

The Human Condition

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

IN THE BEGINNING

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CAIN AND ABEL

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

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

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

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

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

NOAH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When it was all over, Noah was still listening to Yahweh. **“Then God spoke to Noah, saying, ‘Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you: birds and cattle and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.’”** (Genesis 8:15-17) How do you know when it's safe? When Yahweh tells you it's safe. You can't possibly get yourself in trouble by following the instructions of such a God.

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

believers are never more than one generation away from extinction. Indeed, it seems we've spent most of our 6,000-year existence on the "Endangered Species List."

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

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

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

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

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

TRYING GOD'S PATIENCE

- (625) *Heed the voice of Yahweh.* “So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” So he cried out to Yahweh, and Yahweh showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet....” (Exodus 15:22-25) I'll never understand why the Israelites complained against *Moses*. They'd seen the plagues of Egypt that had effected their liberation; they'd witnessed the way Yahweh had delivered them at the Red Sea. Oh, sure, Moses had announced the plagues and stuck his rod out over the waters before they'd

divided, but nobody in his right mind thought that *he* was doing the miracles.

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

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

Moses later explained why the gentiles would have to be "sweetened" before Israel could finally be redeemed. **"Truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh. Because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it."** (Numbers 14:21-23) That's right. Because Israel had not heeded the voice of Yahweh, they would not see the truth until "all the earth" had been filled with the glory of Yahweh. Don't look now, but that time is almost upon us.

- (626) *Keep physical reminders of God's provision.* **"Then Moses said, 'This is the thing which Yahweh has commanded: "Fill an omer with it, to be kept for your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt."' And Moses said to Aaron, 'Take a pot and put an omer of manna in it, and lay it up before Yahweh, to be kept for your**

generations.' As Yahweh commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept. And the children of Israel ate manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan." (Exodus 15:32-35) How quickly we can forget the provision of God. You know how it goes: when times are good, we ignore Him. But when adversity strikes, we complain as if He's not doing His job. We need to remember that if we are Yahweh's children, *everything* He lets into our lives is for our ultimate good—even the "bad" stuff. Poverty teaches us to rely on Him. Sickness reminds us that He is the Great Physician. Stress tells us that Yahshua is the Prince of Peace. Hunger instructs us to assimilate the Bread of Life. Even death has an upside: it reminds those left behind of their mortality, while bringing eternal life in its wake to the deceased—if he has been made alive with God's Spirit.

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

In our lives, we tend to keep significant mementos of family and friends, photos and the like. I'm thinking it would be a good idea (based on scriptural precedent) to do the same thing with God. I don't mean collecting idols, icons, or relics, you understand—religious talismans we imbue with quasi-magical powers—but rather ordinary things that remind us of Yahweh's provision at critical junctures in our lives. A personal example from my own life: I keep on my desk a small limestone pebble. I picked it up in Jerusalem, a few feet from where Yahshua was crucified (in a vacant lot behind the main bus station, a stone's throw from the Garden Tomb). I can't look at it without being reminded of the Messiah's sacrifice, of course, but it also reminds me of Yahweh's protection. On that trip, you see, my friends and I interviewed a dozen *bona fide* Islamic terrorists—deep in Muslim-controlled territory—only three months after the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001. Very enlightening. And probably a really stupid thing to do. But Yahweh protected us, and gave us some invaluable insight for our book, *Tea With Terrorists*. (It's linked free from this site, by the way. Check out chapter 17 for a fictionalized account of what actually took place there. I kid you not.)

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

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

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

- (628) *Heed and treasure whatever evidence Yahweh provides.* **"And Yahweh said to Moses, 'Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die.' Thus did Moses; just as Yahweh had commanded him, so he did. So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, 'Surely we die, we perish, we all perish! Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of Yahweh must die. Shall we all utterly die?'"** (Numbers 17:10-13) A significant subset of Precept #626 (keeping

mementoes of God's provision) is that when Yahweh goes out of His way to provide evidence for us, we are to retain that evidence and use it to substantiate His claims or doctrine—to “argue his case in court” using the forensic data He has made available.

