the *Ruach Qodesh* who permeates the lives of believers, comforting, convicting, and providing for us "all things that pertain to life and godliness." And the wine of the *nesek* or drink offering is a transparent metaphor for the blood of Yahshua, shed for the remission of our sins. These should be familiar and obvious symbols to all of us by now.

What isn't so obvious is the restriction shoehorned in there sideways: the people who were to observe this precept are described as "**all who are native-born.**" This isn't a "get out of compliance free" card for Jews whose parents have been thrown out of the Land for bad behavior, bereft of their Temple and priesthood—who now couldn't conform to the letter of the Torah even if they wanted to. (Our first clue that something else is afoot here comes from the realization that when the precept was given, the Israelites hadn't yet crossed the Jordan. There was no such thing as an Israelite who was "native-born" in the Land.) As happens so often, though, we'll have to get into our Hebrew lexicons to see what God is trying to teach us. "Native-born" is the Hebrew noun *'ezrah*. The surprise is its root

verb, *zarah*, which means “to arise, rise up, or shine.” Thus the east, the place of the sunrise, is called *mizrah*, and *'ezrah* is one who arises (*zarah*) out of the land (*eretz*), hence, a native. But consider the use of our root word in this millennial passage from Isaiah: **“Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of Yahweh is risen (*zarah*) upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people. But Yahweh will arise (*zarah*) over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising (*zarah*, the noun based on *zarah*).”**

(Isaiah 60:1-3) What’s being said in our Precept then, ever so subtly, is this: offerings of praise and homage to Yahweh are to reflect the sacrifice of Yahshua the Messiah in the heart of the worshipper. This is reality for people who have a personal relationship with God through His Son, people over whom “the glory of Yahweh is risen” and upon whom “His glory will be seen.” But those who refuse to receive the light of Yahweh into their lives cannot “arise and shine.” Their light has *not* come, for they dwell in darkness. Their offerings are subsequently *not* a “sweet aroma to Yahweh” but rather an offensive stench in His nostrils. They shouldn’t have bothered trying to “butter up” God. Their butter has turned rancid.

- (806) *One law applies to all.* **“If a stranger dwells with you, or whoever is among you throughout your generations, and would present an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to Yahweh, just as you do, so shall he do. One ordinance shall be for you of the assembly and for the stranger who dwells with you, an ordinance forever throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the stranger be before Yahweh. One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you.”** (Numbers 15:14-16) Because Yahweh chose to reveal His plan of redemption through the nation of Israel, some have gotten the idea that salvation is only for the Jews—that one must first become a Jew and keep the Torah if he is to taste the mercy of God. Passages like this one seem at first glance to support that view. And in the absence of any conflicting instruction, this position might seem a rational and logical extrapolation to make. But there *is* conflicting instruction. It’s not contradictory, mind you, but there is another side to this—and we must consider the whole body of scriptural instruction if we hope to arrive at the truth.

Let’s look at the historical background. The crowd who left Egypt under Moses’ leadership were not all Israelites. They are described in Exodus 12:38 as a “mixed multitude.” The vast majority were Israelites, but there were a few gentiles among them. Some were serious about adopting the ways of Yahweh—the mighty Caleb was apparently one such individual, a Kenizzite (i.e., an Edomite; cf. Joshua 14:6) who had attached himself to the tribe of Judah. But some among the mixed multitude were merely a gentile rabble who had seized upon the Passover

opportunity to escape from Pharaoh's iron-fisted tyranny. It was these who first complained about the lack of dietary variety in Yahweh's miraculous provision of manna (cf. Numbers 11:4). Whether dedicated to Yahweh or mere opportunists, these "strangers" among Israel are now being informed that if they wish to live before Yahweh and among His people, His precepts and instructions will apply to them just as they do to the chosen race. One size fits all.

Unfortunately, we have scant information concerning individual gentile believers in the Old Covenant Scriptures. While the prophecies predicting the eventual redemption of the gentile nations (as in the Isaiah 60 passage we quoted above) are numerous indeed, there are few examples of gentile saints in the Old Testament, and we are given only circumstantial evidence concerning their adherence, if any, to the Torah. Rahab, the heroic harlot of Jericho, and Ruth, the faithful Moabite widow, assimilated into Israelite society so thoroughly they both show up in Yahshua's family tree. On the other hand, Naaman, the cured Syrian leper, and the Sidonian widow who fed Elijah (the prophet who subsequently raised her only son from the dead) were mentioned prominently by Yahshua (in Luke 4:24-27) as examples of gentiles who had shown more faith than anyone in Israel, but we have no indication that either of these folks attempted any sort of Torah observance. Then we have the disturbing example of Uriah the Hittite, a gentile who was by all accounts a faithful and devoted worshiper of Yahweh, a valiant soldier for His cause, who was betrayed and murdered by no less a Biblical hero than King David, a guy who was described as "a man after God's own heart." Ouch.

The final laying to rest of the "you've-gotta-become-a-Jew first" theory is presented in Acts 15, where the new gentile believers in Yahshua were told by the council in Jerusalem that they would not have to "be circumcised and keep the law." When they heard the news, the gentiles "rejoiced over its encouragement." And why had the leaders of the ekklesia determined this to be the proper course? Because these gentile believers, having come to faith, had been given the Holy Spirit—long before any of them had even considered keeping the Torah. Their trusting belief in God's promise of salvation had been counted as righteousness, just as Abraham's faith had so many years before.

So where does that leave our Precept? Has it been abrogated? No, for the simple reason that the keeping of the Torah has never saved anyone, Jew or gentile, nor was it designed to. As Peter had put it to the Jerusalem council, **"Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the [gentile] disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"** (Acts 15:10) The

point of the Precept is simply this: there is but one path to God. It is not determined by one's religion or cultural heritage, but it is defined by something that can look quite similar: *what one believes, whom one trusts*. Where our salvation is concerned, there is no difference between Israel and the gentiles. The very Law of offerings that both the Israelites and the gentile "strangers" living among them were instructed to observe proclaimed the coming Messiah between every line—His sinless life and selfless sacrifice. That is why Yahshua could declare, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."** (John 14:6)

TRESPASS OFFERINGS: CASES IN POINT

- (807) *The spiritual status of your victim can affect your punishment.* **"Whoever lies carnally with a woman who is betrothed to a man as a concubine, and who has not at all been redeemed nor given her freedom, for this there shall be scourging; but they shall not be put to death, because she was not free. And he shall bring his trespass offering to Yahweh, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, a ram as a trespass offering. The priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering before Yahweh for his sin which he has committed. And the sin which he has committed shall be forgiven him."** (Leviticus 19:20-22) Yahweh isn't condoning slavery here, but He is once again using it as a teaching aid, employing a cultural situation to demonstrate a spiritual truth. In other words, just because we don't have concubines any more in our society (or the means to present trespass offerings to Yahweh, for that matter), we aren't free to ignore what Yahweh is saying to us.

We need to sort out the symbols in order to get to the heart of the matter. The nature of the offense is sexual contact with someone you're not married to, but with a twist. Normally, this kind of thing would fall under another precept, either (1) rape (the penalty for which is death); (2) adultery, i.e., sexual relations with someone legally joined to another (the penalty for which is also death); or (3) fornication, i.e., sex with someone *not* promised to another (the penalty for which is the payment of a dowry, accompanied, if the woman's father allows it, by marriage with no possibility of parole—no divorce, for any reason, *ever*).

The twist here is the status of the woman: she is (1) a slave, human property belonging to another man; and (2) betrothed, that is, engaged to be married (tantamount to being legally married, though the marriage has not been consummated), whether to her owner, her owner's son, or to a third party, e.g., another slave. The word translated "concubine" in our text (*shiphchah*) really just means "maid-servant," but the supporting

description (that she “has not at all been redeemed nor given her freedom”) makes it clear that she is a slave, and not merely hired help.

This distinction is important to comprehend, for sexual contact is a ubiquitous metaphor in scripture for spiritual relationships. Israel is portrayed time and again as Yahweh’s unfaithful wife because of her liaisons with Ba’al and other false gods; Paul speaks of the ekklesia as Yahshua’s spotless bride: **“For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”** (II Corinthians 11:2) Yahweh refuses to share our affections. He loves us, and wants us all for Himself—an exclusive, monogamous, lifelong, unswervingly faithful relationship. What, then, does our text’s reference to the violated concubine mean? I believe it is a metaphor for people who are *already* in spiritual bondage, “owned” by someone other than Yahweh. “Lying carnally” with someone in this state is thus a picture of presenting *someone else’s* false doctrine to them. Example: a Muslim is told by a Catholic priest that he must accept the authority of the Pope. Or, a Catholic converts to the Mormon faith (or Jehovah’s Witnesses, or Orthodox Judaism, or *you fill in the blank*) in the belief that this other religion is the road to salvation. We’re talking about jumping out of the frying pan into another frying pan. The “concubine’s” position may have changed, but it has not improved. She is still a slave, still in bondage, still in need of redemption. The only solution that would have actually helped her would have entailed her marriage to Yahshua, clothed in a wedding garment of pure light, with a bridal gift of her freedom from slavery to sin. But the false lover/rapist/seducer has only made a bad situation worse.

However, we’re only halfway done with the precept. Unlike the case of the common “adulterer,” the seducer isn’t guilty of his victim’s spiritual downfall, since she was already in bondage. You can’t murder a corpse, though it is possible to desecrate one. So his life is not forfeit, but he is to be punished—“scourged.” Forgiveness is possible (though by no means automatic) in this case. Upon repentance, a trespass offering (the *asham*, appropriate for “mistakes”) may be brought. The ram of the trespass offering, of course, is actually Yahshua the Messiah. His blood alone atones for our trespasses at “the door of the Tabernacle”—the Plan of God. How does this work? Perhaps the best example we have of a repentant “concubine seducer” is the Apostle Paul, a Pharisee who ceased trying to convert pagans to rabbinical Judaism and began leading them to the Messiah instead. I know of former Mormons, former Catholics, and even a few former Muslims, who no longer lead the lost astray but now serve Yahweh with gratitude and commitment. Their sins have been

atoned by the blood of Yahshua. No longer do they “seduce concubines.” Now they “present them as chaste virgins to Christ” if they can.

- (808) *Things given to Yahweh are His, and are not to be “retasked.”* “If a man eats the holy offering unintentionally, then he shall restore a holy offering to the priest, and add one-fifth to it. They shall not profane the holy offerings of the children of Israel, which they offer to Yahweh, or allow them to bear the guilt of trespass when they eat their holy offerings; for I Yahweh sanctify them.” (Leviticus 22:14-16) God keeps His promises, and He expects us to do the same. Things we have dedicated to Yahweh are Yahweh’s, and that includes intangibles like our time and service. We are not to make promises to Him we can’t or won’t keep (nor does He ask us to). In Israel under the Torah, of course, it was possible to make “mistakes” concerning intended offerings. Most everybody’s wealth consisted of agricultural increase, whether animals or crops. A farmer who had set aside a lamb because it was a firstborn male, for instance, might find it on his dinner table some evening, ’cause one sheep looks pretty much like another, and somebody goofed. The divine solution falls somewhere in between slitting your wrists and shrugging it off. Yahweh, in short, knows we’re as fallible as He is holy.

Once the worshiper realizes his error, he is to rectify it by replacing what was “eaten” by mistake, and add twenty percent to it. This is more than just a penalty for having encroached upon what belonged to Yahweh. It’s a reminder of our humanity, for the total comes out to six fifths of the original offering—six being the number of sinful man, falling short of God’s perfection. The point, reiterated four times in these two short sentences, is that the offerings we make to Yahweh are *holy*. That is, they are set apart for His exclusive use and purpose. They’re not a “slush fund” we can feel free to dip into when we find ourselves with too much month left at the end of our money. (How did I know what you were thinking? Because I’ve thought the same thing myself from time to time. I’m preaching to the mirror here.)

The reason He considers our offerings holy is that *His* offering—Yahshua—was holy. Though mortal like we are, there was no confusion or divided purpose in His approach to the task He came to fulfill. We’re told His adoptive father, Joseph, was a carpenter (or perhaps a stonemason), so we can presume that as a youth Yahshua was taught the same trade. I realize we’re reading between the lines here, but it’s pretty clear that from the time Yahshua was old enough to pick up a hammer, His unwavering attitude was that He “must be about His father’s business,” as He told the learned teachers in Jerusalem (Luke 2:49). But

He wasn't talking about Joseph's business; He was talking about Yahweh's. Did He, as a twenty-something journeyman craftsman, go to work in the morning, build things, and earn money to help support His earthly family until He began His teaching ministry? Most certainly. But His thoughts, His plans, and His focus, were always on His *real* job.

And what is the application for us today? What are we to learn from this? As Yahweh's offering turned out to be Himself—Yahshua, God incarnate—*our* offering, in the end, must also be *ourselves*. Once set apart for Yahweh's glory, we are not to be “retasked” to some other purpose. Following Yahshua's example, our single-mindedness in Yahweh's cause does not preclude our earning a living, materially supporting ourselves and our families. He knows we have needs, and He has promised to meet them if we'll only seek His kingdom first. But although we have to work *in* the world, we don't have to work *for* it. What is a man to do, then, if he wakes up one morning only to realize that he has lost focus and “unintentionally eaten the holy offering,” that which had been dedicated to Yahweh? That is, what if he comes to appreciate that he has inadvertently reneged on his whole-hearted devotion to Yahweh, chasing instead the “good life,” the “American dream,” or whatever you want to call it? (Don't look so pious: we've all been there.) He is to “**restore a holy offering to the priest** [read: Yahshua], **and add one-fifth to it.**” In other words, he is to unconditionally render his humanity to the service of Yahweh (just as Yahshua did). To fail to do so is to “**profane the holy offering.**”

THE TITHE

- (809) *The tithe is based on one's increase. “You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year.”* (Deuteronomy 14:22) We discussed what the Torah had to say about tithing in Chapters 10 and 11 of Volume I. Somehow, Maimonides missed much of the salient teaching on the subject, failing to reference significant passages (like this one in Deuteronomy 14:22-27) and shamelessly tilting what he did find to the advantage of the rabbinical class. So let's take the opportunity to examine Moses' recounting of the topic for the generation about to enter the Promised Land, with an eye toward filling in the spots we might have missed. The Hebrew word translated “tithe” is *'asar*, a verb derived from the number ten: i.e., to “tenth” something. Not coincidentally, its consonant root (that is, without the vowel pointing) is identical to *'ashar* (to be or become rich) and *'osher* (wealth or riches). Simply stated, the Israelites were instructed to tithe, that is, to render back to Yahweh one

tenth of whatever they had increased in their agricultural wealth, year by year.

We've seen this principle before, but it bears repeating: the tithe was based on the increase that Yahweh had *already* provided—past tense. The concept of “increase” seems simple enough, but there are some fascinating lessons in the linguistics of the word. *Tebua* indicates one's produce or increase, his harvest, gain, or yield. The word is sometimes used poetically in scripture, as when a personified “Wisdom” says, “**My fruit is better than gold, yes, than fine gold, and my revenue [*tebua*] than choice silver.**” (Proverbs 8:19) Or “**Great wealth is in the house of the righteous, but trouble is in the income [*tebua*] of the wicked.**” (Proverbs 15:6) It may seem strange at first glance, but *tebua* is based on the Hebrew word *bo'*, the fourth most oft occurring verb in the Old Testament. It means “to go in, arrive, come to, or enter,” as in “**Blessed is He who comes [*bo'*] in the name of Yahweh.**” (Psalm 118:26) The “increase” that Yahweh has provided us, then, is all prophetic on some level of the ultimate expression of benefit to us—our Messiah. It is only fitting that we reciprocate the blessing, as we've been instructed to do.

One further thought: I was raised a city kid, but as the Last Days approach, my wife and I are trying to become “country folk” of sorts, hoping to be a bit less dependent on “the system” for the basic necessities of life. So we're planting fruit trees, growing veggies in back yard gardens, and so forth. Some like-minded friends of ours pointed out that some of the things they've planted—potatoes, for example—are expected (according to the research) to yield an increase of “ten times” what has been planted. It struck all of us, more or less simultaneously, that this says it all: *we invest by planting something in the ground. Yahweh provides a tenfold increase. Then He asks us to render back to Him only as much we were prepared to invest for ourselves in the first place—leaving us ninety percent richer in the bargain. And that's only after our crop has come in.* Who wouldn't want a God who works like this to run the world?

- (810) *Tithes and offerings are to benefit giver and recipient alike. “You shall eat before Yahweh your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to revere Yahweh your God always.”*

(Deuteronomy 14:23) Three parties were always involved in the Torah's giving process: (1) the giver—the one who had been blessed, whose flocks, herds, and crops had “increased” and who wished to answer Yahweh's provision with obedience; (2) the recipient—the one to whom the tithes or offerings were given: Yahweh Himself; and (3) the Levites—

the ones whom God designated as surrogate recipients, set apart from Israel with no inheritance of their own—a subset of which was the priesthood who ministered before Yahweh at the Tabernacle. The same sort of symbiotic triad exists today: Yahweh blesses the giver, who in turn shows his thankfulness to Him by supplying the needs of people He has put in his way—people whom He has designated as recipients.

I believe that's why Yahweh made a point of bringing all three parties together when the gift was given. The worshiper didn't *send* his tithe; he *brought* it. Three times a year every man in Israel was to make the short journey to "the place where Yahweh chooses to make His name abide," where the Tabernacle (read: the Plan of God) stood. Offerings like the *selem*, the firstborn offering, and the token of the tithe, were to be shared by the worshipper, the priests, their families, and Yahweh Himself (through the fat burned upon the altar). It was a big party. Everyone benefited; everyone was blessed. And today, even though there's no temple or priesthood, this triad of blessing still holds true: Yahweh blesses His people by providing them with "all things that pertain to life and godliness." We then respond in thanksgiving by supporting those few who have been precluded by God's express calling on their lives from earning a living in the normal manner—or those who find themselves in material need through no fault of their own—with gifts which will (or at least *should*) be seen as divine mercy by those whose lives they touch.

Any firefighter will tell you that a blaze can be extinguished by removing any one of its three components—heat, fuel, or oxygen. The influence of the Spirit of God can also be quenched (see I Thessalonians 5:19) by removing just one leg of the giving triad—Yahweh (the Heat), the giver (the oxygen, for he as a believer is indwelt with God's Spirit), or the surrogate recipient (Levites, i.e., God's servants and the needy "opportunities" He places in our path)—the "fuel" of our motivation. Obviously, nothing happens if nothing is given: the fire of testimony dies out if believers don't tangibly demonstrate their thankfulness. Yahweh is "removed" from the giving triad if our alms are given with the wrong spirit or motive (compulsion, self-aggrandizement, guilt, etc.). And what if the fuel turns out to be non-combustible? If the one receiving the offerings is inert to God's word, the flame of God's love will smolder and die, failing to provide its light and warmth. (Examples: an apostate cleric out to line his own pockets; a big "charity factory" that's more a business than a ministry; any number of "causes," worthy or otherwise, that aren't in line with Yahweh's agenda—Saving harp seals and spotted owls is a fine thing, I suppose, but not at the expense of human souls.)

- (811) *Tithes are not restricted to payment in kind.* **“But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where Yahweh your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when Yahweh your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which Yahweh your God chooses.”** (Deuteronomy 14:24-25) It wasn’t always practical to bring a tenth of the *actual* increase to Yahweh. If you had forty acres of wheat fields or grape vines, the weight of ten percent of your harvest could be far more than your family could carry to Jerusalem. So Yahweh provided a practical alternative: sell the crop (something you were probably planning to do with the other ninety percent anyway) and bring the cash proceeds to the Tabernacle. Today, of course, we are typically paid in money (i.e., some form of symbolic wealth that the society agrees has a specific value—in stark contrast to the barter system in common use in the bronze age). The “money” the early Israelite would have used, unlike ours, had intrinsic value of its own, being made of gold or silver, not paper and promises (or the more cynical analysis: debt and delusion). Nevertheless, the principle is the same: the tithe may be “laundered,” exchanged for its equivalent in some other form than that in which the giver’s increase in wealth was originally received. Use your imagination—but don’t enlist this precept as a way to rationalize *not* tithing. If you’re not thankful, if you don’t trust God to meet your needs, then don’t tithe—don’t give at all. Yahweh doesn’t need or want your money.
- (812) *Enjoy tithing.* **“And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before Yahweh your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household.”** (Deuteronomy 14:26) When the worshipper showed up in Jerusalem (or wherever the Tabernacle was at the time) to present his tithe, a token amount of it was used to celebrate before Yahweh. The worshipper’s family and the priests would get together and have a big barbecue—a party in honor of the God who provided the “increase” in the first place. They didn’t spend the whole tithe, you understand, for it was the remuneration of the Levites, and through them, the priests and the poor. But it is significant that the very first thing the money was to be used for was to facilitate the rejoicing of the community in recognition of God’s bounty. That should tell us something about Yahweh’s priorities. Why does God love a “cheerful giver?” (cf. II Corinthians 9:7) Because He wants us to **“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”** (Philippians 4:4)

You may be thinking to yourself, *“Easy for him to say. He’s got it made—lives in a nice house, drives a nice car, has a wife who’s stuck by him through thick and thin for forty years, and gets to sit around all day writing lofty platitudes about this God he serves. But I just lost my job, my spouse left me, my dog hates me, the truck won’t start, and I’m so broke I can’t even pay attention. And God wants me to rejoice? Yeah, picture that.”* I’ve got a better idea: let’s let the prophet Zechariah “picture that.” Here he’s talking about Yahshua’s Millennial kingdom, and the restoration of Israel subsequent to their national repentance. They *need* to be restored, Yahweh says, because **“For thus says Yahweh of hosts: ‘Just as I determined to punish you when your fathers provoked Me to wrath,’ says Yahweh of hosts, ‘And I would not relent, so again in these days I am determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear.’”** (Zechariah 8:14-15) How does He intend to “do good” to them? By turning their mourning into gladness, their sorrow into rejoicing. Where they used to fast and weep on the anniversaries of their greatest national tragedies, they will now, under Yahshua, rejoice! **“Thus says Yahweh of hosts: ‘The fast of the fourth month [commemorating the severe famine during the Babylonian siege], the fast of the fifth [the destruction of Solomon’s temple], the fast of the seventh [the treachery and flight into exile of Judah’s royal family], and the fast of the tenth [the commencement of Nebuchadnezzar’s siege against Jerusalem], shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.’”** (Zechariah 8:19)

You think *you’ve* got trouble? You don’t *feel* like rejoicing? Try walking in Israel’s rebellious shoes for a while. But as rough as their road had been, when they finally come to terms with what Yahweh has done for them (and for us), their mourning will be turned into thankful celebration. And that’s why rejoicing is to accompany our giving. In the end, our giving is nothing more or less than a picture—a reflection—of God giving to us. It is, like so many things in the Torah, a symbol of a greater reality, a means Yahweh employs to teach us about Himself. As Paul says, **“The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”** (Galatians 3:24)

- (813) *Do not forget who and what the tithes are for. “You shall not forsake the Levite who is within your gates, for he has no part nor inheritance with you.”* (Deuteronomy 14:27) Yahweh’s structuring of Israelite society is kind of a dare—with a lesson attached. We begin with a hunk of Land and thirteen tribes (including Joseph’s double portion). But the Land is not divided up among all thirteen, but only twelve—the tribe of Levi has been removed from the pool. Why? So Israel can demonstrate their trust in Yahweh—

who had *already* proved Himself worthy of their trust, in spades. He's challenging them to be good stewards of what He's already given them.

If you do the math, God is telling each tribe that instead of giving them 100% of their inheritance, He's giving them each 108.3%—thirteen shares divided twelve ways. The land, moreover, is a gift, something they didn't have before and for which they didn't pay. All they have to do is receive it in faith. (Yes, there are battles to be fought, but Yahweh has promised to fight their battles for them, if only they'll trust Him and keep themselves separate from the nations they're displacing, nations who have forfeited their right to the Land through their abominable satanic worship practices.)

For all practical purposes, then, each of the twelve tribes is getting its own piece of land, plus 8.3% of Levi's land to hold for them in trust. So (for you bean counters out there), all He's really asking of them in the law of the tithe is 1.7% of *their* annual increase. Bear in mind that *all* crops that grow on their lands are due entirely to the provision of Yahweh. In fact, He provides for all His creatures, including sinful man, without discrimination, rarely interfering (and then only with good reason and ample warning) with the natural processes He ordained at creation. As Yahshua said, "[Your Father in heaven] makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:45) Does any of this sound unfair or harsh to you? Does it sound at all like the caricature of a wrathful, vindictive, demanding God the world tries to paint? Yahweh says, "Give me *only* what I've caused to grow on the land that by all rights should have gone to my servants the Levites, plus less than two percent of that with which I've blessed you on your own land—land I gave you. If nothing grows, you owe me nothing. But if you get bumper crops, remember where they came from and Who you have to thank for them."

To put things in perspective, how loudly would you protest if the government suddenly announced that your *total* annual tax—including everything from income tax to Social Security to personal property and sales taxes—would from now on be only 1.7% of your income? If you made \$50,000 a year, you'd owe only \$850. Think you could live with that? Apparently, the tax rate during Yahshua's Millennial kingdom will be somewhere in this neighborhood: **"This is the tax you must give to the prince: one bushel of wheat or barley for every sixty you harvest, one percent of your olive oil, and one sheep for every two hundred in your flocks in Israel. These will be the grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings that will make atonement for the people who bring them, says the Sovereign Yahweh."** (Ezekiel 45:13-15 NLT) It's amazing how efficient government could be if it

wasn't spending your money on armed forces and police, disaster relief, welfare, social security, or interest on the national debt. In the Messiah's kingdom, none of those things will be needed.

And the Levites? How do they figure into all of this? Ask yourself this: what has Yahweh left in "trust" with us in the present age? If the Israelites were to act as trustees for the Levites' share of the national wealth, what have we believers in the church age been given for safekeeping? The answer is prophesied in the Levites' job description, that with which they were tasked instead of being given farmland in Israel: they were "appointed over the Tabernacle of the Testimony" and its furnishings (cf. Numbers 1:50). They were to carry it forth and encamp around it. The Tabernacle, as we have seen, is a multi-faceted metaphor for the Plan of God. So the neo-Levites are those who carry forth His Plan in today's world, who announce it, advocate it, and guard it. And who are represented by the "tribes" who were to support these Levites with the 8.3% of the "increase" on land that was a gift to begin with? These are all the believers who benefit from the labors and dedication of the neo-Levites, the new servants of God. I'll leave it to you to figure out which group you belong to, if either. But remember this: the Levites in turn tithed to the priests, who are (on another level) a symbol for believers in general. Bottom line: we are *all* to be invested in God's work, one way or another. This is no place for bystanders, innocent or otherwise.

OFFERINGS FOR CLEANSING

- (814) *Cleansing is neither free nor priced out of reach. "If [a woman who has given birth] is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons—one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean."* (Leviticus 12:8) It is never Yahweh's agenda to cause us financial hardship. But in hundreds of different ways, He instructs us that our cleansing, our atonement, is not free. In fact, it's so expensive only He could pay the ultimate price to reconcile us to Himself. Our sacrifices, then, are but shadows. We could neither comprehend nor identify with His selfless act if our purification cost us nothing. So here, the ritual cleansing of a poor woman who has given birth, something that would normally have entailed the sacrifice of a lamb, is given a mercifully inexpensive alternative. Two doves or pigeons—far less costly than a lamb—may be sacrificed instead. One was to be used as a burnt offering—pure homage to Yahweh—and the other sacrificed as a sin offering.

The classic example of this precept in practice, of course, is Mary, the mother of Yahshua. She was so poor she couldn't have paid for a lamb if her life depended on it (the wise men with their gold, frankincense, and myrrh were still a long way off), but she and her husband Joseph did manage to buy a couple of turtledoves, as required in the Torah and recorded in Luke 2:24. (The odd Roman Catholic notion that Mary was sinless is proved false here: one of the doves was brought as a *chata't*—a *sin* offering.) The irony is, as it turned out, she actually *had* “brought a lamb,” the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” More ironic still, since she couldn't pay for a lamb, the Lamb paid for her.

- (815) *We are declared clean before Yahweh, not before men. “And on the eighth day he [the cleansed leper] shall take two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and one log of oil. Then the priest who makes him clean shall present the man who is to be made clean, and those things, before Yahweh, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.”* (Leviticus 14:10-11) In Mitzvah #578, I referred briefly to the passage that will take us through to the end of this chapter. There and in the surrounding mitzvot, Maimonides was busy skirting the core issues concerning the Law of leprosy, spelled out in Leviticus 13 and 14. If you'll recall, the Israelite who had contracted leprosy and had been healed was to go before the priest to be pronounced clean, offering certain sacrifices. Now it's time to get into the details concerning these offerings. I should reiterate right up front that the phrases “**makes him clean**” and “**to be made clean**” are grossly misleading translations. The verb here is *taher*, and the connotation is that the leper (who has *already* been healed—Hebrew: *rapha*) is not *made* clean through this ceremony, but is rather being *pronounced* or *declared* to have been cleansed.

Leprosy, if you'll recall, is the Torah's metaphor for spiritual sickness, of which there are dozens of different permutations in our world—reflected in the wide variety of ailments and symptoms discussed in Leviticus. There was a formula involving cedar, hyssop, and scarlet that the leper was to follow during the first seven days of the cleansing procedure that verified his healing—the seven days prophetically referring to what happens to cleanse us during our mortal lifetimes. This precept picks up where we left off—on the eighth day—which I believe indicates that which follows our mortal lives: the eternal state. Our text provides a summary of what is to be offered (all of which, one way or another, speaks of Yahweh's cleansing work on our behalf through Yahshua the Messiah and the Holy Spirit.) We'll discuss each of these elements in turn as we proceed. For now, however, notice the circumstances of the ceremony.

The ex-leper, the one who has already been healed and is in the process of being pronounced clean, is presented by the priest to Yahweh at the door of the Tabernacle. To anyone attuned to what these symbols mean (as we all should be by this time) the ramifications are breathtaking.

We were once afflicted by a spiritual disease, one that kept us alienated from God and His people, made us odious to those around us, and would have, if left untreated, killed us in the end. We were brought to the priest—our great High Priest, Yahshua, who examined our affliction and verified that we were indeed spiritually ill. By Law, we were then required to live outside the camp, isolated from God’s people. Worse, we searched the Torah in vain for a cure, for no remedy is to be found in the Law. It’s not until we encounter the Messiah, Yahshua, that we are healed. Now, and only now, does the Law become of use to us, for it is at this point—*after we’ve been healed*—that its provisions facilitate reconciliation with Yahweh and His Congregation.

First, during our mortal lives (the first “seven days”) the priest who once declared us unclean (Yahshua) condescends to go to where we have been exiled, for we can’t legally approach Him in our ritually unclean state. Two clean birds are brought. One is slain within an earthen vessel over running water—a transparent metaphor of Yahweh being clothed in mortal humanity in the person of Yahshua, according to the living Word of God, and then sacrificed on our behalf. The priest then takes cedar wood (a symbol of our irrational pride), hyssop (our irrelevance apart from Yahweh) and scarlet thread (a picture of the indelible stain of our defilement), and dips them along with the second bird (the living one) into the blood of the slain bird. Finally, he sprinkles the blood on us (the cleansed lepers) and releases the live bird to enjoy its freedom. In other words, Yahshua has died so that we might freely live. He has taken our pride, our irrelevance, and our sin with Him to the tomb.

But now we come to the eighth day, the eternal state, where we, the cleansed lepers, are brought to stand before Yahweh. Who brings us? Our High Priest, Yahshua, who by virtue of his sacrifice enjoys unlimited and unfettered access to the throne of God. (He *is* God, of course, but for the purpose of this illustration, He plays the part of our advocate and intermediary.) He stands beside us and declares that we are no longer defiled, leprous outcasts, but have been cleansed, made well, rendered fit to join the Congregation of Yahweh. Where does all this take place? At the doorway to the Tabernacle, which speaks in detail of the Plan of God we have followed—the *only* way God has provided for us to reach Him. And Yahweh sees us standing in clean, white linen garments in the

company of His Son, and asks (though He knows the answer) “What gives you the right to stand before Me?” And we (because we’ve been coached) reply, “I’ve brought **‘two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and one log of oil,’** all of which represent Yahshua Your Son, Your Spirit, Your sustenance. It is only by virtue of the blood of His sacrifice that we stand before You, cleansed and whole.” And Yahweh smiles and says, “Good answer. Welcome, My children.” Or something like that.

- (816) *Use the first lamb as a trespass offering in the cleansing process.* “**And the priest shall take one male lamb and offer it as a trespass offering, and the log of oil, and wave them as a wave offering before Yahweh. Then he shall kill the lamb in the place where he kills the sin offering and the burnt offering, in a holy place; for as the sin offering is the priest’s, so is the trespass offering. It is most holy. The priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering, and the priest shall put it on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.**” (Leviticus 14:12-14) The first male lamb is an *asham*, or trespass offering. If you’ll recall from Volume I Chapter 12, the *asham* was offered up for our mistakes, our inevitable lapses in holiness (in contrast to our bad behavior, which was covered via the *chata’t*, or sin offering; see Precept #818). The *asham* is acknowledgment of our fallen state, the human condition, a recognition that our most sincere efforts and dedicated devotion will inevitably fall short of God’s perfect standard. And since we’re still in the context of “pronouncing lepers clean,” we, by offering up the *asham*, are declaring our reliance upon the blood of the Messiah to inoculate us against error, just as it atones for our sin.

Notice next what the priest is to do with the blood of the trespass offering: he is to apply some of it to the former leper’s right ear, right thumb, and right great toe. This, of course, is going to seem like *déjà vu* to the priest, for he experienced the very same procedure during his ordination ceremony (cf. Exodus 29:20—Precept #754). Anointing the right ear with the blood of the lamb is a picture of the former leper’s hearing and acceptance of the truth (whereas the left ear would presumably symbolize listening to lies or heeding false teaching). Similarly, the right thumb indicates doing the right thing (as opposed to the wrong thing), and the big toe on the right foot would mean walking in the right path, not in the way of the world. In a very real sense, this means that the cleansed one is being made into a priest himself, in a way. Remember, this is all after the fact. He is already cleansed of his spiritual disease; he has already (as the symbols of the first seven days of his

cleansing process attest) been set free from his pride, irrelevance, and the stain of sin. Throughout eternity, he will henceforth enjoy unrestricted access to the throne room of the Almighty Creator. Not bad for an old ex-leper.

- (817) *Use the oil to anoint the leper in the cleansing process.* **“And the priest shall take some of the log of oil, and pour it into the palm of his own left hand. Then the priest shall dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand, and shall sprinkle some of the oil with his finger seven times before Yahweh. And of the rest of the oil in his hand, the priest shall put some on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the blood of the trespass offering. The rest of the oil that is in the priest’s hand he shall put on the head of him who is to be cleansed. So the priest shall make atonement for him before Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 14:15-18) Olive oil, as we have seen so often before, is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. We’ve seen it used as fuel for the menorah (the only light source within the Tabernacle), as a component of the priestly anointing oil, and mixed with the flour of the *minha* grain offering. But we’ve never seen it used like this. As in the previous Precept, we see the former leper being made by the priest into something of a priest himself—not of the Levitical order, of course, but an anointed priest nonetheless. The handling of the oil here, unique in the Torah, tells us something previously unrevealed about the Holy Spirit it represents.

As with the blood of the trespass offering (indicative of atonement through Yahshua’s sacrifice), the oil is applied by the priest to the cleansed leper’s right ear, right thumb, and right big toe—this time telling us that his words, works, and walk are all to be influenced and illuminated by Yahweh’s Holy Spirit. What’s unexpected is how the priest is to go about doing this. He doesn’t just dip his right index finger into the *logh* of oil (a container or unit of liquid measure about half a liter in volume), but rather pours some of the oil from the *logh* into his *left* hand, and dips into that to perform his ritual.

Whoa! Isn’t the left side symbolic of being “wrong” or “evil” when contrasted with the right? Yes, it is. Hence the revelation: before God’s Spirit can be of use to the leper, it must be placed into a flawed, imperfect container—a human body, mortal, frail, and subject to disease and death. The human hand is a less-than-ideal container, to be sure: it doesn’t hold much liquid, what it does hold is easily spilled, and the oil, even if one is very careful, is apt to leak out through the fingers. But whose left hand is in view? It’s not the leper’s, but the priest’s. That is, Yahshua the Messiah, in order to function as High Priest on our behalf, had to assume a less-than-divine form, a frail vessel that was vulnerable to attack, pain,

weariness, and temptation—just like ours. Now you know why He was forever wandering off into the hills to commune with God—He was replenishing and refreshing the Spirit who dwelled within Him, without which His human body would not have been up to the task set before Him. The next time you’re tempted to view Yahshua’s first-century advent as somehow “easy” for Him because He was “God in the flesh, a super-human character with super-hero capabilities,” remember that. He got tired just like you do; He felt pain and struggled with temptation. He became a “left hand” so you could be anointed with the oil of Yahweh’s spirit.

But this is the eighth day, and we lepers have already been healed of our spiritual affliction. So most of the oil is used elsewhere. With His right index finger, the priest sprinkles the oil seven times before Yahweh, as if to say, “the ministry of the Holy Spirit is complete in this person’s life.” Then the rest of it—about a pint—is poured lavishly over the head of the celebrant, as if to declare that in the eternal state the cleansed one will find himself *soaked* in the Spirit of God—to coin a phrase: baptized in it!

- (818) *Use the second male lamb as a sin offering in the cleansing process.* **“Then the priest shall offer the sin offering, and make atonement for him who is to be cleansed from his uncleanness.”** (Leviticus 14:19) The second male lamb is to be offered as a sin offering, a *chata’t*, which is similar to the *asham* trespass offering, but this time the cleansed leper’s own sins, his personal lapses in behavior, are in view. The point of offering both types of sacrifices is that we are not only condemned by our fallen nature (making us incapable of avoiding the mistakes that prove us unworthy to stand in the presence of a holy God), but we’re also damned by our own sins—things we can’t logically blame on Adam, our own bites out of the forbidden fruit, as it were. This sin offering, as always, is predictive of Yahshua’s atoning work on Calvary. It is a blood sacrifice of an innocent male lamb—the symbology is hard to miss.
- (819) *Use the ewe lamb as a burnt offering in the cleansing process.* **“Afterward he shall kill the burnt offering. And the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. So the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be clean.”** (Leviticus 14:20) The last sacrificial animal listed in verse 10 is **“one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish.”** Although not specified here, this is the only candidate left for the burnt offering, or *olah*, called for in our present Precept. This conclusion is bolstered by the further instruction to bring **“three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering,”** for every *olah* was to include a *minha* grain offering mixed with oil, reminding the worshiper of the provision of Yahweh through His

Holy Spirit. Also, the fact that the lamb is a female this time stresses the only component of the Messiah's human constitution that gets passed on to His followers: the Holy Spirit of Yahweh that indwelt and empowered Him, and promises to do so for us as well.

Normally, the *olah* burnt offering was completely voluntary, a spontaneous statement of one's homage to Yahweh. But here it appears to be commanded as part of the process by which the leper is pronounced clean. What gives? Is God making the *olah* sacrifice a condition for the leper's cleansing? No. Remember when this is taking place: the "eighth day," i.e., *after* the leper has been healed of his spiritual disease. The "cure" was provided when Yahshua took our sins upon Himself. But if we are to be pronounced clean before Yahweh, we must choose to avail ourselves of the cure. After all, it is possible to ignore the gift of healing we've been given and choose to remain "outside the camp," living like the other lepers, even though we no longer have to. The Monty Python comedy troupe once did a parody of this very thing, a hilarious look at the dark side of the human condition. A leper is healed by Jesus, but all he can do afterward is complain that his lucrative career as a street beggar has been ruined by this unwanted intrusion into his life—I mean, who'd give alms to an *ex-leper*? Now if he wants to eat, he'll actually have to *work* for a living.

Another anecdote (this one historical) will illustrate what our Torah precept is saying. In Luke 17, we are given the story of ten lepers who were healed by Yahshua. But of the ten, only one—and a Samaritan at that—came back to thank his Benefactor. The other nine presumably scampered off to fulfill the letter of the Law, presenting themselves to the priests at the Temple. But this guy, who didn't even *have* the Law, fulfilled its spirit anyway with his reaction to Yahshua's kindness: **"When he saw that he was healed, [he] returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks."** (Luke 17:15-16) This spontaneous outpouring of gratitude was the very *olah*, the burnt offering, that Yahweh had specified back here in Leviticus.

We are all lepers, and we have all been given the cure for our deadly condition. Who among us will (1) realize we've been healed, (2) return, i.e., turn around (read: repent), (3) publicly glorify God, (4) worship our Healer, and (5) give Him thanks? Only those who do will be pronounced clean before Yahweh on the eighth day, in the eternal state.

- (820) *Modify the leprosy cleansing procedure to accommodate the poor. "But if he is poor and cannot afford it, then he shall take one male lamb as a trespass offering to be waved, to make atonement for him, one-tenth of an ephah of fine*

flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, a log of oil, and two turtledoves or two young pigeons, such as he is able to afford: one shall be a sin offering and the other a burnt offering.” (Leviticus 14:21-22) As we saw above (Precept #814) with the Law of post-childbirth cleansing, it is never Yahweh’s intention to make His instructions an unbearable financial burden, though He does want us to know that our healing didn’t come cheap—it was purchased with the most precious substance known: the blood of an innocent Man. That being said (and notwithstanding the fact that not a single Israelite was cured of leprosy under the rules of the Torah until Yahshua arrived on the scene), the expense of providing three lambs was probably out of reach for most lepers. So, having established the principles and symbols for us to learn from, Yahweh provided a more affordable version of the cleansing rite as a merciful provision for the poor. Basically, the only difference is the substitution of one turtledove or pigeon for the male lamb of the sin offering, and another in place of the ewe lamb of the burnt offering (with a corresponding reduction in the amount of flour for the *minha*). Everything else appears to be the same.

“He shall bring them to the priest on the eighth day for his cleansing, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, before Yahweh. And the priest shall take the lamb of the trespass offering and the log of oil, and the priest shall wave them as a wave offering before Yahweh. Then he shall kill the lamb of the trespass offering, and the priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering and put it on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.” (Leviticus 14:23-25) The identical procedure as before (Precept #816) is followed with the lamb of the trespass offering. The same is true of the oil (Precept #817). “And the priest shall pour some of the oil into the palm of his own left hand. Then the priest shall sprinkle with his right finger some of the oil that is in his left hand seven times before Yahweh. And the priest shall put some of the oil that is in his hand on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of the right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the place of the blood of the trespass offering. The rest of the oil that is in the priest’s hand he shall put on the head of him who is to be cleansed, to make atonement for him before Yahweh.” (Leviticus 14:26-29) The difference for the poor man is the substitution of inexpensive turtledoves or young pigeons for the second and third lambs, the sin offering and the burnt offering. “And he shall offer one of the turtledoves or young pigeons, such as he can afford—such as he is able to afford, the one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, with the grain offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him who is to be cleansed before Yahweh. This is the law for one who had a leprous sore, who cannot afford the

usual cleansing.” (Leviticus 14:30-32) Since atonement is the goal, blood must be spilled, for the life is in the blood.

Once again we are confronted with God’s counterintuitive arithmetic. The cleansing (or the *pronouncement* of cleansing) has a cost associated with it, but that cost has no direct correlation to the severity of the disease itself. It doesn’t matter if it was manifested with a tiny blemish, or your whole face was falling off. They both carry the same onus and the same curse. In a manner of speaking, all have contracted leprosy; all have fallen short of the glory God requires of us if we are to stand in His presence. But among us lepers, some of us have been given great riches, and some not so much. That is, some are blessed to live in societies where God’s truth is freely available, where we can worship Yahweh openly and study His Word without fear of reprisal; others are not so lucky, for they inhabit a world of limited opportunities and suppressed truth. But blessed or not with such personal freedoms, all of us have been provided a cure for the spiritual sickness that condemns us. It is our choice to either accept and embrace the cure or not. The point of this Precept is simply that those of us blessed with opportunities to meet Yahweh openly are expected to respond in a manner consistent with our blessed status, while those who can enjoy only limited personal freedoms (or none at all) are expected to do only what they can “afford” to do. Some of us can shout the good news from the housetops; others can only scrawl their praise on the walls of the catacombs. But all of us, like the lone Samaritan leper, are expected to turn around and glorify God. We who do can look forward to an eternal anointing in the Spirit of the God who loves us.

Dates of Destiny: Past Perfect

I confess. I get impatient with well-meaning folks who are not only ignorant of certain Biblical principles, they're happy to remain so. I'm not talking about simply not realizing (yet) that some of God's Word has ramifications beyond its plain surface meaning—that Yahweh uses symbols and metaphors to communicate with us. We've all had scriptural epiphanies, where one minute we didn't "get it" and the next minute we did. Our lives as believers are a journey from darkness into light, and we all take the trip at different rates of speed. No, I'm talking about *willful* ignorance, a determination *not* to explore the Scriptures in response to questions that are begging to be answered. And why would someone do this? Because of what they've read *into* a few scattered verses, taken out of context, of course: a perceived admonition against inquiry—don't ask, don't tell, don't even think. Not knowing *everything* may not hurt you, but the fact remains, **"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."** (Hosea 4:6)

One of these areas of willful ignorance is the subject of Yahweh's schedule. If you're like me, you were taught that God plays His cards very close to the vest: "We can't discern anything about it," they say, because after all, Yahshua told his disciples, **"It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority."** (Acts 1:7) Or, **"But of that day and hour no one knows [literally, perceives], no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."** (Matthew 24:36) His point (in both places) was that we should not fixate on the hour of His return for His people, but rather that we should live our lives doing His will, serving in joy while remaining watchful. But it is too often taken as a command to ignore the obvious (or semi-obvious) clues Yahweh has left us concerning His schedule, His agenda, His plan, if only we'll open our eyes. Even these "proof texts," recruited to encourage willful ignorance, teach us something significant: the Father *does* have a schedule; He *has* put times and seasons under His own authority. But Yahweh exists outside of the restraints of time. The scriptural information explaining God's schedule, strewn from Genesis to Revelation, is there for *our* benefit and enlightenment, not His.

If you've read my book on prophecy, *Future History*, you know I believe God has given us far more information on the subject of His timing than most of His children realize. However, it is not my intention here to explore Yahweh's schedule *per se*, but rather to examine one of the basic tools He has given us with which to discern that timeline. Our focus in the present work is on the Torah, and more specifically, on those things within it that were not previously addressed in

our survey of Maimonides' supposedly definitive list of 613 Laws. This "tool" we wish to investigate is the incredibly significant annual festival calendar Yahweh instructed Israel to observe, along with other periodic rites. Where the Rambam mentioned these convocations at all, it was invariably in reference to the mechanical bits and pieces he could "safely" list (such as what to present as offerings) while remaining blissfully oblivious to what God was really telling His people. These seven annual holidays, along with the weekly Sabbath, are like God's "to do" list, a schedule of events in Yahweh's personal date planner. Through them He is delineating what He considers the seven most significant milestones in His plan for our redemption, as well as revealing the order of these events. We ignore this information at our peril.

Our first scriptural listing of all these holidays together is in Leviticus 23, but I'm afraid the terminology employed in our English translations to describe their nature leaves something to be desired. **"And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of Yahweh, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of Yahweh in all your dwellings. These are the feasts of Yahweh, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times.''"** (Leviticus 23:1-4) The word translated "feasts" has nothing to do with food or drink, as we today might expect. (In fairness to the King James translators, the word implied something a bit closer to the correct meaning in the early seventeenth century: it's the English language that has shifted.) The Hebrew noun rendered "feast" is *mo'ed*, which means an appointed time, place, or sign; a meeting or assembly convened by an authority. The Sabbath and each of these seven *mo'edim* of Yahweh, then, are meetings, scheduled and appointed by the authority of God Himself. They were to take place at a particular time and place, and each of them signified something He deemed of the utmost importance. Although these are commonly referred to as "the Feasts of Israel," they're never called that in scripture: they're the appointments ordained by Yahweh. As we'll see, they outline His master plan not only for Israel, but for all mankind, Jew and gentile alike.

Another word we need to examine under a microscope is the one translated (correctly, though the word is seldom used these days) as "convocation." It's the Hebrew noun *miqra*, meaning a calling together into a sacred assembly (which makes it quite similar in meaning to the Greek word we errantly translate "church"—*ekklesia*: a calling out). It also means "a reading" (as in Nehemiah 8:8), that is, the content of a written communication that is publicly uttered aloud—a rehearsal or recounting. It's based on the root verb *qara*, meaning to call, call out, or recite. Since "to convoke" means to call together to a meeting, we can see that the Hebrew words *miqra* and *mo'ed* are almost synonymous. The *mo'ed* stresses the fact of the assembly—its place, time, and significance, while

the *miqra* emphasizes its purpose—the information it is to impart to those who assemble. And of course, when we see the word *qodesh* (holy) used with *miqra* (as it invariably is when referring to these special appointments with God), we are reminded that these days are to be kept set apart from other days—separate, sacred, and consecrated: they’re *special*.

Thus we can now see that the very words Yahweh chose to describe these set-apart days indicate that they were to be more than mere “holidays” to be observed. Each *mo‘ed-miqra* was to be a sign, a prophecy if you will, of a specific momentous event in God’s plan for our redemption. Each one was a recital, a retelling, of something special Yahweh intended to do for us. The things He told Israel to do—and not to do—on these days are not self-serving, pointless religious rituals. They are, rather, a recounting or rehearsal reflecting what Yahweh was promising to do for us on each of these spiritual milestones. Every instruction is, in effect, a pledge made to humanity. God is saying, “Recite these My promises week by week and year by year throughout your generations, for they tell you how I’m going to reverse the very curse of Adam.”

FEASTING BEFORE YAHWEH

(821) *Demand freedom in the name of God.* **“Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, ‘Thus says Yahweh God of Israel: Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’”** (Exodus 5:1) I’ve always found it surprising that Yahweh wasn’t entirely straightforward with Pharaoh here. He didn’t say, “Let My people go, that they may start a new life with Me in another land, free from your tyranny and oppression.” His initial demand was couched in much less far-reaching terms. He gave Pharaoh the opportunity to grant a simple request, one that would not have automatically spelled political suicide for the Egyptian leader: let these people take a holiday, a short break from their labors, so they can honor their God for a season. He didn’t ask Pharaoh to do anything particularly difficult or politically dangerous—convert to the Hebrews’ religion or give them the right to vote. Just let them take a break in honor of Yahweh.

God gave no hint that there was a monumental appointment with destiny awaiting them out there in the desert. He didn’t use the word *mo‘ed* to delineate this “feast” to which they had been called, for this would have been an indication that there was *significance* to the release of the slaves—making this something no rational political leader in Pharaoh’s position could have condoned, no matter how much good will he wanted to show. Rather, the verb Moses used for “hold a feast” was *hagag*, which means to celebrate a festival, to make a pilgrimage to a holy place for worship in a festive atmosphere—in short, to travel to the site of

a big party. Going to Woodstock in 1969 might have been described as *hagag*. Pharaoh *could* have agreed with this request. I can guarantee that Joseph's Pharaoh, four hundred years before this, would have said, "Go, enjoy yourselves. In fact, let me supply some wine and cattle to make your sojourn more enjoyable. And while you're there, please ask Yahweh your God to bless my kingdom." But the times had changed. Yahweh perceived the arrogant hardness of Pharaoh's heart, but He had to ask—He had to give Pharaoh the opportunity to do the right thing, even though He already knew how he would answer.

Egypt, of course, is a metaphor for the world, the place of our former bondage to sin. To this day, the world doesn't wish to release people to go and serve Yahweh, even temporarily. The world feels threatened by our freedom because of their strange mixture of jealousy, denial, fear, and pathological insecurity. They are afraid to be free themselves, so they cower in bondage, making what they can of a bad situation, going so far as to call it "good," or at least normal. *Religion* is tolerated, because it implies (and often personifies) a state of bondage in the guise of piety or faith, but they remain suspicious of anything that even hints that real liberty might be possible through sharing a familial relationship with God. Our freedom in Christ is a constant and uncomfortable reminder to them that they live—by their own choice—in slavery. So they do whatever they can to prevent our bodily escape, though we have already attained liberty in a spiritual sense. But Yahweh says, ever more forcefully as the Last Days approach, **"Let my people go."**

- (822) *Recognize the holy convocations as Yahweh's. "Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: The feasts of Yahweh, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.'*" (Leviticus 23:1-2) These "feasts" (*mo'edim*—appointments) included the weekly Sabbath, seven annual "holy convocations" (*qodesh miqra'ey*), the Sabbatical year, and Jubilee, each of which was prophetic of some significant event or situation in Yahweh's plan of redemption. We will discuss these things in more detail in the following pages.

Christians today often brush off these appointments with God as mere "Jewish ritual," with no particular importance for them in a post-Calvary world. But this attitude is seriously flawed: Yahweh here declares that "These are *My* feasts." We thus ignore them to our own detriment. For generations after these instructions were given to Israel, only two of the seven annual *mo'edim* had any historical basis. To be sure, the object lessons inherent in these two (the initial Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread) marked a turning point, a national epiphany, in the life of Israel.

Before the exodus, they had been a rabble, a loosely organized assembly of Semitic clans with a common ancestral line, enslaved by their former hosts on the basis of biological prejudice and a lust for power. But after forty years under Moses' leadership in the wilderness, they emerged a nation, unified by one thing above all others—the recognition of Yahweh as the One true God. The first two *miqra'ey* gave them only a rough idea of what these special days on God's calendar were really all about—sacrifice leading to deliverance. Naturally, when they tried to assign historical precedents to the other five *mo'edim*, they obscured the real reason God had instituted them. Truth be told, the basis for *all* of these, even these first two, would be found in their prophetic nature, not their memorial significance. The events of the exodus, as momentous as they were for Israel, were only dress rehearsals for the spiritual drama that would be played out for the benefit of the whole world some fifteen centuries later on the hills of Jerusalem.

The events prophesied by the first four of Yahweh's seven annual *mo'edim* took place in 33 A.D. They are now in the history books (or would be, if historians really understood the world around them). From the way these four were fulfilled, we can confidently predict some things about the last three, those yet to be realized. First, they will be fulfilled on the specific calendar days mandated by scripture—the first, tenth, and fifteenth days of Tishri (the seventh month on the lunar Hebrew calendar, falling in September or October in the solar Gregorian system). Second, if the Levitical Law specifies a Sabbath celebration for a *miqra*, it will fall on a *natural* Sabbath (that is, Saturday) in the year of its definitive fulfillment. (This very thing happened in 33 A.D., when the Feast of Unleavened Bread fell on the Sabbath, as required, but Passover, the Feast of Firstfruits, and the Feast of Weeks did not.) This Sabbath circumstance is definitely the case for the seventh and final *miqra*, the Feast of Tabernacles, and it seems to be the case for the fifth *miqra* as well, the Feast of Trumpets, although I can't be dogmatic about that one.

Of more fundamental importance, each of the remaining three *mo'edim* can be expected to fulfill a divine promise of sweeping consequence, something on the same order of magnitude as the first four. To briefly recap these, (1) Passover marked the sacrifice Yahweh made to atone for the sins of mankind; (2) The Feast of Unleavened Bread predicted the removal of our sins from us; (3) The Feast of Firstfruits prophesied the resurrection of Yahshua from the dead, demonstrating His ability and intention to raise us who follow Him into a new life as well; and (4) the Feast of Weeks fulfilled Yahshua's John 14:17 promise (and David's Psalm 51:11 prayer) that whereas He had been *with* His disciples,

afterward He would be *in* them—manifested as the Spirit of God indwelling and empowering every believer. The final three *mo'edim* can be expected to deal with three other subjects every bit as vital to our eternal relationship with our Creator as these first four did.

- (823) *Rejoice in Yahweh's presence.* **"You shall rejoice before Yahweh your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite, who is within your gates since he has no portion nor inheritance with you."**

(Deuteronomy 12:12) God is really *serious* when it comes to our rejoicing. The verb used here (*samach*) occurs 95 times in the Old Testament Scriptures, the related adjective (*sameach*—joyful) 23 times, and the noun form (*simchah*—joy or gladness) occurs another 94. *Samach* means pretty much what you'd guess—to rejoice, be glad, delight in, be elated, to have a feeling or attitude of joy, mirth, or happiness—including, believe it or not, using alcohol (in moderation, of course) as a mood elevator. If that comes as a shock, you should be aware that the dour, grim-faced Christianity of popular myth—that Puritanical teetotaling killjoy attitude the world loves to hate and ridicule—is every bit as contrary to Yahweh's ideal as a self-destructive lifestyle of revelry and dissipation. God, in short, wants us to be genuinely happy. Who saw that one coming? In fact, as counterintuitive as it may seem, He actually promised to *punish* Israel's joyless, thankless attitude: **"Because you did not serve Yahweh your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom Yahweh will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you."** (Deuteronomy 28:47-48) Notice that joy, service, and gratitude are inextricably linked.

The context of our precept is the double-edged sword of instruction concerning where to gather for worship in the Promised Land—and where not to. The Israelites were forbidden in no uncertain terms to adopt the religious practices of the Canaanites, to worship Yahweh in the same way, or even in the same places, that the indigenous pagans worshiped their gods. Rather, they were to periodically gather as a nation in one central location that would be selected by Yahweh Himself—invariably called "the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide"—eventually revealed to be the city of Jerusalem. They were *not* to "rejoice before Yahweh their God" in corporate worship anywhere other than this specified location, for this was where the Tabernacle, and later the Temple, were. That makes perfect sense, since the pattern of the Tabernacle is an elaborate pictorial metaphor for God's Plan for the redemption of Man. The point is that following Yahweh's plan would give someone ample reason for rejoicing, but do-it-yourself modes of religious

practice—however pleasurable, culturally stimulating, or effective in smothering a guilty conscience, would inevitably lead to death. They were therefore not cause for rejoicing, but for mourning.

And who was to rejoice before Yahweh? Not just the landowner, not just his family, but everyone—rich or poor, bond or free, male or female, those specially set-apart for God’s service, and plain, ordinary folk. In the same way, the joy of Yahweh’s salvation is to be a reality in the lives of every believer, not just “super-saints,” religious professionals, or believers who find themselves especially gifted in some way. The joy, after all, is not a result of our circumstances or status, but is derived from what has happened “at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide,” where the Tabernacle tells its eloquent and irresistible story: Yahshua’s sacrifice has atoned for our sins and cleansed our life so that we might enter the Holy Place, see the light of God’s love, taste of His provision, commune with Him, and ultimately enter His very presence as beloved children. If *that* doesn’t put a smile on your face, you’re not paying attention.

THE SABBATH

- (824) *Don’t light a fire on the Sabbath. “You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day.”* (Exodus 35:3) The rabbis immediately jumped from here to the idea that you couldn’t cook on the Sabbath because it was somebody’s usual work. That sounds reasonable enough until you factor in Yahweh’s instructions for the Passover in Exodus 12. The lamb was to be killed at twilight, when the sun was about to go down, only minutes before the Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was due to begin. It was then to be roasted—the whole thing, even the head and the entrails. Do the math: you can’t roast a whole lamb in a few minutes. It takes hours, which means that although the fire would have to have been *kindled* before the Sabbath began, the actual roasting process went on for some time into the night. The Paschal supper would have taken place sometime between the time the Lamb was ready to eat and when the Death Angel came (at “midnight”—verse 29).

Yahweh is very careful in His choice of words, and He doesn’t make dumb mistakes. The point is that there’s something else going on here, and we need to get to the bottom of it. Why did he not specifically prohibit cooking *per se*, but rather the kindling of a fire on the Sabbath day? Why did He say that this prohibition applied “throughout our dwellings,” that is, where we live? The answer is bound up in the symbols—what fire represents, and what the Sabbath predicts. Fire in scripture is that which

judges, i.e., separates the good from the worthless, purifies by melting, and proves by burning. The picture is that of the ore of precious metal being melted in fire, allowing the impurities to float to the top where they are skimmed off and discarded. It is a picture of the means by which we attain holiness, of the process of our being set apart from the worthless dross of our mortal existence. Our works are the issue. Gold, silver, and precious stones survive the fire's trial; wood, hay, and stubble do not.

The kindling of such a fire, then, is a picture of the Judge's authority, His prerogative to instigate the purification process. Thus we read in the Psalms, **"Therefore Yahweh heard this and was furious. So a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel, because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation."** (Psalm 78:22) Yahweh is the Judge: it is He alone who is worthy to kindle the fire. Why was Yahweh "furious?" Why did He feel it was necessary to "kindle a fire against Jacob?" It was because they "did not trust in His salvation." I'm afraid something's totally lost in the English here—something that's subtle enough in the Hebrew. The word translated "salvation" is (pronounced according to Strong's lexicon) Yâshuw`ah (יְשׁוּעָה), i.e., it sounds identical to the Messiah's name—not "Jesus," but *Yahshua*. Note further that Yahweh rested on the seventh day—the Sabbath rules are meant to teach us about Him. That means, if we follow this to its logical conclusion, that Yahweh's "fire kindling," His judgment and purging of Israel (not to mention the rest of humanity), will take place *before* the Sabbath—before the commencement of the Millennial reign of Yahshua the Messiah. That's why they call the Tribulation "the time of Jacob's trouble."

The Sabbath speaks of the timeframe and the identity of the One doing the judging. From the fall of Adam to the commencement of the Millennial reign of Christ, mankind will have six thousand years (the prophetic object of the six-day "work week") in which to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," as Paul puts it in Philippians 2:12. That is, while we are yet mortals, our job is to exercise faith with reverence, for as Yahshua said, **"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."** (John 6:29) For the time being, then, our works are like gold in the ground: God may have to process a ton of ore to extract an ounce of pure metal, but He's willing to do that. In the present world (our current "dwelling place"), though we try our best to live pure lives, our success is spotty and imperfect at best. But on the Sabbath—i.e., during the final Millennium—the gold of our lives that was refined in the fires of purification, kindled by Yahshua during God's "work week," will at last gleam for His glory, having been purged and separated from all our worldly impurities.

(825) *Trust Yahweh to provide what is needed for the Sabbath.* **“Yahweh said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.” (Exodus 16:4-5)** There are several important lessons to be learned from the manna in the wilderness. It is, in fact, the quintessential teaching tool for instructing us about how Yahweh provides for us, both materially and spiritually.

(1) Manna was unfamiliar and unexpected, but it filled the need to perfection. The word, loosely translated, means “What is it?” The children of Israel were not in a position to plant wheat or barley as they journeyed through the wilderness, so God provided an ongoing 40-year miracle—“bread from heaven” as it were, nutritious, tasty, and fresh every day. The only thing it “lacked” was variety, for **“The blessing of Yahweh makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it.”** (Proverbs 10:22) The manna He provided was ideal for its purpose. To add “variety” would have compromised it in some way, making it somehow less than perfect—like adding a hip-hop movement to a Bach concerto. Still, we read that the Israelites complained about the monochromatic nature of the diet Yahweh had given them. We today need to take the hint, and stifle the urge to grumble when God’s provision seems to be falling short. In reality, He always provides exactly what we need. But sometimes what we need *most* is a compelling reason to talk with our Father.

(2) The gift of manna was participatory. That is, Yahweh provided it, but the Israelites also had to *receive* it: they had to go out and harvest it, bring it back to their tents, and prepare it as they would any raw grain. For six days a week, there was work involved: gathering the manna, milling it, getting firewood, kindling a fire, cooking, and cleaning up. On the seventh day, however, God would provide no manna, and man’s involvement would be limited to enjoying what had *already* been provided by God or accomplished by their own efforts. In the same way, our mortal lives in this age are characterized by a partnership, a division of labor. Yahweh does His part, and we are to do ours: that is, receive what He has provided—gather and use the manna. It’s not that our works have any efficacy in effecting our salvation, but what we do in this life confirms what we believe and identifies who we trust—whether Yahweh or ourselves. As James put it, **“Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.... As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”** (James 2:17, 26) In the sabbatical age to come, our faith will give way to sight, and our works will serve only as confirmation that we did the right thing, and trusted the right God, in this life.

(3) There were choices involved in what to do with the manna. God provided only the raw materials. It was up to the Israelites to decide what to do with it. As with any grain, they could make it into cakes, wafers, flatbread, or leavened loaves. (As an old Keith Green song put it, they could make manna bagels, manna-cotti, or ba-manna bread.) The point for us is that we too have choices concerning what to do with what Yahweh provides for us. Using the ingredients Yahweh has provided, some of us cook up tasty and enjoyable dishes while others concoct dour and tasteless recipes. What makes the difference? Today His manna consists of **“all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us.”** (II Peter 1:3) Some of us seem to be interested only in the things that pertain to “life,” that is, our mortal circumstance, but not with “godliness,” or vice versa. But a recipe made with only half the ingredients isn’t going to taste right. Others try to gather their manna inside their tents or outside the camp—i.e., somewhere other than where God has provided it—which is “through the knowledge of Him who called us”—Yahshua. And then they wonder why the bread they’re baking turns out to be inedible.

(4) There was always just enough. An interesting phenomenon is reported in Exodus 16:16-18. The Israelites were instructed to harvest one “omer,” of manna, about half a gallon, per person per day. But as it turned out, if they gathered more than that, they wouldn’t have too much, and if they harvested too little, that would somehow turn out to be sufficient for their needs as well. God’s provision of what we need “for life and godliness” is like that: He gives us, as individuals, precisely what we need, no more and no less. Therefore, if you find yourself “gifted” in some specific way, whether materially or spiritually, it should be taken as an indication that Yahweh has a bigger than average job for you to do, and He’s supplying what you need for it up front. It could be money, or the capacity for empathy, or spiritual insight, or any number of things. Conversely, if you find yourself shortchanged in some area, rest assured that’s not where God has asked you to serve. In my own life, I’ve also observed that my areas of gifting shift over time: when I needed money to keep a growing horde of adopted kids in braces, orthopedic shoes, and Christian schools, God made sure I earned a good living; now that my kids are mostly grown and gone, I’m on a short leash financially, but I can see God’s truth more clearly than I ever could before. Ten years from now, it could be something else entirely. A believer’s life is one grand adventure.

(5) You couldn’t ordinarily keep manna leftovers. The Israelites found out the hard way that hoarding manna didn’t work. You couldn’t gather a double ration of manna today if you didn’t trust Yahweh to supply your needs tomorrow, because the stuff would go bad overnight and stink up

your tent. You had to use what Yahweh provided, when He provided it. Yahweh was teaching us to rely on Him day by day: each day's provision was sufficient for that day alone. He would still be there on the morrow with precisely what we needed for that new day. This was why Jeremiah could write during the darkest days of Judah's history, **"Through Yahweh's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness."** (Lamentations 3:22-23) Yahshua was teaching the same truth when He said, **"Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."** (Matthew 6:31-34) But then He turned around and instructed His people to gather and prepare two omers—twice the usual amount—on the day before the Sabbath. And this time it stayed fresh. Read on...

(6) Whatever God provided, He did it during the work week, not on the Sabbath. We should not overlook the fact that Yahweh provides *for* the Sabbath—not *on* the Sabbath. The pattern was established as far back as the creation account: **"Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made."** (Genesis 2:3) Our salvation, our reconciliation with Yahweh, was accomplished during His "work week." There is nothing else left to be done, nothing we can add to make His work more efficacious. Furthermore, if we wish to avail ourselves of God's provision, we must do it before the seventh day begins. That is, there's a deadline—literally. Fallen mankind will have only six thousand years to "work things out" in faith, for when the Messiah reigns on earth during the seventh millennium, man will instead "walk by sight" in the light of His physical, corporeal presence. For the time being, however, faith is required: **"Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."** (Hebrews 11:6) If we didn't believe Him during the first six "days," we can't expect to reap the rewards of faith on the seventh.

(7) The sixth-day provision of manna was said to be a test. If we believe God, we will gather and use the "manna" He's provided now, while it's still available, for He has told us in no uncertain terms that it won't always be there. Call me an alarmist, but look at the prophetic clock: it is now late afternoon on the sixth day. If you haven't yet gathered the manna you'll need to sustain you through the coming Sabbath, if you haven't harvested the "things that pertain to life and godliness" that

Yahweh has freely provided for you, then please, wake up and receive the gift while there's still time! Don't assume it will always be there waiting for you, for it won't. Yahshua said, as He was in the process of doing His part, **"I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work."** (John 9:4) That hour is almost upon us.

THE SABBATICAL YEAR

- (826) *Prosperity will result from obedience to Yahweh's precepts. "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts...You shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother. However, there will be no poor among you, since Yahweh will surely bless you in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess if only you listen obediently to the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today. For Yahweh your God will bless you just as He promised you; you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; you shall reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over you."* (Deuteronomy 15:1, 3-6. vs. 4-5: NASB) It's easy to lose the train of thought here. The context is the instruction concerning the Sabbatical year, in which "Yahweh's release" would *by law* free the poor from their bondage and debt. The point, however, is that if the Israelites as a people would "listen obediently to the voice of Yahweh," there would be virtually no debts to forgive, for there would be no poor among them, no hardship, no people living on the fringe of society struggling to get by. This is not a contradiction to the statements both Moses and Yahshua made, saying "The poor you will always have with you," for they both knew that Israel would not "carefully observe the commandments" that Moses was handing down. Poverty was a prophetic *fait accompli*. But it didn't have to be that way.

The lessons here go far beyond the prospect of temporal prosperity for theocratic Israel. The picture being painted is almost beyond human comprehension. Imagine a society finding itself with nothing to forgive. Not just monetary debt, but moral debt as well. If everyone—*everyone*—observed the Law of God (which in practice boils down to "Love Yahweh with your whole being" and "Love your neighbor as you do yourself"), then poverty and crime would disappear. War would be unheard of. Substance abuse, marital infidelity, murder, fraud, and vice would evaporate. Covetousness, dishonesty, and hidden self-serving agendas would become nonexistent. Government budgets would shrink to a tiny fraction of their present bloated reality, for they would no longer be tasked with coping with the aftereffects of sin (or, let's be honest, with the very implementation of iniquity, the institutionalization of wickedness).

Sounds like a pipe dream, you say? Maybe, but this very thing is prophesied to be the prevailing character of the coming Millennial Kingdom of Yahshua the Messiah. The “prosperity effect” of obedience to God’s precepts will be absolute in Israel, but will also be endemic throughout much of the earth for a thousand years. Needless to say, that is not the case today, as a whole different group of prophecies, predicting rebellion, apostasy, tribulation, and turmoil, is being played out on the world’s stage, and will continue to be until King Yahshua returns to take His throne. The contrast between the two worlds is like black and white, night and day. But the only real difference is whether or not we **“listen obediently to the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today.”**

PASSOVER

The first of Yahweh’s seven annual *mo’edim-miqra’ey* (appointments and convocations) was Passover. We may at first find it odd that the “Law” passages of the Torah offer little instruction concerning this appointment outside of reminding them what day it fell upon (see Precept #834). In its introduction in Exodus 12, however, the Israelites were told to perform a detailed dress rehearsal for an event that would prove to have both near and a far fulfillments. Moreover, they were told to perpetuate this rite in their future generations as a memorial of their emancipation. But Israel’s release from bondage in Egypt was not the essence of the convocation, nor its fundamental reason for being. The historical events defining the original Passover would prove to be, in and of themselves, only a picture, a prophecy, of what the day actually signified—mankind’s release from the bondage of sin through the sacrifice of Christ.

- (827) *Kill the Passover lamb.* **“Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb.”** (Exodus 12:21) This is a detail worth noting: Yahweh would not slay the Passover lambs Himself, nor would Pharaoh or one of his false gods. Rather, the very people hoping to be protected by the shed blood of the lambs would have to sacrifice these innocent creatures—lambs who had been living among them like pets for the previous four days, having been specifically selected from among the flock for this “honor.” This act was designed to be personal, purposeful, and painful (not to mention prophetic). The guiltless Passover lamb, of course, was the prototype for the Messianic sacrifice to come: as John the Baptist would put it, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

An offering, by definition, is made by one who wishes to have an effect on—to influence, honor, or appease—someone whom they perceive is greater than themselves in some way. Thus we observe that the Passover lamb was more than just a meal. It was an *offering*, one whose purpose (as directed by Yahweh) was to demonstrate, to bear witness, that the household shielded by its blood was under His protection—because they had requested it. The same principles are true of the Passover lamb’s antitype. For Yahshua’s death to be efficacious in the removal of our sin, Yahweh (though He *provided* the Lamb) couldn’t offer Him up as a sacrifice (that is, it would not have solved our problem if Yahshua had committed suicide), for an offering must be made by the lesser to the greater. Besides, Yahweh had no shortcomings for which to atone. Nor could Satan (whose sins were ubiquitous) offer Him up, for Yahweh’s purpose was not to atone for the rebellion of our adversary, but rather for the sins of man. God therefore withheld His authority: Satan couldn’t touch Yahshua. That left but one possible agent: us, for our sins had separated us from our Maker. We were the ones in need. The atonement was for us. And the death kept at bay by the Lamb’s blood was our own. So we—mankind—would have to kill the Passover Lamb. And we did.

It’s incredibly ironic, if you think about it. The one thing we did right—that is, in accordance with the Torah—was the worst crime imaginable: killing the innocent Passover Lamb, Yahshua. Other, lesser crimes had already condemned us, of course. But Yahweh arranged it so that our blackest deed would shine the brightest light on our need for salvation, at the same time providing the mechanism for our redemption. That’s why Yahshua prayed, **“Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”** (Luke 23:34)

And you thought God was making this stuff up as He went along.

- (828) *Apply the blood of the Passover sacrifice to the doorway of your home.* **“They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it.”** (Exodus 12:7) **“And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin.”** (Exodus 12:22) The initial “celebration” of Passover would be the last time they could have observed it *as originally instructed* for the next forty years, for the tents of their wilderness wanderings had no doorposts upon which to apply the blood of the sacrifice. (They did, however, observe a modified form of the feast in the wilderness: see Numbers 9:2-3.) When Yahweh seems to be telling us to do something that’s physically impossible, it should be our first clue that the symbol it represents is what He really wants us to pay attention to.

We have seen that the Lamb ultimately represents Yahshua. What, then, do the “doorposts” and “lintel” of our house represent? It’s the cross of Christ, upon which “some of the blood” of the Lamb of God would be applied as He was sacrificed. It’s interesting that Moses didn’t say, “the doorframe,” but broke it down into its components, vertical and horizontal. Why? Because the Greek word we translate “cross” (*stauros*) doesn’t actually mean a “cross” (i.e., a tee-shaped implement) but rather an “upright stake or pole.” It therefore corresponds to each upright “doorpost,” and is analogous to the pole upon which Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, as Yahshua Himself pointed out in John 3:14. The “lintel,” then, would mirror what the Latins called the “*patibulum*,” the crosspiece hoisted to the top of the *stauros*, upon which the crucifixion victim’s arms would be outstretched. In the Exodus prototype, these two elements comprised the doorway to the Passover celebrant’s home; in the Calvary antitype, they are also a portal, this time to his permanent home—an eternal dwelling place in the presence of the Almighty.

The doorpost and *stauros* speak of the “vertical” connection, the reconciliation that is being established between man and God through Christ’s sacrifice. In contrast, the lintel and *patibulum* refer to the “horizontal” relationship between people of faith that is created through the same Selfless act—the formation of the *ekklesia* (the called-out assembly) of Yahshua the Messiah. Both relationships require the shedding of innocent blood, applied to the doorway that leads to where we live.

- (829) *Do not linger over the Passover meal. “And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is Yahweh’s Passover.”* (Exodus 12:11) The Passover meal wasn’t designed to be a particularly pleasurable, relaxed, or joyful experience, unlike some of the other *miqra’ey* on Yahweh’s calendar. The Israelites were to eat in haste, in a spirit of expectation and anticipation, prepared to bolt for the door on a moment’s notice like a sprinter on the starting blocks. It’s kind of funny, if you think about it. After four long centuries in bondage, it came down to one night of antsy watchfulness for the Israelites, after which they’d be shot out of Egypt like a human cannonball. Yahweh apparently likes to build the tension to the breaking point before He lets events unfold, knowing that when they do, they’ll fairly *explode* into place (a lesson that should not be lost on today’s prophetically pregnant world).

The watchfulness enjoined here is reminiscent of how we present-day believers are directed to live our lives. As Yahshua told His disciples,

“Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is [that is, the time of His return for them]. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” (Mark 13:33-37) We, too, it seems, are being told to keep “a belt on our waist, our sandals on our feet, and our staff in our hand,” in a constant state of readiness to leave this world behind at the drop of a hat. That’s going to be really hard to do if we’re “invested” in the things of this mortal life. Yes, as in the Passover meal, we can eat our lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs as time permits, but we aren’t to get too comfortable: we must be alert, ready to go the moment Yahshua calls us.

- (830) *Remain where God says it’s safe.* **“And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning.”** (Exodus 12:22) Another admonition for the night of the Passover feast—actually now (since the sun had set) the wee hours of the first day of the *miqra* of Unleavened Bread: the Israelites were not to go wandering around out of doors. They were to stay within the house whose doorposts and lintel had been sprinkled with the blood of the lamb. Why? Because outside was where Yahweh’s Angel of Death would be busy implementing His wrath. It was not enough merely to be an Israelite, for biological serendipity was not the criterion for receiving God’s protection. Indeed, there were a fair number of Egyptians (later referred to as the “mixed multitude”) who determined to heed Yahweh’s warning and stay indoors behind the blood-stained portal with their Israelite neighbors that night. One’s shelter and protection was based on Who he believed, not who his ancestor was.

