

Offering Advice

Yahweh, as Creator of the universe, owns everything. He subsequently *needs* nothing, and from what we can tell from scripture, *wants* only one thing: to share a loving relationship with us humans. It's pretty obvious (at least to me) that we were created for no other purpose—and that the rest of creation, from quarks to quasars, are only byproducts of Yahweh's quest for the one thing He doesn't possess within Himself: loving companionship.

We may therefore find it a bit surprising to find a large body of instruction in the Torah that tells man to give stuff to Yahweh. A dizzying array of offerings, sacrifices, tithes, and oblations are prescribed, each accompanied with a plethora of rules telling us precisely *how* to go about giving these things to God—and how not to. And as if to prove that this isn't some thinly disguised ploy foisted by a newly empowered priesthood upon a superstitious and gullible populace, the Torah's instructions on giving are often a bit counterintuitive. We are instructed to do apparently “wasteful” things like sacrificing the firstborn of our flocks and herds, or leaving the corners of our fields unharvested so the poor can earn a living there—and are told that these things are honoring to Yahweh. He does seemingly contradictory things like insisting that only the best—perfect, unblemished specimens—are good enough to be offered to Him, only to turn around and say to reserve for Him only the gross, unhealthful, fatty portions of the sacrificed animal, while the rest of it is to be eaten by the worshipper or the priest. He declares that waving things in the air will demonstrate that we've given them to Him, even though we are then free to turn around and use them for our own benefit. He delineates different profiles for seven distinct offering types (the *olah*, *mincha*, *chata't*, *selem*, *asham*, *nesek*, and *bekor*—see Volume I, Chapter 12). And we are forced to conclude that for a God who needs nothing at all, Yahweh sure asks for a lot.

The question that must be answered, as usual, is “Why?” Why did Yahweh issue such complicated instructions telling us to give Him things He doesn't really need or want? On the surface, some of what He told the Israelites to do may have looked a bit like the pagan religions of Egypt and Canaan, what with the specially garbed priestly class, facilities set aside for ritual purposes, and blood sacrifices. But the similarities were purely superficial. Pagan ritual was designed to reinforce the attitude of submission of the worshipper. It was calculated to enhance the power of the priests and the demon-gods they served by keeping the masses subservient. Hebrew rituals, by contrast, were designed to fulfill three functions.

They were (1) an elaborate prophetic dress rehearsal of the atoning sacrifice that Yahweh would make on behalf of man, (2) a means for individual worshippers to spontaneously demonstrate their thankfulness, and (3) a way to unify the entire nation under the banner of the One true God. As with the rest of the Torah, the rules are there for *our* benefit, not His. They're there to teach us about Him, about what He has done for us, about what He has given to us. By our giving, through our sacrifices, we are given a glimmer of understanding concerning what God did for us, beginning with creation and culminating in the provision for our salvation through the sacrifice of Yahshua. In fact, nowhere in God's instructions for giving is there a precept that doesn't originate with and help to explain what He has already done for us.

In the first volume of *The Owner's Manual*, mostly in Chapters 10 through 13, we saw the rabbinical take on offerings. Even when Maimonides wasn't twisting scripture to benefit the self-appointed religious elite of which he was a part, he restricted himself to listing the mechanical letter of the law, and to this day, orthodox Jews refuse to admit that the sacrifices and offerings delineated in the Torah could have had any bearing on the mechanism Yahweh would ordain for the salvation of mankind. But if they aren't prophetic of a coming Savior, then they degenerate into a pitiful attempt to bribe God. They become nothing more than watered down imitations of the ritual infanticide practiced by the devotees of Molech—something Yahweh specifically anathematized. And the even more anemic form such attempts at appeasement assume in today's world—tossing a few dollars into an offering plate—becomes downright insulting to God if one is trying to impress Him or buy Him off. We need to come to grips with the fact that our offerings can't logically be proffered as a bribe, a form of penance, or a means to drive our guilt back into the shadows. They are worthless as inducements to forgiveness, peace, or prosperity. Our offerings must be, rather, expressions of our love toward Yahweh, outpourings of thankfulness, reflections of the love He first showed to us. And our tithes should be a statement of our grateful trust in Yahweh's continued provision. Anything beyond that is blasphemy.