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

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

As far as I can tell, attaining human fellowship was Yahweh's entire reason for becoming The Creator. Seems to me He's gone to an awful lot of trouble for a pitifully insignificant result, numerically, at least. I mean, creating matter and energy in a matrix of space-time so that life might have a place to happen, then creating millions of life forms, narrowing the focus of His attention down to one species (us), only to watch the vast majority of the individuals of that species choose to ignore or reject Him, and then, manifesting Himself as a member of that species in order to save it, setting aside not only His heavenly glory but even *dimensions* in order to do so—well, it all seems awfully, shall we say, *inefficient*. But hey, it's Yahweh's nickel, so He gets to call the tune: He's apparently interested in

quality, not quantity. Anyway, my point is that if the Creator of the universe went to this much trouble to make us and redeem us, the least we could do is talk with Him. It must be terribly frustrating (if that were possible) to watch us ignore Him as we stumble through our lives, moaning and whining when things seem less than ideal. Yes, I realize that our free will necessitates that He refrain from forcing us to reciprocate His love. But we ought to realize that our Maker made us for a reason: He wants us to have a relationship with Him—a two-way association: creation, provision, and perfection on His part, and trust, respect, and reverence on ours, all coming together in a matrix of mutual love. Those of us who choose to have such a relationship with our Creator, He adopts as His own beloved children. Amazing!

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

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

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

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

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

(Numbers 20:10-12) Fortunately for us, the recorded instructions of Yahweh are sufficient to explain the object lesson.

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

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

- (633) *Don't bear burdens alone.* "Yahweh said to Moses: 'Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the

people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone.” (Numbers 11:16-17) Yahweh, having created us, knows our frailty. Seems the first thing He noticed about Adam when He put him in the Garden was that he was hopelessly inadequate for the task set before him—he needed a woman to help him. Here we see that although Moses had been the one specifically called and prepared for the job of leading Israel, he was not expected to do everything all by himself—or bear all the responsibility of leadership upon his own shoulders, broad though they might be.

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

That being said, if you haven’t yet donned the mantle of Yahweh’s servant, if you haven’t begun the work He has given you to do, then don’t expect help to be forthcoming. We don’t have to bear our burdens alone, but we *do* need to bear them. Nor should we jealously covet our own perceived place in Yahweh’s service—if He raised us up, He is perfectly capable of raising up others as well. As Moses chastised young Joshua a few verses later, when some of these designated assistants began showing signs of God’s anointing, **“Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all Yahweh’s people were prophets and that Yahweh would put His Spirit upon them!”**

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

Manna bagels, manna patties, manna-cotti, manna pancakes, ba-manna bread? They remembered the perks of the slave life in Egypt—leeks, onions, garlic, fish—and they began to long for something that could make their breath stink.

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

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

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

them,” at which point Moses interceded again (see Precept #632), “persuading” Yahweh to relent, sort of.

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

I don’t know, but maybe a better question to ask is: how is that generation any different from our own? We’ve seen with our own eyes (or at least our fathers and grandfathers did) Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel from the clutches of Nazi genocidal tyranny, transforming an unprecedented disaster into a national homeland for His people. We’ve seen Him defend them against blind Islamic rage time and time again—1948, 1955, 1967, 1973—and *still* neither the Jews nor the vast preponderance of the gentile world seem to be able to do the math on this thing. Yahweh’s prophets predict that He will keep upping the ante—allowing stronger and nastier enemies to afflict Israel—until they can no longer ignore or deny His presence, protection, or sovereignty. To this very day, Yahweh’s motives and ability have been called into question by a disbelieving world. But the day is coming when, like it or not, they *will* believe.

- (636) *Do not arrogantly defy God or despise His Word.* **“But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on Yahweh, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of Yahweh, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him.”** (Numbers 15:30-31) There is sin, and then there is *sin*. The whole passage just previous to this dealt with what to do (in a ritual-symbolic sense) when an individual or the whole congregation came to the realization that they had sinned. Such sins (literally, missing the target) are characterized as being “unintentional.” They’re still sins, of course. They must be atoned for,

dealt with, cleansed; but at least there is a remedy. For the fault spoken of in this passage, however, there is no remedy; it therefore behooves us to determine precisely what it is Yahweh's describing.

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

A different word is rendered "presumptuously" in this parallel passage, but the message is nearly identical: **"Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before Yahweh your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously."**

(Deuteronomy 17:12-13) Here "presumptuously" is the Hebrew word is *zadown*, a noun (the parallel verb *ziyd* is also used) meaning pride, insolence, presumptuousness, or arrogance. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes, "The basic idea is pride, a sense of self-importance, which often is exaggerated to include defiance and even rebelliousness...having pride in view as opposed to God, which is a major sin. Persons so characterized are paralleled with those who 'work wickedness' and 'tempt God,' and with 'all who do wickedly.' As a result, they will be burned like stubble in the day of God's impending punishment. Frequently, such people are depicted as opposing those who try to do the will of God."