In the same way, we today are vulnerable to wrath if we scoff at Yahweh’s warning and walk about in the darkness outside, unprotected by the blood of Yahshua sprinkled on Calvary’s upright stake and upon the lintel of fellowship. Consider the geography of the thing: the Israelites were in Egypt—symbolically, “in the world.” Yahweh was declaring their blood-spattered homes to be “embassies,” so to speak—a patch of heavenly soil set in the midst of a foreign country. We who dwell in this world under the embassy’s auspices possess diplomatic immunity, even though our respective nations are engaged in a cold war. Our Ambassador, of course, is Yahshua, who represents His “nation,” the Kingdom of Heaven, before the world. And we, the embassy staff, enjoy all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities associated with being citizens of the Kingdom. But our diplomatic protection in this foreign land is only as real

as our citizenship. If we are pretenders, if we are traveling through life on a false passport, the protection we assume to be ours is an illusion.

- (831) *Trust the blood of the Passover Lamb to save you.* “I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am Yahweh. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 12:12-13) “For Yahweh will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, Yahweh will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you.” (Exodus 12:23) There is a tacit precept latent in these verses: “You shall trust the blood of the Lamb to afford protection from the Destroyer.” It was a simple exercise in obedience based on evidence (in truth, the only kind of obedience Yahweh ever asks of us). The Israelites (not to mention the Egyptians) had seen Yahweh keep His word nine times by this point. Each promised plague had been worse than the last, each one calculated to destroy the reputation of one of Egypt’s deities. Their chief deity, the sun “god” Ra, had been the latest to fall, and still Pharaoh had hardened his heart. I get the feeling that the Egyptian king didn’t really believe in his nation’s pantheon anyway—religion was merely a convenient way to keep the masses subservient, obedient, and paying taxes. The real power, as far as Pharaoh was concerned, lay in the royal bloodline. On some level, he claimed the status of “deity” for himself, a position of ultimate lordship that would pass to his firstborn son and heir when he died. So Yahweh set about to dethrone the tenth and most tangible of Egypt’s false gods.

A clear choice was presented. Depending upon whether or not the people obeyed Yahweh in faith, they would experience one of two things: either the Destroyer would pass *through* their life, or he would pass *over* it. One might thus assume that the blood had been intended as a sign for the Destroyer, so he’d know which houses to pass over—to exempt it from wrath. But here Yahweh says that the “blood shall be a sign *for you*,” that is, for the Israelite believers. Since they weren’t supposed to be wandering around outside their dwellings during Passover, the only time they’d even *see* the blood was when they were applying it to the doorposts and lintels. At this point, the only sign they’d be able to see was their own faith. They’d done something totally illogical simply because their God had told them to: they trusted Him, even though they didn’t understand what He was doing, or how.

But fast forward fifteen hundred years or so to the definitive fulfillment of the Passover prophecy, and the intended train of thought becomes clear. (1) The Passover Lamb was to enter the Israelite “household” on the 10th day of Nisan (Exodus 12:3). Yahshua’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem took place on that very day, March 28, 33 A.D., fulfilling the Daniel 9:25 prophecy in the process. (2) The Jews were to slay the Lamb on the 14th of Nisan, which they did right on schedule by manipulating the Roman Procurator, Pilate, into crucifying the Lamb of God. (3) The Lamb’s blood was to be applied to the doorposts and lintels of Israel. These turned out to be the *stauros* and *patibulum* of a cruel Roman cross. (4) The blood was to be applied with hyssop, the same implement used to sprinkle the waters of purification in the ordinance of the “red heifer” (see Mitzvot #574-576), required for cleansing in the event of one’s contact with death (something Passover brings into razor sharp focus). Again, the sacrifice of Yahshua fulfills the Torah’s requirements perfectly. (5) The Israelites were then instructed to stay indoors, remain watchful, and trust the blood they themselves had spilled to be efficacious in protecting them from the wrath of God.

Since the blood was to be a sign for *them*, not for the death angel, it had to have far-reaching significance beyond the events of that first night. If it didn’t point directly to Yahshua’s sacrifice on Calvary—ultimately offering shelter for the entire world when the Destroyer would eventually pass through—then either Yahweh is a liar, or some other fulfillment is forthcoming. Israel *is required* to figure out what the definitive *miqra* of Passover signifies. Search all you want: history offers no suitable alternative explanation to Yahshua’s sacrifice.

- (832) *Do not forget what Yahweh has done for you. “And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which Yahweh will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ that you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice of Yahweh, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.’”* (Exodus 12:24-27) I have no axe to grind with people who wish to commemorate their nation’s history. But Jews today who insist that Passover has absolutely no significance other than God killing a few Egyptians so they could escape from slavery thirty-five hundred years ago just aren’t thinking clearly. Sure, it was a big deal at the time, and one might be inclined to see that bloody night as an earthshaking event to this very day—if it had led to permanent greatness for this nation of runaway slaves. But it didn’t. In reality, the times of Israel’s national prominence have been few and far between. In all of

Israel's long and turbulent history, they have enjoyed a combined total of *maybe* a hundred years of real glory—and none of it is directly attributable to this incident. In point of fact, it's a miracle of Biblical proportions that the nation of Israel even exists today—in any form. When asked to “observe this thing as an ordinance forever,” any thinking Jew could ask, quite reasonably, “Why? What have You done for us lately?”

The only possible explanation is that Passover *does* have significance beyond God's deadly one night stand in Egypt on behalf of Israel. Yahweh *has* done great things for them—and us—lately. It's easy to look at the prescribed response, **“It is the Passover sacrifice of Yahweh, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households,”** and conclude that the *Egyptians* were Yahweh's sacrifice. But actually, the innocent lambs (prophetic of *The Innocent Lamb*) were “the Passover sacrifice of Yahweh.” It was their blood that kept the Destroyer at bay. The Egyptians were little more than collateral damage—a physical picture of a spiritual principle, namely that whatever is not under Yahweh's protection cannot long survive. That's why observant Jews through the ages have slain and eaten lambs, not Egyptians, on Passover.

- (833) *Salvation is achieved the same way for both Jews and gentiles. “If a stranger dwells among you, and would keep Yahweh's Passover, he must do so according to the rite of the Passover and according to its ceremony; you shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger and the native of the land.”* (Numbers 9:14)
The message here is virtually identical to that of Precept #806 in the previous chapter. Here the principle is specifically applied to Yahweh's Passover. The point, here as there, is that Yahweh's ordained rites have significance beyond Israel; they bear consequence that is as universal as it is fundamental: we are all saved by the same thing, if we are saved at all.

Ignorance (or denial) of this precept has invariably led to two mirror-image heresies. The first says that the gentile “strangers” must become practicing Jews before they can enter the Kingdom of Heaven: their males must be circumcised, the signs of the Torah (such as the wearing of the tsitzit) must be observed, the dietary laws must be obeyed, and so forth. Acts 15 effectively dealt with that one, though its practitioners persist to this day, undaunted by scripture and reason.

The converse heresy is that Israel's heritage and function—and indeed, the Torah itself—has been eclipsed by church tradition. Though the ekklesia was populated almost exclusively by Jews in its early years, the treacherous triumph of Akiba's rabbinical system over Israel's priesthood in the first few decades of the second century effectively killed the church

in Israel, driving it so far underground it took the better part of two millennia to resurface. The animosity became a mutual phenomenon, evidenced by the precepts laid down by the Council of Laodicea in 364. A few entries will serve to demonstrate this:

Canon 29: “Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath [Saturday], but must work on that day, rather honoring the Lord’s Day [Sunday]; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.” I beg to differ: Yahweh never set apart Sunday as a day of rest, but specified the Sabbath as His weekly *miqra*, or convocation, and He never changed that. The “church” doesn’t have the authority to refute Yahweh, nor does it have the right to pass off human tradition as God’s Word. It’s folly to even try.

Canon 37: “It is not lawful to receive portions sent from the feasts of Jews or heretics, nor to feast together with them.” This, of course, contains a direct contradiction to our present Precept. Between the resurrection of Yahshua and His Millennial Kingdom, Jewish and gentile believers were supposed to be branches grafted into the same Vine.

Canon 38: “It is not lawful to receive unleavened bread from the Jews, nor to be partakers of their impiety.” By this time, the church leaders had defined “impiety” as anything they didn’t agree with, even if Yahweh Himself had ordained it. Not to be outdone, the rabbis had ransacked Judaism, leaving nothing *but* “impiety” in their wake. But God’s Word had decreed “one ordinance, both for the stranger and the native of the land.” That ordinance was Christ.

- (834) *Observe Passover on the day specified by Yahweh. “On the fourteenth day of the first month is the Passover of Yahweh.”* (Numbers 28:16) We’re used to national holidays where the actual *date* doesn’t really matter all that much. I mean, Independence Day in the U.S. may fall officially on the fourth of July, but if the big day falls on a Sunday, everybody is going to take off Monday the fifth instead, I guarantee it. The precise date of Passover, however, is of crucial importance—as are the dates of each of the seven annual *mo’edim* of Yahweh. Not only could it have been a fatal error if you’d killed the Passover lamb a day late or a day early—leaving your firstborn child vulnerable to the Destroyer—Passover and all of the other *miqra’ey* were prophecies of significant events that would transpire in future history, on the very days of their scriptural mandate. In the case of this first *miqra*, Passover (the 14th day of Nisan, which falls in the spring, in March or April on our Gregorian calendars) was commonly referred to as the Day of Preparation, because the actual meal (that of *Chag Matzah*, the Feast of Unleavened Bread) was eaten after sunset, technically the start

of the new “day.” And John 19:31 reports that Yahshua was indeed crucified on this Day of Preparation—Passover, the day before the Sabbath. Undoubtedly, this is why Yahweh stressed only the date, the “appointed time”—the fourteenth day of Nisan—here in Numbers 28, in Leviticus 23:5, in Numbers 9:2-3, and in Deuteronomy 16:1, hardly mentioning what the Israelite celebrants were supposed to do.

Are these dates still important? Yes, aside from the historical confirmation of Yahweh’s Word in the fulfillment of the first four *miqra’ey*. That’s because the last three of these seven milestones are still in our future. When their fulfillments are due on God’s calendar, they will come about on the very days specified in the Torah, just as the first four did. The next one on His schedule is the Feast of Trumpets, *Yom Teruah*, which I’m convinced is prophetic of the rapture of the church. It will fall on the first day Tishri (in our September or October) in some future year. Next on the list is the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippurim*, on the 10th of Tishri—indicative of the day the returning King Yahshua will be recognized and hailed as the Messiah by Israel (see Zechariah 12:10-11). Last on the schedule of holy appointments is the Feast of Tabernacles, prophetic of the day when Yahshua will begin His earthly thousand-year reign upon the earth—God “camping out” with men for the duration of the fulfillment of another of Yahweh’s “schedule” metaphors, the Sabbath Day—the last of seven millennia delineating the course of Spirit-enabled man upon the earth from Adam onward.

- (835) *Congregate in the place chosen by Yahweh when observing Passover.* **“Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to Yahweh your God, for in the month of Abib Yahweh your God brought you out of Egypt by night. Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to Yahweh your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where Yahweh chooses to put His name.”** (Deuteronomy 16:1-2) Every spring, Passover Seders are celebrated by observant Jews all over the world, in apparent compliance with this passage. They eat their lamb and unleavened bread and bitter herbs (along with a wide variety of rabbinical “condiments” that weren’t even mentioned in scripture) and in so doing, they think they are following the Torah. But if we read on for a few more verses, we encounter a startling clarification: **“You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates which Yahweh your God gives you; but at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt. And you shall roast and eat it in the place which Yahweh your God chooses, and in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents.”** (Deuteronomy 16:5-7) That’s right. Once the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they were forbidden to sacrifice the Passover lambs

anywhere but where the Tabernacle was—“the place where Yahweh chooses to make His name abide.” That means that today, according to the plain reading of the Torah, Passover Seders held anywhere but Jerusalem are illegal!

Once again, we are faced with a conundrum. By evicting Israel from the Promised Land because of their sins—not once, but twice—did Yahweh make it impossible to do what He required them to do? Has He callously “written off” entire generations of Jews, simply because they didn’t have access to their ancestral homeland—in effect damning them for the sins of their fathers? It’s roughly the same problem we ran into when we realized that they haven’t had the ark of the Covenant and its mercy seat with which to carry out the rites of the Day of Atonement since before the Babylonians destroyed Solomon’s Temple in 586 B.C.—meaning that if the Torah doesn’t point toward something greater, if it isn’t symbolic of a more comprehensive reality, then their sins have accumulated without atonement or forgiveness for the last twenty-six hundred years! Yahweh hasn’t *forced* Israel to recognize Yahshua as the fulfillment of these two prophetic types (and hundreds of others), of course. But He has placed Him firmly in the “strongly suggested” category. The Jews’ only remotely logical alternatives—the self-serving prevarications of rabbinical Judaism and mindless retreat into atheism—leave much to be desired (if you ask me).

On the other hand, if Yahshua actually was (and is) the Messiah, then a whole different paradigm is in play. “The place where Yahweh chooses to make His name abide” is in reality the hearts of Spirit-indwelled believers. (Did not Paul remind us that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit? And is not the temple God’s picture of His plan for our redemption and reconciliation?) Passover is “kept” there—in our hearts—through our recognition, acceptance of, and trust in the sacrifice of Yahshua on Calvary’s cross, for He is indeed “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

The second *miqra* on Yahweh’s calendar is inextricably linked with the first—so much so that in common Jewish practice and parlance, they are seen as virtually the same thing. It’s only natural: the lamb that was slain on the afternoon of Passover was eaten after sundown, that is, technically several hours into the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The fire that was kindled during the first *miqra* was used to roast the lamb on the second. The leaven or yeast that was removed from every Israelite home on *Pesach* was the very thing characterized and defined

Chag Matzah by its absence. One day could not be observed without the other, and they were, for all intents and purposes, seen and celebrated as one holiday.

But Yahweh was very careful to separate them in His instructions, to call them by different names and place them on different dates—though the second followed immediately on the heels of the first. It behooves us to ask why. If these days were purely memorial—if they spoke only of the events surrounding the exodus—then there would be no reason to distinguish them. But if they were symbolic of separate concepts, prophetic of different events that would prove crucial to God’s plan for our redemption, then we need to carefully consider what these things might be. We have already observed that the crucifixion of Yahshua took place on the 14th of Nisan, Passover, in the year 33—His death occurred at the very time the paschal lambs were being slain. This of course is a dead giveaway (if you’ll pardon the all-too-literal expression) to Christians that Yahshua’s sacrifice was the very thing the Passover symbolically pointed toward. Indeed, recognition of this fact is what most fundamentally separates Christianity from Judaism. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, then, symbolizes a different facet of Yahweh’s plan. Precisely what that is will become apparent in the next few Precepts.

- (836) *Observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the day specified by Yahweh. “On the fifteenth day of this month [the first month, Abib/Nisan] is the feast; unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work.”* (Numbers 28:17-18) The day after the Nisan 14 Passover, a seven-day festival (see Precept #838) was to begin. We are reminded that the first day of this *mo’ed* was to be a *qodesh miqra*, a holy convocation—and a Sabbath: no customary work was to be done. (We find this literally the case in the crucifixion year, 33 A.D., when Nisan 15 fell on a Saturday, the natural Sabbath.) And indeed, when the sun heralding the Sabbath fell below the horizon, the work of our redemption had been completed. The sacrifice had been made, the fires of judgment had been kindled, and Yahshua had declared, “It is finished.”

Something else had been finished as well. The leaven—all of it—had been removed from the household of faith. That is, our sin (which is what leaven represents) had been physically taken away, if we would but trust in Yahshua’s finished work. These things—the Sabbath and the removal of leaven—are related. With both images, the picture of God’s having already done the work of removing the sin from our lives is the central theme. If we fail to accept that Yahweh has removed our sin—*past tense*—we are faced with the prospect of doing it ourselves (something that has proved impossible for everyone who’s ever tried). And if we

refuse to “rest” in Yahshua’s finished work, represented by the Sabbath, we once again will be faced with a never-ending and ultimately impossible task: working to achieve reconciliation with God on our own merits.

So whereas Passover explained the means by which Yahweh would redeem us, the Feast of Unleavened Bread reveals that He has actually accomplished His mission—and that we may now rest in the assurance of our salvation: our sin has been removed from our lives. What was Yahshua doing on this day in 33? His body rested from its labors in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. His soul meanwhile, made alive by the Spirit of God, **“went and preached to the [antediluvian] spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient,”** as we’re informed in I Peter 3:19-20. That is, He did nothing more to secure *our* release from sin, for everything that could be done, had been done.

- (837) *Present an offering to Yahweh on the Feast of Unleavened Bread. “You shall present an offering made by fire as a burnt offering to Yahweh: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year. Be sure they are without blemish. Their grain offering shall be of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah you shall offer for a bull, and two-tenths for a ram; you shall offer one-tenth of an ephah for each of the seven lambs; also one goat as a sin offering, to make atonement for you. You shall offer these besides the burnt offering of the morning, which is for a regular burnt offering.”* (Numbers 28:19-23) Though in a class by itself, the Passover Lamb wasn’t the only sacrifice specified for the spring *miqra’ey*. Here, still in the context of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we see an assortment of “burnt offerings,” or *olah*, which, if you’ll recall, were not to be eaten by the priests or the worshipers, but were to be wholly consumed in the flames of the altar, indicating their dedication to Yahweh. Let us break down the list and review what each type of sacrifice signified in the liturgy of Israel.

First were two young bulls. Bulls, you’ll recall, represent false teaching, the influence and error of the world’s agenda. At first, I was puzzled as to why Yahweh would specify two of them. Indeed, if these instructions were for Israel’s edification only, this would make no sense. But Yahweh knew that eventually there would be two groups who called upon His name (or *should have*), Israel and the *ekklesia* of Yahshua, and both of them would make ruinous mistakes, foster damnable heresies, and embrace error. Not the same mistakes, mind you: Israel’s blunder would consist most fundamentally of its rejection of their Messiah; the church’s most disastrous misstep would be its propensity to incorporate pagan worship practices and attitudes. Both would display a tendency to ignore what Yahweh had told them and substitute their own manmade traditions

in place of His Word in their daily walk. The close familial relationship He wished to share with them both would all too often be cast aside in favor of mindless religion. The parent-child bond of love He desired to foster between us would be twisted by us into a sad caricature: we would habitually respond to our Heavenly Father either with arrogant pride or obsequious obeisance. Fortunately, both permutations of this “bull” are being consigned to the flame. Both Israel and the Church will be, in their own way, purged of their sacrilege.

The ram (a mature male sheep with horns) represents the Messiah, with special emphasis being placed on His authority, His right to rule. He is the Lamb of God who has been qualified, so to speak, by laying down His life for His people. This ram is a precursor of the honored Lamb in the heavenly scene recorded by John: **“Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!’ And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: ‘Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!’”** (Revelation 5:11-13)

Then there were seven yearling lambs, which again represent Yahshua the Messiah, but this time emphasizing the totality of His innocence: their number, seven, speaks of completion and perfection, and they are said to be “without blemish.” All of these *olah* sacrifices are accompanied with fine flour. This flour (which speaks of God’s provision for us in this life) is grain from which the worthless, inedible husks have been removed through a milling process that can only be described as “tribulation.” The flour is permeated with olive oil, symbolic of the Holy Spirit. So ask yourself: for whom does God provide in this life, refining them through trials to become pure and undefiled, filling them with His Spirit? *Us!* We believers accompany our Messiah as the fine flour accompanies the lambs.

Finally, a goat is offered. The symbolism is explained for us right in the text: **“as a sin offering, to make atonement for you.”** Note that only one goat is offered, as if to say it’s not so much our *sins* being atoned for—the individual acts of less-than-perfect behavior that plague our days. Rather it’s our *sin*—the very concept of our failure before God. All of this is to be offered up as part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. These things are the sum total of what it means to have the “leaven” removed from our lives.

- (838) *Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days.* “In this manner you shall offer the food of the offering made by fire daily for seven days, as a sweet aroma to Yahweh; it shall be offered besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering. And on the seventh day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work.” (Numbers 28:24-25) The sacrifices that were made on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, listed in the previous precept, were to be repeated every day for the duration of the festival—seven days in all. Both the first day and the seventh day were designated Sabbaths—days in which no one was to do their regular jobs. We should contrast this with the arrangement we’ll see concerning the final *miqra*, the Feast of Tabernacles, where another Sabbath was tacked onto the end as well (see Precept #861). But there it was to fall upon the *eighth* day, not the seventh as is the case here. The symbol is different because the reality it represents is different.

As always, seven is the number indicating completion or perfection. Bearing in mind what each sacrifice meant—the two bulls, the ram, the seven lambs, the fine flour with oil, and the goat—it is clear that Yahweh wants us to understand that Yahshua’s sacrifice would be complete, perfect in every way for its intended purpose—to remove our sin from us so our fellowship with God could be restored. By declaring both the first and last days of the festival to be Sabbaths, Yahweh is telling us, in so many words, “From beginning to end, My grace is sufficient for you.” Or, as the risen Yahshua put it, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.” Then, as if to declare Himself the very personification of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the bridge between Passover and the Feast of Firstfruits, He explained, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.” (Revelation 1:17-18)

Something else worth noting: these sacrifices—made by man in recognition of God’s awesome accomplishments—are pleasing to Yahweh. They are His “food,” a “sweet aroma” to Him. As odd as it may sound (especially if we’ve been raised in an atmosphere of dour, works-based religious repression) God actually *enjoys* it when we acknowledge what He’s done for us. Like any father, he loves it when His children jump up into His lap, hug Him, and thank Him for being their Daddy. You know it’s true: moments like that make all the grief and toil worth it.

- (839) *Assemble before Yahweh on the seventh day of the feast.* “Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a sacred assembly to Yahweh your God. You shall do no work on it.” (Deuteronomy 16:8) A slightly re-phrased repetition of the same thought is found here in Deuteronomy, this time with a reminder that only unleavened bread—a symbol of the life

Yahweh provides, free from corruption—was to be eaten for the whole week. The concept of the *godesh miqra*—a holy convocation—is reintroduced here, but a different Hebrew word is used. “Sacred assembly” (“solemn,” in some translations) is the Hebrew noun *asarah*, which is derived, oddly enough, from the verb *asar*, meaning to hold back, restrain, or govern. The idea is that on this Sabbath, we are to restrain ourselves from working—from usurping Yahweh’s authority by attempting to attain a sinless state through our own efforts—presumably because it can’t be done. Being “governed” by God’s methods thus gathers us into a sacred, solemn assembly of like-minded believers, trusting in the finished work of Yahshua, as represented by the sacrifices of the *miqra*.

FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS

We discussed certain aspects of the Feast of Firstfruits in Chapter 13 of Volume One of *The Owner’s Manual*, in Mitzvot #517-#520, and again in Mitzvah #552. There we observed that Maimonides was fixated on what grain offerings must be made, how much to bring, when to do this, and in what order. It totally escaped him that without a tabernacle or temple or priesthood, none of what he said was legally possible. Once again, we are faced with the prospect that if Yahweh didn’t have something more important in mind when He instituted these appointments, if they were not symbolic of some great and fundamental truth affecting the destiny of the entire human race, then His instruction concerning them (along with the bulk of the Torah) devolves into what looks like a silly, pointless exercise in which God delights in seeing an entire race of people chase their collective tail—endeavoring to do the impossible in order to appease the unreasonable. In other words, the very idea is nonsense.

- (840) *Observe the Feast of Firstfruits on the day specified by Yahweh.* **“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before Yahweh, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.’”** (Leviticus 23:9-11) Even though the third *miqra* on Yahweh’s schedule wasn’t memorial of anything related to the exodus, and even though there was no overt connection between it and the first two *mo’edim*, the Feast of Firstfruits (also known as *Bikurim*) followed the initial Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread by only one day, making its scripturally mandated date the 16th of Nisan. This placed it *within* the seven-day observance of Unleavened Bread—making it part of the process

by which our sin is shown to be removed from our lives, and at the same time indicative of something entirely unique in God's plan.

Believers in Yahshua, of course, immediately recognize the significance of the timing: the day after the specified Sabbath marked the resurrection of Christ from the tomb—Sunday, Nisan 16 (April 3), 33 A.D. Our entire faith hinges on the reality of this one act: the fulfillment of the Feast of Firstfruits in the resurrection of Yahshua. It's not that it's any more important than His substitutionary death (predicted by Passover) or the fact of His having removed our sin from us forever (prophesied by the Feast of Unleavened Bread). But by conquering physical death, Yahshua proved His deity and His worthiness to be the propitiation—the One who can legitimately atone—for our sin. After all, men die because they sin. It's a universal fact of our nature. Only One who was sinless—who was in fact God incarnate—could presume to die to provide a ransom for the ruined life of someone else. If He weren't sinless, He'd be paying for His own sins, leaving the rest of us right back where we started—lost.

It isn't immediately apparent, however, how the resurrection of Yahshua meshes with the imagery set forth in the *miqra* of Firstfruits. Let's walk through it. You begin with grain, which Yahweh has caused to grow out of the dust for our benefit and nourishment. This grain is no longer growing in the field (that is, alive and walking among us) but has rather been cut down and bound by men: it's a sheaf. It is the intention of God and Man alike that the grain be used to make the bread of life, but Yahweh asks us to do something first: bring it to the priest (he whose function it is to communicate with God on our behalf), who is then to wave the sheaf before Yahweh as acknowledgment that He is the source of this blessing, the One worthy of our thankful praise.

This "sheaf" in this illustration is Yahshua, cut down by men for the benefit of men (on Passover). The "priest" is also Yahshua—He who ultimately represents mankind before Yahweh. And in a remarkable plot twist, Yahweh—the God to Whom we owe our thanks—is *also* Yahshua, voluntarily bereft of several dimensions and clothed in mortal human flesh. (I guess it's true: sometimes if you want something done right, you've got to do it Yourself.) Thus the sheaf, when lifted into the air before Yahweh, is a picture of the resurrection.

Moses notes that the sheaf will be "accepted by Yahweh on *your* behalf," that is, on behalf of—for the benefit of—those who brought it to the priest in thanksgiving to God. Logically then, if we do not thank God for the bounty He has provided (ultimately, our salvation) the sacrifice of Yahshua will *not* be "accepted by Yahweh on our behalf." In other words,

though the sheaf has been cut down, its benefit to us depends upon our willingness to accept it with thanksgiving and acknowledge its Source. After all, the Israelites (as we saw in Leviticus 23:14, Mitzvot #518-520) were forbidden to do anything with the grain until it had been presented before Yahweh as the firstfruits offering. Christ's death avails us nothing as a mere "historical event." This is personal.

And notice something else: the sheaf (Yahshua) is not all the grain there is. There is a whole field out there waiting to be harvested. Yahshua is not just the "fruit," but the *first* fruit. The harvest to come will be comprised of grain that is like that first sheaf—it has the same sort of spiritual DNA, if you will. We are the same kind of organism—children of Yahweh—brothers and sisters of the Son of God. There are other kinds of plants out there in the world, of course, but they are not the same "species" as Yahshua and His followers. They may even look somewhat similar, but upon close examination, it becomes evident that there is nothing of value there—you can't make "bread" out of them that will spiritually nourish the world. Some of these plants are merely worthless, while some are poisonous, but none of them will participate in the harvest. Oh, they'll be cut down at the end of the age all right, but they won't be gathered into God's "barn." So the Feast of Firstfruits, between the lines, predicts a coming harvest of believers. As we shall see in a little while, the harvest itself is commemorated by another of Yahweh's seven *mo'ed-miqra'ey*.

- (841) *Present an offering to Yahweh on the Feast of Firstfruits. "You shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to Yahweh. Its grain offering shall be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to Yahweh, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin."* (Leviticus 23:12-13) As we saw in Precept #837, several symbolically significant animals from the flocks and herds of Israel were to be sacrificed as burnt offerings on each day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Since the Feast of Firstfruits falls on the second of those seven days, you might expect the offerings of Unleavened Bread to serve for both celebrations. But here we see that in addition to the bulls, rams, lambs, and goats of *Chag Matzah*, a separate burnt offering was to be made on Firstfruits, *Bikurim*. Once again, we see that Yahweh wants us to keep them separate in our minds, for they predict different things.

The special Firstfruits offerings were to be performed at the same time the sheaf of grain was being waved before Yahweh, indicating that the two things are related—indeed, the sacrifice of the lamb is the key to the meaning of the waving of the barley sheaf. The lamb, of course, signifies

The Lamb of God, Yahshua. As usual, the burnt offering is accompanied with a *minha* or grain offering with olive oil, reminding us of Yahweh's provision permeated by His Spirit. And as with most offerings (but overtly specified here) a drink offering (*neseq*) of wine was to be poured out, a transparent reference to the shed blood of Christ. "One-fourth of a hin" (somewhere between two and three pints) is significant for two reasons. First (as I explained in Vol. 1, Chapter 12) the drink offering and the oil for the *minha* were always the same amount. But second, it seems likely to me that this is the precise volume of blood Yahshua would have lost during His ordeal on the cross. The average human body holds a little under five quarts of blood, and the amount specified here is about a third of that, perhaps slightly less. Crucifixion victims did not bleed to death, though blood loss certainly weakened them. Their Roman torturers actually made it a point to avoid severing arteries with their nails, for they didn't want their prey to succumb too quickly: agony was a far better intimidation tool than mere death. The imagery of the *miqra*, then, links the blood of the Messiah spilled upon the earth with the rising of His Spirit and body, as the oil is burned upon the altar with the grain and the flesh of the lamb, rising as smoke toward the heavens. It's the perfect picture of Christ's bodily resurrection, if you know what to look for.

FEAST OF WEEKS

The Feast of Weeks was known as Pentecost in the Greek New Covenant scriptures (*pentekonta* means fifty; *pentekoste* means "the fiftieth day") because there were to be exactly fifty days between the Sabbath beginning the Feast of Unleavened Bread and this fourth *mo'ed* in Yahweh's schedule of seven appointments. It's also known as *Shavu'ot*, the Feast of the Harvest, and (since it's not confusing enough already) it's occasionally associated with the concept of "firstfruits," though this time the summer wheat harvest is in view, not the spring barley harvest—which was the focus of the "Feast of Firstfruits," *Bikurim*.

We covered the basics under Mitzvah #521 in Volume 1, Chapter 13. There we demonstrated from scripture that the historical event presumed by the rabbis to be the reason for the holiday is wrong—they're off by several months. The real reason for the timing is revealed in the Book of Acts, Chapter 2: this would prove to be the day Yahweh chose to send His Spirit to indwell those who had received Yahshua as their Savior and anointed King. Shortly before His passion, Yahshua had told His disciples, **"I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."** (John 14:16-17) The events of Acts 2 are the fulfillment of this

promise—tantamount to saying “God will personally dwell inside you”—as well as being the fulfillment of the Feast of Weeks.

We should recognize that for Yahweh to take up residence within His children, a major paradigm shift has taken place, making this event worthy of a place—the central position, in fact—on His exclusive *mo‘ed-miqra* list. Why? Because formerly, His stated place of residence on earth was the Tabernacle or Temple—in the Most Holy Place (see Exodus 25:8, 40:34). But from Pentecost onward, we believers—our bodies and souls—would be where Yahweh “lived.” As Paul put it, **“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”** (I Corinthians 3:16-17) And, **“What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’”** (II Corinthians 6:16; cf. Leviticus 26:12) This explains why our behavior *per se* has nothing to do with our salvation, and why practicing religion in lieu of having a personal relationship with God is spiritual suicide. The only real issue is whether or not Yahweh’s Spirit dwells within us. Remember: His Spirit only comes if invited.

(842) *Observe the Feast of Weeks on the day specified by Yahweh.* **“You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the grain.”** (Deuteronomy 16:9) **“Also on the day of the firstfruits, when you bring a new grain offering to Yahweh at your Feast of Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation.”** (Numbers 28:26) The timing of the Feast of Weeks is described several different ways in scripture, but they aren’t contradictory: they all boil down to the same thing. Another way of putting it was what we saw in Leviticus 23:15-16. **“You shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath.”** There is a raging rabbinical controversy, of course, as to whether the “Sabbath” in question is the *miqra* of Unleavened Bread (designated a Sabbath even when it didn’t fall on the seventh day of the week), or the natural Sabbath that came closest to it. Only in one year out of seven, on average, would the *miqra* fall on a natural Sabbath. And Yahweh—who is *not* the author of confusion—saw to it that the definitive fulfillment of the Feast occurred in just such a year, 33 A.D., making the whole discussion academic.

This means that the day after the Sabbath upon which *Chag Matzah* fell, the Israelites would begin to harvest the barley crop—they would “begin to put the sickle to the grain.” By definition, this is a Sunday.

Seven weeks to the day after this (i.e., Sunday, Sivan 6) the Feast of Weeks, *Shavu'ot*, would be celebrated by, among other things, bringing the firstfruits of the *wheat* harvest as a “new grain offering,” as we saw in Numbers 28:26 above. So you may be asking, as I did, what does the wheat harvest have to do with the indwelling of God’s people with His Holy Spirit? I believe the answer is to be found in God’s consistent use of metaphor. Yahshua used this one twice in Matthew 13.

First, the parable of the sower: **“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”** (Matthew 13:19-23) Those of us who “hear the word and understand it” are those who “bear fruit.” What fruit? In context, it’s the increase of the grain that the Sower has sown, something explained later by Paul as **“the fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.”** (Galatians 5:22-23) In other words, the harvest of souls promised by the Feast of Weeks is possible *only* if those souls are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God—as evidenced by “the fruit of the Spirit” in their lives.

A second parable explains the difference between bearing “the fruit of the Spirit” and bearing no fruit at all. **“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares [weeds that look like wheat but bear no fruit] among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’... And His disciples came to Him, saying, ‘Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.’ He answered and said to them: ‘He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one.’”** (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-38) Beside the prophetic

ramifications for the worthless tares, the lesson at hand is: “the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom,” i.e., those who produce the “fruit of the Spirit” since they are indwelt by that Spirit. It is these alone who will be harvested when the time comes. But the harvest *per se* is a subject embodied in another *miqra*. For now, we’re “just” being shown how the Spirit of Yahweh indwells and sets apart the “wheat” growing in the field of this world—you and me, if we trust God.

- (843) *Present an offering to Yahweh on the Feast of Weeks.* **“Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to Yahweh your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as Yahweh your God blesses you. You shall rejoice before Yahweh your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide. And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.”** (Deuteronomy 16:10-12) In Leviticus 23:15-20 (Mitzvah #521) a whole range of offerings were mandated by Yahweh for the Feast of Weeks—all symbolic of the coming Messiah, one way or another. But here in Deuteronomy, none of that is repeated. Rather, the people are given a short list of related instructions designed to help them get to the essence of the *mo‘ed-miqra*. The “Then” that begins our passage refers to the calculation of the date for the Feast spoken of in the previous verse (and our previous Precept).

First, a “freewill offering” is to be made. That’s a *nadabah*, literally: “voluntariness.” It’s based on the verb *nadab*, meaning “to make willing, to incite.” The idea here is that Yahweh had “incited” the Israelites to thankfulness by blessing them, and they are to take the opportunity of the *miqra* to willingly respond in kind “as Yahweh your God blesses you.” It’s an admonition to remember and recognize Yahweh’s blessings.

Second, they were to rejoice—not only those who were enjoying obvious temporal blessings, but everyone. Rich and poor, free and slave, citizens and aliens, landowners and Levites, families as well as widows and orphans—*everyone* was to rejoice. Yahweh is telling us that something about this day is a universal cause for joy, something that transcends our earthly circumstances. That “something,” as it turns out, is the indwelling of Yahweh’s Holy Spirit, which is available to everyone, regardless of his or her station in life, temporal circumstances, cultural background, or personal history. No one is so broke, so oppressed, or so simple-minded that he can’t cry out to God. And no one is so rich, privileged, or gifted that he doesn’t need God.

Third, they were to keep the feast “at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide.” Physically, this was where the Tabernacle or Temple stood, but as we have seen, that “place” is now—ever since the fulfillment of the Feast of Weeks on Sunday, the sixth day of Sivan, 33 A.D.—within the hearts and minds of believers. *We* are the Temple of God; *we* are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

And fourth, they were to remember their former state as slaves, being forever cognizant of the change that had taken place in their lives. More to the point, the Israelites needed to remember Who had brought about that transformation from bondage to freedom. It was Yahweh, not themselves. They had been slaves in Egypt so long, it didn’t even occur to them that freedom was possible; nor could they have attained it for themselves by simply rebelling against the world they knew. They needed a deliverer, a redeemer, a savior. It’s the same with us: while we remain in bondage to our sin, it is not in our own power to effect our release. Only Yahweh can free us—and He has. This we must never forget.

We are by no means finished with our survey of Yahweh’s appointments, His holy convocations. But this might be a good place to take stock of where we are in His unfolding plan. Each of the four *mo’edim-miqra’ey* we’ve addressed thus far have been fulfilled in history—all within the space of a little over seven weeks in the spring and early summer of 33 A.D. Each of the four took place on the very days of the Hebrew calendar that were required in the Torah. And each of the four was ultimately centered on the life, sacrifice, and Spirit of Yahshua of Nazareth. To recap, the first appointment was Passover, fulfilled through the sacrificial death of Yahshua. The second, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, prophesied the fact that the Passover sacrifice had removed the curse of sin from our lives. The third *miqra*, the Feast of Firstfruits, was fulfilled through the Messiah’s resurrection, a harbinger of our own anticipated harvest. And the fourth, the Feast of Weeks, came to pass when the very Spirit of God took up permanent residence in the lives of the followers of the Messiah.

Of course, not everyone is prepared to perceive that the first four Feasts of Yahweh were fulfilled in the person of Yahshua. Orthodox Jews, by definition, do not. In order to see this truth, one has to be willing to accept a comprehensive, and quite consistent, system of symbols and metaphors that Yahweh built into His Torah. Some of these (such as the goat atoning for sin) He explained in the immediate context; some (like the lamb of God ultimately being fulfilled in

Christ, or the drink offering representing His spilled blood) were made clear only in the Gospels. And others (for instance, that the sacrifice of a bull represents the rejection of false worship and the world's ungodly agenda) are pretty much left for us to figure out on our own. So it's a fair question to ask: why didn't God simply spell it out in plain English—okay, Hebrew? *I'm going to manifest Myself as a human being and provide Myself as an offering, so whoever chooses to trust in the efficacy of My sacrifice to redeem him from his debt of sin will never have to die, but will enjoy fellowship with Me for all eternity.* (Oops, He *did* spell it out, not in the Torah, and not in Hebrew, but in John 3:16, in Greek) Why didn't Yahweh make His plan clearer in the beginning? Because love requires choice: He wanted folks to choose to be with Him, and that means the option must exist *not* to choose Him or accept His way. So instead, He employed symbols and metaphors, dress rehearsals and outright prophecies. To one who's looking for Yahweh, as I am, the symbols are ridiculously transparent; but to those who are not willing to accept God's grace, they're opaque, mysterious, pointless, and in the end, impossible to follow.

But I digress. We were talking about how Yahweh has delivered four essential features of His plan of redemption through Yahshua's role in the first four *miqra'ey*. We can safely surmise that something equally significant remains to be accomplished in each of the remaining three. So what's left on Yahweh's revealed "to-do" list? What has He said He would do on our behalf? What has He told us about time and again, both by implication and overt prophetic prediction, in the Old Testament and the New? It's actually a rather short list.

First (in order of human expectation, not of chronological fulfillment) is the concept that the Messiah must come. This is the one thing Orthodox Jews and Christians can agree upon, though Christians realize that He will be coming *back again*. It is clear from the large body of Messianic prophecy that no one has fulfilled *all* of the things prophesied of Him: He has yet to come in power and glory, a King reigning over the whole earth in justice and wisdom with a rod of iron, as the Scriptures insist He must. The Messiah will, moreover, rule as King of the Jews: His throne will be in Jerusalem.

The second thing on God's unfinished agenda is to restore Israel. I realize that Task Number One listed above sounds like roughly the same thing, but it's not. You see, Yahweh's idea of restoration and that of the Rabbinical Jewish mindset are two very different things. The rabbis envision a new era of earthly political power reminiscent of the glory days of Solomon. But in reality, Israel's coming political ascendancy under the Messiah's reign will be a *byproduct* of her national restoration, not its cause. That's because Israel's restoration, as far as God is concerned, will be a *spiritual* phenomenon. As Yahweh promised Solomon, **"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face,**

and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." (II Chronicles 7:14) Israel's "wicked ways" continue to this very day, evidenced by the ongoing state of exile outside of Israel and the Muslim blight within it. God has not yet "healed their land," but He will. What will it take to bring this about? A complete spiritual paradigm reversal within Israel—precipitated, I'm afraid, by the coming of God's wrath upon the earth. It may sound like the most improbable of scenarios, but this repentance leading to restoration is the single most oft-repeated prophetic theme in the entire Bible. Yahweh apparently enjoys doing the impossible, and He always keeps His word.

Third, and most astonishing of all, is the promised transformation of Yahweh's people from their present mortal state, human beings made of dust, subject to entropy and eventual death, into glorious immortal beings (not unlike the resurrected Christ), with bodies built for a new heaven and a new earth where death is a foreign concept. This miraculous "translation" from one kind of body into another isn't some Johnny-come-lately Christian theological innovation, either. It was revealed in the oldest writings in the Bible: **"All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer You."** (Job 14:14-15) What kind of "change?" **"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me."** (Job 19:25-27) Yeah. Mine too. Paul described the process God would employ to bring this about in I Corinthians 15:35-54.

We shall soon learn that these three monumental "tasks" God has set for Himself are reflected in the celebration of the final three *mo'edim* on His list. You may be thinking, *There's a fourth thing, isn't there? What about all that judgment, wrath, and hell-fire I've heard about all my life? Aren't those things on God's agenda?* Yes, they are, but they are not subjects for our celebration or commemoration. We will not participate in these things. Although Yahweh in His mercy has revealed what lies in store for His enemies, so that we might warn them, His holy convocations are appointments He's made with *us*—meetings whose time, place, and circumstances tell us of the incredible lengths to which our God went so that we might have life, abundant and eternal.

Dates of Destiny: Future Tense

In the previous chapter, we explored the first four “Feasts of Yahweh,” those whose fulfillments are now history. But Yahweh listed seven such days in total: there are still three *qodesh miqra'ey*—holy convocations—specified in the Torah that have as yet seen no fulfillment parallel to those that are already past. We are therefore anticipating three more earth-shakingly significant events—not merely three important days in the life of Israel or critical milestones in the unfolding plan of Yahweh (though these three remaining *mo'edim*, or appointments, will certainly be all that) but events that also meet several restrictive criteria.

First, they must fulfill overt prophesy. That is, they must bring about conditions that Yahweh has predicted in His Word but has not yet caused to happen. As noted in the previous chapter, these should include the transformation of our frail human state into something permanent, the spiritual restoration of Israel, and the coming of the reigning Messiah. Merely being seen as a “good thing” for God's people does not necessarily qualify something as a candidate for one of these three remaining *miqra'ey*.

Second, there must be a logical tie-in to the unique rites and rituals associated with these days in the Levitical instructions. Passover had to do with slaying a lamb, the Feast of Unleavened Bread required the removal of yeast from the house, Firstfruits anticipated a harvest, and the Feast of Weeks focused on the time lapse since the previous *miqra'ey*—defining its celebration on the first day of the week: circumstances that were all—if we're willing to see them—reflected in the events that fulfilled the prophecies. In the same way, the coming *miqra'ey* will have some connection to whatever it is that makes them unique: the Feast of Trumpets will have something to do with blowing trumpets or shouting; the Day of Atonement will involve affliction of the soul, and the Feast of Tabernacles will feature some permutation of the building of temporary dwelling places.

Third, they must fall upon the precise dates mandated in scripture, that is, the first, tenth, and fifteenth days of the month of Tishri on the Hebrew lunar calendar—which fall in the Gregorian calendar's September or October. These, therefore, are commonly called “the Fall Feasts,” for they all occur in the autumn. By this criteria, such momentous events as Israel's independence day (May 14, 1948) or their stunning victory over the forces of Islam in June, 1967, could not be considered fulfillments to Yahweh's final *miqra'ey*, no matter how much prophecy they may have fulfilled otherwise.

Fourth, as with the first four, these last three will be fulfilled literally, though within the framework of Yahweh's consistent and extensive matrix of symbols and metaphors. (For example, if you hope to comprehend the significance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, you must understand that leaven or yeast is God's symbol for sin, pervasive and corrupting.) My point is that "spiritual" or "allegorical" fulfillments, devoid of any concrete, overt, historical manifestation or consequence, won't cut it as candidates for fulfillment. If it takes scholarly eloquence or clever argument to "prove" something has happened, then it hasn't.

And fifth, each of these last three *miqra'ey* (as before) will involve interaction between God and man. We can't by ourselves precipitate their fulfillments. On our own, we are quite incapable of controlling or even influencing Yahweh's timetable, though His agenda is scheduled solely for our benefit. Therefore, even if every living child of Yahweh, every soul redeemed by the blood of Yahshua, were to shout for joy or blow the *shofar* in commemoration of the Feast of Trumpets on the next occurrence of the first day of Tishri, that would not *in itself* constitute fulfillment of the *miqra's* prophecy, no matter how cool it would be. Fulfillment *will* happen, but only when Yahweh is good and ready.

FEAST OF TRUMPETS

There are three primary passages in the Torah where instructions concerning the seven Feasts of Yahweh are grouped: Leviticus 23, Numbers 28 and 29, and Deuteronomy 16 (though in Deuteronomy 16, the Feast of Trumpets isn't mentioned at all, for reasons that can only be understood if you comprehend what the *miqra* predicts—something we've discussed before and will again). All Maimonides had to say about it (based on what he saw in Leviticus 23:24-25) was to rest on the day (in Mitzvah #130) and also (since we're dumb sheeple and might miss it) not to work on it (Mitzvah #131). I've got no earthly idea what the difference was supposed to be. Adding to the confusion, the Rambam referred to the day as *Rosh Hashanah*, meaning "the head of the year," or "new year's day," although Yahweh plainly stated that the beginning of the Hebrew year was to coincide with the new moon in the month of Nisan, in the spring (a day, by the way, that was *not* designated as one of these seven *mo'edim*). The autumn "new year" was a bad habit the Jews picked up during their captivity in Babylon. One of many, it would seem.

The Hebrew name for this *miqra* is found in Numbers 29:1—*Yom Teruah*: the "day of shouting," or the "day of blowing the trumpet." Strong's defines *teruah* as an "alarm, signal, sound of tempest, shout, shout or blast of war, alarm, or joy; a war-cry, battle-cry; a shout of joy (with religious impulse or in general)." Baker and Carpenter add, "It refers to a loud, sharp shout or cry in general, but it often indicates a shout of joy or victory, or a great shout anticipating a coming event. It

can refer to the noise or signal put out by an instrument. Amos used the word to refer to war cries.” Although it isn’t specifically named in the text, the “blowing” connotation would naturally imply the use of the ram’s horn “trumpet,” the *shofar*, the quintessential Hebrew implement for both raising an alarm and making a joyful noise. We should contrast the *shofar* in our minds with both the bull’s horn, a symbol of secular power, and the silver trumpet, or *hasoserah*, that was used to call Israel to worship at the Tabernacle or Temple.

The *miqra* of *Yom Teruah*, then, is prophetic of a specific future day when all that is implied in the word “*teruah*” will be brought to pass in the fulfillment of one of Yahweh’s most fundamental areas of promise. We can start to home in on precisely what that is by taking a look at other usages of the word in the Tanach. Let us begin in the Psalms: **“God has gone up with a shout (*teruah*), Yahweh with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with understanding.”** (Psalm 47:5-7) Three things are seen happening in a single context: (1) Yahweh is going up; (2) this rising is accompanied by *teruah*—shouting and the blowing of the trumpet; and (3) God is consequently being praised by people who understand exactly what’s going on, namely, that He Himself is coming to reign as King over the whole earth. Today we believers sing praises to God, though to say we do it “with understanding” would be a stretch. But when “God has gone up with *teruah*,” we’ll finally *get it*. Notice, by the way, that Yahweh (the God who “has gone up”) and the reigning King of the whole earth are equated in this passage. Yahshua *is* God, not merely His anointed servant.

And as it turns out, God is not the only one who is “going up with a shout.” His people are going with Him: **“Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound (*teruah*)! They walk, O Yahweh, in the light of Your countenance. In Your name they rejoice all day long, and in Your righteousness they are exalted.”** (Psalm 89:15-16) There is more going on here than Yahweh’s people being “exalted” in their earthly circumstances. In point of fact, our normal experience tells us that people who display Yahweh’s righteousness these days are as likely to be ridiculed and persecuted as glorified. What gives? The key is the Hebrew word translated “exalted.” *Ruwm* means to rise up, be raised, set on high, be lifted up. It’s the same picture we saw above: “God has *gone up* with a shout,” and now we’re told that the people who hear and respond to the “joyful sound,” the *teruah*, who walk in His righteousness and rejoice in His light, are to be “lifted up” as well.

I’ll readily admit that without the New Covenant scriptures to illuminate this, we might never have realized what’s being prophesied (until it actually happened, of course). But the Apostle Paul helps us to connect the dots. **“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be**

changed." (I Corinthians 15:51-52) Putting the Torah, the Psalms, and the Pauline epistles together then, it transpires that the *miqra* of *Yom Teruah*, the Feast of Trumpets, predicts nothing short of the transformation of our decaying mortal existence into a glorious immortal, incorruptible state. Not all of humanity will be changed like this, you understand, but only those who fit the Psalmist's description—those who "know the joyful sound—the *teruah*—and who walk in the light of Yahweh's countenance." These alone will be "raised incorruptible" in God's righteousness on *Yom Teruah*.

How is this going to work? I mean, according to the requirements of the Torah, it all has to transpire (as Paul put it above) "in the twinkling of an eye," on a single autumn day. The logistics are daunting, to say the least. It would take *God Himself* to pull this off. And so it shall: **"The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."** (I Thessalonians 4:16-17) The shouting and trumpet-blowing (the *teruah*) will be done by God Himself, accompanied by an archangel. The "Lord," the risen Yahshua, will descend to earth, gather his people, and then (as we were informed in Psalm 47) "go up" with them. This gathering is described here as being "caught up." That's the Greek verb *harpazo* ("to seize, carry off by force, claim for oneself eagerly, snatch out or away"—Strong's), a word translated in the Latin Vulgate as *rapiemur*. (*"Deinde nos qui vivimus qui relinquimur simul rapiemur cum illis in nubibus obviam Domino in aera et sic semper cum Domino erimus,"* if you must know.) That's where we get the common term for this momentous event: the "rapture." Don't let anybody tell you the word can't be found in the Bible, just because it doesn't show up as an English noun.

Is that all there is to *teruah*? I'm afraid not. Following in its wake (for those who failed to "know the joyful sound") is pain, war, and destruction: in a word, Tribulation. **"O my soul, my soul! I am pained in my very heart! My heart makes a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm (*teruah*) of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried, for the whole land is plundered."** (Jeremiah 4:19-20) The prophet is lamenting for Jerusalem (see verse 14). The whole extended passage is predicting the crushing of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, a process that began in 605 B.C. and culminated in the destruction of the Temple in 586. But it doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that this prophecy still has some life left in it. It's also a perfect description of the coming invasion of Israel by the Islamic federation of "Magog," prophesied so unambiguously in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Of particular interest to our present inquiry, we should note that (according to Daniel) one of the major participants in this "War of Magog" is the European leader commonly referred to as "the Antichrist." And Paul tells us (in II Thessalonians 2:7-8) that this fellow won't be "revealed"

(that is, he won't begin doing things that prophetically identify him as the Antichrist) until after "the Restrainer" (that is, the Holy Spirit who now indwells the *ekklesia*) is "taken out of the way." There is only one way to take the Spirit "out of the way." Catch up—*rapture*—the people in whom the Spirit dwells—on *Yom Teruah*.

So here's what Jeremiah is being shown: the "soul" of Israel is in deep distress because they have "heard the sound of the trumpet." But because they have not heeded their Messiah, this trumpet heralds not a joyful rapture—their own transformation to a glorious immortal state—but rather "the alarm of war," the other side of *teruah*. Though Israel has "heard the trumpet," they (as a nation) have not participated in the rapture: they've been left behind to face the music. Their only real ally on this earth—the believers in Yahshua—have departed: we have been "caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." This argues forcefully that the Tribulation (a.k.a. "the Time of Jacob's Trouble") will follow on the very heels of the rapture—within the space of a few years, not decades or centuries. Indeed, *Yom Teruah* seems to be the very event that precipitates the destruction and plunder of the land.

Jeremiah is not alone in this assessment, nor is Israel alone in their plight. "The great day of Yahweh is near. It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of Yahweh is bitter. There the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm (*teruah*) against the fortified cities and against the high towers. I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against Yahweh. Their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung." (Zephaniah 1:14-17) *Yom Teruah's* coming will signal bad news for the whole world left behind at the departure of the *ekklesia*. Again we see (if we are willing to open our eyes) that one man's rapture is another man's call to war. One man's transformation into immortality is another's ticket to a day of wrath, trouble, distress, devastation, desolation, darkness, and death. Yet at its core, the only difference between these two people is their respective relationships with Yahshua the Messiah. It either exists, or it doesn't.

- (844) *Observe the Feast of Trumpets on the day specified by Yahweh. "In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. For you it is a day of blowing the trumpets."* (Numbers 29:1) As with all seven *mo'edim-miqra'ey*, the exact calendar date is specified, leading us to the inevitable conclusion that this very day will mark the fulfillment of the prophecy. In this case, the date is the first day of Tishri—the seventh month on the Hebrew calendar, and the final

month in which anything on Yahweh's agenda is scheduled. Tishri falls in September or October on our Gregorian calendars.

For those who are fuzzy on how the two calendar systems vary, let me offer a short explanation. Our Gregorian calendar is solar based: it records one revolution of the earth around the sun per year—approximately 365¼ days (the one-quarter day being accommodated by a “leap year day” once ever four years). It is broken, quite arbitrarily, into twelve months. The Hebrew calendar, by contrast, is lunar based. Each month (or “moonth”) begins at the sighting of the first sliver of the new moon. Since the synodic lunar month lasts only about 29½ days, a twelve-month cycle is only 354 days long. So seven years out of every nineteen, a “leap month” (called Veadar, or Adar II) is added just before the first month (i.e., Nisan, in March or April) to keep the seasons from drifting. There are advantages and disadvantages to each system, but the lunar was far more user-friendly in a pre-industrial world. That's why Hebrew dates don't correspond to the same Gregorian dates from one year to the next, but vary by as much as several weeks.

Anyway, *Yom Teruah*, or the Feast of Trumpets, falls on the first day of Tishri. This makes it unique among the seven *miqra'ey*, for it falls during a period of lunar darkness, when the moon is reflecting practically none of the sun's light to earth. (*Every* lunar month begins and ends this way.) By contrast, the spring *miqra'ey* all hover around the middle of the month, the brightest part (the full moon), as does the final one, the Feast of Tabernacles. The two remaining days both occur when the moon is “waxing,” i.e., when its reflection is in the process of increasing in brightness. I don't know how significant that is, but it strikes me that none of this is accidental: Yahweh has planned every detail. He seems to be telling us that the *ekklesia* will be raptured from the earth during a period of maximum spiritual darkness. The days in which we live certainly seem to be moving in that direction. I mean, how much darker can the world get?

There's another issue that needs to be addressed. As we saw in Mitzvot #130 and #131 (Leviticus 23:24-25), and again in our present text, the Feast of Trumpets is to be celebrated as a Sabbath. No one's customary work is to be performed on this day. The bottom-line spiritual principle, of course, is that in the end, we can't earn or work for what God is proposing to do for us on this day—transform us from frail mortals to incorruptible eternal beings capable of standing in His very presence. Rather, we must accept it as Yahweh's gift to us, resting in His finished work, if we are to receive it at all. But there is a literal side to this as well.

It appears (though it's by no means certain) that the definitive *Yom Teruah* should take place in a year in which the first day of Tishri falls on a natural Sabbath. In the next few years, there are only a handful of such dates left: 2020, 2023, and 2026 (this last one about two months before the Tribulation is scheduled to begin, if my observations are correct—see *Future History* for my thoughts on prophetic chronology).

Why am I not certain? The word used to describe the Sabbath-ness of this *miqra* (in Leviticus 23:24) is *sabbaton*, meaning “Sabbath observance.” There is a far more commonly used term for Sabbath—*Sabbat*, but it is never used in scripture to describe the Feast of Trumpets. Both words are based on the verb *sabat*, meaning to cease, desist, or rest. The *-on* suffix of *sabbaton* and other Hebrew nouns indicates their abstract or conceptual nature—the observance of Sabbath rest as opposed to the Sabbath day itself (i.e., Saturday). *Sabbaton* is used only eleven times in scripture, four times referring to the weekly Sabbath, twice to the Sabbatical year, once to *Yom Teruah*, twice referring to *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement), and twice to *Sukkot* (the Feast of Tabernacles). Two things about this list give me pause, so I'll just lay my cards on the table.

First, the word *Sabbaton* was not used of the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the actual instructions concerning it, though *Chag Matzah* did fall on a natural Sabbath in the year of its definitive fulfillment, 33 A.D. (It was only described: “You shall do no work.”) It was, however, referred to as the *Sabbat* in the Feast of Weeks instructions: “Count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath...” This is the linguistic converse of what we see with *Yom Teruah*—which is called *Sabbaton* but not *Sabbat*.

Second, the Day of Atonement is twice called a *Sabbaton*, but my research for *Future History* led me to the firm conviction that the definitive *Yom Kippur* and the definitive *Sukkot* will occur in the same year, which, according to the rules of the Torah, means they can't both fall on natural Sabbaths, because they're five days apart (see Precept #861). If the Day of Atonement (called a *Sabbaton*) is a Sabbath observance that will *not* fall on a natural Sabbath (since the evidence tells me that the Feast of Tabernacles *will*), could the same thing be true of the Feast of Trumpets? You can see why I'm reluctant to positively predict a Sabbath (Saturday) fulfillment for *Yom Teruah*.

The bottom line is that for us who are called out of the world by Yahshua (i.e., the *ekklesia*—the “church”), the transformation of our mortal bodies into immortal, incorruptible, spiritual beings will occur on *Yom Teruah*, the Feast of Trumpets. All the evidence I've seen points toward a fulfillment of this *miqra* (in an event popularly known as “the

rapture”) on the first day of Tishri some year between now and 2026. And whether or not it will fall on a natural Sabbath, no one can achieve what the day portends through his own efforts.

- (845) *Present an offering to Yahweh on the Feast of Trumpets. “You shall offer a burnt offering as a sweet aroma to Yahweh: one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, without blemish. Their grain offering shall be fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, to make atonement for you; besides the burnt offering with its grain offering for the New Moon, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, as a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh.”* (Numbers 29:2-6) In Precept #837 (Numbers 28:19-23) we looked at a similar list of burnt offerings to be made at the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The same thing is true of the Feasts of Firstfruits and Weeks. But the lists weren’t identical—there were subtle differences that help us understand the significance of each individual “appointment” with Yahweh. To recap (focusing solely on the animals to be sacrificed):

Unleavened Bread: *Olah* (burnt offering): 2 bulls; 1 ram; 7 lambs.

Chata’t (sin offering): 1 goat.

Firstfruits: *Olah*: 2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs.

Chata’t (sin offering): 1 goat.

Feast of Weeks: *Olah*: 1 bull, 2 rams, 7 lambs.

Chata’t: 1 goat.

Selem (peace offering): 2 lambs.

Feast of Trumpets: *Olah*: 1 bull, 1 ram, 7 lambs.

Chata’t: 1 goat.

In the interests of seeing the whole picture, let’s also analyze the sacrificial requirements of the two final *miqra’ey*, which we’ll cover later in this chapter:

Day of Atonement: *Olah*: 1 bull, 1 ram, 7 lambs.

Chata’t: 1 goat (that is, only one of the two “sin offering” goats was to be sacrificed; the other was set free).

Tabernacles: *Olah*: 13 bulls (first day), 2 rams, 14 lambs.
 (The number of bulls decreases by 1 each day of the
 feast, down to 7 on the seventh day, and then to 1 on
 the eighth day, when the number of rams drops to 1
 and lambs to 7.)
 Chata't: 1 goat.

We're thus faced with a dizzying variety of combinations, and we're forced to ask ourselves just what Yahweh is up to here. Forget for a moment that without a temple or priesthood these sacrifices can't be made at all. Even if they could be, one of two conflicting propositions has to be true: either God enjoys making His people jump through hoops like trained poodles for His own amusement, or He's giving us subtle hints as to the nature of His plan for our redemption—clues that can only be understood through the application of careful scriptural forensics.

Let's start with what remains constant—the sin offering, or *chata't*, that's slain. It's always one goat, never more, never less. This tells us that an underlying theme of all of Yahweh's holy convocations is that sin—as a concept, our falling short of His perfect standard—is being dealt with throughout the entire process.

Next let's consider lambs. A lamb is a picture of innocence, which when offered as a sacrifice indicates the innocence of Yahshua the Messiah—Yahweh's "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Seven is the number of completion or perfection, so we are not surprised to see seven lambs required for each *miqra*—until we get to Tabernacles, when we're presented with a puzzle. What is the significance of fourteen lambs—seven *doubled*? To me, this seems to be a clue as to precisely who each *miqra* is addressed to, and it's not always the same. Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits both speak to believers generally: Israel, including the "mixed multitude" of gentile believers with them. But the next two, Weeks and Trumpets, address the *ekklesia*, the church, which is neither Jewish nor gentile in composition but is a new creation, a "mystery." On the Day of Atonement, however, Yahweh's focus is (as we shall see) strictly upon Israel, for the *ekklesia* will have been removed from the earthly scene (at the Feast of Trumpets) when its promise comes to fruition. Up until this point, one complete picture of the Messiah's innocence was appropriate for each spiritual group, so seven lambs are specified each time. But when we get to Tabernacles, the doubled seven tells us something remarkable: Yahweh will be dealing with both the

raptured (now immortal) *ekklesia* and the still-mortal but spiritually restored Israel (again seen leading a mixed multitude of mortal believers worldwide)—as separate, coexisting populations! Having already done my homework for this class (see the resulting thesis: *Future History*), I can assure you that every shred of prophecy supports this view.

We see the same sort of shifting of the prophetic object when studying the variation in the number of rams. The ram (a mature male “lamb” with horns), if you’ll recall, is symbolic of the Messiah’s authority. Here we see exactly the same shifts going on, but with one exception. As before, Israel and its mixed multitude are seen anticipating One ruling Messiah, the *ekklesia* is seen following One (who of course is the *same* One, though the two groups perceive Him differently), and the Feast of Tabernacles witnesses a split between the called-out immortals and the redeemed mortals of the Millennial kingdom. After all, though their Messiah is the same, their relationship with Him—their response to His authority—is necessarily somewhat different. But what about the exception of which I spoke? The Feast of Weeks calls for *two* rams. Why is this so, if it concerns only the church? It’s because when the *ekklesia* began on the Feast of Weeks with the Spirit of God indwelling His followers, Israel had not yet systematically rejected the authority of Yahshua as Messiah. Only its leadership had declared, “We will not have this man to rule over us.” The fact is, virtually every participant in the Pentecost epiphany was Jewish. Israel’s total rejection took place a hundred years later when, following Rabbi Akiba’s endorsement, they chose to follow a false Messiah—the brutal but charismatic Bar Kochba—one whom they *still* prefer to Yahshua, even though He brought the nation to utter ruin.

Note, by the way, that on the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles, prophetic of the inauguration of the eternal state, Israel and the *ekklesia* are addressed as one entity. The indicator is that we’re again instructed to sacrifice a single ram (not two) and seven lambs (not fourteen). Then, as in the mortal church today, there will be no functional difference between Israelite and gentile believers: at this point we all will have been transformed into immortal, incorruptible, spiritual beings, relating to our Messiah and God in exactly the same way.

And what about bulls? They represent false worship, a trust in the world’s power, however it manifests itself. *Young* bulls are always specified—the epitome of temporal strength, capability, and volition, something to be seen in contrast to Yahweh’s counterintuitive means of redemption—the frail, vulnerable, innocent lamb. Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits each call for two bulls, because Israel and the mixed multitude

each brought with them different kinds of baggage—the Jews (being sons of Jacob) had a propensity to rely on themselves, their intellect and industry, while the gentiles among them fell prey with great alacrity to pagan religions and human demigods. (Some things never change.) But Weeks and Trumpets, in which one bull is specified, focus on the heresies peculiar to the *ekklesia*, while the bull of the Day of Atonement represents the errors specifically endemic in Orthodox Judaism. The eye opener is the eight-day Feast of Tabernacles, in which gradually, over the course of the week (prophetic of Yahshua’s Millennial Kingdom), every possible permutation of false worship and error will be gradually rooted out and eliminated, one by one, from among the mortal population. When it’s all over, there will be nothing left but Yahweh’s truth.

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

One of the most surprising things about the research for my book on prophecy, *Future History*, was the sheer volume of scripture promising the spiritual—followed by the physical—restoration of the nation of Israel. I mean, I knew it was going to happen, but I had no idea God had told us about it in so many places and in so many ways. This is easily the most oft-repeated theme in prophetic scripture, and taken all together, the evidence clearly precludes transference of the promises to the church—a pipe dream promulgated by ambitious Christian clergy ever since Constantine’s day. Nor will it fit the requirements of scripture to simply re-define all who come to faith as “Israel,” ignoring inconvenient biological reality. No, the “restored Israel” of the Bible is *Israel*—a literal biological remnant of the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all twelve tribes, redeemed, reunited, and regathered into the Land of promise under the reign of Yahshua their Messiah. I know it sounds somewhere between unlikely and impossible. But that’s where God does his best work. We should not be surprised, then, to find this fundamental truth reflected in Yahweh’s schedule of annual *mo’edim*.

These appointments with God not only predict the seven most important milestones in His plan of redemption, they also indicate their order of chronological fulfillment. The first four, now history, prophesied the death, burial, and resurrection of Yahshua, and then the calling-out of His followers from the world through the personal indwelling of His Spirit. The next one in line, as we have seen, comprises God’s “exit strategy” for these believers in Yahshua—the *ekklesia*—who were defined by the events of the fourth *miqra*. *Yom Teruah*, this fifth appointment with God, will bring about the transformation of the saints, living and dead alike, into immortal beings, inhabiting bodies not unlike Christ’s manifestation as He appeared to His disciples for forty days after His resurrection.

But alas, neither Israel (as a nation) nor the vast majority of gentile mankind will participate in the rapture, for it is an “off ramp” from a straight and narrow road that comparatively few choose to travel. That’s why Yahshua admonished us to **“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”** (Matthew 7:13-14)

So, because these days fall in chronological order, we can expect the sixth *miqra* of Yahweh to be fulfilled in a world from which the *ekklesia* of Yahshua has previously been removed. Further, based on what we learned of the downside of *teruah* in Jeremiah 4:19-20 and Zephaniah 1:14-17 above, it seems likely that this sixth *miqra*, the Day of Atonement, will take place within the period of time called the Tribulation (which will begin shortly—within a few years—after the rapture). The Tribulation is defined (in the Daniel 9 prophecy) as the time in which Yahweh will complete His program for Israel—the last of 70 “weeks” (seven “prophetic-year” periods, each 360 days in length). If the Day of Atonement concerns Israel exclusively (since the “church” is gone by this point), then its fulfillment must be linked to the spiritual restoration of the nation.

We discussed the Day of Atonement in Mitzvot #133-136 (Leviticus 23:27, 29, 31-32) and #505 (Leviticus 16:2-3), but unfortunately, Maimonides said only to rest, to fast (something that isn’t specifically commanded in scripture), and to keep the Torah’s rituals concerning the offerings, the scapegoat, etc. (something that can’t be observed, whether in his day or ours, for lack of a temple and priesthood). So the Rambam is only batting one for three here. But the core definition of the day is much more fundamental than he pictured it: **“It is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before Yahweh your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people.”** (Leviticus 23:28-29)

As always, we need to define our terminology. “Day of Atonement” is the Hebrew *Yom Kippur*, or more literally, *Yom Kippurim*—the Day of Atonements: it’s always plural in the Torah. This noun is based on the Hebrew verb *kapar* (translated here as “make atonement”), which means “to cover, purge, make an atonement, make reconciliation, to cover over (as with pitch), to pacify, to propitiate.” (Strong’s) Baker and Carpenter explain further: “*Kapar* is a verb meaning to cover, to forgive, to expiate, to reconcile. This word is of supreme theological importance in the Old Testament as it is central to an Old Testament understanding of the remission of sin. At its most basic level, the word conveys the notion of covering but not in the sense of merely concealing. Rather, it suggests the imposing of something to change its appearance or nature. It is therefore employed to signify the cancellation or “writing over” of a contract (Isaiah 28:18); the appeasing of anger (Genesis 32:20 and Proverbs 16:14); and the overlaying of wood with pitch so as to make it waterproof (Genesis 6:14). The

word also communicates God's covering of sin.... In the Old Testament, the blood of sacrifices was most notably imposed. By this imposition, sin was purged and forgiven. The offenses were removed, leaving the sinners clothed in righteousness." The ultimate *kapar* sacrifice was, of course, Yahshua.

The other word begging for illumination here is rendered "afflicted (in soul)," and while that's not incorrect, there's much more to it. '*Anah* is a Hebrew verb that carries two very different connotations, both relevant to *Yom Kippurim*. First, it means to be afflicted, humbled, or bowed down, to be occupied or busied with, or to be depressed, downcast, or in a state of oppression. This is how it's invariably handled in passages relating to *Yom Kippurim*. But in contrast to this, '*anah* also means to answer, respond, testify, speak, or to reply as a witness. I believe both definitions apply to the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement.

(846) *Be afflicted in soul and do no work on the Day of Atonement.* **"You shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before Yahweh your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people."** (Leviticus 23:28-30) We've seen the "Sabbath" concept many times before. The central lesson, as always, is that we cannot work to attain the salvation Yahweh has promised those who trust Him. Rather, we must rest in reliance upon His word: we must trust Yahweh to redeem us. Further, we have noted that Yahweh *Himself* rests on the Sabbath: whatever salvation He provides has been made available to us during His six-day (read: six-millennium) "work week," that is, between the fall of Adam and Yahshua's imminent return to earth in glory. That's why the scriptures say, **"Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."** (Hebrews 11:6) What "pleases Yahweh" is our love, and love is by its nature voluntary: it can't be forced, bought, or stolen, or it would become something else. If Yahweh forced us to receive His gift of eternal life (by cramming incontrovertible *proof* down our throats, for example), our response couldn't be love—it would merely be surrender. He's not seeking a victory; He's looking for a friend. He doesn't desire our capitulation; He wants our trust.

But what does it mean to be "afflicted in soul" on the Day of Atonement? We've seen that '*anah*, the verb translated "afflicted," not only means "to be humbled or bowed down," but also "to answer or respond." Upon returning to Jerusalem from Babylon (457 B.C.), Ezra the priest learned that some of those who had preceded him had taken pagan

wives, doing precisely what had gotten their nation in trouble in the first place—blending the abominations of Canaanite paganism with the worship of Yahweh. Ezra’s reaction is the very picture of “affliction of soul.” **“When I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished. Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to Yahweh my God. And I said: ‘O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens.’”** (Ezra 9:3-6) That’s the “affliction” part. But He also responded; he led his countrymen in answering the call of God upon their lives. **“Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath.... Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. Now therefore, make confession to Yahweh, God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives. Then all the assembly answered (‘*anah*) and said with a loud voice, ‘Yes! As you have said, so we must do.’”** (Ezra 10:5, 10-12)

Psalm 88 may also help us to understand this. The first few verses will set the scene: **“O Yahweh, God of my salvation, I have cried out day and night before You. Let my prayer come before You; Incline Your ear to my cry. For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to the grave. I am counted with those who go down to the pit; I am like a man who has no strength, adrift among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom You remember no more, and who are cut off from Your hand. You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the depths. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and You have afflicted (‘*anah*) me with all Your waves. Selah.”** (Psalm 88:1-7) The rest of the chapter goes on in the same vein: affliction, being brought down. On a national scale, it’s an experience that Daniel described (in 12:7) as “when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered.” The affliction the Psalmist is describing will be like that imposed upon the newly redeemed remnant of Israel who find they must flee from the Antichrist into the mountain wilderness (see Matthew 24:15-21) after the abomination of desolation, just before the mid-point of the Tribulation. Why have they been humbled? Why are they oppressed? Because, having rejected Yahweh and His Messiah for the past two and a half millennia, they have now changed their mind. (Read what leads up to Ezekiel 39:22 if you want to know why.) Now they’re refusing to accept the *Antichrist’s* messianic claims

instead. They have finally *'anah*: “answered, responded, testified, spoken, and replied as a witness” that Yahweh alone is God—and for that, their mortal lives are forfeit under the Antichrist’s iron rule. (The Tribulation isn’t called the “Time of Jacob’s Trouble” for nothing.) But who are they crying out to? **“Yahweh, God of my salvation.”** *Who?* The word translated “salvation” here is *yashuw’ah*—phonetically indistinguishable from the Messiah’s name: Yahshua! Whether they know it or not, Yahweh was—and is about to be again—manifested as their Messiah, Yahshua. Yahweh explains what it will take for this to come about: **“I will return again to My place till they [Israel and Judah] acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face. In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.”** (Hosea 5:15)

And when will that happen? On the Day of Atonement, of course. That is, five days before the end of the Tribulation, as the armies of the whole earth are closing in against Jerusalem under the genocidal banner of the Antichrist. Zechariah paints the scene. **“In that day Yahweh will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem... It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.”** (Zechariah 12:8-10) This “defense” of Jerusalem is the “battle” of Armageddon, and Yahweh—that is, Yahshua the Messiah (see Revelation 19:11-21)—has returned to “destroy all the nations” that come against it—and against Him. They will see Him descend upon the Mount of Olives (compare Zechariah 14:4 to Acts 1:9-12) and they will do two things, both implied in the Word *'anah*: “mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son,” for their fathers’ part in his death and for their own subsequent national rejection of His grace; and answer, respond, and testify that Yahshua the Messiah is indeed the King of kings and Lord of lords. It’s *Yom Kippurim*: if they don’t afflict their souls in humility now, in the Messiah’s glorious presence, if they don’t respond to Him and testify of His greatness when they see Him bodily returning to earth, then they must be, as the Torah demands, “cut off from their people.”

- (847) *Observe the Day of Atonement on the day specified by Yahweh. “This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you.”* (Leviticus 16:29) As with all of Yahweh’s *mo’edim-miqra’ey*, the Day of Atonement will be fulfilled on the very day of its Levitical mandate—in this case the 10th of Tishri. The Zechariah 12 passage we just looked at makes it pretty clear that the requirements of *Yom Kippurim* will be fulfilled only a few hours before

the “battle” of Armageddon commences—that final confrontation between the Antichrist’s armies and the returning King Yahshua. And unless the conflict proves to be an uphill battle for Yahshua (something that is flatly contradicted in scripture), we are led to the conclusion that the Day of Atonement’s fulfillment and that of the Feast of Tabernacles on the 15th of Tishri—in which God “camps out” with mankind (see Precepts #861-864, below)—will occur in the same year, which means they’ll be only five days apart. My prophecy research has led me to believe that this auspicious year will be 2033—precisely two thousand years (or forty jubilee periods) after the passion of Yahshua. (Feel free to disagree with my chronological conclusion if you want, but *don’t* feel free to ignore the warning it implies.)

For reasons I’ll explain in Precept #861, I don’t believe the definitive Day of Atonement will fall on a natural Sabbath (Saturday). But I’d love to be a fly on the Wailing Wall on *Yom Kippurim* in 2028, which *will* fall on a Saturday—September 30 that year. This (according to the Tribulation timeline worked out in *Future History*) has to be very near the date of the miraculous defeat of Gog’s Islamic forces by the hand of Yahweh, spoken of in Ezekiel 38 and 39. And the conclusion of *that* little skirmish will be: **“So the house of Israel shall know that I am Yahweh their God from that day forward.”** (Ezekiel 39:22)

By the way, notice that little phrase describing the participants of *Yom Kippurim*: **“whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you.”** The same requirements are made of everyone, Jew and gentile alike: do no work, and ‘*anah*—afflict your soul in repentance and respond to Yahweh. Though the *miqra* is structured in terms especially germane to Israel’s restoration, we should not be unaware that multitudes of gentiles will also come to faith during the Tribulation. And Yahweh’s means of atonement for them is the same as that for His people Israel (and for us, for that matter): the blood of His perfect sacrifice—Yahshua.

- (848) *Allow the High Priest to make atonement for you.* **“For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before Yahweh. It is a sabbath [*sabbaton*: Sabbath observance] of solemn rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls. It is a statute forever.”** (Leviticus 16:30-31) The procedure of the annual atonement ritual was to be performed by one person, the High Priest—Aaron or one of his male descendants. But notice how Yahweh defines the High Priest: **“And the priest, who is anointed and consecrated to minister as priest in his father’s place....”** Yahweh’s wording is carefully crafted (as always) to describe this Priest as one who is anointed (Hebrew: *mashach*, the word from which

“Messiah is derived), is consecrated (*male’*, meaning to fill, consecrate, satisfy, accomplish, confirm, or complete), and, most significantly, ministers as priest (read: intercessor) “*in his father’s place*.” The word translated “in place” deserves our attention as well. It’s the Hebrew *tachath*, meaning “under, beneath, instead of, for, or in place of.” It’s the very essence of a son’s role as representative of his father in Hebrew society (see Psalm 127:5). Does the phrase “Son of God” ring any bells? The High Priest performing the atonement rite is clearly a type of Yahshua the Messiah.

