

A Holy People

The mitzvot in this chapter cover a wide variety of topics: prophecy, idolatry, agriculture, clothing, and the firstborn. It would seem to be a bit of a potpourri, but there is a unifying theme—the setting apart of God's people from the world. Though we must live *in* the world, we don't have to be *of* it. Maintaining a separateness, a pilgrim mentality, is what we're called to do. If we're willing to look past the surface, these instructions will give us a glimpse at Yahweh's heart.

So in our continuing effort to sort out what we're supposed to be doing with the Torah during the Church age, let us first turn to Paul's letter to the Galatians. **"When I saw that they [i.e., the Jewish contingent among the believers at Antioch, including Peter] were not following the truth of the Good News, I said to Peter in front of all the others, "Since you, a Jew by birth, have discarded the Jewish laws and are living like a Gentile, why are you trying to make these Gentiles obey the Jewish laws you abandoned? You and I are Jews by birth, not 'sinners' like the Gentiles. And yet we Jewish Christians know that we become right with God, not by doing what the law commands, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be accepted by God because of our faith in Christ—and not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be saved by obeying the law...."** Here's what had happened. After Peter had had his eye-opening encounter with Cornelius the Centurion (a faithful gentile), he had dropped his inbred Jewish snobbishness—something demanded by rabbinical tradition—and had begun to treat all men as equals under Yahweh. He finally recognized the truth that salvation was intended for all people, not just the Jews.

The New Living Translation has added an explanatory phrase that could easily be misconstrued. The phrase "have discarded the Jewish laws" doesn't appear in the original text. But technically, this is precisely what Peter had done. Don't misunderstand: he still observed the Torah as best he could, but he had dropped the *Jewish traditions* that had been added onto God's instructions by the rabbis. Verse 12 of Galatians 2 gives an example: Peter had taken to openly fellowshiping with gentile believers, even eating meals with them, something he never would have done before the Cornelius episode. He hadn't for a moment forsaken the Mosaic dietary laws (see Chapter 5 of this volume), but he *had* discarded the rabbinical prejudices against keeping gentile company or sharing supper with them.

But then some guys from the church at Jerusalem showed up, fellows whom Peter knew would be shocked at his newfound tolerance for goyim companionship. And Peter waffled. Paul saw right through it, of course, and

called him on his lapse—something hilariously ironic in its own right, since Paul had been a “Pharisee of Pharisees,” a qualified expert in (and a rabid proponent of) the Torah *and* the rabbinical traditions, not necessarily in that order. At one point he had been willing to kill to keep the rabbinical view from being pushed aside by this new sect, the “followers of the Way.” But Paul now pointed out that by giving lip service to the “oral law,” the rabbinical perversion, excuse me—*interpretation*—of the Torah, Peter was leaving the false impression that salvation depended on keeping the law. (Maimonides’ system of mitzvot, of course, didn’t exist yet, but the oral traditions that his 613 “laws” were based upon were firmly entrenched by this time.) Peter and Paul, though, both understood that salvation came only through faith in Yahshua.

Paul continues: **“But what if we seek to be made right with God through faith in Christ and then find out that we are still sinners? Has Christ led us into sin? Of course not! Rather, I make myself guilty if I rebuild the old system I already tore down. For when I tried to keep the law, I realized I could never earn God’s approval. So I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ. I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not one of those who treats the grace of God as meaningless. For if we could be saved by keeping the law, then there was no need for Christ to die.”** (Galatians 2:14-21, NLT) We’ve seen these truths before. The only way we can escape the requirements—and the condemnation—of the Law is to die to it. But the only way to “die” without suffering all sorts of unpleasant side effects, like turning back into dust, is to “hitch a ride,” that is, spiritually associate ourselves with someone who has fought death on our behalf and won, someone who has died for our sins and risen from the grave under His own power, someone who has proved with a faultless life that He is a worthy sacrifice, acceptable to God. There is only one candidate: either we stand justified through Christ, or we fall, condemned under the Law.

The Galatian Christians had begun well enough, receiving their redemption through grace alone. And they had, quite reasonably, looked at the Torah and said, “This is part of God’s word. We should pay heed to these instructions.” But from there it was an easy jump to, “We *must* do this if we are truly Christ’s,” and then to, “Our salvation *depends* on following the letter of the law as interpreted by the rabbis.” So Paul points out the disconnect: “Yes, the Law is good and should be followed, but it never had the power to save anyone, only the power to point out our need for a Savior.” **“Oh, foolish Galatians! What magician has cast an evil spell on you? For you used to see the meaning of Jesus Christ’s death as clearly as though I had shown you a signboard with a picture of Christ dying on the cross. Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by keeping the law? Of course not, for the Holy Spirit came upon you only after you believed the message you heard about Christ. Have you lost your senses? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to**

become perfect by your own human effort? You have suffered so much for the Good News. Surely it was not in vain, was it? Are you now going to just throw it all away? I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law of Moses? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ.” (Galatians 3:1-5 NLT)

What we often miss here is what Paul *didn't* say. He didn't declare that the Torah was obsolete, useless, or of no value. That's an erroneous attitude we inherited from Constantine's clerics. It all began like this: In an ecclesiastical power grab worthy of the most ambitious rabbi, Constantine's bishops, at the Council of Nicea in 325, voted to replace Yahweh's "Jewish" Passover with the pagan Easter (a name derived from the Babylonian goddess Ishtar), because it was (as Constantine later wrote) "declared improper to follow the custom of the Jews in the celebration of this holy festival, because, their hands having been stained with crime, the minds of these wretched men are necessarily blinded." In the same way and for the same reasons, the Council of Laodicea, later in the fourth century, declared that God's ordained Sabbath must be replaced with Sunday worship. In fact, Sabbath religious meetings were declared to be illegal. *If the Jews do it, it must be bad!* In their heated headlong rush to persecute Jews (in turn, an attempt to steal for themselves the promises of future glory Yahweh had made to Israel) the Roman Catholic Church was willing to throw out the Word of God itself if it bore any resemblance to the way the hated Jews practiced their religion. We've been struggling with this legacy of ignorance and deceit ever since.

But I digress. Paul was correcting our mistaken attitudes on what the Law was designed to do: not to save us, but to remind us we need saving. **"But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, 'Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all these commands that are written in God's Book of the Law.'" Anybody can keep a little of the Torah perfectly, I suppose. (I'm pretty sure I've never eaten a mouse.) But nobody born with Adam's sin nature can—or has—kept "all these commandments." "Consequently, it is clear that no one can ever be right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, 'It is through faith that a righteous person has life.' How different from this way of faith is the way of law, which says, 'If you wish to find life by obeying the law, you must obey all of its commands.' All is a tall order. The prime example of receiving righteousness through faith is Abraham, who didn't follow the Law (because he didn't have it) but was nevertheless accounted as a righteous man because of his faith in Yahweh's promise. "But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.' Through the work of Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, and we Christians receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith." (Galatians 3:10-14 NLT)**

Since Yahweh promised to bless Abraham on the basis of his faith over four centuries before Moses received the Torah, these promises obviously could not have been predicated on Abe's keeping of the Law. As Paul puts it, **"For if the inheritance could be received only by keeping the law, then it would not be the result of accepting God's promise. But God gave it to Abraham as a promise."** Which begs the question: **"Well then, why was the law given? It was given to show people how guilty they are. But this system of law was to last only until the coming of the child to whom God's promise was made."** (Galatians 3:18-19 NLT) This child of promise, of course, is Yahshua. But wait a minute! Is Paul saying that the Torah has outlived it's usefulness? Has God's Word been rendered obsolete? No, because the Law's "usefulness" *never* consisted of the power to save from sin, any more than a speed limit sign on the highway has the power to keep us from driving too fast.

Perhaps we can use our highway metaphor to illustrate how God's Law and His Promise interact with each other. Picture a bridge across a deep gorge. The Designer has said, "The bridge I've provided is the only way to cross the gorge. It will hold you. I promise. Trust Me." At the same time, He's posted a sign: Bridge speed limit—40 MPH. Now we, mankind, are all standing around contemplating how to get across the gorge. And we find ourselves gathering in groups reflecting our varying "solutions." The first group (whose leader is Abraham) says, "I trust the Designer to get me across the gorge, but since my car doesn't have a speedometer, I'll just keep my eyes fixed on Him as I cross the bridge." The next group, led by Moses, says, "We too trust the Designer," and they cross the bridge with their eyes glued to the speedometer: 40 MPH—that's the law. David's group not only trusts the Designer, they're enthusiastic fans. However, though they know there's a speed limit on the bridge, they often forget to observe it—and subsequently they crash their cars repeatedly into the guard rails as they cross the chasm. All three of these groups believe the Designer's promise and make it to the other side of the gorge because of that belief. The Law has played its part in how smooth (or bumpy) the journey was, but it hasn't affected the destination or their certainty of reaching it. These three groups represent the world's believers.

There are, however, other groups of which we need to be aware. Herod's group doesn't want to cross the gorge at all. They'd rather try to build paradise on this side. The bridge seems to them to be beside the point. Jezebel's people swear they know of a fast, smooth road that will easily get you across the river, just downstream a few miles. "You don't always have to do what the Designer wants," they say. "Trust us instead. C'mon. It'll be fun!" Those who follow Rabbi Akiba don't trust the bridge to hold their weight. They say there's a better path *upstream*, but to use it you've got to be disciplined and keep the letter of the Law—as we interpret it: "The 40 MPH speed limit must apply to all roads, everywhere, even though we reject the bridge that the law was written to instruct us about in the first place." They say, "Crossing the gorge with us will be an

impressive achievement of which you can be justifiably proud. But the bridge is just too easy—it's only there to deceive the gullible.” And finally, there's Constantine's group, who actually do venture out onto the Designer's bridge, but not to cross it. Their idea is to encrust it with gold and jewels, restrict access to it, and erect a toll booth at the entrance. The bottom line: nobody in these last four groups crosses the bridge at all, and consequently, none of them make it across the gorge. It really doesn't matter whether they keep the law or not, because they don't believe the Designer's assurance: “My bridge will get you to the other side.”