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

(637) *Know that your mortal days are numbered.* **"Now the children of Israel, the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor. And Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying:**

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

Death didn't sneak up on Moses or Aaron. They *knew* they wouldn't be entering the promised land, and they knew why. What's more, they knew it for the better part of forty years. Being confronted with our own mortality can be liberating, if we stop and think about it. If we candidly face the fact that nobody gets out of here alive, we gain the incentive to think beyond the cares and responsibilities of this world, and instead lay up treasure in the next. I personally think it would be a very healthy thing if every believer knew (or lived as if they knew) that they only had two years, eight months, and seventeen days yet to live—long enough to fix some of our mistakes and finish the race we were given to run, but short enough to keep the finish line clearly in sight. No distractions, no detours, no wasted effort. Let us run our leg of the relay with everything we've got, and then pass the baton to the next generation.

- (638) *Don't despise God's provision.* **"Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.' So Yahweh sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died."** (Numbers 21:4-6) Is there an echo in here? We've heard these same complaints before. So had Yahweh. They

moaned, “There is no food or water,” and yet we read of no Israelites—not one—dying of hunger or thirst in the wilderness. Their very next statement demonstrates their propensity for exaggeration: “Our soul loathes this worthless bread.” So the “no food” complaint wasn’t precisely accurate, was it? They had all the manna they could eat. They didn’t lack food; they only lacked *variety*. And since you can’t survive very long without water, it seems that this grievance wasn’t quite true either. Okay, there wasn’t enough to bathe or go fishing in, but there *was* enough to drink.

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

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

At first glance, it seems Yahweh is telling Moses to violate the second Commandment: **“You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”** That is, until you read the rest of it: **“You shall not bow down to them nor serve them.”** (Exodus 20:4-5) He was *not* telling Moses to make an idol—something to worship and bow to. Quite the contrary: this was an object lesson, one that wouldn’t be fully understood until the first-

century advent of the Messiah. Yahshua explained it to Nicodemus: **“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:14-15) Yahshua wasn’t comparing Himself to a snake. Rather, He was revealing that by being “lifted up” in crucifixion, He would be taking upon Himself the sins of mankind (represented by the serpent).

We should compare the Hebrew for “look at” with the parallel Greek word translated “believe.” Two Hebrew verbs are used in this passage to denote “look at.” The first, *ra’ah*, means “to see, look, view, i.e., use the perception of sight to view objects and make judgments based on these perceptions.” The second is *nabat*, which carries a very similar connotation: “look at, observe, gaze, i.e., use the perception of sight to see or detect objects, implying interpretation and understanding of what is observed, to consider, have regard—to see, i.e., think about an object, implying an appropriate, caring response.” (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*) In the John 3 passage, the verb “believe” is the Greek word *pisteuo*, meaning, “to think to be true, be persuaded, place confidence in, to entrust something to someone.” (*Strong’s*) Putting these concepts together, our instructions are to observe what Yahshua accomplished on Calvary’s pole (specifically, taking our sins upon Himself), make a well-informed judgment based upon what we have perceived, understand its significance, and respond appropriately to it. Having been convinced by our senses that our observations are true, we are to place our confidence in that fact, entrusting our souls to Him. Note that no “blind leap of faith” is required by Yahweh. Quite the contrary.

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

- (640) *Be blameless before Yahweh.* **“You shall be blameless before Yahweh your God. For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, Yahweh your God has not appointed such for you.”** (Deuteronomy 18:13-14) There are echoes of Yahweh’s instructions to Abraham here: **“I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.... Also I will give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”** (Genesis 17:1-2, 8) Yahweh has tied walking blamelessly before Him to

two things: (1) possession of the promised Land (a metaphor for our rest in Yahweh's care), and (2) being the God of Abraham's spiritual offspring (all believers, Jew and gentile alike). He's using general terms, bestowing temporal as well as spiritual blessings on "the blameless." The salient question, then, is: how in the world can one walk blamelessly before Yahweh? On the surface, it sounds impossible. We are all personally cognizant of the truth of Paul's statement, **"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** (Romans 3:23) And Isaiah's lament hits home as well: **"All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned, every one, to his own way."** (Isaiah 53:6) If we have all missed the target of God's glory, if we have all strayed and gotten ourselves lost, then how can we be blameless?

