

Marriage, Sex, and Family Ties

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

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

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

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

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

“Then what’s the advantage of being a Jew? Is there any value in the Jewish ceremony of circumcision? Yes, being a Jew has many advantages. First of all, the Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God. True, some of them were unfaithful; but just because they broke their promises, does that mean God will break his promises? Of course not! Though everyone else in the world is a liar, God is true. As the Scriptures say, ‘He will be proved right in what he says, and he will win his case in court.’” (Romans 3:1-4 NLT) This is particularly significant in light of our current study. The transmission of Yahweh’s instructions to us, called here the “whole revelation of God,” was accomplished through the Jews. So the children of Israel have had the great privilege of being the custodians of God’s truth. Were they always worthy of this exalted position? No. So what? The fact remains, the blessings of Yahweh came to man through the Jews.

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

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

we follow Jewish customs, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the father of all who believe." Yes, not Moses, but *Abraham*: a gentile (or pre-Jew, if you will) who was "counted as righteous" by Yahweh long before the law existed.

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

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

MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND FAMILY

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

But there's more to it. There is a virtually universal perception that God assumes a strictly male persona—a view that often leads to an unscriptural and erroneous attitude that men are somehow "better" than women. It's true that Eve's starring role in the introduction of sin into the world earned her a place of permanent subservience ("Your desire shall be toward your husband, and he shall rule over you." Genesis 3:16). But God's original and intended pattern was equal honor between men and women. As I pointed out in #8, Yahweh is referred to as "father" only once or twice in the Old Covenant

scriptures—most memorably in Isaiah 9:6, where the Messiah is called “**Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**” We aren’t surprised to find that the name Yahweh is a masculine form in Hebrew. But consider this: the word for “Spirit” (*ruwach*) as used of deity in passages like Genesis 1:2 (“**And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters...**”) is a *feminine* noun. Yahweh is not only our Father; “He” is also our *Mother!* The reason God designed us as He did—children of *both* our mothers and our fathers—was to demonstrate a spiritual truth: in order to be truly alive, we need to be born not only in body and soul, but also in spirit. Yahshua pointed out this very thing to Nicodemus in the third chapter of the Gospel of John.

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

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

As far as the mitzvah’s prescribed temporal punishment is concerned, it should be understood that the death sentence for striking your earthly father or mother was reserved for Israel under its theocratic government. We today are not to exact this penalty. But Yahweh’s word is not obsolete: he who

strikes out at the God who is represented in this life by his parents “**shall surely be put to death.**” There’s no getting around it.

- (61) *Do not curse your father or mother.* “**He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.**” (Exodus 21:17) This is even harsher than it looks at first glance in the English. The word for “curse” is one we’ve seen before—*qalal*: to trivialize, to bring into contempt, curse, despise, or revile. (See #3.) Admittedly, the death penalty seems a bit extreme for merely taking your parents lightly. But as we have seen, our mothers and fathers stand in the place of Yahweh on this earth. Ultimately, if we take *God* lightly, we shall “bear our sin.” Aside from the metaphor of father and mother representing God, keeping the parent-child relationship intact in Israel during the years between the exodus and the coming of the Messiah was a crucial factor in delivering our Deliverer to a lost world. Sending the promised Messiah into a dysfunctional society the likes of the Canaanites’, the Babylonians’, the Romans’, or today’s America for that matter, would have been, shall we say, problematical.

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

- (62) *Reverently fear your father and mother.* “**Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: “You shall be holy, for I, Yahweh, your God, am holy. Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I am Yahweh your God.”’”** (Leviticus 19:1-3) As if to confirm everything I’ve said in the last few entries, Moses now reports Yahweh’s instructions to “revere” one’s mother and father in the larger context of reverence for *Him* and separation from the world. The reference to “mother and father” here is in fact a bit incongruous if taken strictly as the earthly relationship between parents and children. But if you “read” it: “You shall revere *Me* and keep My Sabbaths,” it all makes perfect sense. Yahweh is our Father, our Mother, our reason for being, the One whose love brought us into existence. And again, it makes little sense to link

reverence for our earthly fathers and mothers to the weekly Sabbath rest, but if you see that Yahweh is equating the Sabbath to our eternal salvation as He is identifying our parents with Himself, the picture becomes clear and stunningly beautiful: those who are holy—separated to Yahweh’s will and purpose—are children of their Heavenly Father/Mother, and it is these who will “keep His Sabbaths”—in other words, enjoy everlasting life. Why? Because Yahweh is their God.

