

## Politics

It is said that in polite conversation, one should never discuss one's views on either religion or politics. In the Torah, however, these two subjects collide with gleeful alacrity. I guess if you're into small talk, Yahweh would make a terrible dinner guest.

Because God told them to remain separate from the nations, the Jews have traditionally viewed politics as a case of “us vs. them”—Israel against the rest of the world. And because a plethora of yet-to-be-fulfilled Bible passages predict their national restoration to greatness, these same Jews (those who still believe there's a God, that is) assume that He's on their side. And He *is*, for the long haul, but that doesn't mean He's blind to their national rebellion—even if they can't see it. Unfortunately, the Jewish sense of political destiny has become inexorably intertwined with the rabbinical view of the Torah: the idea that keeping rules and observing traditions are what binds a people to God and purges their iniquity—and that the Messiah will come to their aid only when they've proved themselves worthy.

On the other hand, the “blessings and cursings” passages in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 clearly indicate that Israel should be able to gauge their spiritual condition—their success at “observing all these commandments”—by taking notice of whether or not they are actually being blessed (and by this, I mean more than merely continuing to exist as a separate people, for God promised *that* to them unconditionally). Judging by the standards of scripture, the Jews are still worlds away from the center of God's will: half of them (at least) are still scattered throughout the world; they serve “gods” other than Yahweh, gods of tradition, intellect, and wealth; they are hounded and persecuted in the nations in which they are scattered, irrationally hated and ostracized; and their very national existence in their own land is threatened daily by enemies both foreign and domestic (cf. Deuteronomy 28:64-66). If the rabbis' approach is right, then why hasn't God kept His promise: **“If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments and perform them...you shall dwell in your land safely...I will give you peace in the land...none shall make you afraid...I will set my tabernacle among you...I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.”** (Leviticus 26:3-12, highlights) Needless to say, none of that is the case today. They *aren't* walking in His statutes, no matter what they think.

The prophet Isaiah describes the epiphany of Israel when they finally realize how wrong they were: **“We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags. We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You. For You have hidden Your face from us, and have consumed us because of our iniquities...Do not be furious, O Yahweh, nor remember our iniquity forever.”** And lest there should be any doubt that Israel is the petitioner here, he goes on to say, **“Indeed, please look—we are your people. Your holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.”** (Isaiah 64:6-7, 9-10)

Yahweh’s reply is like a bucket of cold water in the face. **“I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation that was not called by My name.”** In case you missed it, He’s talking about the gentile believers who (unlike the Jews, for the most part) were “made right with God by faith,” as Paul puts it in his epistle to the Romans, which we’ll visit in a moment. God says that these people—we who were so dumb we didn’t even know we were *looking* for Yahweh—gladly received salvation when it was presented to them, whereas the Jews stubbornly refused to either keep His Law or accept what (and Whom) it signified: **“I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts, a people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face.”** And what are they doing that so arouses Yahweh’s ire? *Religious* things: **“...Who sacrifice in gardens [see Leviticus 17:8-9 for instruction on what they *should* have been doing], and burn incense on altars of brick [Exodus 20:24-25, 30:1-6]; who sit among the graves and spend the night in the tombs [Numbers 19:16]; who eat swine’s flesh and the broth of abominable things is in their vessels [Leviticus 11:7, 41]; who say, ‘Keep to yourself [*especially* you pesky gentiles], do not come near me, for I am holier than you!’ These are smoke in My nostrils, a fire that burns all the day. Behold, it is written before Me: ‘I will not keep silence, but will repay—even repay into their bosom—your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together,’ says Yahweh.”** (Isaiah 65:1-7) Each of the examples listed is a perversion of God’s Torah instructions, one way or another, just as we have seen to be the case with the majority of Maimonides’ mitzvot. The Jews’ true heart has been revealed by their lack of respect for God’s Word. While claiming to be “Torah observant,” these religious rebels actually “walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts.”

Now Paul picks up the thread. **“The Gentiles have been made right with God by faith, even though they were not seeking him [just like Isaiah said]. But the Jews, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law [whether the real thing or their twisted version of it—Paul is willing to give them the benefit of the doubt here], never succeeded. Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law and being good instead of by depending on faith.”** (Romans 9:30-32 NLT)

It's kind of like illegal aliens in America. Judging by their normal behavior, most of them are basing their hope (in this case, the hope of being able to stay in the country long enough to build a good, prosperous life) on "keeping the law and being good." They work hard, obey the laws of the land (excuse the immigration laws), and try to keep their heads down, because they don't want to make waves. *Waves can get you deported.* Now, not exceeding the speed limit and coming to a full and complete halt at stop signs are good things—the law requires them. But keeping these laws does nothing to legitimize an illegal alien. Even if he's keeping *all* the traffic rules perfectly while driving a properly registered car, it doesn't matter—he's breaking the law just by being here! In fact, until he takes advantage of the country's "grace through faith" program—taking whatever steps are mandated to become a legal resident—*everything* he does, in a manner of speaking, is a crime against the state. Being "good" doesn't help him if he isn't legally entitled to be here in the first place. Likewise, keeping the "Laws" of the Kingdom of Heaven is a relatively pointless exercise if we haven't become citizens of the realm.

The politically correct view would chastise Paul for being so hard on his fellow Jews. But open-mindedness concerning their errant approach would do them no practical good, and he loved his people so much, he desperately wanted to rescue them from their blunder. If there is such a thing as absolute truth, then tolerance for error is the antithesis of love. **"Dear brothers and sisters, the longing of my heart and my prayer to God is that the Jewish people might be saved. I know what enthusiasm they have for God, but it is misdirected zeal. For they don't understand God's way of making people right with Himself. Instead, they are clinging to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law. They won't go along with God's way. For Christ has accomplished the whole purpose of the law. That's because "the whole purpose of the Law" was to demonstrate man's need for a Savior—and God's plan to reveal Him. "All who believe in Him are made right with God...."**

**"For Moses wrote that the law's way of making a person right with God requires obedience to all of its commands [something none of us has ever accomplished, making "the law's way" a dead-end street if you're depending upon it to save you]. But the way of getting right with God through faith says, 'You don't need to go to heaven' (to find Christ and bring Him down to help you). And it says, 'You don't need to go to the place of the dead' (to bring Christ back to life again). Salvation that comes from trusting Christ—which is the message we preach—is already within easy reach. In fact, the Scriptures say, 'The message is close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart....'"** In a nutshell, Paul is saying that we can't reach God. He reaches us. And we can't keep the Law, but the Law—the fulfillment of which is Yahshua—keeps us from death, for "the whole purpose of the Law" is summed up in that one word: *Yahshua*—which literally means "Yahweh is salvation."

The bottom line, then, is this: **“For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus [i.e., Yahshua] is Lord and believe in your heart that God [i.e., Yahweh] raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, ‘Anyone who believes in Him will not be disappointed.’ Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They all have the same Lord, who generously gives his riches to all who ask for them. For ‘Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord [actually, it’s *Yahweh* here—Paul is quoting Joel 2:32] will be saved.”** (Romans 10:1-13 NLT) Believing and confessing: it’s precisely the same procedure through which Abraham was accounted righteous before God. Some things never change.

### THE KING

(581) *Do not curse a ruler, that is, the King or the head of the College in the land of Israel. “You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.”* (Exodus 22:28) Maimonides has removed one admonition and replaced it with another more to his liking. What happened to “You shall not revile God?” The Hebrew word for “revile” is *qalal*, meaning to take lightly, treat with contempt, dishonor, or curse. It seems to me that by tampering with God’s Torah like this, that’s precisely what the rabbis were doing to Him. *Qalal* is the perfect antonym of the verb we saw in the Fifth Commandment: “*Honor (kabad: literally, make weighty) your father and your mother...*” which goes a long way toward proving my contention that honoring our earthly father and mother is fundamentally a metaphor for taking seriously our Heavenly Father, Yahweh, and our Heavenly *Mother* (so to speak), His Holy Spirit.

And what about “to curse?” This is the Hebrew *’arar*, which literally means “to bind (as with a spell), hem in with obstacles, render powerless to resist.” Therefore, the meaning is more like, “Do not *be* a curse to a ruler of your people through your resistance or rebellion.” And who, precisely is a “ruler of your people?” Though Yahweh parallels God and the ruler, implying that the ultimate “ruler” is King Yahshua, *nasi*, the word translated “ruler” here, is never used to denote the reigning Christ in the Old Covenant Scriptures. (Ezekiel, describing the Millennial kingdom, says “**My servant David will be their prince (*nasi*) forever,**” (Ezekiel 37:35) and most commentators interpret this as meaning the Messiah, but I am convinced that the *actual resurrected David*, and not King Yahshua, is being identified. We are, after all, in a post-rapture world at that point. David will be sporting his new immortal body, just like the rest of the raptured saints. See *Future History*, Chapter 27, for a more complete exploration of the subject.) *Nasi* denotes a prince, captain, chief, leader, or

ruler, without regard to his degree of exaltation or worthiness. Even Gog, leader of the Islamic hordes seen invading Israel in the last days (Ezekiel 38-39), is called a *nasi*. (The similarity between *nasi* and Nazi, though delicious, is purely coincidental).

The Messiah *is* called a ruler in Scripture, of course, but a different word is employed. Daniel 9:25 calls Him “Messiah the prince,” using the same word translated “ruler” in this passage: **“Since the day that I brought My people out of the land of Egypt, I have chosen no city from any tribe of Israel in which to build a house, that My name might be there, nor did I choose any man to be a ruler over My people Israel. Yet I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there; and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel.”** (II Chronicles 6:5-6) The word for “ruler” here is *nagid*, whose root verb means “to tell or make known, to make a matter conspicuous.” The *nagid* is thus a fundamentally different kind of ruler than a *nasi*, whose linguistic root means “to lift, carry, or take.” The *nasi* has *received* his leadership role; the *nagid* rules by virtue of his very nature.

So basically, this precept tells us not to actively sabotage the leader/ruler with whom God has “blessed” us (without regard to whether he’s a saint or a scoundrel). The classic example of how to do this is David’s dealing with King Saul. Though Saul repeatedly tried to kill David in fits of jealous rage, David (whose name means “love,” by the way) refused to harm “God’s anointed,” even when it would have been an easy, justifiable, and arguably prudent thing to do. Yahshua, following the same principle, didn’t trash Herod, Pilate, or Emperor Tiberius (who were doing a fine job of condemning *themselves*); He merely went about doing His divinely appointed job, just as we are all to do.