There are other groups as well, outside the experience of Judeo-Christianity, that neither trust the bridge nor respect the speed limits. One is represented by Muhammad. They provide an inclined ramp and a promise that if you drive fast enough, you'll make it to the other side, where big-eyed virgins await you with come-hither looks and goblets of wine. Buddha's group says the gorge is an illusion, and if you just walk up to the edge and step in, all your troubles will be over. Hitler's group, meanwhile, insists that fate has decreed victory over the gorge and that the *lebensraum* that lies beyond it must fall to his irresistible military might. Need I go on?

In case you still don't know what I'm talking about, here is the key to the metaphor. The “bridge” is Yahshua, the one and only way that the “Designer,” Yahweh, has provided for us to reach Him. The near side of the gorge is our mortal life, the far side is heaven, and the gorge itself is death. The speed limit is the Torah, God's instructions for a safe and productive journey. The “vehicles” in our story are our physical bodies. If we don't heed the “speed limit,” our bodies can be expected to suffer some damage along the way. But if we try to reach the other side by any means other than the Designer's bridge, we will fail altogether.

We have taken this round-about journey to illustrate what Paul was talking about: **“Well then, is there a conflict between God's law and God's promises? Absolutely not! If the law could have given us new life, we could have been made right with God by obeying it. But the Scriptures have declared that we are all prisoners of sin, so the only way to receive God's promise is to believe in Jesus Christ.”** (Galatians 3:21-22 NLT)
Obeying the speed limit won't help you reach your destination if you're not on the right road. As we return to Maimonides' list of 613 laws, let us remember that.

PROPHECY

(309) *Heed the call of every prophet in each generation, provided that he neither adds to, nor takes away from, the Torah. “Yahweh your God will raise*

up for you a Prophet like me [Moses] from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of Yahweh your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of Yahweh my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’” (Deuteronomy 18:15-16) After the Exodus, Yahweh had told Moses to gather the elders of Israel together at Mount Sinai (a.k.a. Horeb), and there, He gave them a tiny peek at His awesome power, enveloping the entire mountain in smoke and fire, with lightning, thunder, the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of God (see Exodus 19). Showing His *full* glory, of course, would have turned the whole planet into a charcoal briquette, but even “dialed down,” the effect was more than they could bear. The people were so afraid, they begged to be spared from such terrifying displays in the future. Yahweh agreed, and made them the promise we read above—the promise of a coming Israelite “prophet” who would do what they had “desired of Yahweh your God in Horeb,” namely, to be God in their midst, to show them how to live as men before Yahweh.

Maimonides’ mitzvah, though a fine sentiment in its own right, is a pale, twisted mischaracterization of what Moses had actually said. Moses spoke of *a* Prophet, not many, one who would speak with the very “**voice of Yahweh my God,**” a factor that makes rabbinical pontifications about whether or not he was maintaining the Torah totally superfluous. This Prophet would be a man, one born of the house of Israel—“your brethren.” Moses was referring, as we can see now, to the Messiah, Yahshua. When Moses had said, “**Him you shall hear,**” it was both a command and a prophecy. Many Jews in the days following the resurrection *did* “hear” and follow Him—though their voice was brutally and treacherously silenced by the Jewish ruling elite. But the day is coming when the nation of Israel *will* hear the voice of Yahshua. The definitive Day of Atonement (October 3, 2033, if my observations are correct—see Mitzvot #112 and #133-136 in Chapter 4) will see the fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy.

The thinly veiled reason that Maimonides added the stipulation that “*he neither adds to, nor takes away from, the Torah*” was the widely held assertion among Jews that Yahshua had violated the Torah by doing such things as healing sick people on the Sabbath. In point of fact, He had *not* violated the Torah—He had merely violated their *interpretations*, their traditions. It takes a lot of nerve to tell Bach how to play his own fugue.

- (310) *Do not prophesy falsely.* “**But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.**” (Deuteronomy 18:20) I wonder if Maimonides blushed when he got to this point. As we have seen, he played so fast and loose with the actual requirements of the Torah, and his

agenda is so transparent, it's a wonder he could put quill to parchment. There are two types of "false prophecy" delineated here. The first is making up what you'd like people to believe Yahweh said. It's the kind of thing Maimonides and other rabbis did all day long. Of course, the Jews don't have a monopoly on this tactic. Roman Catholics and quite a few Protestants routinely preach doctrines derived in this very way. Before we glibly say, "God said..." we need to be very sure of our facts.

The second category of false prophet is those who "speak in the name of other gods," like the 450 priests of Ba'al that Elijah dealt with in I Kings 18. Don't take comfort in the idea that there aren't all that many "Ba'al worshippers" around these days. Any religious system that purports to have answers for this life and beyond, outside of Yahweh's truth, is guilty. Islam's Allah is currently the world's number one "other god," with over a billion souls in bondage. But there are thousands of other ones, both obvious and covert, for whom false prophets put in their two bits' worth. And take note: "other gods" needn't be "gods" at all in the traditional sense. Communism and secular humanism are "religions" in every sense of the word, with their own prophets and doctrines.

- (311) *Do not refrain from putting a false prophet to death nor be in fear of him. "And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which Yahweh has not spoken?'—when a prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which Yahweh has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.*

(Deuteronomy 18:21-22) The penalty for false prophecy is death. But who is to administer the punishment? In Theocratic Israel, the *people* were to execute the offender (see Deuteronomy 13). Does that mean that we today should be going around killing everyone who voices a religious philosophy divergent from our own? (The Islamic scriptures demand this very thing, though Muslims don't always comprehend this.) It's pretty clear that the answer is "no," for during His first-century advent, Yahshua didn't advocate holy war against Rome (as some did), even though the Romans practiced the worship of many gods (none of whom answered to the name Yahweh) and the emperor himself demanded to be worshiped as a deity. So outside of a theocratic Israel that no longer exists, all we can say for sure is, "**That prophet shall die.**" How? Yahweh will apparently use His *enemies* to do most of the wet work. Read my book on prophecy, *Future History*, to find out how and when.

The rub here is that most prophets in the Bible predicted things that *didn't* take place during their lifetimes. In fact, so many prophecies *still* haven't been completely fulfilled, even today, it took me almost 900 pages

to explain them all in *Future History*. I suppose that's why the Old Covenant prophets often uttered prophecies with near and far fulfillments. Warnings about Assyria and Babylon often morph into warnings about Last-Days enemies like Islam and the Antichrist. The near-term fulfillments were a down payment on the *real* prophetic bottom line.

The translation of the phrase “**you shall not be afraid of him**” is a bit misleading. The word for “be afraid” is *guwr*. Its primary meaning is “to sojourn, abide, dwell in or with, to seek hospitality with.” (S) Moses is actually telling us that if a prophet says things in the name of God that don't come to pass, we aren't to have anything to do with him—we're not to “enter his house.” So when Muhammad tells you that the “day of doom” will take place in 1110 AD (i.e., half a prophetic “day,” or 500 years, after his coronation as Allah's last messenger) that's the signal to drop him and his religion like a hot rock. When the TV preacher promises you that God will bless you financially or cure your cancer if you send him enough money, it's time to tune him out. Remember, “**That prophet shall die.**”

IDOLATRY AND IDOLATORS

- (312) *Do not make a graven image; neither make it yourself nor have it made by others. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God.”* (Exodus 20:4-5) This, of course, is the second of the “Ten Commandments.” The point is not who makes the “graven image” or for whom, but rather its intended use. Images of created things are not to be employed as objects of worship. Things that would immediately pop into the minds of the Israelites hearing these words include the sun-god and moon-god symbols of their former Egyptian hosts, the golden calf they had merrily constructed while Mo was up on the mountain receiving this very Law (oops), and the fish-god images of the Dagon worshippers they were soon to encounter in the Land of Canaan.

The word translated “jealous” is *qana*, from a root which means “zeal.” The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* says, “It may prove helpful to think of ‘zeal’ as the original sense from which derived the notions ‘zeal for another’s property’ equals ‘envy,’ and ‘zeal for one’s own property’ equals ‘jealousy.’” Thus Yahweh was reminding the Israelites that they were His own set-apart people. They belonged to Him. And if we today are His children, He is similarly “jealous” over us.

- (313) *Do not make any figures for ornament, even if they are not worshipped.* “You shall not make anything to be with Me—gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves. An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it.” (Exodus 20:23-25) Maimonides has taken the “no graven images” ball and run with it, forbidding (as the Muslims do) any image of anything for any purpose. Yes, representations of any object of worship—even of Yahweh Himself, if that were possible—were strictly and specifically forbidden. And it’s clear from the passage that Yahweh doesn’t want us to try to impress Him with our skill and workmanship, the best of which—let’s face it—is pathetically anemic when compared with the glories of His creation.

That being said, only a few chapters after the Ten Commandments, Yahweh is seen selecting a man (named Bezaleel—meaning “in the shadow of God”) because of, among other things, his “filling with the Spirit of God...in all manner of workmanship to design artistic works.” And He is heard *instructing* Israel to place specific decorative “images” on the mercy seat: “**And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat.**” (Exodus 25:18-20) Further, the instructions on the construction of the Tabernacle are peppered with references to “graven images” the Israelites are *supposed* to make—bowls shaped like “almond blossoms” on the golden lampstand; pictures of cherubim (what *does* a cherub look like, anyway?) woven into the curtains; golden bells and pomegranates sewn onto the hem of Aaron’s robe, etc.

So Yahweh clearly isn’t prohibiting all graphic or three-dimensional representations, but rather the *worship* of them. The Jews, to their credit, seem to have this one down pat, though as usual, they’re more restrictive than God Himself, which is pretty scary. It’s the Catholics who have it all wrong. The late pope John Paul II declared, “A mysterious ‘presence’ of the transcendent Prototype seems as it were to be transferred to the sacred image.... The devout contemplation of such an image thus appears as a real and concrete path of purification of the soul of the believer...because the image itself, blessed by the priest...can in a certain sense, by analogy with the sacraments, actually be a channel of divine grace.” (Quoted by

Dave Hunt in *A Woman Rides the Beast*.) In other words (in case you couldn't follow the slippery religious gobbledygook), "A picture of Jesus—if a Catholic priest blesses it—is as good as the real thing." Not according to Exodus, big guy.