This Priest “**shall make atonement, and put on the linen clothes, the holy garments; then he shall make atonement for the Holy Sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tabernacle of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. This shall be an everlasting statute for you, to make atonement for the children of Israel, for all their sins, once a year.**” (Leviticus 16:32-34) We discussed the concept of atonement at length under Precept #787. To reprise my conclusion, “At its heart, atonement is an action, prompted by a gift, that brings two parties together who were formerly estranged. Both parties have to agree on the terms of the arrangement; otherwise reconciliation would not result.” That’s what it *does*, but how does it relate to what it *means*? The word translated “atone” (*kapar*), as we’ve seen, actually means “to cover.”

Perhaps an illustration would help us to understand this. For ten years I lived at the end of a half-mile long gravel road up a hillside in Central Virginia. For ten years, my car was never clean; winter snows took *forever* to melt (meaning that if I wanted to go home in February, I had to have four wheel drive); Buick-sized potholes reappeared every spring, conspiring to steal the joy the daffodils brought to the party. Basically, I loved the house, but hated the road; I wanted the destination, but despised the journey. That road needed “atonement” in the worst way. So when I moved a couple of years ago—into a new house with a long gravel driveway—the first thing I did was to have it paved—covered over (*kapar*) with asphalt. As the Hebrew word implies, this covering of asphalt didn’t merely conceal the driveway, but fundamentally altered its character—snow doesn’t hang around, potholes don’t form, and towering clouds of dust following my car are a thing of the past. The “atonement” of my driveway *reconciled* my home to the community in which I live. There’s one thing I should add, however: there was a price to pay. Atonement doesn’t come cheap, whether you’re talking about driveways or human souls.

Here on the Day of Atonements (plural: *Yom Kippurim*) the High Priest is instructed to make atonement for seven distinct entities:

- (1) “You,” that is, Moses, the temporal leader of the people, who is specifically said to be in need of cleansing from all of his sins before Yahweh. Our leaders should never start to believe their own press: they not only sin, they should be first in line to seek forgiveness and cleansing.
- (2) The “Holy Sanctuary.” This is the whole Tabernacle enclosure, every detail of which reveals some facet of the Plan of Yahweh for our redemption. Please refer to Chapter 4 of this volume, “The Tabernacle of God,” for details. Atonement is needed because we—sinful people—are responsible for communicating to the world the truths that the Sanctuary represents.
- (3) The “Tabernacle of Meeting.” Though often spoken of as synonymous with the Sanctuary, this speaks specifically of the tent that stood within the courtyard, where the symbols concerning our Messiah’s role and what we’re supposed to do in light of them become most intense.
- (4) The Altar. This is where the blood of innocence was to be shed—the worst of crimes, but necessary in order to reconcile the worst of criminals—us—to the God who made us.
- (5) The priests. Those who ministered before Yahweh, whose role it was to intercede for the people, but who were themselves flawed and frail, in need of atonement. Finally,
- (6) “All the people of the assembly,” and (7) The Children of Israel. These last two, in context, sound identical, but they’re not, if you look at them in light of subsequent history. “Assembly” is the Hebrew *qahal*, usually translated *ekklesia* in the Greek Septuagint. Ultimately, the “church,” comprised of all post-resurrection believers regardless of genetic heritage, is specified here as needing atonement. In reality, it is our collective acceptance of the atonement provided by Yahweh and administered by Yahshua that *defines* us as members of this *qahal* or *ekklesia*. But the Children of Israel are listed separately as being in need of atonement. This is but one of hundreds of indicators in scripture that a remnant of *biological* Israel—outside the church (because they’ll come to faith after the *ekklesia* has been raptured) will also receive atonement under the ministry of the ultimate High Priest.

- (849) *The High Priest shall wear special linen clothing. “Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with the blood of a young bull as a sin offering, and of a ram as a burnt offering. He shall put the holy linen tunic and the linen trousers on his body; he shall be girded with a linen sash, and with the linen turban he shall be attired. These are holy garments. Therefore he shall wash his body in water, and put them on.”* (Leviticus 16:3-4) Throughout scripture, linen is a recurring symbol for grace or imputed righteousness—often contrasted with wool, a metaphor for work (something that would cause you to sweat). So we see

that the two fibers were not to be blended: **“You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you.”**

(Leviticus 19:19) That is to say, work, though a necessary part of our mortal lives, has no part to play in God’s plan of redemption. Yahweh’s formula is “grace alone through Christ alone,” not “God’s grace plus our works.” The priests and Levites who will minister in the Millennial temple are given the same instruction: **“And it shall be, whenever they enter the gates of the inner court, that they shall put on linen garments; no wool shall come upon them while they minister within the gates of the inner court or within the house. They shall have linen turbans on their heads and linen trousers on their bodies; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat.”** (Ezekiel 44:17-18)

The metaphor carries all the way through to the “marriage supper of the Lamb,” the wedding feast, so to speak, of Yahshua the Messiah and His bride, the *ekklesia*. **“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”** (Revelation 19:7-8) Righteous *acts*? That sounds like “good works,” doesn’t it? Perhaps, but the fact is, these linen wedding garments were *granted* to her (i.e., us)—she didn’t labor to attain them. That’s why we’re to give *Him* (Yahshua the Messiah, a.k.a. “the Lord God Omnipotent (v.6) glory upon learning of the readiness of His bride. He is the One who *made* the bride’s acts righteous. All this is precisely the same picture we’re being given in Leviticus 16: the priest, like the bride, is “made ready” by being cleansed by washing with water (the Word of God), followed by donning the linen garments of grace—imputed righteousness.

- (850) *The High Priest shall offer a sin offering for himself and his house. “Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house.”* (Leviticus 16:6) **“And Aaron shall bring the bull of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house, and shall kill the bull as the sin offering which is for himself.”** (Leviticus 16:11) The High Priest may have *stood* for the Messiah-Redeemer in his metaphorical role, but in reality he was a sinful man in need of atonement just like everybody else. So before he could “make atonement” for the sins of the people, he had to make sure he himself was covered. The animal specified for the task was a bull, because a real danger in being the High Priest was pride of position, which could (and sometimes did) lead to false doctrine. The sin offering of a bull addressed that.

Leviticus 16 skips around a bit, introducing subjects but only implementing them later. The schedule of events for the High Priest on the Day of Atonement is apparently as follows: (1) He bathes and puts on the holy linen garments (Precept #849); (2) he slays the *chata't* bull for the atonement of his own sins (#850); (3) offers the incense (#851); (4) sprinkles the bull's blood on the mercy seat (#852); (5) casts lots to determine the fate of the two goats (#854); (6) kills one goat and sprinkles its blood upon the mercy seat (#855); (7) sprinkles blood from both the bull and the goat upon the altar (#855); (8) sends the scapegoat into the wilderness (#857); (9) removes the special linen garments and washes himself again (#858); (10) offers the ram upon the altar as a burnt offering (#858); and (11) directs the disposal outside the camp of the carcasses of the *chata't* bull and goat (#860). One notes that considering it's a "sabbath of solemn rest," the High Priest has to work awfully hard on behalf of his people on *Yom Kippurim*. That's the point, of course: Aaron, as the anointed Priest (a type of the Messiah) does his job so the people may rest in it. Doing what he does, in fact, would be *illegal* for anyone else.

- (851) *The High Priest shall burn incense on the Day of Atonement. "Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before Yahweh, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil. And he shall put the incense on the fire before Yahweh, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die."* (Leviticus 16:12-13) If you'll recall, the altar of incense stood immediately in front of the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Normally (every morning and every evening, in fact), incense would be burned upon this small altar—a picture of constant and recurring prayer and intercession. But today, on *Yom Kippurim*, the incense was to be brought inside the veil—into the Most Holy Place—and burned in a censer. Why? Because Yahweh's Shekinah Glory was said to abide between the two cherubim atop the mercy seat on the ark of the Covenant. At this point, the blood of the bull (which would atone for the sins of the Priest) had not yet been sprinkled upon the mercy seat (see the following precept), so the process of atonement was not complete. This means that Aaron or his successor would have had to walk into the very presence of God in a sinful, unreconciled state—and that would be a fatal move. So Yahweh provided a way to insulate His glory from fallen man until the task of atonement could be performed.

In case you haven't caught the significance of all this, the incense, this insulating intercessor between God and man, is a picture of Yahshua's earthly life prior to Calvary: God Himself walking among us fallen mortals. How He did this without inadvertently killing us by His very

glorious presence is one of the great theological conundrums of the ages. Moses reports that the cloud of incense (symbolic of prayer) was to “cover” the mercy seat, where the Shekinah dwelt. This is not *kapar* (the verb from which we get “atonement”), but *kasah*, which denotes “to cover, conceal, hide, or clothe.” (S) In Yahshua, Yahweh’s awesome deity was concealed, hidden, and covered by being clothed in mortal flesh. Like the smoke of incense, it wasn’t made to last, but this condition persisted long enough for Him to make atonement for mankind. It also means that Yahshua was *prayer personified*. Hallelujah!

- (852) *The High Priest shall sprinkle the blood of his sin offering on the mercy seat. “He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.”* (Leviticus 16:14) Now protected by the cloud of incense, the High Priest could begin the process of symbolic atonement—starting with his own needs. The blood of the bull (see Precept #850) was to be applied with his finger onto the east side of the mercy seat—that is, the side that was closest to the east-facing veil separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place. I get the impression that he wasn’t to loiter, walk around, and make himself at home in the Holy of Holies, but was rather to pull the veil aside, do as Yahweh had directed, and then respectfully withdraw—immediately. This was where God “dwelled.” The Priest was just visiting—he wasn’t in the process of becoming a god himself.

After applying the blood to the mercy seat, he was to sprinkle the bull’s blood seven times upon the ground in front of the ark of the covenant and its mercy seat. The number seven denotes completion or perfection, signifying that the act was perfectly efficacious in achieving its purpose—atonement for the High Priest and his household. But why was the blood to be sprinkled on the mercy seat *and* on the ground? The mercy seat sat atop the ark of the covenant, where the two tablets upon which Yahweh had written the Ten Commandments were kept, telling us, I believe, that the blood so applied would satisfy the requirements of the Law. The earth before the ark was sprinkled with blood for the same reason: what *it* contained—namely, us—would also be perfectly and completely reconciled to Yahweh through the atonement process—if only we’d accept the gift.

The Priest was to use his own finger as the tool of application (not some neutral implement like a sprig of hyssop). That is, the One represented by the anointed High Priest—Yahshua the Messiah—would personally (not vicariously) apply the blood of atonement. Moreover, He

would do it—it wouldn't be done to Him. He would be the subject of atonement, not the object; our Savior, not our victim.

- (853) *Present a burnt offering and sin offering to Yahweh on the Day of Atonement. "He shall take from the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats as a sin offering, and one ram as a burnt offering."* (Leviticus 16:5) The burnt offering (*olah*) of a ram symbolically indicated the priest's recognition of, and homage to, the authority of the Lamb of God. But the really unique feature of the *Yom Kippurim* was the use of two goats in the atonement process. Although both goats were considered *chata't*, or sin offerings, only one was to be actually slain, as we shall see in the next couple of precepts.

We should note that the concept of "offering" is only *implied* in the noun *chata't*. Along with a number of other derivatives with various closely related shades of meaning, it is based on the verb *chata'*, meaning to miss, miss the way, sin, incur guilt, forfeit, or purify from uncleanness. Thus *chata't* (the most often used form) was used of both the offense and the means of purification from its consequences. *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes that although "sin was understood in the ancient near eastern religions as a violation of the status quo in cultic, political, and social life," in theocratic Israel, "the people learned by revelation that sin was disobedience of God's will and exploitation or disregard of the rights of other people. Sin was declared to be an extremely serious matter and could only be taken care of by a creative and gracious act of merciful forgiveness by God. And the cure was effective, bringing about a new life of joy and fruitfulness." So we see that the concept of shedding blood is incidental, but not essential, to the concept of *chata't*. (In contrast, the verb *zabach*, translated "to sacrifice," actually means to slaughter.) Thus sacrificing only one of the two *chata't* goats isn't self-contradictory.

- (854) *Cast lots to decide the fate of the two goats. "He shall take the two goats and present them before Yahweh at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for Yahweh and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat on which Yahweh's lot fell, and offer it as a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before Yahweh, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness."* (Leviticus 16:7-10) This instruction is unique in the entire Law of Moses: two goats, both called *chata't*, or sin offerings, are to be brought before Yahweh, but only one of them is to die (Precept #855) while the other one lives (#857). God is telling us that both death and life are involved, and indeed required, in the atonement process. We'll

discuss what the ramifications are in the coming precepts, but for now let us examine the means by which the goats' relative fates are decided: by "casting lots." Although the goats were to be as similar as possible—both young, male, and without blemish—Yahweh is *not* telling us (like Allah would have) that whoever lives and whoever dies is a coin toss. Rather, the goats are to be seen as a set, a unit, two sides of the same coin: each of them plays a part in explaining Yahweh's procedure for our reconciliation with Him, and both of them are said to provide atonement for the people, each in his own way. Neither goat tells the whole story or does the whole job. Therefore, for God's purpose, it doesn't really matter which goat does which job.

- (855) *Make atonement for the people.* **"Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat. So he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness."** (Leviticus 16:15-16) We discussed how (and why) the blood of the bull was to be applied (atoning for the Priest) in Precept #852. Here we see the process being repeated, this time with the blood of the slain goat—the *chata't* required for the sin of the people. Three things made it necessary for blood to be shed: (1) The "uncleanness" of the people. This is the Hebrew *tum'ah*: impurity, uncleanness, dross, or foreign particulate matter. The goal, then, would be to purify them, to separate them from their sin. (2) "Transgression" or *pesha*, is an act of rebellion, crime, or revolt—that which is contrary to God's standard—emphasizing not the error but the rebellion. And (3) "sin" is *chata'ah*, a violation of a standard, in the sense of missing a mark.

Surprisingly perhaps, making atonement for the people in this way was also said to atone for the Holy Place and the tabernacle of meeting. Because of their nature, these things obviously didn't sin, rebel, or become impure by their own behavior. Nevertheless, they were detailed symbols describing Yahweh's plan of redemption for mankind, and more to the point, they were to be used by God's chosen people to communicate the story to the rest of the world. So if Israel rebelled, if they became impure or missed the mark, the message of the Tabernacle would be obscured. Unfortunately, that very thing has become historical fact: Israel's sin has made the lessons of the Sanctuary opaque to the world, not to mention themselves. *Yom Kippurim* will correct that.

- (856) *The High Priest must do his work alone.* “There shall be no man in the tabernacle of meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the Holy Place, until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel. And he shall go out to the altar that is before Yahweh, and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. Then he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, cleanse it, and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.” (Leviticus 16:17-19) The activities of the Day of Atonement were centered in one man, the High Priest. He was the only one allowed in the Tabernacle sprinkling blood or burning incense. We’ve seen before that the High Priest is a type of the coming Messiah, and this bears out that fact: Yahshua accomplished our atonement single-handedly. No one else’s sacrifice—the ultimate “good deed”—would have any part to play in the reconciliation of man to God. Not even martyrdom can secure one’s place in the Kingdom. Only Christ’s innocent blood can do that.

I may be reading too much into this, but when we’re told that the High Priest made atonement for “his household, *and* for all the assembly of Israel,” I see a theological distinction between the two things. “The assembly of Israel” is easy enough to figure out, of course. But what precisely is the High Priest’s “household” (beyond the obvious literal context—his immediate family)? After all, his wife and children were in no physical danger when he strode into the Holy of Holies with his incense and the blood of the bull, so why were they not simply included in “the assembly of Israel?” I believe the answer is prophetic: the “household” of the ultimate High Priest, Yahshua the Messiah—the temple and dwelling place of His Holy Spirit—would not be confined to biological Israel, but would find realization in every nation, tribe, and tongue. I’m speaking, of course, of the church, the *ekklesia*, the called-out assembly of Yahshua’s followers. We too, even if we’re not of Israelite ancestry, receive the gift of atonement if we “afflict our souls” in repentance, answer Yahweh’s call (we are, after all, the *ekklesia*—the “called-out”), and rest in His finished work.

- (857) *The live goat shall bear the sin of the people into the wilderness.* “And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat. Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.” (Leviticus 16:20-22) *Yom Kippurim* not

only covers our sins; it also removes them. Yes, the innocent blood of the first goat was required to atone, to propitiate—to pay the penalty—for our sins. But the job is really only half done at this point. It is not enough to merely be dead to sin: we must at the same time become alive to God. This is where the second goat comes into the picture. Both death and life are required.

Both goats are a picture of what Christ accomplished for us on Calvary. Not only was He slain for our transgressions (prophesied by Passover), He also lives on our behalf (the point of the Feast of Firstfruits). What lies in between (the Feast of Unleavened Bread) is the task of the second goat, the living one. The sins of the people were to be symbolically laid upon his head, and he was to bear them to a place where they could no longer trouble God's people in any way: to the wilderness, an "uninhabited land."

The world's religions make a killing (sometimes literally) by fostering and nurturing the guilt that their adherents feel concerning their sin. They are in the business (again, literally) of providing ways to deal with the shame that sin inevitably leaves in its wake for people who perceive, deep within their souls, that there is a God who has standards of holiness they have violated. There is money to be made and power to be grasped selling indulgences, prescribing penance, and declaring oneself to be the sole doorkeeper to paradise. Guilt is a tar baby: it's best to leave it alone. I'm not suggesting that we should flippantly brush off the consequences of our sin, you understand. The "afflict-your-souls" connotation of *Yom Kippurim*'s 'anah requirement demonstrates that repentance and contrition is part of the atonement process. But if we are to embrace the other side of 'anah—to answer and respond to God—then we need to come to terms with the fact that our sins have been carried away to an uninhabited place. Yahweh has already dealt with them. They are gone, never to return. We can—we *must*—rest assured of that.

- (858) *The High Priest shall change clothes to present the burnt offering. "Then Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of meeting, shall take off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the Holy Place, and shall leave them there. And he shall wash his body with water in a holy place, put on his garments, come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, and make atonement for himself and for the people."* (Leviticus 16:23-24) If we see the High Priest's special linen garments as the imputed righteousness of God's grace and nothing more, we'll miss part of the subtle picture Yahweh is painting. I mean, our knee jerk reaction is, "If linen garments indicate imputed righteousness, we should *all* wear them, not just the Priest, and

we should never take them off for any reason.” So we’re being told there’s more to it. Let’s analyze the instructions.

Aaron was told to bathe and don the linen garb before he did anything else on *Yom Kippurim*. Thus prepared, he proceeded with all of the sin offerings, slaying the bull and the first goat, sprinkling their blood, then pronouncing the sins of the people on the scapegoat and sending it off into the wilderness. Only now, with all of the *chata’t* sacrifices and offerings out of the way, is he to bathe again and put his regular clothing back on. But he’s not finished at the altar: he must now offer up the ram as an *olah*, a burnt offering. Why change clothes?

The most obvious factor is that when sprinkling the blood on the mercy seat, the High Priest was standing in the physical presence of Yahweh’s Shekinah Glory, and you can’t do that in your own righteousness if you want to survive. Moreover, Aaron was acting out a scene, playing the part of the Messiah Himself—the source of our righteousness. And later, when sending the scapegoat into the wilderness, he was playing God’s role before the people—for we in our own strength have no means to rid ourselves of our iniquity.

But the *olah* is a different matter. Here Aaron was back in the persona of a priest, and more to the point, a son of Israel—a mere man. An *olah*, if you’ll recall, is a voluntary act of homage to God. If I may quote myself (from Volume I, Chapter 12), “The *olah* was a voluntary sacrifice made for atonement, homage to Yahweh, and celebration before Him. Total dedication is implied, for the offering was to be completely consumed by fire. Abraham’s intended sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah was called an *olah*, making the messianic message evident. Through it we are reminded that Yahshua’s self sacrifice for our redemption was not something He *had* to do, but was something He *wanted* to do, because He loved us.” The burnt offering, then, is *not* part of the process whereby Yahshua’s righteousness is accounted to us. It is, rather, an expression of deep, humble gratitude for having already attained that amazing status. And that, to my mind, explains the High Priest’s change of apparel.

- (859) *The “suitable man” shall undergo cleansing. “He who released the goat as the scapegoat shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.”* (Leviticus 16:26) Here we are given instruction concerning one of the supporting cast—the “suitable” man (verse 21) who was assigned to take the goat out of the camp into the wilderness. The word translated “suitable” is *itiy*, meaning able, fit, ready—pertaining to one who is capable of accomplishing a task. The “task,” in this case, was to see to it that the sin-bearer reached his destination, i.e., the uninhabited

land, where the sin could no longer trouble God's people. God may be alluding to those rare individuals who serve as "moral compasses" for their communities, whose refusal to compromise with the world becomes a quiet beacon of truth and love, whether or not they purposely set out to become reformers or spokesmen for Yahweh's cause. A few Biblical examples: Job, Gideon, Ruth, Samuel, Abigail, Daniel, John the Baptist, and Nicodemus.

But "taking out the garbage" can be a dirty business. The lesson is not that these people are capable and willing to do what God has called them to do (though that's what defines them). It's that their willingness and ability to do God's work does not *in itself* qualify them to "come into the camp," that is, become a part of the congregation of the saints. What qualifies them, rather, is "washing their clothes and bathing with water," that is, allowing their lives to be cleansed by the Word of God, which speaks of the sacrifice of Yahshua. No matter how "suitable" we are to do good works in this world, our position before God requires us to be clean—and only He can provide that.

- (860) *The fat of the sin offerings shall be burned on the altar, but their flesh shall be burned outside the camp. "The fat of the sin offering he shall burn on the altar.... The bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp. And they shall burn in the fire their skins, their flesh, and their offal. Then he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp."* (Leviticus 16:25, 27-28) In contrast to the burnt offering of the ram, which was to be completely consumed upon the altar, the sin offerings of the Day of Atonement were quite selective in what was burned on the altar. As always with *chata't* sacrifices, the fatty portions were removed and burned upon the altar in homage to Yahweh. On reflection, I think these might be—like the olive oil mixed with grain offerings—symbolic of the Spirit that indwells the worshiper, which is being declared to be God's in the sacrificial act.

Normally with a sin offering, the priest who performed the ceremony would receive the flesh of the sacrificed animal to eat, so long as the *chata't* wasn't being offered to cover *his* sins. But here, it was: the bull in very specific terms, and the goat in a general way—the High Priest was, after all, part of the congregation for whose sins the goat was being offered to atone. So the entire carcass, the flesh, the skin, and the inner organs—everything but the blood and the "fat that covers the entrails and all the fat which is on the entrails, the two kidneys and the fat that is on them by the flanks, and the fatty lobe attached to the liver above the kidneys," (Leviticus 4:8-

9) was taken outside the camp and burned. This once again is a Messianic prophecy. Yahshua, who had taken our sins upon Himself, was taken “outside the camp,” that is, outside Jerusalem’s city walls, to receive the sentence of judgment for our trespasses (which is what “burning” represents).

As with the “suitable man” who accompanied the scapegoat into the wilderness, the man who was tasked with the burning of the carcasses of the bull and the second goat was not allowed to enter the camp until he had “washed his clothes and bathed his body in water.” This is the flip side of the same coin. Metaphorically, the “carcass burner” is the one who inflicted judgment on God’s Messiah. This isn’t limited to a few Roman soldiers in Jerusalem. In reality, it means *all of us*: we’re all complicit in His crucifixion. In the end, then, our salvation doesn’t depend on whether we *meant* to do good or not. We have all fallen short of Yahweh’s perfect standard. But all of us—not only those who sincerely tried to keep the curse of sin from wandering freely among the people, but even those of us who in our ignorance and pride executed judgment upon God’s innocent Messiah—can be admitted into “the camp,” into fellowship with Yahweh and His people. The price of admission is cleanliness: we must be washed clean by the Word of God and in the blood that we have so blithely shed—the blood of Yahshua the Christ.

FEAST OF TABERNACLES

The seventh and final appointment with God on the Hebrew festival calendar is called *Sukkot*, or the Feast of Tabernacles. We’ve already explored aspects of this *miqra* under Mitzvot #137-142, #522, #543, and #838. This was structured as an end-of-summer “harvest party,” a week long celebration where the whole nation of Israel would gather where Yahweh had “chosen to make His name abide” (which, from David’s reign onward, was the city of Jerusalem) and “camp out” in temporary shelters for the duration of the feast.

The name of the *miqra* is derived from *sukkah* (as in Leviticus 23:34; *Sukkot* is the plural form), which means a dwelling place or shelter—a thicket or covert (when animals are being housed—e.g. Genesis 33:17) or a hut, booth, tent, pavilion or canopy (when referring to people). This is *not* the word translated “Tabernacle” when referring to the “tent of meeting” (Hebrew: *mishkan*), although the Tabernacle was occasionally referred to as a *sukkah*—most poignantly in the noble protest of Uriah the Hittite, husband of Bathsheba, who said to the desperate and deceitful king David, **“The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in tents (*sukkot*).... Shall I then go to my house to eat and drink, and to lie with my wife? As I live and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.”** (II Samuel 11:11) But from

Yahweh's point of view, the *mishkan*-Tabernacle and the *sukkah*-tabernacle represent two very different truths, the first (as we saw in Chapter 4 of this volume) being a detailed treatise on the Plan of God for our redemption, and the second embodying Yahweh's incredible desire to enjoy personal fellowship, or stated more informally, to "hang out," with us. I wouldn't exactly call it "slumming," but the amazing fact is, in spite of our shortcomings and failures, Yahweh actually *likes* us. He enjoys our company. And if He has to leave His heavenly abode to spend "quality time" with us (until we're ready to inhabit His world), then that's what He'll do. The *mo'ed-miqra* of *Sukkot*, in the most graphic of terms, is a prophecy of Yahweh coming to "camp out" among men.

We can get a more focused view of *sukkah/Sukkot* by examining some other instances of the word's usage. In a clearly Millennial passage, the prophet Amos reports, **"On that day I will raise up the tabernacle (*sukkah*) of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old."** (Amos 9:11) The "tabernacle of David" is his earthly kingdom, which "fell down" only one generation after his death, with the division of Israel from Judah. It will be restored, however—all twelve tribes together again, with Yahshua on the throne—during the thousand-year reign, the Kingdom of God upon the earth.

Speaking of the same glorious time, Isaiah writes, **"And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem. When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, then Yahweh will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering. And there will be a tabernacle (*sukkah*) for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain."** (Isaiah 4:3-6) What is this *sukkah* of which he speaks? What is this "covering" that will provide "refuge" and "shelter from storm and rain?" Why, it's the Shekinah of Yahweh—His glorious presence that will once again fill the Temple on Moriah (see Ezekiel 43:4)—the very presence of God dwelling among men.

- (861) *Observe the Feast of Tabernacles on the day specified by Yahweh. "On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of Yahweh for seven days."* (Leviticus 23:39) As always, Yahweh was very specific about when the children of Israel were to observe the *miqra*. Considering the history of the festivals' fulfillments so far, we can only conclude that we're being told the very date of the year upon which Yahweh will bring about whatever it is that the *miqra* is designed to teach us. In this case, it's the ascension to the throne of earth

by Yahshua the Messiah (the bodily manifestation of Yahweh's Shekinah Glory, as we saw above). He will rule His people in perfect peace for a thousand years—and beyond. As Isaiah told us, **"The government will be upon His shoulder, and His name will be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."** (Isaiah 9:6)

I find it interesting that the names of the Hebrew months are seldom mentioned in scripture. They're usually just numbered, as here: the "seventh month." (Days of the week aren't named either; they're merely numbered, one through seven.) The names we commonly assign to the months of the Jewish calendar are derived from those used by their Babylonian captors (the obvious tip-off being the fourth month, named after the prototypical sun-god counterfeit, Tammuz). In fact, we only have the original names of four of the twelve months. For the record: the first month, Nisan, was called Abib (which means "ripening of grain"). The second, Iyar, was originally named Zin (meaning "splendor, or radiance"); the seventh month, Tishri, was first called Ethanim ("everflowing streams"); and the eighth, Cheshvan, was originally called Bul (which means "to produce," in the sense of providing rain). The rest of the names have been lost to posterity.

Anyway, the date specified for the Feast of Tabernacles is the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Tishri), which usually falls sometime within the Gregorian calendar's October. Of course, because the symbols Yahweh is using to communicate His truths are so well established by this time, we could perhaps paraphrase our current precept as follows: *"When the reflection of Yahweh's truth upon the earth has at last reached its brightest phase—that is, when God's plan has reached a climax of perfection, marked by the completion of His harvest of believing souls from every age into the Kingdom of Heaven upon the earth—then it's time to celebrate with a joy that will never cease. But beware: one cannot work to attain a seat at Yahweh's banquet table, whether in the earthly kingdom, or in the eternal state that follows, for it is a gift from God that we may either accept with thanksgiving or reject with contempt. The choice is ours."*

Or, we can try to joyfully discern when He will bring this most amazing event to pass. We've been told the day of the year, Tishri 15; can we determine which year? After all, He called this a *mo'ed*, an *appointment*. Even if we don't actually have to arrange to show up on time ('cause He's promised to send His limo for us, so to speak), an appointment presupposes that both parties know when to meet, does it not? Notwithstanding the prevailing Christian opinion that we can't know

anything at all about Yahweh's chronology (despite scores of scriptural clues and outright prophecies), I believe God *did* tell us the year of the definitive Feast of Tabernacles. (Everybody in this parade is out of step but me, right?) The Apostle Peter tells us, **"Beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."** (II Peter 3:8; cf. Psalm 90:4) The reason so many of us think God's timing is all a big mystery is that we *have* forgotten "this one thing." In both the creation-week account and the institution of the six-day work week followed by a Sabbath rest, Yahweh was telling us what His schedule for mankind's redemption was going to be: six thousand years of "work" (laboring under a sin nature that separated us from direct fellowship with Him, making grace through faith necessary), followed by one day of "rest" in His finished work (the Millennial Kingdom of Yahshua). All this would be followed by the eternal state, in which all believers would relate to Yahweh directly, having at last received their immortal, "spiritual" bodies, as described in I Corinthians 15.

The only "innovation" I've brought to the theological table is the thought that *The Millennium* (the seventh) isn't the only one defined by a period of exactly one thousand years—they *all* are. (I know, it sounds slam-dunk obvious when you say it out loud.) But if this is true, then each of the seven millennia of Yahweh's plan will have begun with a spiritually significant "milestone," a millennial marker. Most of these markers are clearly apparent once you start looking for them, and I've discussed them all in *Future History*. At this juncture, I just want to reiterate that the *really* obvious one, the anchor by which all the others are firmly secured in history, is 33 AD, the year of Yahshua's passion, the year in which the first four *miqra'ey* of Yahweh were fulfilled. That fact leads me to the unshakable conclusion that Yahshua's Millennial Kingdom will begin in 2033—two thousand years after Christ's sacrifice. On the Feast of Tabernacles, the fifteenth day of Tishri, Yahshua will commence his earthly reign, fulfilling the requirements of the *miqra's* prophecy.

For me, this chronological epiphany finally made sense of such esoteric statements as this: **"Come, and let us [in context, Ephraim and Judah—all of Israel] return to Yahweh; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us. On the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight."** (Hosea 6:1-2) If a "day" is only a day, then this makes no sense that I can see (though it suggests that the timing of Christ's death and sojourn in the tomb—something Jews today refuse to acknowledge—may also be prophetic of Israel's plight). But if Peter's formula is applied, it means that Israel would be "torn" and "stricken" for *two thousand years*, beginning in 33. That much is historical

fact. But Hosea reports that they will also be “raised up” on the *third day*—that is, during the third millennium after the crucifixion, a period of time that will begin in 2033.

You’d like a little confirmation? Okay. King Hezekiah got sick and was told by Isaiah that death was near. When he protested, pouted and prayed, the prophet was told to go back and tell him this: **“Thus says Yahweh, the God of David your father: ‘I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of Yahweh.’”** (II Kings 20:5) I believe Hezekiah’s illness was a picture of Israel’s impending “torn and stricken” condition. Isaiah has thus prophesied the same thing Hosea did: Israel would be restored, but not until *two thousand years* had passed. And not only restored politically. They would “go up to the house of Yahweh,” a euphemism for the Temple, which you and I now know to be a comprehensive metaphor for God’s plan of redemption: Israel’s restoration would be *spiritual*!

And what about the Sabbath issue? The Feast of Tabernacles is described as a Sabbath (*Sabbaton*), a day of rest. Although the “do-not-work-for-your-salvation” admonition is what we must primarily heed, it is not without significance that in the year 2033, *Sukkot* does fall on a natural Sabbath, Saturday, October 8. The reason I concluded that the Day of Atonement (also a *Sabbaton*) would *not* fall on a natural Sabbath is that if they are fulfilled in the same year (as scripture seems to indicate), they can’t both be on Saturdays, because they fall only five days apart.

- (862) *Build booths in which to “camp out” on the first day of the feast. “You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before Yahweh your God for seven days.”* (Leviticus 23:40) When I covered this under Mitzvah #141, I was so busy looking at the forest, I neglected to examine the trees—literally. For that I apologize, and will endeavor now to make amends by getting to the root of their meanings. If you’ll recall, our introduction to this section revealed that the *sukkah*, the booth or tabernacle each Israelite family was to build at “the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide” was a picture of the Shekinah Glory of Yahweh. *He* personifies the covering that provides refuge and shelter from the storms of our existence. Here, we’ll see the flip side of this coin. The four types of trees, the components from which the *Sukkot* are to be made, indicate who will populate Yahshua’s Kingdom: those who by definition are indwelt and empowered with the Spirit of Yahweh. As we shall see, this is not the random assemblage of building

materials as it first appears, but rather a comprehensive list—a detailed and multifaceted description—of those in whom the Holy Spirit abides.

(1) “Beautiful” is from the Hebrew verb *hadar*, meaning to honor, adorn, or make glorious. Not surprisingly, it is a word used of the return of Yahweh (in the persona of Yahshua) to the earth as He takes care of business a few days before the Feast of Tabernacles: **“Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious (*hadar*) in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength?—‘I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.’”** (Isaiah 63:1) Or how about this? **“His glory is great in your salvation [that’s *Yâshuw`ah* (יְשׁוּעָה)—the Messiah’s given name]; honor and majesty (*hadar*) you have placed upon Him.”** (Psalm 21:5) The first “tree,” then, represents King Yahshua, the very personification of the Shekinah and Spirit of God, returning to earth to reign in glory. Note, however, that the people were instructed to use the “fruit” of beautiful trees to build their booths. That’s the Hebrew word *pariy*, meaning fruit, produce, offspring, children, or progeny. And who are the spiritual progeny of King Yahshua? We who trust Him. **“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!...Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”** (I John 3:1-2)

(2) “Palm trees” are the Hebrew noun *tamar*, the water-loving date palms that congregate in oasis settings. **“The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree; He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of Yahweh shall flourish in the courts of our God.”** (Psalm 92:12-13) Who are these “righteous ones?” Job’s friend Elihu explains that Yahweh **“does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous; but they are on the throne with kings, for He has seated them forever, and they are exalted.”** (Job 36:7) But righteousness (as you know) is not the result of our own efforts, but God’s on our behalf: **“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”** (James 2:23) The second tree, then, stands for those accounted righteous—we who believe God—who will populate the Kingdom under Yahshua’s sovereignty. We will be “planted in the house of Yahweh” and shall “flourish in the courts of our God,” for He does “not withdraw His eyes” from us. *Ever*.

(3) “Leafy” trees. The adjective *abot* means thick with leaves, dense with foliage. So, he’s saying we’re *dense*? Well, not exactly. The verb from which “leafy” is derived, *abat*, means “to weave together, to conspire, to wrap up, to intertwine something.” Who are these who conspire together, who are weaved or intertwined into one in the context

of the Millennium? Why, Israel and the *ekklesia*. I'll admit, I probably would have missed that one if I hadn't already studied the structure of the wilderness Tabernacle (see Precepts #712-#715, #720, and #722). If you look at the details, this concept is everywhere you look: the *ekklesia* and the nation of Israel are side by side, united but distinct, working shoulder to shoulder. The *ekklesia* has not absorbed—or replaced—Israel, nor have they become part of Israel. Rather, we are entwined like branches grafted into the same divine tree (see Romans 11), or woven together like the warp and woof of one magnificent tapestry, created by and for the glory of Yahweh. If you don't believe me, read on...

(4) “Willows of the brook” are designated by the Hebrew noun *ereb*, meaning a willow or poplar tree. A virtually identical noun, however (with the same consonant root), denotes “a mixture, a mixed company, interwoven. The primary meaning is a grouping of people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It was used of the heterogeneous band associated with the nation of Israel as it departed from Egypt...” (Baker and Carpenter) The word also means “woof,” as in the threads that cross and interweave with the warp in a fabric. This, perhaps, sheds new light on the reason *ereb* is used in Exodus 12:38 to describe the “mixed” gentile multitude that believed in Yahweh and left Egypt along with the Israelites in the exodus. The two groups were interwoven, interdependent, and symbiotic, but their identities and heritage remained somewhat distinct.

Together, then, the four trees listed in Leviticus 23:40 signify the populace of the Millennial Kingdom of our Messiah, beginning with the glorious King, Yahshua himself, and including His “children,” the righteous who will flourish in His courts: those of Israel and every other nation who have “conspired” together to love and honor Yahweh in truth and trust—every believer from every age, from Adam until the last child born during the Millennium. Perhaps the most amazing fact of all is that these people are said to be the very *dwelling place* of the Glory of God.

Either that, or I'm just making this stuff up as I go along.

- (863) *Keep the Feast of Tabernacles in the place God has specified. “Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh chooses, because Yahweh your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice.”* (Deuteronomy 16:15) The Israelites were never to formally gather for worship (at least when sacrifices were involved) anywhere except where the Tabernacle or Temple and the ark of the Covenant were. But they were *required* to make the short journey three times a year to wherever this was. The Feast of Tabernacles is one of those times. Once again, we observe that Yahweh

has, because of Israel's idolatry and the rejection of her Messiah, made it impossible to do what He's required them to do. Even if you're a Jew living in Jerusalem, you cannot literally "keep" *Sukkot* today, because there is no Temple and no priesthood. Symbolically, however, is another matter. "The place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide" is defined by what it means: the Tabernacle is a detailed picture of the Plan of God for our redemption, centered in Yahshua the Messiah. Therefore, if the Spirit of Yahweh dwells within you (as a result of your trusting belief in Yahshua's atoning work) then *you* are the place Yahweh chooses to be; *you* are the "fruit of the beautiful tree," *you* are the righteous one who "flourishes like the palm tree," the "leafy tree" intertwined in worship with Yahweh's other children, and the "willow" who's such a vital part of God's joyous mixed company. Yahweh has blessed us with life, love, and His very presence. We shall surely rejoice!

- (864) *Observe the seventh feast by dwelling in tabernacles for seven days during the seventh month. "You shall keep the feast of Yahweh for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest."* (Leviticus 23:39) **"You shall keep it as a feast to Yahweh for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am Yahweh your God."** (Leviticus 23:41-43) The prevalence of the number seven in these instructions tells us that God intends to use what the *miqra* foreshadows to bring the affairs of mankind to a complete and perfect end. This is not the first week-long festival on Yahweh's calendar, however: the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the spring taught us that our sins could be removed from our lives—*completely*. This second and final seven-day appointment with God will at last reunite us (who had been estranged from Him by our sin) to perfect and intimate fellowship.

Note that the seventh month, though it marks the end of the story of our redemption as told through the seven *mo'edim-miqra'ey* of Yahweh, is not the end of the calendar year. There are many months yet to run. These months, I believe, are analogous to the eighth day of the feast: they represent the eternal state—that which comes after the Millennial Kingdom. The eighth day is a *sabbaton*, an observed Sabbath, so it's clear that the principle of grace will never be abrogated. The number of bulls sacrificed will have dropped from thirteen on the first day to one on the eighth (see Precept #845), leading me to the conclusion that error and falsehood will be a thing of the past.

During the eternal eighth day, however, the tabernacles or booths that we lived in during the festival week will no longer be inhabited. Why? Because the unique relationship we shared with Yahshua the Messiah (the “beautiful tree” in the metaphor) will no longer be precisely what it had been. Yahweh will no longer be “camping out” among men. He won’t have to. Since all of God’s children will at last be clothed in our immortal, spiritual bodies, it will no longer be necessary for Yahweh to diminish His glory by showing Himself to us in an assumed human form, as Yahshua the Messiah. At last we will see Him as He is; we will know as we are known—things that would have killed the most holy of mortal men.

In a sense, every created entity is as a metaphor designed to teach us about its Creator: light and sound, earth and sky, good and evil, life and death—they can exist in our understanding only because we ourselves have been given corporeal reality by our God. But on the eighth day, there will be no more need for these metaphors, symbols, and parables. Biology, chemistry, and physics were introduced by Yahweh for only one reason: to bring into being the mechanism by which He could love and be loved in return. But on the “eighth” day, the eternal day, the physical properties defining our *immortal* bodies will no longer be dependent on these things. Now that Yahweh’s little “science project”—the physical universe—will have finally served its purpose, He has something new planned, something that did not necessarily have its origins in the Big Bang (through which Yahweh Himself created our present physical existence). A new heaven and new earth await. This is what Paul was talking about in II Corinthians 5:16-17: **“Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”**

Loving Your Neighbor

In America, it is our practice to elect people to enact laws. Then we elect or appoint judges to implement—and if necessary, interpret, amend, or invalidate—those laws. Over the course of a couple of centuries, this has resulted in an impenetrable maze of rules, procedures, guidelines, exceptions, and exceptions to the exceptions. This in turn requires the attention of armies of lawyers—most of whom are being handsomely paid by clients with personal agendas to swing the outcome in one direction or the other, regardless of what's right or wrong. And we ordinary citizens begin to wonder where the law ceased being our protector and started becoming our master. The whole idea of having laws in the first place was to make life safe and fair for all concerned. Where did we go wrong?

It has become fashionable in Christian circles to declare that although we've forgotten our roots, the Ten Commandments were the foundation for our whole system of common law, and we should therefore keep them posted on the courthouse wall. I'll agree that they *should have* been the basis of American jurisprudence, but from the very beginning, we edited the life out of God's list. In truth, only four of the Ten Commandments were *ever* the law of the land in this country: do not murder, do not commit adultery (and we've long since jettisoned that one—it's no longer considered a crime in this country), don't steal, and don't perjure yourself. None of the rest of them (i.e., worship Yahweh only, don't make idols, use the name of God with respect, keep the Sabbath, honor your parents, and do not covet) were *ever* taken seriously by our lawmakers (or the European legal traditions they built upon). So our legislators didn't exactly go wrong by abandoning the Ten Commandments along the way. Rather, they (we) went astray by failing to implement them in the first place. (I'm speaking of law in the United States because that's what I know, but I suspect that much of what I'm saying applies to most nations.)

But as Yahshua pointed out, there are two “laws” that, if heeded, would have rendered the Ten Commandments, and indeed the entire Torah, more or less redundant. First, **“You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”** (Deuteronomy 6:5) And the second is a natural result of doing the first: **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** (Leviticus 19:18) I submit to you that not only the “Torah and the Prophets” hang upon these two precepts; if we all followed them, they would also eliminate the need for ninety percent of American law. Think it through: how much of our legal system is dedicated to trying to ensure that people *act as though* they “loved their neighbors as they do

themselves?” It’s not just the obviously criminal stuff like, “Don’t mug a guy and steal his wallet.” Everything from trade and banking regulations to civil rights, consumer protection, patents and copyrights, family law, environmental protection, immigration, national defense, intellectual property, probate and taxes, malpractice and workers’ compensation law, the regulation of alcohol, tobacco, and firearms—and a score of other categories—would have no reason for being there if we all simply loved our neighbors as much (and in the same way) as we love ourselves. Most statutes would be rendered obsolete if we (and I mean *worldwide*) didn’t covet what others had, if we didn’t try to steal from them, and if we didn’t seek to murder them, whether literally or figuratively.

I would never do that, you protest. Maybe, but *somebody’s* doing it. Let’s play the David vs. Nathan “You-Are-The-Man” game, and see if anything rings a bell. Say you work for a bank who’s making loans to shaky customers—taking unwarranted risks with money that isn’t theirs in hopes of making a quick buck. (*The FDIC will always bail us out if we go too far.*) Or maybe you work for a manufacturer whose only reason for making their product safe or suitable, or whose only motivation for the safe disposal of their company’s waste products is that the government will fine them if they don’t do the right thing. My son just ran into this one: he put \$27 worth of gasoline on his *pre-paid* debit card, but they charged him \$60. Why? Because they can. They’re allowed to “escrow” the remainder, it turns out, until the transaction is finalized—which means he’s got his wings clipped for a week or so. (It’s all designed to trick card users into making overdrafts, engendering hefty and unexpected fees. I’m told the banking industry “earned” over fifteen billion dollars last year by doing this. Makes me want to pay for everything in pennies.) Maybe you’re guiltless here, but I’m not. I used to be a packaging designer. How many times, I wonder, did I try my best to “put lipstick on the pig” so to speak—to make a product look better than it really was? It’s one thing to put your best foot forward; it’s another to lie to your client’s customer. Sometimes it was very hard to tell where that line was. My point is, if I really *loved* the consumer, I would have found a way to let him know that this nifty energy-saving electronic light bulb I’d just sold him wouldn’t actually fit in any standard table lamp known to man.

God never specified a penalty for failing to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Good thing, too. Nobody actually attains perfection in loving his neighbor in this life, which is not to say we shouldn’t constantly try. This is clearly less “law” than instruction: a goal to aim for, like when Yahweh said, “Be holy, for I am holy.” The ability to love, like the ability to be holy, are gifts from God: we can’t really do this in our own strength. Loving people is a byproduct, a natural result, of loving Yahweh—or more correctly, reciprocating His love for us. In the end, you can’t love your fellow man without loving God, for Yahweh is the source of love in this world. The best we can achieve in our own strength is love’s negative

permutation—not showing hatred, not doing harm. Is it really *love* to refrain from robbing a man? No, it isn't. There's a big difference between not stealing his money and meeting his needs by spending yours. That's why Yahweh instructed us to love our neighbors *as we do ourselves*.

How *do* we love ourselves? We feed us, clothe us, try to keep ourselves from injury or pain. We do what we can to meet our own needs and desires. We try to make ourselves happy and healthy, and if we're smart, we'll come to the realization somewhere along the line that the happiness we seek is best achieved through fellowship, intimate contact with other people and with God. (That's why solitary confinement is considered such a harsh form of punishment.) If you think about it, love is always a transaction: it requires two parties, a giver and a recipient (who can and do—and *should*—swap roles). When we “love *ourselves*,” it actually means our souls are providing what our bodies want or need—and conversely, our bodies are giving our souls sustenance. (When the body gives the *body* what it wants, it's not love at all—it's lust, and the soul is likely to “regret it in the morning.”) “Loving our neighbors” therefore implies a transference of the same kind: doing for other people what we can to make them happy, safe, fulfilled, or contented—whether physically or spiritually. Consider the alternative: the refusal to love puts *both* the potential giver and his recipient into a solitary confinement of sorts—it carries with it its own punishment: isolation.

Though Yahweh didn't designate a specific penalty for failing to love one's neighbor, He did lay out detailed rules delineating what should happen in the wake of various key indicators of that absence of love: murder, kidnapping, rape, adultery, theft, criminal negligence, and so forth. Maimonides addressed some of these, of course, which we covered in turn, primarily in Volume 1, Chapter 8. Here we'll pick up the precepts that fell through the cracks. I've broken these down by type: retaliation, retribution, recompense, restitution, restoration, redemption, and respect. These seven “R's” reveal God's remedy for our failure to love—a progression that in itself teaches us something about Yahweh's method for reconciling us to Himself and for leading us into His love.

Man's laws and the Bible generally consider the same sorts of things to be right or wrong. Paul explains why: **“When Gentiles, who do not have the law [i.e., the Torah], by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.”** (Romans 2:14-15) In other words, a man's conscience normally tells him the difference between right and wrong, whether he's got actual laws to guide him or not. (It's an artifact of having been made in the image and likeness of God.) There isn't a society on earth that considers murder, theft, or adultery to be good things (within their own social unit, that is). Since we (mankind and God) basically agree on what's right and what's not, it's instructive to examine the ways with

which Yahweh instructed society to deal with criminal sins and compare them against our own man-made solutions. We aren't remotely close to being on the same page here. Man's solutions tend to be socio-centric, that is, they endeavor to make things better for the group by (1) punishing the wrong-doer, (2) rehabilitating him, or (3) insulating the community from him so he can cause no further harm. God's solutions, in contrast, are victim-centric: they address the wrongs done to individual people, doing what can be done to make restitution, minimizing the impact of the crime. Punishment in Yahweh's economy is invariably reserved for cases in which restitution cannot be made—you can't undo a murder, for example. In addition, there is always a spiritual undercurrent in Yahweh's criminal laws, a reflection of how He restores us as victims of Satan's crimes against God and humanity.

There is some overlap in these stated purposes of jurisprudence, of course. God's law, like man's, seeks to confront wrongdoing, rehabilitate the sinner, and protect society. But the methods employed to achieve these goals are poles apart. Man's basic tool for dealing with crime is incarceration—prison. In theory, the worse the crime, the longer the sentence. The cost to society is staggering: over sixty billion dollars per year in America alone—that's \$88 per prisoner per day. Currently in America, over seven people out of every one thousand are behind bars—almost one percent of the population! Granted, that's four or five times the average among western democracies, but that's probably because we've become as adept at catching criminals as we are at creating them. *Creating* them? Yes, that's precisely what we've done. You can't systematically suppress God's precepts in your society (as we have) and expect people to behave in a godly manner. Like I said, loving one's neighbor is an outgrowth of loving God.

Yahweh, in contrast, mandated no prison system in Israel. The closest He came was to institute cities of refuge (see Mitzvot #292-#295), which were actually designed to prevent unauthorized revenge killings—think of them as “protective custody.” So how did He expect to maintain law and order among His people? The answer sounds absurdly simple when compared to the legal labyrinth we are asked to negotiate these days. Yahweh merely gave teeth to the golden rule. For all intents and purposes, He told His society to *assume* that people treated others as they wanted to be treated. If you stole, you “obviously” wanted to be stolen from in return, and society was to oblige the thief. If you murdered someone, you were “requesting” to be slain by your victim's closest kin, and he was authorized to do as you had “asked.” If you betrayed your spouse by committing adultery, you were declaring your desire to be betrayed in turn. As we have seen (and will again) the institution of slavery had a part to play in Yahweh's system of practical justice, though He didn't institute the practice—He merely made use of it. Prisons today can fulfill the role slavery played in theocratic Israel, but these days jail sentences are pressed into service to punish

virtually any kind of offense—while “being sold into slavery” was resorted to in the Torah only in rare instances where restitution couldn’t be made. God’s wisdom virtually guaranteed that there would be no such thing as a “career criminal” in Israel.

Justice under God was swift, sure, and designed to fit the crime perfectly—being neither too harsh nor too lenient. False accusations were punishable by the same sentence the innocent accused would have suffered, and perjury was such a serious matter, it rated a spot in the Ten Commandments. Judges were to be chosen for their character, not their cunning or charisma, and bribery was strictly forbidden. More than one witness was required to convict someone of a capital offense. All things considered, Yahweh’s justice system was engineered to deliver justice to the guilty, restitution to the victim, and peace to the community, while systematically giving the benefit of the doubt to the accused in questionable situations. But we should not forget that this kind of merciful justice is only possible in a society that honors God, for it depends on those two baseline principles being endemic in the community: loving Yahweh with their whole heart, soul, and strength, and loving their neighbors as themselves. That’s why the Psalmist declares of Yahweh, **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face.”** (Psalm 89:14)

RETALIATION

(865) *Employ the death penalty for murderers.* **“Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death.”** (Leviticus 24:17) The translation “kill” here falls somewhat short of the true meaning of the Hebrew expression *nakah nephesh*. *Nakah* is a verb meaning “to strike, smite, hit, beat, scourge, slay, kill, give a thrust, attack, destroy, conquer, subjugate, chastise, send judgment upon, or punish.” (Strong’s) And *nephesh* is the familiar designation for one’s soul, the “self, life, person, appetite, mind, living being, desire, emotion, passion; that which breathes, the breathing substance or being, soul, the inner being of man; the living being (with life in the blood); the man himself, the person or individual; the seat of emotions and passions, or the activity of mind.” (S) So a more precise translation might be, “Whoever strikes at the soul of any man” or “Whoever attacks a person’s life...” “Murder” would be a far more accurate translation than “kill,” and it’s clear that the *intent* to do harm, and not merely one’s success at accomplishing this evil, is condemned. Murder and attempted murder are seen as virtually the same crime. The idea is that of trying to destroy someone’s life, with malice and purpose.

It’s clear from the Bible’s many warnings against false teachers that this “murder” need not be physical, the slaying of the body—technically,

the separation of someone's body from his soul. Of much more far reaching significance is the murder of someone's soul—preventing the victim from having a relationship with Yahweh, thus robbing him of the opportunity to be indwelt with God's eternal Spirit. Let's face it: murder of the body may deprive someone of a few years of mortal life in a fallen world, but murder of the soul is a matter with perpetual ramifications.

As we shall see, Yahweh distinguishes between murder and accidental homicide (manslaughter), though both have serious consequences. But there are no "degrees" of murder in His view that qualify the perpetrator to greater or lesser degrees of punishment depending on his state of mind, circumstances, weaponry, or age. There are no "plea bargains" to be made, only guilt or innocence to be determined. And there is only one penalty prescribed for the murderer: death.

I am not unaware that the death penalty is out of fashion in our world. According to Amnesty International, 137 nations have abolished the death penalty. Though seventy countries still have provision for it on the books, only twenty-four of them carried out executions in 2007 (1,252 souls, down from 1,591 in 2006), while there are upwards of 20,000 prisoners on death row worldwide. (There's currently a twelve-year lag, on average, between sentencing and execution in the U.S.) But compare these statistics to the numbers of *murders* worldwide—520,000 reported in 2000 alone—and you begin to see the problem. People who don't ascribe to Yahweh's wisdom here, who think that the death penalty is immoral because it does not serve as a deterrent (an idea that's by no means proven), are missing the fact that the statistics tell the would-be murderer, "Go ahead—even if you get caught, there's only a 0.02% chance you'll die for your crime." But if the 18,000 murders per year in the U.S. (more or less) resulted in the arrest, conviction, and *execution* of, say, 10,000 criminals, *then* you'd be able to tell if the "deterrent effect" of capital punishment was real.

All of this misses the point, of course. Yahweh never even hinted that executing murderers should be done to deter others from committing the same crime (although deterrence *is* mentioned as a factor in the execution of idol worshippers). It was to be done simply because justice demands it: it's not only *not* immoral, it's the only possible moral course of action, if the victim is figured into the equation. As I said, there's no way to restore one's mortal life after you've murdered him, so restitution is impossible. Retaliation is the only just measure available: a life for a life.

But, "*What ever happened to mercy?*" you ask. "*Doesn't God love murderers too?*" Yes, so much so that He sent His only Son, His Messiah, to die for our sins—to be executed in our place: again, a life for a life.

Why, then, does He still require the death penalty for murderers? It's because flesh is flesh: the things done in the flesh must be answered in the flesh if justice is to be served. The things done in the spirit will likewise be answered in the spirit. We will under no circumstances carry the deeds of the flesh (whether bad or good) into the afterlife, the world of the spirit. In fact, we will not enter "the afterlife" at all if our souls are not indwelt with an eternal Spirit. Our bodies are not built to last forever: they are "alive" only so long as they are made so by their soul (the *nephesh*). But the *nephesh* cannot survive without a body unless it in turn is made alive by an eternal indwelling spirit (Hebrew: *ruach*).

That's why Yahshua told Nicodemus, **"Unless one is born again [literally: from above], he cannot see the Kingdom of God.... That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.... For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."** (John 3:3, 6, 16-18) Condemned *already*? Yes, because the only way to make one's soul truly alive—the only way to receive the Spirit of Yahweh—is to **"believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God,"** Yahshua the Messiah. This "condemnation" of which Yahshua speaks has two possible manifestations. First, the default: one may be spiritually dead (or perhaps more accurately stated, spiritually non-living or inert). His soul has no indwelling spirit to give it life after the body's death, so his physical demise is the end of his existence, for all practical purposes. But second, there is a horrible alternative type of condemnation: his soul *can* be indwelt with a demonic or satanic spirit (if he has put his trust in Satan as he should have in God)—he can be "born *from below*." This will make his sojourn in the afterlife a living, eternal hell. Yahshua spoke of this "option" when He called the scribes and Pharisees a "brood of vipers," that is, the spiritual offspring of the serpent, Satan. Thus there are *three* doors to the eternal state, not just two (as is usually taught): life, death, and damnation.

Therefore, the only deeds that follow us into eternity are those done "in the spirit" (whether Yahweh's Spirit or Satan's). Deeds (whether "good" or "bad") that are done by dead (i.e., spiritless) people don't really exist beyond the mortal realm. That explains why justice must be served *in the flesh* for crimes perpetrated in the flesh. But it's also why murderers are not necessarily precluded from coming to faith, from accepting the

grace of God. True, Yahweh won't bail them out of their self-imposed troubles in this life, but He has *already* paid their debt in the next.

- (866) *Distinguish between murder and manslaughter.* **"He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die."** (Exodus 21:12-14) The institution of the six "cities of refuge" in the Promised Land facilitated the judicial distinction between murderers and those guilty of manslaughter. If a man killed someone, he was to flee to the nearest city of refuge, where he would be protected from possible avengers from the victim's family (see Precept #869) until his case could be tried in an impartial hearing. If the wrongful death was found to be an accident or unintentional, the killer was required to remain in the city of refuge (see Precept #870) until the death of the High Priest, after which time he was free to return to his own home. But if the court (see Precept #868) found him guilty of murder—of purposely and maliciously slaying his victim—then the city of refuge would offer no further protection. The avenger of blood would be allowed to slay the slayer no matter where he went to hide, even if he appealed to Yahweh Himself (seen here as clinging desperately to the altar of sacrifice at the Sanctuary, pleading for mercy).

As I pointed out in Mitzvah #260, we are all guilty of the death of Yahshua the Messiah. Whether intentionally murdering Him (by rejecting His mercy and allying ourselves with the adversary) or "merely" violating Yahweh's standard of holiness (necessitating Yahshua's atoning sacrifice), we are all guilty of something. The city of refuge represents mortal life. If we are guilty of Son-of-Man-slaughter, we dare not leave this city without the protection afforded by the death of the High Priest (a role also played by Yahshua). And if we "leave" the city—this life—without availing ourselves of the amnesty provided by the High Priest's death, we are no longer protected from the avenger of blood, the slain Yahshua's "next of kin"—Almighty Yahweh Himself.

In a very real sense, leaving unprotected from the city of refuge is a picture of the Great White Throne judgment. John reports, **"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books."** (Revelation 20:11-12) The dead, those guilty souls who have left the "city of refuge," are to

be judged “according to their works.” That is, since their names are not recorded in the Book of Life, the divine Judge is reviewing the evidence of each case to determine which defendant is guilty of murder and which of manslaughter. Then, having made His determinations, He passes sentence: **“Anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”** (Revelation 20:15) Both accidental manslaughter (those not indemnified by the death of the High Priest) and malicious murderers are consigned to the lake of fire—*everyone* not found in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

What, then, was the point of judgment? After all, being “judged” (Greek: *krino*) implies separation (to decide, select, choose, or determine), in this case, one type of unatoned guilt from another. In *Future History*, Chapter 29, I explored the little-known (but scripturally ubiquitous) principle of God’s separation of the *dead* (those whose souls will be destroyed or annihilated—something I dubbed “Door Number Two”) from the *damned* (those whose indwelling with Satan’s spirit has delivered them into everlasting torment in hell, sharing Satan’s eternal destiny—i.e., “Door Number Three”). Allow me to quote a couple of paragraphs:

“Who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to Yahweh an offering in righteousness.”

(Malachi 3:2-3) This refining process is primarily one of separation—removing the worthless dross from the pure metal by heating it to a liquid state and letting the impurities float to the top. But here beyond the Great White Throne, the precious metal has already been removed and put in a safe place. So in the case of the “lake of fire,” the separation is that of one kind of dross from another—the merely worthless from the toxic waste—door number two from door number three.

“The lake of fire, then, is a graphic portrayal of a place or state where lost souls enter a refining process—a *krino*-judgment that separates the dead from the damned. The lightweight worthless dross floats to the top of the ‘lake’ and spills out into dissipation, annihilation, destruction—what we’ve been calling door number two. But the weightier Satanic spirit-laden souls sink to the bottom of this eternal abyss, never to escape, never to rest, never to forget. The bottom of the lake of fire is door number three.” Even though we’re all guilty of one thing or another, both of these fates—one a tragic waste of life and the other a horror beyond human comprehension—are completely avoidable. “Door Number One” is eternal life, freely and graciously offered to sinners who stay in the city of refuge,

leaving only when the death of Yahshua the High Priest has rendered them innocent in the eyes of the Avenger of Blood—Yahweh.

- (867) *Weigh factors such as weaponry and attitude when determining the nature of the crime.* **“If he strikes him with an iron implement, so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. And if he strikes him with a stone in the hand, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. Or if he strikes him with a wooden hand weapon, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.”** (Numbers 35:16-18) Yahweh makes determining the nature of the crime (murder vs. manslaughter) relatively straightforward. The use of a potentially lethal weapon to intentionally kill someone cannot be construed as an “accident.” It doesn’t really matter if you “merely” lashed out in anger with a baseball bat without thinking about the consequences. “Second Degree Murder” in this country, which typically carries with it a lesser punishment than premeditated homicide, is defined as “an intentional killing that is not premeditated or planned, or a killing caused by dangerous conduct and the offender’s obvious lack of concern for human life.” God, who recognizes that the victim can’t really see the distinction, doesn’t split hairs: murder is murder.

Moses continues: **“If he pushes him out of hatred or, while lying in wait, hurls something at him so that he dies, or in enmity he strikes him with his hand so that he dies, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death. He is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.”** (Numbers 35:20-21) All it takes is a bad attitude. If you meant to merely hurt someone and he dies, you’re a murderer. If the gun you were waving around to intimidate someone goes off “accidentally” and kills him, you’re a murderer. Because Yahweh considers the victim, states of diminished responsibility such as substance abuse or post traumatic stress disorder are inadmissible as defenses. The dead victim doesn’t really care if you were “temporarily insane” when you shot him. Nor does he care if you ever “get over it” and start to “feel better” as long as you take your meds. He doesn’t care if you stabbed him once or forty-seven times. He’s dead, so forgiveness, understanding, reason, and mercy are beyond his ability. God’s justice isn’t being served on behalf of the courts, the victim’s loved ones, or society at large. His justice serves the victim. Why doesn’t ours?

I should reiterate that the same criteria apply to *spiritual* murder or manslaughter—the prevention of someone forming a relationship with Yahweh. It’s bad enough (though theoretically forgivable) to be guilty of spiritual manslaughter—through carelessness, ignorance, or apathy leading someone to the conclusion that Yahweh needn’t be the center of

their lives. (This is the primary danger with the practice of religion, whether nominal “Christianity” or something else.) But it is infinitely worse to do it on purpose, to “push him out of hatred” (or greed, or lust for power), or to “lie in wait” for your victim, purposely “hurling” deadly lies designed to lead him away from Yahweh’s love. That explains Yahshua’s scathing rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees: **“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.”**

(John 8:44) John later provided commentary: **“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”** (I John 3:14-15) I hasten to point out that retribution was to be carried out not by society, but by the victim’s near kin. We are not to go on “crusades,” declaring “holy war” on people we perceive are spiritual murderers or manslayers, killing them physically for their spiritual crimes. Yahweh reserves that right for Himself.

- (868) *The congregation shall determine the nature of the crime.* **“However, if he pushes him suddenly without enmity, or throws anything at him without lying in wait, or uses a stone, by which a man could die, throwing it at him without seeing him, so that he dies, while he was not his enemy or seeking his harm, then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood according to these judgments.”** (Numbers 35:22-24) This is the Torah’s description of non-intentional homicide—manslaughter—for which crime the guilty party had to seek shelter in the city of refuge, remaining there until the death of the High Priest. Because he didn’t mean any harm or demonstrate any aggression, he is not guilty of murder, but there is still a corpse to answer for, and an avenger of blood to deal with.

As we saw previously, this “judging,” done to determine whether the slayer is guilty of manslaughter or murder, is a picture of the coming Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20. The Hebrew word for “to judge” (*shaphat*) is the rough equivalent of the Greek *krino*: to judge, decide, adjudicate a matter between two parties, to decide a controversy. But at first glance, there appears to be a glitch to this theory...

At the Great White Throne, the One doing the judging is obviously God: He “from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away.” But here in the Torah, it says “the *congregation* shall judge.” Once again, we must turn to our Hebrew lexicons to discover the amazing solution to a seeming Biblical contradiction. The word for “congregation” is *‘edah*—a gathering or assembly. And I have no doubt that in theocratic Israel, the congregation—the people—were indeed meant by Yahweh to be

responsible for figuring out what had really happened in cases of homicide. But there is a second *'edah* in Hebrew, also a feminine noun, spelled and pronounced exactly the same way. This one means “testimony or witness.” Baker and Carpenter note that “this term refers to the act of testifying to a fact or an event.” This would put the second meaning of *'edah* in perfect sync with the criteria by which the Great White Throne defendants are to be judged: the evidence, their works, what they did, and why they did it. After all, their sins have not been atoned—*covered*—by the blood of the Messiah. The only thing left upon which to judge them, and indeed the only fair and just criteria, is the witness of the facts in the case, the testimony of the evidence—none of which is hidden from Yahweh or inadmissible in His court.

- (869) *The avenger of blood shall serve as executioner. “The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death.”* (Numbers 35:19) Within Israel, some punishments were to be carried out by “the congregation.” For instance, stoning was prescribed in cases of Ba’al or Molech worship, or when a betrothed virgin had had sex with another man (if a case of rape, only he was stoned; if consensual, both of them). The crime in these cases, Yahweh is saying, was against society as a whole, and therefore must be addressed by the whole congregation. But in the case of homicide, a single individual, a close relative of the slain person, was to serve as executioner. Murder was not to be seen as a “crime against humanity” or an affront to the nation of Israel. It was personal. And that should give us pause, for the “homicide victim” about whom all of this is designed to teach us—the One of whose blood we are all guilty—is Yahshua, the “Son” of God. Thus His “avenger of blood” is going to be Yahweh Himself. This means there’s no place to run unless He Himself provides it.

The term “avenger of blood,” while describing his *function* in this scenario well enough, isn’t a particularly accurate translation. “Avenger” is from the Hebrew verb *ga’al*, which means to redeem, to buy back, to free from captivity or release from blame or debt. The related noun *go’el* was the “kinsman redeemer” whose privilege and duty it was to extricate a near relative from debt or servitude. A more direct translation might be, “One redeeming of the blood.” The “blood,” of course (Hebrew: *dam*), is where the life is (Leviticus 17:11, 14). The idea is that of a near relative “buying back” the life of the victim with the blood of his murderer. It’s not so much vengeance as it is redemption. It’s not so much punishment as it is justice.

The avenger/redeemer was instructed to put the murderer (or the manslayer, if he left the city of refuge—see Precept #870) to death *when he meets him*. Yahweh has so far chosen not to “meet” with us for the purpose of judgment as long as we inhabit these mortal bodies—our “cities of refuge,” as it were. (Being God Almighty, He *could* have exercised His prerogative for wrath at any time, but He has other plans.) The time is coming, however—and soon—when Yahweh will finally begin to scour the “cities of refuge” to deal with the murderers who have been hiding out there for the past two millennia. I’m speaking, of course, of the coming Tribulation, the impending seven-year period of God’s overdue wrath upon mankind. Those manslayers indemnified by the death of the High Priest (i.e., the *ekklesia*, the world’s believers in Yahshua) will have already left the “cities.” They will have been raptured—“caught up”—before the manhunt begins. The “murderers,” however, those who purposely aligned themselves against Yahweh, will find themselves being told, **“Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels, ...And these will go away into everlasting punishment.”** (Matthew 25:41, 46) In other words, the divine Avenger/Redeemer, when He has finally chosen to “meet” the murderers, will have put them to death—the *second* death—just as the Torah requires.

- (870) *The manslayer must stay within the city of refuge to be legally protected.* **“But if the manslayer at any time goes outside the limits of the city of refuge where he fled, and the avenger of blood finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood, because he should have remained in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest.”** (Numbers 35:26-28) The manslayer—one who was responsible for the death of another though it hadn’t been intended or precipitated by malice—was safe as long as he remained where Yahweh had provided shelter for him. But if he chose to ignore the protection afforded by God’s law and prematurely leave the city of refuge, then the “avenger of blood” could kill him “when he met him” without himself becoming guilty of murder. In fact, the *only* thing that would “buy” for the manslayer safe passage outside the city of refuge was the death of the High Priest.

At the very least, we are all manslaughterers—we are all complicit in the death of God’s Messiah. It is our sins that sent Him to Calvary’s pole, though we intended no harm and bore him no malice. (Oh, we *sinned* on purpose, alright; we just didn’t factor in the consequences. We had no idea it would all get so *personal* between us and our Creator.) So we are safe only as long as we remain in the city of refuge. But here’s the rub: this city represents our mortal life, which means we can’t stay there forever.

Everyone eventually dies; that's what mortality means (Latin: *mortis* = death). But the *first* death, the death of the body, is not the real problem. The problem is what can happen afterward—the *second* death, as we saw above: the death of the soul for lack of the eternal Spirit of God indwelling it—death, legal and justified, at the hands of Yahshua's "avenger of blood." That's the life that's indemnified by the death of the High Priest—the Anointed Savior, Yahshua the Messiah.

The moral of the story: don't leave your mortal life unless you're protected by the atoning death of Yahshua.

- (871) *The manslayer's sentence is to remain in protective custody in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest. "But after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession. And these things shall be a statute of judgment to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings."* (Numbers 35:28-29) Son-of-Man-slaughter carries with it a life sentence, but it's not the *manslayer's* life. The life and death of the anointed High Priest (read: the Messiah) determines when (or whether) the guilty party is safe to leave the city (i.e., his mortal life). But what does it mean to "return to the land of his possession?" Yahshua told His disciples about it: "In My Father's house are many mansions.... I go to prepare a place for you.... I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:2-3) The writer to the Hebrews explained further: "All these faithful ones [Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah] died without receiving what God had promised them, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed the promises of God. They agreed that they were no more than foreigners and nomads here on earth. And obviously people who talk like that are looking forward to a country they can call their own. If they had meant the country they came from, they would have found a way to go back. But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a heavenly city for them." (Hebrews 11:13-16 NLT) We manslayers are but "foreigners and nomads" while we live in the "cities of refuge" of our mortal lives. It is not until we embrace the freedom afforded to us by the death of the High Priest, Yahshua the Messiah, that we can at last go home.

RETRIBUTION

- (872) *Adultery is to be punished with death. "If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die—the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel."* (Deuteronomy 22:22) These days adultery is commonly regarded as grounds for divorce, but it's not considered a crime, much less a capital

offense. Our society says, “Okay, so you caught your spouse with someone else. They’re only human, and you’re not perfect either. I can see where you might not trust ’em anymore, but life goes on: get over it already!” God, meanwhile, looks at the very same act and says, “This is treachery—a form of betrayal that pollutes my people like a cancer, destroying them from within. So both the adulterer and adulteress must die.” Clearly, Yahweh and modern society are not on the same page here. What does God know that we apparently don’t?

It’s not sex He objects to. He created us as males and females who reproduce sexually, and He Himself commanded us to **“Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth.”** (Genesis 1:28) In fact, it was the very *first* thing He told us to do. But almost immediately, He put boundaries about it: **“A man...shall be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”** (Genesis 2:24) That is, a man shall not be joined to someone else’s wife, only his own. Over the course of centuries, it would become clear that Yahweh was crafting a metaphor describing His relationship with His own “wife,” the people on this earth with whom He shared a familial bond, one of trust, faith, love, intimacy, and fruitfulness.

Notice that when adultery is described in the Bible, it is invariably couched in terms similar to those we see here: “a man found lying with a woman married to a husband.” Is it not possible for adultery to be committed between an unmarried woman and a married man? Indeed it is, but in the reality that Yahweh’s metaphor represents, the husband—*Him*—is *never* unfaithful. The same cannot be said of the wife, unfortunately. So if Yahweh is the Husband, and His people the wife, who is the “man” with whom the “wife” is being unfaithful? “He” by definition is *that which is not God*—in other words, false objects of worship. It could be the “graven images” that plagued the ancient world, representations of false gods like Ba’al and Astarte, Isis and Osiris, or Zeus and Diana. But the most seductive would-be adulterers over the ages would prove to be far more subtle—intangibles we find ourselves placing before Yahweh in our affections before we even know we’re doing it: pride, tradition, possessions, pleasure, and comfort—in other words, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Like sex, none of these things are necessarily bad in themselves. We *should* maintain a certain amount of self respect, for we are made in the image of God. Traditions *can* be useful, helping us get through the day without having to re-invent the wheel every time we turn around. We are mortal, having physical needs for which we must work—food, clothing, and shelter. Pleasure is the same emotion Yahweh felt when He looked at

His creation and called it “very good.” And comfort—the lack of pain—is the underlying condition that defines being in the center of God’s will: **“All these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you because you obey the voice of Yahweh your God.”** (Deuteronomy 28:2) But it is incredibly easy to let any of these “good” things become “gods” in their own right—that is, to become the objects of our affection, our goals. When we allow that to happen, it is tantamount to spiritual adultery, betrayal of Yahweh.

We should not be unmindful that *both* guilty parties are to be put to death. Not only will the unfaithful “wife” be forever separated from her “Husband,” bereft of His eternal Spirit, but the things of the world that people so often put before Yahweh in their affections are also destined for destruction. One could work his whole life seeking wealth or power for himself, pursuing the elusive goddess of pleasure, chasing vindication through intellectual pursuit, or searching for solace through penance and pious tradition, only to find in the end that all such would-be substitutes for Yahweh—riches, lust, pride, and even religion—are all blind alleys, “adulterers” that cannot and will not endure in the light of God’s glory.

- (873) *Kidnapping is to be punished with death. “If a man is found kidnapping any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and mistreats him or sells him, then that kidnapper shall die; and you shall put away the evil from among you.”*

(Deuteronomy 24:7) The word for “kidnapping” in Hebrew is *ganab*, a verb simply meaning to steal (whether an object or a person), the emphasis being on the deceptive nature of the crime. (The noun—“kidnapper”—is virtually the same word but with different vowel pointing.) So technically, the basic admonition against kidnapping is covered in the Eighth Commandment, “You shall not steal.” (See Precept #878.) Here we are told of the penalty for this particular type of theft. Yahweh’s victim-centric instructions demand the death penalty, even if the abductee was not killed.

I’m told there’s a technical difference in English Common Law between “kidnapping” and “abduction.” (It’s called abduction when the victim is a woman.) Yahweh makes a different distinction, based not on the gender of the victim but upon the intentions of the kidnapper. Anticipating a phenomenon that must have been exceedingly rare in theocratic Israel (but is quite common in our own dysfunctional society), God withholds capital retribution for those whose motive is not harm or profit. In America today, instances of child stealing by strangers are outnumbered by a margin of over five to one by kidnappings perpetrated by *parents* who don’t have legal custody. These inter-family kidnappings, however misguided, are usually carried out in a perceived effort to *protect*

the children from the estranged spouse—not to harm them, but to keep them from harm. The perceptions of such a kidnapper may be skewed, but his (or her) motives are not. Such “innocent” abductions, justified or not, do not carry the death penalty.

That leaves two basic types of “real” kidnapping, both of which earn the penalty of death, even if the abductee gets rescued or is returned unharmed in the end. (Criminals don’t get bonus points for either skill or incompetence.) The first type is kidnapping for ransom (whether the intended “redeemer” is the victim’s family, a slave buyer, or a third party targeted for extortion). This crime has a long and nefarious tradition going back to the age of the patriarchs (see Genesis 14). It has become a thriving cottage industry in many third world countries today. The motivation is usually greed, fueled by covetousness and sloth, though occasionally the perpetrators are seeking political leverage, their impetus being hatred, pride, or envy. Second (and even more disturbing) are the kidnappings committed out of lust, whether twisted sexual proclivities or the unnatural desire to exert power over one’s victim. These two broad categories are not mutually exclusive, of course. They can and do overlap or morph from one to the other. Muhammad, the founder of Islam, was an avid proponent of both (or should I say, all) of these forms of kidnapping. He not only financed his rise to power through kidnapping for ransom and torture for fun and profit, he also raped scores of captive women, teaching his followers to do the same. His methods were the very antithesis of “loving your neighbor as yourself.”

As always, there is a spiritual component to this. The potential victim who’s protected by the law is called “any of [the kidnapper’s] brethren of the Children of Israel.” This identifies both the victim and the perpetrator as “Israelites,” a euphemism for people who purport to be of the household of faith, people who profess a belief in God. The crime is “stealing a person.” In spiritual terms, this would equate to taking them away from their spiritual “families,” the people who love and care about them (and remember, the verb *ganab* implies stealth or deceit). But the crime is further defined by two factors. First, is it the intention of the kidnapper to “mistreat” his captive? That is, is the kidnapper’s exercise of dominion over his victim the point of his action? Is the result of “stealing” this person likely to cause the victim harm, whether physically, mentally, or spiritually? Second, is the kidnapper hoping to enrich himself through the captivity of his victim? Is there money to be made or status to be achieved?