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

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

(64) *A eunuch shall not marry a daughter of Israel.* **“He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of Yahweh.”** (Deuteronomy 23:1) The mitzvah here bears no resemblance to what Yahweh said. The rabbis simply took the ball (so to speak) and ran with it. This has nothing to do with marriage or family, and everything to do with symbols. It’s not that God is somehow put off by those unfortunate enough to have become eunuchs; it’s that these poor guys were a ready metaphor for fruitlessness. Yahweh is teaching us that “entering into His assembly” in truth will be evidenced by spiritual “fruit” in one’s life, defined later by Paul as love (hence: joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—Galatians 5:22). Just as a physical eunuch is not equipped to father children, a “spiritual eunuch” is inherently unable to transmit the spirit of God’s love to those around him.

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

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

As in the case of eunuchs (see #64), Yahweh is not arbitrarily condemning a group of people who had no control over their familial situation. Rather, He is instituting a symbol, a picture, of the necessary state of being set apart for Yahweh's use. "Bastards" in this context represent the fruit, or result, of sin. The metaphor demonstrates that the ends do not justify the means in God's economy—the "Assembly of Yahweh" cannot be populated through corrupt methods or impure motives, but only through a "legitimate" relationship with Yahweh. Thus when Constantine's Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) *de facto* "converted" all of the Roman Empire to "Christianity," it was a pointless and counterproductive tactic. When you baptize a pagan, all you get is a wet pagan.

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

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

separation from the world's influence. As usual, Yahweh's clear intention goes far beyond the face value of the mitzvah.

- (67) *Do not exclude a descendant of Esau from the community of Israel for three generations. "You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother.... The children of the third generation born to them may enter the assembly of Yahweh."*

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

- (68) *Do not exclude an Egyptian from the community of Israel for three generations. "You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land. The children of the third generation born to them may enter the assembly of Yahweh."* (Deuteronomy 23:7-8) Same song, second verse. Unlike Moab and Ammon, Egypt's crimes against Israel and its God were not those of false teaching and seduction, but rather of lost men behaving badly—something that's (let's face it) inevitable for lost men. So Yahweh offered to consider their repentance (though there's no evidence that they ever did, at least on the national level). Egypt is a common scriptural metaphor for the world: not particularly good or bad, just *there*—a place of routine, mediocrity, malaise, and finally slavery. It's the place we must leave in order to enter the "Promised Land" of Yahweh's salvation. Unlike Edom, a remnant of Egypt will "make it" into the Millennium (see Isaiah 19:23-24), serving Yahweh with Israel at her side. The children of Egypt's third generation (following paganism and Islam) will indeed "enter the assembly of Yahweh."

- (69) *There shall be no harlot in Israel; that is, there shall be no intercourse with a woman without a formal declaration of marriage. "There shall be no ritual harlot of the daughters of Israel, or a perverted one of the sons of Israel. You shall not*

bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of Yahweh your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to Yahweh your God.”

(Deuteronomy 23:17-18) The rabbis have missed the point entirely (although what they prescribed is no doubt a fine thing). By making us the way He did—males and females designed to mate for life and produce offspring as a byproduct of our love for each other—Yahweh is showing us something wonderful about the spiritual pattern He has designed for us. He pictures Israel as His wife (just as the Church is described as the bride of Christ) and He is her “husband.” The essence of our marital faithfulness is monogamy—restricting our sexual contact to one partner. This is a picture of our faithfulness to Yahweh. We are not to “cheat” on Him by giving our affections to false gods—even stealthy idols like wealth, pleasure, or pride.

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

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

- (70) *Take a wife by kiddushin, the sacrament of marriage.* **“When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man’s wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before Yahweh, and you shall not bring sin on the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance.”** (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) God gave us lots of information on whom to marry, but He had precious little to say about how. In Jewish tradition, marriage is a two step process. *Kiddushin*, or betrothal, is in effect from the time the bride accepts a bridal contract, money, or even sexual relations from the groom. It is far more binding than our modern “engagement,” and can only be dissolved by death or formal divorce. The final step to full-blown “marriage,” called *nisuin*, is

achieved when the bride moves in with the groom. There is nothing at all wrong with this system, but the scripture the rabbis use to support it has nothing to do with the marriage/wedding process. As a matter of fact, Yahweh never actually specified a particular wedding formula (except for the obvious—one man and one woman sharing a life together—becoming “one flesh”). The Deuteronomy passage is, rather, a discussion about divorce and an admonition against certain abuses of the practice (which we’ll cover shortly).