- (314) *Do not make idols even for others.* **"You shall make no molded gods for yourselves."** (Exodus 34:17); **"Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods: I am Yahweh your God."** (Leviticus 19:4) Again, Yahweh doesn't particularly care who makes the image or who intends to worship it: the instruction is, "Don't do it." Notice also that Yahweh is saying that the worship of idols would entail "turning" from Him. He began this relationship with Israel right in front of them—in their midst. When they parted company, He did not leave them. They left Him.
- (315) *Do not use the ornament of any object of idolatrous worship.* **"You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it is an abomination to Yahweh your God. Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing."** (Deuteronomy 7:25-26) The context here is the impending conquest of Canaan. Because the inhabitants of the Land were idolaters, it could reasonably be assumed that the victorious Israelites would find idols, graven images of false gods, left behind by the defeated foe. Yahweh is saying to completely destroy them: burn them with fire. Don't adopt them as objects of worship (duh), don't put them in museums as historical artifacts, don't even recycle the intrinsically valuable or useful components of them—the gold or silver they're made of. Lesson: we need to adjust our view of what's valuable (and what isn't) to align with Yahweh's way of thinking. He values love, faith, fellowship, and truth. *Gold* He uses as paving material.
- (316) *Do not make use of an idol or its accessory objects, offerings, or libations.* **"You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it is an abomination to Yahweh your God. Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing."** (Deuteronomy 7:25-26) Our supporting text is the same as for the previous mitzvah. Once again, the rabbis are more restrictive than Yahweh. His ban was limited to idols—the rabbis extended it to the objects that became associated with them through errant worship, which, if you think about it, is giving far more credit than is due to a dumb, lifeless hunk of wood, rock, or metal.

Paul addressed this very issue. He wrote, **“Concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.”** (I Corinthians 8:4) The rabbinical view was that meat that had been offered to idols in the pagan temples and subsequently offered for sale in the marketplace was tainted, and thus forbidden. Paul says, “Hey, it’s just meat, the same as any other. Since the idol is nothing, it has no power to accept, consecrate, or defile a sacrifice that’s offered to it. Believe me, the cow doesn’t know the difference.” However, Paul went on to say that there *are* circumstances that would make it improper to eat “things offered to idols.” But they have nothing at all to do with the meat itself, but rather to the damage one could do to the weak conscience of a less mature believer. **“Food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.”** (I Corinthians 8:8-9) In the real world, Yahweh’s law of love trumps everything else.

- (317) *Do not drink the wine of idolaters.* **“For Yahweh will judge His people and have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is no one remaining, bond or free. He will say: ‘Where are their gods, the rock in which they sought refuge, who ate the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise and help you, and be your refuge.’”** (Deuteronomy 32:36-38) Maimonides has completely missed the point—again. Yahweh is looking forward to a time when He will have to judge His people Israel because of their idolatry—the very thing He incessantly warned them about. Eventually, Moses relates, it will get so bad that He has to evict them from their Land until no Jew is left there (can you spell Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Vespasian, or Hadrian?). They will have to live out their generations in exile, wondering why the false gods they worshipped with their burnt sacrifices and to whom they poured out their drink offerings never answered them or came to their rescue. Did Maimonides not realize that he was penning his prevarications in Cairo, not Jerusalem? Was he so comfortable in exile that he didn’t notice that Yahweh had divorced his people?

Don’t skip over the line, **“Yahweh...will have compassion on His servants.”** Daniel predicts (in 12:7) that during the last three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation, the power of Yahweh’s people Israel will once again be “completely shattered”—one last time they will be driven from the Land (by the Antichrist’s “abomination of desolation”). This time, however, their exile will teach them to trust in Yahweh and His Messiah. The result will be the final and permanent restoration of Israel. (See *Future History*,

Chapter 19: “Visions of Grandeur,” through Chapter 21: “The Great Awakening,” for the whole story.)

How incredibly sad it is to see that even today, the Jews take this Torah passage and torture it until they’ve derived a complicated system of what *grape products* are okay and which ones aren’t. The Judaism 101 website reports that because of idolatrous *gentile* practices, “The use of wines and other grape products made by non-Jews was prohibited. (Whole grapes are not a problem, nor are whole grapes in fruit cocktail). For the most part, this rule only affects wine and grape juice. This becomes a concern with many fruit drinks or fruit-flavored drinks, which are often sweetened with grape juice. You may also notice that some baking powders are not kosher, because baking powder is sometimes made with cream of tartar, a by-product of wine making.” I mourn for the blindness of my Jewish brothers, and long for the day when Yahshua will restore their sight.

- (318) *Do not worship an idol in the way in which it is usually worshipped. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.”* (Exodus 20:4-5) We discussed the Second Commandment in Mitzvot #312 and following. There the rabbinical emphasis was on making idols; here it’s on worshipping them. What Maimonides is missing is that an “idol” can be anything that we “serve” in place of God. It doesn’t have to be a statue that we physically bow before. It can be our career, our leisure-time activities, religion, sex, power, money, drugs, or any of a thousand other things that may or may not be “bad” in themselves. It can even be our interpretation of the Torah! If it takes the place of Yahweh in our affections, it is a “graven image” that needs to be removed from our lives.
- (319) *Do not bow down to an idol, even if that is not its mode of worship. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.”* (Exodus 20:4-5) Here’s the Second Commandment again. All these nuances that Maimonides has been listing for the last few entries are beside the point if we understand that we are to revere Yahweh alone.

The interesting thing to note is that under normal circumstances, Yahweh doesn’t even want us “bowing down” to *Him!* Yes, we are to recognize His suzerainty, but He would much prefer to see us walking upright with Him, being as comfortably conversant with Him as Adam was before he fell into sin. Genesis 17:1 describes the relationship

Yahweh wants to share with us. He said to Abraham, **“I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.”** Without losing sight of His majesty and power, we are to interact with our Maker confidently, honestly, face-to-face. But *blamelessly*? How is that possible? Strong’s defines *tamiym* as “Complete, whole, entire, sound, healthful, wholesome, unimpaired, innocent, having integrity—entirely in accord with truth and fact.” If we’re honest with ourselves, we realize that we’re sinful creatures: we are *not* blameless. But as with Abraham, Yahweh is willing to count our faith as righteousness. If we trust Him, we are *tamiym* before Him.

- (320) *Do not prophesy in the name of an idol.* **“And in all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.”** (Exodus 23:13); **“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.”** (Deuteronomy 18:20) There are two related concepts here, both important. First, because Yahweh wants His word before us at all times, there is no room for talk of “other gods.” If we think of Him as one among a pantheon, we will not comprehend His uniqueness, His holiness.

Second, if we speak of “other gods” as if they were real like Yahweh is, we are lying; and worse, we are attempting to prevent our audience from having a relationship with Yahweh—a very bad thing, worthy of the death penalty. “Speaking in the name” of something is not some esoteric religious formula, by the way. “Name” is the Hebrew word *shem*, meaning either one’s name, reputation, character, or renown. When one says, “So-and-so says this (or does this, or thinks this),” we are “speaking in his name.” When a Muslim shouts “Allahu akbar” (“Allah is greater”) as he fires his Kalashnikov into the air, he is “speaking in the name of another god.” Yahweh says, “That prophet shall die.”

- (321) *Do not hearken to one who prophesies in the name of an idol.* **“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for Yahweh your God is testing you to know whether you love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after Yahweh your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.”** (Deuteronomy 13:1-4) Maimonides got this one right, though his summary misses the impact of the Torah. This is where systematically removing Yahweh’s name from the Bible really becomes a problem—which is why I’ve restored Yahweh’s name in place of the title

that has been systematically substituted for it, “the LORD.” If you don’t know who your God is—by name—then you’re going to be more vulnerable when somebody comes along and does some really cool signs and wonders, attributing them to “God.” Remember how Pharaoh was led astray by the “miracles” performed by his court magicians, replicating the signs Yahweh had given Moses and Aaron to do to validate their mission? Miracles can be faked. Especially today.

There’s not a lot of this sort of thing recorded in scripture, however. Most advocates of false gods are pathetically ineffectual in presenting evidence to back their claims. But in our not-so-distant future, a false prophet will arise, performing signs that will *seem* to prove the deity of his counterpart, a man we’ve come to know as “the Antichrist.” John explains: **“Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.”** (Revelation 13:11-15) There it is: deceptive signs designed to make people worship one who is not god—the very scenario about which we were warned back in Deuteronomy. The Antichrist (the “first beast”) will try to pass himself off as the Messiah. Remarkably, the lie will work on much of the world. But for the first time in three thousand years, I’m happy to report, the Jews won’t fall for it. They will have finally learned to **“walk after Yahweh their God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice... serve Him and hold fast to Him.”** Better late than never.

- (322) *Do not lead the children of Israel astray to idolatry.* **“In all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.”** (Exodus 23:13) Nice thought. Too bad the rabbis never paid attention to their own mitzvah, leading Israel into the idolatry of pride, intellect, and pointless works designed to impress a god they don’t know and whose name they won’t utter. What the NKJV renders “be circumspect” is the Hebrew word *shamar*, which means keep, guard, watch, preserve, attend, observe, protect, etc. And “make no mention of” isn’t a particularly good translation either. *Zakar* basically means to remember, to proclaim what has been remembered, to commemorate. Moses, then, is telling his audience to carefully observe the Torah just the

way Yahweh delivered it, and not to honor and memorialize a counterfeit system of “laws.” The religion of Judaism today, far from being the key to the mind of God as the rabbis contend, is the very antithesis of this mitzvah and the Torah from which it was wrested.