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

No, the word rendered "believed" is *'aman* in Hebrew, a verb meaning (in the *niphal* stem, or voice) "to be faithful, be trustworthy, loyal, i.e., pertaining to reliability, thus a state or condition of being dependable and loyal to a person or standard, and so not fail; trust, rely; to be true, verified, i.e., to be in a state that conforms to a real situation, and so is certain and reliable; to be established, i.e., confirm a relationship with another; to have enough, i.e., pertaining to having sufficient supply; lasting, enduring, i.e., pertaining to a duration of time." Thus in the *hiphal* stem (as the word is being used in our text, *'aman* means "to believe, put faith in, trust, have confidence in, i.e., have faith as a believer in what God has revealed; to believe to be true, to be confident of." (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*) This is the kind of belief that Yahweh "accounts as righteousness"—the thing that makes us "blameless" before God: our trust in Him to be reliable, dependable, true, sufficient, eternal, and incapable of failure as He operates within the relationship we share.

THE ERROR OF BALAAM

- (641) *Don't prophesy falsely.* **"Then the Angel of Yahweh said to Balaam, 'Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak.'** So Balaam went

with the princes of Balak.” (Numbers 22:35) The story of Balaam (Numbers 22 through 25) is exceedingly strange. The guy functioned as a *bona fide* prophet of God in that he could (and did) deliver messages from Yahweh. But when we first see him, he’s described as a pagan “diviner,” a fortune teller or sorcerer of some local repute. He seems willing enough to do what Yahweh tells him to do, though—at first refusing to go with the envoy of Balak (a Moabite king in league with the Midianites) or accept the fortune he was being offered to curse Israel. Only after Yahweh *reversed* His instructions and added the caveat above did Balaam agree to go. But then, it seems, it was all Yahweh could do to restrain Himself from killing the guy (presumably because of what he *would* do later)—going so far as to give his *donkey* prophetic powers and the gift of human speech to underscore his warning: **“Only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak.”** I *told* you it’s a strange tale.

Twice Balaam sought to use the tools of his trade—sorcery—in order to find a way to curse the Israelite hordes, but Yahweh wouldn’t allow it, turning the cursing for which Balak would have paid so handsomely into blessings upon Israel. The third time, the very Spirit of Yahweh fell upon the wannabe wizard, compelling him to say some really nice things about his would-be victims. Balak was not amused. Balaam’s fourth oracle prophesied Israel’s ascendancy in the latter days over Moab, Edom, Amalek, the Kenites, and Assyria. This passage even includes a very early Messianic prophecy (Numbers 24:17).

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

listen, truth is where you find it. For those who teach, God judges both message and motive.

- (642) *Don't tolerate spiritual harlotry.* “Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of Yahweh was aroused against Israel. Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before Yahweh, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of Yahweh may turn away from Israel.’ So Moses said to the judges of Israel, ‘Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor.’” (Numbers 25:1-5) Balaam the diviner had been offered big bucks to curse Israel for King Balak of Moab, but Yahweh had made it painfully clear that if he did, he’d never live to spend a shekel. But there’s more than one way to skin a cat, as the proverb goes. Balaam apparently decided that he could still earn his fee—not by cursing God’s people himself, but by giving *Yahweh* reason to curse them! How? Since we’re spouting homilies here, we have a saying that goes, “The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.” Balaam knew a more reliable route—a few inches to the south. If the Moabite women could seduce those studly young Israelite warriors—inviting them to participate in the overtly sexual ritual worship of Ba’al (*Hey, when in Moab, do as the Moabites do, right guys? What happens here stays here.*)—then Yahweh would burn their biscuits *Himself*. It’s sheer genius, in a perverse sort of way. Balak wouldn’t have to lift a finger to defeat them. We’re given evidence that the plan was Balaam’s idea in a later chapter: “**These women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against Yahweh.**” (Numbers 31:16)

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

(after killing 24,000 men) only after Aaron's grandson Phinehas personally skewered an unrepentant Israelite man and his Midianite trollop with a javelin.