The Torah also teaches us something else. The mere act of giving, scattered and undirected, is *not* what we're called to do. Its object in the Law was always well defined, falling into three broad categories: (1) pure homage to Yahweh, including the offerings of atonement that prefigure *His* offering on Calvary; (2) the upkeep and advancement of the Tabernacle (which we should now recognize as a multi-level metaphor for the Plan of God; and (3) the support of the Levites and priests—who were precluded by Yahweh's calling from earning a living in the usual manner. The Levites, from the tithes they received, were also to provide for the poor among them. Though the Tabernacle and priesthood no longer exist, the principles remain intact. We should give first and foremost because we love

Yahweh, or more accurately stated, we wish to reciprocate His love for us. Then we should give out of a desire to see the Plan of God advanced in the world, that is, out of a desire to implement the Great Commission. Third, our tithes and offerings should support those who are called by God to minister to our spiritual needs or equip *us* for the work of the ministry, and to materially assist those among us—primarily believers—who have fallen on hard times.

It is at this point that I must offer a politically incorrect caveat. Not everyone who stands behind a pulpit is called of God or is doing God's work. We are instructed to be discerning—as wise as serpents, but as harmless as doves. Granted, if you're reading this book, you probably wouldn't knowingly put up with apostasy or outright heresy in the pulpit for very long. Most Evangelical pastors have the basics (e.g., salvation by grace, the deity of the Messiah, the reality and efficacy of the resurrection, the virgin birth, etc.) down pat, but all too often, longstanding Christian traditions pass for God's truth, and they're *not the same thing*. I'm not suggesting you stop supporting your pastor if he makes a mistake: he's human—it's going to happen now and then. What I'm saying is that you shouldn't be financially supporting a ministry that systematically denies (or sidesteps) the basic truths of the faith. And if you can't in good conscience give to such a church or ministry, why associate with them at all?

In the same way, not everyone who finds himself in need is a legitimate candidate for our alms. Poverty due to laziness, substance abuse, or a rebellious attitude is not to be rewarded. But although helping believing brothers and sisters in need should be a high priority for us, our giving need not be restricted to the faithful. For example, my wife and I are involved in the support of some folks who run a couple of free clinics in Bolivia. Medical care is provided for free (which is about all their clientele can afford) and everybody who comes into the place is presented with the good news of Christ's love. But it was discovered that some people in need were *still* going without essential medical treatment because they couldn't afford the expense of travel and lodging, or there was no way to provide for their dependents if they were laid up in the hospital, even for a few days. So a "mercy fund" was set up to take care of these hidden needs—things that had nothing to do with health care. From our point of view, it was ridiculously cheap—a few hundred bucks would help dozens of people get what they needed, both medically and spiritually. Bottom line: thousands of poor Bolivians who came in for free medical treatment went away with more than they bargained for—eternal life. To me, that makes way more sense than buying fancy stained glass windows.

In giving, as with everything else, we need to draw a distinction between perpetuating religion and fostering our relationship with Yahweh. That's not to say it is always easy sorting them out—one often masquerades as the other. But

when “religious professionals” ask us to contribute to a cause, it becomes our duty to examine just how directly the ministry correlates to Yahweh’s actual instructions on the matter. In short, where is the money going? To inflated salaries, bigger and fancier buildings, or air time on cable TV channels (so they can ask for even *more* money)? Or to more effectively teaching the Word at home and supporting missions abroad, to equipping the saints for the work of the ministry, and to extending practical mercies to people in dire need. Are the funds contributing to human pride or to God’s agenda? Call me a cynic, but I’ve observed that there is often an inversely proportional correlation between the time and energy spent raising money and the worthiness of the ministry doing the asking. It’s one thing to make needs known. It’s quite another to badger people into contributing to something they neither understand nor in which they perceive God’s leading. Woe to the man who says in effect, “Give me your money because I’m doing God’s work,” when all he’s really doing is building a monument to himself.

Another permutation of error in giving is to equate a human institution—*any* human institution—with the will of God, and to support it accordingly. Roman Catholicism is the most obvious purveyor of this evil, and they’ve grown bloated with wealth over the last seventeen centuries by telling the faithful, “*The Church and its leaders represent God on earth, so you must render unto us whatever you would render unto Him.*” Though the RCC leads the pack in this regard, they are by no means alone. Any concentration of ecclesiastical power, however localized, can lead to the same attitude. The problem for the worshipper, of course, is that it can be hard to see the difference. If in doubt (or even if you’re not), check the “plant” for fruit. If a “religious institution” is found, upon close scripturally based scrutiny, to be sprouting idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contention, jealousy, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambition, dissention, or heresy, then scream and run away. If, on the other hand, it fosters love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, then you can feel good about supporting them financially.