These conditions fairly *scream* a warning to those who would sneak in and take you away from your life in Yahweh's close-knit family and replace this relationship with religion—placing you in bondage to ecclesiastical hierarchy, the rules and traditions of man, and a system of penance, alms, and works designed to obfuscate—and compete with—the finished work of Christ. This sort of thing isn't merely unfortunate or inconvenient for God's people: it's a *crime* against them—it's kidnapping, spiritual abduction, the penalty for which, specified in the Torah, is *death*. God is very serious about us avoiding religion if it gets in the way of a relationship with Him. (Religion *can* be useful as a matrix or medium through which one can express his faith in Yahweh, but it is of no use whatsoever in establishing the relationship we must have with our God. In fact, it all too often masquerades as that very relationship, preventing the real thing from happening.)

Paul informed Timothy, his young protégé, that this kind of “spiritual kidnapping” would become a virtual crime wave in the last days. **“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”** (II Timothy 3:1-7) Here we've been given a clear “mug shot” of the potential “kidnappers” of our day. We've also been informed that avoiding their snare is our prerogative. We can—we *must*—stop being gullible, stop getting carried away by our lusts, and stop confusing information with truth.

RECOMPENSE

- (874) *Evil inflicted is to be paid back with the equivalent evil.* **“If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him—fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him.”** (Leviticus 24:19-20) Whether through malice or negligence, injuries inflicted are to be met with payment in kind. The stark logic and equity of God's law can be somewhat startling when compared with the anemic shadow we see in our own legal statutes. Consider this hypothetical scenario: a guy walks into a bar (no, this isn't the beginning of a joke) and has a few too many beers. Another patron comes in and says

something that offends him, so our drunken subject expresses his opinion to the contrary with a pool cue, breaking the man's arm.

Under our laws, he might be arrested for being drunk and disorderly with a side order of assault, jailed for a month at taxpayer's expense, slapped with a fine (which goes to the county, not the victim), and released on parole (again, at taxpayers' expense). The victim, meanwhile, goes to the hospital to get his arm set, misses four days of work, sticks his insurance company with the bill (after paying a hefty deductible), and then weighs the option of hiring a lawyer to sue his assailant for damages, deciding in the end that since the inebriate with the pool cue is probably as broke as he is stupid, suing him would be an expensive exercise in futility. The insurance company spreads out their loss over the future premiums of a hundred thousand policy holders, the county uses the perp's fine to cover court costs and police salaries, and the victim's employer builds the cost of his recovery time into the price of their product, passing it on to you and me.

Yahweh's law works a bit differently. The witnesses would take the offender to the town's elders and explain what happened. Upon confirmation of the facts, he would be required to (1) pay out of his own pocket all of his victim's medical expenses; (2) make good the loss of income the victim (or his employer) would have incurred due to his injuries (see Mitzvah #299, Exodus 21:18-19); and then (3) have his own arm broken with a pool cue. Direct, just, and dare I say, downright poetic. At this point, of course, the perp (having sobered up) is thinking to himself, *I think I'm losing my taste for beer. Thank God I didn't shoot him in the kneecap.*

The whole thing could have turned out quite differently under our laws, of course. Yahweh's instructions prevent *this* scenario as well: the victim *does* decide to sue, and hires the slickest lawyer he can find. He wins his civil case and is awarded four thousand dollars in actual damages (though neither his insurance company or employer ever get reimbursed for their expenses) and *four million* in punitive damages. The offender's insurance company negotiates it down to two point five mil and passes the loss on to their policyholders. Justice has not been served here. It has been mugged and left for dead on the sidewalk.

The inevitable spiritual application looks like this: if your handling of spiritual matters (doctrine, exegesis, interpretation, etc.) is used maliciously or negligently to harm or exert control, hindering someone's search for God's truth, expect the "weapons" you use to be turned back against you. I know you're probably getting tired of hearing me say this,

but religion is often the single biggest impediment to forming a relationship with Yahweh. If your philosophy blinds your brother to the truth of Yahweh's love, you'd better start getting used to life in the dark.

- (875) *One law shall apply to all people in the Land. "You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I am Yahweh your God."* (Leviticus 24:22) If non-Israelites chose to live among God's people in the Land (and many did) they were to live by the same standards of behavior as Israel. This precept was precipitated by an incident in which the son of a mixed marriage (Egyptian father, Israelite mother) had blasphemed the name of Yahweh. The question naturally arose, "Should we relax our stance concerning God's law in the face of cultural diversity?" The answer was an unequivocal No! Everyone in God's country was to live by God's Law. Why? Because He said, "**I am Yahweh your God.**" I hasten to point out that we're talking about conduct *among God's people* here, folks who purport to follow Yahweh, not the world. He's not advocating going back and forcing Egypt to toe the line, imposing Yahweh's rules and morals upon people who don't want or claim to have a relationship with Him.

Remember that our customs and traditions, even (or should I say, *especially*) our religious traditions, are not necessarily the same thing as God's Law. A silly example might shed light on this truth. Congregations have very different "cultures" when it comes to music worship styles. One employs a piano, organ, and robed choir. Another has a loud, boisterous "praise band," complete with drums and electric guitars. Another allows no instrumental music at all, but sings its praises to God *a cappella*. Who's right? Actually, all of them, if done in the spirit of reverent, joyful honor to Yahweh, not pinch-faced legalism or fawning emulation of the world's ways. For that matter, music need not be a part of the congregational experience at all. It's not a matter of Law; it's a matter of taste, of style, of personal preference, even of God's provision.

But then take two congregations with identical forms of expression and compare their doctrine. One might play fast and loose with the First or Second Commandments, piously exercise politically correct "tolerance" toward what Yahweh considers abominable religious practices, or *de facto* worship gods of pride, prosperity, popularity, or power. The other assembly, meanwhile, strives only to honor Yahweh and his Word, love each other, and be light and salt to their community. To the untrained ear, they may *sound* the same, but they're not. One is following God's Law; the other isn't.

There is another facet to this precept that we should not overlook. We believers often think in terms of a double standard—the very thing

Yahweh is warning us against. We brush off our own sins as somehow inconsequential, since we're "saved by grace" and "washed in the blood." But at the same time, we *act as if* we believe the searching world should be compelled to embrace "Christian" standards of morality and behavior, as if such outward performance is the door to eternal life. While I'll admit that life would be considerably safer and more pleasant if everyone were to refrain from murder, theft, adultery, perjury, and covetousness, the outward observance of these Commandments brings one no closer to the family of Yahweh. Only God's grace—the very thing we so stupidly recruit to excuse our own bad behavior—can reconcile us to Him. No, the believer and the "stranger" alike have but one Law, and as we have seen, this Torah points toward one thing above all others: our utter hopelessness in trying to reach God through our own merits. The grace we take so lightly is the only lifeboat aboard this sinking ship. Without it, we would all—passengers and crew alike—drown in our sins. You'd think we'd treat it more carefully.

- (876) *Do not mistreat a slave who belongs to you. "And if a man beats his male or female servant with a rod, so that he dies under his hand, he shall surely be punished. Notwithstanding, if he remains alive a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he is his property."* (Exodus 21:20-21) Western Christians, awash in a sea of political correctness, would be either puzzled or horrified to learn (though most never get that far) that Yahweh doesn't specifically condemn slavery as an institution. Rather, his Torah regulates it, mitigates its abuses, and arranges for people to be extricated from it. But He never says anything remotely resembling, "There shall be no slavery in Israel." Why would God "tolerate" such an obvious evil?

Let me answer the question with another question. Why would God tolerate *death*? The answer is the same. Death, like slavery, is a temporary evil that serves as a pungent illustration of a far greater spiritual truth. Just as physical death (the separation of the soul from the body) warns us about spiritual death (the separateness of God's eternal Spirit from one's soul), so the institution of slavery informs us of a universal spiritual reality: all of us serve someone or something. Who we serve is our master; we are by definition slaves to whatever or whomever we obey (see Romans 6:16). Like death, slavery is universally understood (at least by those who are subject to it) to be a bad thing, and yet Yahweh lets it stand (for the moment, anyway) to teach us valuable lessons about master-slave relationships: (1) We are not our own: we have all been bought and paid for; (2) He who has bought us is entitled to our service; (3) If we disobey our Master, discipline is His prerogative; (4) If we flee from His service, we are fleeing from the shelter and provision of His household as well;

(5) Running away from our rightful Master (the One who paid for us) never results in real liberty, but in either the tyranny of a precarious future or slavery to another master, a usurper; (6) The only one who can legally grant us freedom is the Master who paid for us; and (7) perhaps the most surprising fact of all—voluntary service to a kind and loving Master is actually better than emancipation into an uncertain and hostile world.

Our *real* Master, of course—the One who paid for our souls with the most precious substance in existence, the blood of His own “Son”—is Yahweh. Actually, it’s worse than it seems: Yahweh first created us (which defines us as His possessions) after which we sold ourselves into bondage to Satan, an act that made our subsequent redemption necessary. So He is in reality our Owner twice over. Most epistles in the New Covenant Scriptures make reference to the writer being a “slave” or “servant” or “prisoner” of Christ—though not with chains of legal authority, for they (and we) have long since been granted our freedom. No, our “chains” are gratitude, loyalty, and love, things that bind us more securely than any physical restraint ever could. This is pictured beautifully in the Torah in Exodus 21:5-6 (see Mitzvah #189 and Precept #887): the bondservant, having been freed, may opt rather to remain in his master’s service for life.

So who does the abusive slave master in our present precept represent? It’s not Yahweh, for He always treats His servants with respect—even when He finds discipline necessary. No, this is a cruel master to whom a disobedient and rebellious slave has fled—Satan or one of his agents. Satan’s agenda is to force man’s submission, and he’s not above using the rod to obtain it. So what if he kills a few of us? We were only chattel to him anyway, a means to an end, disposable. Think of the disobedient slave as a runaway teenager irrationally rebelling against the authority of her parents; and think of the “cruel master” as the pimp who gets his hooks into her when she hits the big city. She has made a bad bargain, whether she knows it or not. The freedom she sought has proved to be an illusion. That’s what it’s like when we run from God. Survival and restoration are possible, but by no means guaranteed, and many runaways never realize that Satan, the pimp, has no real power over them. The amazing truth is, all we have to do to free ourselves is get up, swallow our pride, and return to our Father Yahweh. But make no mistake: we are not safe on our own. Even if we flee from Satan’s clutches, if we don’t then go home to our Father Yahweh, the devil will hunt us down and kill us. He’ll do whatever he can to prevent us from having eternal life in Christ. Yahweh, however, promises that the murderer, whether Satan or his agent, *will* receive justice—death for death.

But what about this enigmatic alternative scenario, “If he [the slave] remains alive a day or two, he [the slave owner] shall not be punished; for he is his property.” I believe this is telling us that even though someone misleads Yahweh’s servant, if he fails to completely and permanently separate the runaway from God’s love, his status as a “spiritual murderer” will not have been legally established. By usurping Yahweh’s place as the Master, this “pimp” has taken a terrible risk, of course. With ownership comes responsibility, and even though you can’t really *own* another person, possession is, as they say, nine tenths of the law: if you control a person’s spiritual outlook, you are responsible for his spiritual welfare—his very life.

It is instructive to compare the Torah’s slavery scenario with Paul’s course of action when dealing with Philemon’s runaway slave, Onesimus, who had come to Christ under Paul’s ministry. Paul could have “kept” Onesimus in his own service, but knowing the Torah, he realized that the slave’s service was not his to use, nor was freedom his to grant. Philemon (who, by a remarkable coincidence, had also come to faith through Paul’s teaching) was asked to receive Onesimus back, accept his repentant heart, and display a merciful spirit. After all, that’s precisely what Yahweh does, receiving us runaways back into his household when we repent. But we can only repent if we leave those cruel masters to which we have foolishly fled—those who would enslave, mistreat, and kill us if given the chance.

(877) *Man is responsible for the punishment of crimes against man.* **“Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.”** (Genesis 9:5-6) It’s a logical question to ask: why doesn’t God punish criminals Himself? Why does he require man to provide justice for other men? After all, it is *He* who “demands a reckoning” when a man’s blood is spilled, when a life is taken. This line of inquiry will lead us to some very fundamental truths.

The atheistic secular humanists who control our public policy these days insist that man is nothing but a highly evolved animal, one whose basic nature is not all that different from an ape, a salamander, or a garden slug. We find ourselves at the top of the food chain, they say, because we have, over eons of evolution, developed into a smarter, more “fit” species than our ecological contemporaries. God’s word, on the other hand, states that man is a fundamentally unique kind of being: we alone are “made by God in His image.” We alone have been placed on earth to relate to and fellowship with our Creator. It’s not my purpose here to debate the issue.

(I think you know where I stand.) Rather, I would like to explore just one key indicator, comparing what we observe in nature against these two competing “theories.” That subject is justice.

Animals have no sense of justice, no concept of fair play, no notion of moral right and wrong. Though some have greater cognitive ability than others, they are all motivated by instinct, biological imperatives like hunger, reproduction, self preservation, and the continuance of the species. It’s hard to say what gazelles and wildebeests think when one of their own is run down by lions and killed, but it’s safe to say they don’t find the lions morally culpable. They apparently feel no sense of injustice or righteous outrage that one of their group has been “murdered.” In fact, once the kill has been made, the herd very quickly goes back to business as usual, knowing that for the moment, their adversaries are not interested in pursuing them.

Men, on the other hand, have an inbred sense of right and wrong. One of the first complaints our children are likely to express in verbal terms is, “It’s not *fair*!” Remarkably, they’re often right—it’s *not* fair—but how would a three year old know that? It would require an innate biological *need* for justice, a built-in moral compass, something the Bible indicates every child was born with (e.g. Romans 2:14-15). This sense of justice is not merely a highly developed pain-avoidance mechanism, either, for it transfers to others. We “feel sorry” for people who are being mistreated—people we don’t even know. Our species is uniquely “wired” to seek justice. That so many of us eventually learn to suppress our inborn need for fair play in order to gratify our carnal desires doesn’t change that fact. Like it or not, we are “made in the image and likeness of God.”

If we *were* mere animals, all driven by the same evolutionary imperatives, our entire concept of law (whether God’s law, man’s, or the law of our consciences) would be detrimental to the survival and advancement of the species. In seeking justice, we are in effect protecting the weak from the strong. But evolution can only advance (so the theory goes) if the strong prevail and the weak are eliminated. According to the humanist creed’s bottom line, then, every act of kindness or mercy not motivated by our own survival or short term gratification is a nail in the coffin of the human race—every act of justice weakens the species.

But we are *not* mere animals. Not only are we made “in the likeness of God” (which is a maddeningly nebulous description), we have within us a mechanism, unique to man, by which Yahweh’s eternal Spirit can dwell within us, described in Genesis 2:7 as the “breath of life,” the *neshamah*. This is neither the soul (the *nephesh*, something any animal possesses),

nor the spirit itself (the *ruach*), but a capacity for life of an entirely different paradigm than that of your ordinary dung beetle or chimpanzee. Yes, our bodies are mortal—subject to decay—but *we* can live forever! This explains why Yahweh is so protective of the sanctity of human life—why He takes it personally and demands retribution when a man’s blood is spilled, whether by another man or by a beast.

But why, if He feels this way, does God insist that we mortals execute justice in the mortal realm, rather than dispensing it Himself? There are two reasons (at least). First, His standards are absolute and perfect, while we are frail, fallen creatures. In this world, if Yahweh were to take it upon Himself to right every wrong according to His own standard of holiness, none of us would survive past breakfast. And He *wants* us to survive, for our life is essential to His agenda (boiled down to one word, Love); which brings us to the second reason, the very reason provided in our Genesis text: **“For in the image of God He made man.”** We are to deal justly because the One after whom we are patterned is just. We are to be holy, because He is holy (that is, we are to be set apart *in* the world because Yahweh is separate *from* it). We are to treat human life with reverence and respect because God sacrificed The Perfect Human Life to redeem us from our fallen state. If Satan can convince us that human life is cheap, Yahshua’s awesome sacrifice will be rendered insignificant in our eyes. I assure you, it is nothing of the sort. His blood is the most precious substance known to man.

RESTITUTION

- (878) *Don’t steal. “You shall not steal.”* (Exodus 20:15) Maimonides scoured the Talmud to extract the “613 laws” that Jews are supposed to follow. Somehow, he managed to miss this one. Considering what we’ve seen in the last few precepts, I can’t help but wonder if that was a Freudian omission. Like so many of the other Commandments of the Decalogue, this one, the eighth, has ramifications that go far beyond the surface prohibition against taking other people’s stuff. Is Yahweh really all that concerned about purloining a candy bar from a convenience store? In principle, He is, for theft makes a statement. First, stealing betrays a lack of respect for a fellow child of God, the absence of the love of our neighbor that’s so important. Second, it’s an indication that we don’t really trust Yahweh to supply our needs. Third, in a way, theft is idolatry, for it shows that we desire the material possessions of this world more than we do fellowship with our God.

But as I said, it isn't just *stuff* God is concerned with. His primary, overarching goal is to establish a loving relationship with mankind. Restricting or preventing the formation of this liaison is the worst sort of stealing: it's the theft of the soul. This explains why Yahshua was so angry at the religious elite of His time: **"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves."** (Matthew 23:12-15) We don't hear Yahshua condemning prostitutes or publicans like this, though by definition, they were law-breaking sinners, and at some level they all knew it. He invariably encouraged them to "Go and sin no more." To a belatedly repentant thief, caught and in the process of being punished for his crimes, He said, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise." But these guys, the scribes and Pharisees, were, as far as the man on the street could tell, *good* people, law-abiding and religious. They gave alms, paid their tithes, and prayed eloquently in public. What were they doing that was so upsetting to the Messiah? They were stealing the opportunity God had given to honest searchers to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. They were stealing life itself.

- (879) *Restore what has been stolen, plus twenty percent.* **"If a person sins and commits a trespass against Yahweh by lying to his neighbor about what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or about a pledge, or about a robbery, or if he has extorted from his neighbor, or if he has found what was lost and lies concerning it, and swears falsely—in any one of these things that a man may do in which he sins: then it shall be, because he has sinned and is guilty, that he shall restore what he has stolen, or the thing which he has extorted, or what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or the lost thing which he found, or all that about which he has sworn falsely. He shall restore its full value, add one-fifth more to it, and give it to whomever it belongs, on the day of his trespass offering."** (Leviticus 6:2-5) I'll admit that the law of restitution can get a little complicated. Back in Exodus 22, we learned that if someone stole a sheep and sold or slaughtered it, he had to pay back four sheep in restitution, and if it was an ox he stole, the payback was five oxen (the idea apparently being that the ox was not only valuable property, but was also a "tool" its owner needed to earn a living—it was the man's tractor, so to speak). On the other hand, if the thief was found with the goods still in his possession, he "only" had

to pay back double. Clearly, the mental anguish of the victim is as important in God's restitution formula as is the financial loss.

Here we see a case in which the owner/victim is paid back not two, four, or five times what was stolen, but only twenty percent more than what was taken. What's different? The type of theft in view here is not the type perpetrated by a violent criminal (armed robbery, burglary, hijacking, mugging, etc.) but rather what we might call "white-collar crime." Examples in our sort of society might be tax or insurance fraud, cooking the books to defraud shareholders, overbilling, selling pirated entertainment media, the use of substandard materials to cheat on the terms of a contract, insider trading, pension fund shenanigans, bait and switch advertising—you get the idea. It's any kind of dishonest dealing where the victim wasn't even supposed to know he'd been cheated.

This kind of theft is positively endemic in our godless society today. Individuals and businesses have made "shady dealing" a way of life—effectively demonstrating a refusal to honor God and trust Him for provision. Creditors or utilities purposely send their bills too late for the customer to avoid incurring late fees. Manufacturers tweak their packaging to hide price increases. (Have you tried buying a "gallon" of paint lately? It can't be done.) Livestock and poultry is fed sub-therapeutic levels of antibiotics—not to ward off disease, but to cause water weight retention, in effect, invisibly cheapening the product. Employers often schedule their employees almost—but not quite—enough hours to let them qualify for benefit packages, and then they wonder why these same employees show no loyalty to them at all. As with violent crime, these sneaky, underhanded practices would cease if everyone loved Yahweh and loved his neighbor.

- (880) *A thief may obtain forgiveness after restitution by making a trespass offering. "And he shall bring his trespass offering to Yahweh, a ram without blemish from the flock, with your valuation, as a trespass offering, to the priest. So the priest shall make atonement for him before Yahweh, and he shall be forgiven for any one of these things that he may have done in which he trespasses."* (Leviticus 6:6-7) Okay, so the merchant succumbed to temptation to make a quick shekel, made a transaction using dishonest scales, got caught, and then made restitution by paying the defrauded customer back in full plus twenty percent. Is he *no longer guilty* under the law at this point? Is he *forgiven*? No, he's merely a thief who got busted. His restitution has made his neighbor whole, but his guilt before God remains. What can he do? He can (and must) bring a trespass offering (*asham*) to the Sanctuary as an expression of his repentance before Yahweh. The sacrificial animal

specified for this transgression is a ram without blemish—a symbol (whether he knows it or not) that the authority of Yahweh’s Messiah has been recognized by the offender.

If you’ll recall from Volume I, Chapter 12, there is a subtle difference between the sin offering (the *chata’t*) and the trespass offering (the *asham*). Simply stated, the *chata’t* was rendered for lapses in behavior, while the *asham* was brought to atone for lapses in holiness. God is therefore saying here, “I don’t care if everybody in town is cheating just like you did. You have been called out of the world—you’re to be separate from it, set apart and consecrated to Me. So participate in the trespass offering by bringing a perfect ram to the altar. His blood will cover your sin in My eyes, for I consider it precious: it represents the blood of My own Son, who will tell you, ‘Go, and sin no more.’”

- (881) *Lethal incidents concerning other people’s animals must be paid for.* **“Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, animal for animal.”** (Leviticus 24:18) **“And whoever kills an animal shall restore it; but whoever kills a man shall be put to death.”** (Leviticus 24:21) This one flies in the face of evolutionary theory, who insists that man is nothing but a highly developed animal. Because a man is made in the image of God, the penalty for murdering him is death. But the penalty for doing the same sort of thing to someone’s animal is to merely replace it with another of the same kind and value. “Animal rights” people should note: we’re not talking about killing an animal (one you own) for food or sacrifice. Rather, it’s killing your neighbor’s dog because he barks incessantly, or killing his goat because it got into your vineyard and wiped out next year’s cabernet. Animals can be inconvenient (don’t get me started about deer in my vegetable garden), but if they belong to someone else, they’re his property—and his responsibility. If your neighbor’s goat ate your grapes, it’s up to him to restore your loss—it’s *not* up to you to execute the goat for its crimes. Once again, we see that God’s victim-centric system of jurisprudence stresses restitution over retribution.

RESTORATION

- (882) *One in a position to help must help.* **“If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again.”** (Exodus 23:4) Now you know where Yahshua’s revolutionary statement in the beatitudes came from: **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”** (Matthew 5:43-

45) This is but one of many ways to “love your neighbor as yourself.” But note that “your neighbor” isn’t necessarily only someone who you’d normally *want* to do a favor for—someone you’re on good terms with. No, it’s also your *enemy’s* ox or donkey you’re to return. These days, most of us don’t have “assets” that are prone to wander off by themselves, of course. But we can be creative in the application of this precept. Your rude neighbor down the street is away on vacation, but you see a van backed into his driveway at two o’clock in the morning: don’t ignore it just because he’s obnoxious. Call the cops—his house is being robbed. Of course, if we acted like this consistently, we might find ourselves unable to keep the strict letter of the precept, for we could eventually find ourselves *without* any enemies.

- (883) *Do not limit acts of love or mercy to people you know. “Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”* (Exodus 23:9) Not only must we not reserve our acts of kindness to people we like (as we learned in the previous precept), we are even responsible to love people we don’t even know—anyone we come in contact with. Remember, “oppression” in God’s eyes needn’t be a purposeful act of overt evil toward someone; simply to refuse assistance to someone whom it’s in your power to help is oppression.

This, of course, is the point of Yahshua’s familiar story about the “Good Samaritan.” A religious lawyer had asked Him what he could do to inherit eternal life. When Yahshua asked him what he saw as the Torah’s requirement, the lawyer named the same two precepts we have been discussing: Love Yahweh, and love your neighbor. And Yahshua readily agreed. “But [the lawyer], wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ Then Jesus answered and said: ‘A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side....’” By doing this, the priest and the Levite in the parable had not only violated our present precept, but also the law of mercy implied in such passages as Deuteronomy 22:4—“Don’t pretend you didn’t see the problem.” By seeing the stranger in need and refusing to help, the priest and the Levite had “oppressed” him just as surely as the thieves had.

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii,

gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you." So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?' And he said, 'He who showed mercy on him.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'" (Luke 10:29-37) The Samaritan was a total stranger to the guy who'd been mugged. In fact, since the victim was coming from Jerusalem, we can assume he was a Jew, who would ordinarily (at this point in history) have considered a Samaritan, if not an enemy, at least someone to be shunned, culturally despised, and treated with contempt. From this Samaritan's point of view, even though the cultural prejudices ran both ways, the only impetus he needed to show mercy to the man was, "He saw him."

There is no shortage of need—even tragedy—in the world today, and because of our advanced communications technology, we are in a position to become aware of personal catastrophes happening all over the globe. Mutilation and starvation in Africa; flood devastation in Southeast Asia; earthquakes and volcanoes, terrorist attacks and wars, rampant crime in the inner city. We look at the news reports and take note of the statistics, and we shake our heads and mutter, "Even if I sent my entire income to the Red Cross or Salvation Army, I couldn't make a dent in this. It's hopeless!" It is therefore instructive to study what the good Samaritan did, and what he didn't do.

(1) He met the immediate need he saw before him, not some need he'd heard about in Capernaum or Cairo. (2) He took time out of his own busy schedule, postponing his plans but not canceling them altogether. (3) He didn't consider the race, color, creed, or personality profile of the victim, only his need for immediate help. (4) He didn't judge the victim for having been alone and unprotected on a notoriously dangerous stretch of road. (5) He provided what was required to get the victim back to whatever condition he had enjoyed before the bandits jumped him, but he made no attempt to change or "improve" the man's whole life, imposing his own value system on the man. What he gave to help the victim was considerable, but not to the point that it threatened the welfare or security of his own family. In today's terms, he went to the local Walgreen's, bought some bandages, antiseptic, and aspirin, and then took the victim to a nearby Motel 6 and paid for his room for a few days and for food at the Macdonald's next door while he was there. He spent maybe two or three hundred bucks, a significant sum but not his entire life savings. (6) He promised to check on the victim's welfare, and pay for any further necessary expenses, on his return trip. In other words, he wasn't merely throwing money at the problem in order to ease his own guilty conscience, but was investing himself in the well being of the individual he'd found in

need. And (7) He did not take up a collection, hold a telethon, or demand that the government or other passers-by contribute their “fair share,” nor did he ask the victim to reimburse him. He simply did what he did because it was the right thing to do. He got personally involved.

We needn’t restrict our “rescue efforts” to the physically wounded, however. We’ll meet people along the way who have been mugged spiritually through false teaching and hypocrisy, and they too need our help. The Samaritan, we are told, provided “bandages” to staunch the loss of the victim’s life’s blood. That is, in spiritual terms, he made available the “**fine linen, clean and bright...the righteous acts of the saints**” (Revelation 19:8) that alone could enable him to stand one day before His Creator, alive and whole. He anointed him, pouring “oil” on the man’s wounds—that is, he manifested the Spirit of God’s love, comforting, nurturing, and consoling him, giving him the will to live and the knowledge that someone cared deeply for him. And finally, he cleansed the victim’s wounds with “wine,” a picture of the blood Yahshua shed to cleanse us from our sins. Although the Samaritan couldn’t have known it, God was subtly telling us that even if the man’s wounds weren’t mortal, infection from the filth of the world could still kill him. He had to be washed—sterilized—in the blood of the true vine, Yahshua (cf. John 15:1-11). Religion couldn’t (and didn’t) help the man. Only someone willing to show him Yahweh’s righteousness, Spirit, and sacrifice could be of real assistance.

REDEMPTION

- (884) *The life of one guilty of fatal criminal negligence may be redeemed. “If there is imposed on him [the owner of an ox who has killed someone] a sum of money, then he shall pay to redeem his life, whatever is imposed on him. Whether it has gored a son or gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him.”* (Exodus 21:30-31) The context for this precept was referenced in Maimonides’ listing of dietary laws, though it has virtually nothing to do with diet: “**If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, then the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten.**” That’s all the farther the Rambam went. “**But the owner of the ox shall be acquitted. But if the ox tended to thrust with its horn in times past, and it has been made known to his owner, and he has not kept it confined, so that it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death.**” (Exodus 21:28-29) The immediate point is that we are responsible for the actions of our animals. I realize that not too many people keep oxen in their back yards these days, but the same principles would apply across the board—millions of people own dogs, for instance. A distinction is drawn between an animal that

unexpectedly injures or kills a person and one who has been known to be dangerously aggressive in the past. One who keeps Pit Bulls or Rottweilers is *required* to be aware of the breeds' characteristics, and take appropriate precautions.

What is to happen if such a dangerous beast, one who has a history of aggression, attacks and kills a person? Even the most politically correct animal activist can see that the animal should be destroyed. But what about its owner? Under the Torah, his life is forfeit also, for his negligence is directly responsible for an innocent person's death. However, the family of the victim has the option of "suing" him in lieu of letting him suffer the ultimate penalty, and apparently, the sky's the limit: "*whatever* is imposed on him." From the negligent owner's point of view, when your very skin is at stake, losing your shirt may not sound so bad. The scary thing is, the *default* penalty for this type of criminal negligence is death: the option of allowing the guilty party's life to be redeemed is strictly up to the victim's kin. They are not required to do so.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see the spiritual ramifications here. The sinful world's ultimate "beast" was the Roman empire. It had been described prophetically to Daniel as **"dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet."** (Daniel 7:8) The religious elite of Israel knew that Rome would, if properly motivated, attack and kill their inconvenient antagonist, Yahshua the Messiah, for them. So in the spring of 33 A.D., they conspired with this creature for their own evil ends. Both of these two "beasts," Rome and the Sanhedrin, were personally guilty of Christ's death: the former a raging ox, goring, slashing, and trampling, and the latter the vicious little dog nipping at its heels, driving it to madness. The "owner" of both these two beasts was *us*—Adam's fallen race—who *should have known* that both unrestrained political power and arrogant religious ambition could be deadly, especially when working together. Thus we had, under the Torah, earned the death penalty just as surely as the animals who did the actual killing.

The two beasts were to be destroyed: there was no equivocation in the law about that. But there was still the issue of whether or not mankind, the irresponsible "owner," would be given the chance to redeem its life. Would the victim's "next of kin"—Almighty Yahweh—allow us to be redeemed for our act of criminal negligence, and if so, what price would He demand? The answer is a good news-bad news story for anyone who desires to remain estranged and aloof from the God who made him. Yes, we may be redeemed, but the price of our deliverance is horrendous, not to

mention being impossible to obtain through our own efforts. It's the most precious substance known to man—the blood of God's only Son. The irony of ironies is that the price of redemption is the same blood that was shed by our own vicious “animals.” It's as if Yahweh is saying, “Sure, you can buy your way out of this one. Just give me back the life-blood of My Son, the blood you shed at Calvary.” *But that's impossible*, you say. “Yes, it is,” God replies, “so because I love you, I have made the blood of My Son available for your redemption. All you have to do is accept my gracious offer. You've got three choices, then. You can either receive My gift, you can insult Me by trying to pay Me off through your own pitiful efforts, or you can die.” Gee, that's a tough one.

The Torah's spiritual application in this regard isn't limited to the case of the Messiah's death, of course. Anyone, a “son or daughter,” a “man or woman,” who is “gored to death” by our rampaging ox receives the same consideration under God's victim-centric Law. This is just one more way of saying that preventing someone from having eternal life through the indwelling of Yahweh's Spirit is a crime punishable by death. The point is that you needn't murder people personally to merit God's wrath: doing it through an agent, something you own or control, also defines your guilt.

- (885) *Permanent possessions lost through poverty may be redeemed at any time. “If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession, and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold.”* (Leviticus 25:25) This is part of the Law of Jubilee, describing, as we have seen, the things that impact the eternal state (as the Sabbatical year is prophetic of the Millennial reign of Yahshua the Messiah). “Becoming poor” is a euphemism for falling into sin, the consequence of which is “selling” our “possession”—the earth—to Satan. This has been the state of affairs since our father Adam first encountered the curse of sin in the Garden of Eden. Satan's 7,000-year “lease” will be up at the end of the Millennial Kingdom (the last thousand years of which he'll spend locked up in the abyss, thank God). The point here is that we need not wait until then to get our land back. Our “redeeming relative,” Yahshua, has come to buy back what we lost. The price of redemption has already been paid. All we have to do is go back home, though few realize that our poverty and servitude need not continue one more minute.

Moses' treatise continues: “**Or if the man has no one to redeem it, but he himself becomes able to redeem it, then let him count the years since its sale, and restore the remainder to the man to whom he sold it, that he may return to his possession. But if he is not able to have it restored to himself, then what was sold shall remain in the hand of him who bought it until the Year of Jubilee; and in the**

Jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his possession." (Leviticus 25:26-28) In spiritual terms, of course, none of us has proven willing or able to "redeem our own possession," for this would entail undoing what cost us our inheritance in the first place, reversing the effects of sin—becoming sinless in our own right. Moses is pointing out, however, that doing so is *theoretically* possible; that is, if one were to keep the whole Torah, one would have earned what is required to buy back the time left on the lease. The fact that no one has ever achieved this (except for our Redeemer Himself) doesn't mean it's intrinsically impossible. As a practical matter, of course, Yahweh wished to give every Israelite every opportunity to enjoy the bounty of his own inheritance for as long as possible. So he made it *legal* to buy back one's land at any time. One who had been poor did not have to wait until the Jubilee to reclaim his inheritance. Nor do we, having received the grace of God, have to wait until the end of the seventh Millennium to start enjoying our inheritance: everlasting life in Christ. Eternity begins now.

RESPECT

- (886) *Respect the right of the firstborn.* **"If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved, and if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn. But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his."** (Deuteronomy 21:15-17) Though we may find it strange (as is the case with slavery), Yahweh never specifically outlawed polygamy. The reason, we may surmise, is the same: He had lessons to teach us that could most readily be understood in the context of this practice. Israel was, of course, quite familiar with this very scenario, for Jacob had ended up with two wives and two concubines, but only one of these women was really loved. Reuben, his firstborn, was the son of his unloved wife, Leah. Yet though Jacob recognized his status as the firstborn son, we read of no double portion being bestowed upon him, but rather a curse: **"Unstable as water, you shall not excel."** (Genesis 49:4) (If you want to know why, read in Genesis 35:22 about what Reuben had done.) Rather, Jacob *de facto* bestowed the firstborn's double portion on Joseph, the first son of his beloved Rachel, by "adopting" Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (see Genesis 48:16).

Jacob hadn't actually violated the Torah, of course, for it hadn't yet been handed down. But Yahweh now wished to establish the normal order of things: the firstborn (even if he was the son of an unloved wife) was to receive the status of leadership and the double portion of the inheritance. Since Yahweh never supported human institutions and traditions for their own sake, we must ask ourselves *why*. What did He wish to teach us with the Law of the firstborn? Remember first that God is, in a manner of speaking, polygamous Himself. That is, He characterized the Nation of Israel as his "wife"—one who was subsequently unfaithful to him. Then, manifested as Yahshua the Messiah, God took a second "wife," the *ekklesia* or called-out assembly of believers (a.k.a. "the Church")—called the "bride of Christ." This is clearly less an "arranged marriage," and more a love match, than Yahweh's union with Israel. As part of this "bride," I can assure you that there is real passion in this romance.

What, then, is the point of the Torah's precept? I believe it's a prophecy. When Yahshua receives His kingdom, the nation of Israel—now restored and cleansed—will function as the "firstborn son" among nations, receiving a double portion of honor, authority, and blessing. The sons of the Church (the Millennial gentile believers), while enjoying the blessings of the kingdom, will look to Israel as their honored "eldest brother," holding the uncontested position of leadership among Millennial mortals. This is in direct contradiction to the "Onward Christian Soldiers" mentality so prevalent a century ago that insisted the Church had replaced Israel in the plan and the heart of God. Yahweh begs to differ.

- (887) *Respect the devotion of your servants.* **"And if it happens that he [the servant who loves his master] says to you, 'I will not go away from you,' because he loves you and your house, since he prospers with you, then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also to your female servant you shall do likewise."** (Deuteronomy 15:16-17) This is part of the Law of the Sabbatical year. At the end of six years of service, the one who had been sold into servitude would be free to go, staked and supplied with whatever it would take to get him on his feet for good (verses 13-14). At this point, the only "bonds" the master might have upon the servant would be those of thankfulness, loyalty, and love. He had no legal right to expect any more service from his former bondservant. The servant, likewise, had no legal right to ask anything further from his former master. Except for one thing...

Let's back up a step. What had caused the "servant" to come into the master's household in the first place? He had become "poor," a euphemism, as I noted, for having sinned against God, incurring a spiritual

debt he could not pay. His six years of service represent his mortal life as a fallen man. So in spiritual terms, we poor servants are, until the day we die, in the debt of the Master, He who paid the price of our redemption *up front*. Since “the wages of sin is death,” we are no longer in God’s debt after we’ve died. And since He has provided us with “all things that pertain to life and godliness” while we spend our days upon His earth, He too has done everything that could be reasonably expected of Him. We could then, at the end of our mortal lives, simply part company from God, no harm, no foul. There would be neither friendship nor enmity; neither punishment nor reward; neither relationship nor responsibility. The servant’s labors cease at his death, but this state of affairs is neither heaven nor hell. It’s something else entirely: the second of “three doors”—the three possible eternal destinations I spoke of in Precepts #865 and #866 above. It is simply ceasing to exist. No more pain or sorrow. But no more joy or fulfillment, either.

But what is that “one thing” I spoke of, that loophole in the Law of the Sabbatical year? What is the servant who has fulfilled his contract legally entitled to demand of the master who has likewise kept his end of the bargain? This servant may, at his own discretion and volition, request to make his place of service in the master’s household *permanent*—extend his contract indefinitely, so to speak. Why would he do this? Isn’t freedom to be desired above all things? No, it isn’t. It all depends on what you wish to be set free *from*. Sure, freedom from tyranny, oppression, fruitless toil, and pain would be a good thing, but life under our Master Yahweh is none of those things. It is, rather, a time of joyful labor, of justice tempered by mercy, of loving, nurturing relationships—things no sane person desires to be “freed” from. You may protest that life for the vast majority of mankind answers to the former description, tyranny and oppression. True, but that’s not because Yahweh is a tyrant or oppressor. It’s because they have been serving some other master, some usurper. It is tragic indeed to spend your life serving someone or something other than the God who bought you, but *woe* to the one who is responsible for your condition.

The servant, then, may ask to serve his master forever, continuing to do the same fulfilling work, maintaining the same loving relationships, enjoying the same peace and security he or she did before. The formal procedure—piercing the earlobe with an awl—involves blood and pain, for it is a picture of the price the Master originally paid for his redemption: the sacrifice of His Son, Yahshua, upon Calvary’s pole. But it is a privilege indeed for the servant to be counted worthy to partake in that sacrifice. Note that the choice is entirely up to the servant. The master apparently has no say in the matter: he is required by law to comply with

the servant's request. Amazingly, Yahweh has put limits on His own power here. He has made it *illegal for Himself* to refuse the servant's appeal. (Of course, one who is not actually His bondservant, one who has been serving another master, has no such rights.) According to His own Law, Yahweh may neither compel the servant to stay, nor decline to honor the servant's choice to remain with Him forever. The choice to enter into eternal life, "Door Number One," is ours to make. There's only one word to describe a God who would arrange this awesome opportunity for us: Yahweh is *Love*.

Learning From Experience

Love—arguably the only thing God wants from us—is by its very nature a bizarre and intangible entity. It's a matrix that exists between two beings. Yahweh, being "One," could therefore not participate in a loving relationship until He created us. That is, His very nature, that of a loving God, could not be meaningfully manifested until there was something toward which He could express that love, and that "something" had to be *like Him* in a way: alive, animate, aware, and, if I'm right about this, capable of loving Him. It was thus an act of pure love when Yahweh created space-time, matter-energy, and organic life, for those things are prerequisites for our physical existence, and more to the point, for our ability to reciprocate His love.

For two beings to love each other, they must have the same nature. That is, an animal can love another animal because they both possess souls, the attribute of "life" expressed in Hebrew as the *nephesh*. So a man can love a dog or a horse, and *vice versa*, but he cannot "love" a sunset or a job or a motorcycle. But Yahweh's nature is spiritual (Hebrew: *ruach*. See John 4:24). Consequently, for a man to be able to love God, he must have a spirit as well as a soul. We read in Genesis 2:7 that Yahweh "**breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.**" The word translated "breath of life" is neither *nephesh* nor *ruach*—neither soul nor spirit. It's *neshamah*. It is this attribute, exclusive to the human race since it was bestowed on Adam, that distinguishes man from other animals with souls, for it allows him to have a *spiritual nature* in addition to his mortal life. Man is thus uniquely equipped to dwell in a matrix of love with his Creator—something no mere animal can do. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), the French mathematician, physicist, and philosopher, wrote "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man that cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus." That's a pretty fair description of the *neshamah*, if you think about it.

This matrix of love is ephemeral and elusive. It must be offered freely—even unconditionally—or it morphs before our very eyes into something else: an inducement, a bribe, a subtle form of pressure. And it must be accepted on the same terms, or once again it changes imperceptibly into something that is not love at all. Love can be desired, but not acquired. It can be given, but not forced upon its object. It can be offered, but not delivered. It can be accepted, but not seized. Love cannot be bought, sold, bartered, or cajoled. It cannot be earned, coerced, or programmed. It can only be freely given and voluntarily received.

Returning someone's offering of love requires choice—free will—for without it, love degenerates into something less, such as loyalty, fidelity, gratitude, politeness, or obedience. Therefore, as strange as it sounds, in order for the concept of love to have any meaning whatsoever, it must be possible—even permissible—*not* to love. Angels, apparently, do not have this capacity. They are created spirit beings who function like soldiers: their nature is to do what the Commander says to do, and if they rebel (for like all soldiers, they *do* have the capability of disobedience, though not the privilege), they will be punished, sent to the brig, as it were. When an angel does what Yahweh commands, he is demonstrating loyalty and obedience, not love. And conversely, if the angel rebels and becomes a demon, he is not showing a lack of love: technically, he is “only” being treacherous and defiant. We humans, on the other hand, have a choice: we may reciprocate God's love or not—it's our decision. Unlike the angels, when we obey God's precepts (if we're doing it *because* they're His precepts), we're demonstrating our love, for it is our prerogative to ignore Him if we want to.

At this point, people steeped in conventional Christian theology think they've spotted a glaring flaw in my logic. What about hell? *Oh sure, we have the God-given right to ignore Him and refuse to reciprocate His love, but if we do, He'll consign us to an eternity of torment in hell fire. Some choice!* We must ask ourselves (in the undying words of the serpent in the Garden), “Has God indeed said this?” He *does* speak of everlasting affliction in hell for Satan and his followers. But for those who simply fail to love Yahweh, the scriptures speak not of punishment but rather of *destruction*, of becoming nothing, of ceasing to be. What's the difference? “Hell's torments” and “destruction” sound equally bad, you may be thinking. But they're not. One who is “destroyed” *no longer exists*: someone in this state cannot, by definition, suffer “eternal torment.” One Hebrew word used to describe this state (unfortunately translated “corruption”) is *beliy*, which actually means nothingness—it is the word for negation, literally: “no, not, or without.” This isn't heaven, I'll grant you, but in comparison with hell's eternal waking torment, it is the most tender of mercies. Death is not remotely the same thing as damnation.

Hell, it turns out, is reserved for those who *prevent others* from choosing to reciprocate the love of Yahweh, a group coterminous with those who have been indwelt by demonic spirits in the same way believers are indwelt by Yahweh's Holy Spirit. They're “born from below” as we are “born from above.” Those slated for destruction or “nothingness,” by contrast, *aren't born at all* in a spiritual sense. Their *neshamah* remains an empty vessel, a “vacuum” inhabited by no god of any shape, true or false. It's one thing to choose to pass up a good thing yourself. Yes, it's a waste, a squandering of potential blessing, but at least it's *your* blessing you're throwing away—it's your decision, your prerogative. It's something else entirely to force, trick, or otherwise seek to prevent other people

from experiencing that good thing for themselves. Making available to mankind the choice to love Him was Yahweh's whole point in creating us. As we saw in the previous chapter, God considers it murder to thwart the loving relationship He has offered to us. And spiritual murder is a capital crime. If somebody offered to give you a million dollars, but you, whether out of suspicion, pride, or apathy, told him to go away and leave you alone, your relative poverty could not logically be blamed on your would-be patron. It might, however, be blamed on a third party who talked you out of accepting the free gift.

Yahweh obviously wants us to obey Him, but it's entirely up to us—there's no pressure, bribery or inducement for acquiescence, nor threats for noncompliance. There are *consequences*, of course. We reap whatever we sow. But Yahweh does not demand that we plant wheat instead of opium poppies. He merely points out what can be expected to thrive in this soil we call human life, and what will best nourish us after the harvest. The point is that we humans are creatures imbued with choice: love God or not, obey Him or not, trust Him or not. The only real penalties associated with our failure to love, obey, and trust Him are intrinsic in the act of rebuffing our Benefactor. As we have seen throughout our study of the Torah, this "Owner's Manual" of God's is there for our benefit, not His ego. He told us these things so that we might, through following His precepts, enjoy happier, healthier lives, both physically and spiritually. His only motivation for issuing these instructions was that He loved us.

So we should not be surprised to find that the "penalties" for noncompliance are usually built in, not added on. (For example, although there is a penalty imposed for murder, the "penalty" for *not enforcing this penalty* is the gradual unraveling of society. It's inherent in the nature of injustice. It's a "natural law.") If you insist on eating pigs, don't blame Yahweh when you contract trichinosis. If you marry your sister, don't blame God if your children are plagued with hereditary diseases brought on by dredging recessive genes to the surface. If you refuse to honor Yahweh in your public institutions, don't blame Him when your civilization degenerates into chaos and despair. If you refuse to keep the Sabbath, don't blame Yahweh when the Day of Judgment sneaks up on you like a thief in the night. Because He loves us, He told us everything we need to know concerning life and godliness. It's not God's fault if we choose to ignore His truth.

It bears repeating: history is a stern schoolmaster. If we do not learn its lessons, we will flunk out and have to repeat the class. Solomon, bemoaning the vanity, the emptiness, of man's labors under the sun, identifies the reason for our spiritual frustration: we don't remember the lessons of the past. We refuse to learn from experience. We choose ignorance over wisdom. **"That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is**

there anything of which it may be said, 'See, this is new'? It has already been in ancient times before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after." (Ecclesiastes 1:9-11) So his counsel, after all was said and done, was to remember what God had told us. **"Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them.'"** (Ecclesiastes 12:1) *Remember*. Choose to learn from the experiences, insights, and revelations Yahweh has recorded in His word, for His counsel is refuge against the insanity of the lost world. Remember your Creator now; heed His precepts "before the difficult days come." Make no mistake: they *are* coming.

REMEMBER WHAT GOD HAS DONE AND SAID

(888) *Know that Yahweh chastises us when we need correction.* **"Remember what Yahweh your God did to Miriam on the way when you came out of Egypt!"** (Deuteronomy 24:9) The story of "what Yahweh did to Miriam" is recorded in Numbers 12. In a nutshell, Miriam (backed by Aaron, who, we get the feeling, never instigated anything in his entire life, good *or* bad) criticized Moses for marrying a black woman, an Ethiopian. We are not told if his first wife, Zipporah (a Midianite, from Northern Arabia) had died, or if this new wife was taken in addition to her. I would guess it was the former, since we read of no similar objection lodged by either Zipporah or her father Reuel/Jethro, both of whom were known to speak their mind. Zipporah would have been over sixty years old at this time. We last see her in the Biblical record, perhaps two years before this point, in Exodus 18, so it's hard to know for sure what had happened. But in any case, God had not outlawed polygamy, nor would He. This leads me to conclude that Miriam's criticism was racially motivated.

Yahweh had nothing to say either way about Mo's second marriage. His issue was that someone would have the temerity to speak against His chosen prophet—nay, more than a prophet: Moses was, He pointed out, a servant who was **"faithful in all My house; I speak with him face to face [not in dreams and visions, like ordinary prophets], even plainly, not in dark sayings."** (Numbers 12:7-8) Yahweh, though angry with Miriam, hadn't lost His sense of humor. It was as if He said, "You say you don't like black skin, Miriam? Okay, I aim to please." **"And when the cloud [the Shekinah] departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow."** (Numbers 12:10) This, of course, meant that she would be ostracized from the congregation of Israel, forced to live outside the camp. No more lofty status for her; no more of the perks that came with being the big sister of the guy who ran the whole country. A horrified and repentant Aaron, not

knowing what lay in store for him, pleaded with Moses to intercede for their stricken sister, which Moses did. And Yahweh did as His servant had requested, though He gave Miriam seven long days as a leper in which to contemplate her sins.

And what are we to learn from this? First, and most basically, Yahweh is not reluctant to chastise us—His own children—when we need His rod of correction. In my long experience, His punishment always fits the crime—neither too harsh nor too lenient—and not infrequently, it’s just as poetic as it was here. Modern Christians who don’t believe in corporal punishment should be aware that Yahweh Himself uses it to instruct and guide us. Second, we need not defend our status as servants of God (if that is indeed what we are). Yahweh is the One who vindicates us. For our part, we should endeavor to be as Moses was described: “very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.” Third, the incident happened when they were “on the way...out of Egypt.” That is, if you’re still living “in the world,” don’t expect to feel God’s rod of correction across your backside. It’s only when you leave it, when you begin your journey toward the Promised Land—life under Yahweh’s sovereignty—that you are ready for His guidance. Remember, a rudder is useless as long as the ship is tied up at the dock; it can only steer a vessel that’s moving.

- (889) *Recognize God’s tests for what they are.* **“And Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.’ Then they fell on their faces, and said, ‘O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?’”** (Numbers 16:20-22) For some people, it doesn’t matter how humble you are. If God exalts you, they’re going to resent it and covet your status before Him. Such was the case with Miriam, as we just saw. And now, in Numbers 16, we have a similar tale, the story of Korah’s intended coup. It’s a classic confrontation between man’s ways and God’s. We begin with bloodline: Korah was a Levite of the house of Kohath (the same clan as Moses and Aaron). If the Kohathite Levites were to be the leaders, he figured, why Moses, and not him? As a supporting cast, Korah’s two main cohorts were Reubenites, that is, descendants of Jacob’s firstborn. (That ought to entitle them some added prestige, according to human wisdom.) But Korah didn’t stop there: he next recruited two hundred and fifty of the leading men of Israel. In doing so, he figured he’d wrapped up the “electoral college.” If this had been a democracy, Moses would have been a lame duck, except for one small detail: in the immortal words of John Knox, “A man with God is always in the majority.”

Moses, who remembered his sister's little mutiny, knew this couldn't end well. So he devised a test whereby God might demonstrate whom He had chosen to be the leader: all of Korah's two hundred and fifty "elders" were to present censers with incense. If Yahweh selected them, their smoke would rise toward heaven, but if only Aaron's did, then he and Moses would have been revealed (again) to be the chosen leaders. Simple enough, but it never got that far. The rebels gathered together not only the two hundred and fifty, but the whole congregation to help them intimidate Moses and Aaron. This is where our current precept comes in: Yahweh now says, in effect, "That's it. I'm going to wipe them all out and start over. You two may not want to be standing so close. This is going to get ugly."

Moses and his brother recognized the threat as a test, and immediately pleaded with God to consider His own character: a just God, One not willing to destroy the righteous with the wicked. So the challenge was changed: if Korah and his big shots lived happily ever after (or even died a normal death) then *that* was to be the sign that Yahweh had not chosen Moses. **"But if Yahweh creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected Yahweh."** (Numbers 16:30) What were the chances of that happening? Zero, if there was no God, or if He hadn't called Moses to the position of leadership in Israel. But the words had barely left Mo's lips when that very thing happened. Then fire from Yahweh came and consumed the two hundred and fifty ringleaders. God had made His point.

That should have ended the debate, but no. **"On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, 'You have killed the people of Yahweh.'"** (Numbers 16:41) I don't get it. If Korah and his two Reubenite cohorts had been "the people of Yahweh," then why didn't God protect them? And if *Moses and Aaron* had somehow made the ground swallow them up—tents and all—you'd think that maybe the Israelites might have figured out it wasn't such a hot idea to defy them to their faces. But the Israelites, just like the world *we* live in, had lost the ability to reason, to weigh the evidence, to recognize the hand of God at work among them. *Don't confuse us with facts; our minds are made up!* So Yahweh was compelled to sing the song again: second verse, same as the first. **"And Yahweh spoke to Moses [*again*], saying, 'Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.'"** (Numbers 16:44-45) At this point, I (being slow but teachable) might have said, "Okay, I see Your point. I'm out of here!" But Moses, once again being technically disobedient to Yahweh but willing to defend His character to the death,

simply fell on his face and pleaded for mercy for his people. Then, as the plague began, Moses instructed Aaron to hurry and perform what the *first test* had proposed as a sign: intercede for the people with a censer burning incense as a prayer to Yahweh. And God did indeed halt the plague, but not before it had slain another 14,700 rebellious Israelites.

Some things never change. The world still doesn't want to consider the evidence—choosing to believe manmade myths over God's revealed truth ninety-nine percent of the time. But what is "the congregation of man" going to do when all the faithful have been removed from the earth—when there is no longer a Moses to plead for mercy for them, or an Aaron running out among them praying to God for the plague to stop? The core issue will not have changed: the world will still be figuring out whom it will follow. The choice, in the end, will be between Yahshua (Yahweh's Man—for whom both Moses and Aaron are a prototype), and the Antichrist (Satan's boy, his Korah-equivalent). Remarkably, we are told that the Antichrist and his false prophet will end up pretty much like Korah and his Reubenite buddies did—and for roughly the same reason: **"Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone."** (Revelation 19:20)

- (890) *Don't make up your own religion.* **"You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes—for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which Yahweh your God is giving you. But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, then there will be the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide."** (Deuteronomy 12:8-11) "Crossing over the Jordan" is seen in some of the old hymns as "entering heaven" (doubtless an artifact of Bunyan's allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*). But it's no such thing. It's a picture of commencing one's life as a believer in Yahweh—in this world. The fact is that the battles don't even really *begin* until we've entered this Promised Land. The point of the passage is that within the believer's earthly experience, our faith in Yahweh's grace must lead us to faith in His instructions as well. It's disingenuous to say we're relying on God for our salvation when we refuse to take His word or counsel about anything else in life.

The believer's life is like a room with two doors, a window, and a table and chair sitting in the middle. God invites us to leave the world and enter the room through the first door (salvation), sit in the chair, attend to

whatever tasks we find upon the table that need to be done, and when we're finished, exit by the second door—the one that leads to heaven. Subject Number One enters, only to be distracted by what he sees through the window (the world). He never sits down and never does what God prepared for him to do, but he never impacts the world either, for he's not out there anymore. When he leaves the room, though nothing of value has been accomplished, he feels fatigued and frustrated. Subject Number Two, on the other hand, enters the room and never bothers to look out the window at all. But he doesn't sit down and follow God's instructions, either. Rather, he sets about busily decorating the room, laying carpet, hanging curtains, painting the walls, and rearranging the furniture. A lot of things get done, though none of them were on God's to-do list—a fact that totally eludes him. He finally leaves the room, exhausted and famished but inordinately proud of his “accomplishments.”

Subject Number Three, however, enters the room and, because he really trusts Yahweh to know what's best, does as he was told: he sits at the table to begin the work God assigned to him. Once seated (resting in God's word), he discovers all sorts of things the other two missed. First, there's the list of tasks God left for him, so he knows precisely what he needs to be doing with his time. Next he sees that the view out the window is quite different from this angle: he can now see what's really going on out there in the world, and what it will take to make it a better place—information he needs in order to address his to-do list. He notices there's a phone on the table, so he can talk to the world, listen to their problems, counsel and comfort them, and even call 911 for them if need be. He notices a menu for a nice little Kosher Deli nearby, so he orders himself a tasty lunch to sustain him through the day. When it's finally time to go home, his to-do list has been seriously depleted, but his spirits have not.

Subject Number One is what Paul would call a “carnal Christian,” someone guided not by the Spirit of God, but rather by their own flesh, “behaving like a mere man,” as he says in I Corinthians 3:3. Number Two is the “religious Christian,” someone so busy doing “good works,” he never takes time to consider whether they're actually what God wants him to do—confusing progress with process, generating lots of heat but very little light. But Number Three is the “obedient believer” spoken of by John: **“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”** (I John 2:3-6) How did Yahshua

walk? He did the will of His “Father,” Yahweh. He was obedient, even to the point of death.

Our present precept speaks to all three types. Moses admonishes us that as we enter the life of a believer, we are to (1) leave the world’s ways behind us, (2) prepare to fight our spiritual battles in God’s strength, not our own, and (3) commune with Yahweh according to His direction, not our invention. There is a place, He says, where He will “choose to make His name abide.” We are to meet Him there, and *only* there—not where our spiritual adversaries are accustomed to bowing to their false gods. Although God may be present in religion, in nature, or in the better impulses of the human psyche, we are instructed *not to seek Him there*. We are, rather, to meet Him in His sanctuary, the place where His name abides and His Spirit dwells. And where is that? Yahshua promised us, “**I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him or knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.**” (John 14:16-17) Or as Paul asked, “**Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?**” (I Corinthians 3:16) God is with us and in us. Once we have “crossed the Jordan,” we don’t have very far to go at all.

- (891) *Verify God’s word through historical inquiry.* “**For ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether any great thing like this has happened, or anything like it has been heard. Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live? Or did God ever try to go and take for Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that Yahweh your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that Yahweh Himself is God; there is none other besides Him.**” (Deuteronomy 4:32-35) It’s abundantly clear that choice is our prerogative. But real choice requires two things: knowledge and the freedom to act upon it. Here Yahweh is saying to put His words and deeds to the test—compare what He has done for you to the résumé of any conceivable rival. Acquire the knowledge necessary to make an informed decision. Conduct historical, scientific, or philosophical inquiry, for the facts—the truth of the matter—will vindicate His word at every turn. It’s a dare, a challenge: God has nothing to fear from “full disclosure.” He’s not looking for “blind faith.” He wants us to open our eyes: to exercise faith based on historical reality.

“Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that He might instruct you; on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire. And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power, driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land as an inheritance, as it is this day.” (Deuteronomy 4:36-38) The history of Israel’s deliverance is a metaphor for God’s calling upon all of us, if only we’ll choose to follow Him. We too “hear His voice.” We too “see His fire.” We too are brought by His presence and power out of the world that held us in bondage. And formidable forces of evil that would threaten, confound, and beguile us are still driven out from before us, if we will but trust in Yahweh to keep His word. The evidence the Israelites saw and heard was admittedly more palpable, more tangible, than what we experience today. They *saw* the pillar of fire; they *heard* the thundering voice of Yahweh upon the mountaintop; they smelled the smoke and felt the earth tremble. But for all that, they did not have what we do: sure knowledge of our deliverance from the bondage of Adam’s curse—historical confirmation that Yahweh has kept His word, fulfilling the promise of redemption through the sacrifice of His Messiah—redemption that was prophesied in hundreds of the Torah’s precepts. The evidence of God’s glory we enjoy today is no less real than that which awed the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai. The fact that Yahweh now speaks in a still, small voice instead of a thunderous roar should neither lessen our awareness nor mitigate our awe.

- (892) *Base your conclusions on truth, and apply logic to formulate a plan of action.* **“Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that Yahweh Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you for all time.”** (Deuteronomy 4:39-40) The “therefore” refers back to the indisputable evidence of Yahweh’s glory Moses has been talking about for the last few Precepts—and I would include the historical evidence for the Messiah’s redemptive act in that admonition. The simple, profound conclusion we are encouraged to reach is that Yahweh alone is God. And because He is God, He has the right to call the shots: we are to “keep His statutes and commandments.” Note that the promise attached to the precept is virtually identical to the Fifth Commandment of the Decalogue: **“Honor your father [a surrogate for Yahweh] and your mother [symbolic of His Holy Spirit], that your days may be long upon the land which Yahweh your God is giving you.”** (Exodus 20:12) Honoring—taking seriously—God and His

Ruach Qodesh is therefore equated to “keeping His statutes.” It reminds me of what John said in the passage quoted above: **“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.”** (I John 2:3)

At the risk of appearing to beat a dead horse, let me point out (again) that even though the Land was given to Israel “for all time,” it has *not* “gone well with them.” Because they did not “keep His statutes,” Israel was evicted from their Land lock, stock, and barrel—*twice*. If (as some of them claim) they *have* been following Yahweh’s statutes this whole time then Yahweh is either a liar or incompetent. It’s only in the last century or so that the Jews have returned to their inheritance in any significant numbers, or with any significant political presence (and that’s only because Yahweh still has a boatload of prophecies to fulfill concerning their restoration). Yahweh did *not* tell them to “keep the statutes and commandments that *your rabbis* will command you to do.” By now (900 pages into this book) you should realize that the two bodies of Law—Torah and Talmud—bear only a superficial resemblance to each other. But both Old and New Covenant scriptures insist that keeping Yahweh’s actual commandments—not the traditions of men—is how we can “know God” and “prolong our days” in the land He has given us.

- (893) *Don’t let your prosperity distract you from the God who provided it. “So it shall be, when Yahweh your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full—then beware, lest you forget Yahweh who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.”* (Deuteronomy 6:10-12) Who among us can truthfully claim to be “self-made?” You might declare, “I worked hard, kept my nose clean, learned how to get ahead in life, and the success I’m enjoying is entirely because of my own efforts.” But that’s a narrow, provincial, and dare I say, disingenuous view. Who gave you the intelligence, the aptitude, the opportunity, the physical ability, and the shelter from unforeseen disaster that were baseline prerequisites for your success before you even lifted a finger? Who lined up the intangibles for you—that first job, the chance meeting, the accident you narrowly avoided, the fact that you were born in, say, North America in the 20th Century instead of in Central Africa in the 18th? You would not be precisely what you are (whether for better or for worse) without a thousand factors that are entirely out of your control.

I’m not saying we are strictly the products of our environment. I’m saying, rather, that we are responsible before God to play the hand we’re

dealt. When we're blessed, we are to acknowledge His bounty and provision. When afflicted, we are to cry out for mercy to the One who has the power to deliver us. Yes, hard work and discipline are good things. But in the end, what we have is the sum total of what we've done with the gifts—and the challenges—Yahweh has given us. Israel's entrance into the Promised Land serves as a microcosm of this principle. Like us today, they were given the opportunity to stand on the shoulders of those who had gone before them, reaping where they had not sewn. Like us, the blessings they were given could either be viewed as gifts from God or things to which they were entitled by right of conquest. But Yahweh warned them—and us—not to let prosperity or accomplishment cloud our memory, our sense of gratitude, or our appreciation of how we got here.

- (894) *Remember who the real God is.* **“You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you (for Yahweh your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of Yahweh your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.”** (Deuteronomy 6:14-15) This is the same basic tenet as the Second Commandment—an admonition to honor Yahweh as God (Creator-deity, Master, Provider, and Savior) and at the same time to refrain from showing reverence, devotion, or adulation to other things other people might worship. Back in bronze age Israel, these things were usually easy to spot—false “gods,” with names like Ba'al, Chemosh and Molech, with characteristics and desires men had ascribed to them, idols that represented them, and cults built around them. But today, the “other gods” people pursue are usually far more subtle: wealth, sex, power, fame, pleasure, respect, or popularity. They could manifest themselves as almost anything: a fancier car, a bigger house, a greener lawn, a lower golf score, or a higher high. They might be “political causes” like fighting for world peace, saving the environment from its inhabitants, pressing one's views on gun control, abortion, or the right to copulate with whomever or whatever one felt like, or simply escaping from the realities and responsibilities of human civilization. These “other gods” always seem to be just out of reach, constantly requiring just a little more devotion, a little more sacrifice. Our “other gods” are, in short, anything that stands between us and Yahweh—things that distract us, that broach no recourse to Godly counsel, things in which our relationship with Yahweh is declared to be “beside the point.”

Interestingly, things need not be *intrinsically* bad to be characterized as the “other gods” about which Yahweh has warned us. In fact, many of the same things could just as easily be right or wrong—depending on how they affect our walk with God. Wealth can easily distract us, and yet Yahweh showered great wealth on some of the most faithful men in the

Biblical record: Job, Abraham, David, etc.—without corrupting their character. Sex is implicit in the very first command Yahweh issued to the human race: “Go forth and multiply.” And yet its practice outside of God’s guidelines—holy matrimony between one man and one woman for a lifetime—has been a constant source of distraction in our world since mankind left the Garden, “another god” that we should have left alone.

Religion is another example: it can serve as a matrix in which like minded believers can congregate to separate themselves from the influences of the world—acting as a medium through which holiness (becoming set-apart and consecrated to Yahweh, being called out of the world) is worked out in practical terms. But it can all too easily become a substitute for the very God it is designed to honor. I recently reread John Bunyan’s classic allegory *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. I realize it’s merely semantic nitpicking on my part, but Bunyan constantly refers to “religion” as if it’s the sum total of the Christian experience in this world. It is nothing of the sort. Rather, it is a loaded gun—an inherently dangerous but potentially useful implement that can be used to either bring home dinner or kill it’s owner. It must be handled with great care.

Moses uses a word here that may seem odd to our ears: he says Yahweh is a “jealous” God. Actually, he repeats this six times in the Torah. The word in Hebrew is *qanna*, from a verb meaning to be zealous, jealous, or even envious. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* points out the basic idea: “zeal for another’s property is envy, while zeal for one’s own property is jealousy.” Since “we are not our own; we have been bought with a price”—the blood of the Lamb of God—we belong to Yahweh. If we have chosen to accept the terms of our redemption, we are by our own admission His property. He is quite within His “rights,” then, to claim our exclusive love as His own, becoming angry if we squander our affections on “other gods.” It bears repeating. Although Yahweh’s children would never bow to a Molech, Zeus, or Allah, we can find ourselves “worshiping” other gods without even realizing it. Beware!

- (895) *Be diligent about observing Yahweh’s statutes.* **“You shall diligently keep the commandments of Yahweh your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of Yahweh, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which Yahweh swore to your fathers, to cast out all your enemies from before you, as Yahweh has spoken.”** (Deuteronomy 6:17-19) If this were as obvious as it looks, God wouldn’t have had to repeat it so many times and in so many ways. Several factors bear mentioning. (1) You can’t “diligently keep the commandments of Yahweh” if you don’t know what

they are. That's why it's so important to study God's word. Don't assume anything. Don't take anyone's word for it (and that includes mine). Look it up for yourself. Let the Holy Spirit teach you, bringing to remembrance what Yahweh has instructed as you walk through this world.

(2) Doing "what is right in the sight of Yahweh" is for our benefit, not His. The natural result of compliance is that "it may be well with you." The "enemies" Yahweh promised to cast out if we obey Him are not necessarily people. They could be our own self-destructive tendencies, the "lusts that war against our members." "Possessing the good land" is living in peace and security as believing mortals *in this life*, and we'll never do that if we refuse to trust Yahweh to know what's best for us here and now.

(3) We are not to define our own standards of right and wrong, and we are certainly not to defer to clerics and kings to define good and evil for us. Rather, we are to "do what is right and good in the sight of Yahweh." His world, His rules.

And (4) note that we are to observe three categories of instruction. First are Yahweh's "commandments"—those things that are to be manifested as a constant, ongoing reality in our lives. These are not so much things we *do* as things we *are*. They invariably have a spiritual undercurrent, even if they seem on the surface to deal with outward behavior. For example, the commandment to honor one's father and mother, while valid and binding on the literal face of it, actually means we are to take Yahweh and His Holy Spirit seriously. Second are His "testimonies"—the characterizations, symbols, and metaphors that pepper the Torah, and indeed, the entire Bible from one end to the other. The tabernacle, the sacrifices, the festival calendar: all of these things and more conspire to inform us, if we will but heed them, of Yahweh's unfolding plan for our redemption. And third are His "statutes"—the rules that govern our human interactions and guard our health, things that make civilization *civil* and encourage us to demonstrate our trust in Yahweh's love by keeping His word.

- (896) *Look for the meaning behind God's statutes. "When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which Yahweh our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your son: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and Yahweh showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. And Yahweh commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear Yahweh our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. Then*

it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before Yahweh our God, as He has commanded us.”

(Deuteronomy 6:20-25) Allow me to boil this down to its essentials. *What does the Torah mean?* Deliverance! *Why should we heed all these instructions?* Because Yahweh is interested in our welfare, liberty, preservation, and righteousness. Revering our God and observing His statutes will naturally result in all of these good things.

The underlying assumption here is that the “testimonies, statutes, and judgments” of the Torah *do* have meaning. They’re not only rules for successful living (though they are certainly that). Yes, the *halakhah*, the path that one walks, is the focus of the statutes (Hebrew *choq*: a regulation, decree, ordinance, or boundary; a clear prescription of what one should do). But beyond the statutes, there are also “judgments” (*mishpat*: the act of deciding a legal dispute or case; the proclamation of a verdict; the dispensing of justice) and “testimonies” (*edah*: a witness—an object used as a memorial or remembrance of a covenant).

It is this last category—the *edah* or testimony—that completely eludes the rabbis. In Genesis 31, we see Jacob erecting a heap of stones as a pillar—a witness of the covenant he had made between himself and his deceitful father-in-law Laban. The reason is stated in verse 52: **“This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm.”** Yahweh has characterized the Torah as the same sort of “witness” or “testimony” against Israel. As Jacob’s pillar had cautionary significance to the parties of the covenant, so did the Torah. As the pillar was more than a pointless heap of rocks, so the Torah was more than a meaningless collection of rules. Both parties, Yahweh and Israel (and through them, us) were expected—were *required*—to consider the meaning of the *edah*, or testimony. And what was the meaning? What was the very first thing the Hebrew father was to answer his son when asked that question? **“We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.”** That is, we were in bondage to sin in the world, and Yahweh delivered us. How? By sending His Messiah, His only begotten Son, to fulfill the promise of all the bloody sacrifices prescribed in the Torah. They were signs, witnesses, *testimonies*, and every last one of them pointed toward Yahshua.

- (897) *Warn Israel concerning their wicked ways. “Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel.”*
(Deuteronomy 31:19) Knowing what’s coming can be a curse if it’s bad

news for someone you love. Sometimes I think being omniscient must be really depressing for Yahweh. The context here is God's prophetic assessment of what Israel would do with the revelation they'd been given. It wasn't pretty: **"This people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land.... They will forsake me and break my covenant.... My anger shall be aroused against them.... They shall be devoured.... I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they have done."** (Deuteronomy 31:16-18) These weren't hypotheticals. There was no "if" involved. These things *would* happen. So Moses was instructed to write a song (recorded in Chapter 32)—sort of a parallel to the letters John was told to send to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3—a prophecy of sweeping proportions outlining the future history of Israel after Moses was gone.

He begins (vs. 1-4) by reminding them who the Rock of their salvation is. Then (vs. 5-14) he recounts God's calling of Israel, their special place in His heart. But Israel's rebellion, apostasy, and pride is then recounted (vs. 15-21), including a tantalizing preview of the "foolish" gentiles (the *ekklesia*) who would take up the mantle of truth they'd dropped (driving Israel crazy by doing so). Verses 22-27 declare that if Yahweh had not given his word to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He would have allowed Israel to disappear from the face of the earth—He's that angry. He laments their ignorance (vs. 28-33) and recounts His determination to show them where they went wrong—no matter how painful it is (vs. 34-38). Finally (vs. 39-43), Yahweh promises vengeance upon His enemies and atonement for His people—calling once again on the gentiles to rejoice over the restoration of Israel.

I don't really know how an observant Jew today can look at Deuteronomy 32 and keep from cringing. Moses did his job: he recorded for all time Yahweh's "witness against the children of Israel." It has all come about precisely as He predicted—right up to verse 38, at which point Israel's **"power is gone, and there is no one remaining, bond or free,"** and He challenges them to call upon their false gods to save them. When did they reach this point? 1945—the final year of the Nazi holocaust. Since then, we have seen only glimmers of the coming fulfillment of the rest of the Song of Moses. Yahweh says, **"Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand. For I raise My hand to heaven, and say, 'As I live forever, if I whet My glittering sword, and My hand takes hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to My enemies, and repay those who hate Me. I will make My arrows drunk with blood, and My sword shall devour flesh, with the blood of the slain and the captives, from the heads of the leaders of the enemy.' Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and render vengeance to**

His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people.”

(Deuteronomy 32:39-43) That’s a somewhat squishy, though thoroughly consistent, view of the coming Tribulation. If God’s word has proved one hundred percent accurate up to our current point in history (and it has), what are the chances He’ll drop the ball now—now that He’s sprinting past the two yard line? Only a fool would bet against His crossing the goal line—and soon. Israel has been warned. We’ve *all* been warned.

TAKE HEED

- (898) *Don’t mistake God’s blessing for your own greatness. “For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as Yahweh our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life.”* (Deuteronomy 4:7-9) It is easy for us to take our blessings for granted. It’s not so much that we feel entitled to them; it’s that we become so used to them, we never even think about where they came from. At this point in their history, Israel had seen God’s mighty hand up close and personal—or at least their parents had. These desert pilgrims had never known anything but Yahweh’s miraculous guidance, provision, and instruction: the pillar of cloud and fire, the manna, the water from the rock. Their national deliverance from Egypt was as real to them as, say, World War II was to me—something that had fundamentally shaped their parents’ world view, even though it had passed into history and legend before they were even born. God’s personal presence, and a leader who talked with Him face to face, were all they had ever known. It would have been easy to forget that this was *not normal*: other nations had no such privileged personal relationship with their Creator and Deliverer.

Moses therefore cautions the children of Israel to be cognizant of their unique position—and their singular responsibility. He knew that when they entered the Promised Land, the comparatively “normal” routine of life they found there could easily distract them from their unique and amazing heritage. As they fought the inevitable battles, it would be tempting to credit their victories to their own valor or superior strength, rather than to Yahweh’s provision. But if they always kept in mind “the things their eyes had seen” on a national level, the natural tendency to ascribe God’s blessing to their own effort would be kept at bay.

This principle is just as valid on a personal level. Anyone who has witnessed Yahweh’s greatness for any length of time is in danger of taking

it for granted. Anyone who has enjoyed God's blessing runs the risk of becoming less thankful than he should be. We are cautioned here to "take heed," diligently and purposefully making a point to remember how great our God is, and thankfully recount His blessings.

- (899) *Pass on Yahweh's precepts to future generations. "And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, especially concerning the day you stood before Yahweh your God in Horeb, when Yahweh said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'" (Deuteronomy 4:9-10)*

At my age, I've seen a remarkable shift in how successive generations view material wealth. My parents and grandparents were products of the Great Depression, so they remained quite frugal even after they no longer had to be. My "baby-boomer" contemporaries, building on our parents' phobias, tended to fixate on money and security. So *our* children and grandchildren—reacting to our obsession with success—all too often squandered their opportunities and despised their birthrights—setting *their* children up for another round of hard times. My point is that the legacy we pass on to future generations is just as often a response to our failures as it is the result of our successes. What we teach our children is shaped more by what we value than by what we say.

What's evident in the material realm is even more true in the spiritual: our children can spot our hypocrisy—the dichotomy between what we say and what we do—a mile away. We can teach God's precepts to our children with our lips, but the lessons will go unheeded if they're not borne out by the way we live our lives. We can tell them to love God and trust Him, but it will all be for naught if we despise and cheat our neighbors. We can instruct them to "honor their parents," but our words will sound hollow indeed if we ship grandma off to a nursing home at the first sign of our own "inconvenience." If we value religious tradition over a personal relationship with Yahweh, our children will sense it. If we trust our own efforts instead of the provision of God, they will know. What we tell them doesn't matter nearly as much as what we do.

The point of teaching our children the ways of God is not to make them well behaved or compliant. Moses reminds us that it's so they might learn to revere Yahweh. And why is that important? Because **"The reverence of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments."** (Psalm 111:10) And again, why are wisdom and understanding so critical? **"Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the**

things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand; in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her.” (Proverbs 3:13-18) That’s quite a legacy, and it is within our power to bestow it upon our children—reverence toward Yahweh, leading to wisdom, leading in turn to something better than mere temporal wealth: happiness, long life (in the end, *eternal* life), true riches, honor, pleasantness (*no ‘am*: grace, favor, kindness, delight, or beauty), peace, and abundant life. You can’t leave stuff like that to your kids in your will. You have to give it to them in person, or not at all.

- (900) *Be careful not to worship created things instead of their Creator. “Take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which Yahweh your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage. But Yahweh has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people, an inheritance, as you are this day.”* (Deuteronomy 4:19-20) It is axiomatic that if you’re going to worship something, that “something” must logically be greater than you are. In fact, it only makes sense to reserve your worship for the *greatest thing* of which you can conceive—not the second or third greatest. Unfortunately, once mankind had, as a whole, turned its back on its Creator, the kind of insight that can only be gained through a personal relationship with Him—the kind enjoyed by Adam, Seth, Enoch, and Noah—was supplanted by mere human logic. At that point, God and man both had a problem. For man’s part, he was now equipped with a *neshamah* (the “breath of life” of Genesis 2:7) that enabled his soul to be made alive forever by the indwelling of the Spirit of God—but without which he was an incomplete and deficient being—spiritually empty. Mankind now had a thirst for God—a nagging consciousness of his unfulfilled, unborn spiritual state. He was compelled by his very nature to try to fill this “God-shaped vacuum.” He was *driven* to search for the very God he had chosen not to honor.