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

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

business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken.” (Deuteronomy 24:5) This, of course, is simply the converse of Mitzvah #71. (The rabbis felt compelled to come up with a certain number of positive and negative rules, which explains why the list seems so contrived in places.) Consider this: if marriage is a picture of Yahweh’s relationship with His people, then there ought to be a spiritual counterpart to this honeymoon period—and there is. Yahshua the Messiah is prophesied to reign on earth as King of Kings for a thousand years—a period of time generally referred to as the Millennium, actually the seventh of seven millennia Yahweh has ordained as mortal man’s time upon the earth. Following the “marriage supper of the Lamb,” spoken of in Revelation 19, God’s thousand-year-long honeymoon with the redeemed of the earth will usher in the wedded bliss of eternity with Him. As a confirmed “old married person,” that sounds pretty good to me.

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

In a symbolic sense, Yahweh Himself is polygamous. He has separated Himself from His “first” wife, Israel, because of her unfaithfulness (see the book of Hosea). And now He has betrothed Himself to a new bride, the Ekklesia of Christ, who looks forward to consummating the union at the “marriage supper of the Lamb,” spoken of in Revelation 19. According to His own Law, Yahweh is prepared to treat the Church with the same level of devotion He affords to Israel. Will He restore Israel to her former place of blessing? Yes, but only after she repents of her wickedness. (Actually, it’s

more complicated than that: see #78.) And how does Yahweh view this potentially awkward three-way relationship between Himself, the Church, and Israel? Brace yourself for some *really* heavy symbolism, and read the Song of Solomon. The key is: Solomon represents the Messiah, the Shulamite is the Church, and the daughters of Jerusalem are, well, the daughters of Jerusalem—Israel.

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

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

- (75) *One who defames his wife’s honor by falsely accusing her of unchastity before marriage must live with her all his lifetime. “If any man takes a wife, and goes in to her, and detests her, and charges her with shameful conduct, and brings a bad name on her, and says, ‘I took this woman, and when I came to her I found she was not a virgin,’ then the father and mother of the young woman shall take and bring out the evidence of the young woman’s virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. And the young woman’s father shall say to the elders, ‘I gave my*

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

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

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

This spiritual application rings true for Israel, unfortunately. She was unchaste. She did—and continues to—follow false gods. And the “men of her city” (i.e., the world) have in obedience to the Law been stoning her for thousands of years. If only Israel had understood what Yahweh was teaching them in His Torah.

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

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

stubborn, willful disobedience of His instructions. He didn't tell us these things for His health; He told us for *our* health.

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

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

perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And it shall be that the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel." (Deuteronomy 25:5-6) In ancient Israel, this mitzvah was part of the welfare system, intimate and practical, as usual. To become a widow was bad enough, but to be left with no sons to carry on the family name and provide familial support was considered a catastrophic tragedy. The widow wasn't to remarry just anybody. God's ideal solution was for the dead husband's brother to marry the widow (even if he was already married, so the rules governing polygamy apply—see #73). The first son born of this union of necessity would bear the name, status, and inheritance rights of the deceased husband. This also kept the DNA—the genetic profile—of the son as close as possible to what it would have been had the dead brother been his actual father.

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

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

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

FORBIDDEN SEXUAL RELATIONS

- (82) *Do not indulge in familiarities with relatives, such as kissing, embracing, winking, or skipping, which may lead to incest. "None of you shall approach anyone who is near of kin to him, to uncover his nakedness: I am Yahweh."* (Leviticus 18:6) This verse does not, as the rabbis suggest, prohibit specific ostensibly innocent activities that could be preludes to sexual sin. Rather, it introduces and summarizes an entire category of taboo relationships listed in Leviticus 18. In this whole next section, then, we will explore these specific forbidden relationships one at a time. One thing we should make clear at the outset: to "uncover one's nakedness" is an unambiguous Hebrew euphemism for sexual relations—it does not merely mean to strip (or *skip*, for that matter). However, the use of the word "approach" (Hebrew *qarab*: to come near, approach, bring forth) signals that not only is the actual act forbidden, but also the intent—read: "Don't attempt to seduce them." This of course meshes perfectly with what Yahshua had to say in Matthew 5:28—to look at a woman with lust is tantamount to committing adultery with her. God looks at the heart.