The vast preponderance of direct scriptural instruction concerning giving is found in the Torah, and in the course of our study we will have covered all of it. References to it in the New Covenant scriptures, by contrast, are rare but worthy of our close attention. Since the New Testament doesn’t replace the Old, but builds upon it, we find its teaching complementary to the Torah, clarifying and focusing God’s message.

For example, Yahshua taught us to be discreet in giving: **“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”** (Matthew 6:1-4) Yahweh is interested in attitude, not amount. He’s more concerned with *why* we give than *how much*. Our motives determine how the gift is perceived by our heavenly Father. A gift *could* be given primarily in order to elevate the status of the giver in the eyes of his peers. While reminding us that the glory such a hypocrite sought would be his only reward, Yahshua here establishes the fact that God does indeed reward us for acts of charity if done with the proper motive—to serve Him. Motive is key. There is a movement afoot these days that says that wealth can be turned on like a faucet by giving to God’s work. The error is obvious. If your motivation is personal greed, then you’re not really “giving” at all; you’re investing. (And if your faith is in your method, rather than in God, then you’re actually *gambling*.) The Father’s “rewards” of which Yahshua speaks *could* be financial, but they could just as easily be something else—something more appropriate to your own needs: peace of mind, health, or shelter from harm in this world—or a crown of victory in the next, awarded to you “openly” before your peers at the judgment seat of Christ.

As if to punctuate these thoughts, we read, **“And He [Yahshua] looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, ‘Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.’”** (Luke 21:1-4) Everyone He saw here, rich and poor alike, presumably wished to honor Yahweh with their gifts. Because the “treasury” in the Temple was a public place, one wasn’t expected to be particularly surreptitious about making a contribution, a fact that must be balanced against what we noted a moment ago in Matthew 6. What Yahshua saw—and remarked upon—was that the widow gave “out of her poverty.” Written between the lines is her attitude of utter, unshakable trust in the God she had come to worship with her “two mites.” It didn’t matter that the amount of her gift wasn’t going to accomplish much. God didn’t need her money anyway, but He valued her devotion above all human qualities, rewarding her “openly” through this glowing tribute in His scriptures. So, did she go home and die of starvation because she’d put her entire pitiful paycheck in the offering box? No. I can *guarantee* she didn’t miss it much.

There’s another factor that needs to be addressed here. The poor widow made her contribution at a time when the high priesthood of Israel was corrupt,

unbelieving, and politically motivated. The very Temple she had visited was an edifice erected as a cultural bribe—not an act of worship—by a corrupt and murderous gentile king, a vassal of a brutal, pagan, foreign overlord. So the question must be asked: did she waste her offering by giving it to the wrong people? Was her gift “thrown away” because those who received it in the name of God were less than worthy? Yahshua didn’t seem to think so. All He was concerned with was *her* attitude, *her* devotion. She did what she could do, and He honored that. The priests would be held accountable to administer her gift in accordance with His instructions. But even if they did not, she would not be held responsible for their faithlessness. All that being said, we today usually have more options available to us than she did: we are called to be discerning about where and to whom our gifts are given.

Giving “to God” is never discouraged in scripture. It is a good thing, something we should all do. But there are guidelines for godly giving. Giving Principle #1, then, is to give whatever you give without fanfare—let it be a matter between you and God. Principle #2 is the lesson of the widows mites: trust Yahweh in all things, for this honors Him. Principle #3 is in something Paul told the believers at Corinth: **“Now concerning the collection for the saints...On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.”** (I Corinthians 16:1-4) He reminds us that needs are constant and recurring; therefore, we should *plan* to give, setting aside our gifts—in proportion to our prosperity—even before they’re needed. The gifts weren’t for Paul’s use, however. They were for the needy saints: believers in other places who had fallen on hard times or were suffering persecution. Though he volunteered to play the role of postman, Paul made it clear that the gifts should be sent by means of the Corinthians’ own choosing. This wasn’t construed as a “Support Paul’s Ministry” telethon. In a later epistle, he reiterated the principle: be prepared in advance. **“Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.”** (II Corinthians 9:5) Some might object, saying that making our giving a “budget item” sucks all the spontaneity out of it, rendering it somehow less “spiritual.” But we were told in both the Old and New Testaments: the poor would always be with us. There would always be needs to meet. There is nothing unholy about planning ahead. Yahweh does it all the time.