Yahweh too had a problem. His fundamental nature is Love, which as we have observed, cannot be forced upon its object without morphing into something else. He therefore couldn’t make His work, purpose, or even His presence, known in unambiguous terms to the intended object of His love—*us*—without robbing us of the ability and privilege of choosing to love Him, for such a choice implies and requires the option of *not* doing so. But He had already created us, which in turn had necessitated the creation of an infrastructure in which to maintain our organic life: earth, an oxygen-rich atmosphere, liquid water, a sun just the right size and

distance away to provide light and energy, and a large moon to drive tides, weather, and plate tectonics—all of which, and much more, are essential to our biosphere.

So here's the human race—fallen from the pure state and living in a world surrounded with really impressive big, bright, shiny things in the sky. The sun is the most obvious: it's heat and light bring life and security to our world. It's so critical to our survival, even a *caveman* could appreciate its importance. And the moon? Viewed from earth, it's *exactly* the same size as the sun, and though it's not as bright, it's far more interesting—disappearing and then magically reappearing in small increments every thirty days or so. The starry heavens too are fascinating and majestic, marching serenely across the night sky in pace with the seasons, forming pictures and suggesting stories in the minds of inquisitive men. The problem is that fallen man can't easily fathom anything greater than these, for the God who made them—Yahweh—doesn't force His presence and creative role into the forefront of our imaginations. And to make matters worse, until well into the twentieth century it was assumed that the sun, moon, and stars had *always* existed. The finite lifespan of the universe (about 14 billion years) wasn't scientifically established until Einstein's relativity, Hubble's red shifts, and Penzias' and Wilson's cosmic microwave background radiation had been thoroughly vindicated.

The idea of worshiping the sun, moon, and stars, then, isn't as crazy as it sounds to our jaded twenty-first century ears. It was what you might call an "understandable error." That's why Yahweh was careful to specifically point out that these things are not to be worshiped. They are merely created things, placed by God into our experience for our benefit—not only to sustain life on this planet, but also to teach us something about *His* glory. As David wrote, **"The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or a word; their voice is silent in the skies; yet their message has gone out to all the earth, and their words to all the world. The sun lives in the heavens where God placed it. It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding. It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race. The sun rises at one end of the heavens and follows its course to the other end. Nothing can hide from its heat."** (Psalm 19:1-6 NLT)

- (901) *Be careful to remember Yahweh's covenant.* "Furthermore Yahweh was angry with me [Moses] for your sakes, and swore that I would not cross over the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance. But I must die in this land, I must not cross over the Jordan; but you

shall cross over and possess that good land. Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of Yahweh your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which Yahweh your God has forbidden you. For Yahweh your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.”

(Deuteronomy 4:21-24) Moses is saying, in effect, “You’re about to enter the Land of Promise, and I can’t go with you. But if you’ll heed the covenant Yahweh made with your fathers after they left Egypt, you’ll do just fine without me.”

A covenant is an agreement or contract between two parties, both of whom are expected to keep their end of the bargain. What were the terms of this “Mosaic” covenant? Let’s go back and review it: **“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”** (Exodus 19:4-6) For the Israelites’ part, they were to “obey Yahweh’s voice.” The word translated “indeed obey” is the Hebrew verb *shama*: to hear, listen to, heed, or obey, with interest, attention, and understanding. That is, they were to carefully do as He instructed them through Moses, the heart of which is related in the very next chapter—the “Ten Commandments.”

Yahweh’s part of the bargain was three-fold—beyond what He’d already accomplished on behalf of Israel. First, He would consider Israel His “special treasure,” elevated in status and affection above all the peoples on the earth. The single Hebrew word translated “special treasure” is *segulla*, which actually means “personal property,” or “possession.” It is used of something especially valued by its owner, something for which he has extraordinary affection. Malachi fleshes out the idea: **“Then those who revered Yahweh spoke to one another, and Yahweh listened and heard them. So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear Yahweh and who meditate on His name. ‘They shall be Mine,’ says Yahweh of hosts, ‘on the day that I make them My jewels [*segulla*]. And I will spare [Hebrew *chamal*: to have pity or compassion on, to show kindness to] them as a man spares his own son who serves him.”** (Malachi 3:16-17)

Second, Yahweh would make Israel a “kingdom of priests.” A kingdom, by definition, has a king—in this case, Yahweh Himself manifested in the flesh, the One we know as Yahshua the Messiah. A priest is one who intercedes for others, one who goes before God on behalf of mankind. So a “kingdom of priests” is a group who represent the world before God—the King—and also represent God to the world. The *ekklesia*—the “Church”—is described in deceptively similar terms: not a

kingdom of priests, but “*kings* and priests” (Revelation 1:6 and 5:10). Though our role as intercessors before King Yahshua will be the same as restored Israel’s, the members of the *ekklesia*, as resurrected, immortal, perfected beings, will function as co-regents with Christ during His Millennial Kingdom. The thought makes me blush, but that’s God’s plan.

Third, Israel would be a “holy nation.” That is, they would be set apart from the other nations as God’s “special people,” selected and consecrated for His glory and His purpose. Mere national survival—even against incredible odds and in the face of intense persecution—does not define Israel as a “holy nation” today. Only the recognition and acceptance of their Messiah, Yahshua of Nazareth, will declare that they at last have “obeyed Yahweh’s voice” and “kept His covenant.” As unlikely as it looks, that day is coming—and soon.

- (902) *Remember that blessing is contingent on obedience.* **“When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of Yahweh your God to provoke Him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong your days in it, but will be utterly destroyed.”** (Deuteronomy 4:25-26) There are two contrasting bodies of prophecy concerning the nation of Israel. There are unconditional promises that the Land will always belong to them and that their destiny as Yahweh’s people is secure. On the other hand, there are also scathing predictions and dire warnings of judgment and eviction from the Land in the wake of their disobedience of God’s Law. These may seem contradictory, since they predict diametrically opposite events, but they’re not. The first group of promises are predicated on Yahweh’s unchangeable character; the second on Israel’s behavior. Once again we see that only a God who transcends time—who can see the end and the beginning in the same view—could say with assurance that Israel *will* “act corruptly” and “perish from the land” but they will also be restored—if and when they repent. **“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”** (II Chronicles 7:14)
- (903) *Recognize that good weather is an indicator of God’s approval.* **“It shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love Yahweh your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled.”** (Deuteronomy

11:13-15) The unsubstantiated opinion of atheist evolutionists notwithstanding, the data of science strongly suggest that our biosphere here on the earth balances on a razor's edge—indicating quite convincingly that an Intelligent Designer is behind it all. A small variation in any of a number of factors (for example, the strength of any of the four basic forces of nature—gravity, the weak and strong nuclear forces, and electromagnetism—the distance of Earth from the sun, the mass of the moon, the percentage of oxygen in our atmosphere, etc.) would result in the impossibility of life as we know it existing here. Our governments spend billions on the search for extraterrestrial life, hoping against hope that they can find something with which to bolster their sagging atheistic presuppositions: *“Life is nothing but a lucky accident—there's no need to acknowledge an Intelligent Creator, especially one with such inconvenient moral standards!”* And then they spend billions more on “disaster relief” when the weather goes haywire, destroying people's lives and property.

Call me a cheapskate, but it seems to me we could save ourselves a lot of money and grief if we simply honored the God who *told us* that He would use weather as an indicator of how we were doing in His sight. Yes, the promises were made specifically to Israel (once a “land of milk and honey,” now a barren wasteland except where industrious Jews have wrested gardens from the recalcitrant soil through Herculean effort and unimaginable personal sacrifice), but I believe the principles apply to anyone who purports to follow God. Favorable weather, allowing material prosperity to follow in its wake, is a sign that we are in favor with Yahweh; whereas droughts, floods, destructive hurricanes, and earthquakes are signs that we may not be. What is the real issue here? Moses explains further: **“Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest Yahweh's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which Yahweh is giving you.”** (Deuteronomy 11:16-17) Disastrous weather is promised as a direct result of “turning aside and serving other gods.”

It is not without significance that “bad weather” (sent in response to the “serving” of false gods) is a sign of the coming of the last days—*before* Christ has returned for His ekklesia. **“Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.”** (Matthew 24:4-8) Famines, of course, are caused by droughts,

among other things. But notice also the warning about “earthquakes.” The Greek word is *seismos*, which according to scriptural usage includes not only earthquakes, but also “tempests,” i.e., violent storms (Matthew 8:24)—hurricanes, typhoons, tornadoes, tsunamis, and so forth. We can’t say we haven’t been warned.

- (904) *Remember how to reestablish fellowship with Yahweh.* **“And Yahweh will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where Yahweh will drive you. And there you will serve gods, the work of men’s hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there you will seek Yahweh your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things come upon you, in the latter days when you turn to Yahweh your God and obey His voice (for Yahweh your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.”** (Deuteronomy 4:27-31) I found it distressing that Yahweh didn’t couch Israel’s apostasy in terms of “if,” but of “when.” He flatly said “You’re going to turn your back on Me.” But He also unequivocally declared that they would come back to Him “in the latter days.” When they (or any of us, really) find themselves in distress, suffering the consequences of having turned their backs on Yahweh, there are simple, profound instructions here for obtaining His mercy: **“Turn to Yahweh your God and obey His voice.... Seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.”**

The rabbis, of course, would insist that they never left Him. But to hold this opinion is to call Yahweh a liar, for the Jews *are* “scattered among the peoples.” They *are* “few in number.” And even now that Yahweh has resurrected their political presence in the Land, the vast majority of Israelis living there are either agnostics or atheists—they *do* serve “other gods” that have no life. What will it take to compel Israel to “seek Yahweh their God with all their heart and soul?” Disaster, I’m afraid—a war worthy of Tolkien’s epic saga of good against evil in Middle Earth. With their backs to the Wailing Wall, Israel will witness Yahweh’s miraculous defeat of the world’s combined Muslim armies, determined to once and for all drive them into the sea. The story is recounted in all its gory detail in Ezekiel 38 and 39. The bottom line is, **“So the house of Israel shall know that I am Yahweh their God from that day forward.”** (Ezekiel 39:22) Better late than never.

- (905) *Note that Yahweh has never led you astray in the past.* **“Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which Yahweh swore to your fathers. And you shall remember that Yahweh your God led you all the way**

these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.”

(Deuteronomy 8:1-2) Even though the Israelites were no longer oppressed slaves in Egypt, no one would suggest that their wilderness wanderings were a picnic. Besides the material inconveniences, their life during that time was one continual test. Sometimes they passed with flying colors; other times they failed miserably (just like us). So as graduation day approaches, Moses reminds them that it wasn't him who led them all these years—it was God Himself. Yahweh told them where to go and when to stop. Yahweh fed them and gave them water to drink. And Yahweh gave them a priesthood and tabernacle that would explain, if they would but open their eyes, how He planned to provide salvation to the whole world—using them as a vehicle. They had left Egypt a contentious, ignorant rabble. They would enter the Promised Land a dedicated, disciplined army, empowered and enlightened personally by the One True God. Moses didn't reserve one iota of credit for himself. To the very end, he simply pleaded with his people to heed the commandments of Yahweh.

Moses later continued the theme. **“He is your praise [that is, the One in whom you can rightfully boast], and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen. Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now Yahweh your God has made you as the stars of heaven in multitude. Therefore you shall love Yahweh your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always.”**

(Deuteronomy 10:21-22, 11:1) This is one more restatement of the agreement, the covenant, that existed between Yahweh and Israel. Moses' point here is that Yahweh had, here at the end of the wilderness wanderings, followed through on his end of the bargain at every turn. The Israelites were about to get their first real opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to keeping up their part, as they prepared to cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land (read: “begin living the day-to-day life of a believer”). Yahweh doesn't ask us to love or obey Him without giving us ample—actually, *overwhelming*—reasons for doing so. He demonstrated His love for us long before He invited us to reciprocate.

- (906) *Observe that trials are there to teach us lessons. “So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of Yahweh. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so Yahweh your God chastens you.”* (Deuteronomy 8:3-5) Point number one: a lesson isn't worth much if it doesn't make an impact on our lives. A drunk driver who is

merely told by the officer who pulls him over, “Please don’t do that any more” is far less likely to change his ways than the one who loses his driving privilege for six months. Saul of Tarsus needed to be struck blind for three days before he could hear the call of Yahweh on his life. Pain tells us to remove our hand from the hot skillet before we seriously injure ourselves. The sad fact is that the most effective lessons often involve a little discomfort. At the very least, they shake us out of our complacency. These lessons are a gift from God, like the manna in the wilderness—something we desperately need, even if they’re as unfamiliar as they are timely. Yahweh, who loves us, is perfectly willing to make us “uncomfortable” in the interests of teaching us His ways, for His ways lead to life, health, and happiness.

I have eleven children, and when necessary as they were growing up, I disciplined them. But I never chastised the neighbors’ kids (even if they obviously needed it). Point number two: God doesn’t expend breath teaching other people’s children—only his own. I know it seldom feels like it at the time, but that should be a great comfort to us: when “bad things” happen to a child of God, we can rest assured that there’s always something valuable He intends to teach us through the experience—something he wants us to learn and remember, something that will make us (or those who know us) better people. When similar “bad things” happen to people who do not wish to call Yahweh their Father, these things are merely the result of living in a fallen world, the natural consequences of sin, whether their own or someone else’s. I realize it sounds counterintuitive, not to mention being so conveniently nebulous it can’t be disproved. But remember the conundrum of love: Yahweh can’t bribe us with blessings or threaten us with cursings in order to gain our love. Only after our love has been freely given to Him do His blessings and chastisements become effective in guiding our paths.

Point number three, then, is that the trials that fall into our lives are there for our benefit. The very first thing James wrote about in his epistle was, **“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”** (James 1:2-4) Peter too reminds us that this “testing of our faith” can lead to all sorts of profitable results: **“Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (II Peter 1:5-8)

(907) *Know that when we keep Yahweh's commandments, He will provide for all of our needs. "Therefore you shall keep the commandments of Yahweh your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. For Yahweh your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper."* (Deuteronomy 8:6-9) Back in Precept #903, we were reminded that the rainfall that had made the Promised Land perennially lush and fertile was henceforth to be contingent upon the Israelites' obedience to the commandments of Yahweh. Here we see the same truth presented in slightly different terms. God says, in effect, *Because I have prepared this good and productive land for you to live in—a land you didn't have to work for, develop, or purchase—you are to revere Me and follow my instructions.* The pattern never changes: Yahweh first created us, loved us, provided for our needs, and set us free from bondage. In response, we are to acknowledge His authority and reciprocate His love. We are never asked to exercise "blind faith" in God's word (and we're specifically *prohibited* from blindly following what men tell us). We are merely invited to open our eyes (eyes *He gave us*, by the way), recognize His great goodness toward us, and respond accordingly. In reality, Yahweh is asking for little more than good manners from us. He has given us the world, and all He wants is a thank-you note.

But what do we do? All too often, we see the good land before us and assume we're entitled to it. We credit good luck or our own strength when we win battles (though we still curse God when we lose). We refuse to see His provision, and instead invent myths honoring "chance" and "destiny" and "valor." We leverage our meager successes in order to subjugate our brothers, and then we congratulate ourselves for "outgrowing our dependence on God." And we wonder why the rains cease, the trees wither, and the topsoil blows away. Compare the description of the "good land" Yahweh deeded to Israel, described above, to the barren wasteland to which they began returning in the 19th century. Therein lies the difference between honoring Yahweh and serving "other gods."

(908) *Observe that the choice between prosperity and death is ours to make. "You shall remember Yahweh your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. Then it shall be, if you by any means forget Yahweh your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. As the nations which Yahweh destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of Yahweh your God."*

(Deuteronomy 8:18-20) As if he hadn't already made his point, Moses says it again. *You are a covenant people. Honor the covenant you've made with Yahweh and you will be blessed as a result. Or serve other gods instead, as the nations around you do, and perish.* The destruction he speaks of is a national phenomenon: Israel's political existence within the Land depends upon their national observance of their covenant with Yahweh. Of course, the people to whom Moses was preaching were intimately familiar with the power and provision of their God. They'd lived in its shadow, quite literally, all their lives. But Moses points out where they would run afoul of the commandment: they would *forget*. Their national memory would be lulled to sleep by the background noise of business as usual in the Land. To the generation that crossed the Jordan, the exodus from Egypt was the stuff of bedtime stories; to their children, ancient legend, and to *their* children, misty half-forgotten myth.

"Remembering Yahweh" was built into the Law. The Torah is peppered from one end to the other with devices great and small designed to prevent Israel from forgetting. Wearing the tsitzit, resting on the Sabbath, writing God's Instructions on the doorposts of your house, tithing, observing new moon celebrations, congregating three times a year in a central location to bring sacrifices and rejoice before Yahweh—all these things and more were designed to keep Yahweh's persona constantly before Israel. In the theocracy of early Israel, it would have been really hard to forget about Yahweh by accident. You'd have to purposely ignore Him, for evidence of His provision was everywhere you looked.

- (909) *Never assume the good things in your life are there because you deserve them. "Do not think in your heart, after Yahweh your God has cast them out before you, saying, 'Because of my righteousness Yahweh has brought me in to possess this land'; but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that Yahweh is driving them out from before you."* (Deuteronomy 9:4) When we find ourselves blessed by God, there are several logical ways to respond, and they're not all correct. We could say, "*Of course* I'm being blessed. I'm better than my neighbor, more moral, upright, and religious. God must be very happy to have me on His team." Don't be too sure. The Pharisees of Yahshua's day enjoyed the same sort of prosperity and displayed the same sort of pride—and God was furious with them for their hypocrisy.

We could say, "These good things I'm enjoying are merely the result of following God's Law. After all, He said that if I walked in His statutes and kept His commandments, He would give me fair weather, bountiful harvests, peace, security, and prosperity. So since life is pretty good, I must be doing everything right." While it's true that keeping Yahweh's

commandments can be expected to have certain “natural” consequences that benefit us, we should not mistake the prosperity we gain by living “godly” lives for a relationship with the God who pointed these things out to us. This was the actual source of the Pharisees’ general state of prosperity—nobody kept the letter of the Law more rigorously than they did. Today, we see the same sort of phenomenon. Mormons, for example, are often statistically more prosperous than their neighbors. Why? Because their religion tells them to work hard, live clean, and behave themselves. But the “blessings” they enjoy are not specially bestowed upon them by Yahweh. They are, rather, the result of “natural law.” They’re “blessed” for pretty much the same reason that Amish people don’t die in high speed car crashes.

Thus we observe that Israel wasn’t given the Promised Land because they had the Torah—and certainly not because they kept it. Their possession of the Land was based on only one thing: Yahweh chose to give it to them—centuries before the Canaanite inhabitants had earned themselves a one way ticket to oblivion. So Yahweh warns them in this Precept not to start “believing their own press.” It is not because they were especially good, but because the Canaanites were particularly bad, that the Land was changing hands. The underlying truth was that if Israel became as bad as the former tenants, they too would be evicted. What, then, was the proper response to having been blessed with possession of this good land? They should have said, “Thank you, Father Yahweh. Though we have done nothing to deserve this, we will endeavor to become worthy of your goodness by observing your statutes, keeping your commandments, and teaching our children to honor you as well. Please help us!”

- (910) *Remember what makes God angry.* **“Remember! Do not forget how you provoked Yahweh your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against Yahweh. Also in Horeb you provoked Yahweh to wrath, so that Yahweh was angry enough with you to have destroyed you.”** (Deuteronomy 9:7-8) Learning from experience is a two way street. Not only should we take notice of our blessings and consider their source, but we should also remember the “bad things,” those times when we “provoked Yahweh our God to wrath” and lived to tell the tale. If we bear in mind what has angered God in the past, we’ll naturally be more careful about repeating those same stupid mistakes in the future. Yahweh is not unreasonable: He has told us what He wants us to do. God went to a lot of trouble to inform us of His Instructions. Moses reports, **“When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which Yahweh made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread**

nor drank water. Then Yahweh delivered to me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words which Yahweh had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. And it came to pass, at the end of forty days and forty nights, that Yahweh gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.” (Deuteronomy 9:9-11) Can you blame Him for being angry when we don’t even *try* to keep His commandments?

These lessons are not just for Israel. They’re for anyone who purports to honor Yahweh—and they apply on a national as well as a personal level. Picture Yahweh as your Father. Although He may offer *advice* to the other neighborhood kids, He exercises *authority* over you—a very different thing. Because you are His own child, He both blesses and disciplines you, but he does neither of these things to other people’s children (in His role as our Father, that is. He will soon assume a different role—that of King—and things will change a bit). My point is that in a life (whether individual or national) that professes to honor Yahweh, the things that happen, whether good or bad, should be viewed as having been ordained by God. They may (or may not) be the direct result of our actions, but they are definitely the result of our relationship.

A contemporary example of how this all works was chronicled by journalist William Koenig in his book *Eye To Eye—Facing the Consequences of Dividing Israel*. He lists scores of instances during the Clinton and Bush years that linked America’s official attempts to betray Israel to the Palestinians to devastating consequences on our own soil, suffered by our own people—fires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and terrorist attacks—all of which happened within 48 hours of our attempts to plunder Israel in the name of “peace.” But what were Yahweh’s clear instructions on the matter? He had told Abraham, **“I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you.”** (Genesis 12:3) He revealed through Isaiah, **“Then behold, at eventide, trouble! And before the morning, he is no more. This is the portion of those who plunder us, and the lot of those who rob us.”** (Isaiah 17:14) And finally, **“It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.”** (Zechariah 12:9) We Americans have “provoked Yahweh to wrath.” We have rebelled against Him and plundered His chosen people. Call me politically naïve, but it seems to me we ought to stop doing what angers God and start doing what pleases Him.

- (911) *Know that your actions can affect future generations, not just yourself. “Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of Yahweh your God.”* (Deuteronomy 12:28) This is a corollary to Precept #899. Forget for a moment about “morality,” “doing the right

thing” and “following your inner compass.” The most visceral, primeval reason for following Yahweh’s instructions is that if you do, “it will go well with you.” And even if you’re so other-worldly that you don’t care about what happens to yourself (which is really stupid, since God told us to love our neighbors as we do *ourselves*), then think about the consequences that will fall upon your children: they too will reap temporal benefits from your spiritual obedience.

It may come as a shock to some devout believers: God encourages us to obey Him not solely out of pious duty or religious obligation, but out of sheer self-interest. He *wants it* to “go well with us.” The same God who told us to worship Him alone, rest on the Sabbath day, and refrain from disrespect, murder, theft, adultery, perjury, and covetousness also commanded us to *rejoice*. We must try to understand that everything Yahweh commanded us to do is *good for us*—even the stuff we don’t quite understand. If there’s no direct and obvious benefit associated with a precept, then the benefit is indirect and obscure—but it’s always *there*.

I realize that we all have a rebellious streak a mile wide. We hate being told what to do. If I take cold medicine, I suddenly get this irresistible urge to go out and operate heavy machinery, simply because the instructions have told me not to. If Yahweh’s one and only commandment had been, “Thou shalt not hit thy thumb with a ball peen hammer,” I can practically guarantee that within a generation, a cult would have arisen whose sole purpose would be finding ways to “get around” this onerous burden. We’d be smashing our thumbs with rubber mallets or in door jambs, or going for our pinky fingers, or shattering other people’s thumbs. We would be engaging in heated theological debates about whether only the ball peen end of the hammer head was meant, but not the flat side, or whether it might be permissible to whack your thumb with the handle. One group would be advocating outlawing hammers altogether. Another would conclude that thumbs were so holy, it was a sin to let them be seen in public. We’d do *anything* to “keep the law” while rebelling against its Author. Who among us would comprehend that because the Lawgiver loved us, He simply wanted to keep us, and our children, free from pain?

- (912) *Be careful not to be influenced by what you’re fighting.* “When Yahweh your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ You shall not worship Yahweh your God in that way; for every

abomination to Yahweh which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.” (Deuteronomy 12:29-31) Yahweh made it relatively easy to distinguish between worshiping Him and practicing the rites of the Canaanites. There was no overlap at all. The Canaanites had temples, shrines, and worship groves all over the place; Yahweh directed them to formally worship only “in the place where He chose to make His name abide.” The worshipers of Ba’al, Molech, Chemosh, Dagon, and Asthoreth, etc. bowed before idols representing their gods; Yahweh strictly forbade the making of images—even of Himself—for worship. The temples of Canaan’s false gods were as large and impressive as their devotees could manage to build; Yahweh’s “house” was a small, gray, nondescript portable structure surrounded by a flimsy linen fence—they wouldn’t have a “real” temple for almost half a millennium. It was as if Yahweh was telling Israel, “You don’t need all the props, the hype, and the impressive infrastructure. You’ve got Me, and though I’m Spirit, I Am *real*—unlike all these pitiful counterfeits you see being worshiped in the Land.

The lesson of this precept is largely lost on the Church in today’s world. All too often, we employ psychology in place of the simplicity of the Gospel; we measure success by counting noses (or worse, dollars) instead of reaching hearts; we use Madison Avenue marketing techniques instead of the seeming foolishness of preaching the unabashed truth. In short, we “inquire after the gods of the land,” and say to ourselves, “How does the world achieve its goals? I will do likewise.” We have been warned not to do this.

- (913) *Neither ignore God nor “put words in His mouth.” “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.”* (Deuteronomy 12:32) Neither Israel nor the Church have a very good track record in their “care” in observing Yahweh’s commandments. Speaking in broad generalities, the Jewish approach has traditionally been to “add to it,” that is, to place a hedge about God’s word with layer upon layer of insulation, explanation, and interpretation—until the truth is buried so deep it can no longer be detected or discerned.

The classic Christian pitfall, on the other hand, is to “take away from it,” to remove from our daily experience everything we don’t understand (or don’t *want to* understand) and don’t have the maturity or courage to honestly explore. That could include anything beyond the bare-bones doctrine of our salvation: the “hard sayings” and inconvenient commandments of Christ, the prophetic texts of the Old and New Covenant Scriptures, and the Torah—*especially* the Torah. Perhaps the

most blatant example of this approach is the famous “Jefferson Bible,” in which our third President unabashedly edited Yahweh’s scriptures down to forty-six pages of platitudes with which he was prepared to agree, leaving nothing miraculous, nothing divine. Explaining his project in a letter to John Adams in 1813, Jefferson wrote, “We must reduce our volume to the simple evangelists, select, even from them, the very words only of Jesus, paring off the amphibologisms [ambiguous declarations] into which they have been led, by forgetting often, or not understanding, what had fallen from him, by giving their own misconceptions as his dicta, and expressing unintelligibly for others what they had not understood themselves. There will be found remaining the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man. I have performed this operation for my own use, by cutting verse by verse out of the printed book, and arranging the matter which is evidently his, and which is as easily distinguishable as diamonds in a dunghill.” I don’t know, Tom. Unlike you, I haven’t exactly found the *other* 1,271 pages of God’s Word a “dunghill.” By taking away from the Bible Yahweh’s commandment *not to* “take away from it,” Jefferson (and so many others) have merely demonstrated their own arrogance and ignorance.

But I’m preaching to the choir, am I not? By now you surely know that the Torah is absolutely consistent with the New Covenant texts (including both TJ’s “diamonds” and his “dunghill”), and if you’ve read my previous work, *Future History*, you know that the New and Old Testament prophetic passages are in perfect sync as well, if you have the chronology straight. It is not without significance that the Bible closes (almost) with a virtual restatement of this precept’s principle, this time enumerating the dire consequences for refusing to comply: **“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’”** (Revelation 22:18-20) If you find yourself purposely obfuscating or denying God’s truth, there is still time to repent—but not much.

- (914) *Don’t be afraid of Yahweh’s adversaries.* **“If you should say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?’—you shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember well what Yahweh your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt: the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and the wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm, by which Yahweh your God brought you out. So shall Yahweh your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. Moreover Yahweh your God will send the hornet among them until those**

who are left, who hide themselves from you, are destroyed.” (Deuteronomy 7:17-20) The Israelites may have been surrounded by God’s enemies, but they are not alone in this respect. In these Last Days, the Called-Out of Christ too find themselves surrounded like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid by hostile and aggressive foes. But as with Israel, to ask ourselves, “How can I dispossess them?” is to ask the wrong question. Overcoming Yahweh’s antagonists is not our job. He will take care of it, and what’s more, He has already told us how He will do it. No, our task is to preach the “foolishness” of the Good News to the world, feed Yahshua’s “sheep,” love our God, and love each other as we do ourselves.

But what about the enemies that beset us, depicting truth as lies and presenting lies as established fact, declaring Yahweh “dead” (or worse, redefining Him as being the same as somebody else’s false deity), ridiculing our scriptures and faith, and threatening our rights, freedoms, and even (gasp!) our standard of living? Yahweh’s instructions are quite clear: **“You shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember well what Yahweh your God did to Pharaoh.”** As bad as things are (or promise to get), Christians today will likely never face a situation bleaker than what Israel labored under just prior to the exodus—slavery, despair, and the hopelessness of having forgotten the promises of God. The Church under overt persecution—the “Smyrna” of Revelation 2:8-11—though still suffering here and there in our world, is no longer *characteristic* of our age, although they were given virtually the same commandment our current Precept offers: **“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.”** (Revelation 2:10) The Church that defines our current state is that of Philadelphia, who were told, **“See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.”** (Revelation 3:8) Here the risen Christ is informing us as to *why* we need not be afraid, and the answer is the same as it’s always been: Yahweh is fighting our battles for us. This fact may not be quite as blatantly obvious as it was when Yahweh brought Pharaoh to his knees (if not his senses), but the days of the “mighty hand and outstretched arm” of Yahweh are about to visibly return. In the meantime, we are *commanded* not to be afraid of God’s enemies.

- (915) *Endeavor to be the tool in Yahweh’s hand.* **“Yahweh your God will drive out those nations before you little by little; you will be unable to destroy them at once, lest the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. But Yahweh your God will deliver them over to you, and will inflict defeat upon them until they are destroyed. And He will deliver their kings into your hand, and you will destroy their name from under heaven; no one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them.”** (Deuteronomy 7:22-24) The days of military conquest in

the name of Yahweh were confined to a finite list of national adversaries (see Mitzvot #352, #353, #601, #602, and Precept #918) a long time ago. But that doesn't mean the lessons inherent in God's instructions for the conquest of Canaan have been abrogated. The principle is still valid: Yahweh often chooses to fulfill His purposes through the agency of men. The reason, of course, is that His *direct* action would leave little or no room for free will in our response—we would be obligated to adore Him, leading to the conundrum of which we spoke earlier: love compelled is not love at all. Interestingly, Yahweh's human agents needn't even be of the "believing" variety. The rod of God's correction is often seen wielded by pagan monarchs like Nebuchadnezzar, whom Yahweh called "My servant" in Jeremiah 25:9. And consider this: Adolph Hitler did more to give the Jews their own homeland and state than any other man in modern history.

That being said, I believe the highest honor to which a believer can aspire in this life is to be a tool in the hand of Yahweh. As Uncle Mordecai reminded Esther, **"If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"** (Esther 4:14) In other words, if we don't fulfill the destiny Yahweh has prepared for us, He will simply bestow our privileges of service onto someone more willing. As Mordecai pointed out, the power needed to achieve God's goals remains in His hands anyway. We merely have to be willing to walk in that strength. I know it seems counterintuitive, but if we're willing to pick up His shovel, He'll hand us the keys to His back hoe. Even with all that power available to us, however, Yahweh cautions us that He won't achieve more than we're willing to attempt. He wants us to walk *together* through this world, side by side. We are neither to lag behind nor race ahead of Him. Of course, Yahweh could, if He chose to do so, accomplish all of His goals in the blink of an eye. But like any doting Father teaching His children, He condescends to our inadequacies: the "result" He's *really* after is fellowship with us. So in this life, the work we do in Yahweh's power will get done at man's pace, not God's. If we'll offer to drain the swamp for Him, He won't let us find ourselves up to our aspirations in alligators.

- (916) *Show your reverence for Yahweh through your love, obedience, and service.* **"And now, Israel, what does Yahweh your God require of you, but to fear Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of Yahweh and His statutes which I command you today for your good? Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to Yahweh your God, also the earth with all**

that is in it. Yahweh delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer."

(Deuteronomy 10:12-16) Lest there should be any confusion on the matter, Moses here flatly states that all these things we've been talking about: reverence for God, righteousness, love, service, and obedience are not merely suggestions or recommendations—they're requirements! He reminds them that Yahweh's love for, and delight in, their forefathers, beginning with Abraham, resulted in His choosing Israel, out of every nation on earth, to be His covenant people. That gave them astounding privileges, but also serious responsibilities. They were, in short, to be the people through whom Yahweh's promise to Abraham would be kept: **"In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** (Genesis 12:3)

With the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, we can see today that that promise was fulfilled in the advent and sacrifice of Yahshua the Messiah—though many Jews, still characterized by an "uncircumcised" attitude and "stiff neck," refuse to believe it. But if, as I have been insisting, the Torah looks forward to Christ in every symbol, rite, and precept, then "revering Yahweh, walking in His ways, loving, serving, and obeying Him" are all tantamount to embracing Yahshua as the promised Messiah. These requirements cannot be met by half-heartedly and imperfectly following a contrived list of 613 regulations cherry-picked from the Torah—half of them altered beyond recognition by self-serving rabbis.

Since these things are "required" specifically of Israel, does that mean mankind in general is held to a lower standard? Not really. The prophet Micah explains what God wants from the rest of us: **"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does Yahweh require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"** (Micah 6:8) In intuitively practical, albeit less specific, terms than those given above, this "list" boils down to the same thing. The key, of course, is "walking humbly with our God." If we are walking *with* Him (not against, in front of, or behind Him) in humility (i.e., realistically assessing our relationship, not arrogantly replacing His truth with our own concepts), then justice, mercy, and all the rest will naturally tend to fall in line.

- (917) *Appreciate the unique nature of the Promised Land.* **"Therefore you shall keep every commandment which I command you today, that you may be strong, and go in and possess the land which you cross over to possess, and that you may prolong your days in the land which Yahweh swore to give your fathers, to them and their descendants, 'a land flowing with milk and honey.'"** (Deuteronomy 11:8-9) This is but one of many places in the Torah where the possession of the

Land is seen as being contingent upon keeping Yahweh's commandments. Note that Moses didn't say "some of them" but "*every* commandment" God has made. Now that we have seen most of them, it is readily apparent that quite a few of these precepts—especially the overtly symbolic ones, those having to do with Yahweh's seven annual convocations, the tabernacle, sacrifices, or the priesthood—could *only* be kept in the Land. It was, in fact, *illegal* to "keep" them in any location other than "where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide." So Yahweh was actually telling Israel, "If you *won't* worship Me, I'll arrange it so that you *can't* worship Me." Seems to me, that lesson still applies—to all of us.

It's helpful to remember that at the time of the exodus, the climate of the Land of Promise was very different from what it is today. **"For the land which you go to possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and watered it by foot, as a vegetable garden; but the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which Yahweh your God cares; the eyes of Yahweh your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year."** (Deuteronomy 11:10-12) Even this is symbolic of Yahweh's redemption. The land they had left, while prosperous enough, required lots of labor, in addition to the provision of God's predictable seasonal weather and the annual flooding of the Nile. Yes, with irrigation and manpower, you could coax a decent living from Egyptian soil, and they did just that for millennia. But Canaan was different. At that point in history, the prevailing west winds constantly blew moisture from the Mediterranean over the Land. (They still would, if Yahweh wasn't so displeased with the sons of Abraham who live there.) The clouds would pile up against the hills, precipitating their precious cargo over the coastal plain—much like the weather pattern we normally see in Washington State and Oregon. Behind this range lies the Jordan Valley—all of which is hundreds of feet below sea level—and beyond that, desert.

If "Egypt" represents living in the world, and "the Land" symbolizes walking through life as Yahweh's children, then the climatic differences between the two places illustrate the dichotomy between our old life and our new one. We have moved from being dependent on our own never-ending labor to being reliant upon Yahweh's provision—not just for our daily bread, but for our very spiritual existence. Don't lose sight of what introduced us to this concept. Our possession of the "Land" (the blessed life of a believer) is contingent upon our observation of Yahweh's commandments—which, as I've noted 'til I'm blue in the face, all point unequivocally to our grace and cleansing provided by Yahweh through the life and sacrifice of His Messiah, Yahshua of Nazareth. The bottom line:

believe God, and it will be counted unto you as righteousness. (Gee, that sounds sort of familiar, doesn't it?)

- (918) *Expect victory if you love Yahweh and obey Him.* **"If you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do—to love Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him—then Yahweh will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the River Euphrates, even to the Western Sea, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand against you; Yahweh your God will put the dread of you and the fear of you upon all the land where you tread, just as He has said to you."** (Deuteronomy 11:22-25) We've already identified who these "great and mighty" nations were. To reprise the list, **"When Yahweh your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when Yahweh your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them."** (Deuteronomy 7:1-2) What we haven't done (yet) is to figure out what they represent from a symbolic point of view. These are things we will encounter *in the Land*—that is, as we endeavor to walk in Yahweh's grace. He promises to "drive them out from before us," but only if we'll "walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him." So, who are these bad boys?

(1) The Hittites are the sons of Heth, a Canaanite tribe. "Heth" means "terror," so Yahweh is saying we need not be afraid.

(2) The Girgashites are also descendants of Canaan. The name means "dwelling on a clayey soil." I can relate to that, living in Central Virginia. "Clayey" soil is nutrient-poor, unproductive, and hard as a rock, like the "stony places" in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:5-6. Where the seed couldn't grow deep roots, it withered and died. Yahweh, then, is telling us we can be productive and fruitful.

(3) The Amorites' name is derived from the verb *amar*, meaning "to say, speak, command, boast, or avow." I believe Yahweh is saying we can "dispossess" empty speech, that is, we will be able to discern fact from fiction, truth from lies, even as those around us are being deceived.

(4) The Canaanites were descended from the son of Ham who was cursed by Noah in Genesis 9:20-25. The name is derived from the primitive verb *kana*, meaning "to be humbled, subdued, or made low." Yahweh is telling us that His enemies will never succeed in bringing us down. We are reminded of Peter's declaration that Yahshua was "the Messiah, the Son of the Living God," upon which truth Yahshua promised

to build his called-out assembly, against whom “the gates of Hell would not prevail.” (See Matthew 16:18.)

(5) The Perizzites’ name is derived from *paraziy*, meaning one who dwells in a village, hamlet, rural setting, or in the open country—that is, one who lives unprotected by a city wall. God will never leave us unprotected.

(6) The Hivites at first seem to mean something similar to the Perizzites. It means “villagers,” from a word, *chavvah*, meaning “a village, town or tent-village.” But notice that Chavvah (spelled and pronounced the same way) is also the name of the person we usually call “Eve,” as in Adam’s wife, the one who was first deceived by Satan. Could it be that Yahweh was telling us that we will no longer be deceived into sin if we will keep His commandments? Sounds good to me.

(7) The Jebusites were another Canaanite tribe, named for Jebus, from a verb (*bus*) meaning to tread down, trample, reject, or desecrate. Yahweh is once again reminding us that no one will tread His children underfoot if they’ll keep His precepts.

BLESSING AND CURSING

- (919) *Choose between the blessing and the curse. “Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of Yahweh your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of Yahweh your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known.”*

(Deuteronomy 11:26-28) Choice is the exercise of the privileged. In my neighborhood, we can choose between twenty brands of coffee, thirty-five kinds of breakfast cereal, and about eighty different varieties of cheese. Paper or plastic. Regular or high-test. Windows or Mac. Some places in the world, the choice is between scrounging through the city dump and going hungry. But seldom is the choice this clear cut, this blatantly obvious as to which option we should choose. Let’s see, live or die, blessing or curse? Gee, that’s a tough one.

Here’s the tricky part in today’s world. The purveyors of modern Babylon—in the guise of politics, commerce, and religion, often offer choices that aren’t really choices at all. *Would you like the red curse, or the blue curse? It’s your choice.* Only Yahweh offers us a real choice: obey His commandments and live in blessing, or disobey them and bring the curse of estrangement from Him to your doorstep. Remember, He doesn’t have to go out of His way to “punish” us for breaking His laws.

The punishment is built in. If you “break the Law” of gravity by stepping off of the roof of a forty story building, don’t blame God for “punishing you” with the sidewalk at the end of your journey. And don’t forget that there may be a gap between the sin and its consequences. It does no good to say “So far, so good” as you fly past the twentieth floor on your way down.

- (920) *Assign physical reminders of the choice God offers.* **“Now it shall be, when Yahweh your God has brought you into the land which you go to possess, that you shall put the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. Are they not on the other side of the Jordan, toward the setting sun, in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the plain opposite Gilgal, beside the terebinth trees of Moreh? For you will cross over the Jordan and go in to possess the land which Yahweh your God is giving you, and you will possess it and dwell in it. And you shall be careful to observe all the statutes and judgments which I set before you today.”** (Deuteronomy 11:29-32) How this was to be done would be recorded in Deuteronomy 27, which we’ll get to shortly. For now, just notice that God assigned physical objects—two entire mountains—to punctuate His instructions, or more precisely, the choice to be made between heeding them or not. His Law wasn’t merely to be a mental exercise—a series of esoteric rhetorical points to be discussed, debated, codified, and then relegated to musty theological tomes by learned scholars in ivory towers. Rather, the Torah was to live and breathe in the experience and walk of every Israelite—as obvious and as hard to ignore as a mountain. That was the point, of course, of using *two* mountains to make His point: one had to choose between them—you couldn’t stand upon both at the same time.
- (921) *Publicly display the words of the Law.* **“Now Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people, saying: “Keep all the commandments which I command you today. And it shall be, on the day when you cross over the Jordan to the land which Yahweh your God is giving you, that you shall set up for yourselves large stones, and whitewash them with lime. You shall write on them all the words of this law, when you have crossed over, that you may enter the land which Yahweh your God is giving you, ‘a land flowing with milk and honey,’ just as Yahweh, God of your fathers, promised you.”** (Deuteronomy 27:1-3) Joshua ended up splitting Moses’ instructions into a two part process, because the Israelites’ crossing point over the Jordan was almost thirty miles from Mount Ebal—a long way to carry a pile of heavy unhewn boulders. First, he built an altar of large stones taken from the riverbed (Joshua 4:8-9) , setting them up in nearby Gilgal (4:20). Later, after the conquests of Jericho and Ai, the Israelites traveled north and gathered at Shechem, a village nestled between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, to complete the task.

“Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan, that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I command you today, and you shall whitewash them with lime. And there you shall build an altar to Yahweh your God, an altar of stones; you shall not use an iron tool on them. You shall build with whole stones the altar of Yahweh your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to Yahweh your God. You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before Yahweh your God. And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law.” (Deuteronomy 27:4-8) So we read that **“Joshua built an altar to Yahweh, God of Israel, in Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of Yahweh had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: ‘an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron tool.’ And they offered on it burnt offerings to Yahweh, and sacrificed peace offerings.”** This was perfectly permissible, because the Tabernacle and the ark of the Covenant were there. **“And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written.” (Joshua 8:30-32)**

If you want to bring militant atheists and their lawyers crawling out of the woodwork in America today, all you have to do is post a copy of the Ten Commandments in a public place. Even if we never attempted to keep this microcosm of the Torah, from our very beginnings we recognized the source of whatever justice is latent in our legal system: God’s word. But in our zeal to separate manmade religion from our public policy (in itself a noble and worthy goal) we have declared war on reason, declaring *persona non grata* the very God whose words these religions have twisted. So today, without Yahweh’s definition of right and wrong to guide us, our civilization has begun to degenerate. Our national doctrines are now (1) “might makes right,” (2) the golden rule (i.e., “he who has the gold gets to make the rules”), (3) “your government knows best,” (4) “share the wealth” (a.k.a. “rob from the productive and give the booty to everybody else”), (5) “protect the rights of criminals,” and (6) “all men are created equal—and some are more equal than others.” Because we have purposely neglected to build upon the foundation of judicial and moral sanity that Yahweh gave us, we now find ourselves a nation sinking into the quicksand of chaos and despair, easy prey to false Christs and false hope. Separating church and state may be a good thing; separating *God* and state is suicide.

- (922) *Be careful and attentive with God’s Word.* **“Then Moses and the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying, “Take heed and listen, O Israel: This day you have become the people of Yahweh your God. Therefore you shall obey the voice of Yahweh your God, and observe His commandments and His statutes which I command you today.” (Deuteronomy 27:9-10)** Although their parents had (see Exodus 19:8) affirmed their determination to follow Yahweh’s

precepts (and then proceeded to rebel against Him every chance they got) this new generation of Israelites, many of whom were born during the wilderness wanderings, had never—until now—had the opportunity to formally voice their own opinion on the matter. Moses reports what they decided: **“Today you have proclaimed Yahweh to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice. Also today Yahweh has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to Yahweh your God, just as He has spoken.”** (Deuteronomy 26:17-19) My point is that we can only choose or reject Yahweh for ourselves; we *cannot* do so on behalf of other people, even our own children. In the end, everyone has to choose their own master; every individual must select whom—if anyone—they will trust with their eternal destiny.

Having voiced their choice, they are reminded—for the umpteenth time—that their commitment entails obedience. Note that it doesn’t actually demand *perfection*, for the Torah is peppered with provisions for dealing with sin: sacrifices, washings, and priestly intercession. It is a given that they will, being human, fall short of the mark. Obedience to Yahweh’s precepts therefore includes a willingness to avail oneself of His provision for reconciliation—it doesn’t presuppose that we won’t need it. That provision for reconciliation, of course, is personified in Yahshua the Messiah: the very “voice of Yahweh our God.”

- (923) *Know that behavior has consequences, for good or ill. “And Moses commanded the people on the same day, saying, ‘These shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, when you have crossed over the Jordan: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin; and these shall stand on Mount Ebal to curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.’”* (Deuteronomy 27:11-13) These two “mountains” (actually just rocky hills, rising less than 1000 feet above the surrounding plain) are quite similar in a lot of ways, making them the ideal metaphor for “choosing one thing or the other.” As if to punctuate this fact, Ebal, the “mount of cursing” (whose name means “bare” or “bald”), is sparse on vegetation, while Gerizim, the “mount of blessing,” is covered with trees.

Like a card stunt at a football game, the idea here was to involve the whole audience in “acting out” or “performing” their commitment to following Yahweh’s instructions. Six tribes were to stand on the northern hill, Ebal, facing south, to confirm the curses for not following God’s Law, and the other six were to station themselves on Gerizim, facing

north, to affirm the blessings that would result from compliance with Yahweh's statutes. The Levites were to stand in the middle, like cheerleaders, reading the precepts, to which the audience was to respond by saying "Amen" (pronounced aw-Mane), which means "truly," or "so be it." It's from the verb *'aman*, meaning to support, confirm, be faithful, be established, to verify, to be certain, or to believe in.

The spatial orientation of this piece of "performance art" may be significant. Although Yahweh is omnipresent, the seat of divine power was culturally conceived to be in the north. Thus we read of Satan's ambition: **"For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north.'**" (Isaiah 14:13) Gerizim's six "blessing" tribes would be facing north; in other words, they are pictured as being in communication and communion with the authority of Yahweh. Mount Ebal's six "cursing" tribes, meanwhile, are depicted as having their backs turned upon God.

There are twelve each of cursings and blessings listed. The cursings are listed as individual infractions: **"And the Levites shall speak with a loud voice and say to all the men of Israel... *Cursed is the one who does this.*"** The list is by no means comprehensive. It leans heavily toward the "practical" end of the scale—things that, for the most part, define "loving one's neighbor as oneself" or would otherwise tend to hold society together if the admonitions were heeded. Note also that the list stresses secretive, covert sins—things done underhandedly or in private.

(1) Idolatry—as in the Second Commandment: **"Cursed is the one who makes a carved or molded image, an abomination to Yahweh, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets it up in secret.' And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen!'"** (Deuteronomy 27:14-15)

(2) Disrespect of parents—as in the Fifth Commandment: **"Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'"** (Deuteronomy 27:16)

(3) Land fraud, included in the Eighth Commandment: **"Cursed is the one who moves his neighbor's landmark.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'"** (Deuteronomy 27:17)

(4) Leading the innocent and helpless astray: **"Cursed is the one who makes the blind to wander off the road.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'"** (Deuteronomy 27:18)

(5) Injustice and an unmerciful spirit toward the helpless, included within the Ninth Commandment: **"Cursed is the one who perverts the justice**

due the stranger, the fatherless, and widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'" (Deuteronomy 27:19)

(6-9) Sexual sins, represented by the Seventh Commandment: **"'Cursed is the one who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's bed.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!' 'Cursed is the one who lies with any kind of animal.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!' 'Cursed is the one who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!' 'Cursed is the one who lies with his mother-in-law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'"** (Deuteronomy 27:20-23)

(10) Any manifestation of hatred: **"'Cursed is the one who attacks his neighbor secretly.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'"** (Deuteronomy 27:24)

(11) Perversion of justice: **"'Cursed is the one who takes a bribe to slay an innocent person.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'"** (Deuteronomy 27:25)

(12) Rebellion against God's revealed will: **"'Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'"** (Deuteronomy 27:26)

The blessings, on the other hand, are not linked to individual good deeds, but are rather a listing of different ways Yahweh would bless Israel if they observed the blanket admonition to "keep My commandments." **"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that Yahweh your God will...."** He would give them twelve kinds of blessing:

(1) Political ascendancy over other nations: **"Set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of Yahweh your God...."**

(2) Security throughout the Land: **"Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country...."**

(3) A population boom, both of people and livestock: **"Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks...."**

(4) A plentiful food supply: **"Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl...."**

(5) Triumph over circumstances: **"Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out...."**

(6) Military victory: **"Yahweh will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways...."**

(7) Fertile soil: **“Yahweh will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you....”**

(8) A reputation as God’s chosen race: **“Yahweh will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of Yahweh your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of Yahweh, and they shall be afraid of you....”**

(9) Material wealth and prosperity: **“And Yahweh will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which Yahweh swore to your fathers to give you....”**

(10) Good weather: **“Yahweh will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand....”**

(11) An overabundance of riches: **“You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow....”**

(12) A position of leadership: **“And Yahweh will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of Yahweh your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them. So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them.” (Deuteronomy 28:1-14)**

Is the Torah optional? Sure it is. We have the option of heeding it and reaping its inevitable rewards, or ignoring it and suffering the curses that follow disobedience like a shadow on a sunny day.

Messianic Messages I: From Eden To Israel

The concept of a coming “Messiah,” an “Anointed Savior,” was unveiled only gradually in Yahweh’s scriptures. By the close of the Old Covenant canon, the keepers of those scriptures had some fairly well-defined expectations of who He might be and what He might do, but most of the prophecies were cryptic, to say the least. There is no single passage where Yahweh laid out His whole program concerning the Messiah in one comprehensive declaration: *I’m going to make it possible for people to regain the harmonious relationship I once shared with mankind, before Adam sinned against Me. At a certain pre-determined time, I will shed My glory, humble Myself and take the form of a man, born into a specific family. I will offer Myself up as a sacrifice, shedding My blood so that those who choose to trust and believe in Me will be reconciled, purified, and redeemed. I will then reassume My former glory and return on a pre-ordained date to reign as King of Kings upon the earth, separating those who trust in Me from those who do not.* Yahweh *did* tell us all of these things in His Word, but not all at once, and not necessarily in plain English (or Hebrew, as the case may be). Rather, He doled out His plan one small clue at a time over the course of several millennia, pieces of a puzzle often presented in such obscure language that by themselves in isolation, they might have led to any number of conjectures. It is only by putting the puzzle pieces together that a clear picture begins to emerge.

The Messiah Himself, as He matured from boy to man, recognized that His coming and mission had been foretold in God’s Word—a remarkable epiphany in itself, considering how few people had discovered this when He was born into the world. Even Anna and Simeon (Luke 2) didn’t so much figure it out from the scriptures as they did learn of the Messianic advent through the exercise of their prophetic gifts—listening to the voice of God’s Holy Spirit. The Jewish religious leaders of the day were convinced that the key to everlasting life was to be found in the Law of Moses, and Yahshua agreed with them, in a left-handed sort of way. He told them, **“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”** (John 5:39) In other words, they were looking in the right place for answers, but they weren’t prepared to accept what was actually there. What saved someone wasn’t the outward observance of the Torah’s individual mitzvot (something no one was able to do perfectly), but rather what these precepts *meant*—what they signified, what they pointed toward. For example, the scribes and Pharisees knew they were supposed to sacrifice a spotless lamb on Passover and remove the leaven from their homes. But they

didn't comprehend that this lamb was symbolic and prophetic of the means God would use to provide eternal life for them, and that the leaven represented the corruption of sin that the Messiah's sacrificial death would (or at least *could*) banish from their lives. John the Baptist had introduced Yahshua to the world by declaring, **"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"** (John 1:29) John understood the concept that Yahweh had planted in His Word. The Pharisees did not.

But like I said, the concept was by no means obvious. Even those who *wanted* to believe in Yahshua didn't really understand what had happened when He was suddenly condemned and crucified. It seemed to them as if God's promise had somehow been thwarted, for they, like the scribes, had embraced only the "reigning Messiah" prophecies, while largely ignoring all those unsettling and incomprehensible "suffering Savior" passages. But on the afternoon of His resurrection, Yahshua—concealing His identity—discussed what had happened with a couple of disciples as they walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus. He asked them, **"Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"** And **beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.**" (Luke 24:26-27) We've grown used to hearing of Messianic predictions from prophets like David, Isaiah, and Daniel. But *Moses*? Yes. Yahshua declared that the story begins here, at the very beginning, in the Torah.

You've stuck with me for what is turning out to be a very long book. Along the way we've seen hundreds of places where the Torah does indeed indicate a coming Messiah. But these truths are presented in such a way that you can choose to see them or not—that is, you can decide to perceive Messianic significance in God's precepts, or you can restrict your comprehension to their "face value," denying that they might mean anything beyond merely being orders we're required to follow. It is only in hindsight that we can see what Yahweh was in the process of communicating to us. It is only in the shadow of Calvary that we can perceive the evidence God left behind for us—evidence that His plan of redemption was in motion from the very beginning, even before Adam proved there was a need for it. And even now, the evidence is not so blatantly compelling that men are *forced* to accept it, for that would make it impossible to freely reciprocate God's love—our affirmative response would have become nothing more than acquiescing to unassailable logic, like obeying the "law" of gravity. Yahweh has, in fact, made the evidence easy to deny—and easier to ignore—if we want to. But it is there by the boatload for those of us who choose to seek and receive God's truth.

The richest repository of these Messianic Messages in the Torah is contained in the blood sacrifices demanded by Yahweh. But judging by these instructions

alone, in isolation from the rest of the Bible, one might conclude that the God who required them is capricious and unreasonable. There are lambs, rams, bulls, goats, and more—always with very precise rituals to follow and specifications to meet: a particular number, of a particular gender, in a particular order, offered on a certain day, at a certain time of day, butchered in a certain way by certain people, eaten (or not) by certain participants, accompanied by a certain amount of grain and wine and oil. Always with salt; never with leaven. Always made at a central worship location of God's choosing; never where the worshipper just happened to live.

Then there are the "contradictions." First, Yahweh demands that these sacrifices be made; then He says He doesn't really want them. God issues excruciatingly detailed instructions for a place and priesthood to administer the blood sacrifices, and then He allows idolaters from foreign lands to come in and destroy His sanctuary and scatter His people to the four winds—leaving them without a temple and priesthood for thousands of years. Why haven't the Jews figured out that there's something wrong with this picture? How can they follow a God who, for all they can tell, is *both* a fickle control freak obsessed with unattainable perfection *and* woefully incapable of blessing, or even protecting, His own chosen people? It's no wonder so many Jews today are practicing atheists. Without the Messianic Messages of the Torah, Psalms, and Prophets—fulfilled to the letter in the life and work of Yahshua of Nazareth—their religion makes absolutely no sense.

Yahshua Himself revealed the problem with rabbinical Judaism: without the recognition of the Savior-Messiah prophesied in the Tanach, it is a religious system empty of God's truth and devoid of life. **"The Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me.... But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.... Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"** (John 5:37-40, 45-47) That's the crux of the problem, isn't it? For all the Pharisaical veneration of Moses, they didn't really *believe* what he'd said. Oh, they tried like crazy to adhere to the maze of regulations he had handed down from God. But they refused to see what (or Whom) these Instructions were really about. So Moses, Yahshua says, stands in witness against them—against the most scrupulously religious, faithfully observant practitioners of the Mosaic Law the world had ever seen, before or since! The line, then, has been drawn in the sand. Either the Torah is a compendium of pointless (and ultimately impossible to perform) rules and rituals imposed by a sadistic, micromanaging control-freak of a god, or it is a signpost pointing out the way to an abundant and joyous eternal

life: Yahweh's Anointed One. If the Torah is indeed God's Word, then either the Pharisees were correct or Yahshua was. But there can be no middle ground: they cannot both be right.

It is not my purpose here to compile every shred of evidence in the Torah that points toward the life and mission of Yahshua as God's Messiah. We have already covered much of it. I do not intend to revisit the vast body of material explaining the sacrificial rites Israel was instructed to perform, all of which were Messianic prophecies, one way or another. I won't repeat what we've already seen concerning the design of the Tabernacle, which with every nuance reveals the coming Christ as the centerpiece of God's Plan for our redemption. Nor do I wish to return in detail to the seven holy convocations of Yahweh, though they too reveal the Messiah's mission as He brings to pass the seven most significant milestones in Yahweh's Plan. We've covered these subjects elsewhere in *The Owner's Manual* (though I reserve the right to revisit a few "high points" heralding the Messiah's role that I touched upon earlier—some of this stuff is too wonderful to say only once). My primary intention now is to sweep the Torah for indicators we might have missed. Up to this point, everything we've discussed has been somehow connected with God's instruction—what He specifically told Israel to do. In the interests of identifying these references to the coming Messiah, I will henceforth be ignoring that convention, opening up the field of inquiry to the Torah's historical commentary as well. To keep things consistent, however, I'll maintain the number-precept-scripture-commentary format I've used throughout this book.

CREATION, EDEN, AND BEYOND

- (924) *The Messiah must appear on the fourth "day"—i.e., during the fourth millennium of the Plan of God. "Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day."* (Genesis 1:14-19) I have become convinced that the creation week (six "days" of creation followed by one of rest),

mirrored in the seven-day week and seven-year sabbatical cycle, are God's way of telling us the timing of His plan for our reconciliation, informing us of the duration of our allotted time on earth as fallen mortals. That is, from Adam's fall—the inauguration of our need for redemption—to the commencement of our “rest” under King Yahshua's rule during the final Millennium, we will have had six thousand years to “work it out,” to make our choices as to whether to honor Yahweh or not. This “one-day-equals-one-thousand-years” formula is stated in both Psalm 90:4 and II Peter 3:8. Although we tend to read these verses as pure metaphor, as if they're merely saying, “God is really patient with us,” I can't shake the feeling that He's also imparting specific information to us, if only we'll take Him at His word.

The second observation I must make is that the case for a literal six-day creation period (that is, getting it all done within 144 hours as measured by the earth's rotation relative to the sun) is scientifically untenable, no matter what a surface reading of the King James text may lead you to believe. Nor does the scripture (in Hebrew, anyway) demand such an interpretation. Call me a heretic if you must, but the scientific data seems to indicate a “big-bang” creation about 13.7 billion years ago, with our solar system being formed somewhere in the neighborhood of four billion years ago. The whole procedure is so exquisitely balanced, it fairly screams that an Intelligent Designer with infinite power and wisdom controlled the process from the very beginning, and did it all with a very specific purpose in mind. Life does not and cannot spontaneously generate itself, nor can one life-form evolve into something fundamentally different (though small changes within a genome happen all the time). The geological history of our planet, rather, is the record of a Creative Deity introducing life into our biosphere, one “kind” at a time, as soon as the earth was ready to receive it—just as the Genesis record reports it.

There is, however, a glitch in the Genesis 1 account—something that is not scientifically possible in any literal sense. The passage upon which our precept is based declares that the sun and moon—and the stars, for that matter—showed up *after* plant life appeared on the earth. Since the earth is made of heavy elements formed by the collapse of second generation stars, the *creation* of the stars on the fourth day can't be what God meant to describe. The simple answer, of course, is that earth's atmosphere wasn't transparent enough to clearly reveal the heavenly bodies until plant life had taken hold, taking greenhouse gasses out of the atmosphere and putting free oxygen in. But I believe there's more to it. The Bible, though scientifically accurate (allowing that it's written in common vernacular), is not *about* science—it concerns only the redemption of fallen mankind.

Could it be that Yahweh was trying to tell us something significant by planting an obvious “mistake” in the creation account?

Malachi reports, **“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,”** says Yahweh of hosts, **‘That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings.’** (Malachi 4:1-2) It’s a Messianic prophecy, with both of Yahshua’s advents in view. Judgment is coming, he says, for the proud and wicked, but those who revere the name of Yahweh shall experience healing. And *both* the judgment and the healing will be accomplished by the “Sun of Righteousness,” obviously a reference to the Messiah. Judgment will be visited upon the earth during the Tribulation—when all these wicked ones will be consumed as stubble in the flame—and onward into the Millennial Kingdom, when Yahshua will rule mankind with a scepter of iron. But when will the God-fearing people receive healing? When the “Sun of Righteousness” arises. And when will that be, according to the Genesis creation account? During the *fourth day*!

By my reckoning, the first thousand-year “day” of Yahweh’s redemptive plan began with the fall of Adam; the second at the time of the flood; the third with Abraham’s almost-sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah; the fourth with the building of Solomon’s temple; the fifth with the sacrifice of Christ (33 A.D.); the sixth with the low water mark of the Christian faith in 1033 (see Mitzvah #535 and *Future History*, Chapter 3); and the seventh day will begin with the commencement of Yahshua’s Millennial reign (due in 2033, unless my theory is seriously flawed). The “fourth day,” then—the day when the Sun of Righteousness would arise—ended in 33 A.D., as Yahshua’s earthly mission was completed. We are “healed” by what Yahshua our Messiah did during His first advent—or we aren’t healed at all.

- (925) *Understand the relationship between God and Man.* **“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”** (Genesis 1:26-28) Anthropologists will tell you that Man created gods in our own image: that is, part of being human is the compulsion to worship a deity of some sort, something we conceive as being in control of the awesome forces of

nature that we ourselves cannot comprehend—much less harness and manage. We invest these gods (they say) with human-like attributes—feelings, needs, volition, etc.—because that’s all we understand. We fear them and try to appease them because we perceive that they have the power to harm us but also the ability to help us. The tacit message of the anthropologists’ science is that if Man can learn to comprehend and control his environment, we will have no more need for these primitive superstitions—we will be free at last to live our lives without the inconvenient moral standards imposed upon us by these gods and their self-appointed spokesmen.

God, on the other hand, contends that just the opposite is true: *He* made man in *His* own image—complete with feelings, needs, and volition—because He wished to share His own innate nature—Love—with someone who had the capacity to reciprocate that love, even if He had to create that “someone” first. That explains whatever similarities the anthropologists find between mankind and their objects of worship: they are either Yahweh Himself or false gods we’ve substituted for Him.

Where is the Messianic Message in all of this? Note that the Creator has invested man with “dominion” over the earth. This is our first hint that God—the One to whom dominion intrinsically belongs—intended to manifest Himself as a man—not as an animal (a serpent, for instance) or an angel or some other glorified being. If you think about it, that’s a remarkable and counterintuitive turn of events, one nobody could have seen coming. We can understand the converse, of course—a man wanting to be worshipped as a god, grasping for himself power and glory beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. But *this*—that God Almighty would elect to exercise dominion over His creation through the agency of a mortal man—frail, feeble, and subject to death—is unexpected, to say the least. Man would never invent a God who would humble Himself in such a way—it’s not in our nature.

- (926) *God’s work on our behalf is finite in scope.* **“Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”** (Genesis 2:1-3)
 Yahweh has informed us that He set Himself a task—one that would have a beginning and an end. His “work” would be followed by “rest.” If you think about it, this is a rather remarkable thing to do, for this God purports to be eternal and unchanging. When man conceives of god, he sees a never ending cycle of confrontation and gratification: the god (through his

priests) makes demands, and people sacrifice to appease him, either to receive his blessing or prevent him from hurting them. It's the original "protection racket." But the God of the Torah does things quite contrary to our natural expectations. *He* works, *He* sacrifices, and then He invites us to enjoy the fruit of *His* labor. Yes, He tells us what we should do, but not in order to gratify His own desires. He does this because He loves us: He wants us to prosper physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And having built us, He knows precisely what it will take to attain this blessed state.

But right here at the beginning, He starts hinting at the temporary nature of our mortal existence—the "work which He had done." There is something beyond this, He intimates, something outside our present experience in a physical universe comprised of "the heavens and the earth and all the host of them." There is a day of rest awaiting us, and He is working so that we might enjoy that rest with Him. Although He doesn't say so here, it would transpire that the work He would perform in our finite world would be accomplished in and through His Messiah—making Him the bridge between today and tomorrow, between natural and supernatural, between God's work and our rest.

- (927) *Know that man is a spiritual being.* **"And Yahweh, God, formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."** (Genesis 2:7) We've encountered this verse several times in our exploration of the scriptures, and for good reason. This is God's explanation of what makes mankind different from the animals: we have Yahweh's "breath of life" within us. It's not just that we're living beings, that is, that we have souls (*nephesh*) that are alive (*chay*), even though those very words are used here to describe our condition: "man became a living being." But other animals—apparently *all* of them—are described in exactly the same terms: "living creatures" that abound in the waters (Genesis 1:20), every "living thing" that moves (1:21), more "living creatures" like cattle, creeping things, and beasts of the earth (1:24), and beasts, birds, and creeping things that have "life" (1:30). But none of these are described as having received the *neshamah*, the breath of life, from Yahweh—only man is. In other words, animals are "alive," but not in precisely the same way that men are. The difference is our capacity for spiritual life: we alone, among all of God's creatures, have the opportunity to remain alive even after our bodies have perished, for just as the soul makes the body of an animal physically alive, a spirit, indwelling our *neshamah*, can give a soul (our *nephesh*) spiritual life. And since spirits are eternal, our souls will endure as long as their spirits dwell within them—forever!

That is good news, of course, but it also has a potential downside. First, there's the eventuality about which Yahweh warned Adam and Chavvah (Eve) in the Garden. If they disobeyed Him by eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, they would "surely die," and not just "someday," but on *the very day* of their sin. Because we are then told that Adam lived on as a mortal man for 930 years, begetting sons and daughters, it's obvious that physical death (the separation of the soul from the body) was not what Yahweh had been talking about. No, it was the departure of God's Spirit (His *Ruach*) from Adam's *neshamah*. The withdrawal of His Spirit, for all intents and purposes, rendered them mere animals, spiritually lifeless, subject to corruption. But their capacity for spiritual indwelling remained intact, and I believe Adam and Chavvah, by accepting the coverings of the slain-animal skins Yahweh provided (a picture of the imputed righteousness still available to us today), demonstrated their repentance—and their acceptance of the salvation Yahweh had made on their behalf through His blood sacrifice.

But the "bad news" doesn't end there. You see, Yahweh's *Ruach Qodesh*—His Holy Spirit—is not the only spiritual being in existence, even if it is the only *uncreated* spiritual entity. But God also made angels, beings of pure spirit, some of whom rebelled against Him and became demons. These too are capable of indwelling the *neshamah* of a man—with eternally disastrous results. We are warned about this in Proverbs 20:27, **"The spirit of a man is the lamp of Yahweh, searching all the inner depths of his heart."** "Spirit" here is a bad translation. It's not *ruach*. The word is *neshamah*, the place within us where the spirit resides. Solomon is informing us that the *neshamah* discloses to God the "inner depths of the heart" of man. That is, the *neshamah* is the light that reveals his spiritual condition: it is indwelled either with Yahweh's Spirit, with no spirit, or with the spirit of a demon. It is the litmus test that determines whether a person is alive, dead, or damned for eternity.

None of that, of course, reveals anything directly about the coming Messiah. But there's one more word we should examine a bit more closely. What did Yahweh do after He "formed man from the dust of the ground?" He "breathed" into him the *neshamah*. Not surprisingly, we find that the verb translated "breathed" is related to *nephesh*, or soul. It's the Hebrew *naphach*. It means "to breathe, blow at, sniff at, seethe, or [and here's what we need to take note of] to give up or lose one's life." (S) The *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* points out that when used in conjunction with *nephesh* (as it is here in Genesis 2:7) *naphach* can mean "die: formally, breathe out life, i.e., enter into the state of death, as an extension of breathing out one's last breath of air." In the

same vein, it can also mean “to die: formally, cause to pant, i.e., make another to be in a state of anxiety or distress, as an extension of causing a person to exert great energy and so gasp for breath.”

I realize that as Messianic clues go, this one’s awfully esoteric, but try to visualize what Yahweh is telling us here: by “breathing into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life,” He gave him a choice: either God could breathe out *His own life* on behalf of man, or His death would “make another [i.e., the one whose *neshamah* was empty or had been indwelt with a satanic spirit] to be in a state of anxiety or distress.” And how did Yahweh intend to “breathe out His own life?” By setting aside His glory, becoming a man Himself—the Messiah—and offering Himself up as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of a fallen human race.

- (928) *The Messiah will become joined as “one flesh” with humanity. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”* (Genesis 2:24) It seems to me that if ever there was an unassailable argument disproving Darwinian evolution, it’s the existence of sexual reproduction. What conceivable environmental stimulus would it have taken to induce an organism to shift from simple cell division to the impossibly complex systems involved in dividing a species into distinct male and female components? It would appear disingenuous indeed for an evolutionist who believes such an unlikely eventuality to flippantly accuse a Christian of exercising “blind faith.” But right here at the beginning, Yahweh describes His spiritual pattern in biological terms: a man and his wife become “one flesh” when their DNA is blended in the conception of their child.

If Yahweh designed us that way—male and female—we should ask ourselves the obvious question: why did He do that? It has to be something more profound than merely figuring we might enjoy the process of getting from one generation to the next. The structure of the family as God ordained it—a man joined with his wife and becoming “one flesh”—is of fundamental importance, not only as biological imperative, but also as a spiritual principle. This becomes clear when we realize that Yahweh symbolically characterizes His followers as being “joined” in marriage to Him. Israel is called His “wife,” and the called-out followers of Yahshua are referred to as “the Bride of Christ.” Like human children, believers are spiritually “conceived” through an act of love—the love of the Messiah toward His ekklesia.

This discourse began with an observation. Yahweh had noted, “**It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.**” (Genesis 2:18) The word translated “comparable” bears closer

scrutiny. It's *neged*, meaning: "before, in front of, straight ahead, i.e., pertaining to a spatial position anterior to another object...being in the presence of another; opposite, beyond, i.e., a spatial position in front of another object, but with a space between; nearby, i.e., pertaining to a spatial position which is in proximity to another object" (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*). The noun form of *neged* denotes a counterpart, that is, an object that corresponds to or is like another object. Considering the fact that Yahweh had **"created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them,"** (Genesis 1:27) we can begin to see what was on His mind. He's really talking about Himself. He's saying, in effect, "It is not good for *Me* to be alone in the universe; I will make a helper, a companion, comparable (in a way) to Myself—made in My own image and likeness, with a spiritual nature—to stand before Me, near Me, in My presence."

The Messianic Message in this is evident. It is not for nothing that Yahshua is called the "Son of God." In order for Him to take us as His bride, He had to "leave His Father and Mother," that is, set aside the power and privilege that were rightfully His in heaven, humble Himself, assume the form of a mortal man, and do whatever it would take to reconcile us to Himself. Thus Paul reminds us, **"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish."** (Ephesians 5:25-27)

- (929) *The "woman's seed" will conquer Satan.* **"The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.' So Yahweh, God, said to the serpent: 'Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field. On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.'"** (Genesis 3:13-15) We covered this passage in the first chapter of this volume, under Precept #615, where the lesson was: "Recognize your enemy." Here I'd like to emphasize instead that the "seed of the woman" Who was destined to crush the head of the serpent (Satan) is ultimately Yahshua the Messiah. That may seem obvious to many of us today, but the Jews still don't get it, and most of the world is oblivious to the ramifications of the prophecy. What's lost on us these days is the tremendous impact this prediction had on the generations immediately following Adam's fall. It shaped their expectations and colored their outlook. Ever since being kicked out of Eden, they were looking expectantly for a redeemer, someone who could reverse the curse of Adam's sin. I have no doubt that Chavvah (Eve) fully

expected her firstborn son to fulfill the prophecy, naming him Cain, which can be translated “spear.”

But it was in the proto-Babylonian mystery religion a few generations after the flood that the counterfeit fulfillment of the “woman’s seed” prophecy gained traction—influence that’s still being felt today. It was here, after the death of the first demigod worthy of the name, Nimrod (some say, at the hands of the righteous Shem), that his widow, Semiramis, bore a male child near the winter solstice—late December. This son (or “yule”) was marketed as the reincarnated Nimrod, and more to the point, the fulfillment of the Genesis 3 prophecy. Tammuz thereby gained the dubious honor of being the world’s first “false messiah”—almost three thousand years before the Real Thing showed up.

Queen Semiramis, having conceived Tammuz long after Nimrod’s demise, invented the fiction of an “immaculate conception” to explain her situation. Had not the prophecy declared that *the woman’s* seed would crush the serpent’s head? The worship of this unholy trinity, Nimrod, Semiramis, and Tammuz, became the prototype for false religions and pagan cults from one end of the earth to the other. All of them, of course, ignore the *other* requirement of the prophecy: the woman whose Son would conquer evil would be “at enmity” with the serpent—she would be an adversary to our Adversary, and a friend of Yahweh. Mary was; Semiramis was not.

The idea of the Deliverer being the seed of the *woman*—implying that He would not at the same time be the seed of a man—would be developed and refined in subsequent Messianic prophecies (cf. Isaiah 7:14). The only way that could happen, logically, is for the “woman” to be a virgin, pure and undefiled—like Mary of Nazareth was when she conceived Yahshua through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Satan, though an accomplished illusionist and a master of spin, cannot perform creative miracles. He had to settle for the bastard child of an illicit sexual liaison to perpetrate his forgery. Considering the success his false messiahs have enjoyed over the centuries, it makes me shudder to think of what he could have done to us if he had any *real* power. The devil has “bruised” the heel of Yahweh’s Anointed, the seed of the woman. We have only to wait for the second half of the prophecy to be fulfilled: the Messiah *will* crush the head of Satan. Soon.

- (930) *Innocent blood had to be shed in order to cover our shame. “Also for Adam and his wife Yahweh, God, made tunics of skin, and clothed them.”* (Genesis 3:21) After they had eaten of the fruit of the forbidden tree, Adam and Chavvah (Eve) suddenly realized that they were naked before God. I get

the impression that a vague sense of inferiority now swept over them. They somehow knew what they had never comprehended before, that Yahweh was fundamentally unlike them: totally pure, awesomely majestic, on a different plane of existence altogether—in a word, holy. The serpent had, in a way, told the truth: having disobeyed God, they could now see the difference between good and evil. The shocking epiphany for them, however, was that *they* were evil, utterly unworthy of being in the presence of such a holy being as Yahweh. They had not expected that, for their inferiority had never been an issue until now. Yahweh had never brought it up, and they had been blissfully unaware of it. Sure, they knew that He was in charge, but He had always conversed with them as a friend and companion, not a master or overlord. They had been treated like family, like the children of a loving father, not merely the subjects of a powerful ruler, or worse, the chattel of a slave owner. That secure feeling had now departed, leaving in its place a vague sensation of dread, a shame that compelled them to hide, to flee, to cover themselves. They couldn't let Yahweh see them in this condition. What would He think of them? It was all too horrible to contemplate.

For His part, Yahweh seems to have been saddened, but not surprised. He first asked Adam and Eve what they had done, not because He didn't know, but because He wanted them to come to terms with their own sin—that it was their doing, their responsibility, and that it had fundamentally changed the nature of their relationship with Him. There would be consequences—the most basic of which they had already discovered: sin had separated them from their God, for His Spirit had departed, making them unworthy to stand in his presence.

And what about the clothing they had sewn together out of fig leaves? Yahweh's response said, in so many words, "Okay, you understand the problem, or at least part of it. You're naked and guilty before Me. But you don't yet understand the solution. Not only must you be covered, but the penalty for your sin must be paid. I warned you about this: 'In the day that you eat of the tree in the middle of the garden, you will surely die.' And as things stand now, you *are* dead, spiritually, anyway. My Spirit has departed from you, leaving the *neshamah* I breathed into you an empty shell. If nothing changes, when your body dies (as it must) your life will be destroyed, for a soul not indwelt by an eternal spirit cannot survive without its body. But I have provided an alternative to this death you've earned yourselves, because, let's face it, I love you and don't want to see you perish.

“You must understand: the wages of sin is death. You knew that going in. Because you’ve sinned, death is decreed. It doesn’t have to be *your* death, however. It is possible for Someone else—Someone also made in My image and likeness, as guiltless as you were before you threw away your innocence—to die in your place. But none of your children will ever fit that description, so I have resolved to become a human being Myself. I will come to the earth at a time of my choosing and offer Myself up as a sacrifice on your behalf. In the meantime, I’ll give you a demonstration guaranteeing my intent: I will kill an innocent animal and make clothing for you from it’s hide. If you will trust Me, accept My offer, and wear this clothing as a sign of your faith, I will re-establish the spiritual relationship we once enjoyed together in the garden. But if you insist on trying to cover your sin your own way with those ridiculous shriveling fig leaves—or worse, decide to walk through life butt naked—My Spirit will not return to dwell within you. The choice is yours.”

- (931) *Innocent blood must be spilled for an offering to atone for sin.* “**And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to Yahweh. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And Yahweh respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.**” (Genesis 4:3-5) Yahweh evaluated two things when Cain and Abel brought their offerings. First was the attitude of the suppliant: Abel was honestly trying to follow God’s own lead, shown in the act of atoning for the sins of his parents. But Cain was still “wearing an apron of fig leaves,” as far as Yahweh was concerned—he was practicing a religion of his own invention, not following in faith what God had instructed by example.