We should not skip over the admonition that punctuates this summary verse: "**I am Yahweh.**" This oft-repeated formula is the reason given for all the detailed instruction on sexual purity that would follow. It's a reminder that Yahweh created a certain order to things: one man and one woman becoming one flesh, metaphorically in their life together, and literally in the procreation of offspring through physical union driven by mutual love. This is a picture, of course, of our relationship with God. When we are "born from above" or "born of the Spirit," we become the spiritual offspring of our

Heavenly Father, Yahweh, and our “Mother,” the Holy Spirit (remember, the word for Spirit, *ruwach*, is a feminine noun in Hebrew). This makes us Christ’s adopted brothers and sisters! Yahshua said, **“For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.”** (Mark 3:35) And that’s why Paul could write, **“We are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.”** (Romans 8:16-17) If we indulge in sexual relationships that violate the divine metaphor, we have defaced the priceless masterpiece Yahweh has created, like scribbling a moustache on the Mona Lisa.

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

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

that the father (because he represents Yahweh in the family structure) is to receive reverence and respect at all times from all his children.

- (85) *Do not commit incest with your father's wife.* **"The nakedness of your father's wife you shall not uncover; it is your father's nakedness."** (Leviticus 18:8) Incest with your mother was covered in #83, so this mitzvah, it seems, is expanding and refining the rule to include other wives your father may have married, either as a widower or in a polygamous union. Either way, it supports the basic tenet of being respectful of your father, who stands in for God in the family constitution. Again we see that wrongly exercising your father's prerogative and privilege is equated to usurping the authority of Yahweh, which (in case you've lost your bearings) is a bad thing. And again, this mitzvah is a subset of the Seventh Commandment: **"You shall not commit adultery."** When we are totally faithful to our spouses (and our God), we don't have to go out of our way to obey any of these "Laws." They're perfectly natural.
- (86) *Do not commit incest with your sister.* **"The nakedness of your sister, the daughter of your father, or the daughter of your mother, whether born at home or elsewhere, their nakedness you shall not uncover."** (Leviticus 18:9) Now the instructions are getting a bit more real-world practical. Sisters and half-sisters are now taken off the eligible-wife-material roster. Abram, you'll recall, had married his half-sister, Sarai. This was not an uncommon practice in the patriarchal era, when local populations were sparse and the gene pool was still relatively deep. But here, half a millennium later, we see Yahweh prohibiting such unions among the children of Israel. God, having designed our DNA, knew that successive generations of inbreeding could bring debilitating recessive genes to the surface, making the population as a whole more susceptible to a wide range of hereditary diseases and genetic abnormalities. Like many of these mitzvot, the *reason* for God's instruction would not be understood for thousands of years, but those who followed the "Owner's Manual" carefully in the meantime were nevertheless protected in spite of their lack of scientific knowledge.
- (87) *Do not commit incest with your father's wife's daughter.* **"The nakedness of your father's wife's daughter, begotten by your father—she is your sister—you shall not uncover her nakedness."** (Leviticus 18:11) Is there an echo in here? Under normal circumstances, the object here would be the same as in #86. But if the father has remarried or taken a second wife, a daughter of that union (i.e., one's step-sister) is also included in the do-not-marry list. According to the Inventor of our human genome, the relationship is still too close to avoid weakening the gene pool.

- (88) *Do not commit incest with your son's daughter.* **“The nakedness of your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter, their nakedness you shall not uncover; for theirs is your own nakedness.”** (Leviticus 18:10) Chafetz Chayim's list of the 613 mitzvot lists this one and #89 together, while Maimonides lists them separately. They're way ahead of me. I'm still scratching my head trying to figure out who would be sick enough to want to have sex with his own granddaughter. But we should not neglect the overall context of the passage. Yahweh explains why He took the trouble to describe the filth the Israelites were *not* to roll around in: **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘I am Yahweh your God. According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am Yahweh your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 18:1-5) They had apparently seen all of these aberrant behaviors being practiced in Egypt, and they would see them again taking place in Canaan (that is, if they let the inhabitants of the Land live long enough to observe their deviant lifestyles first hand—something they were not supposed to do). God in His wisdom knew that it wouldn't be sufficient to simply say “Be faithful to your own wife” after the children of Israel had been exposed to pagan sexual practices in Egypt for four hundred years. He had to spell it out.
- (89) *Do not commit incest with your daughter's daughter.* **“The nakedness of your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter, their nakedness you shall not uncover; for theirs is your own nakedness.”** (Leviticus 18:10) Forget the DNA thing for a moment. Wanting to have sex with someone two generations removed is just plain creepy; which explains why Satan promotes the idea. In 622, Muhammad, who was fifty at the time, married a six-year-old girl named Aisha, the daughter of his best (okay, his *only*) friend, Abu Bakr. Even if he waited a while to consummate the marriage, there's still only one accurate word for that kind of behavior: pedophilia. Allah loves it; Yahweh hates it. By the way, the highest rate of close-family marriage in the world to this very day is Muhammad's homeland, Saudi Arabia, where 56.8 percent of all marriages are between close relatives. Maybe all that inbreeding explains the way they think.
- (90) *Do not commit incest with your daughter.* Tracey Rich of Judaism 101 observes that this is not found explicitly in the Torah but is inferred from other commands that would include it. I would single out Leviticus 18:17 as a proof text—**“You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter.”** If you have a daughter, it is axiomatic that you have at one point “uncovered