This is where Maimonides’ take on the whole thing derails. He and his fellow rabbis would have you believe God wants you to refrain from “being a curse” to *them*—a self-appointed religious elite, people who want you to submit to and honor them in obsequious obeisance. Nothing could be further from the truth. Again, Yahshua is our example. While saying nothing against the flawed political rulers that God in His wisdom saw fit to place in positions of power for His own purposes (cf. Romans 13:1-7), Yahshua lost no opportunity to lambaste the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy, ambition, and greed. Therefore, when God says, **“You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people,”** He is indeed saying the same thing two different ways: don’t revile Yahweh, and don’t curse the political rulers He has entrusted with your well being, whether or not they are fulfilling their mandate. The bad news? We tend to get the governments we deserve. Ouch!

(582) *Appoint a king.* “When you come to the land which Yahweh your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom Yahweh your God chooses....” (Deuteronomy 17:14-15) Yahweh is *not* commanding Israel to appoint a king over themselves. Quite the contrary. Having perfect foreknowledge must be a pain sometimes. God *knew* Israel would someday cast His rule aside in favor of an earthly king (see I Samuel 8:6-9). This is merely instruction about what to do after they make their dumb decision. It’s like saying, *If and when you get it into your head to jump out of a perfectly good airplane, wear a parachute, and don’t forget to pull the rip cord.* Then the rabbis come along and tell their gullible audience that they all have to take up skydiving. *Oy!*

Of course, Maimonides didn’t have much choice in the matter. If he’d properly communicated Yahweh’s precept, it would have led Israel straight to the Messiah, God’s Anointed—Yahshua—the One “whom Yahweh your God chooses,” a.k.a. “the Stone whom the builders rejected.” And that would have caused him and his fellow rabbis to loosen their grip on power and prestige. Can’t have that, now, can we?

(583) *Do not appoint as ruler over Israel one who comes from non-Israelites.* “...One from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.” (Deuteronomy 17:15) History is replete with foreign rulers who have come in and taken over nations not their own—with disastrous results; Napoleon and Hitler come readily to mind. The American Constitution wisely follows the Torah’s precept, requiring their presidents to be “home grown.” But as you may expect, there’s more to this than a formula for acquiring empathetic temporal leadership. It’s a prescription for national holiness.

There are two ways to “set a king over yourself.” You can either choose him—via election, acclamation, or uncontested succession—or your adverse circumstances can place him on the throne without so much as asking your permission: nobody in Judah *wanted* Nebuchadnezzar as their king; he reigned strictly by right of conquest. Yahweh desired to be chosen as Israel’s “King,” but as we’ve seen time and again, He refuses to abridge our right to choose our own destiny. He informed the newly freed Israelites, “If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Exodus 19:5-6) Later He told them what it would take to lose the privilege of having Him as King (see Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28). Sure enough, over the next millennium Israel did everything they’d been warned not to do. In doing

so, they in effect “set foreigners over themselves, who were not their brothers.”

The ultimate reason behind the precept, of course, is that the promised Messiah would be an Israelite: “I [Yahweh] will raise up for them a Prophet like you [Moses] from among their brethren [the nation of Israel], and will put My words in His mouth, and He [Yahshua] shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.” (Deuteronomy 18:18-19) This mitzvah hasn’t run out of gas, either. Israel is about to be confronted with a false messiah the Scriptures identify as “the beast from the sea,” a metaphorical code that tells us he’s a gentile. You may know him by one of his other titles, “the Antichrist.” Israel has been warned, however. They are not to choose a foreigner as their king.

- (584) *The King shall not acquire an excessive number of horses. “...But he [the king] shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for Yahweh has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’”* (Deuteronomy 17:16) In the long run, He’s not really just talking about horses, and He’s not really talking about Egypt. The horse was the quintessential article of military hardware. A king who felt he needed lots of horses was relying on the strength of his own armed forces to defend his realm—not upon Yahweh. “Multiplying horses” is therefore a subtle form of idolatry.

And Egypt? Egypt is a Scriptural metaphor for the world that formerly enslaved us prior to our redemption—the cost of which was the death of the firstborn Son at Passover (I don’t have to spell it out, do I?). The ultimate price has already been paid to extricate us from the “Egyptian predicament.” The *last* thing we should want to consider is going back there—especially if our return to slavery is for no better reason than that we don’t trust Yahweh with our defense.

The lessons are clear and valid on a personal level, but we should be cognizant of the fact that Yahweh is talking about the *king* here—that is, the leadership we choose for ourselves. It speaks to our motivation for choosing whom we want to lead us. Do they *really* trust Yahweh, or are they merely fast talkers who give lip service to God while they implement worldly solutions to their constituents’ problems?

As I write these words, I have just been informed of the death of Pastor Jerry Falwell, who at least *tried* to provide candidates to the American electorate who would honor God. The “Moral Majority” he founded was a start, I guess. But it quickly devolved in the popular mind into the equation of a conservative political viewpoint with Protestant

fundamentalist Christianity. While there are laudable points of convergence, I would hasten to point out that they are not remotely the same thing, nor are conservative politicians automatically friends of Yahweh. (“Christians” aren’t either necessarily, but let’s not go there. How can you be a friend of a deity Whose name you know but refuse to use and Whose instructions you either ignore or malign?) The issue of abortion has become a very slippery slope for Christians on their way to the polls. A candidate who cheats on his wife (or her husband), abuses drugs or alcohol, lies through his teeth for personal advantage, wouldn’t be caught dead in a house of worship unless there was political capital to be made, and is generally in favor of “multiplying horses from Egypt” so to speak, can nevertheless count on getting the fundamentalist Christian vote if he comes out publicly against abortion. My friends, it’s okay to vote for “none of the above.” Yahweh is neither the God of the lowest common denominator nor the God of the lesser of two evils.

- (585) *The King shall not take an excessive number of wives. “...Neither shall he [the king] multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away.”* (Deuteronomy 17:17) We’re still in the passage in which Yahweh defines the proper attitude of the king. In three areas (weaponry, wives, and wealth) the king is instructed to exercise moderation, and in each case the reasons are related: the king is to rely on Yahweh, trust Him alone, and lead his people in worshipping Him. All of the pitfalls against which the Torah warns, of course, tend to go with the territory of being king: he is the *de facto* Commander in Chief for his nation’s armed forces, he is on some level the most attractive man in town, and taxes and tribute naturally flow his way. Yahweh is warning him not to let these things turn his head. He is to pursue Yahweh alone.

Way back in Genesis 2, we were told that God provided a wife (singular) for Adam to be “a helper *neged* (comparable to, corresponding to, suited for, or in the presence of) him.” Looking at this from the point of view of simple logistics, *one* wife could fulfill this role, but multiple wives could not. The more wives a man had, the less “help” (as defined by *neged*) he would actually receive. So why would a man want ten wives instead of one, even if he were a king and could afford the upkeep on a harem? Well, there’s the obvious (*duh*): the prospect of more sex. But even this logic breaks down if you factor in the human psyche: instead of having a close relationship with one woman who’s just as sexually fulfilled as he is, the polygamist monarch has *at best* (on any given day) one satisfied woman and nine others who are seething with frustration and resentment. That’s not exactly a recipe for contentment—for any of them.

But there's another reason a king might "multiply wives." Royal marriages were a time-honored way of artificially allying one nation's interests to another's. The king of Nation X isn't likely to attack Nation Y if his daughter is married to the king of that country, is he? But once again, we are reminded here of the unique nature of Israel's political structure as Yahweh intended it: they were to be set apart from the surrounding nations—tasked with being the conduit of God's salvation to the world. They were to be allied with Yahweh and no one else. Marriage alliances with their neighbors could only serve to dilute (or pollute) Israel's relationship with their God.

(586) *He shall not accumulate an excessive quantity of gold and silver. "...Nor shall he [the king] greatly multiply silver and gold for himself."* (Deuteronomy 17:17) Same song, third verse. Wealth (even though it flows naturally to the king) is not something to be grasped at and hoarded. Rather, it is a means by which the king might bless his people. King David was so successful, he found himself swimming in loot. But the only thing he really wanted to do with it all was to build a temple honoring Yahweh. Don't ignore those last two words in our text: "...for himself." Being blessed materially is not a sin—king or not. But beyond the needs we all experience (of which God is quite aware—see Matthew 6:19-34) the money isn't *meant* for us, for our gratification, pleasure, or pride. It's there so that we might honor God with it, either by meeting the temporal needs of those less fortunate than ourselves or by investing in the spread of the Good News. Yes, David built himself a nice house to live in. But the bulk of his money went toward the temple. That's where his heart was.

In a familiar anecdote, Yahshua demonstrated what our mindset toward money ought to be: "Watching for their opportunity, the leaders sent secret agents pretending to be honest men. They tried to get Jesus to say something that could be reported to the Roman governor so he would arrest Jesus. They said, 'Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right and are not influenced by what others think. You sincerely teach the ways of God. Now tell us—is it right to pay taxes to the Roman government or not?' He saw through their trickery and said, 'Show me a Roman coin. Whose picture and title are stamped on it?' 'Caesar's,' they replied. 'Well then,' he said, 'give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God.' So they failed to trap him in the presence of the people. Instead, they were amazed by his answer, and they were silenced." (Luke 20:20-26 NLT) Yahshua wasn't particularly impressed with the might of Rome or the wealth of its emperor. He, after all, was the "only begotten Son" of the God who (as we saw above) said, "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine." (Exodus 19:5)

Yahweh owns the whole world, yet what He treasures is *us*—if we treasure Him.

Just for the fun of it, I took a look at a U.S. hundred dollar bill with the same mindset Yahshua did with the Roman coin. The phrase “In God we trust” is still there, which one might think would short-circuit the exercise. But it merely begs the question: who is the God in whom we as a nation put our trust? Our national “gods” are revealed by the other “images and likenesses” printed on the bill. First, of course, there’s Ben Franklin’s half-smiling face. Americans admire him. He was inventive, resourceful, witty, and practical, one who began as a penniless immigrant but through ingenuity and hard work became one of the “great men” of his day. He was also a womanizing politician who reveled in the fawning sycophants of the salons of Paris, someone who could and did hold his grudges for decades. Franklin was not a Christian, but a deist (or at least that’s how he characterized himself). He was disgusted and appalled by the hypocritical religiosity of those he met who called themselves Christians. (Actually, I can’t say I disagree with him there).