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

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

But Yahweh opted not to miraculously dispose of His people's enemies for them. Instead, He directed Israel to go to war with Midian, for it was them, not God, who had been harmed by the pagans' seduction

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

And what about Balaam, who had counseled spiritual warfare through religious prostitution against Israel when it became clear that military action against them would be of no avail? **“Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword.”** (Numbers 31:1-8) Balaam might have protested (as in the gangster movies) “Nothing personal—it’s just business.” It didn’t matter to Yahweh, for whom business is *always* personal. Balaam didn’t live to spend a penny of his ill-gotten gains.

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

- (644) *Do not value that which causes you to sin.* **“And the children of Israel took the women of Midian captive, with their little ones, and took as spoil all their cattle, all their flocks, and all their goods. They also burned with fire all the cities where they**

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

No, they hadn’t. Think about it. What “weapon” had been brought to bear against Israel in the first place? What tactic had proved so successful in weakening Israel? It *wasn’t* Moab’s or Midian’s military might. **“And Moses said to them: ‘Have you kept all the women alive? Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against Yahweh in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of Yahweh.”** Oops. **“Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man intimately. But keep alive for yourselves all the young girls who have not known a man intimately. And as for you, remain outside the camp seven days; whoever has killed any person, and whoever has touched any slain, purify yourselves and your captives on the third day and on the seventh day. Purify every garment, everything made of leather, everything woven of goats’ hair, and everything made of wood.”** (Numbers 31:14-20) It wasn’t women *per se*, of course, but the fact that these pagan women had drawn Israelite men into the worship of false gods by offering them ritual sex. The conquering Israelites had conveniently forgotten what had dragged them out of fellowship with their God. They had mentally replaced the real enemy with a straw man.

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

- (645) *The spoil of war must be purified before it can be utilized.* **“Then Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone to the battle, ‘This is the ordinance of**

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

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

So how did Yahweh view booty and spoils? First, they belonged to Him (like everything else in creation) and were thus subject to His instructions. Sometimes (as in Jericho) He told His people to keep none of it—to destroy it all—and sometimes they were allowed to make use of it, subject to His will. (More on that in the following precept.) Second, as we see here, the booty was considered defiled, unclean. The metals were to be

melted down and recast, and everything else was to be ritually purified in water. Third, those who had “liberated” the spoils from the pagans were defiled by contact with them. They, like the booty they had won, were to go through a ritual cleansing process before they could re-enter the fellowship of their people.

The bottom line is that in God’s view, the wealth of the world is of no particular value in itself. It is only as it is set apart as holy to Yahweh that it gains acceptability and utility. Paul instructed Timothy about how we are to view the wealth of this world: **“Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”** (I Timothy 6:6-10) The “spoils of war,” then, are in Yahweh’s view to be considered a *byproduct* of our righteous struggles in and against this world—they are not supposed to be the point of the struggle, the impetus for waging war. Thus (for example) when Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon threatened to engulf Israel in the 1967 Six Day War, the Jews’ subsequent territorial gains in the Sinai, the West Bank, Southern Lebanon, and the Golan Heights were all legitimate “spoils of war,” since they had been won not through Israeli aggression, but as a byproduct of their own defense. (The universal Muslim hallucination that merely *being a Jew* in “Palestine” is *de facto* an act of aggression is an absurd and self-serving proposition, but absurdities often pass for facts in Islam.)

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

(646) *Give a portion of the spoils of war to Yahweh, via His priests and Levites.*
“Now Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Count up the plunder that was taken—of

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

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

BECOMING CLEAN

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

Case in point: if said mosquito fell into your coffee cup, you’d ordinarily throw your drink out and clean the cup with water. But if the little bugger fell into the cistern where the water for cleaning (and drinking) was kept, you didn’t have to throw the whole thing out and start over. (If a dead elephant fell in there, though, well, you get the picture.) God gave us brains so we could figure out when we had a real problem and when we didn’t. If a mouse got into your seed corn and ate himself to death, you didn’t have to kiss goodbye to next year’s crop. You were going to put the seed in the ground anyway—what you’d end up eating had no possibility of being tainted by contact with the corpse of the corpulent little rodent.