The passage goes on to state Giving Principle #4: **“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always**

having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.” (II Corinthians 9:6-8) Our giving is supposed to be a reflection of how we perceive what God has done for us. If we are unthankful, if we count Yahweh’s grace and provision as a small thing, then we’ll tend to give parsimoniously. But if we really appreciate what He’s done for us, we will desire to reciprocate. We may not be rich, but we as God’s children really do have “sufficiency in all things.” And that is enough to make any thoughtful believer a “cheerful giver,” a cheerful disciple, a cheerful witness—even a cheerful martyr.

Paul used the occasion to brag on the believers in Macedonia. **“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.”** (II Corinthians 8:1-5) Giving Principle #5: if your heart is in the right place, you can do *more* than you can do. The Macedonians didn’t have a lot, but notice what Paul says they did have: (1) abundant joy in the face of trial and affliction; (2) liberal generosity in the face of temporal poverty; (3) a willingness to serve that enabled them to give *beyond* their intrinsic ability; and (4) a sense of urgency in the matter of meeting the needs of others in even worse shape than they were. How did they do all that? By first giving *themselves* to Yahweh, and then dedicating themselves to aiding and abetting fellow servants like Paul who were in “the will of God.”

Seems like every time we’re given an example of somebody doing it right, they’re poor, but every time we see an admonition or rebuke on the subject, the audience is wealthy. Here, Paul instructs young Timothy how to deal with rich folks in his congregation: **“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”** (I Timothy 6:17-19) Giving Principle #6: riches are given to the rich to enable them to do good works. The man who thinks he’s “self-made” is deceiving himself: even if he got his money honestly (which cannot be automatically assumed), it was only through God’s gift of fortuitous circumstances. It was Yahweh who gave him the ability to work hard, recognize and capitalize on opportunity, be in the right place at the right time with the right idea, and so forth. He could just as easily have been born in the wrong century, in the wrong country, on the wrong side of the tracks, with the wrong skin color, the wrong intelligence quotient, or with the wrong accent in his mouth instead of a silver spoon. Does hard work make a difference? Sure, but I can guarantee there

were slaves working on sugar or cotton plantations who worked every bit as hard as Donald Trump or J. Paul Getty.

Ever heard of Humphrey Monmouth? Me neither, until recently. He was a wealthy man who actually *was* “rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,” who not only stored up *for himself* “a good foundation for the time to come,” but for us as well. You see, Humphrey was a sixteenth century English cloth merchant who grew rich selling the fabrics worn by the nation’s high society. He also led a secret life as a member of an underground society of faithful London merchants known as The Christian Brethren. At a time of intense religious oppression under the Roman Church, these daring men smuggled Christian literature into England and supported men like William Tyndale, whose ground-breaking English translation of the Bible is the linguistic foundation upon which the venerable King James Version would be built a century later, retaining ninety percent of Tyndale’s wording. Monmouth provided Tyndale with room, board and financial backing as the scholar labored diligently on his common-language translation. The merchant-disciple then paid to have it printed in Europe, smuggling the Bibles—so hated and feared by the politico-religious establishment of the day—back into England in the very shipments of cloth that would grace the backs of the bishops and princes who were so determined to keep the Word of God out of the hands of the unwashed masses. Were it not for the likes of the faithful (and rich) Humphrey Monmouth, our scriptures might *still* be in Latin.

All of this brings us to Giving Principle #7: we can only give because Yahweh first gave to us. **“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”** (I John 3:16-17) Again, notice the scripturally specified recipient of our giving, the beneficiary of the “laying down of our lives.” It’s the brethren, our fellow believers who find themselves in need. We were never commanded (at least not by God) to provide lavish lifestyles for our clergy, fancy buildings for our assembly, or welfare payments to able-bodied people who refuse to work. It bears repeating, there are only three scriptural reasons for giving: to honor Yahweh, to spread His gospel, and to support His people who are precluded by their calling or circumstances from providing for themselves.

A GODLY ATTITUDE

(799) *Give as you are blessed.* **“Three times a year all your males shall appear before Yahweh your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before Yahweh empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of Yahweh your God which He has given you.”**

(Deuteronomy 16:16-17) The tithes and offerings that Israel was to render unto God through the priests and Levites were to be based upon past blessings, not future hopes. They were not to be thought of as bribes or appeasement or advance payment rendered for divine services, a means by which one might induce his god to show his favor by sending rain in its due season and making his flocks and fields fertile. This wasn't a bill to be paid, but a way to acknowledge the source of the blessings one had *already* enjoyed, an outpouring of thankfulness to Yahweh.