*Eleven times* the bill proclaims that it’s worth one hundred dollars, but I can assure you, it’s not. I can remember a time when a hundred dollars would gas up your car, take your wife out to a nice dinner, pay the babysitter, and leave you with something left over. Now you chose between those options. And why is it like this? That’s printed on the bill as well: it’s not actually *money*, backed with gold or silver in a vault somewhere. No, it’s a “Federal Reserve Note,” a.k.a. funny money conjured up from debt and deceit by a private banking corporation—the Federal Reserve System—to whom our nation foolishly sold its financial soul back in 1913. On the back side of the bill is a picture of what Independence Hall used to look like. We Americans tend to worship our history and heritage, whether it’s real or not. Our independence, too, is more historic illusion than present reality.

And all over the bill, you’ll see counterfeiting countermeasures—intricate engraving, special rag paper, microprinting, watermarks, and other subtleties that defy spurious reproduction—because we Americans are obsessed with the false god called security. If I may tweak a thought from Psalm 127:1, “Unless Yahweh backs the currency, they labor in vain who earn it; unless Yahweh guards the treasury, the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board stays alert in vain.”

- (587) *The King shall write a scroll of the Torah for himself, in addition to the one that every person should write, so that he writes two scrolls. “Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a*

**copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites.”**

(Deuteronomy 17:18) The king was to copy for his own use *one* scroll, not two. Maimonides is compounding an error he made way back in Mitzvah #16. There he said that *every* Israelite was to write a copy of the Torah. However, as the text (Deuteronomy 31:19) shows, it was only Moses and Joshua who were to write down what Moses had been preaching. But yes, the king (when the time came that Israel had one) was instructed to write for himself a copy of the Torah. The priests were to be the keepers of the standard, the original manuscript. Note, by the way, that nothing at all was said about the “oral law” that later rabbis would hypothesize in order to prop up their perversions of the written Torah. The king was given no instruction about it because it didn’t exist.

Maimonides seems fixated on the number of copies the king was to make. Yahweh, in contrast, gives His reasons for requiring this task of the king (something that would normally have been done by a professional *shoter*, or scribe). **“And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear Yahweh his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.”** (Deuteronomy 17:19-20) The king’s Torah scroll was to be his constant companion, an oft-consulted guide, an Owner’s Manual for his life and reign. It would keep the king on the path Yahweh had set for him, benefiting the entire nation, and would prevent him from becoming prideful and arrogant—reminding him that *his* king was Yahweh.

We have no historical evidence that any king of Israel ever kept this precept, though one, Josiah, was so mortified with Judah’s failures when the Law was rediscovered during his reign that he tore his clothes in mourning and led his people in national repentance (see II Chronicles 34:14-33). And King David lived a life that, at least some of the time, suggests his obedience in the matter. Although he is not listed as the author of Psalm 119, the entire chapter speaks of a delight in the Torah that only intimate familiarity could bring. Some highlights: **“Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of Yahweh! ...Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.... I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me.... Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.... The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver.... I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life.... You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me.... Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”** (Psalm 119:1, 11, 30, 54, 72, 93, 98, and 105)

## NAZIRITES

(588) *A Nazirite shall not drink wine, or anything mixed with wine which tastes like wine; and even if the wine or the mixture has turned sour, it is prohibited to him. "When either a man or woman consecrates an offering to take the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to Yahweh, he shall separate himself from wine and similar drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from similar drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins."* (Numbers 6:2-3) The Nazirite vow is the purest form of personal consecration prescribed in the Torah that's available to *any* Israelite—that is, to one who was not born a priest or Levite (whose "consecration" was *assigned* to them by being born into a particular tribe or family in Israel). As we shall see, the Nazirite vow is symbolic of the life of the believer, the child of God—a voluntary, purposeful, meaningful life of separation to Yahweh. Leave it to Maimonides to suck all the life out of it by reducing it to a list of rules. This mitzvah and the next four center on the avoidance of anything grown on a grapevine. There are also prohibitions against cutting one's hair and touching a dead body, which we'll address in due time. But first, we should explore the vow itself, its purpose and significance.

The word we render "Nazirite" is the Hebrew noun *nazir*. It is derived from the verb *nazar*, meaning "to separate." Depending on what preposition it's paired with, it can mean "to keep oneself away from something," "to abstain from something," or "to be separated *to* something." A Nazirite, then, is someone who is separated from the world and consecrated instead to Yahweh, the sign of which being his or her abstinence in several well-defined areas. Except for the abstinence component, it is quite similar to the concept of being *qodesh*, or "holy," (literally, set-apart) a word that was supposed to describe the entire nation of Israel. One normally became a Nazirite by voluntarily taking a vow of consecration to Yahweh for a specific and limited time duration, after which his or her normal mode of life was resumed. But there are at least three instances in Scripture where the Nazirite was consecrated for a lifetime in his mother's womb: Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist.

This was not monasticism. The Nazirite did not retreat from society, cloistered behind locked doors in order to shelter himself from the influence of the world. Nor were the signs of the Nazirite a penance to be performed in an attempt to bring himself closer to God. There was no shame in *not* taking a Nazirite vow, and it was not designed to give the devotee any special religious status or authority in the community (though

both Samson and Samuel were Judges of Israel, and John the Baptist was the last and most privileged prophet of the Old Covenant period). Ordinarily, the Nazirite would continue his or her daily occupation, unless, of course, it conflicted with the vow. (For example, a soldier might be called upon to slay an enemy, and an undertaker prepared corpses for burial, either which would have made it impossible to keep both the vow and the occupation at the same time.)

Notice the contrast in the text: “separate himself *to* Yahweh” as opposed to “separate himself *from* wine....” What’s being pictured is a conscious, purposeful, transfer of affiliation from one thing to another. At first glance, it would seem that the prescribed abstinence from the fruit of the vine is merely a requirement for sobriety. Though that’s included (the phrase rendered “similar drink” is *sekar*—“strong drink” or liquor capable of making somebody drunk), one cannot get inebriated by nibbling raisins. There’s more to it. Read on....

- (589) *He shall not eat fresh grapes.* “**Neither shall he...eat fresh grapes.**” (Numbers 6:3) I don’t care how many grapes you eat; they won’t make you tipsy. We need to look at this in view of the contrast “separated to” versus “separated from.” What do grapes symbolize? When the twelve spies returned from their excursion into Canaan, they brought back a cluster of grapes so big they had to carry it on a pole between two of them. The vineyard they had raided was obviously well established—it takes many years of hard work to produce a crop like that. And that’s the point of the Nazirite vow: grapes represent being settled in this world, tied to it, invested in it. Now, that’s not necessarily a bad thing in itself. The promised land was a gift from God, a good and bountiful place. But it was not God Himself. The Nazirite was choosing to forsake the good in favor of the perfect, if only symbolically (and temporarily). He was saying, “I am but a pilgrim in this land—my real home is in Yahweh.”
- (590) *He shall not eat dried grapes (raisins).* “**Neither shall he...eat raisins.**” (Numbers 6:3) Changing the form of the grape didn’t change the fact that partaking of the fruit of the vine implied an investment in the world, an attachment to it. Thus grapes in any form symbolized for the Nazirite a state of peace, even compromise, with the world he lived in. The clearest example I can think of that demonstrates this state of affairs is Lot’s life in Sodom. Though he was “**oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked**” (II Peter 2:7), Lot opted to stay there nevertheless, “tending his vineyard,” so to speak. While his neighbors drank their share of “wine and strong drink,” Lot (if I may stretch the metaphor) used his grapes to make raisins—doing what he could to make his settled life secure and

impervious to the ravages of time, even if it did render his spiritual existence dry and wrinkled. Of course, merely being under a Nazirite vow didn't automatically make you perfect either. The classic example of *that* is Samson, who for the most part ignored his holy calling. We'll have more to say about him (and his hair) when we get to Mitzvah #594.

Nor did one have to take a Nazirite vow to live a life pleasing to God. The ultimate example of this is the life of Yahshua, who though fully consecrated to Yahweh (because He *was* Yahweh) never took *any* vow that we know of. He drank wine (and even made it on occasion), demonstrating a connection with humanity that was essential for Him—as the rightful Lord of Heaven—to possess if He were to have empathy with our plight on earth. And He was witnessed touching a dead body (see Matthew 9:25), though the corpse of the young girl had no choice but to reawaken at his touch. Indeed, anyone who is touched by Yahshua will find it impossible to remain dead.

Perhaps you're wondering, as I was, if there was any connection between the Hebrew root of the word we translate Nazirite (*nazar*, meaning "to separate") and the name of Yahshua's home town, Nazareth (Greek: *Nazoraios*), especially in light of Matthew's observation: **"And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'" (Matthew 2:23)** As it turns out, the answer is no—it's a transliteration artifact. Matthew was referring to this Messianic prophecy: **"There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch [that's the word] shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of Yahweh shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahweh."** (Isaiah 11:1-2) The word translated "branch" here is the Hebrew *netser*, which denotes a branch, bough, or limb, and by extension a shoot, scion, or root stock—in other words, one of the same kind of a succeeding generation. The "rod" here is King David, son of Jesse; the Messiah was thus prophesied to be a direct descendent of David.

It is not insignificant that we "Christians" were first called "Nazarenes," being identified with Yahshua of Nazareth. (See for example Acts 24:5.) We believers are "branches" whose root and stem is Yahshua, whether we grew there naturally (as Jews) or were grafted in (as gentiles). This state was prophesied as well in reference to the restored Israel in Christ's Millennial kingdom: **"Also your people shall all be righteous. They shall inherit the land forever, the branch [*netser*] of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified."** (Isaiah 60:21) Alas, while all believers in this

life are *netserim*—branches of God’s Messiah—it seems that few are *nazar*—totally separated from the world and consecrated to Yahweh.