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

(648) *Male pattern baldness shall not be considered “leprosy.”* “As for the man whose hair has fallen from his head, he is bald, but he is clean. He whose hair has fallen from his forehead, he is bald on the forehead, but he is clean. And if there is on the bald head or bald forehead a reddish-white sore, it is leprosy breaking out

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

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

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

“And he [the priest, symbolic of Yahshua] shall break down the house, its stones, its timber, and all the plaster of the house, and he shall carry them outside the city to an unclean place. Moreover he who goes into the house at all while it is

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

But at least this time, not the entire world will rebel. “But if the priest comes in and examines it, and indeed the plague has not spread in the house after the house was plastered, then the priest shall pronounce the house clean, because the plague is healed. And he shall take, to cleanse the house, two birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop. Then he shall kill one of the birds in an earthen vessel over running water; and he shall take the cedar wood, the hyssop, the scarlet, and the living bird, and dip them in the blood of the slain bird and in the running water, and sprinkle the house seven times. And he shall cleanse the house with the blood of the bird and the running water and the living bird, with the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the scarlet. Then he shall let the living bird loose outside the city in the open field, and make atonement for the house, and it shall be clean.” (Leviticus 14:45-53) Those Millennial mortals who do not rebel will still need healing, cleansing, and atonement for their sins and trespasses, just as we do today. They, like us, must be cleansed of the world’s filth before they can assume their transformed immortal bodies—bodies that will endure in Yahshua’s presence for eternity. We mortals all become defiled just by walking through the earth—the “leprous house” in the present scriptural metaphor. The prescription for “pronouncing the house clean” is a reprise of passage we discussed in detail under Mitzvah #578, so I won’t go over it again here.

- (650) *Eating a clean animal that died naturally defiles a person.* “Every person who eats what died naturally or what was torn by beasts, whether he is a native of your own country or a stranger, he shall both wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. Then he shall be clean. But if he does not wash them or bathe his body, then he shall bear his guilt.” (Leviticus 17:15-16) In our chapter on the Mosaic dietary laws, we covered these contingencies from the point of view of Exodus 22:30 (Mitzvah #155) and Deuteronomy 14:21 (#156). Those passages, however, did not enumerate the remedy for

having run afoul of the Torah in this respect; here in Leviticus, we see what must be done. It's interesting that the cure for this offense is the same sort of cleansing we'd expect to see in the case of ritual defilement (as when a dead body had been touched)—in contrast to being a sin for which atonement had to be made.

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

On the spiritual level, we are reminded of other lessons. The death of the clean animal is of no use to us unless it was *purposefully* slaughtered for our sustenance and nourishment. Death in general does us no good at all, but Yahshua's death on Calvary's pole was purposefully orchestrated so that we might live. But remember: even the intentional death of the “Clean One” will do us no good if we do not “eat His flesh,” that is, derive spiritual sustenance from it by assimilating His life into our own.

- (651) *Contact with death defiles a person.* **“This is the law when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who are in the tent shall be unclean seven days; and every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, is unclean. Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.”** (Numbers 19:14-16) This bit of Torah fell between the cracks in Volume I. It fits between Mitzvot #575 and #576. The context is the so-called “Law of the Red Heifer,” which describes the cleansing process for one who has touched a dead body—or more to the point, has been metaphorically “touched by death” merely by living out his mortal existence. The first symbol introduced here is the “tent.” We (or is it just me?) are immediately reminded of the seventh and final *miqra* of Yahweh, *Succoth*—the Feast of Tabernacles—in which God promises to “camp out” with men. This appointment was prefigured in the first-century life (and purposeful death) of the Messiah, and will be culminated in His soon-to-be-fulfilled thousand-year reign as King of

Kings. We who know this earth is not our permanent home also camp out here, adopting a pilgrim mentality as we dwell within our tents—symbolic of both the world in which we sojourn and our mortal bodies. All of us dwell in “tents” defiled by death—we are all unclean “for seven days,” that is, for the duration of our mortal lives. It is only through being sprinkled with the waters of purification provided through the sacrifice of the Messiah (see Mitzvot #574-#576) that we can be made clean.

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

And the bones and bodies found slain in the open field? Their presence defiles the land, so they must be disposed of—but at the cost of our own temporary defilement as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. We are reminded of the coming Battle of Magog (Ezekiel 38-39) in which the corpses of the slain Muslim hordes will litter the Israeli landscape. Ezekiel 39:11-16 states that the dead will be so numerous it will take the Israelis seven months to bury them. Yahweh is saying that the existence of death within Israel (in this case, personified by the armies of Islam) will cause their complete defilement, but in the end, the Land—and its people—will be cleansed.

NOT QUITE READY FOR PRIME TIME

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

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