the nakedness” of her mother, whether or not she is actually your wife. I’d say the mitzvah is more than “inferred.” It’s commanded.

- (91) *Do not commit incest with your father’s sister.* **“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s sister; she is near of kin to your father.”** (Leviticus 18:12) In other words, do not marry (or merely have sexual relations with) your aunt on your father’s side, even if your uncle has passed away and she is free to remarry: she is too near a relation to you to be genetically safe.
- (92) *Do not commit incest with your mother’s sister.* **“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother’s sister, for she is near of kin to your mother.”** (Leviticus 18:13) There went the apparent loophole left by verse 12: your aunt on your mother’s side is out of bounds as well. The odd phrasing is not due to the fact that there is no generic word for “aunt” in Hebrew (it’s *dodah*, used in verse 14—see #93). Yahweh is just leaving no stone unturned—a man’s father’s sister and his mother’s sister are both forbidden as sexual partners.
- (93) *Do not commit incest with your father’s brother’s wife.* **“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s brother. You shall not approach his wife; she is your aunt.”** (Leviticus 18:14) Though there is no genetic link to be wary of, there’s still the little matter of adultery to deal with. Beyond that, one’s uncle is the closest of relations to your father or mother; therefore the same sort of respect is due to them as should be shown to one’s parents.
- (94) *Do not commit sodomy with your father’s brother.* **“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s brother.”** (Leviticus 18:14). Sodomy, or any sort of homosexual relationship, is singled out for prohibition elsewhere (see #103). The actual Torah wording does not presuppose an all-male audience; this applies to women as well. Sexual intimacy of any kind with one’s uncle is forbidden.
- (95) *Do not commit incest with your son’s wife.* **“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law—she is your son’s wife—you shall not uncover her nakedness.”** (Leviticus 18:15) This is the one that Judah—had there been a written law at that time—would have blown in Genesis 38—which brings up an interesting question. Was it, or was it not, a sin for Judah, since the Law had not yet been handed down, and he didn’t know the prostitute he was hiring was his daughter-in-law anyway? It’s like the old “If a tree falls in the forest and there’s nobody there to hear it, does it make a sound?” conundrum. The answer here, as with the tree, is yes. **“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”** (Romans 3:19-20) Sin existed before the Law was given; the Law merely made us aware of how badly we were failing. It doesn’t matter how many

laws there are, six million, six hundred thirteen, or only one (as in “Don’t eat the fruit of that tree”). If we fall short of God’s standard in any way (and we all do), we will find ourselves in need of redemption, a means of reconciliation with our Father. Nor does the mechanism for that reconciliation reside in the Law: Abraham *believed* God, and it was counted unto him as righteousness. Or stated in terms of our own dispensation, “Jesus answered and said unto them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’” (John 6:29)

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

18:18) This is the very type of multi-wife relationship that jump-started the nation of Israel, not that it was Jacob's fault or plan. God allowed it and used it for His own purposes in that instance, but He's making it clear here that it is not His pattern for the ideal family unit. If polygamy is dynamite with a short fuse, polygamy with sisters is like nitroglycerine on a bumpy road—it's apt to blow up in your face with no warning at all.

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

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

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

- (102) *Do not have intercourse with another man's wife. "Moreover you shall not lie carnally with your neighbor's wife, to defile yourself with her."* (Leviticus 18:20) More simply stated is the way Yahweh wrote it with His own hand on a stone tablet: **"You shall not commit adultery."** (Exodus 20:14). That's a pretty good summary of most of the mitzvot in this section. I can only reiterate that Yahweh ordained marriage between a man and a woman to be a picture of the relationship He seeks to enjoy with His people—lifelong, fruitful, devoted, faithful, and loving. As the prophet Malachi puts it, **"Did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth."** (Malachi 2:15) Adultery is the ultimate treachery.