- (591) *He shall not eat the kernels of the grapes. “All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin.”* (Numbers 6:4) Grapes aren’t all juicy sweetness. They’ve got seeds and skin that, though necessary and functional, aren’t something you’d want to eat for their own sake. We’ve already established the principle that a Nazirite’s abstinence from the fruit of the vine is symbolic of not becoming settled in the world—of maintaining a pilgrim mentality. The idea of eating grape seeds reminds us that some people, thoroughly rooted in this world, know nothing of its sweetness, for they know nothing of Yahshua’s love. They experience nothing but its bitterness, frustration, and pain. It’s why so many young Muslims can think of nothing better to do than kill as many people as they can, along with themselves. It’s why devotees of Buddhism long for release from the cycle of life—achieving “nirvana,” a state of nothingness, the extinction of the soul. The Nazirite abstains not only from whatever appealing sweetness the world can offer, but also its bitterness. He is set apart to God.
- (592) *The Nazirite shall not eat of the skins of the grapes. “All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin.”* (Numbers 6:4) In the same way that the seeds of the grape aren’t really what you’re after when you eat one, neither is the skin. If the seeds represent the bitter core of a merely mortal life (I realize I’m stretching the metaphor to its breaking point here) then the skin represents the humdrum functionality, the boring but necessary routine of life in the world—earning a living, getting the job done, being responsible, *holding it all together*. The point is, if that’s all there is to life, it’s not much of a life. If you’re going to be settled in the promised land—a land, after all, to which Yahweh has led you, you should expect to experience the “whole grape,” a little work, a little pain or disappointment at times, but more sweetness and nourishment than anything else. The Nazirite, however, sets himself apart from all that—the good *and* the bad—in favor of a more intense encounter with his God. He is the one of whom Isaiah lamented his absence in the passage with which we opened this chapter: the man “**who stirs himself up to take hold of [Yahweh].**” You’ve heard of extreme sports; this is extreme spirituality. It’s like the difference between taking a walk in the park and climbing Mt. Everest. It’s not something you’d do on a whim.
- (593) *The Nazirite shall permit his hair to grow. “All the days of the vow of his [the Nazirite’s] separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to Yahweh, he shall be holy. He shall let the locks of*

**the hair of his head grow.”** (Numbers 6:5) Here Yahweh is using the hair of our head as a symbol of a significant truth. Hair is funny stuff. We can’t cause it to grow (or stop it from growing), though we might like to. We can’t change its rate of growth, texture, or color without tampering with it externally—cutting, curling, coloring it, or whatever. So our hair is a ready metaphor for God’s provision, His work in our lives. It comes on God’s terms, by His grace, and on His schedule. By abstaining from cutting his hair, the Nazirite is saying, “I will not stand in the way of Yahweh’s plan; I will not tamper with what He has provided or alter His *modus operandi* by imposing my will or “style” upon it.

- (594) *The Nazirite shall not cut his hair.* **“All the days of the vow of his separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to Yahweh, he shall be holy. He shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.”** (Numbers 6:5) This isn’t really a separate mitzvah, but merely the negative restatement of the previous affirmative thought. Maimonides is padding the list so he can come up with the magic number 613.

The Nazirite we immediately think of in regard to this precept, of course, is Samson, whose story is told in Judges 13-16. We’ve all heard how Delilah tricked him into revealing the source of his strength so she could betray him. But it’s pretty clear that not even Samson *himself* recognized that his Nazirite vow had anything to do with it. Twice in the record of his life we read, **“Then the Spirit of Yahweh came mightily upon him,”** after which he went out and did something rude to a bunch of Philistines. Nowhere do we read of a connection between his hair and his strength until Delilah called for the barber—*after* she had proved her willingness to betray him *on three separate occasions*. The record plainly says that Samson was surprised to find his strength gone when his hair was cut off.

What had happened? I believe this is one of those rare occasions when Yahweh allowed one of the Torah’s many metaphors to get up and walk on all fours—giving substance to the symbol. Samson clearly didn’t have as much of a desire to remain as holy—set apart for God’s purposes—as his Nazirite status would have indicated. Every time he got in trouble it seems, there was a Philistine—read: *enemy*—woman in the picture. The Nazirite vow required (as we shall see) that he not touch any dead body. But killing a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass pretty much proves that Samson didn’t take that part of his Nazirite vow very seriously, even if they needed killin’. Furthermore, as we saw in Mitzvah #589, the Nazirite was not to eat grapes or drink wine, for this was a picture of being “settled in the land” instead of being settled in Yahweh. But Samson was apparently quite comfortable living among the enemies of his people and

his God. So Yahweh tied the terms of the vow to the gifts that came with it—if his hair (symbolic of what God had provided) was cut, then his strength (the actual God-given gift) would be cut off as well. God takes His symbols seriously.

- (595) *He shall not enter any covered structure where there is a dead body. “All the days that he [The Nazirite] separates himself to Yahweh he shall not go near a dead body.”* (Numbers 6:6) Yahweh’s instruction is more general than the rabbis’ because He’s interested in the heart’s attitude, while they’re looking for a loophole. The death of the body is in itself merely a symbol of something far more tragic—the death of the soul. Just as physical death is marked by the final departure of the soul from the body (something every living creature experiences at the end of its life), spiritual death is marked by the departure of the *spirit* from the soul. It is this death that Adam and Eve suffered when they ate the forbidden fruit. When they sinned, God’s living Spirit left them—the *neshamah*, or “breath of life” that had made them “living beings” in the Garden (see Genesis 2:7) departed or was emptied, though their physical bodies did not succumb for quite some time. And it is because of this death that we, their children, must be born anew—born spiritually from above, re-indwelled with the Holy Spirit—if our souls (*nephesh*) are to survive their separation from the body at our physical deaths. (See *Future History*, Chapter 29: “The Three Doors” for a full explanation).

The Nazirite’s separation to Yahweh reflects and foreshadows this new birth. By observing this vow, he is proclaiming in effect, “Death cannot touch the one who is consecrated to Yahweh.” In Yahweh’s world, life cannot coexist with death any more than light can coexist with darkness. Whether he knows it or not, that’s what the Nazirite is so eloquently saying by observing this part of his vow.

- (596) *A Nazarite shall not defile himself for any dead person (by being in the presence of the corpse). “All the days that he separates himself to Yahweh he shall not go near a dead body. He shall not make himself unclean even for his father or his mother, for his brother or his sister, when they die, because his separation to God is on his head. All the days of his separation he shall be holy to Yahweh.”* (Numbers 6:6-8) Back in Mitzvah #375, we learned that priests were not to touch dead bodies, for they were set apart for the service of Yahweh and thus must not become defiled. There, however, exceptions were specified: attending to the corpse of the priest’s nearest relatives (mother, father, son, daughter, brother or virgin sister) would not render him unclean, that is, ceremonially unfit to perform his priestly duties at the Sanctuary. Not so with the Nazirite. His (or her) separation was to be

complete. And if contact with a dead body was unavoidable, the Nazirite's vow went back to square one—he had to start all over again, offering both sin and trespass offerings and cutting his hair as at the inception of the vow (see verses 9-12).

Why the difference? The same symbol (a close encounter with a corpse) symbolized slightly different things for the priest and the Nazirite. For the priest, being defiled like this signified contamination by sin (an inevitable component of the human condition) that rendered one unfit (if only temporarily) for service to God and man. Cleansing through washing in water and the passage of time were required to rectify the situation. But with the Nazirite, contact with a dead body symbolized identification with *spiritual* death—something that was altogether incompatible with being set apart to Yahweh, who personifies life. Contact with death, then, rendered the vow moot.

Maimonides didn't understand any of this fundamental difference between priests (prophetic of the Messiah as mediator between men and God) and Nazirites (symbolic of the redeemed believer). In his massive tome, the *Mishneh Torah*, he intimated that one can make *himself* a priest or Levite (which as we know are callings Yahweh assigned strictly on the basis of ancestry, so no one could logically aspire to a position of religious authority). The Rambam wrote: "Every person who enters this world, whose spirit moves him and his intellect instructs him to separate himself in order to stand before God, to truly serve Him, to be responsible to Him, to know Him, and to walk upright and straight in His paths as God created him; and he has freed himself from the yoke of petty human considerations that other people pursue—such a person has sanctified himself as being holy of holies, and the Lord is his share and inheritance for all time and all worlds, and he will receive in the World to Come his proper and fulfilling reward as God has given such to the Priests and the Levites." The man Maimonides has so eloquently described, however, is not the priest or Levite, bound by Yahweh's symbolic instructions for them; rather, he is defined by the vows of the Nazirite, for whom the Torah's defining symbols mean far more: (1) avoidance of becoming settled in this world, (2) refusal to thwart or alter the plan and provision of Yahweh, and (3) the total reversal of the spiritual death that was brought upon mankind by the fall of Adam—in other words, the second birth into Yahweh's family.

- (597) *The Nazirite shall shave his hair when he brings his offerings at the completion of the period of his Nazariteship, or within that period if he has become defiled. "And if anyone dies very suddenly beside him, and he*

defiles his consecrated head, then he shall shave his head on the day of his cleansing; on the seventh day he shall shave it.” (Numbers 6:9); “Now this is the law of the Nazirite: When the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall be brought to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. And he shall present his offering to Yahweh: one male lamb in its first year without blemish as a burnt offering, one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish as a sin offering, one ram without blemish as a peace offering, a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and their grain offering with their drink offerings. Then the priest shall bring them before Yahweh and offer his sin offering and his burnt offering; and he shall offer the ram as a sacrifice of a peace offering to Yahweh, with the basket of unleavened bread; the priest shall also offer its grain offering and its drink offering.” (Numbers 6:13-17) The Nazirite vow wasn’t designed to be a lifelong endeavor. Normally, one would take the vow for a certain specific period of time, after which the devotee would resume his or her normal life spiritually refreshed. Symbols aside, it’s intended to be kind of a mountain-top experience, life-changing, focusing, and renewing.