Second was the nature of the sacrifice. Let’s assume for the sake of argument that the value of Cain’s vegetables and Abel’s lamb or goat were equivalent. God is not complaining that Cain should have brought *more*, or even that his sacrifice should have been *better*. It was not a question of quantity *or* quality. The problem was that there was no “life” in Cain’s tomatoes and cabbages—at least not in the same way that Abel’s lamb was alive: with a soul, with blood coursing through its veins. God had made it plain in the Garden: our sin carried with it the penalty of death. You couldn’t buy your life back with non-living sacrifices—not with garden produce, and not with gold. Only Life could redeem life. Only Innocence could buy back innocence.

We aren’t told how, but it became painfully obvious to Cain that his bloodless sacrifice had been rejected. But his reaction was neither remorse leading to repentance, nor perplexity leading to inquiry. It was anger—the

child of pride. **“So Yahweh said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?’** If he had not sinned, there would have been no need for an atoning sacrifice. **“And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.”** (Genesis 4:6-7) I believe this enigmatic statement is a play on words. The word for “sin” here (*chata’ah*) is closely related to another Hebrew noun, *chata’t*, which as we have seen, denotes the *offering* for sin. Yahweh seems to be saying that if Cain would but acknowledge his sin, the proper blood sacrifice was readily available to him—a lamb or goat crouching right outside his dwelling—a metaphor for the Messiah that Yahweh would Himself provide. But if he would not humble himself, a personified “Sin” was laying in wait, preparing to pounce upon and devour him. Yahweh’s counsel was for Cain to “rule over” the wickedness in his heart that desired to overcome him. Yahweh had given Cain another chance to get it right, as Abel already had. He was now faced with a choice: repent or rebel.

He chose poorly. **“Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then Yahweh said to Cain, ‘Where is Abel your brother?’** As usual, it was not because He didn’t know the answer, but because He wanted to give Cain a chance to come clean. **“He said, ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?’ And He [Yahweh] said, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.’”** (Genesis 4:8-10) Let me ask a provocative question. If God had decreed that innocent blood must be shed in order to atone for the sins of mankind, then why wasn’t Cain’s murder of Abel considered a “good thing,” an offering on a par with the slaying of the innocent lamb for Abel’s sacrifice? We get the impression that God had given mankind very little instruction (outside His own example) of how and what to sacrifice. Furthermore, Yahweh at this point had issued no proclamation prohibiting murder. Let’s look at the evidence.

First, there is no indication that the death of Abel was intended to be a sacrifice. Cain merely lashed out in a fit of anger and jealousy. His actions demonstrate the danger inherent in religion, in the sense of being a manmade attempt to approach God, rather than a corporate response to God’s offer of redemption. Cain wasn’t apathetic: he truly wanted to be accepted by Yahweh—but on his own terms, through his own efforts. He *had* offered a sacrifice. Yahweh, knowing Cain’s heart, had rejected it.

Second, Cain *knew* that murder was wrong. This is demonstrated in his deceptive answer to Yahweh's question. If his conscience had been clear in the matter—if he had not realized that murder was morally wrong—then he would have answered by saying something like, “Abel? Oh, he’s lying out there in the field. I crushed his head with a rock ’cause he was annoying me. Why, is there a problem?” As with the fig-leaf fashions of Adam and Eve, an attempt to conceal the crime proves the awareness of one’s guilt.

Third, Abel’s life could not be given (or taken) as a sacrifice to atone for the sin of Cain because Abel wasn’t actually “innocent.” Even though he was a far more righteous man than his brother, Abel was aware that he too had fallen short of Yahweh’s standard of perfection. That’s why he had offered a sacrifice of the “firstborn of his flock.” The point is that God doesn’t grade on the curve. There is no point at which our good deeds outweigh our bad ones, making us worthy to be God’s children. In fact, our behavior has nothing to do with our salvation, except as an indicator of what (and Who) we believe. If we really love Yahweh, we will at least *try* to keep His commandments. Abel did; Cain did not.

THE ANTEDILLUVIAN WORLD

- (932) *The names of the men in the godly line during the first millennium tell the story of Yahweh’s redemptive plan. “In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.”* (Genesis 5:1-3) Genesis 5 is one of those passages everybody skips over, because it’s “just” a genealogy. There’s “obviously” no doctrine there, precious little narrative, and no great spiritual truth. Or is there? What would happen if we analyzed the ten names we find here, looking for clues in their meanings? After all, names in the Bible invariably mean something—and these meanings are often significant in the grand scheme of things.

(1) Let us begin at the beginning, with Adam. **“Yahweh, God, formed man of the dust of the ground.”** (Genesis 2:7) The word translated “man” is *adam*, and the “ground” from which he was formed is a related word: *adamah*. (Since the ground was rich in iron oxides, *adam* also means “red,” reflected in such derivatives as “Edom,” named after Esau, who sold his birthright for a bowl of red porridge, and *adem*, meaning red or ruddy—the color of blood). So the first name on the list simply means man, or *mankind*.

(2) The godly line continued through Adam's third recorded son, Seth, for Cain had slain the godly Abel. **"And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, 'For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.'"** (Genesis 4:25) "Seth," as revealed in the text, means *appointed*.

(3) The next in line was Enosh or Enos, which is another word for mankind, but this time stressing man's mortality, his vulnerability to death. **"And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of Yahweh."** (Genesis 4:26) It was finally sinking in: the curse of sin had indeed doomed the entire race of mankind to a slow death. Enosh is from the root *anash*. It means mortal, frail, weak, sick, miserable, or incurable; it is a word used of a wound, grief, woe, sickness, or wickedness. So the root meaning of Enosh is *mortal frailty*.

(4) The name of Kenan or Cainan (*Qeynan*) continues in the same pessimistic tone as that of his father Enosh. It means "a possession," but it is apparently derived from a word (*qiynah*) that denotes lamentation, sorrow, a dirge or elegy—the doleful expression of one who finds himself someone else's possession—a slave to sin. Kenan is *sorrow*.

(5) The next name in the godly line, Mahalalel, is a compound of several Hebrew words (an arrangement more common than not). *Ma* means "what," or "that which." *Halal* is a verb meaning to bless or praise, or to shine, radiate, or reflect light. (Thus we find it a component of the quintessential exclamation of praise to God—Hallelujah, which literally means, "shine forth the light of Yahweh.") The last piece of Mahalalel's name is *el*, which is the generic designation for deity: God. The fifth patriarch's name, then, could be translated: what is blessed or praised by God, or that which shines of God, hence *the Light of God*.

(6) Mahalalel's son, Jared, reminds us that there is no "J" sound in Hebrew. The "J" is an artifact from the evolving English language dating from the 17th century. It should be pronounced as a "Y" (as we saw above in the word Hallelujah; Joshua therefore is rightly pronounced "Yahshua"). We should also be aware that vowels weren't part of the Hebrew text until well into the Christian era: thus they are a matter of some conjecture. The root verb of Jared is *yaradh*, which means to descend. We are familiar with a related word: the "Jordan" River is actually the *Yaraden*: the "descender," emptying into the lowest spot on the face of the earth, the Dead Sea. Jared, then, means *shall come down*.

(7) Enoch, the next in line, is a transliteration of the Hebrew *Chanowk*, from the verb *chanak*, meaning to train or to dedicate. We see the concept emerging in the name of the Jewish holiday, Chanukah—the festival of

dedication, commemorative of the cleansing and re-dedication of the second temple under the Maccabees. Enoch means *dedicated*.

(8) Methuselah is another compound word. *Muth* means death, and *shelach* is a verb denoting to bring or send forth. (It's related to the word for "dart" or "spear," i.e., something "sent out.") It seems an odd thing to name one's child, but remember, Enoch his father walked closely with Yahweh: so closely, in fact, that Yahweh "took him"—*raptured* him, if you will—long before his natural life span had run its course. His son's name was meant to be prophetic of a significant event. What was to be "brought" or "sent forth" at the death of Methuselah? God's judgment upon a corrupt and unrepentant world. As it turns out, he died in the same year as Noah's flood, at the extremely ripe old age of 969—making him the oldest man on record. This demonstrates, if you're willing to read between the lines, that although Yahweh is inordinately patient with us, there is eventually a place where mercy ends and judgment begins. Methuselah means *his death shall bring it*.

(9) Lamech, or Lamek, is a bit harder to pin down. One source I consulted defined it as lamenting, or despairing. Another said it means powerful. Another claimed it denotes a wild man. Worse, none of these sources offered any corroborating evidence, no root verbs or other obvious linguistic origins. So allow me to stick my neck out a bit and propose a theory. The final letter of Lamech, the "K" sound, is the Hebrew khaf (כ), which as you can see looks quite similar to the dalet (ד), the "D" sound. They would be formed with virtually identical pen strokes, the main difference being a slightly longer "tail" on the final-khaf. I realize, of course, that the original text would have been written not in Babylonian Hebrew (shown here) but in paleo-Hebrew. But there too the letters are similar, and they are in the Aramaic alphabet as well. Depending on the scribe, there is potentially almost no difference between LMK and LMD. (By the way, we have no ancient manuscripts of this passage to consult: it is missing in the Dead Sea Scrolls.) So where does this take us? *Lamad* (LMD) is a primitive Hebrew verb meaning to teach, to learn, to be taught or trained. Thus *limud* is one who is taught, one who learns, a disciple, as in, **"The Lord Yahweh has given Me the tongue of disciples (*limud*), that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning; He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple (*limud*)."** (Isaiah 50:4) It seems to me far more likely that Methuselah would name his baby boy "one who learns" than calling him wild man, powerful, or despairing. If you don't believe me, compare what Isaiah said about "weary ones" to the meaning of the name of Lamech's son, Noah, below. Lamech (Limud), then, means *disciple*.

(10) Noah, the last name on the list, is derived from the verb *nuwach*: to rest, repose, make quiet, comfort, or to permit. So we read, **“And he [Lamech/Limud] called his name Noah, saying, ‘This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which Yahweh has cursed.’”** (Genesis 5:29) Noah means *rest*.

The ten names from Genesis 5 together, then, form a comprehensive thought, one that explains our condition and Yahweh’s solution for it: “Mankind...(is) appointed...(to) mortal frailty...(and) sorrow...(but) the Light of God...shall come down...(being) dedicated...(and) His death shall bring...(His) disciples...rest.

Does anybody but me have goose bumps?

- (933) *The ark of Noah is a picture of God’s Messiah.* **“Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.”** (Genesis 6:9) **“The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch.’”** (Genesis 6:11-14) We talked about Noah’s little adventure a bit in the first chapter of this volume. But there I didn’t emphasize the Messianic symbology of the ark. Note first that although scripture makes it clear that all men have sinned (and pointedly records one of Noah’s lapses), Noah is said to have been “just,” “perfect,” and walking in fellowship with Yahweh. At this late hour we should all realize that this “righteousness” wasn’t merely in comparison to his less well-behaved neighbors, but was something attributed or imputed to Noah by God in response to the man’s faith and love for Him.

Second, when God sees universal corruption upon the earth, His natural response is to wipe it out and start over again. As its Creator, this is His prerogative alone, and the decision as to when mankind has become irretrievably corrupt is His to make as well. Note that the only stated evidence of this corruption is the sin of violence. In a delicious coincidence (maybe), the Hebrew word for this violence is *hamas*.

Third, notice that the ark was to be “anointed” with pitch inside and out to keep God’s implement of judgment—the flood—from leaking into it. The word translated “cover” is *kapar*, which means both “to cover, purge, make atonement or reconciliation, pacify, or propitiate” and “coat or cover over with pitch” (S) And the word for “pitch” is related: it’s *koper*, which in addition to denoting asphalt or pitch, also means “the price of a life; a ransom or bribe.” I’m sure you’ll recognize these words

as being the root of the name of the sixth *miqra* in Yahweh's schedule: the Day of Atonement—*Yom Kippurim*. The lesson is, the atonement provided by the Messiah's sacrifice insulates and separates us from the wrath of God, just as the coating of pitch insulated and separated the hull of the ark from the waters of judgment.

The narrative and its lessons continue: **"But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you...."** Being in the ark for protection from God's wrath is a picture of being "in Christ." **"And you shall take for yourself of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather it to yourself; and it shall be food for you and for them.' Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did."** (Genesis 6:18, 21-22) Not only would being in the ark (i.e., in Christ) shelter Noah's family from wrath, but this would also be where his temporal needs would be met. Yahweh didn't miraculously stock the ark with food, however. Noah had to go out and gather it, acting in faith on God's instructions. The only "miracle" consisted of the foreknowledge Noah needed to make his preparations in a timely fashion. God warned him, and he heeded the admonition. We too have been advised of the coming judgment; we too have the opportunity to find shelter in an ark of safety—Yahweh's Messiah. But what we're going to "live on" there—if anything—is up to us. We can stock the ark with beets and Brussels sprouts (dour religious legalism), with Skittles and soda pop (shallow, self-centered feel-good theology), or with a balanced variety of nutritious and tasty spiritual provisions—a healthful and enjoyable diet including all four spiritual "food groups," doctrine, fellowship, prayer, and worship.

"So He [Yahweh] destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive." (Genesis 7:23) As in the days of Noah, we are living in a world ripe for judgment. And now as then, only those of us who have sought shelter in Yahweh's ark—Yahshua the Messiah—will survive.

MESSIAH'S FAMILY TREE

- (934) *God's plan will come to pass through Shem. "And [Noah] said: "Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem; and may Canaan be his servant."* (Genesis 9:26-27) As is often the case with prophecy, we can only see in hindsight what God (through Noah) was talking about here—that is, we can only discern the meaning of the prophecy by examining its fulfillment. First, Yahweh is described as "the God of Shem," though both Ham and

Japheth were believers as well. The promised Messiah, He's saying, would come through the line of Shem, not through one of his godly brothers. Yahshua was indeed born into Shem's family, a lineage later prophetically narrowed to Abraham, to Israel, Judah, and David.

Second, Japheth would follow Shem—his descendants would somehow be dependent upon Shem's prophetic role. Geographically, from the resting place of the ark on the mountains of Ararat, Shem's line spread mostly to the south and east; Japheth's descendants went north, and Ham's family settled to the south and west. Noah's prophecy intimates that although the Messiah would come through Shem's line, the family of Japheth would comprise the core of the world's believers, and this has indeed been the case: the ekklesia of Yahshua spread fastest and farthest in Asia Minor and Europe—Japhethite territory.

Interestingly, Ham's prophetic spiritual destiny isn't mentioned, for good or ill. But one of his sons, Canaan, is singled out for condemnation: he would find himself subservient to both Shem and Japheth. The conquest of Canaan by Israel under Joshua is a fulfillment of this prophecy.

- (935) *God's plan will come to pass through Abraham. "Now Yahweh had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" (Genesis 12:1-3)* One doesn't have to be in the lineage of the Messiah to be blessed by God, though I'll admit, getting singled out like this is pretty remarkable. But what would have to happen for "all the families of the earth" to be blessed through you? What kind of universal accomplishment would have to be made in order to bless *everybody*? Create fire? Invent the wheel? Harness the power of chocolate? No, there's only one thing that could bless everyone—including people who lived *before* Abram. Find a way to reverse the curse of Adam's sin; reestablish the fellowship the human race had with Yahweh before we decided we'd rather follow our own road. Yahshua, a descendant of Abram, did that very thing for us.

That's not to say it wasn't "impossible," but Yahweh seems to enjoy doing what can't be done. It separates the Real God from the riffraff. **"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.'" (Genesis 17:1-2)** I realize people lived longer back then than they do today, but

ninety-nine years old back then is still like, say, sixty-nine these days. In other words, good luck, Abe: Viagra hasn't been invented yet. And what was merely improbable for Abraham actually *was* impossible for his wife. At ninety, she was well past menopause. Think of Sarah as a sixty year old—looking good for her age, maybe, but simply not equipped to bear children any longer. Yahweh didn't care. Our barrenness is no particular obstacle to the Creator of life. **"Then God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.'"** (Genesis 17:15-16) Just as Abram ("Exalted Father") had been changed to Abraham (Father of Many), so Sarai's name would be changed to reflect her prophetic status as the "mother of kings." Baker and Carpenter explain that "The change in name indicated the multitude of persons who would come forth from her.... The name means 'princess' or 'woman of nobility.'"

- (936) *God's plan will come to pass through Isaac.* **"Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him."** (Genesis 17:19) **"In Isaac your seed shall be called."** (Genesis 21:12) The child of promise would descend from Isaac, not Abraham's firstborn son, Ishmael. Why? Because Ishmael was not the son of Abraham's lawful wife. No marriage covenant existed between Abraham and Hagar. Since the lifelong marriage union between a man and a woman is designed to mirror Yahweh's covenant relationship with us who love and trust Him, the child of promise would have to be Sarah's son, even if such a thing was physically "impossible." **"Is anything too hard for Yahweh? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."** (Genesis 18:14) And so she did. Yahweh is very serious about His metaphors.
- (937) *God's plan will come to pass through Jacob.* **"Now Isaac pleaded with Yahweh for his wife, because she was barren; and Yahweh granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said, 'If all is well, why am I like this?'"** So she went to inquire of Yahweh. And Yahweh said to her: **"Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger."** (Genesis 25:21-23) Once again, the lineage of the coming Messiah was refined: He would come through the younger of Isaac and Rebekah's twin sons—through Jacob, not Esau.

On his deathbed, though, the half-blind Isaac had apparently forgotten all about this prophecy, for he thought he was giving the covenant blessing to his firstborn Esau when he told Jacob, **"Let peoples serve you, and nations**

bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!" (Genesis 27:29) Later, having learned of Jacob's deceit, but having also been reminded of his own spiritual lapse, Isaac admitted that Yahweh had indeed called Jacob, not Esau: **"May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; And give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham."** (Genesis 28:3-4) And Yahweh confirmed the blessing. **"And behold, Yahweh stood above it [the ladder to heaven in Jacob's dream] and said: "I am Yahweh, God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** (Genesis 28:13-14) Jacob (later known as Israel) received virtually the same promise his grandfather Abraham had been given—to be fulfilled in the life and mission of the same anointed Man, Yahshua the Messiah.

We tend to take these prophetic pronouncements for granted, but we shouldn't, for they're unique in the annals of religious tradition—Judeo-Christian or otherwise. The world thinks that "Jesus" was merely a man, a great moral innovator, the founder of a great religion. He was none of those things, but rather, the One in whom "all the families of the earth would be blessed." In order to fulfill that mission, He would have to be more than a mere man. He would have to be God incarnate, not the arbiter of a manmade moral code but the very personification of goodness. That's why Yahweh began laying down subtle hints concerning Him within hours of Adam's fall, and why we were given stunning and specific prophecies like this one several millennia before the fact. We're not only being told what the Messiah would accomplish, but who His distant ancestors would be. Later prophets would pinpoint the time of His coming, His birthplace, and even His name (subtly revealed over seventy times in the Old Covenant scriptures—invariably translated "salvation." See Chapter 16 of this volume).

This is on a whole different level than predicting that someone will come and do something someday, for example, Alexander the Great, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, or the Antichrist—all of whom are mentioned, though not by name, in prophetic scripture. This is more like sticking your neck out and declaring something like, "The Antichrist will be the direct descendant of Cnaeus Domitius and his lovely wife Agrippina, through their son Lucius." (The Bible makes no such prediction, you understand.

This is just to give you a feel for the kind of boldness it would take.) It's one thing to make the prediction, but if it's going to be meaningful, the genealogical records linking Cnaeus and the Antichrist must be extant and unbroken. They *are* for Yahshua of Nazareth—the verified physical descendant of David, Judah, Jacob, Abraham, Shem, and Seth, just as prophetic scripture requires, recorded in Luke 3:23-38. Furthermore, since the Hebrew genealogical archives were destroyed when Vespasian sacked Jerusalem in 70 A.D., any rival claimant to Yahshua for the throne of David would have a tough time proving his case. False christs are a dime a dozen in our world, but only because their followers are ignorant of the requirements of Yahweh's scriptures. If they knew the prophecies, they'd know that the Messiah has a specific prophetic bloodline, including being in the legal lineage of Israel's kings *and* being born of a virgin. Yahshua of Nazareth is the only man in history who fits the profile.

- (938) *God's plan will come to pass through Judah. "Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise. Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's children shall bow down before you."* (Genesis 49:8) Jacob/Israel had twelve sons, and it is here, in his prophetic blessing near the end of his life, that we see Yahweh's pick for which tribe would convey the Messiah to the world. He begins by noting the character of his fourth son, Judah. **"Judah is a lion's whelp. From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him?"** Yes, no one messes with the lion, does he? He has a well deserved reputation as the King of beasts, the authority figure among God's creatures. Thus the messianic prophecy: **"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people...."** Shiloh means "he whose it is," or "to whom it belongs." It's based on a verb (*shalah*) denoting to be at rest, to prosper, or to be at ease—like the young lion Israel was imagining in his mind, the very picture of confident authority backed by awesome strength. The prophecy itself states that once a king from Judah has ascended the throne, no dynasty from another tribe of Israel will supplant him. This was fulfilled in the line of David, after the scepter *did* depart from the tribe of Benjamin. After the kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians, they had no king at all until Herod the Great showed up—but he wasn't an Israelite. He was an Idumean, a descendant of Esau. Thus the "King" who finally revealed Himself as Shiloh—He to whom it (the throne) belongs—was Yahshua, a descendant of Judah through King David.

The prophecy isn't done, however. **"Binding his donkey to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than**

milk.” (Genesis 49:9-12) The donkey and the colt are, of course, prophetic references to the humble mode of transport that Yahshua employed during His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (see Matthew 21:1-9; John 12:12-15). The rest is a reference to His second coming, this time in bloody judgment upon a world that has rejected Him (Isaiah 63:1-4).

Moses has the last word on the messianic destiny of Judah: **“And this he said of Judah: Hear, Yahweh, the voice of Judah, and bring him to his people; Let his hands be sufficient for him, and may You be a help against his enemies.”** (Deuteronomy 33:7) His prayer, in essence, is that the promise made to Abraham would be fulfilled in a son of Judah—that through the sufficiency of His work, all the families of the world *would* be blessed. We who have accepted this blessing with thanksgiving still pray to Father Yahweh, “Bring Him to His people.”

DEFINING MOMENTS

- (939) *Melchizedek is a picture of the coming Messiah.* **“Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.’”** (Genesis 14:18-20) Abram’s encounter with this enigmatic character tells us quite a bit about God’s relationship with mankind. But Melchizedek might have remained a mystery to us, were it not for the commentary we’re given about him in the Book of Hebrews, where he’s described as being **“without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God...a priest continually.”** (Hebrews 7:3) At the very least, Melchizedek is a metaphor for Christ. But many commentators, myself among them, feel that he was probably a theophany—a pre-messianic manifestation of Yahweh in human form, not unlike the “God” who walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden, or the “Angel of Yahweh” who conversed with Abraham before the destruction of Sodom.

As the writer to the Hebrews points out, Melchizedek’s office was the “king of Salem,” that is, the king of peace (*shalom*), but his name means “king of righteousness.” (*Melek* means “king,” and *tsedeq* denotes justice, rightness, righteousness—an ethical, moral standard defined by the nature and commandments of God.) Melchizedek’s symbolic role as “king” is mirrored perfectly in the life and legacy of Yahshua, the “prince of peace” (Isaiah 9:6) who was born of the royal tribe of Judah, in the lineage of King David, as the scriptures demand—and who in His glory is to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16). Thus we read in the

Psalms, **“Surely His [Yahweh’s] salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.”** (Psalm 85:9-10) These things are *not* coincidental.

Melchizedek was also said to be the priest of the “Most High”—One who is then identified as being the same God Abram serves, later revealed by name: Yahweh. A priest is one who serves as an intermediary or intercessor between God and man. As the writer to the Hebrews points out, priests of the Levitical order of Aaron had to keep getting replaced, because they were “prevented by death from continuing.” (Hebrews 7:23) Yahshua, on the other hand, is a priest of a different order—that of Melchizedek (since you can’t descend from both Judah and Levi). As David prophesied, **“Yahweh has sworn and will not relent, You [referring to Yahshua] are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”** (Psalm 110:4) In other words, He, being eternal, will *always* be our liaison with Yahweh, the form of deity through which Yahweh chooses to reveal Himself to mortal men. As Yahshua explained to Philip, **“He who has seen Me has seen the Father.”** (John 14:9)

And what else did Melchizedek do to clue us in to his real identity? He brought “bread and wine” to Abram. Once again, the Messianic connection is too blatant to ignore. On the night He was betrayed, **“Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.’”** (Matthew 26:26-28) As we have seen, these two substances figure heavily in the imagery of the Tabernacle. Grain is a recurring symbol of God’s provision, and the bread into which it’s made is a picture of the ultimate expression of that provision—the body of Yahshua the Messiah, broken for us. As an offering, it was always accompanied with olive oil (a metaphor for the Holy Spirit) and was often sprinkled with frankincense as well—a picture of purity achieved through sacrifice. And the cup? Wine oblations accompanied every animal sacrifice. This *nesek*, or drink offering, was a transparent symbol of the blood of Christ poured out on our behalf. It was always poured out on or before the altar, and the amount was invariably the same as that of the oil that was brought with the *minha*, or grain offering, symbolically equating the blood of redemption to the eternal life afforded by God’s Spirit.

- (940) *Abraham’s test was a dress-rehearsal for Yahshua’s sacrifice.* **“Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as**

a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” (Genesis 22:1-2) People who aren’t prepared to face the fact of Yahshua’s atoning sacrifice are apt to look at this passage and declare that the Hebrews’ God, Yahweh, is a cruel and bloodthirsty figment of Abraham’s imagination—sort of like Molech was to the Canaanites. Offering a human sacrifice to appease a local deity, hoping to procure some temporal benefit—numerous children or bountiful crops—was not unheard of, even this far back. But notice that Yahweh offered Abraham nothing in return for the life of his son. He just said, “Do it.” That Isaac had been born at all was a miracle, one God had promised and then delivered on. So written between the lines in Yahweh’s instructions was a challenge: “You believed Me before, Abraham, and I didn’t let you down. Your son Isaac is still the child of promise. Trust Me on this, and do as I ask. I will provide.” Abraham couldn’t have known—even after it was all over—that his obedience would give the world a stunningly accurate preview of how Yahweh would provide salvation for the entire world: every detail foreshadows some facet of Yahweh’s impending sacrifice of His own Son, Yahshua.

Let’s look at those details. **“So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey.”** Yahshua too would begin His journey riding a donkey, amid the optimism and celebration of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. **“...and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son....”** The players in this drama are Abraham (which means “father of many”) playing the role of Father Yahweh, Isaac his son of promise, playing the part of the promised Son of God, Yahshua the Anointed Savior, and two “young men,” servants in Abe’s household. These two, I believe, represent the two branches of Yahweh’s household of faith, believing Israel and the assembly of Yahshua, the Church, we who are called out to be witnesses of God’s unfolding plan.

“...And he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.” We’ll get to the wood in a moment. Note that God told Abraham of a specific place where He wanted this act of worship to take place. Earlier it had been described as being “in the land of Moriah,” on “one of the mountains” there. This is the future site of the city of Jerusalem. The ridge that would become identified as Mount Moriah runs roughly north and south, flanked on the west by Mount Zion, and on the east by the Mount of Olives. At its northern end, its highest point would later come to be known as the Bizita Hill, a.k.a. Golgotha, a.k.a. Calvary. Being the highest spot on the “mountain of Moriah,” I believe this is where Abraham took Isaac. **“Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off....”** Yahshua and His Father also made

a journey, and then too the destination only came into view on the “third day.” Their destination was heavenly glory: following a day of sacrifice (Passover), and a day of separation (the Feast of Unleavened Bread), the third day of that journey was a day of celebration—resurrection Sunday (the Feast of Firstfruits).

“And Abraham said to his young men, [the two witnesses, representing Israel and the ekklesia] ‘Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.’ Where did they stay? I’m guessing, of course, but I believe they camped out on the lower plateau of Mount Moriah, the place where the temple of Solomon would eventually stand—a few hundred yards short of the site of the actual sacrifice. **“So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son....”** The “wood of the burnt offering” is seen again in the wooden *stauros*, the upright pole of the cross of Christ. If we reverse-engineer the prophecy, it becomes clear that it wasn’t really the Romans who sent Yahshua to the hill of crucifixion. It was Yahweh Himself. I should reiterate that the word translated “burnt offering” (*olah*) doesn’t really contain the concept of being “burnt.” It’s based on the verb *ala*, meaning to climb, ascend, or go up, which in the *olah* is descriptive of the smoke of a fire, hence the connection. But the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes, “The key appears to be that alone among the Israelite sacrifices the *olah* is wholly burned, rather than partially burned [that is, the fatty portions] and eaten by the worshipers and/or the priest. Thus, the whole animal is brought up to the altar and the whole is offered as a gift in homage to Yahweh. ‘Whole offering’ would be a better rendering in English to convey the theology of the *olah*. It is indeed burned, but the burning is essentially secondary to the giving of the whole creature to Yahweh.” So the burning of the *olah* is in reality a metaphor for judgment—subjection to the “fire,” i.e., the agent that separates the pure from the worthless.

“...And he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ Then he said, ‘Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’” The plot thickens, as they say. Isaac (who, I would guess, was about twelve years old at this time) noticed that they had everything they needed for a sacrifice except for the animal. **“And Abraham said, ‘My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.’ So the two of them went together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order.”** So far, so good, Isaac may have thought, but then Abraham **“...bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son....”** It’s at this point that we wish we had a little more

information. Did Abraham explain to Isaac what was going on? Did Isaac willingly agree that following Yahweh's instructions was the right thing to do, even if it cost him his life? Isaac was a "lad," old enough and strong enough to schlep a load of firewood up the hillside, while his dad was, like, a hundred and ten years old—Isaac could have escaped if he'd really wanted to. But no, I believe Abraham's faith in Yahweh had, long before this, been taught to his son. Both of them, I'm convinced, were sure that if Abraham slew his son as God had instructed, that God would also raise him from the dead. His birth had been miraculous; his resurrection would be no more so. So they proceeded in utterly unshakable faith.

"But the Angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!'" At this point, some of us would have said, "Gimme a minute, Lord. I'm a little busy right now. As soon as I've cut my son's throat and got this fire going, I'll be right with you." We need to learn to be not only obedient to Yahweh, but also sensitive to His voice. We need to learn that God doesn't always give us all the information up front. And in these Last Days we're living in, we need to learn that He has His timing down to the nanosecond, and He apparently likes to cut things close, if you'll pardon the expression. Fortunately, Abraham was listening. **"So he said, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me....'"** Nor would Yahweh withhold *His* only Son from us—which is the only reason I'm here to write about it.

"Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns." The ram (a mature male "lamb") is a transparent metaphor for the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," i.e., Yahshua. The thicket is reminiscent of the crown of thorns He wore as He was crucified. Note that the ram's horns indicate authority or power. The point is that Yahshua was not crucified in weakness. He wasn't hunted down, captured, and killed for his crimes by a higher authority, though that was the story published by the Jewish religious leaders and their Roman allies. No, He was restrained by *His own power*: He, being the only one whose death could make a difference on our behalf, was "caught" on the horns of a dilemma, so to speak. If he walked away from this death (as He was certainly able to do) He would have been untrue to His own nature—love. So at this point the metaphor shifts: **"Abraham [standing in for Yahweh] went and took the ram [symbolic of Yahshua], and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son."** That's the nature of Yahshua's sacrifice: His life was offered up in place of ours—it's a substitute. And because of this, we can now become adopted children of Yahweh ourselves! **"And Abraham called the name of the**

place, Yahweh-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, “In the Mount of Yahweh it shall be provided.” (Genesis 22:3-14) That’s now past tense. In the “Mount of Yahweh,” that is, Moriah, it *was* provided. Now it’s up to us to accept God’s gift of the substitutionary ram, for if we do not, *we* will have to atone for our own sins—*we* will be the burnt offering.

- (941) *The Master’s bride must come from His Father’s house.* “Now my master [Abraham] made me swear, saying, ‘You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell; but you shall go to my father’s house and to my family, and take a wife for my son.’” (Genesis 24:37-38) There is more to this than mere history. The symbols of the Moriah experience continue: As before, Abraham represents Yahweh, and Isaac stands in for the *real* Son of promise, Yahshua. The issue being decided is who is going to become Isaac’s (i.e., Yahshua’s) bride. Abraham gave His servant strict instructions: he was not to espouse Isaac to any of the pagan women from the communities that surrounded them, for even though they might make good matches from the world’s point of view, they wouldn’t from God’s. The one thing that would sanctify a marriage, the one thing that would make it truly blessed—a common faith in Yahweh—was not to be found among them. So Abraham’s servant (metaphorically, any servant of Yahweh) was instructed to be selective, patient, and resourceful in finding Isaac’s bride—going to great lengths to find her, avoiding what was merely attractive, convenient, or available.

The point is obvious. In order to become part of the ekklesia, the bride of Christ, we must be part of Yahweh’s household. That is, we must have a relationship in faith with our Creator, not with the world. If you take a pagan, stick him in a church pew and put a hymnal in his hand, you can’t expect him to magically become a “Christian.” Oh, you might induce him to clean up his language, stop kicking the dog, and drop money in the offering plate. But in the end, without a fundamental inward change of spiritual address, all you’ll really have is a well-behaved pagan. Baptize a heathen, and all you’ve got is a wet heathen. It’s not a question of conduct, appearance, or convenience. It’s a question of relationship. Servants of God are instructed to be discerning—resisting the temptation to pair Isaac with a pagan bride—that is, to compromise with the world’s values and practices in order to gain prestige, power, or popularity. Yahshua made this abundantly clear in the warnings given to the churches in Pergamos, Thyatira, and Sardis, in Revelation 2.

Pagans (and other mis-believers) can, of course, *become* related to Yahweh—through adoption, as it were. (You don’t have to be born into a Christian family to become a believer; nor will being born into a Christian

family *make* you a believer.) In order to understand (in this context, anyway) how the process of becoming part of the bride of Christ unfolds, let's return to the text, and be prepared to stretch God's metaphor a little. **"Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her."** (Genesis 24:67) What is "Sarah's tent?" Sarah had been Abraham's wife, Isaac's mother. So in this elaborate metaphor, Sarah is a type of the Holy Spirit of Yahweh. Moving "into her tent" is a picture of spiritual regeneration, the act of being "born from above" that Yahshua described in John 3. It is only upon being indwelt with Yahweh's Spirit that we become "the bride" of Yahshua.

Compare the imagery of Isaac's marriage to Rebekah with Yahshua's words: **"If you love Me, keep My commandments."** The foremost of these commandments is to trust Him. **"And I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."** You've heard me say that the *Ruach Qodesh* is feminine in character (indicated by "Her" role in our lives as well as the gender of the Hebrew words describing Her.) Don't let the masculine pronouns for the Holy Spirit here throw you. In the original Greek, they're neutral: "It." But beyond that, the Father (Yahweh), His Spirit (our heavenly "Mother"), and the Son (God's Messiah, Yahshua) are all seen as having *the same identity* here—interchangeable in persona, if not in form: they're all the same God, just manifested in different ways. **"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."** In the terms of our present precept, Sarah (metaphorical of Yahweh's Spirit) was "in"—was *part of*—Isaac, and he, with his bride Rebekah, dwelled "in her tent" in a matrix of love. **"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."** (John 14:15-21) Love happens when we dwell in wedded bliss with the Son of Promise in the shelter of the Holy Spirit.

- (942) *Yahweh allows us to "wrestle" with Him.* **"Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, 'Let Me go, for the day breaks.' But he said, 'I will not let You go unless You bless me!'"** (Genesis 32:24-26) This is one of the most revealing passages in all of scripture, mostly because it's so counterintuitive, so contrary to the way we normally think of God. Yahweh is Almighty God, Creator of the universe, so big and

powerful that we can't even begin to comprehend His greatness, and so holy that we can't appear in His presence in our natural state and survive the encounter—His very essence would destroy us as light destroys the darkness, not out of malice, but simply by its nature. But here we see Jacob wrestling with God who has assumed the form of a man (Hebrew *iysh*: a human being, i.e., a person, in contrast to deity). It's what we call a theophany.

Even here, we can sort of comprehend it, since we're familiar with the concept of *Immanuel*, Yahshua coming as a human being to walk among men: God with us. But what we (or is it just me?) can't quite get a grip on is how God could wrestle with Jacob *and not prevail against him*—struggling with him as an equally matched “opponent.” I guess I've always had it in the back of my mind that even when God condescended to interact with man (which He did because He loves us and seeks to develop a rapport with us), He did so under “false pretenses”—that is, He merely refrained from using the awesome power that was His by right and nature. I imagined that He was just “holding back,” concealing his divine attributes, and that even in His humanity Yahshua actually retained the power (at least some of it) that was rightfully His as God—though He refused to use it for vindication or defense because of His love for us. But this passage has shifted my perception, and I'm even more awestruck than I was before. It appears that God *actually* emptied Himself of His divine power for the purpose of edifying Jacob—He didn't merely assume the form of a man, but He *became* one, with all the frailty, risk, and limitation that implies. The implication is that what He did here for Jacob, He also did for us, becoming a mere man in the person of Yahshua of Nazareth, stripping Himself not only of heaven's awesome glory, but also of every vestige of divine power and knowledge, holding nothing in reserve.

If I'm right about this, then the ramifications are stunning. (1) The *only* thing empowering Yahshua during his first-century advent was the Holy Spirit of Yahweh—the very Spirit that indwells *us* as believers. The same “power source” that fueled Yahshua's miracles resides within us today. (2) The knowledge, insight, and perception that Yahshua displayed were due to two factors, both of which are available to us: the written Word of God, and the illumination of God's Spirit. He saw and understood the things that Yahweh had communicated in the Scriptures—things that nobody else comprehended—because He was in perfect conformity with God's Spirit, who communicated with Him freely and naturally. And (3), the Messiah's perfect, sinless walk before God allowed the Spirit to be manifested without restriction through what He did and said. The only reason the Spirit's power is not similarly displayed in our lives is that we

(unlike Yahshua) are fallen creatures whose sin and disbelief quenches and grieves the Spirit of God dwelling within us, to one extent or another. I'm not suggesting that if we try hard enough to harness the Spirit's energy we can become, just like Yahshua, unfettered channels for the power of God. Yahshua's soul was Yahweh's own life residing in the shell of a mortal man. It was not encumbered with Adam's sin nature as ours are. No, I'm only saying that we believers fall far short of our potential as mirrors of Christ's love and power in this world because we restrict and hamper the Spirit of Yahweh who dwells within us.

We are told, **"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."** (James 4:7) But what happens if we resist *Yahweh*? This is where our Genesis 32 passage gains traction: unlike the devil, Yahweh will neither "flee" from us nor crush us with His awesome strength. Rather, He is willing to "wrestle" with us all night long. That is, He gives us the opportunity to try Him, test Him, probe for weaknesses, and find out through experience what He's "made of." But there are some things we need to notice about this process. First, we can't "beat" Yahweh: He will be proven worthy, true, and faithful at every turn. Second, though we might run away from Him, He will never flee from us. As long as we're willing to challenge Him in faith, as long as we "wrestle" as honest seekers after the truth, He will never give up on us. Third, our wrestling match with God cannot go on forever. When the "day breaks," a decision has to have been made. This dawning can represent either our own physical death, or, for the last generation (the one that walks the earth today, if I'm not mistaken), the commencement of the Kingdom of God on earth.

How did this wrestling match turn out for Jacob? **"So He said to him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Jacob.' And He said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.'" (Genesis 32:27-28)** His new name means, "God prevails," or "Prevails with God." It wasn't that Jacob/Israel had "beaten" Yahweh, or vice versa. It was that his objective in wrestling with Him all night had been achieved: Jacob had stubbornly held on until God had blessed him. Thus he was no longer the "Cheater," the "Supplanter." Now he was the one who had tried God and found Him to be true: Jacob had prevailed with God, and Yahweh had likewise prevailed with Him. By the way, in case you're not convinced that it was actually a theophany—a manifestation of God in human form—with which Jacob had been wrestling, the issue is clarified by the prophet Hosea: **"He [Jacob] took his brother by the heel in the womb, and in his strength he struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; He wept, and sought favor from Him. He found Him in Bethel, and**

there He spoke to us—that is, Yahweh, God of hosts. Yahweh is His memorial name.” (Hosea 12:3-5)

The Genesis record continues. **“Then Jacob asked, saying, ‘Tell me Your name, I pray.’ And He said, ‘Why is it that you ask about My name?...”** Twice in scripture a theophany is asked his name, and both times this rather evasive answer is given. The other instance is in Judges 13, where the “Angel of Yahweh” is announcing the miraculous conception of Samson to his parents. As far as I can tell, the reason for God’s elusiveness is that He didn’t want to leave a false impression. If He said, “My name is Yahweh,” as He had to Moses at the burning bush, Jacob (and Manoah) might have gotten the impression that “God” was restricted to a human form, when the reality was so far beyond this it was virtually incomprehensible. But if He had used the name of His future human manifestation, Yahshua, that too would have been misleading, for the Messiah’s name implies His mission: Yahshua (or Yahushua) means “Yahweh is salvation.” His first century advent would prove the name to be matched to the mission. But here in Genesis (and in Judges) although the man/messenger was indeed God in human form, the immediate task at hand was not the salvation of mankind, so the name of the theophany was withheld.

“And He blessed him there. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: ‘For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.’” (Genesis 32:29-30) For his part, Jacob, now Israel, was under no illusions: the One with which he had wrestled was God in human form. The name he gave the place reflects this understanding. Peniel (or Penuel) is made of two Hebrew words: *Panah* means to turn, as in, to turn to face someone; and *El* is the generic word for God. So Peniel means “turning to God” or “facing God.” The remarkable thing, as Jacob noted, is that one *can* “face God” and live to tell the tale. Actually, facing God is the *only* way one’s life can be preserved.

Messianic Messages II: The Egyptian Experience

The family of Abraham had been selected by Yahweh to be the vehicle through which “all the families of the earth would be blessed.” As it would turn out, this “vehicle” would have to be something of an “all terrain” model, for there would be bumps in the road, obstacles to overcome, detours into uncharted territory, and hijackers to elude. This wouldn't be a drag race—a sprint in a straight line from point A to point B. It would be more like a cross between a steeplechase and an explorer's expedition: the destination was defined (sort of), but not the path leading to it. The chosen family had no road map, no instructions to speak of, no Bible to go by. Their knowledge of the God who had set them apart was limited to treasured stories of the brief and sporadic encounters their patriarchs had had with Him. He had given them sweeping but imprecise promises, and equally vague instructions: *separate yourselves from the nations around you; go to a land I'll show you; walk blamelessly before Me.*

As time went on, the promises would become more specific, and the Instructions would eventually be so explicit they'd take on a life of their own. But even in the hazy and indistinct beginning of this journey, glimpses of the goal were given to God's people. Like dabs of paint in an impressionist's masterpiece, each new spot of color contributed to the lucidity and definition of the overall picture, though it may not have seemed particularly significant on its own. At the time, only the Artist knew what each brushstroke would mean. But we, having the privilege of standing back and seeing the finished work from the proper perspective, are in a position to comprehend how all those seemingly unimportant and unrelated details work together to form a cohesive and comprehensive whole.

The question is, do we? What do we see in the finished picture? Do we perceive it at all? The painting, a portrait of the Son of Man, is entitled: “Yahweh is Salvation.” Here it is, hanging in a public place for all to see. And here we are, for whatever reason, in the same place. Some of us intended to come here to see it, and some happened upon this place quite by accident. But we're all here now. So let's do a man-on-the-street interview with some of these folks...

“You, sir, what do you think of the picture?” *I don't have an opinion.* “Is that from ignorance, or apathy?” *I don't know, and I don't care.*

“Okay, moving along then. You, Ma'am?” *Oh, it's lovely. I'd like to have something like this hanging in my spare bedroom. It would go nicely with the drapes in there.*

“Alrighty, then. You, sir, with the magnifying glass. Any opinion you’d like to share with us?” *I’m the art critic for the Times. Of course I have an opinion. I’ll admit: the brushwork is remarkable—the craftsmanship, the juxtaposition of color, the richness of the texture...* “So you like the painting?” *Like it? No, don’t be an idiot. It’s too pedestrian to be taken seriously—too simplistic and unsophisticated. He paints as if there’s such a thing as absolute truth. I’m told this is a self portrait—a subject I find beneath the calling of a true artist. I’ve never even heard of this guy. What’s his name? Yahweh? If he wanted to put “Salvation” in the title, he should have painted something of great social importance, you know, like saving the whales or finding a cure for AIDS!*

“I see. Well then. You, young man. Can you tell me what you think?” *Yes, I’ll tell you, he says, as a tear rolls down his cheek. This is the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen. I took two busses and a subway to get here. And now that I’m here, I don’t think I can ever go home again. You see here, where the Artist sacrificed Himself so that I could live? I’ve been looking for this all my life. If you stand back far enough, you can see that it’s not just a picture of a man—it’s Love, Mercy, and Truth personified. And when you look more closely, every brushstroke, every highlight, every shadow, contributes something wonderful to the story. It’s almost as if it’s alive—and the Life within it is contagious.*

Yes, we don’t all see the same thing when we look at Yahweh’s portrait of His Anointed Redeemer. What we see, or don’t see, depends as much on our own attitudes as upon what God has placed before our eyes. In short, we see what we want to see—we see what we *choose* to see. This portrayal of God’s was not always as clear as it is today. During the age of the patriarchs, it was only seemingly random brushstrokes on an otherwise blank canvas. Progress on the painting, slow and sporadic, was made between Moses and Malachi. But then, early in the First Century, Yahweh labored with sudden intensity to finish His work, though the gallery (our world) was restricted by its architecture and hampered by its lighting. But now, two thousand years later, we are no longer handicapped by poor sight lines and dim oil lamps—we are blessed with an unrestricted view of God’s finished work, lit with brilliant sunlight, for “the Sun of righteousness has arisen with healing in His wings.” At this late date, we (and I mean the whole human race) can see Yahshua more clearly than we ever could before, if only we’ll choose to look at God’s portrait through eyes of faith and trust.

But let us not forget that the Yahshua of history and faith is only a mortal representation, a *picture* of the love of God. Though He’s God incarnate, Yahshua is not *all there is* of God, but is only a pale shadow of Yahweh’s actual being. The day is coming, however, and soon, when Yahweh will actually walk among us as King Yahshua, the reigning, glorified, undiminished personification of God’s Love. The Picture will no longer be mankind’s sole source of insight about

Yahweh's salvation, for we will rejoice in the very presence of the One about whom the Picture was painted. The reality will have overtaken the symbol. The very *dimensions* that He laid aside in the process of communicating Yahweh's love to us will be restored. And we will at last know as we are known.

In the present world, however, we must content ourselves with what we can see, if not with the eyes of understanding, then with the eyes of faith. Until King Yahshua walks the earth in glory, we must continue to study the portrait that Yahweh left behind. After all, false Christs abound. If we don't know what the real Messiah looks like, we won't be able to identify the phony ones.

JOSEPH

(943) *The Messiah's authority will breed animosity among men.* **"Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. So he said to them, 'Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.' And his brothers said to him, 'Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?' So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words."** (Genesis 37:5-8) The story of Joseph is a rich repository of parallels to the life of the Messiah. One commentator counted forty-two places where Joseph is seen as a "type" of Christ. I don't intend to examine them all, but we would do well to explore some of the more obvious Messianic Messages in Joseph's story. Joseph's brothers were already envious of him, for his father Israel had given him a tunic of many colors, a gift that betrayed his special affection for the son of his old age, and more to the point, the firstborn son of Rachel, the wife he actually loved. Singling out Joseph for blessing was thus seen by Joseph's brothers as an insult to their mothers. Between the lines, a subtle truth emerges: God's affection for those indwelt by His Holy Spirit is seen as an affront to those who have some other spirit within them. Just as Israel loved all of his children but had special fondness for Rachel's son Joseph, Yahweh loves all people—so much so that He sacrificed Himself to save them—but He has a special bond with His Spirit-indwelt children. It's a different kind of relationship altogether, not Creator to creature, but Parent to child. And the world hates and envies us as a result.

So with one strike against him already, Joseph announced that, according to his dream, his brothers would bow down to him. Neither he nor his brothers had any doubt as to what the imagery meant. Strike two. He then had another dream, and as before, immediately spoke of it to

those who might be expected to see themselves as being on the losing end of this thing. **“Then [Joseph] dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, ‘Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me.’ So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, ‘What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?’ And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind.”** (Genesis 37:9-11) Strike three. If Joseph had been a bit more mature or circumspect, he might have kept the matter to himself, but he was just a kid, and a spoiled one at that—he (apparently) had no idea what effect such talk might have on his family. Israel was the only one who perceived that the dreams came from somewhere—or rather, some One—and that God might indeed be telling them all something important.

What that “something” was would become apparent as the events of Joseph’s life transpired. We’re all familiar with the story. Through a series of unforeseeable incidents and remarkable “coincidences,” Joseph’s faith in Yahweh elevated him to the top position of leadership in the kingdom, second only to Pharaoh himself—putting him in a position in which he could save his “world,” if only they’d heed his warning and take his advice—which they did. His brothers did indeed end up bowing down to him, just as his dream had predicted. What’s not so obvious is that all of this was a dress rehearsal for a much larger drama. God’s Son would, like Joseph, announce His destiny to His brothers, find Himself betrayed and sold for the price of a slave, unexpectedly rise to receive the throne of the Kingdom, and offer salvation to a hungry, dying world. The only question yet to be answered is, will *our* world welcome His reign and accept His provision for the spiritual famine that’s ravaging the land, or will we, in our jealous envy, continue to hate and resent Him? One way or another, every knee *will* bow before Yahshua.

- (944) *Innocence breeds insight.* **“And Joseph said to [Pharaoh’s chief cupbearer], ‘This is the interpretation of [your dream]: The three branches are three days. Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler. But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon.’”** (Genesis 40:12-15) There is an interesting theme that recurs sporadically throughout the Bible. Lots of folks are given dreams and visions, but only those who are spiritually attuned are able to determine what they mean. Joseph’s rise from prison to palace was fueled by just such an ability. Another

remarkable example is Daniel, whose interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's "statue" dream not only kept his head on his shoulders, but also gave us invaluable information about the future course of world history—including events that haven't to this day come to pass. Yahshua Himself was so spiritually astute, He didn't even need to wait for someone to have a dream. He knew what people were thinking before they did—even if they weren't willing to admit the truth to themselves.

The gift of insight, the ability to see the needle of truth in a haystack of mere information, seems to me to be directly proportional to a person's willingness to surrender to the leading of the Holy Spirit. I'm not talking about flawless behavior, you understand, but having a heart for God. The calling of the prophet Isaiah is telling. **"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory!' And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke."** In theory, anybody might have received a vision like this, but only one (like Isaiah) who was both spiritually responsive and acutely aware of his inadequacy before God would have reacted as he did. **"So I said: 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of hosts.'"** Fortunately, Yahweh has a remedy for our uncleanness. **"Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips. Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.' Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'"** (Isaiah 6:1-8) That's the common thread that runs through the stories of spiritually aware men and women from one end of the Bible to the other—a willingness to be cleansed by God and sent out to a lost world on His behalf. To these people, Yahweh gives insight, which I would define as the ability to perceive the true nature of things, regardless of an ocean of "conventional wisdom" to the contrary.

It might be instructive to review a few instances of the converse: where Yahweh *withheld* the ability to perceive truth in response to a rejection of His Spirit. First, we see the stubborn and arrogant attitude of the Pharaoh of the exodus, and note that God "hardened his heart." (Exodus 10:27, etc.) Isaiah's first task upon making himself available to Yahweh was to go to the rebellious house of Israel and pronounce spiritual blindness upon them: **"And He said, 'Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing,**

but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.” Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.” (Isaiah 6:9-10) Then, we are reminded of Paul’s dire warning to those “who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” He says that they “became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.... Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness... [and] vile passions.... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind.” (Romans 1:18-28) In other words, because of their active unwillingness to accept the truth, Yahweh relieved all of these people of the ability to see it at all. He didn’t abrogate their free will; on the contrary, He determined to forever honor the disastrous choice they had already made.

Like Joseph in prison, we today—if we’re sensitive to the voice of Yahweh’s *Ruach Qodesh*—have the opportunity to interpret the disturbing “dreams” of a lost and searching world. Joseph was able to give Pharaoh’s butler good news, but the baker wasn’t so lucky, though his dream had been superficially similar. If we listen to the Spirit’s testimony within us, we can say to some today, “Take heart. Even though things may look impossibly bleak right now, the King is preparing to vindicate you, for He knows you, and He knows that you trust in Him.” But as Joseph had nothing but bad news for the baker, we too must caution the unbelieving world, “Beware, for your trials are just beginning. The King has perceived that you are neither His friend, His servant, nor His child. Therefore, repent, I beg you, before He locks the door you have already slammed in His face.”

- (945) *God will place Someone wise and discerning over the affairs of the world.* “Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:33) At this point, Joseph had interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams, and told him the good news and the bad news: the land would see seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Having delivered the data, he now proffered the advice: *do something* about it, while there’s still time. “Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine.” (Genesis 41:34-36) Christ has also told us (today’s world) that the time of abundance will end, to be followed by seven years of spiritual famine. And He has added to the raw data this wise counsel: “Do not lay up

for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19-21) His advice to us is thus more or less the same as Joseph’s was to Pharaoh: *Take whatever is necessary to sustain your life and put in a safe place—somewhere where the uncertainties of the world cannot affect it.*

“So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?’” This is one of those delicious moments where the scriptural record lets us sort of fill in the blank with our own imaginations. The vizier looks sideways at the captain of the guard, who trades glances with the chief cupbearer, as if to say, “You’re kidding me, right? The guy who read his dream and figured out how to prepare for it is standing right in front of him. Yeah, I think we can find somebody like that...” “Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.’ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.’” (Genesis 41:37-41) What we tend to forget is that we still have a “recommendation” to make to our King, Yahweh. Who would we like to see put in charge of saving Egypt—or the world? Are we going to vote that the One who single-handedly provided the means of salvation for all mankind be “set over” the kingdom (which is so slam-dunk obvious it’s silly), or are we going to recommend that somebody else—or nobody at all—be made responsible for our destiny? In the end, just as in Joseph’s day, God lets us decide who we’d like to be in control. But now, as then, He’s going to do what’s right. He’s going to set Yahshua “over all the land,” and “all His people shall be ruled according to His word.”

- (946) *A ministry of salvation begins at the age of thirty.* “Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:46) It doesn’t mean much by itself, I suppose, but taken in tandem with a thousand other details, the age of the commencement of Joseph’s service is one more indication that his life was meant to be a dress rehearsal for the Messiah’s—and is therefore significant. We read in Luke’s Gospel, “Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age.” (Luke 3:23)

This could be a coincidence, of course, but I don’t think it is. Yahweh went out of His way to reinforce the idea when He defined the service period of the Levites (the priestly tribe) as beginning at thirty years of age:

“All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel numbered, by their families and by their fathers’ houses, from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who came to do the work of service and the work of bearing burdens in the tabernacle of meeting—those who were numbered were eight thousand five hundred and eighty.” (Numbers 4:46-48)

Interesting, how that’s phrased: “the work of service and the work of bearing burdens in the tabernacle” began at thirty. The whole point of the tabernacle, as we have seen, was to present a complex and beautiful picture of our approach to God through the work of Yahshua the Messiah. His work was one of service (healing the sick, raising the dead, and so forth) and of bearing the spiritual “burden” of the tabernacle (fulfilling its symbols, especially giving His life as a sacrificial ransom for many).

One didn’t *become* a Levite at thirty, of course. One was a “Levite” on the day he was born. Moreover, Levites actually began working in their assigned roles at the age of *twenty-five* (see Numbers 8:24 and Precept #983). But they weren’t *numbered* into the Levitical ranks until they turned thirty. In the same way, Yahshua was Yahweh’s Son on the day He entered the world, and being found as a man, He humbled Himself, learning His adoptive father’s trade and studying the scriptures like any devout young Israelite man would have done. It was only when He turned thirty that His identity could be verified through performing the specific ministry God had assigned to Him. It was only at this age that He could officially begin to fulfill the destiny that His heritage had assigned to Him—becoming the Savior of Mankind.

- (947) *Our sin against God requires a blood sacrifice.* **“Then they said to one another, ‘We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.’ And Reuben answered them, saying, ‘Did I not speak to you, saying, “Do not sin against the boy”; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.’”** (Genesis 42:21-22) Over twenty years had gone by, and Joseph’s brothers still harbored the guilt of their secret sin, as if they had betrayed him only yesterday. Reuben, Israel’s firstborn, understood as none of the others did that a sin against Joseph was in fact a sin against their father (Genesis 37:22, 30). He also understood that even though his intentions toward Joseph had not been quite as evil as those of the other brothers, all of them were equally guilty before God, and Joseph’s blood was now required of them.

But how? Their lives were not in immediate danger. At this point in the story, the vice-Pharaoh (the incognito Joseph) had demanded that to prove they weren’t spies, they must bring their youngest brother back to

Egypt with them—Benjamin, the only living son (as far as they knew) of Israel’s late beloved wife Rachel. Israel’s hope had been reflected in the name he gave his infant boy: “son of the right hand.” One’s “right hand” was the place of honor and strength; there was no question of Israel’s affection, even obsession, for the lad. Having lost Joseph, he would do *anything* to protect Benjamin. So as the famine in Canaan wore on, Israel adamantly refused to send young Benjamin to Egypt with his brothers—until it became clear that without Egyptian grain, his whole family, including Benjamin, would perish.

Was Yahweh’s conundrum any different? The spiritual famine that was ravaging the earth could not be solved by ignoring it in heaven, and it was clear to Him (as all things are) that only by sending His beloved Son into the world—into harm’s way—that those who depended upon Him could be saved. Moreover, just as Benjamin was perceived as a substitute for Joseph, Yahshua would be offered up as a substitute for Adam and all of his progeny—us. Reuben had correctly noted that Joseph’s blood would be required of the brothers. But who would actually be making the sacrifice? Not the brothers, and not even young Benjamin. It was *Israel*, who by sending Benjamin, the Son of his right hand, was a type of Yahweh sending Yahshua, the Son of *His* Right Hand.

- (948) *Yahweh can use man’s evil as an agent for the greater good.* **“Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph; does my father still live?’ But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Please come near to me.’ So they came near. Then he said: ‘I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.’”** (Genesis 45:3-5) It was one of the most dramatic and emotional moments in the entire Bible: Joseph, after concealing his identity for what must have seemed like an eternity to him, at last took the “mask” off and told his brothers who he really was. Why had he waited? I believe he wanted to find out how they felt about their treachery after all these years. Were they repentant, or did they still harbor hatred and envy? Did they acknowledge their guilt, or were they glad Joseph was gone? His question was answered with the exchange recorded in our previous precept: **“We are truly guilty concerning our brother... Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.”** However, having seen God’s hand at work in his life, Joseph wasn’t thinking about revenge, but about forgiveness.

This scene is another dress rehearsal, this time for a play that still is yet to be performed in our day—the final reconciliation of the nation of Israel with her Messiah. The parallels are stunning. Having betrayed their

Kinsman for the price of a slave, Israel has now fallen into a state of spiritual famine: they are starving for their God, who over the last two millennia has become a total stranger to them. He didn't leave them, however—they *left Him*, when they crucified His Messiah and traded in the Torah for the rabbinical fables of the Talmud. Long before Joseph and his brothers met face to face, he had *already* provided the means for their salvation. And before he finally revealed his true identity, he had *already* delivered the sustenance they so desperately needed. In the same way, salvation was provided long ago by Yahshua's sacrificial act. But He will also physically deliver them from national extinction *before* He unveils His identity to them—during the battle of Magog. (See Ezekiel 38 and 39.) His unveiling—His *revelation*, if you will—will take place four or five years later, if I've got the timeline right.

What am I talking about? Zechariah describes the scene: **"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem."** (Zechariah 12:10-11) Who did the inhabitants of Jerusalem "pierce"? It was Yahshua. The same thoughts that raced through the minds of Joseph's brothers when they finally realized who he was will strike the Last-Days Jewish remnant like a thunderbolt: *Oh my God! We killed the Messiah!* Will they be "dismayed," like Joseph's brother's were? Yeah, I can pretty much guarantee it.

When will this take place? On the definitive Day of Atonement (October 3, 2033, if I'm not mistaken), when Yahshua the Messiah returns to earth as its glorified King, splitting the Mount of Olives, from which He ascended 2000 years previously. (See Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:9-11.) The remnant's very prophesied reaction to Yahshua's return is the definitive requirement of *Yom Kippurim*: **"And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before Yahweh your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people.'" (Leviticus 23:26-30)** Joseph forgave his brothers because they were repentant, "afflicted in soul" for their crimes, and they were more than willing to rest in Joseph's provision, for they had wisely concluded that they could not save themselves.

But the story's not quite done. After the death of Israel their father, the brothers once again came to fear that their past misdeeds would be held against them—that Joseph's kindness toward them was but a temporary reprieve designed to honor the old man who had loved him so much. So they sent emissaries to Joseph to plead for forgiveness, though it had already been granted long before this. **"I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you. Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father."** And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, **'Behold, we are your servants.'**" Gee, I guess the dreams he'd had all those years ago were true after all. **"Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?'"** Well, that's refreshing, I must say. Most powerful politicians these days think they *are*. **"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones."** And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them." (Genesis 50:17-21) Again, the parallels to scriptural history are too blatant to ignore. The Jewish religious leaders too intended "evil" against Yahshua. In getting the Romans to execute Him, they meant to be rid of Him forever, maintaining their own pitiful status quo in the process. But Yahweh used their animosity to bring about good—the ultimate good for all mankind. Through Yahshua's death the promise Yahweh had made to Abram would at last be fulfilled. Every family on earth *would* be blessed: a way had been found to restore the fellowship lost through Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, available through trust in Yahshua to every man who had ever lived. **"Now therefore, do not be afraid."**

THE EXODUS

- (949) *The Passover Lamb must enter the household of Israel on the tenth day of Nisan. "Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household.... Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.'"* (Exodus 12:3, 6) We discussed this briefly in Mitzvah #460, but it really deserves a more detailed explanation. Passover (a.k.a. "the Day of Preparation" for the Feast of Unleavened Bread—the day upon which the paschal lamb was to be slain in the late afternoon) was to fall on the 14th day of the month of Nisan. In the year 33 A.D., that day fell on Friday, April 1.

Using the day by day record in the Gospel of Mark, we can work backwards to reconstruct the events leading up to this, and determine the days upon which they took place. Mark 14:1 says, **“After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.”** He’s referring to the events of Chapters 12 and 13—in which Yahshua confounded the Pharisees and taught His disciples—notably, delivering the Olivet Discourse. Since Passover fell on Friday Nisan 14, he’s talking about Wednesday and Thursday (*after which* came the Passover). Wednesday Nisan 12, then, begins at Mark 11:20—**“Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.”** So these next words mark the commencement of the events of Tuesday, Nisan 11: **“Now on the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry.”** (Mark 11:12) Seeing a fig tree with no fruit on it, He cursed it, the results of which were noted the following morning.

Mark notes that this was the “next day.” The next day after *what*? What happened on Monday, Nisan 10? Mark records that as Yahshua walked with His disciples toward Jerusalem from Bethany, He asked them to borrow a donkey’s colt for Him (See Zechariah 9:9). Mounted upon it, He entered Jerusalem amid a throng of worshipers who had gathered along the road to witness the High Priest bringing the “official” Passover lamb into the city from Bethlehem—as required in Exodus 12:3. Recognizing Yahshua, the crowd turned their attention to Him, crying out, **“Hosanna! [that is, “Save now!”] Blessed is He who comes in the name of Yahweh! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”** (Mark 11:9-10; cf. Psalm 118:26) The throng recognized that Yahshua had indeed come in the name of Yahweh. His recent miracles had proved it beyond the shadow of a doubt. What they didn’t understand (yet) was that *He* was to be the very Passover Lamb they had come to see—as John the Baptist had put it, **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”** (John 1:29)

So the precise requirements of our present precept were met by Yahshua: He entered the household of Israel on the tenth day of Nisan, allowing the people of Jerusalem to become thoroughly familiar with Him—in person, not just by reputation—just as the Law prescribed. But there is more to it: the timing of the Triumphal Entry fulfills more than just Exodus 12:3. Daniel had been told: **“Seventy weeks [literally, *sevens*] are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two**

weeks.” (Daniel 9:24-25) A “week” is seven of something, in this case, a specified time unit. It could be a day, a year, or some other length of time. By reverse-engineering some of the prophecies that are expressed in the terms of this system (note that “time, times and half a time,” 42 months, and 1,260 days all seem to refer to the same span of time) it is apparent that Daniel’s “week” is seven 360-day “prophetic” years. The prophecy is given in terms of one of several calendars in use simultaneously in the world Daniel was familiar with—a schematic 360-day “year” of twelve 30-day months, with a five day compensator tacked onto the end. (The Babylonians, like the Jews, knew perfectly well that a solar year was about 365¼ days long, but the schematic year made dates and schedules far easier to keep track of than either a lunar calendar or a goofy system like the one we use.) Interestingly, Yahweh never actually calls this time period a “year.”

The coming of “Messiah the Prince,” then, would occur precisely 69 “sevens” of “prophetic years,” that is, 483 of them, after a “command to restore and build Jerusalem” was issued. That multiplies out to 173,880 days. This very decree was recorded in Nehemiah 2:1-6, dated to **“the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes.”** When? Allow me to quote from *Future History*:

“Most scholars (including the esteemed Sir Robert Anderson, whom I believe was the first to calculate this) peg the twentieth year of Artaxerxes at 445 B.C. It’s simple arithmetic. His father, Xerxes (a.k.a. Ahasuerus, husband of Queen Esther) died in 465; add twenty years to that and you come to 445. But they fail to take into account the little drama that transpired following the death (okay, *murder*) of Xerxes. The king had been killed in his sleep by an ambitious fellow named Artabanus, the king’s vizier or bodyguard, who also (according to Aristotle) killed the heir apparent, Darius. Another royal son, Hustapis, was out of the country, safe for the moment. That left Artaxerxes, a mere teenager at the time. Artabanus left him alive, figuring he could rule through him as regent. Then, seven months later, he changed his mind and tried to kill him, too. But as luck would have it, the lad killed Artabanus instead. Hustapis showed up shortly thereafter and tried to claim the throne, so Artaxerxes killed him as well. These guys needed a Constitution in the worst way. Anyway, all this maneuvering took the better part of a year: thus Artie wasn’t able to assume the throne until 464. That would make the starting date of Daniel’s prophecy the 1st of Nisan, 444 B.C.

“From this date, we must count **“seven weeks and sixty two weeks.”** That is, there would be forty-nine years until Jerusalem’s “street and wall” were

built, “**even in troublesome times**”—the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah relate just how troublesome they were—and another 434 years, or 483 years total, “**until Messiah the Prince.**” 483 years times 360 days—the length of the Hebrew prophetic year—comes out to 173,880 days, or 476 solar years and 25 days inclusive, i.e., to the 10th of Nisan, or March 28, A.D. 33. And on March 28, A.D. 33, if my calculations are correct, Yahshua of Nazareth rode into Jerusalem on a donkey amid the adulation of a teeming throng of Jewish worshipers in town for the Passover holiday. Messiah the Prince had come.”

The 10th of Nisan is the very day Yahweh had specified for the Passover lamb to be brought into the household. So Yahshua not only fulfilled the day required by prophecy, but also the year. The fact that it would be centuries before anybody figured this out doesn’t make it any less amazing. But it all conspires to disqualify any rival claimant to the title “Messiah the Prince.” Jews today looking for their Messiah are required by scripture to consider *only* candidates who (1) announce their anointing precisely 173,880 days after a decree matching that of Artaxerxes, (2) enter Jerusalem for their inspection on the 10th of Nisan, and (3) offer themselves up as atonement sacrifices four days later on Passover. Any takers? (Other than the obvious, I mean.) I didn’t think so.

- (950) *Note the symbolic connection between slaying the Passover Lamb and the removal of leaven. “So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to Yahweh throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.”* (Exodus 12:14-15) Yahweh is careful to separate the imagery of Passover (on Nisan 14) from that of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (on Nisan 15—a designated Sabbath). *Pesach* speaks of the death of the lamb, whose blood, smeared on the doorposts and lintels of the Israelites’ houses, was to keep the Death Angel at bay. *Chag Matzah*, by contrast, speaks of an ongoing state where leaven or yeast (symbolic of sin) is absent. The days seem quite different in symbolic purpose. But in reality, Yahweh is merely distinguishing cause from effect. What happened on Passover made possible the reality of the sinless state symbolized by the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In practical terms, it is impossible to separate the celebration of Passover from Unleavened Bread, for each relies upon the other. First, the actual meal when the lamb is consumed takes place after sunset—technically pushing it into the next calendar “day,” since sunset marks the

beginning of each new day. Thus technically, the Passover meal is not eaten on Passover, but rather on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Second, the deadline for having killed the Passover lamb was the same as that for removing the leaven from the household. By sundown on the 14th of Nisan, both jobs had to be done, plus one more: the fire upon which the lamb was to be roasted had to have been kindled by this same hour, for it was illegal to start a fire on the Sabbath day. So the judgment that would fall upon the substitutionary sacrifice on Nisan 14 is linked to the removal of sin from our lives, while the protection, nourishment, and vindication this judgment would bring in its wake could only be enjoyed after that—and as a result of it—on and following Nisan 15. You’d have to work awfully hard not to see the Messianic connection to all of this. By being crucified (on Passover), Yahshua removed the sin from our lives. The subsequent ongoing state of sinlessness we enjoy (in spiritual fact if not in physical experience) is the direct result of His sacrifice and the judgment He endured in our stead. That’s why Yahweh made the Feast a weeklong event: our sinlessness has become a permanent feature (seven days symbolizing completion) of our relationship with God. In fact, our permanent sinlessness is what makes that relationship possible.

Fine tuning the symbols, Yahweh continues: **“On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you.”** (Exodus 12:16) Normally, you couldn’t prepare food on a Sabbath, but here we’re given an exception. The lesson is clear. We can’t take the place of the Lamb—we can’t accomplish our own salvation. Nor can we do anything to enhance, add to, or complete the work He began on our behalf. Rather, **“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”** (Hebrews 12:1-2) But although Yahshua is both “the author and finisher of our faith,” we still have a part to play. In the time allotted to us, we are to “prepare that which everyone must eat.” That is, “laying aside the sins which so easily ensnare us,” we are to provide spiritual sustenance—truth and light—to the world we’re leaving behind. **“So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance.”** (Exodus 12:17)

- (951) *The elders of Israel are to kill the Passover Lamb. “Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Pick out and take lambs for yourselves*

according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb.” (Exodus 12:21) As a practical matter at the first Passover, Moses gathered the elders in order to pass the word of God along to the individual families they represented, and the heads of those families would have selected unblemished lambs from their own flocks. But the letter of the Torah stands: the *elders* were instructed to “pick out” and “kill the Passover lamb.” *They* were responsible for choosing who would be sacrificed to secure Israel’s salvation.

So we read the Gospel account, amazed at the utter precision of God’s word: **“Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, ‘Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?’ For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.... But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.”** (Matthew 27:15-18, 20) Yes, as required in the Torah, it was the job of the elders of Israel to choose who would be sacrificed on Passover. They chose Yahshua: the very “Lamb” whom God had sent, John had identified, and their citizens had acclaimed. Why they couldn’t see the irony in all this (and still can’t) is beyond me.

A fascinating study in contrasts is the comparison of the death of Yahshua to that of the only man ever to be declared the messiah by the elders of Israel: Simon ben Kosiba. The power of the chief priests was a thing of the past by his day, usurped by the rabbis early in the second century. The influential Rabbi Akiba declared this arrogant and brutal warlord to be the fulfillment of Balaam’s messianic prophecy: **“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.”** (Numbers 24:17) So Akiba renamed ben Kosiba “Bar Kochba,” that is, “son of a star.” To this day, Bar Kochba is the Jewish ideal of the Messiah: he came within a whisker of defeating the Romans, even taking back Jerusalem for a short time. But he did not prevail: he (and Akiba) were slain in 135. Orthodox Jews may protest, “So what? Yahshua didn’t prevail either. He too was slain by the Romans.” Good point, so it behooves us to determine what the scriptures require concerning the Messiah’s death.

It is my contention that the whole Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread scenario makes no sense unless it is meant to be a preview of a larger event, one of universal significance—the offer of salvation to all mankind through the sacrifice of the Messiah, the “Lamb of God.” Therefore, the

Messiah *must* be slain on Nisan 14. Yahshua was. Further, the location of His sacrifice must be in “the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide.” There isn’t a Jew on earth who would deny that this place is Jerusalem, and indeed, Yahshua was slain in this city—on Mount Moriah, no less. Daniel too (in 9:26) intimates that Jerusalem is the city where “Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself”—i.e., not for His own crimes. But how does this stack up against the death of Bar Kochba? He was not slain on Nisan 14, but on the 9th of Av (the same date both the first and second temples were razed, which ought to be a clue). And where did he die? Not in Jerusalem, but in Betar, some six miles to the southwest (a place not even mentioned in the Tanach). The name means “fortress” (literally, “house of the enemy”) in Aramaic. The carnage he brought upon his people was outrageous. Cassius Dio reported that 580,000 Jews were killed in Bar Kochba’s rebellion; 50 fortified cities were taken and 985 villages were destroyed. The Talmud claims that the Romans “kept on killing until their horses were submerged in blood to their nostrils,” and it reports that for seventeen years, the Romans did not allow the Jews to bury the dead of Betar. Yahshua, in contrast, lost none of His disciples in the wake of His sacrifice (see John 17:12), except for Judas, and *that* had been prophesied in Psalm 41:9.

- (952) *Yahweh will strike down whoever in the world is not protected by the blood of the Lamb. “And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. For Yahweh will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, Yahweh will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you.”* (Exodus 12:22-23) What is the price of freedom? Americans today tend to regard Abraham Lincoln as our greatest president—not because he preserved the Union (something we take for granted these days) but because he freed the slaves—prosecuting a long and bloody war to do so. Freedom is widely regarded as our most important asset—a commodity well worth fighting for. How odd it is, then, that many of the same people who venerate Lincoln today vilify Yahweh for striking down the Egyptian firstborn in order to obtain liberty for the Israelite slaves. They characterize Him as a bloody and vindictive God, a celestial bully who won’t hesitate to kill anyone who gets in His way.

The hypocrisy (and shortsightedness) of this position is stunning. Even though Egypt had no right or reason to enslave Israel in the first place, Yahweh in His patience let four centuries pass before He made a move to free them. Then He gave the Egyptians nine golden opportunities to let

His people go, before finally resorting to the angel of death. God is nothing if not patient. But patience is not the same thing as senility: Yes, Yahweh is longsuffering. He's also acutely aware of what we're doing with His earth, even if He doesn't constantly throw His weight around. There is a limit to His patience, and He has told us so in a number of different ways—one of them right here in the Passover account. In so many words, He's saying, "I will give you ample opportunity to recognize my sovereignty and provision. But if you opt not to do so, I will at some point close the door, leaving you to suffer the fate that you yourself have chosen. Count on it."

While prosecuting what was by some measures the bloodiest war ever fought by Americans, Lincoln came to realize two things: that one man's freedom does not include the right to enslave someone else, and that securing freedom is a terribly costly endeavor. Yahweh never had any illusions about these things. Bloodshed had always been the price of liberty: this had been the sad reality as far back as the Garden of Eden. Here in Egypt, the principle of substitutionary sacrifice—an innocent life, free of sin, being the ransom for a guilty one enslaved to iniquity—was reiterated. We're all guilty; we've all fallen into sin (well, some of us *jumped*)—we've become slaves to it. And not only slaves, but prisoners. We're living under the death sentence of our fallen mortality: nobody gets out of here alive. The question is, will *we ourselves* pay the penalty for having fallen short of Yahweh's standards of perfection or would we rather somebody else pay the penalty for us? On Passover, *somebody* had to die—either the firstborn son or an innocent lamb. In every family in Egypt that night, a choice was made: pay the price of freedom personally—or vicariously.

The lessons are still germane today. There is still a penalty to be paid, for we have all fallen short of God's perfect standard. And the choice remains the same: try to atone for your sins yourself, or allow Yahweh to do it for you. No amount of charity, dedication, piety, or penance will suffice. The price of redemption is blood. Always was; always will be.

- (953) *Remember what was accomplished by the Passover. "You shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which Yahweh will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of Yahweh, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.'" (Exodus 12:24-27)* If the Passover sacrifice wasn't fraught with perpetually meaningful symbolism, it is

inconceivable that Yahweh would have directed Israel to observe it forever. If we understand what the symbols mean, the significance of the act in its larger context becomes clear. The children of Israel are symbolic of believers in Yahweh, whatever our actual genetic heritage happens to be. Egypt is the world, its values and idolatrous practice. The slavery from which the people were to be delivered represents our bondage to sin. The angel of death that slew the firstborn of the Egyptians is metaphorical of the divine judgment that still looms like the sword of Damocles over a lost and unrepentant world. And the Passover lamb whose blood was smeared on the doorposts and lintels of the Israelites' dwellings is symbolic of Yahshua the Messiah, whose blood was similarly applied to a cruel Roman *stauros*, the cross of Calvary.

So in reality, what are the Israelites being instructed to tell their children about the Passover rite? They *should* be saying, "It is a picture of Yahweh's sacrifice of His own Firstborn Son, the anointed One, our Salvation—Yahshua. Yahweh shelters and protects those of us who trust and believe in Him, and He delivers us from slavery to sin in this fallen world—a world upon whom God's wrath still rests."