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

- (103) *Do not commit sodomy with a male. "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination."* (Leviticus 18:22) There. He said it. It's wrong. I don't want to hear any more politically correct hogwash about how homosexuality is an "acceptable alternative lifestyle," or how "God made some people different from others in their sexual propensities." If He did, then He's awfully confused. Granted, this is merely one of hundreds of behaviors that are prohibited in the Bible, any one of which is sufficient to define us as "sinners." On the other hand, Yahweh goes beyond merely telling us not to do this; He uses the word "abomination" to describe this particular "alternative lifestyle." The Hebrew word translated abomination is *toebah*, which means: "something morally disgusting, that is, an abhorrence; especially idolatry or an idol—an abominable custom or thing." (S) It comes from the root *ta'ab*, a verb meaning "to abhor, the logical response to a strongly detestable activity. It is associated with a severe sense of loathing." (B&C) To put things in perspective, this is the strongest language you can find in the Bible. Make no mistake: God *hates* homosexuality.

- (104) *Do not have intercourse with a beast.* **“Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it.”** (Leviticus 18:23) I guess I’ve led a sheltered life. Under normal circumstances, this one never would have entered my mind, much less would I have needed instructions prohibiting it for me to know it was wrong. I mean, *duh!* We don’t really need a special mitzvah telling us not to hit ourselves over the head with a frying pan, do we? So why are we told something like this? As I observed at the beginning of this section, the land to which the Israelites were moving was populated with a people whose “iniquity was full.” They had grown so perverse in so many ways, God had no choice but to eradicate them and their practices if He wanted to keep His chosen people set apart for His purposes. This sort of sick behavior was part of what Yahweh wanted to wipe out.
- Beyond that, our sexual relationships are once again pressed into service as a picture of our relationship with Yahweh—or not. Genesis 1:26 reports that we are made in the “image of God.” In all of nature, God designed his creatures to mate only with their own kind—you can’t cross a cat with a gnat. And *we* are God’s “kind.” At least, we become so when we are “born from above.” (John 3) But it’s also possible to be born from below—to become indwelt with the spirit of Satan (whether metaphorically or in fact). This is the spiritual equivalent of “having intercourse with a beast.”
- (105) *A woman shall not have intercourse with a beast.* **“Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion.”** (Leviticus 18:23) In the interests of being thorough, Yahweh makes sure that the women of Israel understand that this applies to them, too. Their purity was every bit as important to God’s plan of redemption as that of the men. And as for the spiritual application, we are reminded that when “God made man in His image, He made them male *and* female.”
- (106) *Do not castrate the male of any species; neither a man, nor a domestic or wild beast, nor a fowl.* **“You shall not offer to Yahweh what is bruised or crushed, or torn or cut; nor shall you make any offering of them in your land.”** (Leviticus 22:24) The rabbis have missed the point entirely here. Yahweh’s instruction was not about castration at all—it was about respect. The Israelites were not to offer imperfect sacrifices, animals that had been injured or for some other reason had become worthless (or worth less) to them as livestock. They were to offer perfect specimens, without spot or blemish, usually specified as males, often of a certain young age. Why? Because their sacrifices were a prophetic dress rehearsal—a symbol—for what Yahweh Himself was about to offer up as a propitiation for our sins:

a perfect Sacrifice, without sin, a young male full of promise, as flawless in character as the lambs or goats of the Levitical sacrifices were in body.

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

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

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

Third, as strange as it may sound coming from a dyed-in-the-wool literalist like myself, God's symbols, lurking just beneath the surface in these mitzvot, are the *primary* point; in many cases the rules seem to be there largely to serve as vehicles for the deeper truth. As we can readily observe from Yahshua's *modus operandi*, teaching in parables is one of God's favorite methods: the lessons

would be somehow less personal if we didn't have to glean the truth from the story and watch the "light bulb" go on above our heads. What matters is not that the stories are true or untrue—it's that they aren't in themselves the point. A good example is the tale told to David by the prophet Nathan about a poor man whose sole possession, a little ewe lamb, was callously slaughtered by his rich neighbor so he could entertain a guest. David was rightly indignant, and being king, declared that the rich man should die for his crimes. Only then did Nathan tell him, "You are the man." If the prophet had chastised the king to his face (as John the Baptist later did to Herod) David might never have repented and asked forgiveness for his role in the Bathsheba affair. His defenses would have been up, and his human nature might have gotten the better of him. But since the story had been presented in symbolic form, the king was able to relate to the core truth of it and make the proper response.

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