And what was to happen when the vow had been fulfilled? The Nazirite was to perform a ceremony whose every facet reflected the condition of the redeemed soul. If you’ll recall the various types of sacrifice we discussed in Chapter 12, an *olah* (a burnt offering) of a year-old male lamb prefigured the sacrifice of God’s Messiah on his behalf. The sin offering (or *chata’t*) of a ewe lamb signified the Nazirite’s indwelling by Yahweh’s Holy Spirit (the “sin” being our failure to heed Her counsel). The *selem*—the peace offering—symbolized the Nazirite/believer’s outpouring of thanks to Yahweh. The appropriate *minha*, or grain offering with oil, was brought as well, a reminder of Yahweh’s provision. And a *nesek*, or drink offering (which would have normally accompanied any of these various types of offerings), stood for the blood of the Messiah Yahshua spilled for us at Calvary. Conspicuously absent from the list of sacrifices the Nazirite was to offer was the *asham*, or trespass offering, which ordinarily covered “mistakes.” It was deemed inappropriate apparently because of the purposeful, thoughtful, and voluntary nature of the Nazirite vow. The Nazirite was to have no “Oops, my bad” moments.

**“Then the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offering.”** The devotee’s hair, which had been allowed to grow for the entire duration of the vow, was now shorn and burned up with the peace offering—a statement that whatever God had provided was offered back to Him in thankfulness. **“And**

the priest shall take the boiled shoulder of the ram, one unleavened cake from the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and put them upon the hands of the Nazirite after he has shaved his consecrated hair, and the priest shall wave them as a wave offering before Yahweh; they are holy for the priest, together with the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the heave offering. After that the Nazirite may drink wine. This is the law of the Nazirite who vows to Yahweh the offering for his separation, and besides that, whatever else his hand is able to provide; according to the vow which he takes, so he must do according to the law of his separation.” (Numbers 6:18-21) The conclusion of the vow ends up being a party, a celebration in honor of Yahweh. The priest (again, prophetic of Yahshua in his role as mediator) is an honored guest. Since it is becoming increasingly clear that the Nazirite vow is prophetic of the life of the believer in God’s Messiah, this “post-game party,” unless I miss my guess, is prophetic of the Millennial reign of Christ. Wine is back on the menu at this point, for *this* is the land in which we *should* be settled—our promised rest, our permanent home, the final destination marking the end of all our pilgrim wanderings. It is our final and complete break with the world.

#### WAR

- (598) *Those engaged in warfare shall not fear their enemies nor be panic-stricken by them during battle. “Your eyes have seen all that Yahweh your God has done to these two kings [the Amorites, Og and Sihon]; so will Yahweh do to all the kingdoms through which you pass. You must not fear them, for Yahweh your God Himself fights for you.”* (Deuteronomy 3:21-22); *“You shall not be terrified of them [the nations of Canaan], for Yahweh your God, the great and awesome God, is among you.”* (Deuteronomy 7:21) It’s one thing to conjure up courage and charge blindly into battle. Any idiot with enough testosterone coursing through his veins can do it—which is why governments draft teenagers, not guys my age. It’s something else entirely to wage war because Yahweh has promised to fight for you. It’s important to keep things in perspective here: this is not everything Yahweh had to say on the matter: we must factor in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, where the same audience was told that if they did “**not obey the voice of Yahweh your God,**” then “**Yahweh will cause you to be defeated before your enemies.**” (Deuteronomy 28:15, 25) Their blessing in battle, then, was conditional. But in the end, it’s all of a piece: if they really knew and trusted Yahweh, they would not hesitate to carry out His directives when it came to warfare, knowing that “where God guides, God provides.”

Bear in mind that Yahweh had given the Israelites who first heard these words a specific military objective: wipe out the seven Canaanite

nations from the face of the land (defined geographically in Numbers 34)—leave no trace of them, their customs, or *especially* their modes of religious observance. Just as there was a caveat based upon their obedience, there were also limits implied to Yahweh’s promises: He *only* said that the Israelites were not to be afraid when fighting the Canaanites. This wasn’t to be a blanket directive to be applied whenever and wherever a Jew felt like attacking somebody. That being said, since the rebirth of political Israel in 1948, they have indeed shown courage in battle against their Muslim antagonists, and Yahweh has obviously been fighting their wars with them and for them. By any stretch of human military logic, the Israelis should have been wiped off the map in 1948, and if not then, then in 1955, 1967, or 1973. But the God who loves them—the One whom so few Jews know—has other ideas. It was a revelation to me as I did the research for *Future History* to discover that Scriptural predictions of the restoration and ascendancy of Israel outnumber any other prophetic subject by a wide margin. They have (at least) one more battle to miraculously win before Yahweh shows them the hard way how to rely on Him. Israel will finally “get it,” but it will take the most drastic of measures for Yahweh to show them who He is and what He’s done for them.

- (599) *Anoint a special kohein to speak to the soldiers in a war.* “When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for Yahweh your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; for Yahweh your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.’” (Deuteronomy 20:1-4) Maimonides’ mindset is to elevate men to positions of honor and authority (authority that could be—and was—later usurped by the rabbis). Yahweh is coming from a different place. He appointed His priesthood by selecting one family in Israel to perform a specific function: not to rule, but to be intermediaries between God and men in prophetic symbolism of the coming Messiah. “The priest” here is simply the high priest serving at the time the Israelites would commence their offensive against the Canaanites. He was to remind them of what we saw in the previous mitzvah: that Yahweh goes before them into battle—fear, therefore, is not an option. It is the height of folly (or is that arrogance?) to presume you can anoint your own priest. Only Yahweh can do that.

By the way, Joshua, Israel's leader during the conquest of Canaan, was not a priest (i.e., a Levite from Aaron's line)—he was an Ephraimite. But notice the prominent role priests were instructed to take in the “battle” of Jericho (Joshua 6). The point of having them march around the city blowing trumpets was to announce to Jericho (and us) that this was no mere “military” operation, just one more materialistic enterprise perpetrated by aggressive and acquisitive men. Rather, they were the heralds of Almighty God—it would be Yahweh who conquered the city, and Yahweh who received the glory of victory.

- (600) *In a permissive war (as distinguished from obligatory ones), observe the procedure prescribed in the Torah. “When you go near a city to fight against it, then proclaim an offer of peace to it. And it shall be that if they accept your offer of peace, and open to you, then all the people who are found in it shall be placed under tribute to you, and serve you. Now if the city will not make peace with you, but war against you, then you shall besiege it. And when Yahweh your God delivers it into your hands, you shall strike every male in it with the edge of the sword. But the women, the little ones, the livestock, and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself; and you shall eat the enemies’ plunder which Yahweh your God gives you. Thus you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations. (Deuteronomy 20:10-15) We shall establish in a moment (Mitzvot #601 and #602) that there were seven specific people groups in the Land that were slated for total destruction because of their utter and irredeemable depravity. But Yahweh knew that here and there in and around the Promised Land were settlements of other tribes whose “iniquity was not yet (necessarily) full.” These (described in geographical terms as “very far from you”) would be given the option of surrendering to the Israelites (and their God) and paying tribute, without being utterly wiped out. Indeed, under David and Solomon, the kingdom expanded to include many such groups—notably, the Philistines.*

There is a revealing story recorded in Joshua 9 about a group who took advantage of this precept (though there is no evidence that they actually knew what Yahweh had commanded). The nations slated for destruction were scared spitless when they heard what Joshua and the armies of Israel had done to Jericho and Ai (not to mention Egypt a generation before this), and they all banded together to fight against the invaders. But one good-sized Hivite city called Gibeon had a better idea. By trickery, they convinced Joshua that they were not among the local tribes slated for destruction, but were rather emissaries from a distant land—they had heard of Yahweh's great victories, they said, and wished to ally themselves with Him and His people. Joshua and his elders bought their story, only to discover later that they were indeed local Hivites with whom

they should not have signed any kind of treaty. Israel honored their agreement, but shaped it to fit the precept at hand, making the relieved Gibeonites wood cutters and water carriers for the congregation of Israel—which they rightly saw as being far better than corpses.

Most commentators see in this only the failure of Israel to follow God’s law. I see in it the incredible mercy of Yahweh. The Hivites of Gibeon—just like you and me—were slated for destruction because of our sin and depravity. Their death sentence was rightly deserved. But faced with the awesome glory of Yahweh, they repented, turned around, forsook their pagan affiliations and idolatrous practices and joined themselves by whatever means they could to God and His people. They wisely decided that it’s better to be a slave in the house of Yahweh than a king in Satan’s domain. And what did Israel’s God do in response to their courageous repentance? He defended them against the attacks of their former allies, achieving for them the great victory recorded in Joshua 10. Will he do anything less for us if we repent? I think not.

- (601) *Do not keep alive any individual of the seven Canaanite nations. “But of the cities of these peoples which Yahweh your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as Yahweh your God has commanded you, lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against Yahweh your God. (Deuteronomy 20:16-18)* Maimonides is not mistaken in saying there were seven Canaanite nations that Israel was tasked with destroying, even though this passage lists only six. All of them are named in Deuteronomy 7:1-2—where they’re called “**seven nations greater and mightier than you.**” (See Mitzvot #352 and #353.) The missing group is the Girgashites, who were named in several similar lists (e.g., Joshua 3:10 and 24:11, Nehemiah 9:8). Interestingly, the territories of several nations not included in the “official” list of seven *were* included in the original promise Yahweh made to Abraham: the Kenites, Kennizites, Kadmonites, and Rephaim.

All these “target” nations had one thing in common: “wickedness.” But they were not unique in that regard. Both the Egypt from which Israel had been so recently delivered and the Assyria and Babylon to which they would eventually be exiled were also wicked. Indeed, even at this very moment in history, Israel itself was far from perfect in God’s eyes, though they had been chosen to be the instrument of Yahweh’s wrath: “**It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that Yahweh**

**your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which Yahweh swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore understand that Yahweh your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people.”** (Deuteronomy 9:5-6) *So Israel was bad but the Canaanites were even worse*—is that the game God is playing here, judgment based on a sliding scale of morality? No. As usual, there’s more to it.