- (323) *Do not entice an Israelite to idolatry.* **“If you hear someone in one of your cities, which Yahweh your God gives you to dwell in, saying, ‘Corrupt men have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, “Let us go and serve other gods”’—which you have not known—then you shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock—with the edge of the sword.”** (Deuteronomy 13:12-15) This passage doesn’t only apply to apostate cities, but to individuals as well, as witnessed in the preceding verses (6-11). Yahweh, in His warnings to theocratic Israel designed to keep the nation pure and set apart for His purpose, was really serious about dealing with idolatry among His people. Yahweh’s Messiah would be delivered to the world through this nation. If they fell into total idolatry (like the Canaanites they were instructed to displace in the Land), the very existence of Israel would have been jeopardized. Without abridging individual choice, Yahweh *had* to keep His people set apart from the nations.
- (324) *Destroy idolatry and its appurtenances.* **“You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship Yahweh your God with such things.”** (Deuteronomy 12:2-4) Without instruction, the Israelite conquerors of Canaan might have been tempted to simply use whatever worship facilities they found, change the name of the deity from Ba’al (or Chemosh, Astarte, Molech, Dagon, or any of a dozen others) to Yahweh, and call it a day. But Yahweh (being the *real* God) had specified a different form of worship for His people—a system of sacrifices, holidays, and “appurtenances” that told the unfolding story of mankind’s salvation in its every detail. Every nuance of the Levitical ritual prescribed in the Torah was prophetic of the coming Messiah.

The sad history of Israel from the Conquest to their final exile can be traced back to their refusal to do what Moses instructed here. Sadder still is the adoption and assimilation of pagan practices into the liturgy of the Church—a process begun in earnest at the time of Constantine. Having

seen what had happened to Israel, we should have known better. What part of “**You shall not worship Yahweh your God with such things**” didn’t they understand? And don’t think you’re immune to the legacy of pagan infiltration just because you’re a “Protestant.” As long as we celebrate Easter and Christmas in place of Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, we remain under the indictment of this mitzvah.

- (325) *Do not love the enticer to idolatry.* “**If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you.**” (Deuteronomy 13:6-11) Maimonides is going to wring the next five mitzvot out of this passage, so I figured I’d better quote the whole thing. The first thing we should notice is that Yahweh did *not* tell us not to love someone—even an idolater. What He is telling us to do is make the hard choices if we must: to put away the evil influences from among us, even if it means rejecting a member of our own family or turning our back on our best friend. The greater good must be considered. We are not being told *not* to love the enticer to idolatry—rather, we are being told to do something far more difficult: to slay someone we *do* love in order to protect the community from falling into idolatry.

The instruction to stone those who would entice us to idolatry was obviously meant to apply only within theocratic Israel. If we tried to keep this law today, we’d have to kill every politician, advertising writer, and rock star in the country, along with half the clergy. The principle, however, still applies to all of us. We are to “kill” the influence of those who would divert our affections from Yahweh to something else—*anything* else.

- (326) *Do not give up hating the enticer to idolatry.* “**If [someone] entices you, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ ...you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him.**” (Deuteronomy 13:6-9) This is merely the negative restatement of the previous mitzvah. Again, hatred is not part of Yahweh’s instruction—but the merciless rejection of false teaching and false teachers *is*. Tolerance is not a godly virtue, as strange as that may seem.

God wants us to know His word and unequivocally denounce the teachings that contradict it. The sort of lowest-common-denominator ecumenical spirit that passes for “Christian unity” today makes God want to puke—and those are His words, not mine—see Revelation 3:16.

- (327) *Do not save the enticer from capital punishment, but stand by at his execution.* “...You shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you.” (Deuteronomy 13:9-11) No, Maimonides, you pathetic wimp! It says that *you*—the one who has been enticed to follow strange gods—are to cast the first stone. Don’t “stand by” and let the mob do your “wet work” for you. *You* do it! Be personally involved in defending the faith.

I should interject here that “enticement away from Yahweh your God” is not remotely the same thing as rejecting the burden of religion that men have laid upon your shoulders in an attempt to subjugate you. First-century Pharisees were guilty of this, but they were pikers compared to the Roman Catholic Church, who killed millions of Christians over the centuries who merely wished to serve God and study His Word—Hussites, Albigensians, Waldensians, Huguenots, and others. Torquemada and his ilk were defending the Roman religious system, not the Word of God.

I should also note (because Maimonides doesn’t) that the reason the enticer was to be executed was not only to “put away the evil from your midst” (Deuteronomy 13:5), but also as a deterrent, “**So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you.**” Political liberals today contend that the death penalty has no deterrent value. Yahweh begs to differ, but it has to be applied even-handedly, consistently, and without prejudice if we want it to serve as a disincentive. Otherwise, it’s just punishment.

- (328) *A person whom he attempted to entice into idolatry shall not urge pleas for the acquittal of the enticer.* “...You shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him.” (Deuteronomy 13:8-9) Remember, the “enticer” in these verses is characterized in a worst-case scenario: one’s brother, child, spouse, or friend—someone near and dear to you. The natural inclination is to hide the crime, to go into a state of denial. Yahweh says, “Be honest with yourself, and be honest with Me. You know what you heard. Deal with it.” If a cancerous tumor is growing, you must cut it out, remove it,

throw it away. I know it will be painful, but if you don't do what's necessary, the patient will die.

- (329) *A person whom he attempted to entice shall not refrain from giving evidence of the enticer's guilt, if he has such evidence. "...You shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him."* (Deuteronomy 13:8-9) We must be very careful to define the circumstances under which one is not to listen to, pity, spare, or conceal the faults of the offender. This passage (quoted fully in Mitzvah #325) deals *only* with him who entices someone to false worship—in other words, a false or misleading prophet, someone who advocates serving something or someone other than Yahweh. It is *not* speaking of human retribution for ordinary sins—places where we all fall short of Yahweh's perfect standard of conduct. In fact, our response to those foibles is precisely the opposite: "[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (I Corinthians 13:7) "Above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.'" (I Peter 4:8, quoting Proverbs 10:12) The point is, Yahweh knows we're sinners. Because He loves us, He has provided a means by which our sins can be eliminated, so we can be restored to fellowship. Therefore, the only *real* evil is preventing people from availing themselves of God's mercy.
- (330) *Do not swear by an idol to its worshipers, nor cause them to swear by it. "In all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth."* (Exodus 23:13) We saw this same text back in Mitzvot #320 and #322. On the face of it, Maimonides has betrayed a total lack of understanding of the Torah's teaching concerning idolatry. Here he is describing the fine points of how God's people are to relate to the idol worshippers among them: "Don't try to gain their allegiance by giving lip service to their gods." But the Israelites weren't to *relate* with them at all—they were supposed to *kill* them—to rid the Land of their presence and memory. And although we no longer live in theocratic Israel (the only place physical death is prescribed), the principle still applies. We are to remain watchful, being careful not to commemorate the name or character of any entity that might vie with Yahweh for a place in our affections.
- (331) *Do not turn one's attention to idolatry. "Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods: I am Yahweh your God."* (Leviticus 19:4) That's pretty clear. Of special interest here is that "gods" and "God" are the same word in the Hebrew text—*elohim*, the plural form of *'el* or *eloah*, the generic name for "deity" or "mighty one." Things that are worshiped or revered are referred to as *elohim*. But Yahweh is One. How can "He" be plural?

The answer lies in His willingness to manifest Himself in less-than-infinite forms we humans can relate to and fellowship with—Yahshua: Immanuel, God existing as a man, characterized as the “Son” of God; and the Holy Spirit (*Ruach Qodesh*): the maternal manifestation of Yahweh dwelling within each believer, comforting, guiding, and admonishing us. These are real. But idols we’ve manufactured (even if only in our minds) are none of those things. They are totally unworthy of our attention and devotion.

- (332) *Do not adopt the institutions of idolaters nor their customs. “I am Yahweh your God. According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am Yahweh your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 18:2-5) *“And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am casting out before you; for they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them.”* (Leviticus 20:23) Maimonides is correct here: the Israelites were to reject the practices, laws, and customs of the world from which they were escaping, as well as those of the Land they were being given. The key to *why* is in the phrase repeated three times in the Leviticus 18 passage: “I am Yahweh your God.” Yahweh’s character changed everything.

We need to recognize that not everything the Egyptians and Canaanites did was evil. They too had consciences, and some of their practices no doubt aligned with God’s Law—I’m sure they considered murder a bad thing, for example. But Yahweh had an entirely new paradigm planned for the Israelites. They were to be holy—that is, set apart from the surrounding peoples for God’s purposes. That meant that every detail of their law and custom would have to be re-invented and re-defined according to Yahweh’s plan. They couldn’t just keep the “good” parts of the previous societies and try to fix what had obviously gone wrong. That’s why Moses delivered instruction concerning everything from what you should eat, to who you could marry, to when to give your donkey a rest, to how to honor God. Even when the laws themselves bore some resemblance to the existing customs of the land, the *reasons* for the laws were brand new. One way or another, they all pointed toward the coming Messiah and toward Yahweh’s master plan for the redemption of the human race.

In application to our generation, we should not merely say, “Okay, I won’t do what Egyptians and Canaanites did,” and call it a day. We too are to be holy, set apart, insulated, and isolated from the influences of the

world. We have to live here, but we don't have to be *of* here. The land in which we sojourn has laws and customs, but we need to bear in mind that there is a Law that takes precedence—Yahweh's law of love.

- (333) *Do not pass a child through the fire to Molech.* **“You shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 18:21) Molech (or Moloch) was a permutation of Ba'al. Fair warning: this gets pretty sick. Heathen worshippers in Canaan were required to avail themselves of the temple prostitutes. The children born of these unions were unwanted baggage, so the satanic priesthood came up with a perfect way to deal with the little bastards. A bronze statue of Molech was brought to red heat and the hapless children were placed in its outstretched arms to die. No one was allowed to grieve or mourn, for the fire, it was said, was a purifying instrument through which the people's sins were purged. One of the places that this horrendous rite was practiced was the Valley of Hinnom, or Gehenna, just south of the old city of Jerusalem—earning it the dubious distinction of being Yahshua's chosen metaphor for hell.