- (954) *Remember what was accomplished by the Feast of Unleavened Bread.* "You shall tell your son in that day, saying, 'This is done because of what Yahweh did for me when I came up from Egypt.' It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that Yahweh's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand Yahweh has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year." (Exodus 13:8-10) Just as Yahweh had instructed Israel to memorialize Passover (see Precept #953), He made a separate point out of doing the same sort of thing for the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Moses had just finished saying, "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand Yahweh brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. On this day you are going out, in the month Abib. And it shall be, when Yahweh brings you into the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service in this month. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to Yahweh. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters." (Exodus 13:3-7)

Though Passover could be seen merely as a "preparation day" for the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed immediately on its heels, different realities were to be celebrated and memorialized on each of these

two days. Whereas *Pesach* stressed Yahweh's sacrifice and the life it bought for Israel, *Chag Matzah* was to be remembered for the freedom that resulted from having been given this life, and the vehicle for the lesson is repeated no fewer than five times in this passage: *the absence of yeast in their bread*.

Bread was (and is) the foundation of the Middle Eastern diet—as ubiquitous as rice is in Asia or tortillas are in Latin America. It would be a normal part of every meal. Normally, it would be made with yeast, or leaven, which makes it “rise.” This property made leaven a handy and unmistakable metaphor for sin. Just as even a small amount of leaven added to a lump of bread dough would eventually permeate the whole loaf, permanently changing its character and altering its chemical composition, sin would permeate and transform the whole *life*. Sin, if you'll recall, is not technically bad behavior, evil deeds, or a rebellious attitude. This is a marksmanship term: it simply means “missing the target.” What is the target? Perfection. And who defines perfection? Yahweh, our Creator.

Most of us at least *try* to “hit the target” in our daily lives. We generally heed the conscience God placed within us, or even study His Word in an attempt to do the right thing. Do we succeed? Sometimes, but not always. Somewhere along the way—invariably very early in our lives—we all miss the target of moral perfection—we let just a few grams of “leaven” into our lump of life. Nobody *starts* by bombing Poland and opening concentration camps in Auschwitz. No, the first little bit of leaven is more likely to be a moment of defiance against mommy, or selfishly seizing a sibling's toy—little things, “normal” human foibles. But the leaven is now there in our lives, and there's no way to stop it from spreading, no way to turn back the clock. Why do we do these things? Why do we miss the target of perfection? Because we're not perfect. It's not in our nature to shoot straight. It's in our nature, rather, to rebel and covet. Blame it on mom and dad if you want to, or on Adam and Eve. It doesn't change the fact that *all of us* have missed the mark—we have all fallen short of God's perfect standard. We are all walking around with a nasty yeast infection, so to speak. Our sin nature is rising within us, and there's nothing we can do about it.

Or is there? Yahweh told the children of Israel to remove the leaven from their homes for the duration of the festival. That should tell us that it is possible—even necessary—to expel the sin from our lives. But how? They were instructed, in so many words, to have the leaven out of their houses *at the same time* the Passover lamb was being slain and its blood

applied to their doorposts. “Twilight” on the 14th day of Nisan was the deadline for both symbolic acts. These two things are related; they’re equivalent in effect. The sacrifice of the Lamb of God *is* what removes the sin from our lives, if we’ll apply its blood where we live. And the fact that the Feast of Unleavened Bread lasts for seven days tells us that this removal of sin is permanent.

- (955) *Judgment is coming.* **“And it came to pass at midnight that Yahweh struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead.”** (Exodus 12:29-30) What happened to those whose households were not indemnified by the blood of the Passover Lamb? The firstborn offspring of every man and beast was slain. God could, of course, have slain *every* Egyptian, but His purpose was not to destroy the world, but save it. By slaying only the firstborn, He was revealing His plan: His own Firstborn would be sacrificed in order that others might live and walk in freedom. Yes, there was a “great cry in Egypt” when their loss was discovered—but no lesser a cry went up in heaven, I’m thinking, when Yahweh purposely turned His back on His only begotten Son for our benefit.

Those unwilling to see the big picture may criticize Yahweh for killing all those innocent people. But we should be aware of two things, related to each other. First, none of them were in fact innocent. All have sinned. It is through God’s mercy alone that we are not consumed on any given day. Second: in truth, they were *already* dead—that is, they were mortal, subject to corruption. Their physical deaths were inevitable. Even if God had left them alone, none of them would have lived another century. Yahweh merely moved up the schedule a little, reminding us that we never really know how much time we have left to walk the earth. As so often happens in scripture, physical death here is “merely” a metaphor for spiritual death. (I know, it didn’t seem particularly “metaphorical” at the time.) The point is that the blood of the Lamb of God, Yahshua, is necessary to shield us from spiritual death, just as the blood of the Passover lambs protected the Israelites from physical death.

Though at this late date the symbolism explaining the tenth plague is patently obvious, only one reason for sending it is actually stated in scripture: **“that you [Pharaoh] may know that Yahweh does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.”** (Exodus 11:7) God distinguishes between His own children and those of the world. Moses (in 11:5) told Pharaoh

quite plainly what would happen if (actually, *when*) he refused to free Israel following the ninth plague. In the same way, Yahweh wants today's world to know what awaits those who reject His word. If the blood of the Lamb of God has not covered their sins, then their own blood will be required of them. Judgment awaits. It's only a matter of time. If you are not set apart for Yahweh's honor, then you will be set aside from His presence.

- (956) *Only God's people can celebrate God's salvation. "And Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, 'This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it.'"* (Exodus 12:43) It may seem obvious when you say it out loud, but it's not. Salvation is only for those who choose to be saved, who agree to the terms of Yahweh's Plan, who become part of His family. The word for "foreigner" is *ben nekar*, literally, "son of a foreign land," that is, one who has no ties of kinship—someone who is not of your own family. You need not be *born into* the family, however: that is, you don't have to be a physical descendant of Israel to be saved through Yahshua's blood (nor, for that matter, does being born an Israelite necessarily assure your status as a child of Yahweh. As I said, Israel is only a metaphor for familial relationship with God). It is possible to become a member of a family through adoption (and if my own family experience is any indication, it's even more likely—nine of my eleven children were adopted).

Moses explains how a "foreigner" might be transformed into a family member: **"But every man's servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it. A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat it. In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to Yahweh, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you."** (Exodus 12:44-49) Requirement #1: He must "dwell with you." That is, the stranger must share the son's reverence and affection for his Father Yahweh. He cannot merely be a sojourner or hireling, one whose involvement is contrived, coincidental or commercial. #2: He must "want to keep the Passover"—he must desire to be covered and protected by the atoning blood of the Lamb, meaning that he must also trust in its efficacy. #3: He must be circumcised, meaning that he must agree to be permanently separated from his sin through a process involving blood and pain. #4: He must change his identity. He will no longer be a "foreigner" or "stranger," but will be "as a native of the land." That is a picture of being adopted into the family of Yahweh. One thing is perfectly clear in

all of this: either you are, or you aren't, a family member. There is no middle ground, no gray area. It's a question of holiness—being set apart. Family members keep the Passover. Strangers do not.

- (957) *Do not break the bones of the Passover Lamb. "...nor shall you break one of its bones."* (Exodus 12:46) Crucifixion was designed to be a deterrent as much as a punishment. The idea wasn't merely to kill the victim, but to do it in such a way as to prolong the public suffering of execution as long as possible. There are cases on record where the victim remained alive for as long as three days—in extreme agony the whole time. In order to stay alive, the victim had to get enough air into his lungs for one more breath. But since his shoulders had been ripped out of their sockets, the only way he could do this was to push up with his legs—an extremely painful proposition if his feet were nailed to the *stauros*—the upright pole. If he did, he might live for another twenty seconds, after which he would have to start the process all over again. The agony was as much mental as it was physical: the victim was forced to choose the moment of his death. The message was, *you see what excruciating pain I am enduring for my misdeeds. I beg you, don't do anything that will put you in this position. Obey those in power or they will do this to you.*

The rule, then, was to prolong the torture. But there were exceptions to the rule. We read of one in John's Gospel: **"Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs."** (John 19:31-33) The Feast of Unleavened Bread was always a "high" Sabbath, a specially designated holy day, no matter what day of the week the 15th of Nisan fell upon in any given year. Apparently it didn't bother the Jewish religious leaders too much if a criminal remained hanging on a cross over a regular weekly Sabbath. But this was different. Because of the special nature of the approaching festival, the chief priests went to the Procurator Pilate and requested that he get those three criminals off their crosses and into their graves before the holiday began, at sunset. Pilate didn't have a problem granting a request that didn't cost him anything, so he sent soldiers to break the legs of the victims—the point being that if they couldn't push up with their legs, they would suffocate almost immediately.

We aren't told if the chief priests knew that breaking Yahshua's legs would disqualify Him as being God's Passover Lamb. I get the feeling that they didn't really understand the ramifications of what they were doing.

But the fact remains, Yahweh had declared that *not one* of the Lamb's bones were to be broken—a prophecy borne out with precision. By the way, the prophecy was repeated by David: **“He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken.”** (Psalm 34:20) By the time the soldiers came to carry out Pilate's orders, the Messiah was already dead: problem solved.

John's notice that **“That Sabbath was a high day”** helps to confirm the April 1, 33 A.D. date of the Passover crucifixion (making Daniel's prophecy—see Precept #949—precisely accurate). John didn't say that “the high day was a Sabbath,” as if to remind us that there were special rules for the seven *miqra'ey* of Yahweh. No, he was telling us that the high day, the first day of Feast of Unleavened Bread, actually fell on a natural Sabbath, a Saturday, that year—which it did in 33. It is not without significance that of the four *miqra'ey* already fulfilled in history, the only one required by the Torah to be an actual Sabbath (and not merely a Sabbath *observance*—a *sabbaton*) did indeed fall on the last day of the week in the year of its definitive fulfillment. It's just one more of a thousand tiny details that conspire to identify Yahshua of Nazareth as the Messiah, Yahweh's promised Anointed One.

- (958) *The firstborn belong to Yahweh.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine.’”** (Exodus 13:1-2) To “consecrate” is to set apart for someone's honor or use—especially to deity. And the “firstborn,” though it technically indicates the initial offspring born to a set a parents, in this context it means something more: that which is preeminent, honored, the beginning of one's strength, the focus of one's hopes. The firstborn was always an “only child” at some point—seen as being special. After all, there was no guarantee of any more offspring. Therefore, to “consecrate to Yahweh all the firstborn” was to express your complete trust in Him—to place the entire future of your family and nation, your financial prospects and political posterity, in God's care, without reservation and without doubt.

The converse is also true: to withhold the consecration of your firstborn to Yahweh is to declare your mistrust of and independence from Him. This is precisely what Egypt had done, which explains Yahweh's selection of the firstborn of Egypt, both man and beast, as the focus of the Death Angel's grim attentions. But the metaphor goes even deeper: the innocent lambs the Israelites were told to sacrifice, though not necessarily “firstborn” themselves, prophetically represented Yahweh's “Firstborn” Son, Yahshua—as He phrased it in John 3:16, “His *only* begotten Son.”

This explains why Yahweh limited the sacrificial firstborn function to males: **"The males shall be Yahweh's."** (Exodus 13:12)

There were three categories of firstborn males: men, clean animals, and unclean animals (their status as clean or unclean being determined by the Levitical dietary laws). (1) Clean domestic animals that opened the womb (sheep, oxen, and goats) were to be sacrificed. (2) Unclean animals (horses, camels, donkeys, etc.) were to be either exchanged for lambs or "wasted." The principle was that if they weren't redeemed, no benefit was to be derived from their life. The animal who was both unclean and unredeemed could not be sacrificed, provide nourishment or resources, or perform labor benefiting mankind. He was to be of no value to anyone, not even to himself. **"But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck."** This, of course, is the perfect picture of us. It doesn't matter how "good" a specimen we might be: we're still unclean. We'll either be exchanged for the Lamb of God who has died in our place, or we'll die for our own uncleanness. And finally (3), **"All the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem."** (Exodus 13:13) firstborn men were to be bought back. They were not to be slain as sacrifices, but were to be redeemed (their lives were exchanged for innocent lambs) and then substituted for Levites, who would henceforth be the unique "property" of Yahweh. (This fact proves that the consecration of the "firstborn" was symbolic of a larger truth: it wasn't the actual firstborn son God was interested in—only what, *or Who*, he represented.)

Once again, the Israelites are told that Yahweh's instructions are there to elicit questions from their children. He knows these things look counterintuitive. That's the whole point. The kids are *supposed* to look at all this and ask, "Why, Daddy?" **"So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' that you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand Yahweh brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that Yahweh killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to Yahweh all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.' It shall be as a sign on your hand and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand Yahweh brought us out of Egypt."** (Exodus 13:14-16) Let us once more paraphrase this according to the symbols God has revealed. He's saying, for those of us who have ears to hear it, "Yahweh did a great and wonderful thing when He called us out of the world, away from our slavery to sin. The false god of this world did not want to let us go. All of his plans depended on keeping us in submission and servitude. The world's death grip upon us was broken only by the love of Yahweh. To

obtain our freedom He invested the most precious thing there was—His own firstborn Son, Yahshua—who defeated our adversary’s hopes and aspirations on the day of our release from bondage. So now we consecrate our firstborn males to Yahweh in homage and gratitude for what He did to free us from our sin. Everything we do and think should demonstrate our understanding of the power of God and our appreciation of His love.”

- (959) *Our survival depends on a tree that Yahweh shows us.* **“So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’ So he cried out to Yahweh, and Yahweh showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet.”** (Exodus 15:22-25) It is said that we can live three minutes without air, three days without water, or three weeks without food. At this point in the life of Israel, Yahweh had only recently provided air for the Israelites to breathe by opening a path through the Red Sea, while Pharaoh’s army had perished in presumption: their three minutes without air were up. You can’t live long without the breath of life (read: Spirit) that God provides. We’ll discuss going without food a bit later. For now, let’s talk about our need for water.

They were three days in, and the Israelites were already at the end of their rope. They couldn’t go another day without water before folks began dying, and they knew it. I for one am willing to cut the ex-slaves a little slack here. Yes, they had seen the power of God over and over again at this point, but it had been manifested only in the selective destruction of their enemies. They knew their God could send plagues and kill people, but could He, and *would He*, also do miracles of provision? ’Cause, that’s what it was going to take, and making things is a whole lot harder than destroying them. Now that they were rid of the Egyptians, they found that they still had a deadly enemy stalking them—their own human mortality. Their big mistake was complaining against Moses, as if *he* were providing the miracles. They should have cried out to Yahweh, but they were new to this whole freedom thing. I honestly don’t think it even occurred to them. We, on the other hand, have no excuse. Do we complain against our national leaders when things go wrong? Incessantly. But why in the world would we assume that they have any real power or wisdom, or exert any actual control over world events? What makes us think they can solve our problems? Only Yahweh can do that. We should be taking the matter up with Him.

“*Marah*” is a play on words. *Marah* (or *mar*: Strong’s #4751) is an adjective that means bitter—having an astringent, pungent, or disagreeable taste; or being poisonous—noxious or deadly. Thus *mar nephesh*, literally “bitter of soul,” means discontented, in a state of unhappiness or mental distress. But there is another *Marah* in Hebrew (Strong’s #4785, spelled the same way). It’s a verb that means to be rebellious against or disobedient toward someone. So in one word, Moses named the place after the foul taste of the water *and* the subsequent rebellion and discontent of the people—something that must taste pretty foul to Yahweh.

The history of this incident is relatively straightforward. **“So he cried out to Yahweh, and Yahweh showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet.”** What we have to ask ourselves is, “Why is this in scripture? Is it meaningful, symbolic, or prophetic?” Since throwing a tree into a fetid pond isn’t normally efficacious in making its waters potable, I’d have to guess that God was trying to tell us something. And indeed, the imagery appears elsewhere in scripture, informing us as to what Yahweh wanted us to understand.

There are two elements, the water and the tree. Of the former, Yahshua Himself promised, **“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”** The phrase “living water” was a common euphemism for fresh, flowing water, the way someone might describe a gushing spring or mountain brook. John explains what this living water consisted of: **“But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”** (John 7:37-39) Is water symbolic of the Holy Spirit, then? Not exactly. It’s more a metaphor of what God’s Spirit would do in and for a believer. The prophet Isaiah clarifies the subject for us: **“Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; For YAH, Yahweh, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation. Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”** (Isaiah 12:2-3) All three times the word “salvation” is used here, the Hebrew word actually identifies the Messiah—by name. The word is *yāshuw`ah*—that is, “Yahshua.” So what is the prophet saying? (1) God is Yahshua, in whom we can have confidence; (2) Yahweh, who is his strength and song, has *become* Yahshua. (Note that Yahweh is also referred to as Yah—the shortened form of the divine name used forty-nine times in the Tanach, though transliterated properly in most English versions only once—here.) And (3) believers (“you”) will draw water from the wells of Yahshua. What water? John already told us: the living water is the Holy Spirit living within us. The bottom line is that “water” is

symbolic of *salvation*—personified in Yahshua the Messiah and witnessed within us by the indwelling Spirit of God.

Okay, then. What is the “tree,” without which the salvation we seek is only a bitter and unfulfilled promise? If you think about it for a nanosecond, it becomes perfectly obvious. Let’s begin with the function of this tree: **“If a man [Actually, that’s “if man....” The article is missing in the Hebrew] has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.”**

(Deuteronomy 21:22-23) We’re being told that if (in truth, *when*) mankind does something worthy of our collective death penalty (and our goose was cooked in that regard in the Garden of Eden), and a man is hanged on a tree (Hebrew: *ets*, the same word used in Exodus 15:25) to pay for that crime (as was Yahshua on Calvary), then his body is not to be left hanging there overnight. The Romans, of course, left victims hanging on crosses overnight all the time. The land was well and truly defiled. But Yahshua’s corpse would not be among those polluting the place that Yahweh our God had chosen to make His name abide. As we saw in Precept #957, there was a rush to make sure Yahshua was dead and down from His “tree” before the Feast of Unleavened Bread began at Passover sunset, though I can pretty much guarantee that the chief priests didn’t comprehend the ramifications of Deuteronomy 21. Yahshua the Messiah was “accursed” by God for our sakes, because of our sins. But even in death, He did not defile the Land, but cleansed it.

Let us, then, put the pieces together. The “tree” is the cross of Christ—the *stauros* or upright pole pointing the way toward heaven. Hundreds of people were crucified over the years, however. So as with Moses, Yahweh has gone out of His way to show us precisely which “tree” He’s talking about. The “water” into which the tree is thrown is the potential for the salvation of mankind, personified by Yahshua and achieved through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This water is “bitter”—that is, it remains unavailable for our needs—*until and unless* the cross enters it. Yahshua’s death is what makes the prospect of our salvation sweet and life-giving. Without it, the promise of salvation would have been nothing but a poisonous myth, a bitter fraud. Those who today wish to drink the water of life while despising the tree of sacrifice are making a fatal error.

- (960) *To obtain salvation, strike the rock. “And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you*

there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." (Exodus 17:5-6) So, the next time the Israelites found themselves in a place with no water, they trusted Yahweh to provide for their needs, and wisely entreated Moses to intercede for them, right? No, sorry. Israel apparently had a learning disability. They blamed Moses *again*, this time threatening to stone him. Sigh. Funny thing, though: if they *had* stoned him, they *would have* died of thirst out there in the desert.

It turns out that there was a reason—a prophetic object lesson—for which Yahweh had led them into a dry place. It wasn't that He wanted them to suffer; He merely wanted them (and us) to learn. We've discovered that water is Yahweh's metaphor for salvation. So what did He instruct Moses to do in order to deliver the life-giving fluid to His people? Mo was told to walk up to a big rock outcropping and strike it with his shepherd's rod—the same rod (perhaps better translated "staff") that he had used to demonstrate Yahweh's power to Pharaoh. Significantly, the same word (*mateh*) is used to describe a staff of governance—a scepter, so to speak—in Psalm 110:2 **"Yahweh shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!"** We've therefore established that the authority of God was to be exercised in bringing water—salvation—to the people.

And what about the rock that was to be struck? Is this symbolic of something? (Would I ask if it weren't?) Here we have scripture to interpret scripture. First, we read in the Psalms, **"Truly my soul silently waits for God. From Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved."** (Psalm 62:1-2) "Rock" here is the same word used in our Exodus passage (*tsur*), and "Salvation" is once again *yâshuw`ah*—that is, "Yahshua." Not only is salvation *from* God, Salvation *is* God. Then, Paul writes of the Israelites and their Rock: **"All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."** (I Corinthians 10:3-4) There can be no doubt or confusion: the rock Moses was instructed to strike symbolized Yahshua the Messiah, who was struck down for our transgressions.

So are we to crucify Christ anew every time we fall into sin, or does Yahweh have something else in mind? Read on...

- (961) *To obtain salvation, speak to the rock. "Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.' So Moses took the rod from before Yahweh as He commanded*

him.” (Numbers 20:7-9) Here we go again. Another dry place, another rock, another thirsty, angry mob. Was Moses told to give the rock a whack again, like before? The record goes on to explain that that’s exactly what he did—he let his anger and frustration get the better of him, and he hit the rock with his rod, *twice*. But in so doing, Moses made Yahweh very angry at him, for he had goofed up the object lesson He wanted to teach us.

No, this time he was instructed to *speak* to the rock. That Hebrew word is *dabar*, which the *Dictionary of Biblical Languages* defines, “speak, tell, say, i.e., speak or talk in verbal communication, with a possible focus on the aloud-sounds and content of verbalization.” It goes on to note, “Context in English allows for many different translation words as one fine-tunes the meaning; here are some possible translation options: address, announce, argue, ask, boast, command, complain, declare, decree, describe, direct, discuss, encourage, explain, foretell, give opinion, instruct, invite, mention, name, order, plead, pray, preach, predict, proclaim, promise, propose, recite, repeat, reply, report, say, sing, speak, state, talk, teach, tell, threaten, urge, utter.”

If our communication with God is characterized by lapsing into a mode of obsequious piety, a fawning, phony, hyper-religious exhibition in which we inexplicably shift into seventeenth century English and suppress all human feeling while telling God what we think He wants to hear, then we’ve missed the point of “speaking to the rock.” Sure, we should always converse with Yahweh respectfully, but He *wants us* to tell Him what’s on our minds, vent our feelings, express our concerns, get it off our chests. You’re thirsty? *Talk to Him*. You think life isn’t fair? *Talk to Him*. You don’t understand what He wants from you? *Talk to Him*. You think you’re not good enough to ask Him for a favor, for forgiveness, for provision, or even for a miracle? Believe me, He knows this already. Yet His instructions stand: *Talk to Him*. Speak to the Rock.

Oh, and by the way, don’t forget to listen to what He says in reply.

- (962) *God provides to each one according to his need. “This is the thing which Yahweh has commanded: ‘Let every man gather it [the manna] according to each one’s need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent.’”* (Exodus 16:16) As He had with air and water, Yahweh also miraculously provided food for the Israelite hordes. We should not be surprised to learn that this process began in exactly the same way—with the faithless and angry masses complaining about God’s apparent shortsightedness and questioning Moses’ sanity. I’m not suggesting that *we* should use this approach, you understand. Though Yahweh delivered the people, He was clearly disappointed at their

denseness, their seeming inability to connect the dots. Let's see: "God freed us from bondage... and then He has saved us from our pursuing enemies... and then He delivered us from death by thirst... *but now (sob!) it looks like we're all gonna die from starvation!*" Oh really? It would transpire that all but two people out of this 600,000-man mob would die of *stupidity*, but not a single soul would succumb to hunger. There's a lesson in there somewhere.

Here's what happened: **"And the children of Israel said to [Moses and Aaron], 'Oh, that we had died by the hand of Yahweh in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'"** In other words, "Slavery wasn't so bad. It had it's perks. At least we were getting abused on a full stomach. You guys aren't just incompetent, you're evil: you *meant* for us to die out here." At this point, I would have sent 'em back to Egypt with my sincere apologies. Good thing I'm not God. Yahweh calmly mused, "Okay, folks, you've recognized your need, and you've realized you can't meet it in your own strength. Good; we're finally getting somewhere. I'm now going to meet that need—just as I'll meet the need it was designed to teach you about: your *spiritual* emptiness." **"Then Yahweh said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you.'"** (Exodus 16:3-4) It's no coincidence that the word for "heaven," (*shamayim*) can mean either the atmospheric sky, the starry heavens, or the abode of God. For just as the "bread from heaven," manna, would sustain their physical bodies, Yahweh would send "bread from heaven" of another kind to nourish their souls—Yahshua the Messiah.

The physical bread was described like this: **"And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground. So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, 'This is the bread which Yahweh has given you to eat.'"** (Exodus 16:14-15) The spiritual "bread" was also described in scripture, and it's pretty clear that the Israelites didn't know what *that* was, either. Yahshua Himself explained the connection: **"Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father [the same One who gave you the manna] gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.... I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.'"** (John 6:32-35) The bread of God is Yahshua, Yahweh manifested in human form.

“This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day....”

When Yahweh provided manna in the wilderness, the people had to *believe* in it—on Yahweh’s word alone, they had to go out and pick it up off the ground, trusting that it was edible and would sustain life, even though it wasn’t the kind of bread they were used to. Manna wouldn’t keep them alive forever, however. Doing that would be the function of the *real* “bread from heaven,” Yahshua. **“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”** (John 6:40, 47-51) He did that very thing on Passover, 33 A.D. The Living Bread—Yahshua—is available to all of us. As with the manna, He is what we need to sustain life, if only we will follow God’s instructions and assimilate Him into our being—if only we will *believe*.

- (963) *God’s provision is a test.* **“And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.”** (Exodus 16:4-5) Yahweh didn’t force the people to gather manna, and He didn’t tell them what to make out of it. He did, however, insist that if they were going to avail themselves of His provision, they must do it *His way* in two significant respects. First, they must gather only enough for one day at a time. They couldn’t horde it, for if they did, it would breed worms and begin to stink. The lesson was that He could be trusted to take care of their needs day by day. A God who is self-existent (Yahweh), who stresses His *being* over any other attribute, will be absolutely consistent in His love and capability: His promises can be counted upon. (Contrast this to a hypothetical “god” whose character is best described by the title “the Lord.” If his whole agenda were to dominate us and make us submit to him, then our needs would always be subsidiary to his whims—making provision a matter of convenience, not promise.)

Second, the Israelites were informed that the manna would not appear on the seventh day, the Sabbath. They were therefore to gather enough for two days on the sixth day of each week. It’s as if Yahweh is telling them, “This is no mere natural phenomenon—a fortunate and timely confluence of environmental forces from which you happen to be in a position to benefit—like seasonal rainfall or the flooding of the Nile. No, it is a direct, ongoing miracle, one I will be performing on your behalf for as long as

you need it. If you'll just trust Me, if you'll obey Me in this one simple matter, you'll never go hungry." Many followed His instructions, but some did not: **"Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And Yahweh said to Moses, 'How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For Yahweh has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.'** So the people rested on the seventh day." (Exodus 16:27-30)

Since the manna was a metaphor for the Messiah's bodily advent, the true "bread from heaven," what are we to deduce from this six-plus-one pattern Yahweh has employed—for the umpteenth time? I have become convinced that the pattern is a timeline. If Psalm 90:4 and II Peter 3:8 have any literal validity (declaring that one day really *is* a thousand years in God's plan) then the pattern of sevens is telling us that His schedule of redemption—the time from Adam's sin to the conclusion of the Messiah's glorious earthly reign—will run *seven thousand years*. But within that span of time, Yahweh's provision of grace through faith in Yahshua (the availability of manna, so to speak) will be offered only during the first *six* thousand years. Why? Because during the seventh Millennium, King Yahshua will walk among us. Faith will become redundant, for His glorious presence will for all practical purposes destroy the element of "reasonable doubt" harbored by those who don't wish to acknowledge God in this age. Rebellion will still be possible, of course, just as it was possible to go out and look for manna on the Sabbath. But the element of trusting obedience, of acting in faith, will have evaporated. During the Millennium, if you want to defy God, you'll have to do it to His face.

Here's the rub. Any way you slice it, our six thousand years have just about run their course. The sun is nearing the western horizon on our sixth day. The opportunity to go out and gather manna—to act upon our trust in Yahweh's promise of salvation—is almost over. And there are multitudes who have not availed themselves of Yahweh's ongoing miracle. Perhaps we should remind them of the lateness of the hour.

Messianic Messages III: Do This In Remembrance of Me

For the past two chapters, we've been examining incidents in the Torah where the Messiah's mission was foretold and defined through circumstances, dress rehearsals, types, and prophecies. I'd like to now return to the realm of what Yahweh actually said to do—His instructions. As we have seen throughout this book, some of these seem to be logical rules any wise bronze age ruler might have imposed upon his people in order to ensure that his society ran smoothly. Others, however, have no apparent basis in human interaction. They don't promote peace, enhance public safety, advance health or welfare, ensure fairness, impose a moral standard, or even benefit the temporal ruler. Rather, they fall into the category of "religious law," ritual statutes for which there is no clear reason other than "God said to do this." We need to recognize that both categories of instruction were given by the same God, to the same people, with the same overarching purpose. Our study has led us (or at least *me*) to the conclusion that the fundamental reason behind *everything* in the Torah—from the mundane to the esoteric—explains something about Yahweh's plan for reconciling mankind back to Himself. He wished to make it possible for us to regain what was lost when our forebears sinned in the Garden of Eden: our innocence. Why? Because that innocence is a necessary component of our fellowship with Him—of communication, of a shared love—for evil cannot dwell in the presence of a holy God any more than darkness can exist in the presence of light. And sharing a loving relationship with mankind is the only thing Yahweh really wants.

Figuring out what God wants from us is the stated goal of every religion on earth, though the various solutions men have proposed betray an abysmal lack of understanding of the character and capability of the supreme deity. Think about it: what's a gift-giver's worst nightmare? It's shopping for the "man who has everything," right? If he wants it, he already has it. And if he doesn't own it already, it's probably because he'd really rather not have it. (I mean, who really *wants* a pouncing black panther table lamp with a clock in its stomach?) An infinitely stickier problem, then, is "shopping" for the Creator of the universe, the One who is holy and complete within Himself.

Virtually every religion assumes that its God wants to be appeased in some way. The Muslim bows toward Mecca five times a day (though their scriptures reveal that Allah really wanted *fifty* prostrations—pointed toward *Jerusalem*). The Jew tries to observe 613 customs and traditions he believes are derived from the

Torah (though as we have seen, half of them bear no more than a passing resemblance to the original Instructions). The Buddhist, reasoning that God must want as many prayers as possible, spins a prayer wheel *automating* the tedious process of talking to a deity with whom he can't relate—and doesn't really want to. The Hindu, believing that all living things contain the divine, meditates, chants mantras, or prepares offerings of food for his favorite god among millions of possible deities—leaving the rest of them ignored and unattended. The Catholic goes to mass and pays *the church* (not God) for the privilege of lighting candles to expedite prayer or extricate his loved ones from purgatory, while performing contrived penances to pay for his own sins—in effect declaring the sacrifice of Christ to be inadequate. The typical Protestant, meanwhile, figures he's done God a big favor by showing up at church for an hour a week, enduring a sermon and dropping a few dollars into the offering plate. We've come a long, long way from the *serious* religions of the past, where one might have been expected to mutilate himself or sacrifice his own child as a burnt offering. We cringe at the prospect of a god who would want such things, of course. But ask yourself: what kind of God would be so shallow as to allow Himself to be placated with the cheap, silly things *we* offer Him these days.

All of these “religious” things—the serious and the silly—are calculated to appease God, to buy Him off. They are not designed as avenues for relationship with Him, but rather as bribes, inducements to persuade Him to either bestow some kind of boon on the worshipper or simply go away and leave him alone—to do him no harm. Religion, in short, is the world's biggest protection racket. The stated goals may differ, but the underlying motivation is always the same: giving the “worshipper,” what he wants. He might be looking for a paradise populated by seventy sex-starved virgins, a place dripping with low hanging fruit and rivers of wine. He might seek nirvana, a state of nothingness where the pain and turmoil of life can no longer trouble him. He might be angling for reincarnation as somebody richer or more privileged than he is now. His motivation might simply be escape from the fiery damnation in hell his guilty conscience tells him he's earned. Man calculates that if he can figure out what God wants—and then give it to Him—then God will reciprocate in kind. But why do men assume the Creator of the universe would be the least bit interested in the pitiful things they do to appease Him? The God I know can spend His mornings building things like the Orion Nebula if He wants to. What makes us think He'll be awed with our devotion if we decorate a cow with flowers, circumambulate the Ka'aba, or manipulate a rosary? I submit to you that the religious things we do “for God” are nothing but “black panther table lamps” to Him. He'd rather we didn't bother. *Really*.

But then we look at the Torah, and we see hundreds of directives that, for all we can tell, look even less logical than mindlessly mumbling multiple “hail Marys” or fasting all day during Ramadan. These precepts were entrusted

exclusively to one nation, Israel—who were then told to separate themselves from the surrounding peoples. In some cases these outsiders were specifically prohibited from joining Israel in the performance of these rites. The Jews are inexplicably told to do things like refraining from work on Saturday, cutting off the foreskins of the penises of their male babies on the eighth day of life, killing their firstborn male animals, removing the yeast from their homes for one week each year, making a gold-covered wooden box with statues of angels on top, putting it in a special room in a tent where nobody is allowed to go except for one guy, one day a year, who sprinkles it with the blood of a dead goat—and hundreds of other things that on the surface seem far goofier than anything the Muslims or Hindus do. It all begs the question: *what's the difference?* One prophet says that Yahweh handed down a body of law. Another prophet insists that *Allah* handed down a body of law—a code diametrically opposed to the first. Moses, Buddha, Muhammad, Confucius, and a plethora of popes, princes, preachers, pundits, potentates, and presidents all claim to have the solution to life's puzzle: *follow me and prosper*. Who, if anybody, can we trust? Each one seems crazier than the next.

But there *is* a difference, though it's one you can only see if you're looking for it—if you're willing to take Yahweh at His word. This fundamental distinction is that all of the world's religions describe and dictate what they think *man must do for God* in order to appease and placate Him—and that includes Judaism's skewed take on the Torah. But in reality, the Torah describes the converse: *what God is doing for man*. This is what makes it absolutely unique among documents of faith. It also explains why its precepts seem so incredibly pointless if taken as mere “religious duties.” Even the word “precept” clues us in that there is more to the Torah than its face value. “Precept” is from the Latin *praeceptum*, based on a verb meaning literally “to take beforehand.” The instruction goes *before* the truth we are to derive from it. The law is not the lesson any more than a map is the actual place. The signpost is not the destination. The religious precepts of Muhammad, Buddha, or Zoroaster are but maps and signposts to cities that do not exist—handed down by “gods” who are figments of their prophets' imaginations. But the precepts of Moses are the words of the true and living God. Yes, the Torah is only a map, but the city toward which it guides us is *real*: a place of shelter, peace, and salvation. That “city” is Yahshua the Messiah.

After his resurrection from the dead, Yahshua explained it all to a couple of very confused disciples: **“Then He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”** (Luke 24:25-27) He pointed out that the writings of Moses—the precepts of the Torah—all concern, predict, and define the coming Anointed One. They are therefore not to

be seen as religious duties, rites and rituals devoid of (or independent from) prophetic significance. They are not things Israel was supposed to do to appease Yahweh, to keep Him “off their backs,” even though obedience promised blessing. They were, rather, symbols on the roadmap of heaven, indications of a thousand specific ways in which Yahweh was in the process of reconciling mankind to Himself—saving the world from its sin.

Paul, too, spoke of the fundamental difference between religious observance and a personal, living relationship with Yahshua. **“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”** Philosophy and tradition (which together define religion) are to be avoided, he says, because they are deceitful products of the fallen world. We are made complete, perfect, and whole not through the “principles of the world,” but through the One in Whom Yahweh dwells among us in bodily form: King Yahshua. **“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead....”** As if to make my point for me, Paul now refers to two ostensibly “religious” rites, one from the Torah and the other from New Covenant practice. Both of these have deep symbolic significance, though they make no practical sense whatsoever. Circumcision, he says, is a picture of “putting off the sins of the flesh,” and water baptism (literally, immersion) is symbolic of being buried and raised again with Christ—both things done as expressions of our faith in the promises of God. Neither of these things are of any value intrinsically; they only become significant in the context of what they represent—the shadow being evidence of the object that casts it.

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross....” I realize that this “handwriting of requirements against us” sounds at first blush like he might be talking about the Torah. But in the Greek, it’s clear that this is an erroneous deduction. The word (*cheirographon*) means “a document or note of indebtedness, written with one’s own hand, as proof of obligation.” It’s an I.O.U., so to speak. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* notes, “The reference is to God’s pronouncement that the note which testifies against us is cancelled. The phrase is obviously based on a thought which is common in Judaism, namely, that God keeps an account of man’s debt.... The point of the metaphor of the note of indebtedness is to underline the preceding statement ‘forgiven you all trespasses.’ God has forgiven sins. He has cancelled the note of indebtedness by taking it and

fixing it to the cross of Christ.” In other words, that which God has nailed to the cross is *not* the Law—rather, it’s the debt we owe, the penalty for our sin: death itself.

Paul now comes to the point: **“Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”** (Colossians 2:8-17) He’s saying that *the way* we observe the symbolic precepts of the Torah is of little consequence, for they are but shadows of the substantial reality—Yahshua. His work is finished, and He has triumphed over the forces of evil (though admittedly, the physical reality hasn’t quite caught up with the spiritual). Since the destination has already been reached, it matters little whether we thought of the journey in terms of kilometers or miles or hours traveled. He makes it clear that both the “practical” and “religious” sides of the Torah point toward the Messiah, each in its own way. The things we are instructed to do are symbolic of what Yahweh was doing for us. They’re a reflection of His work, His grace, His love. We do them not to placate God, but to prepare for His presence.

The examples Paul cites will serve to demonstrate the principle. (1) *Food and drink*. If we follow the Torah’s dietary guidelines, we are showing our trust in Yahweh’s knowledge of what’s good or bad for us—even if we don’t know anything about nutrition or intestinal parasites. Spiritually, this is a picture of being discerning, assimilating into our souls only what is clean, pure, and undefiled—ultimately the body and blood of Yahshua. (2) *Festivals*. If we observe the seven “holy convocations,” the appointments with Yahweh He described in such detail in the Torah, we will see His entire plan of redemption at a glance. They’re sort of a “highlight reel” of the Big Game. But if we substitute Passover with Easter, Tabernacles with Christmas, and dismiss the rest of the *miqra’ey* as “mere Jewish tradition,” we will have a poor grasp indeed on Yahweh’s *modus operandi*. (3) *New moons*. If we don’t make a point of periodically renewing our relationship with Yahweh—as the Israelites were instructed to do at each new moon—we run the risk of growing stale and complacent in our relationship with our God. And (4) *Sabbaths*. If we refuse to honor the institution of the Sabbath, we will rob ourselves not only of the weekly reminder that Yahweh’s plan of redemption is on a schedule, we will miss the point that in the end, we cannot work to achieve our own salvation. God’s work is finished, and all of *our* works—whether done for God’s glory or our own—will also be complete by sundown on the sixth day, that is, the close of the sixth millennium since Adam’s fall. That day is rapidly approaching, but it need not catch us unaware like a thief in the night.

These and a thousand other things have been commanded by Yahweh, not so that we might appease Him, but so that He might teach us about His love and provision. They're not for His benefit, but for ours. Every precept reflects God's light from a slightly different angle, like the facets on a diamond. And like any precious jewel, the Torah is beautiful only if it is seen in the pure light of day. It is of no use to anyone if kept in a box.

SYMBOLIC INFORMATION

(964) *The price of a dead slave is thirty shekels of silver. "One guilty of fatal criminal negligence in the case of a slave must pay the owner the price of a slave. If the ox gores a male or female servant, he shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned."* (Exodus 21:32) Why would Yahweh bother setting the price for a slave who had been slain through gross criminal negligence? Because He Himself was planning to become just such a slave on our behalf. Paul explains: **"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."** (Philippians 2:5-8) Paul's point is that for God Himself to willingly set aside His glory to take the form of a man, He had to abase Himself far beyond what the ordinary slave, having lost his status as a free man, would have endured. We can't begin to imagine the degree of sacrifice such an act would have required, for Yahshua relinquished more than mere power. He gave up actual dimensions (at least one: time) in order to enter our world. It's not like a handsome prince in a fairy tale becoming a toad; it's more like the prince becoming a *picture* of a toad!

Yahshua, then, volunteered to become the slave who was destined to be "gored to death by an out-of-control ox." This ox, of course, was the Roman Empire (goaded into action by the Jewish Sanhedrin, as I pointed out in Precept #884), and its criminally negligent "owner" was the human race—us. And just as the Torah required, a price had to be paid for the life of this "slave," thirty silver shekels: **"Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?' And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him."** (Matthew 26:14-16) At this late date, I am no longer amazed at the incredible accuracy of the Torah's smallest details—or that they all point directly and unequivocally to Christ. What leaves me speechless is that the chief priests and the scribes—who prided themselves on knowing their scriptures inside and

out—couldn't see that their own actions, time and time again, conspired to identify Yahshua of Nazareth as the Messiah.

- (965) *God's sacrifice had to be sinless.* **"You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning."** (Exodus 23:18) A grain offering accompanied every blood sacrifice, though its form (bread, cakes, etc.) was not specified. As we have seen, bread, the staple of the Hebrew diet, would normally have been leavened; that is, yeast would have been employed to make the dough rise in the baking process. But Yahweh symbolically associated leaven with sin in His instructions for the Feast of Unleavened Bread—a small amount of it being enough to chemically alter the entire loaf, changing it from within, just like sin does to our lives. So leaven was never to be a component of the bread offered up with a blood sacrifice, for both the bread and the animal were metaphorical of the Messiah in their own ways. Grain was symbolic of God's provision, and its being made into bread fine tuned the picture to represent His provision of the body of Christ (see I Corinthians 11:24).

This, of course, tacitly requires that the Messiah Himself would have to be sinless, which explains why the scribes and Pharisees worked so hard trying (unsuccessfully) to prove that He was a sinner. If He *had* been sinful, they would have been entirely justified in having Him executed, for He claimed to be One with God. Their standard of "sinlessness," however, was slavish adherence to the impenetrable maze of rules their own "oral law" had extracted from the Torah—not the Torah itself. It would have been physically impossible to observe the requirements of their oral law, for two reasons. First, it is internally inconsistent, at war with itself: its tenets were entirely dependent upon which rabbinical school one chose to follow. Second, it wasn't codified at this point: the Mishnah (the previously forbidden written form of the oral law) wouldn't be created for another century or so. But according to the standards of the Torah, Yahshua—though enduring the same temptations we all face—remained faultless before God. **"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."** (Hebrews 4:14-15) As Paul, one of the foremost Torah scholars of his day, noted, **"He [Yahweh] made Him who knew no sin [Yahshua] to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** (II Corinthians 5:21) I guess that explains why both "sin" and the "sin offering" that covers it are expressed with the same Hebrew word: *chata't*.

And what was that about “the fat of My sacrifice not remaining until morning”? The fat of the sacrifice was Yahweh’s portion. It was to be completely consumed on the altar—a picture of the judgment Yahshua endured. The context of this passage is the observance of the three times each year all Israelite males were to keep the holy appointments of Yahweh—the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the spring (including Passover and Firstfruits), the Feast of Weeks in the early summer, and the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall. We are reminded that the Messiah’s “judgment,” that is, His sojourn in sheol while he endured the wrath of God on our behalf, took place on the Feast of Unleavened Bread. By the morning of the next day (Sunday, the Feast of Firstfruits), Yahshua had already resurrected Himself from the dead. **“Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.... The angel answered and said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.’”** (Matthew 28:1, 5-6) The “fat of God’s sacrifice” had not “remained until morning.” It had not continued under judgment, constrained by death, one moment longer than the Torah had required.

- (966) *Aaron and his sons represent the Messiah and His followers.* **“And Aaron and his sons you shall bring to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall wash them with water. Then you shall take the garments, put the tunic on Aaron, and the robe of the ephod, the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the intricately woven band of the ephod. You shall put the turban on his head, and put the holy crown on the turban. And you shall take the anointing oil, pour it on his head, and anoint him. Then you shall bring his sons and put tunics on them. And you shall gird them with sashes, Aaron and his sons, and put the hats on them. The priesthood shall be theirs for a perpetual statute. So you shall consecrate Aaron and his sons.”** (Exodus 29:4-9) We’ve previously discussed the symbology of the various garments and rituals associated with the Hebrew priesthood, so I won’t repeat the particulars. I’d just like to note that there are priesthods, and then there is *Yahweh’s* priesthood. Every religion on earth has a “priesthood” of some sort—a class of people who claim to intercede between the god of that religion and the common people. They station themselves as gatekeepers—interpreters of the divine psyche. Whether called “priests” or something else, these individuals enjoy power, prestige, and privilege because of their exalted position as go-betweens with the deity *du jour*. Even godless religions like atheistic secular humanism have their priests—the media stars, business moguls, politicians, and professors who shape public perception and mold society to honor ungod of their own manufacture: pleasure, profit, pride, political

correctness, or popular technology. Not surprisingly, these priesthoods are seen as positions to be aspired to, worked for, and coveted.

But in Yahweh's world, you can't join the priesthood. You can't aspire to it or educate yourself to become part of it. You have to be *born* into it. Under the Torah, to become a priest, one must be a male heir of Aaron. In fact, that qualification defines you as a priest, whether you meant to be one or not. The reason God set it up this way was that following His instructions isn't really a religion. A religion is something you *join*; a relationship is something you *experience*. A religion is something you *do*; a relationship is something you *are*. His priests aren't there to rule the people, but to serve them. They aren't tasked with controlling access to God, but merely enabling it.

More to the point, the Hebrew priesthood was—like virtually everything else in the Torah—designed to point toward a greater reality, something beyond its own temporal existence. The anointed High Priest was a transparent picture of the coming Messiah, and his sons are obviously those who “follow Him.” Like the priests of Israel who served in the tabernacle, we who follow Christ must be “born” into the job—that is, we must be “born from above” in His Spirit, as He explained in John 3. Moses was told to consecrate (make holy, set apart) Aaron and his sons for the work of the priesthood. Those who were not consecrated in this way were forbidden to serve in the capacity of a priest of Yahweh. In the same way, one who is not born from above in Yahweh's Spirit is intrinsically incapable of serving God or mankind in any meaningful way—and by “meaningful,” I mean in a manner that will have significance or value beyond our mortal lives.

- (967) *We must be ransomed to avoid being plagued.* “Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a ransom for himself to Yahweh, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them.’” (Exodus 30:11-12) The census to which Yahweh is referring was to be done for military purposes, males “**from twenty years old and above—all who are able to go to war in Israel.**” (Numbers 1:3) Each Israelite male (excluding Levites) who would be tasked with ridding the Land of its corrupt inhabitants was to be ransomed for half a shekel of silver—metal that would be used in the Tabernacle (See Exodus 38:27, Mitzvah #404, Precept #715).

Following God's train of symbolic thought through all of this is enough to make your head swim. The census “ransom” was not a fee or tax. It was an offering given to make a point: the Israelite soldiers were not to rely on their own strength, numbers, skill, or individual valor in

battle. Rather, Yahweh specifically said that *He* would be fighting their battles for them. His point is that self-reliance is antithetical to God-reliance. In fact, self-sufficiency is a plague that will, in the end, inflict death upon the one who does not trust Yahweh in the battles of life: we cannot save ourselves. So the soldier is “ransomed,” that is, exchanged for a nominal amount of silver. **“This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (a shekel is twenty gerahs). The half-shekel shall be an offering to Yahweh. Everyone included among those who are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering to Yahweh.”** (Exodus 30:13-14) The message is: “this half shekel is given in place of the life of the soldier/believer, for the soldier is not responsible for Israel’s welfare or victory in battle—Yahweh is.

The “value” of the individual soldier had nothing to do with this arrangement. The muscular, seasoned Special Forces type of guy didn’t pay more than the skinny, green recruit, for the simple reason that this wasn’t about what *he* could do, but rather what *God* would do for him—and through him. **“The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when you give an offering to Yahweh, to make atonement for yourselves. And you shall take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the children of Israel before Yahweh, to make atonement for yourselves.”** (Exodus 30:15-16) The offering was made *to* Yahweh, but it was to be used *for* “the service of the tabernacle,” in a manner we’ll discuss in a moment. This should be a clue to us that the plan of God is in view, for that is what the tabernacle is all about—each element of its design and ritual said something about Yahweh’s plan for our redemption. Bear in mind that “ransom” (*koper*) and “atonement” (*kapar*) are closely related words. The idea is to atone (that is, cover) by offering a substitute—often a blood sacrifice, but here a silver coin, which as we will see, is going to be pressed into service to represent the same thing.

The silver was used to make the foundation bases, the “sockets” into which the wall-planks of the tabernacle and the supports for the veil concealing the Most Holy Place would be anchored. **“And the silver from those who were numbered of the congregation was one hundred talents and one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary: a bekah for each man (that is, half a shekel, according to the shekel of the sanctuary), for everyone included in the numbering from twenty years old and above, for six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty men. And from the hundred talents of silver were cast the sockets of the sanctuary and the bases of the veil: one hundred sockets from the hundred talents, one talent for each socket.”** (Exodus 38:25-27) As I pointed out a few chapters back, the word

for “socket” (‘*eden*) is spelled the same as the word for lord or master (‘*adon*), and not by accident, I’m thinking. The symbols lead us (or at least *me*) to conclude that we are being held upright, made secure, and kept set apart from the earth by our Master, Yahshua the Messiah—and specifically by the atoning ransom (*kapar/koper*) that He provided for us by shedding His blood for us on Calvary.

- (968) *Burnt offerings predict the Messiah.* **“When any one of you brings an offering to Yahweh, you shall bring your offering of the livestock—of the herd and of the flock. If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 1:2-3) The *olah*, or “burnt offering,” was completely voluntary, an act denoting homage to Yahweh or celebrating His atonement of the worshipper’s sins. Although it was offered of one’s own free will, there were restrictions concerning *how* it was to be done. The reason, as we shall see, was that Yahshua’s death on Calvary was to be an *olah*—a voluntary sacrifice that the Messiah would make of Himself, honoring Yahweh, providing atonement and celebrating the freedom it would bring to mankind. First, it had to be a clean animal (as defined by the Mosaic dietary laws). One couldn’t offer up a snake or pig, an act of penance, a sum of money, or even one’s firstborn child. Because it was a picture of the Messiah’s self-sacrifice, this had to involve the spilling of blood: an innocent life had to be given up—its innocence represented by restricting the types of animals that could be used to those that were “clean” for dietary purposes. Yahshua would later bring this metaphor home to roost, declaring that we had to “eat His flesh” and “drink His blood”—that is, assimilate Him into our very lives—in order to be saved.

Second, the *olah* had to be performed at a specific place: at the tabernacle of meeting. **“Then he [that is, the one who brings the offering] shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. He shall kill the bull before Yahweh; and the priests, Aaron’s sons, shall bring the blood and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of meeting.”** (Leviticus 1:4-5) Although the tabernacle was portable by design, its function was eventually “set in stone” with the building of the temple, on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. The geography of the crucifixion provides remarkable confirmation of the Torah’s prophetic accuracy. The blood had to be sprinkled “all around the altar.” It would transpire that Yahshua was scourged within an inch of His life in the Tower of Antonia—only a few hundred feet from where the altar stood in the temple. Bulls or oxen were to be sacrificed on the *west* side of the altar (that is, between the altar and the door of the tabernacle, which faced east—v.3), and sheep on the *north*

side (v.11). And sure enough, the crucifixion site was *northwest* of the temple mount, at a spot now known as “Gordon’s Calvary,” a rock escarpment tucked in behind Jerusalem’s present day main bus station, a mere seven hundred paces from the temple (*not* down south at the religion-encrusted Church of the Holy Sepulcher). Here you can still see the “skull’s face” alluded to in John 19:17.

Third, just as the worshiper transferred his guilt to the sacrificial animal by placing his hand upon its head, our atonement is achieved through the transference of our sin to Yahshua. Note that the priest doesn’t slay the *olah*—that is done by the one who has brought the offering. Each of us is *personally* responsible for the death of God’s Messiah. Note also that this slaying is done “before Yahweh.” Nothing is hidden from Him.

- (969) *Grain, oil, and wine offerings must accompany every animal sacrifice.*
“When you have come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving to you, and you make an offering by fire to Yahweh, a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or in your appointed feasts, to make a sweet aroma to Yahweh, from the herd or the flock, then he who presents his offering to Yahweh shall bring a grain offering of one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of oil; and one-fourth of a hin of wine as a drink offering you shall prepare with the burnt offering or the sacrifice, for each lamb.”

(Numbers 15:2-5) The Levitical sacrifices—and there were several types (see Volume I, Chapter 12)—were never supposed to be offered up by themselves. Whenever innocent blood was shed during one of the ordained sacrificial rites, three other things had to be presented as well: grain, olive oil, and wine. This should be taken as a clue that there is more to our salvation than one guiltless Man offering Himself up as a sacrifice.

First, grain (wheat or barley) was to accompany the sacrifice. We’ll cover this element more thoroughly in the following Precept, but the central truth here is that grain represents God’s provision. More specifically, the grain given with an animal sacrifice had to be “fine flour,” that is, grain that had been crushed, ground to powder, and from which all of the hulls or chaff had been removed. In this form, the grain represented the body of the Messiah, free of worthlessness (the non-nutritive “chaff” of a mortal life as a fallen, sinful creature), and ground fine in the mill of adversity and sacrifice for the benefit of mankind. Only grain that had been subjected to this “abuse” would be suitable for our spiritual sustenance. Only a Messiah who had shed the protective “hull” of heaven would be available to nourish our souls. An “ephah” was a dry measure equivalent to .652 bushels, or about 20.9 quarts; so the “tenth of an ephah” required here was just over half a gallon, or 2.3 liters.

The title “Messiah,” of course, means “anointed.” Kings and priests were anointed with olive oil poured over the head—inaugurating and consecrating them for their roles of leadership and service. Thus we should not be surprised to find that the “fine flour” that represented the body of Christ was to be infused with oil. This oil (as would be explained in Zechariah 4) represents the Holy Spirit. Thus the metaphor comes full circle: the “oil” with which the Messiah, Yahshua, was to be anointed was, in truth, Yahweh’s Spirit. It would not merely be poured out upon Him, either, but would be “mixed” throughout His very being, shaping His character and providing His power. Since a “hin” is about a gallon and a half, making a quarter of a hin one and a half quarts or 1.2 liters, we can deduce that the fine flour was positively *goopy* with oil—permeated, saturated, *wet* with it. Yahshua wasn’t just *influenced* by the Holy Spirit; He was oozing the Spirit’s presence from every pore. This same Spirit dwells within every believer today. So why isn’t our walk as flawless as Yahshua’s was? Maybe it’s a *lubrication* problem—not enough “oil” in our lives.

The third sacrificial element was wine, which was to be poured out as an oblation upon the ground. It was, in Yahshua’s words, **“the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”**

(I Corinthians 11:25) But the blood of the lambs and goats was to be spilled upon the ground as well. Why the doubling of the symbol? I believe the answer is latent in the instruction as to *how much* wine to pour out: one quarter hin—the very same amount as the oil. The equivalence, it seems, implies a link between the blood of Christ and the Spirit that indwelt Him. We are told several times in scripture, “The life is in the blood.” Our eternal life is, in the same way, dependent upon the presence of Yahweh’s Spirit: **“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again [literally, from above].’”** (John 3:5-7)

- (970) *Grain offerings predict the Messiah.* “When anyone offers a grain offering to Yahweh, his offering shall be of fine flour. And he shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it. He shall bring it to Aaron’s sons, the priests, one of whom shall take from it his handful of fine flour and oil with all the frankincense. And the priest shall burn it as a memorial on the altar, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to Yahweh.... And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt.” (Leviticus 2:1-2, 13) We have seen that grain, bread, and even manna are representative of the body of Christ. As He Himself said, “I am the bread of life.... I am the living bread

which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh.” (John 6:48-51) “Take [this bread] and eat. This is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”

(I Corinthians 11:24) Here in Leviticus we learn that offerings of grain (which were to accompany every blood sacrifice—see Precept #969) always had to have several ingredients added to them. First, olive oil was to be poured upon the grain or the bread. This, as we saw above, is symbolic of the Spirit of God that would permeate the life of Yahshua. Second, frankincense was to be sprinkled on it. This white powder, you’ll recall, was indicative of purity through sacrifice—specifically, *our* purity achieved through *His* sacrifice. And third, every grain offering was to be seasoned with salt, a picture of preservation and flavor, as well as being a symbol of God’s promise and our acceptance: a “covenant of salt,” where two parties would exchange a bit of salt upon reaching an agreement, was like our “shaking hands on it.”

There were also some ingredients that were specifically forbidden in the grain offerings—things that might ordinarily have been part of the process of making bread. **“No grain offering which you bring to Yahweh shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey in any offering to Yahweh made by fire.”** (Leviticus 2:11) Leaven, as we have seen, is a picture of sin. The Messiah would be slain for our sins, not His own. As Daniel’s stunning 70-weeks prophecy puts it, He would be “cut off, but not for Himself.” Or as Isaiah wrote, **“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”** (Isaiah 53:4-5) So leaven was not to be part of the grain offering, for Yahshua did not sin—ever.

Honey was also forbidden as an added ingredient. As I noted in Mitzvah #477, “Honey is pleasant and sweet, a delight to the taste. Christ’s sacrifice, by contrast, was marked by sorrow and bitterness, pain and suffering. Honey was not descriptive of Messiah’s first-century mission, so it was not to be offered.” A telling description of Israel’s privileged position as Yahweh’s chosen people includes this detail: **“You were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil.”** (Ezekiel 16:13) Fine flour was obtained by crushing the kernels of grain, and oil was produced by crushing ripe olives—both things predictive of the pain the Messiah would endure. But honey, the sweetness of a pleasant mortal life (obtained, it must be noted, by stealing it from those unclean creatures who had labored to make it) would not be the Messiah’s lot. He would instead be called a “Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.”

There were also instructions with Messianic significance concerning the manner in which the grain offering was to be prepared. **“If you offer a grain offering of your firstfruits to Yahweh, you shall offer for the grain offering of your firstfruits green heads of grain roasted on the fire, grain beaten from full heads. And you shall put oil on it, and lay frankincense on it. It is a grain offering. Then the priest shall burn the memorial portion: part of its beaten grain and part of its oil, with all the frankincense, as an offering made by fire to Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 2:14-16) Specifically in reference to the offering of firstfruits—a representative of the expected harvest—we see that the “green” or barely ripe grain was to be “beaten from full heads.” “Green” is the Hebrew *abib*, the original name for the month of Nisan—the first month in the Jewish calendar. It indicates grain (in this case, barley) that is ripe, but is still soft. Normally, the barley crop would be harvested in the second month, Iyar, when it had been given time to mature and dry out a bit in the field. Thus the firstfruits offering was made when the barley was at the peak of freshness—when it held the maximum promise for a bountiful harvest. Yahshua, of course, is the antitype for the firstfruits offering. His resurrection from the dead on the Feast of Firstfruits is a harbinger, a promise, of *our* coming harvest, the resurrection of the living and dead saints of His *ekklesia*. This harvest is indicated in Yahweh’s “appointment book” by the Feast of Trumpets, scheduled for the first day of the month of Tishri, in the autumn.

Note that the just-ripe grain offering of firstfruits was to be “beaten from full heads.” No chaff (the worthless, non-nutritive part of the grain) was to be offered up by fire (read: judgment) to Yahweh. Instead, the barley kernel was to be extricated from its husk by beating or threshing—a violent process predictive of the abuse our Savior would suffer on our behalf on His way to crucifixion. Note also that only part of the firstfruits grain, and only part of the oil, were to be consumed in the fire. This tells us that although God subjected His own Spirit-filled Son to wrath for our sakes, He did not consume *Himself* in the process: God is not dead. However, *all* of the frankincense was to be used, telling us that our purity was achieved *completely* through His sacrifice—there is nothing that must be added later, nothing for us to do to finish God’s work, no works, alms, or penance. As Yahshua declared, “It is finished.”

- (971) *The Torah’s dietary rules predict the Messiah.* **“You shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creeps; nor shall you make yourselves unclean with them, lest you be defiled by them. For I am Yahweh your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am Yahweh who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God.**

You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy." (Leviticus 11:43-45) There were certain animals that the Israelites were not only not to eat, they weren't even supposed to touch their dead carcasses. But note what Yahweh *doesn't* say here. He doesn't talk about health hazards, warning of tummy aches or skin rashes; He doesn't speak of intestinal parasites and food-borne toxins. Rather, Yahweh appeals—no fewer than six times in these three short verses—to a *spiritual* principle: *set yourselves apart from the world because I, Yahweh your God, am set apart from My creation*. What we put into our bodies is analogous to what we put into our souls. If eating toxic meat is bad for our bodies, then thinking evil thoughts and idolizing worthless things is bad for our souls. **"This is the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten."** (Leviticus 11:46-47) We are to distinguish, discriminate, *decide* what to put into our lives, choosing the good from among a plethora of spiritual possibilities.

Yahweh uses two words to describe the negative result of association (dietary or otherwise) with these "unclean creatures," neither of them having anything in particular to do with health or nutrition. First, "abominable" is from the verb *shaqats*, meaning to "detest, abhor, disdain, i.e., have a strong emotional response of rejection and antipathy...feel contempt or scorn for those seen as bad, dirty, or without value; defile." (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*) Yahweh is saying that this is how He will feel about the one who ingests "creeping things." The second word is "unclean," also translated "defiled." *Tame'* is a Hebrew verb meaning "to be or become unclean, become impure—sexually, religiously, or ceremonially; to defile oneself or be defiled by idolatry; to profane God's name." (*Strong's*)

On the other hand, there are a few words in this passage that speak of the positive aspects of avoiding these "creeping things" and other dietary no-noes. The first is translated "consecrate." *Qadash* is a verb meaning: "to be sacred, consecrated, i.e., dedicate to service and loyalty to God...to set apart, consecrate, dedicate, regard as holy; be holy, i.e., be in a state of having superior moral qualities, with behavior which is positively unique and pure, in contrast to other corrupt standards." "Be holy," uses an adjective based on the same root: *qadowsh* means "holy, i.e., pertaining to being unique and pure in the sense of superior moral qualities and possessing certain essential divine qualities in contrast with what is human; sacred, consecrated, i.e., pertaining to what is dedicated in service to God." The word translated "clean" is *tahowr*, an adjective that means,

“clean, i.e., pertaining to being ceremonially or ritually clean: pure, i.e., pertaining to the feature of an object not having foreign particles or impurities; flawless, perfect, i.e., without defect of any kind and so free from moral impurity.” (*DBL-SD*)

There is clearly more to this than eating some things and avoiding others. God has drawn a very clear contrast between the two worlds, the clean and the unclean. Eating “clean” animals for food is a metaphor for being set apart for Yahweh’s glory and purpose, dedicated to His honor and friendship, remaining untainted by the world’s moral standards and unimpressed with its wiles—which the believer understands to be dangerous, if not toxic. But eating “unclean” animals like pigs, shellfish, carrion birds, rodents, insects, and reptiles, is symbolic of buying into the world’s system—staying behind in Egypt, so to speak—where Satan’s spiritual substitutes promise exotic experiences, dangerous delights, or merely plausibly palatable counterfeits for the believer’s diet: the bread of life, living water, and a main course of the Lamb of God. The devil would have you believe that what God offers you is bland and boring. I find *nothing* boring about Yahshua. But spicy satanic concoctions like sin salad, pride pâté, and Babylon bouillabaisse leave a lost and hungry world sick to their souls and even closer to spiritual starvation than they were before they sat down to eat. How can we make the world understand that the antidote to poison is not more poison?

- (972) *Tsitzits are to function as reminders of God’s covenant.* **“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of Yahweh and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. I am Yahweh your God.’”** (Numbers 15:37-41) We looked at this concept way back in Mitzvah #18, so I’ll try not to repeat myself too much. These tassels were to be worn by everybody in Israel, throughout their generations. Doing this would achieve several goals. First, when you saw someone else wearing the tsitzit, you’d know immediately that he (or she) was an Israelite—a brother or sister and a fellow member of Yahweh’s “chosen family.” Many of God’s Instructions distinguished between how Jews were to relate to each other from how they were to deal with the world, so this was a practical, reliable, low tech means of identifying your own people—sort of like wearing gang colors would be today in some inner city neighborhoods, only without all the crime and bloodshed.

Second, they were meant to be a distraction from the daily grind of life. One's "life" in the Promised Land might seem to consist of waging war, tending sheep, planting wheat, making bread, or raising children. But this, Yahweh says, is an illusion—it's not your life, only your job. Your life, He says, is defined by the covenant—Israel's special relationship with Yahweh. Twice in this passage, among hundreds of repetitions in the Torah, He reminds Israel to "do all My commandments." At this late date, we have come to recognize that Yahweh's commandments, *all* of them, are there to teach Israel (and through them, the gentiles as well) about His plan for our redemption. Every precept, one way or another, makes a statement about how God was going to save mankind, where He would do it, when, why, or through Whom.

So the third objective of wearing the tsitzit was to instruct Israel about their coming Redeemer. We are not told what the fibers were suppose to be made of. I believe this is purposeful, for if Yahweh had specified wool, we might have read "works" into the precept; and if linen, we would have seen grace—imputed righteousness. As it is, the source of the tassel's thread is left unspecified, as if to say, "The tsitzit represents all of Israel, for better or worse, obedient or not, faithful or not, holy or not." All of the fibers except one would have been white or off-white in color, no matter what they were made of. And that one exception was the key to understanding the significance of the tsitzit.

That single thread was to be dyed blue—the color of authority, of royalty, of extravagant expenditure. The message was messianic: there would be *One* among Israel who had the right to rule. This one thread was made of the same stuff as the rest of them. That is, the Messiah would be human, an Israelite. But its color set it apart (read: *made it holy*) from all the rest, indicating that this One would be special, an eternal King. This blue fiber was, however, bound into a bundle with all the other threads—they all lived in the same Land, walked through the same world.

Blue dye, however, also implied another message: somebody had to get dirty—He had to become unclean. In order to obtain this precious fluid, the *tekelet* blue or purple dye, someone had to handle a ritually defiling animal—the carcass of a dead shellfish, the *murex* snail. Someone would have to sacrifice himself—take the people's impurity upon himself—in order that the Torah might be kept. That "Someone" would turn out to be the same One represented by the blue thread of royalty: Yahshua the Messiah.

- (973) *The Messiah's mother must bring both a burnt offering and a sin offering. "When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter, [a*

new mother] shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then he shall offer it before Yahweh, and make atonement for her.”

(Leviticus 12:6-7) Catholics have been known to jump to the conclusion that because Christ was sinless, his earthly mother must have been sinless as well—making Mary an object of veneration, if not outright worship. But the Torah proves that notion to be false. Luke 2:24 reports that Mary brought “a pair of turtledoves or young pigeons” in order to fulfill the Law. That is, she took the “poor mother’s” option, as described in the Torah: **“If she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons—one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering.”** (Leviticus 12:8) The sin offering (*chata't*) was required **“if a person sins unintentionally [i.e., through error] against any of the commandments of Yahweh in anything which ought to be done, and does any of them.”** (Leviticus 4:2) If she had been sinless, then no sin offering would have been needed. By bringing one of the turtle doves, Mary was acknowledging her guilt before God—something we all need to do.

But what about the “burnt offering,” (*olah*) the sacrifice of homage and atonement that was also required? The Torah allowed, and Mary brought, a turtledove or young pigeon (see Leviticus 1:14 and 12:8), though a lamb was clearly preferred. Funny thing: although Mary didn’t know it, she *had* brought a “Lamb” to her purification ceremony: her own son, Yahshua. As John the Baptist would announce some thirty years later, **“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”** (John 1:29)

- (974) *Bring two goats to describe the Messiah’s role in our atonement. “And Aaron shall bring the goat on which Yahweh’s lot fell, and offer it as a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before Yahweh, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness.”* (Leviticus 16:9-10) On *Yom Kippurim*, the Day of Atonement, two goats were used to achieve the purpose of the *miqra*, which was stated thus: **“This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you. For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 16:29-30) We have previously discussed several key *Yom Kippurim* concepts. (1) “Affliction of the soul” (Hebrew *’anah*), entails *both* repentance, contrition, and acknowledgment of guilt, *and* answering and responding to Yahweh—together achieving personal reconciliation, the formation and development of a familial relationship with Him. (2) The Priest who makes atonement for us is ultimately Yahshua—the only worthy intercessor between God

and man. And (3) the point of atonement (literally, “covering”—a concept related to the paying of a ransom) is to cleanse us from our sins, for becoming clean and pure is the only way we can stand before Yahweh, whose very presence is as lethal to evil as light is to darkness.

Here, I’d like to focus on another aspect of the *miqra*: the relationship between the goats, our sin, and the mission of the Messiah. Two goats were used because two different things happened to our sin through the sacrifice of Yahshua. One of them—designated as a sin offering (*chata’t*) for all of the people—was slain, and its blood was sprinkled by the Priest upon the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place. If the events I reported in *Future History*—Chapter 13: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem”—are true (and I believe they are, though I can’t prove it), then the blood of *Yahshua Himself*, our ultimate sin offering, was literally, physically sprinkled upon the mercy seat, which was secreted away in a limestone cave directly beneath the crucifixion site. The Messiah’s blood was thus, by God’s own definition, efficacious in atoning for the sins of the people—“native” Israelites and believing gentile “strangers” alike.

But Yahshua, having sacrificed His life on our behalf, didn’t remain dead. So the second goat is recruited to reenact the mission of the living Messiah: the physical removal of our sins far away from us. This goat, having had the sins of the people symbolically transferred to him through the placing of the High Priest’s hands upon his head, was led into the wilderness, where no man dwells. Thus “all our iniquities” and “all our transgressions, concerning all our sins” (v.21) are not only covered over and paid for; they’re also separated from us by physical distance: they need never again trouble us. If you think about it, this becoming set apart from our sins is the very *definition* of holiness.

THE “RED HEIFER”

- (975) *Slaughter a red heifer outside the camp. “Now Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘This is the ordinance of the law which Yahweh has commanded, saying: Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which a yoke has never come. You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, that he may take it outside the camp, and it shall be slaughtered before him; and Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, and sprinkle some of its blood seven times directly in front of the tabernacle of meeting.’”* (Numbers 19:1-4) We discussed the Ordinance of the Red Heifer at length in Volume I, Chapter 15, but the subject bears a second look. Remember what I said about “religious law” in the Torah making no sense if there’s no prophetic or symbolic meaning to it? This one is as

goofy as they get, if Yahweh isn't trying to tell us something. In fact, the Jewish sages assert that this is the only thing in the Torah that stumped Solomon.

The *purpose* of the law, however, is perfectly straightforward. Short version: the idea is to have a supply of ritually-prepared “water of purification” on hand at all times. This water, mixed with the ashes of the burned carcass of the red heifer and some other things, was to be sprinkled upon anyone who had touched a dead body. Without this sprinkling, they would remain ritually impure—a bad thing, for it disqualified the unclean person from participating in temple worship. If the ritual was pointless and self-serving, of course, one could merely shrug, yawn, and go on with his life. But if Yahweh meant for the rite to teach us about a spiritual reality, then its execution becomes a vitally important symbolic gesture. The lesson is: don't let death touch you without being cleansed.

But there's a rub. Actually, several of them. First, as usual, the rite can't be performed without a sanctuary and priesthood in place—things that haven't been available to the Jews for almost two thousand years now. Worse, this dog is chasing its tail. That is, the rabbis have declared that because Moses wrote, **“the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of Yahweh,”** (v. 20) the *sanctuary itself* is defiled, as is the priesthood (or, they would be, if they existed). They therefore must be cleansed—through the Red Heifer ordinance. But that would require that the temple and priesthood were already available—and in a state of ritual purity. In other words, both the chicken *and* the egg must come first.

Then there's the little problem of obtaining a kosher red heifer. According to the rabbinical rules (which are far more restrictive than Yahweh's) the heifer must be *all* red—no more than three hairs on its entire hide can be another color; it must be born in Israel; and it must be in its third year. Since the time of Moses, only nine such animals have been seen in the Land—none within the last two millennia. However, prime examples of Red Angus cows that could potentially meet the Levitical *and* rabbinical requirements are readily available in America. So Christian cattle breeder Clyde Lott began working with Orthodox rabbis in Israel in the 1990s to produce the perfect Israeli red heifer. It's only a matter of time before they succeed. And *that* will bring Israel one step closer to returning in faith to Yahweh their God, for it would clear one more hurdle in the Jewish mind concerning the rebuilding of the temple—something that's explicitly predicted in Scripture to happen during the Last Days.

So let's review the Torah's actual, literal requirements so far. (1) The red heifer must be presented by the people of Israel. (2) It must be without blemish or defect (something Clyde Lott interprets to mean, "a good-milking, sweetly disposed, handsomely constructed animal—basically, a twenty-first-century, high-tech cow"). (3) It must never have labored as a working draft animal; (4) It is to be delivered to "Eleazar the priest." Since Aaron was still alive when the law was delivered, his son Eleazar represents his successors down through the generations. Through tradition and DNA analysis, the Jews presume to have identified the priestly line, the Cohenim—technically, males whose genetic profile features the CMH, or "Cohen Modal Haplotype." (5) The Heifer is to be slaughtered "outside the camp," which today I'd take to mean outside the old city of Jerusalem. The traditional site for this is on the Mount of Olives (though something tells me Yahweh had another hill in mind: Moriah). (6) The priest is to take some of the blood and sprinkle it "seven times directly in front of the tabernacle of meeting." This, of course is a problem if no tabernacle or temple stands, but perhaps once the *site* of the future temple is determined, the ritual could be carried out as the Jewish faithful endeavor to once again draw near to their God.

These six points find symbolic fulfillment in the sacrifice of Christ, if only we'll bother to look for them. (1) Yahshua was an Israelite, from the tribe of Judah and the royal line of David. (2) Though fully human, He was without sin. (3) The cleansing of mankind came not through His life and work, but through His death and resurrection. (4) Yahshua stood condemned for our sins before Caiaphas the High Priest, a descendant of Aaron. (5) He was crucified outside the city walls of Jerusalem. And (6) Christ's blood was not only "sprinkled" near the temple during a horrific pre-crucifixion beating in the tower of Antonia (situated next to the temple mount), there is also evidence that His blood was literally splattered onto the ark of the covenant, secreted away for hundreds of years in a cavern directly beneath the execution site (as I mentioned above: see *Future History*, Chapter 13). All of this and much more suggests—dare I say, *proves*—that Yahshua the Messiah, crucified outside Jerusalem's Damascus Gate on Nisan 14, 33 A.D., was *Himself* the Red Heifer whose body would provide purification for mankind, allowing us to overcome the stigma of death.

- (976) *Burn the heifer with cedar, hyssop, and scarlet. "Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight: its hide, its flesh, its blood, and its offal shall be burned. And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet, and cast them into the midst of the fire burning the heifer."* (Numbers 19:5-6) Fire represents judgment, the separation of the worthy from the worthless. It's the same

symbol as that presented by the altar that stood outside the tabernacle: Yahshua was enduring our judgment for us, allowing us to stand as worthy and righteous children before God. The fact that the entire heifer was to be burned made this akin to an *olah*, the “burnt offering” of Leviticus that was a voluntary sacrifice made in homage to Yahweh, for atonement, or in celebration. And note that this was to be done “in the sight” of Eleazar. He (representing the followers of Christ our High Priest) was to be a witness of the sacrifice—just like we are to be.

But in the case of the red heifer, there are three other elements that were to be burned along with the animal. Cedar wood speaks of pride, majesty, or great achievement. Hyssop is basically the opposite concept, denoting humility and insignificance. Thus the ashes that would indemnify us from the curse of death would contain not only Yahshua’s atoning body and blood, but also both our pride and insignificance. It’s as if to say, the whole range of our human experience must be sacrificed, as Christ’s body was sacrificed, in order to be made clean and pure. That is, neither our greatest work nor our most self-effacing humility is of any value in the face of death, unless they’re accompanied by the sacrifice of Yahshua. And the scarlet? Scarlet represents our sin, as well as the blood required to atone for it. We must be willing to consign it to the flame of judgment if we wish to be purified.

- (977) *Realize that the process of cleansing makes us unclean. “Then the priest shall wash his clothes, he shall bathe in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp; the priest shall be unclean until evening. And the one who burns it shall wash his clothes in water, bathe in water, and shall be unclean until evening. Then a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and store them outside the camp in a clean place.... And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until evening. It shall be a statute forever to the children of Israel and to the stranger who dwells among them.”* (Numbers 19:7-10) If this seems counterintuitive, it may help to sort out who is assigned to do what in the ordinance of the red heifer. The High Priest (the original being Aaron, and the prophetic antitype being Yahshua) is involved only in handing over to his son Eleazar the heifer that’s been brought to him by the people. (The heifer, of course, is also prophetic of the purifying work of Christ.) Eleazar, being Aaron’s son and follower, is symbolic of us as believers. He is to sprinkle the blood before the tabernacle and then supervise another man as he burns the red heifer to ash with the cedar, hyssop, and scarlet. Since the tabernacle is metaphorical of the Plan of God for our salvation, sprinkling the blood of Christ before it would seem to indicate making sure that the Messiah’s blood and the Plan of God are associated—connected—in the minds of those watching.