By now we should be comfortable with the concept that the Torah’s ubiquitous symbols are ultimately there to teach us about God’s plan for our redemption, salvation, and reconciliation with Himself. And although it may not look like it at first glance, the conquest of Canaan is one of those symbols—an important one. Israel was a covenant people—that is, they were the recipient of unilateral promises from Yahweh. As such they metaphorically represent Yahweh’s family—believers, whether Jews or gentiles, of every age of man, recipients of God’s grace. These believers are not perfect in themselves, but they *are* holy, that is, separated from the world and joined instead to God by receiving in faith His gift of imputed righteousness, enabling them to stand in the very presence of God. The Canaanites, on the other hand, represent the world from which the believers have been separated. *Seven* nations tell us that God means for them to represent the complete picture—the whole world. This world (as we all know from experience) has some good things in it and some bad: the Canaanites had a relatively advanced civilization for its day, a robust economy and highly developed technology, arts, and agriculture. But they were, in God’s words, “wicked.” I’ll explain precisely what that means in the following mitzvah.

The point of the symbol is that Yahweh will not allow His people and the world’s to dwell side-by-side forever. Yahweh’s conquest of Canaan (with the Israelites functioning as His arm of retribution) was meant to be a dress rehearsal for the eventual conquest of the whole earth by the returning Messiah (accompanied by His resurrected saints). Remember, God had “given” the Land to Abraham hundreds of years before this time. It belonged to Israel, whether or not they had previously occupied it. They were *returning* to it—just as their Messiah will. It’s not just a nice-sounding expression: “The meek—those who trust in Yahweh—*shall* inherit the earth.” God is in the process of separating His people from those who choose not to know Him. Since **“The earth is Yahweh’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein,”** (Psalm 24:1) it is His prerogative to remove from it those who don’t wish to be His people, who don’t wish to receive His inheritance. So when we read, **“You shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them,”** we are

merely getting a preview of what Yahweh is about to do in the world as a whole—clean it out so His people may live there in perfect peace. His planet, His rules.

- (602) *Exterminate the seven Canaanite nations from the land of Israel. “But of the cities of these peoples which Yahweh your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as Yahweh your God has commanded you, lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against Yahweh your God.* (Deuteronomy 20:16-18) Maimonides seems to be drawing a distinction between killing the individual Canaanites and eliminating their national entities. Okay, whatever—they’re both supposed to be “utterly destroyed.” This whole subject is one that today’s shades-of-gray secular humanists really choke on—the idea that a “loving” God would direct one group of people to annihilate another. They complain that it opens the door to *anybody* to engage in genocidal war if they perceive that “God is on their side.” Their observation, moreover, is not without merit: evil men have been doing precisely that since the dawn of history. What makes this any different?

Quite a bit, as it turns out. Note first that Yahweh’s instructions were quite specific: seven nations, all located within the confines of well-defined borders (see Numbers 34, cf. *Future History*, Chapter 6: “Ground Zero”) were slated for “utter destruction” by the generation of Israelites led into the land by Joshua. It wasn’t an open-ended command to kill anybody, anywhere, at any time, who doesn’t believe exactly like you do (which is pretty much what Muhammad told *his* followers to do if they got the chance). Second, a very good reason was given for this attack: “...lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against Yahweh your God.” Whether they realized it or not, Israel had been chosen by Yahweh to be the vehicle for the salvation of all mankind—a task that would be that much harder to achieve if they became infected with the very disease for which they were supposed to be delivering the cure. I realize that atheists don’t find this a compelling rationale. Too bad. The heart of the issue (in the historical sense) was the little phrase “**their abominations which they have done for their gods.**” What in the world were the Canaanites doing “for their gods” that was so bad Yahweh would call it an “abomination”? As it turns out, He had a very specific list of behaviors in mind, and He told us what they were (as will I, in a moment). Moreover, He told the Israelites that if they began practicing these same things, He would kick them out of the Land just as He had the Canaanites. This, then, is not a case of punishing the heathen

for their sins while blessing the Israelites *in spite of* them, but rather of cleansing the land from an evil that had matured, grown rotten, turned toxic, and begun to stink. The Israelites in this context weren't predators; they were scavengers. They weren't invaders; they were God's biohazard containment team.

Like most ancient civilizations, the Canaanites were a very religious culture. And, perhaps in a more direct lineage than most, their gods were derivatives from, or permutations of, the original Babylonian "mystery" religion of Nimrod, Semiramis and Tammuz. I described this seminal false religion in detail in *Future History*, Chapter 3, "In a Manner of Speaking," and Chapter 14, "Mystery Babylon." There I described how the original Babylonian religion spread to virtually every corner of the earth, mimicking and replacing Yahweh's intended familial relationship with a counterfeit religion that took on a plethora of forms and spawned scores of "gods," though in reality there was only one—Satan.

In its grossest incarnation, this religion became what was being practiced in Canaan. The behaviors it fostered, and their consequences, were listed in one of the nastiest passages in the Bible, a passage that explicitly told the Israelites not to do what the Canaanites were doing: Adultery. **"You shall not lie carnally with your neighbor's wife, to defile yourself with her."** Human sacrifice—*of one's own children*. **"And you shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech."** Blasphemy. **"Nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am Yahweh."** Homosexuality. **"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination."** Notice that Yahweh calls it an *abomination*—the strongest epithet in Scripture. Finally there's bestiality. **"Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion...."** I can't even believe there's a word for it.

These are all things the Canaanites were doing in the practice of their sick religion, things from which the Israelites were warned to be separated. **"Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled which I am casting out before you. For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you. For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people."** (Leviticus 18:20-29) The Israelites didn't throw

the Canaanites out, not exactly—the land itself “vomited out” its evil inhabitants. Unfortunately, that category later included the very Jews who had been tasked to be the instruments of God’s housecleaning project. They, too, eventually began to practice these same abominations, and they too were expelled for doing so. But they, unlike the Canaanites, couldn’t say they hadn’t been warned. Review Mitzvot #82 through #105.

“Alas, those poor stupid Jews,” you may be thinking. “They suffered the consequences of their actions, just like the Canaanites they replaced. What were they *thinkin’*?” Yes, they blew it, but are we (the rest of the world) any better? Do we not deserve to be “vomited out of *our* land”? Look at that last sentence again: Yahweh isn’t talking about Israel, necessarily—He’s talking about *anybody*. **“Whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people.”** *But I’d never do these things*, you protest. Maybe not personally, but nationally? Do we tolerate and foster Canaanite/Babylonian practices in our society? Look at the list again.

(1) Adultery: it’s so rampant, it’s almost considered acceptable, even semi-inevitable, in our society. But it’s a stoning offense in the Torah. God calls it the only legitimate reason for divorce, and He *hates* divorce (see Malachi 2:14-16).

(2) Human sacrifice: *How barbaric!* I agree, but we do it all the time. There are about 1,300,000 reported legal abortions performed in the United States each year, some 22 million worldwide. Add to that the unreported legal abortions and clandestine illegal procedures, and the annual number climbs to somewhere between 36 and 53 million abortions each year. (They’re perfectly legal in 54 countries, whose populations represent about 61% of the world’s total.) And why are so many babies murdered in the womb? The number one reason given (in America, anyway) is that having the child would interfere with work, school, or other responsibilities. Number two: financial stress. Number three: relationship issues with the child’s father. Let me put it bluntly, folks. Every year, 50 million children are sacrificed on the twin altars of convenience and irresponsibility. You tell me: how is that any different from Canaanites placing their infants into the red-hot arms of a bronze statue of Molech or Chemosh in return for a promise of bountiful crops?

(3) Blasphemy: to be guilty of this—profaning the name of Yahweh—all you really have to do is ignore Him, pretend He doesn’t exist, live your life as if you’re not personally accountable to an Almighty Creator God whose self-revealed name means “I Am,” i.e., the One who exists

eternally. Of course, you *can* do worse—you can give your allegiance to a “god” of another name, whether it’s Ba’al, Allah, or Lucifer himself.

(4) Homosexuality: this is a fundamental and purposeful perversion of the God-instituted family unit. There’s more to this than merely wanting to put your sexual apparatus where it wasn’t designed to go. Yahweh created our entire mammalian biology to reflect His nature: a Father (representing Yahweh—the ultimate authority figure), a Mother (representing the Holy Spirit—*Ruach Qodesh* in the Hebrew tongue, a *feminine* noun, the nurturing, comforting—and convicting—spirit), and the Child (representing the “Son of God,” Yahshua, who walked among us as a human being, a manifestation of and representative for Yahweh, voluntarily bereft of His heavenly glory as well as several *dimensions* that were His by right of His divinity). Homosexuality destroys this biological picture of a spiritual reality, obfuscating God’s plan and purpose. To hear them tell it, “gays” (a misnomer if ever there was one) number ten percent of the population. (In reality, it’s between one and two percent, which is scary enough.) But with Satan’s help they exert an influence far beyond what their numbers would suggest. Am I a homophobe? You bet I am. I’m scared spitless of being within a hundred miles of anything that Yahweh has promised to “cut off from among His people.” I mean, look what He did to Sodom.

(5) Bestiality: c’mon, does anybody really do this? Whether or not they do physically, they certainly will spiritually. It’s not by accident that an evil world leader prophesied to appear in the last days (who’s more or less equated with the demon that inhabits him) is called “the Beast,” nor is this prophecy insignificant: **“All the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?’ And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”** (Revelation 13:3-8) There it is—spiritual bestiality, coming soon to a world near you.

Are you starting to get the picture? The Israelite conquest of Canaan was nothing short of a prophetic dress rehearsal for the coming destruction of Satan’s kingdom on earth at the hands of the returning Messiah, King Yahshua. It matters not that the Jews failed to achieve their mission

parameters. Yahshua most certainly will not fail. If you think the “poor Canaanites” were treated unfairly by God back in Joshua’s day, you probably think adultery, abortion, homosexuality and secular humanism are all acceptable human foibles, even if you don’t personally practice these things, and in all likelihood you’ll welcome the Antichrist—a.k.a. “the Beast”—as the politician to end all politicians. As mistakes go, that one’s about as wrong as you can get.

One final thought: the Hebrew word for “land,” *erets*, has a broad range of meanings—no doubt by God’s design: “land, earth, the *whole* earth (as opposed to part), earth (as opposed to heaven), the inhabitants of earth, country, territory, district, region, a piece of ground, the land of Canaan (i.e., Israel), the inhabitants of the Promised Land, Sheol (the land without return—the underworld), a city or city-state, ground, the surface of the earth, soil, the land of the living, or the ends of the earth.” (S) In other words, the language itself supports my hypothesis that “the land of Canaan vomiting out its inhabitants” because of their evil can rightly be construed as a prophetic microcosm of the coming worldwide judgment. It’s Yahweh’s *erets*. He wants it back.