So here we see Yahweh warning His people not to do this evil thing, decades before they even entered the Promised Land. Did they listen? No. Jeremiah reports, **“They built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin. Now therefore, thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, concerning this city... It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.”** (Jeremiah 32:35-56)

If you think this abominable practice died out with the Canaanites, I've got some bad news. It was resurrected—in a less gruesome form—in the medieval holiday bonfires of European Catholicism. And it lives on today in the myth of purgatory, which the Roman church insists (contrary to the plain teaching of scripture) is necessary for the purging of individual sin. Vatican II states: “the doctrine of purgatory clearly demonstrates that even when the guilt of sin has been taken away, punishment for it or the consequences of it may remain to be expiated or cleansed.... In purgatory the souls of those who died in the charity of God and were truly repentant but who had not made satisfaction with adequate penance for their sins and omissions [making the Catholic church stinking rich, I might add] are cleansed after death with punishments designed to purge away their debt.” Gee, and I thought Yahshua's sacrifice on Calvary took care of all that.

What was I *thinkin'*? Apparently Molech has moved out of Canaan and rented a condo in Rome.

- (334) *Do not allow anyone practicing witchcraft to live. “You shall not permit a sorceress to live.”* (Exodus 22:18) The Hebrew word translated “sorceress” is actually a verb, *kasap*, meaning to practice magic or sorcery, to use supernatural (i.e., demonic) powers. Listed among King Manasseh’s many sins was *kasap*: **“he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists.”** (II Chronicles 33:6) Notice God’s instruction here: it’s not to disavow the use of sorcery. That’s taken care of elsewhere. Rather, it’s to make sure that no one who practices such things survives. Manasseh reigned for fifty-five years in Jerusalem and yet no one bothered to invoke Exodus 22:18. This means all of Judah was guilty under the law for not dealing with Manasseh’s sin.

It is also instructive to see the kind of things Yahweh promises to lump in with practicing sorcery when it comes time for judgment: **“And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers (*kasap*), against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien—because they do not fear Me, says Yahweh of hosts.”** (Malachi 3:5) One way or another, he’s just touched on Commandments 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, and 10. Sorcery is not only placing “another god” before Yahweh, it’s also the very essence of what it is to regard the name of Yahweh as worthlessness—which is what the Third Commandment is all about.

- (335) *Do not practice onein (observing times or seasons as favorable or unfavorable, using astrology). “You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying.”* (Leviticus 19:26) The word translated “soothsaying” is the Hebrew *anan*, which shows up in Maimonides’ mitzvot as *onein*. *Strong’s* defines it as: “to practice soothsaying, to conjure, to observe times [i.e., as an occult practice], practice soothsaying or spiritism or magic or augury or witchcraft.” As a noun, it means, “soothsayer, enchanter, sorceress, diviner, fortuneteller, or barbarian.” It also means “to bring clouds,” and is used in reference to such things as the “pillar of cloud” that accompanied the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings, clouds of incense representing the prayers of the saints, or in the ubiquitous eschatological mention of the clouds (see for example Zephaniah 1:15 or Daniel 7:13) that will announce Yahweh’s judgment in the last days. The “cloud” angle brings the word into focus: it’s saying that we are not to do, or even simulate, the works God has reserved for Himself. Some deeds remain Yahweh’s prerogative alone; some knowledge remains His exclusive purview.

- (336) *Do not practice nachesh (doing things based on signs and portents; using charms and incantations).* **“You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying.”** (Leviticus 19:26) “Divination” is the rendering of the Hebrew *nachash*, meaning to practice divination, to observe occult or astrological signs, practice fortunetelling, or to take something as an omen. It includes interpreting omens or signs as a way to discern the will or plan of God (or the gods). The point is that when Yahweh wants us to know something *specific* about the future, he instructs His prophets to write it down. And as I’ve noted previously, there are still thousands of prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled—so many, in fact, that it took me almost nine hundred pages to cover them in my book *Future History*. It is our responsibility to read the Scriptures and use them to discern what Yahweh has revealed about our future. We post-Pentecost believers also have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us to guide us toward the truth. But we are *not* to do the kind of thing Constantine did. He saw a cross in the sky and “heard” a voice saying, “In this sign conquer,” and proceeded to act upon the omen, slaughtering his enemies to attain temporal power and then using that power to subjugate millions in the name of religion. He was not listening to the voice of God, no matter what the omen said; he was merely practicing *nachash*.

Yahshua Himself addressed the problem, for the religious elite of His day—who, having the Torah, should have known better—demanded a sign, an omen, that would prove His credentials. **“When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had arrived, they came to argue with him. Testing him to see if he was from God, they demanded, ‘Give us a miraculous sign from heaven to prove yourself.’ When he heard this, he sighed deeply and said, ‘Why do you people keep demanding a miraculous sign? I assure you, I will not give this generation any such sign.’ So he got back into the boat and left them, and he crossed to the other side of the lake.”** (Mark 8:11-13 NLT) They had the Law, the prophets, and the Psalms, and all of it spoke of the Messiah, one way or another. The Pharisees didn’t want to believe any of that, but they were all too willing to accept an occult “sign” if it would demonstrate His standing with God. Yahshua, knowing the Torah, wouldn’t play their game.

- (337) *Do not consult ovoth (ghosts).* **“Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am Yahweh your God.”** (Leviticus 19:31) The Hebrew word translated “medium” here is *’owb*, which according to the *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* means either a “medium, i.e., a spiritist or necromancer that conjures and communicates with ghosts,” or the ghost itself, a “spirit of the dead, i.e., a spirit which can communicate with human mediums, called from the underworld of the dead.” The word is derived from its primary meaning: a

wineskin—something that holds, contains, or dispenses something else. The point is not that ghosts don't exist, but rather that information about the future is not to be sought from anything or anyone but Yahweh Himself.

The definitive anecdote on this subject is, of course, King Saul's consultation with the witch of En Dor, recorded in I Samuel 28:7-25. Samuel the seer had died, and the disobedient king's prayers for guidance were bouncing off the ceiling, as it were. So he consulted an *'owb* to bring Samuel back from the dead for a little chat. In a hilarious scene, the medium, more used to channeling demons (or merely faking her séances) to hoodwink her gullible clientele, actually *did* call up Samuel's ghost. Oops. The prophet, annoyed at having been disturbed from his well-deserved rest, bluntly informed Saul that the Philistines were going to defeat Israel in battle, and that Saul and his sons would be killed. The moral of the story: don't cut off communication with Yahweh, and if you do, don't expect any good news you hear from another source to be true.

- (338) *Do not consult yid'onim (wizards)*. **“Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am Yahweh your God.”** (Leviticus 19:31) A *yidoni* is similar to an *'owb*. In fact, the two words always appear in parallel in scripture. *Yidoni* is alternately translated wizard, familiar spirit, fortune teller, magician, or sorcerer. As with *'owb*, there is some ambiguity as to whether the word refers to the spirit or the one who conjures it up. Yahweh is very clear on this issue: do not regard them; do not seek them—they will defile you. He ends His warning with the ubiquitous *raison d'être* for following His instructions: He is Yahweh our God. As always, that is reason enough for doing what He says.
- (339) *Do not practice kisuf (magic using herbs, stones and objects)*. **“There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh, and because of these abominations Yahweh your God drives them [the Canaanites] out from before you.** (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) Mitzvot #339 through #344 are all taken from the same couple of verses. Yahweh is denouncing the practice of seeking esoteric knowledge in as many ways as the Hebrew language will allow. He wants us rather to rely on Him for revelation. His Word is a lens through which we can discern the truth or falsehood of a matter, while everything listed here is an attempt to circumvent our reliance on Him. Bear in mind that the anglicized spelling of these Hebrew words varies widely from source to source. This first word is *kashaph*,

translated “sorcerer” here. It is a verb meaning to engage in witchcraft, be a sorcerer, or to practice the black magic arts.

- (340) *Do not practice kessem (a general term for magical practices).* **“There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh.”** (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) The phrase “practices witchcraft” is rendered from the Hebrew *qasam qesem*. It means “to practice divination, to seek an omen, or to state or determine the future (or hidden knowledge) through signs, omens, or supernatural power.” (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*) There are “four broad classes of divination: (1) the position of stars; (2) speaking with dead spirits; (3) examining animal parts or potsherds [reading palms or tea leaves would fall into this category]; (4) casting lots for a yes or no answer. A ‘lot’ is a specially marked small stick, pebble, or shard thrown down for making decisions based on pagan views of chance, or believers using the lot perceived as quasi-chance, but believed to be guided by God.” In other words, *qasam qesem* is arranging your life according to astrology, necromancy, voodoo, or even just flipping a coin. All these things are an abomination to Yahweh. We are to be guided by His Word and Spirit, not by chance or self-deception.
- (341) *Do not practice the art of a chover chaver (casting spells over snakes and scorpions).* **“There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh.”** (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) The phrase “conjures spells” is *chabar cheber*, another related verb-noun combination like *qasam qesem*. *Chabar* means “to unite, join, bind together, be coupled, be in league with, heap up, or have fellowship with.” (S) Likewise, the noun *cheber* connotes association, co-habitation, a banding together. The phrase therefore suggests casting magic spells uniting the object with demonic forces via incantations. This type of illicit religious charm would be used to invoke satanic power. The incantation could be made either verbally or through actions like tying magic knots. Thus a *chabar cheber* is an enchanter, one who makes and invokes unlawful incantations of various kinds. The Islamic Hadith makes it clear that Muhammad was a *chabar cheber*.
- (342) *Do not enquire of an ob (a ghost).* **“There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one**

who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh.” (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) We’ve seen this warning before (in Mitzvah #337). If you’ll recall, an *’owb* is either a “medium, i.e., a spiritist or necromancer that conjures and communicates with ghosts,” or the ghost itself, a “spirit of the dead, i.e., a spirit which can communicate with human mediums, called from the underworld of the dead.” Once again, the instruction is to rely on Yahweh alone for information concerning future or hidden events. And even if He hasn’t told you specifically what to expect tomorrow, He has at least told you what to do today: Love God, and love your neighbor.