And the man who actually burns the carcass of the red heifer? He, I believe, represents anyone who finds himself being taught and guided by “Eleazar,” the believers of the world. We’re thus being given a picture of the Great Commission: we (Eleazar) are to go into all the world and preach the gospel (i.e., sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice before the tabernacle) to every creature (represented by the man tasked with burning the red heifer). A third man then gathers the ashes and stores them in a clean place outside the camp (i.e., a place in the world but not tainted by its values and practices). This man, I believe, represents those of us who are specifically tasked by God to transmit His truth, the good news of our indemnification against the curse of death, to succeeding generations. These three are involved in making the ashes of the red heifer available for use. There is also a fourth person in the cleansing process—the one who mixes and sprinkles the water of purification upon the defiled subject (see Precept #980). All of these people are rendered temporarily unclean through the performance of their roles. But all of them, like the one to whom they minister, will be cleansed in the end.

Some of us, of course, find ourselves included in several of the symbolic groups involved in the ordinance of the red heifer. Thus we should not be surprised to see that the consequences of carrying out this ordinance—and the remedy—are the same for everyone involved. We all find ourselves rendered unclean by walking through the world. And what is the cure for this defilement? It’s a three-step process. (1) We are to wash our clothing. What we wear is metaphorical of our status before God—how He sees us. Are we butt naked, or wearing fig leaf aprons or tunics of skin? Are we wearing the scratchy wool of works-based religion, or the brilliant white linen of grace—of imputed righteousness? In any case, we aren’t called to monastic isolation. We are told to go into all the world as witnesses of God’s love. As we walk through the world as mortal believers, it’s inevitable that we’ll brush up against things that make us unclean. But we aren’t to stay that way: we are to wash our garments.

(2) Next, we are to bathe. This is the same basic picture as that presented by the bronze laver standing between the altar of sacrifice and the tabernacle, carried through to the rite of water baptism as a picture of joining Christ in death to our old life and arising in life anew in Him. The water, in the end, is the Word of God, conveyed by His Spirit dwelling within us. It is Yahweh’s truth that makes us clean.

(3) Lastly (and this is the tough one for us, if we consider it carefully) we are to wait until sunset—a pretty clear euphemism for physical death. In other words, the process of purification won’t be fully accomplished as

long as we're still walking about in our mortal carcasses. But death (or rapture, if that happens to occur first) will free us from the bondage of these sinful bodies, making our cleansing complete.

- (978) *Trust the ashes of the red heifer to purify from sin, cleansing the stigma of death.* **"And [the ashes] shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for the water of purification; it is for purifying from sin.... He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean. Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of Yahweh. That person shall be cut off from Israel. He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness is still on him."** (Numbers 19:9, 11-13) Mixed with water (see Precept #980), the ashes became the "active ingredient," so to speak, in the "water of purification" mixture that was to be sprinkled upon anyone who had come into contact with a dead body—defined here as "sin." Although there was a straightforward and relatively simple remedy for having been defiled in this way, God attached dire symbolic significance to contact with death—going so far as to declare that one who did not purify himself as prescribed would be "cut off from Israel," that is, excluded from the household of faith. This, in Yahweh's view, is serious stuff.

But as usual, it's not terribly "practical." I mean, there's no particular antiseptic value in sprinkling someone who has been exposed to germs with water that has cow ashes dissolved in it. If God had instructed the subject to do only as the red heifer preparation team had done—washing their clothes and their bodies, and then waiting until the sun went down—there might be some scientific logic to this. But the death-toucher was not told to do these things until the very end of the process. Let's face it: getting splashed a couple of times with muddy water never made *anything* clean or pure. Yahweh has left us with no alternative but to look for symbolic meaning to the ordinance. And in truth, it's not all that hard to see, this side of Calvary.

First, there are the ingredients of the "water of purification." The ashes are made from the burning of a red heifer, which, given the breeding stock Israel had been using ever since the days of Jacob (see Genesis 30-32), turned out to be an exceedingly rare genetic anomaly. As I said, only nine such heifers have ever been used for this purpose, none of them within the last two thousand years. The point is that the Messiah's advent is not an everyday occurrence, but He's definitely worth waiting for—the central

ingredient in God's plan for the indemnification of death. Also in the ash mixture were cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet—together symbolic of the human condition that must be surrendered to Yahweh if we are to overcome our mortality (see Mitzvah #574 and Precept #976). Finally, the water must be “flowing,” (literally, “living”) a clear reference to the Word of God.

Next, let's examine the timing. The defiled person was to have himself sprinkled with the water of purification on the third day and the seventh day after his contact with the dead body. In Yahweh's prophetic timetable, when did death occur? On Passover—the very day Yahshua would sacrifice His life on our behalf. The third day, then, would fall on the third *miqra*, the Feast of Firstfruits—prophetic of the resurrection of Christ from the tomb, a preview of our own impending reawakenings. The seventh day, likewise, is prophetic of Yahweh's timetable—the proverbial “day of rest” that follows the six-day “work week.” At their core, then, the schedule of the days of sprinkling with the water of purification symbolize—they *personify*—the life made available to us through Yahshua's sacrifice. If we refuse to trust in the efficacy of the resurrection, and if we despise the life we can enjoy under Christ's loving rule, then we will find ourselves unclean forever—cut off from God's people.

- (979) *Be aware that death surrounds us.* **“This is the law when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who are in the tent shall be unclean seven days; and every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, is unclean. Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.”** (Numbers 19:14-16) Here we see that we need not be in physical contact with death in order to be tainted by its curse. Merely being in an enclosed space with it—in its sphere of influence—is enough to defile us. In the light of modern microbiology, we can now see the practical wisdom of this precept: germs are dangerous, even if we can't see them. Worse, infections can travel from dead bodies to living ones under the right (i.e., *wrong*) circumstances. What's not so easy to grasp is the parallel spiritual connotation.

As you'll recall from Numbers 19:9, the death from which the ashes of the red heifer cleanse us is characterized as “sin.” Paul would point out the same connection—and the same cure. **“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Romans 6:23) What, then, is the spiritual equivalent of being found “in a tent” with a dead body? I believe what we have here is a not-so-subtle picture of the prevailing religion of a given place and time. It's your cultural environment. If you lived in the

Roman empire during Paul's lifetime, it would have been paganism; in Renaissance Europe it would have been Catholicism; in the Middle East, Islam; in America (until recently) Protestant Christianity. Of course, one need not paint with such a broad brush: our immediate neighborhoods can have a profound effect on our attitudes and preconceptions when it comes to our relationship with God. Someone who grew up in an Irish Catholic neighborhood in Boston might see things quite differently than the average guy from Dallas does, or a San Franciscan might. These are the "tents" in which we find ourselves, and from what I've seen, most of them have dead bodies lying around stinking up the place. And what about touching corpses in the "open field"? When society is in upheaval or when cultural influences are in a state of flux, it's even harder to remain undefiled, for the "graves" of our religious traditions are hidden, lurking, for all we know, like land mines underfoot. Insofar as religion obfuscates the love of Yahweh, it is both dead and deadly. The point: even children of Yahweh need cleansing as we walk through our lives. We are all in need of the purifying work of Yahshua the Messiah.

- (980) *Mix the ashes of the red heifer with running water. "And for an unclean person they shall take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, and running water shall be put on them in a vessel."* (Numbers 19:17)

Here's the scenario. The ashes of the red heifer (burned along with the cedar, hyssop and scarlet) had been obtained and stored for future use. Then someone who had come in contact with a corpse would present himself or herself to a ritually clean person who would then pour running water into a vessel containing some of the ashes and administer the mixture as we'll see in the next precept.

To give you a feel for the numbers here, in a nation of a million souls (and Israel was bigger than that when it left Egypt), normal attrition would account for over 14,000 deaths per year, or about forty per day on average—each one requiring *at least* one person to become unclean under the law. If the nation were at war, the number of people requiring cleansing would run much higher, for Canaanite and Philistine corpses killed in battle would defile you just like your octogenarian grandfather's did. Because the sprinkling rituals were to be performed twice per person, on the third and seventh days, we must double that number: over eighty souls a day needed to be attended to. In other words, if *the priests* had been exclusively tasked with carrying out this ordinance they would have been busy with it all day, every day. As a practical matter (although it isn't spelled out), the priests, or at least the Levites, would have been entrusted with the safe keeping of the red heifer's ashes. But one didn't have to be a priest or Levite to prepare the water of purification, or sprinkle the defiled

person with it—he only had to be ritually clean. This tells me that the love and testimony of God is not the exclusive province of religious “professionals,” people who have received a special calling upon their lives. No, the simplest, most “unqualified” believer can be the implement of cleansing to those who have been touched by death. That’s why hyssop was used to sprinkle the water of purification—it’s a metaphor for humility and apparent insignificance. Any willing soul can be a powerful tool in the hands of Yahweh.

The water was to be “running” or “flowing,” that is, fresh from a spring or brook. The Hebrew word used, however, is revealing of the mind of God: it’s *chay*, usually translated “living” or “alive.” Thus we read that **“Yahweh, God, formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (the *neshamah*); and man became a living being (*chayah*).”** (Genesis 2:7) Yahweh, of all the “gods” that men worship, is the only One said to be *chay*, alive: **“There is none like You. But they are altogether dull-hearted and foolish. A wooden idol is a worthless doctrine.... But Yahweh is the true God. He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth will tremble, and the nations will not be able to endure His indignation.”** (Jeremiah 10:8, 10)

And living water? Look closely at this glimpse of Christ’s Millennial kingdom: **“In that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur. And Yahweh shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be: ‘Yahweh is one,’ and His name one.”** (Zechariah 14:8-9) This living water won’t just flow *from* the Messiah, either. In a sense, it will *be* the Messiah (in the form of the Holy Spirit living within us), as He Himself explained to the woman at the well: **“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.... Whoever drinks of this [well] water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”** (John 4:10, 13) Yahshua died for us so His Spirit might “spring up” to live within us (see John 14:17). So in the end, the water in which the ashes of the red heifer are dissolved is metaphorical of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Yahweh is the vehicle by which our salvation, through the death of Christ, is delivered, giving us eternal life.

- (981) *The one who has encountered death must be sprinkled with the water of purification on the third and seventh days. “A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, sprinkle it on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a*

grave. **The clean person shall sprinkle the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean.**” (Numbers 19:18-19) As we saw above (Precept #978) the timing of the two sprinklings of cleansing is significant. The “third day” is obviously (to those of us this side of Calvary with eyes to see it) a reference to the resurrection of the Messiah, which took place on the third day after He “touched death.” Yahshua, of course, being God incarnate and knowing His own scriptures, knew this well in advance of the fact, telling His disciples, **“The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.”** (Luke 9:22) This rising on the third day after experiencing death was prophesied in the series of annual appointments that Yahweh had instructed Israel to keep with Him throughout their generations. Death was encountered on the first *miqra*, Passover. The Feast of Firstfruits took place on the third day after this. And what was to happen on this day? **“When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before Yahweh, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.”** (Leviticus 23:10-11) The sheaf of grain, representing the Messiah’s body, was to be “waved,” that is, lifted up before Yahweh. This is clearly a picture of the resurrection. The ordinance of the red heifer is telling us that the Messiah’s resurrection—the evidence that He had overcome death—would effect our cleansing, thereby enabling us to overcome death as well.

The seventh day is, just as obviously, a reference to the Sabbath rest mandated by God. **“The feasts of Yahweh, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of Yahweh in all your dwellings.”** (Leviticus 23:2-3) All the work in the world won’t make us clean before God. In the end, we must rest in His willingness and ability to do the job on our behalf. Indeed, that job is already done: it was accomplished at the resurrection. In a very real sense, God’s *offer* of cleansing is made through the sprinkling of the water of purification on the third day, and our *acceptance* of the offer is symbolized by repeating the rite on the seventh day.

Another way of looking at this is based on the literal reality of II Peter 3:8—that with Yahweh, one day *really is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day. That is, Yahweh’s entire plan for the redemption of mankind was *designed* to take precisely 7,000 years to unfold, beginning at the need for our salvation (the fall of Adam) and ending at the conclusion of the Millennial reign of Yahshua (after which

time the eternal state will commence). The *offer* of cleansing was made during the third millennium—with the giving of the Torah, in all its prophetic glory, and the setting apart of Israel as the vehicle with which God purposed to deliver the Messiah to the world. The *acceptance* is our life as citizens of the Kingdom during the seventh Millennium, resting in Yahweh’s grace on the ultimate thousand-year Sabbath. In truth, it’s all pretty much the same metaphor, just upside down and inside out.

Resting in Yahshua’s finished work, we who have “touched death” are to finally undergo the same cleansing procedure as that required of the priest, the man who burned the red heifer, and the one who carried the ashes: **“On the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean.”** Only after the offer of purification has been made on the third day, and accepted on the seventh, can the *real* cleansing take place. As we have seen, clean clothes represent the way we are now perceived by God: as innocent. And bathing in water is immersion in Yahweh’s Spirit and truth—the “washing of water by the Word.” By the evening of the seventh day—by the end of our sojourn in time and at the beginning of the eternal state—we shall at last be totally, eternally cleansed of the curse of death.

- (982) *One not purified with the ashes of the red heifer remains defiled.* **“But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of Yahweh. The water of purification has not been sprinkled on him; he is unclean. It shall be a perpetual statute for them.”** (Numbers 19:20-21) Once again, we are confronted with the fact that Israel has been unable to literally comply with the ordinance of the red heifer for the past two thousand years—defining the *entire nation* as being “cut off from among the assembly.” The fact that the precept is symbolic—that its real meaning comes to fruition in the death, and subsequent life, of Yahshua the Messiah—doesn’t help Israel out of their collective pickle, because they (as a nation) still don’t recognize Him. So, since they can’t perform the ordinance literally, and they refuse to accept its meaning symbolically, Israel remains defiled. (I hasten to add that Israel’s national rejection of their Messiah is not a permanent condition. The events of the Tribulation will conspire to open their eyes. In fact, Israel’s restoration is the most often repeated prophetic theme in the entire Tanach.)

Note that Moses states that the unclean one shall be “cut off” because he “has defiled the sanctuary of Yahweh,” *not* because he has touched a dead body. We have established through examining scores of precepts that the sanctuary—its rituals, personnel, structure, layout, and furnishings—is

a complex metaphor for Yahweh's plan for our redemption through the sacrifice of Yahshua the Messiah. So what's being said here is quite profound: he who remains unclean (because he failed to avail himself of what the red heifer signifies—cleansing through Yahshua's sacrifice) has defiled, thwarted, and rejected the very plan of Yahweh.

Moses then reminds us that helping others to reacquire their purity can in itself be a dirty business. The participants in the great commission, though sanctified, still need to be cleansed after walking through the world. **"He who sprinkles the water of purification shall wash his clothes; and he who touches the water of purification shall be unclean until evening. Whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean; and the person who touches it shall be unclean until evening."** (Numbers 19:21-22) This, I believe, is the same picture presented by the layout of the tabernacle courtyard. After we've passed the altar (where our sins were atoned with the blood sacrifice), we still couldn't enter the tabernacle (God's Plan) without first encountering the bronze laver, washing our hands and feet—that is, cleansing our work and our walk—with the Word of God. Only then can we enter the sanctuary, see things by the light of Yahweh's truth, be nourished through His provision, offer up our petitions and thanksgiving, and finally enter into the very presence of our God.

Messianic Messages IV: God as King

Yahweh went to great lengths to tell us who His Messiah would be. He declared unambiguously that this anointed One would be a descendant of Abraham, an Israelite from the tribe of Judah, and come from the line of King David, though He would also somehow be God incarnate. He narrowed His human lineage to a highly improbable set of circumstances—met in the end by only one man that we know of. He specified three different places, *all of which* the Messiah had to “come from,” one way or another. He defined the nature of His ministry and mandated His age at its commencement. He specified the price of His betrayal, the date of His appearing, and the precise nature of the wounds He would suffer on our behalf (*and* the ones He would not). Then He told us that for “snakebite,”—the death that Satan the dragon would have us all suffer—the cure would be to look in faith to One lifted up on a pole. *That one* narrowed the field a bit.

God even gave us heavy-handed hints about the coming Messiah's personal identity, saying, “**My name is in Him.**” (Exodus 23:21) “*My name?*” That would be Yahweh—the name by which our God identified Himself to Moses at the burning bush, a name He used seven thousand times in the Tanach to identify Himself (and a name we consistently and foolishly edited out of His scriptures, replacing it with an anemic and misleading title: “The Lord.”) Another 49 times the shortened form “Yah” is used (*also* edited out of existence in most versions but correctly rendered in the NKJV in Psalm 86:4). We'll recognize “Yah” as a component of such illustrious biblical names as Nehemiah (meaning “Yahweh has comforted”), Isaiah (“Yahweh has saved”), Jeremiah (“Yahweh establishes”), Obadiah (“servant of Yahweh”), Zephaniah (“hidden of Yahweh”) and Zechariah (“Yahweh remembers”). All those names have been “anglicized,” of course. Yâsha'yah and Yirmâyah (Isaiah's and Jeremiah's *real* names) still sound strange and foreign to most of us.

The New Testament, having been penned in Koine Greek and transmitted to us through Latin, doesn't help us much. We read that Mary was told, “**Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.**” (Luke 1:31) But actually, it wasn't “Jesus” at all. It was the rather common Hebrew name Yâhowshuwa', which we usually transliterate “Joshua,” but which (since the “J” sound didn't exist in the Hebrew alphabet) I have been consistently transliterating “Yahshua.” This name in turn has two component sources, *yâshuw'ah* (meaning salvation) and Yah. “Joshua” thus means “Yahweh is

salvation.” This, being Jesus’ *real* name, has Yahweh’s name within it—just as indicated in the Torah. But a name (*shem* in Hebrew, *onoma* in Greek) is more than what you call someone; it is also (as far as Biblical names are concerned) meant to convey one’s character, reputation, title or unique personal identity. So the name Jesus or Joshua (Yâhowshuwa’, i.e., Yahshua) indicates not only the fact that Yahweh is salvation, but that the person who bears this name is intended or destined to characterize this concept as a living reality.

It behooves us, then, to track down the “salvation” component of the Messiah’s name, since Yahweh is said to *be* this thing. The word *yâshuw`ah* (pronounced, not coincidentally, the same as “Yahshua”) is used 78 times in the Tanach. It is the passive participle of the Hebrew verb *yasha*: “to save, deliver, rescue, or liberate.” It is usually translated “salvation” or “deliverance” in our English Bible versions. And although this is a perfectly correct rendition, my contention is that Yahweh was also telling us Who His Messiah would be—*by name*: Yahshua.

Here are a few of the more blatant examples from the Torah: **“For Your salvation [yâshuw`ah] I wait, O Yahweh.”** (Genesis 49:18) Jacob was waiting not just for salvation, but *Yahweh’s* salvation: Yahshua. **“Yahweh is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation [yâshuw`ah]; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father’s God, and I will extol Him.”** (Exodus 15:2) Note: Yahweh *has become* Yahshua! And He (the personified Salvation—Yahshua) is identified as “my God.” **“But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked—You are grown fat, thick, and sleek—Then he forsook God who made him, and scorned the Rock of his salvation [yâshuw`ah].”** (Deuteronomy 32:15) Here Yahweh has prophesied Israel’s scornful future mindset against His Messiah.

The historical and wisdom books refer to Yahshua as well: **“Therefore I will give thanks to You, O Yahweh, among the nations, and I will sing praises to Your name. He is a tower of deliverance [yâshuw`ah] to His king, and shows lovingkindness to His anointed, to David and his descendants forever.”** (II Samuel 22:50-51) Note that Yahweh was “Yahshua” in the eyes of King David. **“Sing to Yahweh, all the earth; proclaim the good news of His salvation [yâshuw`ah] from day to day.”** (I Chronicles 16:23) Yahshua is Yahweh’s “good news.” We didn’t really have to wait until we got into the “Gospels” to learn that, did we? **“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him. He also shall be my salvation [yâshuw`ah], for a hypocrite could not come before Him.”** (Job 13:15-16) Here Yahweh is equated with the One who “shall be” Yahshua. Job has also identified Yahshua as the One who enables us to stand before Yahweh as if we were blameless and holy—for that is what his salvation does for us.

References to God’s salvation, personified in the Messiah, are ubiquitous in the Psalms. **“Many are they who say of me, ‘There is no help [yâshuw`ah] for him in God.’”** (Psalm 3:2) Israel’s denial of their Messiah is once again predicted. **“Have**

mercy on me, O Yahweh! Consider my trouble from those who hate me, You who lift me up from the gates of death, that I may tell of all Your praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion. I will rejoice in Your salvation [yâshuw`ah]." (Psalm 9:13-14) **"But I have trusted in Your mercy. My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation [yâshuw`ah]." (Psalm 13:5)** In these two passages, the Psalmist David voices a significant component of the most oft-repeated prophetic theme in all of scripture: that Israel *will* come to recognize that Yahshua is their Messiah. Their national spiritual restoration as predicted in Ezekiel 37:11-14 depends on it. **"Oh, that the salvation [yâshuw`ah] of Israel would come out of Zion! When Yahweh brings back the captivity of His people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad."** (Psalm 14:7, repeated in Psalm 53:6) As Moses said, when the Messiah comes, He will arise from Israel.

Yahshua quoted this Psalm on the cross, applying it to Himself: **"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping [yâshuw`ah] Me?"** (Psalm 22:1) The pain of the cross was more than merely physical. As Yahshua "became sin" for us, Yahweh had no choice but to distance Himself from His only begotten Son. **"Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help [yâshuw`ah] of His countenance."** (Psalm 42:5, repeated in both 42:11 and 43:5) We are to praise God for Yahshua because He is literally the countenance, the face, the presence of Yahweh among us. **"Truly my soul silently waits for God. From Him comes my salvation [yâshuw`ah]. He only is my rock and my salvation [yâshuw`ah]. He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved."** (Psalm 62:1-2) Yahshua comes from God. And oh, by the way, "He alone (i.e., God) *is* Yahshua." **"God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation [yâshuw`ah] among all nations."** (Psalm 67:1-2) Yahshua will be known among all nations, and this is equated with "Your (God's) way being known on earth." This is a prayer for Yahweh's mercy and justice to be shown during His Millennial reign, just as Yahshua instructed us to pray: **"Your kingdom come; Your will be done in earth as it is in heaven."** (Matthew 6:10) Yahweh's kingdom, and His will, are actually *Yahshua's* kingdom and will.

"A fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel, because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation [yâshuw`ah]." (Psalm 78:22) Once again, Yahweh has predicted Israel's rejection and disbelief—and He says He's angry. **"O Yahweh, God of my salvation [yâshuw`ah], I have cried out day and night before You. Let my prayer come before You. Incline Your ear to my cry."** (Psalm 88:1-2) Yahweh is the God of Yahshua. Why would anyone want to be His enemy? **"He [God's "holy One"] shall cry to Me, 'You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation [yâshuw`ah].'" (Psalm 89:26)** Here God the Father is once again equated with Yahshua. **"Salvation [yâshuw`ah] is far from the wicked, for they do not seek Your statutes."** (Psalm 119:155) Yahshua is far from the wicked. We should therefore want to be close to Him. **"Yahweh, I hope for Your salvation [yâshuw`ah], and I do Your**

commandments.” (Psalm 119:166) Doing Yahweh’s commandments is equated here with hoping for Yahshua. The whole Torah points toward this one reality.

Of all the prophets, Isaiah saw most clearly the connection between Yahweh and His salvation, personified in Yahshua the Messiah. **“In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: ‘We have a strong city; God will appoint salvation [yâshuw`ah] for walls and bulwarks.’”** (Isaiah 26:1) Yahshua, he says, is appointed by Yahweh to be Israel’s defender. And once again, we are told that Judah *will* in the end recognize Yahshua as its savior. **“Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation [yâshuw`ah] to the ends of the earth.’”** (Isaiah 49:6) Yahshua will be a light to the Gentiles first—Then He will raise up Israel (those who allow themselves to be “preserved”). The same Savior will accomplish both feats: Yahshua. And finally, **“Thus says Yahweh: ‘Keep justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation [yâshuw`ah] is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed.’”** (Isaiah 56:1) Yes, Yahshua (who is the embodiment of Yahweh’s righteousness) is about to come.

The evidence is overwhelming: Yahweh told us time and again who His anointed one would be—*by name*: Yahshua. And His name reveals His character, His function, and His role: He would be Yahweh in the flesh, our deliverer and our salvation from the curse of sin.

MESSIANIC FINGERPRINTS

- (983) *The Messiah will perform His service between the ages of twenty-five and fifty, officially entering His ministry at the age of thirty.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘This is what pertains to the Levites: From twenty-five years old and above one may enter to perform service in the work of the tabernacle of meeting; and at the age of fifty years they must cease performing this work, and shall work no more.’”** (Numbers 8:23-25) **“From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, everyone who enters the service to do the work of the tabernacle of meeting.”** (Numbers 4:30) God is not a control freak. When He says to the Levites “your career in My service will take place between your twenty-fifth and fiftieth years, but you will begin your service *in an official capacity* at thirty years of age, we can be reasonably certain there’s more to this than “human resources” issues for one tribe in Israel. This is a prophecy of the Messiah’s tenure of service as a mortal man: He must not begin “working” before His twenty-fifth year, and He will have finished His mission prior to His fiftieth birthday. Moreover, He must be officially inaugurated or ordained in some fashion when He is thirty years old.

So how does this line up with the Gospel narratives? Perfectly. **“Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age.”** (Luke 3:23) Though there can be no doubt that His Messianic Self-awareness had crystallized years prior to this, Yahshua—obedient to the Torah—waited until He was thirty to “officially” begin to show the world who He was. What was the occasion? It’s stated in the previous verses: **“Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, ‘You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.’”** (Luke 3:21-22)

And how old was He when He declared, “It is finished”? His earthly ministry spanned only about three and a half years. He was born at the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall of 2 B.C., placing His baptism, at “about thirty,” sometime near the autumn of 29 A.D. The crucifixion took place in the spring of 33, making Him about thirty-three and a half at His death, well short of the fifty-year “forced retirement” cutoff date. This was verified in general terms by the observations of the very men who would condemn Him: **“Then the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’”** (John 8:57) Once again, Yahshua had precisely fulfilled the requirements of the Torah, and His detractors had unwittingly confirmed it.

- (984) *Someone from the tribe of Judah shall lead Israel.* **“And the children of Israel set out from the Wilderness of Sinai on their journeys; then the cloud settled down in the Wilderness of Paran. So they started out for the first time according to the command of Yahweh by the hand of Moses. The standard of the camp of the children of Judah set out first according to their armies; over their army was Nahshon the son of Amminadab.”** (Numbers 10:12-14) If *men* had been leading Israel, I can guarantee that the Levites would have placed themselves firmly in the position of leadership at every level. After all, although the nation at this point had no formal king, Moses (a Levite) was clearly the chief, and his brother Aaron had been designated High Priest, a position of inestimable national significance. From a human point of view, the Levites were in a class by themselves in Israel. So it is something of a shock to find the tribe of Judah placed first in line, preeminent in the order of travel. Other tribes followed as family units, but Levi didn’t even travel as a complete tribe. They were broken up in sub-units, the clans of Gershon and Merari following Zebulun, but the Kohathites (Moses and Aaron’s clan—the priests) following three tribes later, buried inconspicuously somewhere in the middle of the parade (but perhaps we should read that, “placed in the very center, at the heart of Israel”).

This wasn't the only place where Judah was given a leadership role, either. **"Now the leaders offered the dedication offering for the altar when it was anointed; so the leaders offered their offering before the altar. For Yahweh said to Moses, 'They shall offer their offering, one leader each day, for the dedication of the altar.' And the one who offered his offering on the first day was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, from the tribe of Judah."** (Numbers 7:10-12) Judah was also listed first among the tribes in the wilderness camping arrangement, being assigned to the prime spot, immediately east of the tabernacle of meeting (that is, closest to the only entrance—see Numbers 2:3).

We should ask ourselves why this was so. Why was Judah, and not Levi or some other tribe, given the preeminent position as the leading tribe of Israel? Judah wasn't the firstborn: that distinction fell upon Reuben. Nor was he the son of the wife Jacob loved, Rachel; he was the fourth son of the unloved wife, Leah (see Genesis 29 for that whole strange tale). Was he particularly well behaved? No, he got into as much trouble as the next guy, even fathering his own twin grandchildren. We get our first glimmer of Judah's preeminent role in the prophetic blessing given by his father Jacob: **"Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise."** Actually, the name Judah *means* praise. **"Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh [that is, 'he to whom it belongs'] comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people."** (Genesis 49:8-10) Jacob has thereby specified that Israel's royal line would come through Judah, and that includes the ultimate King, the Messiah—the anointed One.

The leader of the tribe of Judah, mentioned several times in our passage, was a man named Nahshon. He was Aaron's brother-in-law, and he shows up in Yahshua's family tree (see Luke 3:32) as the great-great-great grandfather of King David. But his name comes as something of a shock. It means "enchanter," or "charmer," something patently antithetical to the set-apart nature of the newly liberated Israel under Yahweh. Nahshon's name (also spelled Nachshown) is based on a root verb (*nachash*) from which we get several concepts: serpent, divination, and bronze or copper. This verb actually means to learn by experience, to observe, take as an omen—hence the derivative: to practice divination. But of course, one need not embrace occultism to observe and learn from experience, and you don't have to be a sorcerer to "read the writing on the wall," which I think is what Yahweh is showing us here. By selecting a man named Nahshon as Judah's leader, Yahweh is subtly saying (as I will explore further in Precept #987), *Observe and learn, O Israel; take this as*

an omen. Soon you will rebel against Me, and I will chasten you with poisonous serpents. I will direct my servant Moses to erect a pole with a bronze serpent upon it as a sign to you. If you look upon it in faith, you will live. Let this bronze serpent (nachosheth nachash) remind you of Nachshown's name, for My Anointed One, who will come from the royal line of the tribe of Judah now being led by Nachshown, shall also be lifted up upon a pole, and whoever trusts in Him will not perish, for I will give him eternal life.

REVERENCE FOR YAHWEH'S MESSIAH

- (985) *“Cursing” and “blaspheming” Yahweh carry separate penalties. “Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. And whoever blasphemes the name of Yahweh shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of Yahweh, he shall be put to death.”* (Leviticus 24:15-16) We’ve seen this concept before, but it bears repeating. There are two contrasting sins in view here, carrying two distinct consequences. First is “cursing” God. That translation is off the mark a bit: the word (*qalal*) actually means to esteem lightly, to consider insignificant, to treat with contempt or dishonor. There are many who, whether through superstition or politeness, would never “curse” God; yet they don’t pay Him any attention, either. They go about their lives as if He didn’t exist, or as though if He *did* exist, He wouldn’t or couldn’t do anything to personally help or harm them. *Qalal* is kind of like the relationship we usually have with our elected politicians. On a day-to-day basis, we don’t “curse” them so much as we merely ignore them. And what is the penalty for taking God lightly? We will “bear our sin.” That is, we will carry the weight of our own error. That may not sound too bad until we realize that it’s tantamount to remaining forever unforgiven for our sin. Yahshua’s entire Messianic mission was to provide this forgiveness, atonement, and reconciliation with God to anyone who would place their faith in Him. But since He is Yahweh incarnate—God in the form of a man—taking God lightly would include taking *Yahshua* lightly. Forgiveness will not be forthcoming to one who treats His sacrifice with contempt or indifference.

To “blaspheme the name of Yahweh” is a different matter, and it carries with it an entirely different—and more serious—penalty: *death*. “Blaspheme” is the Hebrew verb *naqab*, meaning literally, to bore, to pierce, or to designate or specify by name—in modern parlance, we might say it means to focus on something in a negative or destructive way, to attack, molest, or assault it. Whereas *qalal* was a passive concept—

“merely” failing to take God seriously—*naqab* implies a proactive hatred of its object, in this case, Yahweh Himself. It speaks of purposely going out of one’s way to harm the name (*shem*: the reputation—how one is known) of God. (Note: you can’t hurt Yahweh in any physical sense, no matter how much you hate Him. Attacking His *shem* is the closest one can get to waging war against God. So the pain of an attack on God is felt by those He loves.) The consequence of *naqab* is therefore of the same nature—active, purposeful, and personal: the penalty is death.

Once again we see that Yahweh draws a distinction between those who simply fail to reciprocate His love and those who purposely choose to defy Him. We discussed this at length in *Future History*, Chapter 29: “The Three Doors,” where the scriptural position on eternal destiny was explored. Careful exegesis revealed that, as one might expect with a loving God, Yahweh does not damn people to an eternity of hellish torments simply because they weren’t smart enough or lucky enough to be in a position to see and respond to His grace. As the Messiah told Nicodemus in John 3, “You must be born from above”—that is, you must *choose* to be adopted into a familial relationship with God—in order to receive everlasting life. In the same way, you won’t suffer eternal damnation—defined as having formed a similar relationship with the adversary, Satan—unless you *choose* that fate. This is characterized here in Leviticus 24 as “blaspheming (*naqab*) the name of Yahweh,” that is, pointedly attacking His *shem*, His name and reputation, especially with the purpose of preventing others from choosing to reciprocate His love.

But what of those who choose neither God nor the devil, who seek to form no spiritual relationship at all (in a word, *qalal*), whether out of ignorance, apathy, or lack of opportunity? These will simply “bear their sin.” Yahweh won’t punish them, but He won’t forgive them, either. If the *actual words* of scripture are any indication, their souls will simply cease to exist when they die. Looking at this from the viewpoint of hell, it might seem like the most tender of mercies—and it is. But looking at it from heaven, it is a tragedy of immense proportions, a horrible waste of precious life and potential.

- (986) *The punishment must fit the crime.* “If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him—fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him.” (Leviticus 24:19-20) This sort of thing is called “cruel and unusual” by most people today. I’ll grant you, it *is* unusual—nothing in western jurisprudence today is this logical, this sensible, this *fair*. We habitually substitute anemic and pointless punishments for infractions of

law, typically incarceration or fines, that have neither any direct bearing on the problem, nor deterrent value, nor redress for the injured party. I submit to you, however, that direct and equivalent response is anything but cruel. It is merely the logical, practical application of the golden rule.

Note that intent is beside the point in this precept. Malice and negligence are treated the same way if they result in the same injury. The guy whose leg you broke when you ran over him in your car doesn't much care if you aimed at him on purpose, couldn't control your vehicle because you were drunk, or were simply too irresponsible to watch where you were going. If you fire a gun randomly into the air and hit somebody three blocks away having a backyard barbecue, you're no less guilty than if you had been purposely aiming at him. Would we do the things we do if we *knew* that the same pain we had caused would be inflicted in turn upon us? I doubt it. Everything we do in this life should be calculated to show mercy and kindness to our fellow man—to be as harmless as possible in every situation.

But be aware also that the “disfigurement” that our precept addresses need not be physical. It can also be psychological or spiritual. The hurtful or misleading things we say and do can leave deep emotional scars; our attitudes and words can result in the spiritual blindness of the people we meet. We need to be careful. We need to be vigilant. On the other side of this coin, we must not fail to warn people of their impending doom, whether out of our laziness, apathy, or a misplaced sense of political correctness: to do so is criminal negligence. I'm not talking about forcing people to submit to our own moral or ethical code, or to toe our religious or cultural line, since “good” behavior won't in itself save anyone. I'm merely saying that if we see them in danger of hurting themselves, we *owe them* a word of caution.

The ultimate example of “disfigurement” at the hands of others, in my opinion, is that of Yahshua at His crucifixion. Isaiah had predicted that He would have **“no beauty, that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men.... He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”** (Isaiah 53:2, 4-5) The gospels report that Yahshua was subjected to scourging with a Roman flagrum, whose leather whips were embedded with sharp pieces of bone or metal. The procedure was often fatal in itself. He was beaten on the head with a rod, struck with fists, mocked, spat upon, had a crown of cruel thorns jammed down upon his brow, and was then forced to carry a heavy wooden *stauros*, a pole or stake, to the place of execution. There He was stripped naked and offered a drug to deaden

the pain—which He refused. His outstretched hands were nailed (between the wrist bones) with long iron spikes to the *patibulum* or cross piece that was then hoisted to rest atop the *stauros*. Once in place, the weight of His body would have caused his shoulders to dislocate from their sockets. His feet were then nailed to the *stauros*, for if He had been allowed to hang freely from his wrists, He would have been unable to fill His lungs with air and would have died within minutes—spoiling the gruesome spectacle. It was the intention of the chief priests to have His legs broken so He would die before the religious holiday began, but He expired before the soldiers had a chance to do it.

My point is that all this “disfigurement” was *caused* by somebody—and not just the four Roman soldiers assigned to do the deed. The guilt can’t even be confined to the political and religious elite who engineered Yahshua’s execution, or even to the Jews in Jerusalem for the Passover festival on the day it happened. No, the guilty parties are those for whose sins Yahshua’s sacrifice was designed to atone: *all of us*. It matters not if we meant to do it, or if we were merely criminally negligent. The sentence of the Torah is: “so it shall be done to him.” There is a debt to be paid.

But who will pay it? If we read further from the Isaiah passage we just visited, we find this: **“He [Yahweh] shall see the travail of His [Yahshua’s] soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He will bear their iniquities.”** (Isaiah 53:11) The very act that defined our guilt can also pay our debt. If we will but accept the fact of our freedom, we can walk out of court as free men. Hallelujah!

- (987) *The cure for sin is to perceive in faith what is set upon the pole. “Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against Yahweh and against you; pray to Yahweh that He take away the serpents from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people. Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.’ So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.”* (Numbers 21:7-9) From Genesis 3 to Revelation 20, evil is personified as a serpent. Satan visited Eve in Eden disguised as a snake, and we see his Millennial incarceration in the same terms: **“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.”** (Revelation 20:1-3) So it can be surprising at first to see *the serpent* being displayed on a pole

to serve as the focal point for faith in God's cure for the poisonous snake bites that were tormenting the Israelites.

Some of our confusion is dissipated when we realize that the "fiery serpent" Yahweh instructed Moses to make, and the "bronze serpent" he placed on the pole, are two different words in Hebrew. "Fiery serpent" is from *sarap*, a verb that means, "to burn," which becomes the basis for two nouns that mean radically different things. One is a venomous serpent, whose bite inflicts burning pain. The other is the transliterated designation "seraph" (the plural of which is the more familiar seraphim), the fiery six-winged angelic beings mentioned only in Isaiah 6. The "bronze serpent," on the other hand, is *nachosheth* (bronze, brass, or copper) *nachash* (the ordinary word for snake or serpent).

The real answer begins to emerge in Yahshua's after-hours discussion with Nicodemus. **"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."** (John 3:14-15) Yahshua is pointedly declaring that the whole "snakes-in-the-wilderness" scenario was but a prophetic dress rehearsal for His own crucifixion, and the outcome is identical: **"And it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live."** We've all been bitten, for we have all sinned. The cure for the snakebite of sin has not changed: we must still look with faith upon what was set upon the pole—in the end, Yahshua the Messiah. So why was Moses told to put a symbol for sin—the snake—on the pole? Because that's where our sin would end up, *literally*: **"Be reconciled to God, for He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** (II Corinthians 5:20-21) The sinless Messiah *became* sin for our sakes. How is that possible? I haven't got a clue, any more than I understand how we can *become* the very righteousness of God. But I'm willing (and thankful) to take it on faith.

There's one more word we need to run down. The "pole" Moses was instructed to erect is the Hebrew noun *nes*, meaning something lifted up, a standard, signal, pole, ensign, banner, sign, sail, or rallying point. It's significance has far more to do with its psychological function than its physical form. And as implied in John 3:14, the "cross" upon which Yahshua would be "lifted up" is equivalent to the *nes* of Numbers 21. As we have seen, the Greek word for "cross" is *stauros*, which actually means an upright stake, a pole or post—making it quite similar in meaning to the Hebrew *nes*.

In a passage that I am convinced prophesies America's fate in the Last Days, Isaiah reports (literally translated), **"Go, swift messengers, to a nation**

spread out and independent, to a people feared and respected from their beginning onward, a nation powerful and measured out, whose land the rivers cut through. All inhabitants of the world and dwellers on the earth: When He [Yahweh] lifts up a standard [nes] on the mountains, you [America, if the description means what it seems to] see it; and when He blows a trumpet [the shofar], you give heed to it." (Isaiah 18:2-3) The prophet, I believe, is saying that America will see and rally to the "banner" of Yahweh—the "cross" of Christ. And America *has* done this, more than any other nation on the face of the planet, though it's far from being a universal phenomenon. Note that we Americans will also "hear the trumpet" (this, I'm convinced, means the "catching up" at the last trumpet—the rapture of the Church). And "all inhabitants of the world and dwellers on the earth" are commanded to take note of this. I wonder if they will.

- (988) *Murderers will suffer the death penalty. "These things shall be a statute of judgment to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings. Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses; but one witness is not sufficient testimony against a person for the death penalty. Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death."* (Numbers 35:29-31) The death penalty for murderers is the unequivocal commandment of God. Those who would do away with it are stuck in the unenviable position of contradicting Yahweh—a place that ought to make them extremely uncomfortable, but apparently doesn't. There are safeguards against false accusations, of course—as you'd expect to see from a God of Justice: at least two witnesses (one of which, I take it, could be forensic evidence) are required to convict someone. And note that, as we saw elsewhere, manslaughter—unintentional or accidental homicide—was dealt with through what amounted to "house arrest." The person responsible for another's death, but not by intentional murder, was required to remain within one of six "cities of refuge" until the death of the High Priest—a thinly disguised metaphor for being indemnified by the sacrifice of Yahshua the Messiah. Note also that "plea bargains" are illegal under God's law: no ransom, whether money, inside information, or sworn testimony against other guilty parties, was to be accepted. The Torah doesn't allow the old Mafia two-step, where a thug kills his way to the top and then "retires" to a light jail term or witness protection in exchange for what he knows about his cohorts in crime when the police start closing in.

I fully realize that our convoluted system of jurisprudence is designed with the best of intentions. It's engineered to deliver justice in an imperfect world. But because perfect wisdom is required to follow Yahweh's model—justice tempered with mercy—we settle for justice

tempered by the law of averages: what seems to work under the most common circumstances. Bottom line: most people who are tasked with making the judgment call are pathologically terrified of executing the wrong man, as well they should be. But at its core, this terror is based on the erroneous assumption that there is no possibility of life after death: that if we punish the wrong man for capital murder, there will be no recourse for him in a higher court—a heavenly court. The fact, however, is that what happens to a man’s body in this life has no bearing on his eternal destiny. None of us get out of here alive, and most of us never learn the hour of our departure ahead of time. The guilty man set free is just as sure to die as the innocent man sent to the gallows.

Alexander Solshenitzin, who spent years unjustly incarcerated in Soviet political prisons, observed that he really had no right to complain, for we’re all guilty of *something*—whether or not that’s what we’re being punished for at the moment. In point of fact, we’re all guilty of the death of Yahshua the Messiah. Though Yahshua has provided a mechanism for our salvation and vindication—the “death of the High Priest” (Himself) that sets us free from condemnation within the city of refuge (our mortal lives)—some are guilty not of Son-of-Manslaughter, but of murder, intentional and malicious. They have not only declared themselves enemies of God, they have tried to stop others from entering into a relationship with Him through Yahshua the Messiah. The eternal living-death penalty awaits the one who hinders his brother from seeking eternal life, for the purposeful prevention of life is murder.

- (989) *Obey the voice of Yahweh’s Messenger.* **“Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions, for My name is in Him. But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.”** (Exodus 23:20-22) Was God talking about an *angel* here—a spirit messenger being tasked with carrying out His orders—or was He talking about the coming Messiah? The answer is *Yes*—both of these things. The verses following these make it plain that Israel’s near-term battles were in view, and that Yahweh’s angel would lead them against such real-world foes as the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites. But the verses immediately preceding this passage speak of keeping the Sabbath, the Sabbatical year, and meeting three times a year to celebrate Yahweh’s appointments—all things that prophesy Yahweh’s plan of redemption through His Messiah. The word translated “angel” (*malak*) really just means a messenger or representative, one dispatched as a deputy. We should not dismiss the big picture simply

because the small one is so easy to see. The “angel” we need to recognize in these verses is none other than Yahshua. This is a Messianic Message.

Note that the *Malak* is sent by Yahweh to do two things. First, He will “keep you in the way.” That is, He will guard, watch over, restrain, and protect the people of God in the path we have chosen, the journey in holiness we endeavor to take through this life, our manner of conduct and belief. It is no coincidence that the early *ekklesia* was called “the Way,” or that in a very real sense, the *Malak* that indwells us is Yahshua Himself, in the form of the “Spirit of Truth.” (See John 14:17) Second, the *Malak* will **“bring you into the place which I have prepared.”** You’d have to be blind not to see the connection between this and the promise Yahshua made: **“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”** (John 14:1-3)

Next we see a warning, one that can be a bit shocking if we’re used to marshmallow Christianity (you know: soft, sweet, and totally lacking in nutritional value). He says that there are conditions under which the *Malak* will *not* “pardon your transgressions,” literally, “bear your rebellion” (that’s *pesa*: revolt, rebellion, defiance to authority, crime or fault, that which is purposely contrary to God’s standard). We are warned not to “provoke” Him. That’s the Hebrew verb *Marah*, which means to defy, to rebel, to be openly hostile and defiant against authority. The root of this behavior is bitterness, a state of misery, mental distress and anguish. We’re not talking about making mistakes or falling short of perfection here; we’re talking about open mutiny against Yahweh. Don’t expect the Messiah to sweep it all under the rug for you. Why? Because **“My name is in Him.”** That is, Yahweh’s *shem*, His name, reputation, and character, are *in* the *Malak*—whose name, by the way, is Yahshua: “Yahweh is Salvation.”

Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu wrote in *The Art of War* that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” While that’s not necessarily true in any causal sense (as demonstrated by decades of disastrous U.S. foreign policy) it is certainly true here. **“If you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.”** But what does it mean to “obey His voice?” The short answer is related by James: **“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God.”** (James 2:23) One could do worse, I’m thinking.

(990) *Israel’s King will someday rule the earth. “The utterance of him who hears the words of God, and has the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the*

Almighty, who falls down, with eyes wide open: 'I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near. A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult. And Edom shall be a possession; Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession, while Israel does valiantly. Out of Jacob One shall have dominion, and destroy the remains of the city.'" (Numbers 24:16-19) Sometimes a prophecy is as remarkable for the circumstances in which it was given as for its content. When we search the Tanach, we'll see a fair amount of this sort of thing—predictions of a future Jewish King destined to set everything right in the world, a Messiah reigning with a rod of iron. They are invariably delivered by Jewish prophets—men whom the world usually shrugs off as being a bit too enthusiastic in their patriotism and religious fervor. But this prophecy, one of the earliest and most sweeping of its type, is nothing of the sort. It wasn't delivered by an Israelite, but by a gentile who was being paid handsomely (by a *Moabite* king, no less) to curse them: a prophet-for-hire named Balaam.

God is not restricted as to whom He can use to declare His glory and purpose. He doesn't have to use perfect people (if He had, the Bible would have been one *skinny* volume). He doesn't have to use sons of Israel. He doesn't even have to use His friends. It seems strange, but pronouncing God's truth is no particular guarantee of one's relationship with Him. Yahshua explained, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23) The criteria for entrance into the Kingdom is not doing great things for God or even worshiping Him (for in the end, *every* knee will bow—whether they want to or not). It's merely being "known" by Him. *That* is what it is to "do the will of the Father."

Paul put it like this: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing." (I Corinthians 13:1-3) Balaam did indeed "have the gift of prophecy," but it "profited him nothing," because he used his gift not for love, but for money. Balaam may have "feared" Yahweh, but he did not revere or respect Him: he didn't want to "know" Him. If love is what drives us, it is because *we are known by God*, for God is love: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then

face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.”
(I Corinthians 13:12)

But Balaam’s lack of reverence for Yahweh, as strange as it sounds, does not negate his prophetic gift—which after all, was not given to him for *his* benefit, but for ours. Boiled down to its essentials, the prophecy states that sometime in the unforeseeable future (from the prophet’s perspective—about 3,500 years before our time), one shall arise from the family of Israel who shall be both (1) a star (*kowkab*—a star or its light, or figuratively, a king wielding heavenly power); and (2) a scepter (*shebet*—a rod or club used to control sheep or people, hence a scepter of royal authority or the one who wields it). This ruler, it is said, will possess Edom and Mt. Seir (in today’s southern Jordan) and will **“batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.”** Moab too is in modern Jordan. “Tumult” is the Hebrew *Sheth*, which can mean any (or all) of several things: rebellion or defiance; a group of nomadic tribes in southern Jordan (today, the home of the world’s largest population of “Palestinian” Arabs); or basic principles, that is, the foundations of society. The word also denotes “buttocks,” the foundation, as it were, of a seated man. Did Balaam just inform us that the Jewish Messiah will someday destroy all the Palestinian buttheads? Or am I reading too much into this?

- (991) *Do not take Yahweh’s presence lightly.* **“So it was, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, that you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders. And you said: ‘Surely Yahweh our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that God speaks with man; yet he still lives. Now therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of Yahweh our God anymore, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?’”** (Deuteronomy 5:23-26) Here’s the scene: three months after the Israelite hordes had left Egypt, they arrived at Mount Sinai, near the northwest corner of modern day Saudi Arabia, having endured several tests of their faith and obedience. Yahweh told Moses to have the people sanctify and prepare themselves for three days. Something big was about to happen.

What they experienced then was beyond anything they had ever imagined. **“It came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke,**

because Yahweh descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. Then Yahweh came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And Yahweh called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.” (Exodus 19:16-20) There, Moses received the Ten

Commandments—the heart and summary of the Torah, followed later, apparently, by the rest of it. Yahweh was faced with a bit of a logistics problem here, a balancing act. He wished to demonstrate His power to the people of Israel, so they’d know beyond a shadow of a doubt that He was the One True God. Yes, He’d done that in a score of ways great and small in the past few months, but this time He wanted to make His authority unambiguous, His glory unmistakable—with no “practical” object (like feeding the multitude or destroying the Egyptian armies) in view other than revealing His majesty. The problem was going to be doing this without killing folks—without turning the entire planet into a smoldering cinder. Remember, this is the same God who had declared, *Let there be matter and energy, time and space*, and these things became corporeal reality. If He did too little, the people (being *people*) would not have been suitably impressed, but if He did too much, they would not have survived the encounter.

Being a God of wisdom as well as power, Yahweh gave them a Goldilocks demonstration. It was *just right*: thunder and lightning, fire and smoke, trembling earth and awesome sounds—the mighty blast of a celestial shofar and the very voice of God. For the moment, anyway, the children of Israel were struck with a godly fear—with respect for Yahweh’s power, to be sure, but also with the distinct impression that coming into His presence uninvited would be hazardous to one’s health.

Israel’s godly fear persisted as long as they remained at Mount Sinai—almost a year (Numbers 10:11), during which time they built the Tabernacle and got used to life under Yahweh’s direct rule and provision. But just three days after they broke camp, the complaining began. I’ll admit, my first instinct is to castigate the Israelites for their faithlessness. They had seen and heard the powerful signs of Yahweh’s presence only a year previously; they had been eating His bread and drinking His water ever since. How could they have forgotten so quickly? But then I realize that although my own salvation is a far greater miracle than anything the Israelites ever witnessed, and that God’s provision for me has been an ongoing reality for the past *half century*, I *still* feel like complaining when adversity strikes. At this late date, I should know better. I must never

allow my easy familiarity with my Father Yahweh to degenerate into something resembling complacency.

- (992) *Ask for a mediator to communicate between you and Yahweh.* **“Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, ‘You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.’”** (Exodus 20:18-19) I can’t help but chuckle at the Israelites’ reaction to Yahweh’s awesome display of power on Mount Sinai: “Hey Moses, that mountain looks really dangerous; so *you* go up there and talk with God, and then come back and tell us what He said, okay?” Of course, the people were absolutely right to be terrified. Yahweh had provided signs and wonders calculated to produce that very effect. Why? Because He wanted to introduce us to the concept of an intermediary—Someone who would stand before the Almighty on our behalf, passing His instructions on to us in a way to which we can relate. Moses here is a picture of the coming Messiah.

Yahweh wasn’t displeased with their timidity in the face of all the sound and fury going on up on Sinai. He had, in fact, strictly warned Moses to declare the mountain off limits to them (Exodus 19:12). In the recounting of the story in Deuteronomy, Moses makes it clear that Yahweh was pleased that the people understood their need for a mediator. They had said, **“‘You go near and hear all that Yahweh our God may say, and tell us all that Yahweh our God says to you, and we will hear and do it.’ Then Yahweh heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and Yahweh said to me: ‘I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken. Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!’”** (Deuteronomy 5:27-29) It’s a revealing exercise to compare what the people had said with what Yahweh commended them for saying, for they aren’t precisely the same thing. The people were mostly interested in having someone positioned between themselves and Yahweh, someone who would represent Him and present His instructions without frightening them to death. Yahweh responded, “They are right,” but He wasn’t thinking about Moses; He was envisioning the role *His Messiah* would play: an intermediary between God and men who would give them a heart of reverence and a desire to keep His commandments, for this very reverent obedience would prove to be the key to our well being—for eternity.

- (993) *Consider the glory of God a test of our reverence.* **“And Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before**

you, so that you may not sin.’ So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.” (Exodus 20:20-21) I realize that this sounds contradictory in English: “Don’t fear, but *do* fear.” And even in Hebrew, the same word family is used in both places. The verb and adjective *yare* (to fear, revere, or be afraid) are the basis of the noun *yirah*: reverence, fear, piety and respect toward a superior, terror (i.e., a state of anxiety or alarm), worship, awe or awesomeness (that which causes wonder or astonishment). The word translated “test” is central to our understanding here. *Nasah* means to “try, test, or assay (to attempt to learn the true nature of something); to attempt, that is, to exert oneself to do something; or to test or try—cause or allow hardship or trouble in a circumstance, often with choices within the situation, implying that a different outcome is possible.” (*Dictionary of Bible Languages with Semantic Domains*) So I would paraphrase Moses’ admonition: “Do not be afraid, for God has come to ascertain whether or not you will choose to revere Him. His awesome glory has been displayed so that you might not miss the goal He has set before you.”

Don’t complain, asking “Since Yahweh never shows His glory in the world today, how are we supposed to be suitably awed?” Actually, He does it constantly, if only we’ll look for it. The obvious place to start is to look into the sky. **“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.”** (Psalm 19:1) There, we are faced with a choice. We can either view stars as great balls of hydrogen and helium that happened totally by chance, or we can see them as the factories where God manufactures the heavy elements upon which our mortal existence depends. Scientists have figured out *when* God “created the heavens and the earth,” (about 13.7 billion years ago), and they have some idea of how “awesome” it is, but they have not yet determined *how* He did it, and don’t seem to care why. Nevertheless, I submit to you that only a fool can look at the starry heavens and fail to be awed by them.

Then, we can look at the magnificence of Yahweh’s living creation: **“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”** (Matthew 6:28-30) The phenomenon of life is another subject that eludes science, though Yahweh has presented its stunning complexity in seemingly infinite variety. Those not awestruck by life—those who assume it’s a pointless accident of nature—are simply not paying attention. Paul sums it up: **“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so**

that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God [that is, although they had ample evidence of His existence and benevolence], **they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.**" (Romans 1:20-21) We shouldn't need thunder and lightning or fire and smoke upon the mountaintop to understand something of the power of God, nor should we take His creation—of which we are a part—for granted. It's all here for our benefit, to teach us to revere Yahweh, so that we might not sin.

- (994) *Know that Yahweh wants us to be filled with His Spirit. "Then Moses said to [Joshua], 'Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all Yahweh's people were prophets and that Yahweh would put His Spirit upon them!'"* (Numbers 11:29) The background here is that (as usual) the children of Israel were complaining—this time about the food. Yes, manna was being provided daily, so they weren't starving to death, but they really missed the leeks, garlic, and fish they'd had to eat as slaves in Egypt. *C'mon, Moses, they whined. This manna is boring! Give us something to eat that'll make our breath stink. Give us some meat, already!* Moses, of course, had no meat to give them, and frustrated to the point of madness, he told Yahweh (and again, I paraphrase), *Please! Don't make me tend these ridiculous sheeple any longer. If you love me, just kill me! Put me out of my misery.* (v.15) Yahweh had a better idea, arranging for Moses to share the burden of leadership with seventy elders of Israel—the prototype of the Sanhedrin. These seventy were instructed to surround the Tabernacle, where they were informed that they would soon have so much meat (in the form of low-flying quail) that they'd be vomiting out of their noses before it was all over. Yum.

But that's another story. These seventy elders were each given the same Spirit that was upon Moses (v.25), and they began to prophesy (Hebrew *naba'*: to speak as a prophet; to communicate a message from a deity, either of proper behavior to a standard, or of future events—*DBL-SD*). But something strange happened. Two of the appointed seventy didn't get the memo. But back in the camp, they too began carrying on just like their peers over at the Tabernacle—prophesying, speaking out powerfully in the name of Yahweh. The names of the two missing elders are revealing. They were called Eldad and Medad. The “-*dad*” component (*dowd* or *dawd*) is the basis of King David's name. It means “beloved.” Medad means “He who is loved,” and Eldad denotes “loved by God.” Some things never change: we who are loved by God can't help but speak out in His name.

Joshua, jealous for Moses' sake, was horrified at what seemed to him like a gross breach of spiritual protocol, but Moses was thrilled, pointing out to his protégé that it was God's ideal that *everybody* would speak to Him, and of Him, and for Him. As a later prophet would put it, **"Behold, the days are coming, says Yahweh, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says Yahweh. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know Yahweh,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says Yahweh. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."** (Jeremiah 31:31-34) The same kind of close personal fellowship the called-out assembly of Yahshua (a.k.a. the Church) enjoys with their God will someday be a living reality in Israel. In the end, the redeemed and restored children of Israel will know Yahweh.

Joel describes what being filled with the Spirit of God looks like: **"And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams; your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days."** The glory that Yahweh showed us on Sinai will be reprised as well: **"And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of Yahweh. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of Yahweh shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as Yahweh has said, among the remnant whom Yahweh calls."** (Joel 2:28-32) That "deliverance" will be personified in the reigning Messiah, Yahshua.

CHOOSE THIS DAY...

- (995) *We should ask Yahweh for a Shepherd to guide us.* **"Then Moses spoke to Yahweh, saying: 'Let Yahweh, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of Yahweh may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.'" (Numbers 27:15-17)** At this point, a new Israelite generation was preparing to enter the Land. Moses was pushing 120 years of age. More to the point, Yahweh had told him decades before

this that he would not be allowed to lead his people into their inheritance. So his thoughts naturally turned to succession of leadership in Israel.

One of the hallmarks of a mature nation is that they know how to transfer power peacefully from one generation to the next. Some nations never do get the hang of it—they simply spasm from one tyrant to the next, their people desperately hoping that the next regime change won't be quite as bloody as the last. Others suffer from political Alzheimer's: even if they manage to transition to the next government in relative peace, the old social order is forgotten the moment the new leader takes the reins, for law and tradition is sacrificed to the attitudes and whims of the victor of the *coup du jour*—it's literally "winner take all." Then, many nations these days rely on organized mob rule to transition from one regime to the next: it's called "democracy," and it's perpetrated—I mean *achieved*—by convincing more voters than your opponent to vote for you, even if to do so you have to lie, cheat, intimidate, invent scapegoats, or make ridiculous promises you can't hope to deliver on. Most candidates offer "change." Few deliver improvement.

Moses didn't do any of that. He was all too aware that he himself had been called by Yahweh to the task, plucked from obscurity and exile to do a job to which he neither aspired nor felt qualified to perform. (I kind of suspect that this is why God chose him.) In truth, he had been in preparation for his role from birth: Yahweh had engineered his unique qualifications. Moses knew that he wasn't the *leader* of Israel anyway, not really. Yahweh was; Mo was only His secretary, amanuensis, and ambassador. God had put a "government" in place—priests, Levites, and elders tasked with administering a relatively simple and straightforward code of civil law. But nobody in Israel had what we'd call "power." The Torah did not provide for any kind of political supremacy—only positions (mostly hereditary) of service and responsibility. Israel's tribal leaders were mentors and ambassadors, not governors and warlords. There were rules limiting kings, but no provision for acquiring one. There wasn't even a police force: "enforcing" the law was everybody's job. If we compare the statutory administration of early Israel with our national governments today—any of them—it becomes clear that we've gone horribly wrong somewhere.

But Moses knew that battles lay ahead for his people, and that the conquest of Canaan would require a leader tasked with coordinating the armies of Israel with the mind of Yahweh—Who, after all, had promised to fight their battles for them. Having been a shepherd for forty years, Moses knew that the children of Israel were like a big flock of sheep: they

might be okay as long as there was food, water, and safety from predators, but if they had to move—for any reason—they’d need a shepherd to guide them. Moses surely had a successor in mind—his assistant, protégé, and friend for the previous four decades—but notice that he didn’t suggest to Yahweh, “Hey, how’s about we install Joshua as the next Mo-Man?” No, Moses simply asked Yahweh to choose a worthy and responsible successor. Why can’t *we* do that?

- (996) *Know that Yahweh has provided the Shepherd we need. “And Yahweh said to Moses: ‘Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight.’* (Numbers 27:18-19) Yahweh honored Moses’ prayer, and chose the man he had obviously hoped for, but for whom he hadn’t lobbied: Joshua, the son of Nun. As if to tell us that God’s servants can come from anywhere, the record (in Numbers 13:8) states that Joshua (a.k.a. Hoshea, a.k.a. Jeshua—phonetically, Yahowshuwa or Yahushua) was not from the tribe of Levi (as Moses and Aaron were), nor did he hail from Judah (already established as the preeminent tribe—eventually to emerge as the royal tribe of Israel). Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim.

“Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.” (Deuteronomy 1:38) We (okay, *I*) tend to think of Joshua as the “kid” that always hung out with Moses—his gofer or minion. But he was more like the full colonel who acts as aide for a four-star general. Joshua, who had led the disastrous spy expedition to Canaan, was apparently the oldest man in Israel when Moses died (since everyone from the exodus generation over twenty had died off except for him and Caleb, who was about thirteen years his junior). The record seems to indicate that Joshua was about fifty-five years old at the time of the exodus, and ninety five when he led the Israelites into the promised land. He died at the age of one hundred and ten.

Moses was instructed to “inaugurate” Joshua. The Hebrew word is *tsavah*, meaning literally to command, give charge to, commission, appoint, or ordain. This ordination was not to be done in secret, but publicly, before the High Priest and the entire congregation. Since Joshua (in whom was the Spirit of Yahweh) is a transparent metaphor for Yahshua the Messiah—they even share the same name—the picture is one of transferring authority (all of which ultimately rests in Yahweh) from Moses to Yahshua, that is, from Law to grace. Again, the names themselves are a clue as to what’s happening. Moses means “drawn” in Hebrew (since he was drawn out of the water by Pharaoh’s daughter—see

Exodus 2:10—or “born” in Egyptian, whereas Yahshua (as we have seen) means “salvation” or “deliverance.” Thus we read the words of Yahshua to Nicodemus explaining this two-step process: **“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I say to you, you must be born again [literally, from above].”** (John 3:5-7) The state of being “born of water” (“born of flesh”) is thus represented by Moses and His realm, the Law. But being subsequently born of the Spirit is represented by Joshua (i.e., Yahshua), to whom the Law’s authority has been transferred. The Law is fulfilled through our Salvation.

- (997) *Recognize Joshua’s authority.* **“And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before Yahweh for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him—all the congregation.”** (Numbers 27:20-21) Moses happily did as he had been instructed, relieved to know that Israel would be in good hands for a while after he was gone. **“Then He inaugurated Joshua the son of Nun, and said, “Be strong and of good courage; for you shall bring the children of Israel into the land of which I swore to them, and I will be with you.”** (Deuteronomy 31:23) This is really getting interesting. Once more, Joshua is presented as a prophetic dress rehearsal for the coming Messiah. Did you catch it? *Joshua* would be the one to “bring the children of Israel into the land,” but *Yahweh* had promised, **“I will be with you.”** At some symbolic level then, Joshua’s role and Yahweh’s (through Yahshua) are linked, even equated.

Of course, Moses couldn’t have known that his successor’s name was the same as that of the coming Messiah. Yahushua, meaning “Yahweh is Salvation,” is a rather common name in Hebrew history, popping up several times in scripture before we even get close to the New Covenant. But let’s look at Josh’s *father’s* name. Nun is from a word meaning “to continue in perpetuity, to increase, to propagate.” This verb is used only once in scripture: **“His [in context, the Messiah’s] name shall endure forever. His name shall continue [*nun*: go on perpetually, increasing in glory] as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him. All nations shall call Him blessed. Blessed be Yahweh, God, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things!”** (Psalm 72:17) So it could be reasonably stated that “Joshua, the son of Nun” is a name that tells us that the one in whom “Yahweh is Salvation” will be “the son of perpetuity.” *Who* is perpetual? *Who* “continues” and “increases?” Again, the answer is contained in the name: “Yahweh” means “I Am,” or “I exist”—a statement denoting perpetual continuance. This is precisely the relationship that exists between the Messiah, Yahshua

of Nazareth, who was described in the womb as Immanuel—“God with us”—and God the Father, Yahweh. “Joshua, the son of Nun” is a name that describes who the Messiah would be *and* what the Messiah would do.

“Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as Yahweh had commanded Moses.” (Deuteronomy 34:9) At the present time, Israel does not “heed” the *ultimate* Joshua, Yahshua the Messiah. Israel as a nation has not listened to Him, nor has this generation done as Yahweh commanded Moses. But the restoration of Israel, their turning back to Yahweh’s Messiah, resulting in a glorious national reawakening, is by far the most oft-repeated prophetic theme in all of scripture. It *will* happen, or Yahweh is a liar.

- (998) *Defer to Yahweh when choosing your leader.* **“When you come to the land which Yahweh your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom Yahweh your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.”** (Deuteronomy 17:14-15) This is not, as is sometimes claimed, a command to set up a monarchy in Israel in place of the theocracy that existed under Moses. It is merely instruction on how to go about doing so if and when they ever did. In fact, when it finally happened almost four hundred years later, the move was characterized by God’s prophet as a rejection of Yahweh as Israel’s Leader—even though they followed both the Torah and Samuel’s instructions in the process of the selection of King Saul (see I Samuel 10:17-19).

Several things bear notice in Yahweh’s precept. First, He alone has the authority to choose men to rule over Israel, whether legitimate or not. It’s clear to me that even when evil tyrants ruled, Yahweh had taken a hand in placing them on the throne with an eye toward testing (or even punishing) Israel. Indeed, in the infamous “blessings and cursings” passage of Deuteronomy 28, contrast is drawn between the consequences of asking Yahweh to rule and choosing an earthly king instead. If they obeyed the voice of Yahweh, it says, **“Yahweh will establish you as a people holy [i.e., set apart] to Himself.... All peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of Yahweh, and they shall be in awe of you.... And Yahweh will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not beneath.”** (vs. 9, 10, 13) But if they did not, **“Yahweh will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke.... Yahweh will bring you and the king whom you set over you to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods—wood and stone.”** (vs. 20, 36) Bad kings in Israel would be the result of the people’s

disobedience against God. I can't help but reflect that we gentile nations have pretty much the same deal: the quality of our leaders is apparently a reflection of the spiritual condition of our populations. That ought to sting a bit. Does it?

Second, God's people were prohibited from having a "foreigner" rule over them. Besides being a left-handed admonition to adhere to God's Law, thus avoiding having characters like Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Herod, Caesar, Saladin, or Stalin ruling over them, it is a tacit reminder that their true and eternal King, the Messiah, would be a son of Israel. According to my reading of prophecy, Israel will have one more opportunity to get this one right: they will have to choose whether or not to accept the gentile Antichrist's messianic claims or to reject Him. Most of the world will seize upon the Antichrist's silver-tongued lies in the desperation and despair of a post nuclear-war world, but scripture tells us that a sizeable remnant of Israel, comprehending Yahweh's love at last (better late than never), will reject the world dictator's satanic claims and choose to flee to the wilderness—their final three and a half years of exile—rather than accept his satanically inspired "mark of the beast." The King they finally embrace will be the returning Jewish Messiah—their "Brother," Yahshua.

(999) *Look for a coming prophet who, "like Moses," will communicate God's words as an intermediary or emissary, in a calm, non-frightening manner.* **"Yahweh your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me [i.e., like Moses] from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of Yahweh your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of Yahweh my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.'" (Deuteronomy 18:15-16)** Israel's close encounter with Yahweh's glory at Sinai was a terrifying experience. All that fire, smoke, lightning, earth shaking, and rock splitting were more than these poor ex-slaves were equipped to deal with. They were convinced (and not without reason) that if God continued to confront them personally like that, they would all die. As it was, of course, Yahweh had shown them but a tiny hint of His real power—just enough to get their attention.

Yahweh's little demonstration had the desired effect: the people were so awe stricken, they begged Moses to intercede for them, to talk with Yahweh himself and then tell them what He'd said, instead of having God communicating with them directly. What they pleaded for in their terrified state was precisely what Yahweh had in mind all along—a human intercessor filled with the Spirit of God, an anointed representative for both heaven and earth—a Messiah. **"And Yahweh said to me: 'What they have**

spoken is good.” As if this were *their* idea. **“I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.”**

(Deuteronomy 18:17-19) Yahweh’s response made it clear that Moses himself was not the ultimate intercessor, but that someone “like him” in certain ways would be “raised up” at some point in the future. This Spokesman, moreover, would be “raised up for them.” Interesting turn of phrase.

First, this person would be “a Prophet.” That is, He would be a *nabi*, one who proclaims truth with divine insight, either foretelling or forth-telling the words of God. Second, this Prophet would be “like” Moses, who was characterized by his humility and diligent service while leading God’s chosen people, as well as his being filled with Yahweh’s Spirit, allowing him to speak with God “face to face.” Third, this Messianic figure would be raised up “from among *their* brethren” (not *my* brethren). That is, He would be an Israelite, though not necessarily from the tribe of Levi like Moses. Fourth, He would speak the very words of God, words that Yahweh Himself would put in His mouth. Fifth, those words would carry Yahweh’s authority: if anyone refuses to hear the Prophet, Yahweh promises to demand an answer as to why.

And sixth, being human, the Prophet would not be as “awesome” (read: *scary*) as Yahweh’s Mount Sinai manifestation. **“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law.”** (Isaiah 42:1-4) No more thunder, lightning, fire and smoke. Rather than causing earthquakes, the coming Prophet would calm the raging seas with a simple word, prompting His disciples to remark in awe, **“Who can this be, that even the waves and the sea obey Him?”** (Matthew 8:27)

We have no record of any Israelite other than Yahshua—*ever*—speaking out with the personal authority of Yahweh. At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, we read these telling words: **“And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”** (Matthew 7:28-29) The prophets of Israel had couched their pronouncements in terms of divine messages: “Hear, O Israel: thus says Yahweh....” The

scribes and Pharisees merely parroted the opinions of previous sages: “Rabbi so-and-so argued thusly....” But Yahshua said comparatively outlandish things like, **“Everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”** (Matthew 7:26-27) Either He *was* the Prophet promised by Yahweh through Moses, or He was a fraud who *should* have been crucified for leading people astray. There is no middle ground. If you don’t believe that Yahshua was (and is) the Messiah, then be prepared to tell God why you think so: He has vowed to require an answer from you.

(1000) *Beware of false prophets.* **“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which Yahweh has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which Yahweh has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”** (Deuteronomy 18:20-22) In contrast to the ultimate Prophet “like Moses” whom Yahweh promised to send to the people so they wouldn’t have to endure frightening atmospheric or tectonic phenomena every time He had something to say, God now advises them to be on the lookout for other prophets—both true and false. And since lies can sound plausible, Yahweh laid down some criteria for separating truth from falsehood.

First, the people were instructed to discern who the “prophet” was representing: Whose words did he purport to be speaking? If he claimed to be speaking in the authority of some “deity” other than Yahweh—Ba’al or Molech, for example—then that prophet was to be put to death: period, end of story. But if he declared, “Thus says Yahweh” (as Moses did) then two means were given whereby the prophet’s pronouncements could be put to the test. In our English translation, these sound pretty much like the same thing, but they’re not. “If the thing does not come to pass” means pretty much what it sounds like: in the case of a predictive prophecy, the fulfillment of that prophecy—however unlikely it seemed—would be the vindication of the prophet’s words.

But the other contingency, “if the thing does not happen,” is not quite as straightforward. Literally, it says “if the thing does not exist,” or “if the thing is not established.” It employs the verb “to be,” *hayah*—the same word upon which Yahweh’s name is based. The problem is that not all prophetic pronouncements are predictive of some future event. Many—as testified by the bulk of the Torah—are commandments or statements of

fact. So how are these things to be “established?” Remember that the Ten Commandments were delivered amid undeniable signs from God: fire, smoke, and so forth. It follows, then, that purported messages from Yahweh must be in harmony with these Commandments. So when Yahweh says, “You shall not commit adultery,” but the would-be “prophet” suggests honoring the local “gods” by engaging in ritual sex with their temple prostitutes, you know what to believe—and who to stone. Or when Yahweh says, “You shall not steal,” and “You shall not covet,” you should know immediately that Muhammad is a false prophet when he authorizes raids on caravans and villages.

Predictive prophecy has its own little glitch. Not all (actually, very few) Biblical prophecies were fulfilled in the prophet’s lifetime. We are rarely treated to “prophet’s duels,” such as Elijah’s bout with the four hundred prophets of Ba’al on Mount Carmel—where the vindication of the true spokesman of God is revealed immediately. Equally rare are instances where God’s schedule is openly revealed in the context of the prophecy (as in Daniel 9:24-27). The premise of my book on prophecy, *Future History*, was to identify and place into its chronological framework every yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecy in the entire Bible—and even at this late date, there are still so many of them it took me nine hundred pages to discuss them all. The point is, the prophets themselves never saw the fulfillments of much of what they predicted. As far as their contemporaries (and ours) are concerned, these “things have not come to pass.”

It is up to us, then, to determine whether a spokesman is a prophet of Yahweh, or is speaking for someone else—himself, a religious organization, or even a false god. The prophets of the Bible, to a man, were in perfect accord with Yahweh’s revealed program in every place such a thing could be verified—leaving us no logical alternative but to receive their words in the places where new information is being imparted. In the end, we are faced with an unprecedented phenomenon: forty authors, living over a span of fifteen hundred years, writing of a variety of subjects, in a variety of languages and styles, from a variety of cultures, all purporting to speak for God, and all in perfect agreement with each other. The only possible explanation is that Yahweh Himself was guiding them, inspiring them, putting His words into their hearts and minds.

That’s not to say that every wannabe prophet speaks for Yahweh. We are told what to do with those whose message is out of sync with Yahweh’s scriptures, but unfortunately, our English translation here is totally misleading when it says, **“The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”** This really means, “The prophet has spoken it

in his insolence, arrogance, and pride—in contempt, scorn, and lack of respect (all of which is meant by the Hebrew word *zadown*). You shall not dwell, sojourn, or gather together with him, live as an alien in his land, nor be his guest” (which is the meaning of the Hebrew verb *gur*). In other words, we are to consider those who speak lies in Yahweh’s name—as measured against the truth of His Word—to be arrogant, self-willed rebels. We are to avoid them, shun them, and refuse to listen to them. Of course, doing this requires that we learn and know what the Word of God says. Otherwise, we risk becoming the false prophet’s victim, for he preys upon the uninformed. As Hosea put it, **“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”** (Hosea 4:6)

Identifying and embracing the real standard of truth is essential. After all, Yahshua Himself was accused of being a false prophet by the religious leaders of Israel, but only because they themselves had adopted a false standard—Jewish tradition, the oral law—in place of Yahweh’s Torah. In the end, Yahshua kept the Torah flawlessly—and He fulfilled it to the letter.

After His resurrection, Yahshua reminded His disciples, **“These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures....”** We have looked at only one small part of the prophetic record to which He referred—the Law of Moses. Don’t blame me if it’s taken us over a thousand pages to cover it. Yahweh is nothing if not thorough, and as far as I’m concerned, it would have been unworthy of His love for us to settle for merely skimming over it once lightly.

“Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.’” (Luke 24:44-49) Salvation was never meant to be the exclusive privilege of Israel, nor was the Torah meant to be opaque and meaningless to anyone other than the Jews. Its truth is universal; its message is for all nations. The good news proclaimed in the New Covenant is predicted in the Torah, and here in the risen Yahshua’s benediction, the entire sweep of Yahweh’s grand plan is reprised. We should not

find it the least bit surprising that every point He raised is echoed somewhere in the seven consecrated annual appointments Israel was instructed to keep throughout their generations. Did you spot them?

(1) The “suffering” of Yahweh’s Anointed One was fulfilled on the first of Yahweh’s holy appointments, Passover. (2) The “remission of our sins” was accomplished through the separation of Life from death as Yahshua’s body lay in the tomb on the second miqra, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (3) His “rising from the dead on the third day” was predicted by the Feast of Firstfruits—which promises that we, the harvest of redeemed souls, will someday follow Him. (4) Our personal indwelling with “power from on high”—none other than the Holy Spirit of Yahweh—was achieved on the fourth of God’s appointments, the Feast of Weeks. (5) Our “witness of these things,” our preaching the good news of God’s redemption to every nation, will reach its ultimate expression when we who trusted Yahshua are called to glory at the blowing of Yahweh’s shofar—on the Feast of Trumpets, while those left behind are commanded to “give heed” to our testimony (Isaiah 18:3). (6) The “repentance” of Israel, “beginning at Jerusalem,” will be accomplished at last on the definitive Day of Atonement, the sixth appointment of the series. And (7) the “promise of the Father’s presence” dwelling and reigning personally among us will be kept on the last and greatest miqra of all, the ultimate Feast of Tabernacles. Yahweh’s message is nothing if not consistent. And Yahweh’s mercy is nothing if not breathtaking.

We indeed are witnesses of these things. *Maranatha!*