- (603) *Do not destroy fruit trees (wantonly or in warfare). “When you besiege a city for a long time, while making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them; if you can eat of them, do not cut them down to use in the siege, for the tree of the field is man’s food. Only the trees which you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, to build siegeworks against the city that makes war with you, until it is subdued.”* (Deuteronomy 20:19-20) The disposition of resources is one key to the mindset of God. Man’s agenda (and Satan’s) in war is: “defeat the enemy.” This may seem to make sense until we compare it to God’s agenda in warfare: “Cleanse the land of evil.” Killing the bad guys isn’t the point—in fact, Yahweh doesn’t really want anyone to perish, though He leaves the choice of whether to live or die up to us. During the conquest of Canaan, as with the coming global cleansing, the land (whether Israel or Earth) would have to support a population of the redeemed after the smoke had cleared. God’s not done with the planet quite yet. There’s the little matter of Christ’s Millennial Kingdom to prepare for.

It seems ironic that Muhammad’s tactics when besieging the Jewish Beni al-Nadir tribe of Yathrib (Medina) included cutting down their date palms (cf. Qur’an Sura 59:5; Al-Tabari, Volume II:158; Ibn Ishaq:437). This, of course, left his faithful followers no way to make an “honest” living on their newly stolen lands—they had to continue to rely on piracy, kidnapping for profit, the slave trade, and murder. And some things never

change: when the “Palestinian” Muslims finally bamboozled the pathetically naïve Sharon/Olmert Israeli government out of the Gaza strip in 2005, the first thing they did was destroy the productive hydroponic farms the Israeli settlers had no choice but to leave behind. Muslims apparently don’t have the sense God gave geese.

- (604) *Deal with a beautiful woman taken captive in war in the manner prescribed in the Torah. “When you go out to war against your enemies, and Yahweh your God delivers them into your hand, and you take them captive, and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and desire her and would take her for your wife, then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails. She shall put off the clothes of her captivity, remain in your house, and mourn her father and her mother a full month; after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife.”* (Deuteronomy 21:10-13) Maimonides may finally be getting it: “Do what the Torah says.” This is a precept that applies to Israelite warfare with pagan nations other than the seven Canaanite tribes who were supposed to be completely destroyed—man, woman, and child, “everything that breathes” (see Mitzvot #601 and #602). God knew there would be cases when an Israelite army took captives, and among them, beautiful women. And on that basis alone, a soldier might “desire to take her for his wife.” Never mind the fact that physical beauty shouldn’t rank above tenth or twelfth on the list of things a guy should logically consider when choosing a bride—if a man expects to live a long, happy life with her. Yahweh was dealing with reality here: having designed man’s endocrine system, he knows how hormones work. On a practical note, He didn’t want the conquest of Canaan devolving into an ongoing enterprise of rape and pillage—the idea was to *cleanse* the land.

God’s instructions are a perfect balance between the realities of bronze age warfare and the gruesome task He had set for His holy people. He says to the love-struck soldier, “*You think she’s a beauty, and you want to marry her? Okay, but first, you have to see her at her worst for an entire month—shorn of all the trappings of fashion—forget hair style: she’s got to shave her head so you can see her as ugly as she ever gets. She’ll be in mourning for her lost life and loved ones—expect tears and depression—and she’ll be living right in your face under these conditions. You’ll have her under your roof for a whole month, so you’ll even get to see what she’s like with PMS. If you’re still smitten with her after all that, go ahead and marry her. At least you’ll be going into this with your eyes wide open.*” Okay, that’s a paraphrase.

- (605) *Do not sell a beautiful woman (taken captive in war). “...And it shall be, if you have no delight in her, then you shall set her free, but you certainly shall not sell her for money; you shall not treat her brutally, because you have humbled her.”* (Deuteronomy 21:14) This is a continuation of the previous mitzvah. What if the captured beauty queen doesn’t look so hot to the love-struck soldier after her one-month visit to the ugly parlor? What then? Can he sell her as a slave to somebody else? No. It’s not her fault she’s pretty (or was). And it’s not her fault the smitten Israelite soldier has no perseverance, no imagination, and no common sense. She’s suffered enough humiliation; she must be set free.

Although the text doesn’t spell it out, I believe it is understood that the marriage has not been consummated at this point—i.e., she has not become the soldier’s legal wife—when and if he decides not to “keep” her. If she had been married to him, and only after *that* did he decide that he “had no delight in her,” then the ordinary rules of divorce would apply: a man may divorce his wife *only* if “**he has found some uncleanness in her.**” (Deuteronomy 24:1) Yahshua later defined this as meaning adultery and nothing less. Women are not a man’s disposable possessions (which is how Islam portrays them). They are his *equal*—though instructed to submit to their husbands primarily because they symbolize the Church’s unique role in relationship to her Messiah—she is the Bride of Christ.

- (606) *Do not degrade a beautiful woman (taken captive in war) to the condition of a bondswoman. “And it shall be, if you have no delight in her, then you shall set her free, but you certainly shall not sell her for money; you shall not treat her brutally, because you have humbled her.”* (Deuteronomy 21:14) Part III of the Captive Bride saga.... Suppose our smitten soldier thinks like Muhammad, deciding his beauty-queen captive would make a fine sex slave, married or not. He has no intention of making her his partner, only his plaything. Yahweh’s precept has cut this one off at the knees, for a “marriage” of this sort is no marriage at all in His eyes. It’s serial rape. The Hebrew word for “treat brutally” is *amar*, meaning “to manipulate, to deal tyrannically with, to treat as a slave.” (S)

The vast majority of Torah instructions dealing with slaves or bondservants deal with Hebrews who have sold themselves into bondage (until the sabbatical year or Jubilee) in return for the payment of their debts, and Yahweh’s admonition is invariably to treat them with kindness and respect, for everyone is a slave to sin at some point in their lives. The present precept is one of the very few that deal with what to do with captives of war, and there is a simple reason for that—Yahweh expected this scenario to be very rare. The seven Canaanite nations who populated

the Land (see Mitzvot #601 and #602) were to be utterly destroyed—no captives at all were to be taken. But as we saw in Mitzvah #600, there was a proper procedure for dealing with pagan communities who were not of these seven specific nations: they had the option of surrender and servitude. If they chose instead to fight, the men were to be slain and the women and children enslaved. The “beautiful woman” of which these last three mitzvot have spoken is the rare standout among this already rare category.

We have seen this kind of thing before: God spending inordinate amounts of Torah text on situations that would rarely if ever actually occur in the normal course of Israelite life in the Land, and invariably we have come to the conclusion that some larger issue is being addressed. What, then, is Yahweh trying to tell us here? Let’s examine the scenario. First, the woman is a member (through no fault of her own) of a rebellious pagan society, one whose leaders have chosen to fight against God rather than submit, surrender, and repent. (Sound familiar?) Second, she’s a captive, a slave with no power or privileges of her own. Third, she is naturally attractive to God’s Man, but he is required by God to disregard her beauty. And fourth, God’s people may not abuse or misuse her.

Here’s the lesson (I think). The beautiful woman represents the world—spiritually neutral, but presumably having both positive qualities (obvious to everybody) and negative ones (maybe not so much). She has no intrinsic power over God’s people, but they are attracted to her nevertheless. Yahweh wants to make sure that His people see the unvarnished truth about whatever the world has to offer, the good and the bad alike. Surprisingly, He is not necessarily forbidding a union between His people and the world, for some are called and equipped to make a successful home with her—the occasional believing businessman, pastor, or (extremely rare) politician who is gifted with the ability to work within the world’s corrupt system to advance Yahweh’s cause. But God doesn’t want any of His children to be seduced by her beauty and charm while being blindsided by her less obvious shortcomings. Now here’s the interesting part: even if the believer decides after a while that the world isn’t so attractive after all, and he doesn’t wish to form a union with her (which ought to be the case with most of us), he isn’t to “manipulate her, deal tyrannically with her, or treat her as a slave” (Hebrew: *amar*). In other words, just because “Christians” may find themselves in positions of power or influence (as they did in Europe for over a millennium following Constantine’s 313 AD Edict of Toleration) they have been specifically warned not to abuse the world they find under their control (as the

Catholics subsequently did). Rather, they are to “set her free”—in other words, they are to let the world make her own spiritual choices.

- (607) *Do not offer peace to the Ammonites and the Moabites before waging war on them, as should be done to other nations. “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of Yahweh; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of Yahweh forever, because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. Nevertheless Yahweh your God would not listen to Balaam, but Yahweh your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because Yahweh your God loves you. You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever.”* (Deuteronomy 23:3-6) Maimonides has conjured up a non-existent corollary to the rules concerning going to war with nations other than the Canaanite Seven (see Mitzvah #600). He has conveniently forgotten that Ammon, Moab, and Edom had been specifically declared off-limits to territorial conquest by Yahweh back in Deuteronomy 2. There He says quite plainly, “**Do not harass Moab**” (verse 9), and “**When you come near the people of Ammon, do not harass them or meddle with them**” (verse 19). Of course, refraining from attacking your neighbors is not remotely the same thing as purposely getting chummy with them. Moab and Ammon (today’s Jordan, along with Edom) had proved their undying antagonism to Yahweh and His people through the “Balaam episode,” recorded in Numbers 22:1-25:2, in which the Israelites were *seduced* into Ba’al worship after it became clear that they couldn’t be cursed. That explains why Ammonites and Moabites were not to be admitted to “the assembly of Yahweh,” that is, the fellowship of believers. They had a history of leading people astray into the worship of false gods, which is about the worst thing you can do—a stoning offense in Israel.

At issue here is what believers are to do with people who attempt to entice Yahweh’s children into denial of their God. First, we are to be alert to the danger, and remember the lessons we’ve learned from our past contact with them. At this point, it would be instructive to compare Yahweh’s words concerning Edom with those about Ammon and Moab. Later in the same passage we’re studying, Yahweh says, “**You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land. The children of the third generation born to them may enter the assembly of Yahweh.**” (Deuteronomy 23:7-8) Both the Edomites and the Egyptians had been hindrances to Israel: Egypt had enslaved the Jews for hundreds of years, and Edom had refused them peaceful passage to the Promised Land. But neither nation had attempted to lead them away from Yahweh into the worship of false gods as Ammon and Moab had. God is

really serious about this. In fact, as I demonstrated in *Future History* chapter 29: “The Three Doors,” it is this issue that separates the victims from the perpetrators, the merely “lost,” doomed to destruction, from the damned, destined to eternal torment in hell.