- (343) *Do not seek the maytim (dead).* **“There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh.”** (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) To *darash muwth* is to “call up the dead.” The phrase fully amplified means to resort to, seek, enquire of, consult, investigate, or worship the dead. This, of course, is precisely what Saul did in I Samuel 28. But it also warns against the kind of ancestor worship we see in Eastern religions. And closer to home, it is a stern indictment of the Catholic-style “veneration” of saints, praying not to Yahweh through His “Son” Yahshua, but to an unnamed and misunderstood deity through the good graces of “saints,” dead people to whom has been attributed some sort of magical power. Mary, for example, was a good and faithful woman, but she has no power to help you—and *if she came back from the dead like Samuel did, she would tell you as much!* Yahweh has spoken: You shall not call up the dead.
- (344) *Do not enquire of a yid’oni (wizard).* **“There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh.”** (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) We’ve run into the *yidoni* before, back in Mitzvah #338, which is practically identical to this one, though based on a different Torah passage. A *yidoni*, you’ll recall, is a wizard, familiar spirit, fortune teller, magician, or sorcerer, and the word can apply to either the spirit or the guy who conjures him up.

There are a few words in Moses’ list here in Deuteronomy 18 that Maimonides covered elsewhere, so I’ll take this opportunity to reprise them. The word translated “soothsayer” here is *’anan*, which we covered in Mitzvah #335. It’s a verb meaning: “to practice soothsaying, to conjure, to observe times [i.e., as an occult practice], practice soothsaying,

spiritism, magic, augury, or witchcraft.” (S) Its noun form denotes a “soothsayer, enchanter, sorceress, diviner, or fortuneteller.” We’ve also seen “one who conjures spells” or “interprets omens” (as it’s worded in the NASB) elsewhere. Mitzvah #336 prohibited *nachash*, a verb meaning “to practice divination, to observe occult or astrological signs, practice fortunetelling, or to take something as an omen, including interpreting omens or signs.” The bottom line: Yahweh is crystal clear about His hatred of occult practices. Consult Him alone.

- (345) *Do not remove the entire beard, like the idolaters. “You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard.”* (Leviticus 19:27) Maimonides is correct in connecting the practice of “disfiguring” the beard with the style that had been practiced by the idolaters of Canaan. The connection is clear in the larger context in Leviticus. I get the feeling that Yahweh isn’t so much interested in condemning a particular fashion statement as He is in warning us not to emulate the world. This principle is particularly timely today, when we are bombarded with images of wannabe “idols.” I remember back in the mid-60s when the Beatles hit the scene. Almost overnight, everyone was wearing his hair a little longer than before. God may not have objected to slightly longer hair *per se*, but to grow it out in imitation of a group of musicians was wrong.

The fashions we adopt say a lot about us. The more extreme our personal styles—the more they differ from the societal norm—the stronger our statements become. For example, in Israel, groups of “Hasidic” style ultra-orthodox Jews (popularly known as “black-hats”) compete with each other in modes of dress. The goofier the outfit, the more fundamental and strict the doctrine—or at least that’s what they’d like you to believe. The mode of dress is based not on what the typical Israeli would wear, but rather on what would have been worn by the average Jewish guy in an Eastern European ghetto two or three hundred years ago. In short, the black-hats are showing off—displaying their religious pride by flouting convention.

We’re left with a quandary. Fashions shift with time and place. Are believers to follow style trends, or are we to petrify our fashion sense in some bygone century? I believe the answer is: *neither*. As usual, the key is motive. Going out of our way to look like one thing or another is probably not such a hot idea. But if everybody in your community—regardless of their political, religious, or economic persuasion—is dressing one way, there’s no reason to buck the trend. There is no such thing as “Christian fashion” (provided, of course, that men look like men, women look like

women, and your wardrobe isn't *designed* to engender lust in the opposite sex—see Mizvot #365-367). There is nothing particularly “holy” about fashion that’s thirty years out of date.

- (346) *Do not round the corners of the head, as the idolatrous priests do. “You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard.”* (Leviticus 19:27) Same song, second verse. Again, Moses was warning his people not to adopt the fashion statements of idolaters *because they’re idolaters*. It’s all a question of motivation. Don’t cut your hair (or grow it out) *because* some rock star does it. Don’t wear baggy pants *because* you want to look tough like a gang banger. Don’t wear a daisy in your lapel *because* your favorite news anchor does.
- (347) *Do not cut oneself or make incisions in one’s flesh in grief, like the idolaters. “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 19:28) **“You are the children of Yahweh your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead. For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God, and Yahweh has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”** (Deuteronomy 14:1-2) God is not talking about fashion here—earrings and the like. He’s warning against self mutilation done in the name of religion. The classic Biblical illustration is in I Kings 18, where Elijah challenged the priests of Ba’al to a “prophets’ duel” to demonstrate once and for all whose god was really God. **“And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.’ So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.”** (I Kings 18:27-29) Satan loves to see us bleeding and in pain, and if it’s self-inflicted, so much the better.

Yahweh, though—the inventor of life—tells us that our “life is in the blood.” And pain was something He built into our bodies to warn us when something’s wrong. The last thing He wants to see is for us to suffer pain and shed our blood in a misguided attempt to placate Him. So why do tens of thousands of Muslims cut their flesh in Ramadan rites at the Kaaba every year trying to gain the blessing of Allah—a false god who’s never blessed anybody? Why do twenty million pilgrims a year visit the shrine of the “Virgin of Guadalupe” in Mexico City, many walking for days and then crawling on bloodied knees the last few hundred meters of the

journey to show their devotion to an apparition some guy named Juan says he saw back in 1531? Yahweh plainly said not to do such things.

- (348) *Do not tattoo the body like the idolaters. “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 19:28) Tattoos have grown quite popular of late. I have no idea why. I even have Christian friends who advertise their faith with Christian tattoos. The passage at hand, as Maimonides notes, is primarily a warning against emulating the idolaters in our midst. Does it apply to “faith-neutral” tattoos or Christian body art? I don’t know, but I’d be inclined to take Yahweh’s word for it and call it a day. Yahweh has issued these instructions for our benefit—we can either heed them or not—it’s our skin that’s at risk. Maybe it’s like eating pork and shellfish: if there are consequences, He didn’t enumerate them. He just said, “Don’t.”
- (349) *Do not make a bald spot for the dead. “You are the children of Yahweh your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead.”* (Deuteronomy 14:1) Here is one more example of something that might have been done in imitation of the idolatrous people of Canaan. Although there’s not much of this going on today (quite the opposite, in fact, with baldness-remedy sales going through the roof) the principle still applies: we are God’s people. We are not to pattern our lives, beliefs, or even fashions, after the godless world we see around us.

My personal “favorite” contemporary example of this sort of thing is the “baggy pants” look favored by inner city youth. Why in the world do they prefer ill-fitting trousers? It turns out that the “fashion” got started in jail, where such things as belts and shoe laces were taken away from the inmates so they couldn’t be used as weapons or implements for suicide. Without belts to hold them up, the offenders’ pants tended to droop a bit. In time, this droop became an indicator of prison experience, and kids wanting to look as tough as these convicts affected the same falling-pants style. *My pants are falling off—That means I’m a bad dude—don’t mess with me or my crew....* I know it sounds stupid—as stupid as shaving a bald spot on your forehead so you’ll look like a bigwig with Ba’al. That’s the kind of foolishness Yahweh is warning against here.

- (350) *Do not plant a tree for worship. “You shall not plant for yourself any tree as a wooden image, near the altar which you build for yourself to Yahweh your God.”* (Deuteronomy 16:21) I like trees. I’ve planted scores of them—and *I live in the middle of a forest!* Does that mean I’ve run afoul of the Torah here? No. Moses is referring to a particular pagan practice: planting a tree (*’ets*, the ordinary Hebrew word for a tree or wood—any kind of relatively large woody plant) *as an image*. That’s *asherah* in the Hebrew—one of many

names of the female component of the prototypical false Babylonian trinity of Nimrod, Semiramis, and Tammuz. Semiramis' self-deified character would show up as Astarte among the Assyrians; she was known as Inanna by the Sumerians, Asthoreth by the Caananites, Ishtar by the Akkadians, Isis by the Egyptians, and Diana by the Greeks—among others. Her name is commemorated in “Christian” tradition, I’m sad to say, in the spring festival of Easter—which was supposed to be celebrated as Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Firstfruits, the first three “holy convocations” on the annual festival calendar instituted by Yahweh. These days are prophetic of the death, burial, and resurrection of Yahshua our Messiah—and they center on the removal of our sins. Ishtar is a blatant counterfeit. I explain the whole sick mess in *Future History*: Chapter 14—“Mystery Babylon.”

Anyway, the Canaanite practice was to plant a tree (or a whole grove) near the altars where Asherah was to be worshipped—usually in a “high place” or hilltop. Yahweh’s warning notwithstanding, Israel fell (or perhaps jumped) into the same sort of idolatrous practices. For example: **“They also built for themselves high places, sacred pillars, and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree.”** (I Kings 14:23) Yahweh wanted His people to be holy—set apart from the nations around them. The last thing He wanted was for the rites He instituted—which were all prophetic in some way of His plan of redemption for mankind—to be blended with and corrupted by the religions of the clueless idolaters.

- (351) *Do not set up a pillar (for worship).* **“You shall not set up a sacred pillar, which Yahweh your God hates.”** (Deuteronomy 16:22) This, of course, is a continuation and expansion of the previous thought. A pillar (Hebrew: *matstsebah*) could either be a stone obelisk (like the Washington Monument—oops) or a wooden stump. They were invariably placed in groves or under trees, and used as focal points of pagan worship. It’s no big surprise that Yahweh hates them.
- (352) *Do not show favor to idolaters.* **“When Yahweh your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when Yahweh your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them.”** (Deuteronomy 7:1-2) That’s a strange way of putting it, Maimonides. As the Israelites entered the Land of Canaan, they were to “conquer” and “utterly destroy” the idolaters they found there. Yahweh didn’t even *hint* at the idea of peacefully coexisting with them, tolerating

their presence but “showing no favor” to them. Israel was to totally displace the nations of the Land in order to remain set apart for Yahweh’s purposes. They failed to do so, and the result is scrawled in their blood across the intervening centuries.

- (353) *Do not make a covenant with the seven (Canaanite, idolatrous) nations. “I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”* (Exodus 23:31-33) *“When Yahweh your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when Yahweh your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them.”* (Deuteronomy 7:1-2) Israel can’t say they weren’t warned. If they did not drive out the idolaters, they would be “snared” into serving their false gods. They didn’t, so they were.

Lest we conclude, however, that this is an open-ended call to slaughter or displace all who don’t happen to toe our particular theological line, note that the list of nations to be thrown out of the Land was very precise and very limited: seven people groups whose depravity had reached its “fullness.” The Amorites in particular had been given four generations to get their spiritual act together (see Genesis 15:16) and had not done so. The Torah is very precise here. If we are (1) Israelites who (2) are moving into the Land of Promise, we are to throw out any idolaters we find who (3) are Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, or Jebusites. Yahweh has even promised to do all the heavy lifting. All we have to do is follow His lead.

Haven’t run across any Girgashites lately? Me neither. But its safe to say that the bottom line still applies: we are not to make covenants with idolaters. On a national level, that would mean that a nation of believers should not support or defend nations that are not. The problem, of course, is that there’s no such thing as a “nation of believers.” America, if it ever was, left that place long ago. It would seem prudent, at the very least, to avoid supporting people who have sworn to kill us (that’s any Qur’an-following Muslim, in case you didn’t notice) but we can’t even get *that* right.

- (354) *Do not settle idolaters in our land. “You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”* (Exodus 23:32-33)

When Israel declared statehood on April 14, 1948, Jews had been a majority in Jerusalem for as long as anyone had been keeping records—well over a century. They had never stolen or “annexed” Arab lands, but rather had *purchased* large tracts of land in Palestine from Arab Muslims who considered it worthless. Yet on Israel’s independence day, Azzam Pasha, Secretary General of the Arab League, declared jihad, a “holy war” against the infant nation. He stated: “This will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre.” He ordered all Muslim Arab civilians to leave, in order to make it easier for the Islamic forces to drive the detested Jews into the sea. Those who followed the order became the “Palestinian refugees” we hear about so often. For her part, Israel offered full citizenship to any Arab who wanted to stay, and some did. After Israel won the war (at a horrendous price in terms of percentage of her population) those Arabs, mostly Islamic, became the freest, most prosperous Muslims in the region. And they remained so until they turned on their benefactor in the first *intifada*—biting the hand that had fed them. These are the “Palestinians” (though no such people actually exist—the moniker is merely a useful media prevarication) who trouble Israel today.

Now, what would have happened if Israel had followed the Torah on this point? If, in 1948, they had said, “Alright, if the Muslims as a group are going to attack us, the Muslims as a group must leave,” they would have an entirely different kind of enemy today. The Islamic threat would still exist, to be sure, but the adversary would be *outside* the nation, not distributed throughout Israel like a cancer.

- (355) *Slay the inhabitants of a city that has become idolatrous and burn that city.* “If you hear someone in one of your cities, which Yahweh your God gives you to dwell in, saying, ‘Corrupt men have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods’—which you have not known—then you shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock—with the edge of the sword. And you shall gather all its plunder into the middle of the street, and completely burn with fire the city and all its plunder, for Yahweh your God. It shall be a heap forever; it shall not be built again. So none of the accursed things shall remain in your hand, that Yahweh may turn from the fierceness of His anger and show you mercy, have compassion on you and multiply you, just as He swore to your fathers, because you have listened to the voice of Yahweh your God, to keep all His commandments which I command you today, to do what is right in the eyes of Yahweh your God.” (Deuteronomy 13:12-18) The politically correct liberals among us are

horrified at this sort of thing. Don't people have a God-given right to worship any god they choose, in any way they want? Not in theocratic Israel, they don't. Israel was called out of the nations to be "a holy people," set apart for Yahweh's plan and purpose. Granted, the "burn-the-city-and-kill-the-idolaters" rule no longer literally applies. The theocratic society for which this was written has been gone for some time. But the underlying principle is still germane: Believers in Yahweh are not to tolerate the inroads of false gods and false teachings into their assemblies. And at this late date, it bears mentioning that "false teachings" are those things that contradict Scripture—not the things that challenge our religious traditions.

- (356) *Do not rebuild a city that has been led astray to idolatry. "...It shall be a heap forever; it shall not be built again."* (Deuteronomy 13:16) The idolatrous city is a metaphor for false teaching here. God's point, I believe, is that you can't build something of lasting value on a faulty foundation. If the premise is wrong, the conclusion will be wrong as well. I'll offer a provocative example to make my point. We Americans usually assume that democracy is a good thing, where in reality, it only "works" for the benefit of mankind when the majority revere Yahweh. So when we expend blood and coin in an attempt to impose democracy on places like Afghanistan or Iraq, we learn (or at least we ought to) the horrible truth about democracy: it's nothing but mob rule in a three-piece suit. If the *majority* are convinced that Islamic law must be implemented because their god, Allah, said so, then democracy will inevitably enslave the populace and consign them to a life of misery and seething hatred for all mankind. Without Yahweh, dumping a brutal dictator for a democratically elected *sharia*-friendly government is simply trading a bellyache for an upset stomach.
- (357) *Do not make use of the property of a city that has been so led astray. "...You shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock—with the edge of the sword. And you shall gather all its plunder into the middle of the street, and completely burn with fire the city and all its plunder...So none of the accursed things shall remain in your hand, that Yahweh may turn from the fierceness of His anger."* (Deuteronomy 13:15-17) With the exception of the original Israelite conquest of Canaan (for which this mitzvah was written), every "religious" war in history has been little more than an elaborate snatch-and-run. Islam, truth be known, is far less a religion than it is an acquisitive political doctrine—amply proved by their long and bloody history. And the Roman Catholic Church has grown obscenely rich plundering everyone from "heretics" to Jews to New World indigenous

tribes in the name of religion. But Yahweh—who knows the greed of the human heart—insisted that the eradication of false worship from theocratic Israel would not bring any financial rewards with it. Idolatry was to be destroyed because it was evil, not because there might be a buck in it.

AGRICULTURE AND ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

- (358) *Do not cross-breed cattle of different species. “You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind.”* (Leviticus 19:19) Neither Moses nor Maimonides knew anything about Linnaean taxonomy. But they did know the difference between a sheep and a goat, or between an ox and an ass. These animal “kinds” are not cross-fertile. This mitzvah and the next one are an obvious metaphor for the ubiquitous scriptural injunction against mixing reverence for Yahweh with pagan idolatrous practice. His point: “Nothing good can possibly come from this. My people are to be holy, set apart, pure and undefiled.”
- (359) *Do not sow different kinds of seed together in one field. “You shall not sow your field with mixed seed.”* (Leviticus 19:19) A variation on the “purity” theme, here we are (once again) being warned against mixing idolatrous practice with true faith. This very contingency was used by Yahshua to teach what the course of the kingdom of heaven would be like this side of Judgment Day. In Matthew 13:24-30, we read the parable of the wheat and tares, which, in a nutshell, says that although Yahweh planted good, fruitful “seed” (His believers) in His field, Satan came in afterward and planted look-alike weeds—people who may look “religious” but, being weeds, bear no fruit—they’re just taking up space and resources—choking out the truth. Yahweh has decided to let them both grow together side by side in His field (the world) until the “harvest” at the end of the age, at which time He will “gather” to Himself the believing “wheat,” but burn the tares.
- (360) *Do not eat the fruit of a tree for three years from the time it was planted. “When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to Yahweh. And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: I am Yahweh your God.”* (Leviticus 19:23-25) Beyond the plain obedience of the command, this is a hard one to figure out. Why did Yahweh declare the fruit of a newly planted tree ceremonially forbidden for the first three years? As an enthusiastic arborist, I can tell you that it takes that long for a tree’s root structure to become established.

The “tree maxim” is: the first year they sleep, the second year they creep, and the third year they leap. Perhaps Yahweh is teaching us about patience—not to expect a new believer to bear edifying fruit for a few years, no matter how promising he or she might appear. If ever there was a “convert” who might have wanted to jump immediately into the fray, it was Paul. But as he testifies in his preface to the Galatians (1:18), he waited for a full three years before he even conferred with the leaders of the Ekklesia at Jerusalem. *Three years*. Paul was an acknowledged expert in the Torah. Perhaps he realized that he was a newly planted tree and none of his fruit would be usable for the first three years. So he sidelined himself until, as he himself put it (v. 15), “it pleased God....”

- (361) *The fruit of fruit-bearing trees in the fourth year of their planting shall be sacred like the second tithe and eaten in Jerusalem. “When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to Yahweh. And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: I am Yahweh your God.”* (Leviticus 19:23-25) Orthodox Jews today have, as usual, turned what they don’t understand into a maze of mindless rules. They even have a special “New Year’s day” for trees—not the first day of Nisan, as Yahweh decreed, nor the first of Tishri (erroneously called *Rosh Hashanah*—head of the year—a phony New Year they picked up in Babylon), but *Tu B’Shevat*, or the fifteenth day of the month of Shevat, which falls in January or February. So presumably, if you get that peach tree into the ground by the middle of January, you can cut the better part of a year off the “three-year” rule. Good grief.