Second, we are instructed not to **“seek their peace nor their prosperity.”** Don’t make treaties with them, trade with them, or have anything to do with them. We are not told to attack them. On the contrary, we are told to avoid contact altogether, as much as possible. (If they attack us, of course, it’s perfectly okay to defend ourselves. But we aren’t to be the aggressors.) The bottom line is the same as that repeated several times in scripture when we are being told how believers are to deal with “Babylon,” the collective influence that seeks to lead us away from Yahweh’s love: **“Flee from the midst of Babylon, and every one save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, for this is the time of Yahweh’s vengeance; He shall recompense her.”** (Jeremiah 51:6) Don’t fight it, don’t negotiate with it, don’t work within the system trying to fix it—just *flee!* Yahweh Himself will deal with Babylon, and you don’t want to be anywhere nearby when that happens.

(608) *Anyone who is unclean shall not enter the Camp of the Levites. “When the army goes out against your enemies, then keep yourself from every wicked thing. If there is any man among you who becomes unclean by some occurrence in the night, then he shall go outside the camp; he shall not come inside the camp. But it shall be, when evening comes, that he shall wash with water; and when the sun sets, he may come into the camp.”* (Deuteronomy 23:9-11) We discussed the issues of “clean” versus “unclean” in detail in Chapter 15 of this book. There we concluded that being “ritually defiled”—the kind of thing being spoken of in our present mitzvah—is not a picture of overt sin, but of the inevitable uncleanness to which we are subjected merely by virtue of being human. Thus no sacrifices are necessary for its atonement, but cleansing is required anyway if we are to dwell within “the camp,” that is, be a useful and effective member of God’s faithful army. When Yahweh speaks of “going out against your enemies,” he’s ultimately talking about living our daily lives in this filthy world: we must endeavor to prevail against it while we “do battle,” while at the same time remaining untouched by “every wicked thing” we find there. It’s a tall order, but contamination by the world can easily render us unclean—unfit for active duty, if only temporarily.

Note that Maimonides has thrown a monkey wrench into the works by calling the assembly “the Camp of the Levites.” Levi, the priestly tribe, has not been mentioned in this context. Tracey Rich explains the rabbinical view: “According to the Talmud, in the present day this [“the Camp of the

Levites”] means the Temple mount.” That’s something of a tasteless joke these days. The temple mount is controlled by the Muslims (who according to the Torah’s definition aren’t exactly “clean”), and it has been since long before Maimonides began codifying his 613 hallucinations. Incredibly, even when the victorious Israeli armies re-took Jerusalem in the 1967 Six Day War, their top general, Moshe Dayan, gave the temple mount back to the Muslims (I *still* can’t believe he did that) in exchange for a hollow promise of equal access. We all know how well *that’s* worked out in the intervening half-century. Needless to say, the Talmud’s take on what this precept means is (as they say in theological parlance) *dumb as a bag of hammers*.

- (609) *Have a place outside the camp for sanitary purposes.* **“You shall have a place outside the camp, where you may go out; and you shall have an implement among your equipment, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and turn and cover your refuse.”** (Deuteronomy 23:12-13) Warfare from the dawn of time has been accompanied by disease. As recently as the American Civil War, far more soldiers died of disease (mostly dysentery, diarrhea, typhoid, and malaria) than from wounds sustained on the battlefield (in the Union army alone, 560,000 dying of disease *vs.* 200,000 from trauma). And yet here we are reading simple instructions written some 3,500 years ago that would go a long way toward keeping disease in any mobile military encampment to a minimum. It seems basic and obvious now, but it wasn’t until quite recently: when you set up camp, assign a place some distance from the troops’ bivouac to serve as a latrine, and make sure every soldier is equipped (with a shovel or some other means) to cover his excrement, so germs won’t easily be spread by insects or get into the local water supply. Was Moses really that smart, or do you think he might have been getting help with this from the One who designed not only the human body but the microbes that could make us sick?
- (610) *Keep that place sanitary.* **“...For Yahweh your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you.** (Deuteronomy 23:14-15) Yahweh didn’t have Moses explain the science of the latrine thing, of course. The world wasn’t quite ready for *that*. He merely offered a plausible reason for the need to properly dispose of human waste, one a devout bronze age Israelite could easily understand—and no less true just because it’s a spiritual explanation for a physical issue. An Israelite soldier didn’t have to know his microbiology; he only had to trust Yahweh to know what was in his best interests, and having faith in his God, to act on that trust in obedience to His word.

And is there a lesson here for us who are blessed with indoor plumbing, who must battle the world with words and ideas instead of swords and spears? Yes, I believe there is. We, like the Israelites of old, need to “cover our refuse.” For the sake of a lost world, we need to make sure the evidence of our fallen human condition doesn’t pollute our environment. In practical terms, this translates into modesty, chastity, propriety, sobriety, and responsibility—all those “boring” attributes that are becoming so rare, so out of step with our unclean society as we barrel headlong toward the End of Days. Yes, the lost are going to “step in it” as they walk through the world. Let us at least make sure that what’s defiling them isn’t us.

- (611) *Always remember what Amalek did.* **“Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God.”** (Deuteronomy 25:17-18) The last three mitzvot on Maimonides’ list of 613 have to do with the nation of Amalek—a sub-tribe of Edom. Amalek was a grandson of Esau, listed in Genesis 36:16 as one of Edom’s chiefs. The name is apparently derived from a word (*’amal*) meaning labor, toil, trouble—with an emphasis on the drudgery and grievous frustration of pointless work (as in Ecclesiastes 1:3). It may be instructive to re-read the passage at hand (including verse 19, quoted below), rendering the name “Amalek” as “pointless works.” Interesting, no?

It seems every time we meet Amalek, they’re a thorn in Israel’s side, one way or another. After the Israelites put Yahweh to the test at Horeb (Exodus 17), Amalek attacked them. You remember the story: when Moses held his hands up toward heaven, Israel’s armies prevailed; when he let them fall, Amalek gained ground. It’s an obvious picture of the efficacy of prayer. When it was all over, **“Yahweh said to Moses, “Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.”** (Exodus 17:14) Then the twelve spies (well, *ten* of them) came back from Canaan with tales of “a land that devours its inhabitants.” Israel balked, refusing to trust Yahweh to give them victory, but when they found out what their lack of faith had cost them (a whole generation wandering in the wilderness), they tried to take on Amalek in their own strength—and got soundly trounced. Even in Amalek’s waning hours, as Israel’s armies were finally carrying out God’s directive to wipe them out, they were causing trouble. King Saul (who had been specifically told to **“kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey”**—I Samuel 15:3) couldn’t resist “swooping down on the spoil” (verse 19). His disobedience cost him his throne. Even in defeat, Amalek was bad news.

- (612) *The evil done to us by Amalek shall not be forgotten. “...Therefore it shall be, when Yahweh your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.”* (Deuteronomy 25:19) Notice the contrast: “Remember what Amalek did to you” (verse 17) vs. “Blot out the remembrance of Amalek.” In the literal sense, we are to be forever cognizant of Yahweh’s displeasure with those who attack His people and do not revere Him. On the other hand, the Amalekite people have been history for the past three thousand years—their “remembrance” has been well and truly blotted out.

In the symbolic sense the same contrast is germane. We are to remember what “pointless works” do to us—they obfuscate the grace of God, attacking our faith by suggesting we can work our way into the kingdom of heaven. But the time is coming—and soon—when we will no longer even be able to remember why anyone would buy into such an obviously flawed theory. What will it take to achieve that? The physical presence of King Yahshua among us.

- (613) *Destroy the seed of Amalek. “...Therefore it shall be, when Yahweh your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.”* (Deuteronomy 25:19) If you buy into the error most reference sources try to sell you, the geography and related history of Israel’s brushes with Amalek make little sense. They’ll tell you that the Israelites didn’t *really* traverse the Red Sea, but rather an ankle-deep marsh (the “Reed Sea”) north of the Gulf of Suez. (Drowning Pharaoh’s entire army in *that* insignificant puddle would have taken a *real* miracle.) They subsequently place Mt. Sinai (Horeb) where Emperor Constantine’s mommy decided it should be—in the southern “Sinai” Peninsula. But Paul states quite clearly (see Galatians 4:25) that the Mt. Sinai to which Moses led his people was in Arabia—east of the Gulf of Aqaba (the north-eastern arm of the Red Sea, immediately to the south of Edom—in other words, just south of Amalekite territory). It all starts coming into focus when we realize that the Amalekites hadn’t gone hundreds of miles out of their way to attack the Israelites, but they were merely paranoid about protecting their own turf. The Israelites had asked permission to pass through harmlessly on their way north, but Amalek, not “fearing God,” harassed them at every turn, needlessly earning Yahweh’s wrath. Remember what we learned in Mitzvah #607—All Edomite territory (having been settled by Abraham’s grandson Esau) was off limits to Israelite settlement. Furthermore, Amalek was not listed among the seven Canaanite tribes slated for total destruction (see Mitzvah #601). So

what Yahweh is saying is that the Amalekites must eventually be wiped out, but *their land* will not fall to Israel as an inheritance.

In a way, it's ironic that we should finish Maimonides' list of "613 Laws" with a discussion of Yahweh's determination to destroy Amalek. If the linguistic root of the name is what it seems to be—'*amal*: labor, toil, and sorrow—then God is telling us precisely what the problem is with the rabbinical approach to the Torah. They see it as a list of tasks that must be meticulously performed in order to earn God's favor. But the reality is quite different. Yahweh has in the Torah provided us with The Owner's Manual we need to keep our mortal bodies in good working order—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. If we follow his precepts, we will be—as the Psalmist says—*blessed!* **"Blessed [ 'esher: happy, joyful, blissful, fortunate] are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of Yahweh! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!"** (Psalm 119:1-2) I pray that this study has blessed you.