What’s really going on is that the fourth-year fruit is set apart to Yahweh. It is “a praise to Yahweh,” *hilulim*—offerings of praise similar to the Firstfruits offering. *Hilulim* is linguistically related to the usual word for praise, *halal*, which actually means to radiate light (Yahweh’s, in this case). I take all this to mean that the first thing a new believer should do upon getting himself grounded and rooted in the Word is to praise Yahweh.

- (362) *Do not sow grain or herbs in a vineyard. “You shall not sow your vineyard with different kinds of seed, lest the yield of the seed which you have sown and the fruit of your vineyard be defiled.”* (Deuteronomy 22:9) Again, “different kinds of seed” represent different approaches to God. Yahweh has ordained one way to reach Him: grace through faith in Yahshua—literally meaning “Yahweh is salvation.” Since the “vineyard” here is metaphorical of the world we live in, mixing our “seed,” is indicative of blending paganism with true reverence for Yahweh. In a word it is unholiness.

- (363) *Do not eat the produce of diverse seeds sown in a vineyard. “You shall not sow your vineyard with different kinds of seed, lest the yield of the seed which you have sown and the fruit of your vineyard be defiled.”* (Deuteronomy 22:9) A continuation of the thought of the previous mitzvah: holiness requires us to be set apart from the world, set apart to God for His purposes, for that is what the word means. Yahweh was instructing the Israelites not to mix the worship of Ba’al with that of Himself. In our age the names have changed, but the principle hasn’t. The early church was warned against the inroads of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6, 15), a group who advocated compromise between Yahshua’s Ekklesia and the pagan religions of the surrounding peoples. But Yahweh had spoken: “You shall not sow your vineyard with different kinds of seed.”
- (364) *Do not work with beasts of different species yoked together. “You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.”* (Deuteronomy 22:10) The lesson here is exactly the same as the previous two mitzvot, though Maimonides refuses to see beyond the agricultural ramifications. It’s a plea for holiness, separateness. Not surprisingly, Paul saw exactly what was going on. He wrote: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate,’ says Yahweh. ‘Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,’ says Yahweh Almighty.” (II Corinthians 6:14-18) If you yoke Yahweh’s ox with Satan’s ass, you’ll be plowing in circles.

CLOTHING

- (365) *A man shall not wear women’s clothing. “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to Yahweh your God.”* (Deuteronomy 22:5) Now you know why Satan works so hard trying to blur the gender lines in our society: its because Yahweh, who created the sexes, likes to keep them separate and distinct. The question we should be asking ourselves is “Why?” Why is Yahweh so intent on preserving the family? Why does He want men to look like men, women to look like women, and marriages between them to last for a lifetime, fruitful and secure? It’s because the human family is designed to be a picture of Yahweh and how He relates to us. Yahweh our “Father” is our provider, our strong protector, the ultimate

authority. The more intimate, tender, and personal side of God’s revelation to us comes through the Holy Spirit—*Ruach Qodesh* in Hebrew, a feminine term in that language. Yes, God’s Spirit is quite literally our Heavenly *Mother*. And as anyone who grew up close to a brother or sister can attest, there is a special bond between siblings—a oneness that can’t be achieved with a parent, no matter how warm the relationship. So Yahweh also manifested Himself as the “Son,” God existing in the form of a man—whose brothers and sisters we are if we have been adopted into the family of God. The family, then, is a metaphor for Yahweh’s self-expression on our behalf. He created us, in fact, to reflect that expression in who and what we were: men and women whose lifelong love brings children into being—families.

So from Satan’s point of view, one of the best ways to destroy this picture is to confuse the roles of the family members. He encourages men to be effeminate, women authoritative, and children rebellious. Step number one in achieving his goal of the breakdown of the family is to make men and women look the same, and the easiest way to achieve that is with clothing.

- (366) *A woman should not wear men’s clothing. “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to Yahweh your God.”* (Deuteronomy 22:5) What, exactly, are “women’s clothes” or “men’s clothes”? Since modes of dress are regional, and since fashion norms shift with time, the answers defy any hard and fast definition (which is probably why Yahweh worded His Torah so carefully). I’ve got no problem with ladies in pants, for the simple reason that most women still look unmistakably like women dressed that way. As with so many of these instructions, I’d have to say that *intent* is the key. We shouldn’t be *trying* to look like the opposite sex, or trying to disguise what we are by adopting an androgynous look. Men should look like men, and women, women, in the context of their own regional customs.
- (367) *Do not wear garments made of wool and linen mixed together. “You shall not wear a garment of different sorts, such as wool and linen mixed together.”* (Deuteronomy 22:11) Remember, Israel was to be the keeper of Yahweh’s signs. What they did in their observance of the Torah was meant to be a witness to the world of Yahweh’s plan of redemption—whether they understood the metaphor or not. Clean, white, linen garments are a common scriptural metaphor for holiness. For instance, we read of the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19:7-8, “**Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife**

has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” Our righteousness is a gift from God, thus these “righteous acts of the saints” with which we are clothed are *imputed* virtue—the sinlessness of Yahshua covering our transgressions. So this mixture of wool and linen that’s prohibited in the Torah is symbolic of one’s dependence upon *both* grace and good works. Good works, symbolized here by wool, are fine in their own context, so Yahweh doesn’t prohibit its use. But good works are not germane to the subject of one’s vindication—they aren’t something to be “worn” in addition to the “fine linen, clean and bright” of God’s grace. Yahweh is admonishing us to rely upon Him alone.

THE FIRSTBORN

- (368) *Redeem the firstborn human male.* “All the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is this?’ that you shall say to him, ‘By strength of hand Yahweh brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that Yahweh killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to Yahweh all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’” (Exodus 13:13-15) “Everything that first opens the womb of all flesh, which they bring to Yahweh, whether man or beast, shall be yours; nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. And those redeemed of the devoted things you shall redeem when one month old, according to your valuation, for five shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs.” (Numbers 18:15-16) Yahweh declared that all the males in Israel who were first-born, either of people or animals, belonged to Him. The rabbis, careful to avoid any subject that might have Messianic overtones, studiously stuck to the letter of the law on this one: if a male child opens the womb, he is to be “bought back from God”—redeemed—for five silver shekels (about \$20). Elsewhere (Leviticus 3:40-51), Yahweh explains that the males of the tribe of Levi are to serve as the substitution for the firstborn males of Israel, and the five shekels are just to cover those for whom there are insufficient numbers of Levites (273 of them when Moses first counted them up).

Redemption is deliverance from some evil circumstance by payment of a price. This evil could be debt, guilt of some crime, slavery, or some other predicament. Since we have all fallen short of Yahweh’s perfect standard, we are all in need of redemption. By paying the token “ransom” for their firstborn male children, Israelites under the Torah were acting out

Yahweh's redemption of the whole human race—the offering up of His perfect “Lamb of God,” Yahshua the Messiah.

- (369) *Redeem the firstling of an ass.* **“You shall set apart to Yahweh all that open the womb, that is, every firstborn that comes from an animal which you have; the males shall be Yahweh’s. But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck.”** (Exodus 13:12-13) A donkey was a ceremonially “unclean” animal. A firstborn male donkey, being useful as a beast of burden, was allowed to be redeemed instead of being sacrificed and eaten as a clean animal would have been. The animal specified to take his place? A lamb. Yahweh’s point is that the price of redemption must be innocent, clean, perfect. Sacrificing a clean lamb in place of an unclean donkey is a perfect picture of what Yahshua did for us on Calvary.
- (370) *Break the neck of the firstling of an ass if it is not redeemed.* **“But the firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb. And if you will not redeem him, then you shall break his neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed.”** (Exodus 34:20) There is choice involved, however. The donkey doesn’t *have* to be rescued by the lamb. But if he isn’t, his life is forfeit, and no benefit is derived from his life or his death. He provides no nourishment; he does no labor benefiting mankind; he’s of no use to anyone, not even himself. He has brought pain to his mother and inconvenience to everyone else. This is a picture of our sorry position if the sacrifice of Lamb of God is not invoked on our behalf.
- (371) *Do not redeem the firstling of a clean beast.* **“Everything that first opens the womb of all flesh, which they bring to Yahweh, whether man or beast, shall be yours; nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. And those redeemed of the devoted things you shall redeem when one month old, according to your valuation, for five shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. But the firstborn of a cow, the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat you shall not redeem; they are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar, and burn their fat as an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to Yahweh. And their flesh shall be yours, just as the wave breast and the right thigh are yours.”** (Numbers 18:15-18) This subject is so important to Yahweh, it’s discussed in detail three separate times in the Torah (as we have seen), and other facets are covered in Leviticus 3:40-51 and 27:26. This mitzvah covers the “clean” animal. It is to be sacrificed when it has reached the requisite age, with its blood (representing its life) being sprinkled on the altar, and its inedible fat parts burned as an offering to Yahweh. The meat, however, remains the property of the animal’s owner.

Several things are going on here. The symbols are rich and varied. First, the animal's owner has shown faith in Yahweh's promises of future provision. He has killed an animal that showed promise, whether for breeding purposes, wool, or labor. The "bean-counter" in us may decry the "waste," but Yahweh says, "If you trust Me, I'll take care of you."

Second, Yahweh is using the occasion as an excuse for a party. It's a pot-luck barbeque: He gets the blood and fat, and the family gets the edible parts. Over and over again in scripture, we get the distinct impression that Yahweh loves nothing more than to get together with His children and have a feast. And by the way, there's a big one coming soon—it's going to last a thousand years.

Third, that which is already "clean" needs no redemption. As Moses says, if we are "clean," we have been made holy, set apart for Yahweh's purposes. Yes, death of the mortal body is part of the process, but we who are clean are only dying in emulation of our Savior—dying to sin so that we might live through Him.

And fourth, look at which clean animals were singled out as examples. The bullock or ox represents quiet service—one of the recurring metaphors of Messiah's character. The male lamb, of course, represents Christ in His role as substitutionary sacrifice. As John put it, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And the goat is symbolic of the sin Yahshua *became* for us as he bore our shame to the grave.