The commandment that "Every man shall give as he is able" is a challenge to be honest with yourself about what God has done for you and what you in turn are doing about it. A personal anecdote may shed some light on the subject. Several decades ago, my wife and I were agonizing as to why we were finding it hard—no, *impossible*—to tithe to our local church. I was making a decent workingman's wage, and we weren't living a flamboyant lifestyle, but there just wasn't enough money to give what we wanted to give. But then it hit us: we had adopted nine children, half of whom were handicapped to one degree or another. Our ministry (although we hadn't really thought of it in those terms, 'cause we were having so much fun) was making it impossible to "minister." We couldn't give ten percent to our church because we were *already* giving fifty or sixty to God's work—and had committed to continue doing so for well into the foreseeable future. So we settled on doing what God had said to do anyway: we would give as we were able, as we had been blessed.

- (800) *Recognize your blessings.* "**None shall appear before Me empty-handed.**" (Exodus 34:20) We saw this same instruction in the previous precept, where it was tied to the three annual gatherings of Israel at the central place of worship—wherever the Tabernacle of God was at the time. Again, it is a back-handed admonition to examine your life and recognize the blessings you've received at the hand of Yahweh. God's point was that *nobody* had "nothing." Everyone, right down to the humblest bondservant, had *something* for which to be thankful, some tangible evidence of Yahweh's care and provision. All they had to do was look for it.

Is the glass half full, or half empty? We need to be aware that without the gracious provision of Yahweh, we would have neither container nor contents nor eyes to perceive our condition. This is not a call for blind optimism, however, but rather for sober realism: whatever we have, we owe thanks to God. Having lost "everything," the patriarch Job observed, "**Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I turn back toward there. Yahweh gave and Yahweh has taken away; blessed be the name of Yahweh.**" (Job 1:21) I doubt if many of us today see things quite this clearly.

Americans are in for a rude shock. Having enjoyed “full glasses” for so long without recognizing or acknowledging Yahweh’s provision, we are about to lose our position of privilege. As the Last Days approach, Yahshua (in Matthew 24:6-7) warns us, expect “**wars and rumors of war...famines, pestilences, and earthquakes** (a term that in the original Greek would include ocean-borne storms—hurricanes, tsunamis, and the like) **in various places**”—that’s *before* the end: these are but the “beginning of sorrows.” As Isaiah warned us, “**For thus Yahweh has told me, ‘I will look from My dwelling place quietly, like dazzling heat in the sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.’ For before the harvest, as soon as the bud blossoms and the flower becomes a ripening grape, then He will cut off the sprigs with pruning knives and remove and cut away the spreading branches.**” (Isaiah 18:4-5, NLT) We are about to be—no, let me rephrase that: we are in *the process of being*—pruned back like an overgrown grapevine. And all of this is because we have for too long “appeared before Him empty handed.” May Yahweh forgive us.

- (801) *Thankfulness is not to be forced.* “**If you offer a sacrifice of a peace offering to Yahweh, you shall offer it of your own free will.**” (Leviticus 19:5) I know this sounds suspiciously like saying “The executions will continue until morale improves,” but it’s not the contradiction it seems. As usual, we have to look carefully at the actual text. He’s not talking about offerings in general. Some offerings in Israel *were* mandatory when the need for them arose: the sin offering (*chata’t*), guilt offering (*asham*), the Passover lamb, the Yom Kippur goats, and so forth, each with their requisite grain offerings (*minha*) and drink oblations (*neseq*). But others, notably the peace offering mentioned here (the *selem*) and the burnt offering (*olah*) made in homage to Yahweh were purely voluntary. God never said, “You must thank Me,” but He did stipulate ways we (i.e., Israelites under the Torah) could show our appreciation if we wished to. (Hint hint, nudge nudge.)

We cannot follow the letter of the Law in this regard today, for there is no Sanctuary and no priesthood. But the lessons of the *selem* are as valid as ever. If you’ll recall from Volume I, Chapter 12, the peace offering was the prescribed way someone could offer thanksgiving to God in Israelite society, underscore a vow (also voluntary) that he or she wished to make to Yahweh, or spontaneously demonstrate one’s praise or devotion. It was a blood sacrifice—cattle, sheep, or goats, either male or female. Since the sacrifice had to be without spot or blemish, we are reminded that it ultimately represented the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah, indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Both unleavened cakes and leavened bread were included, contrasting our sinless standing before God (the result of His sacrifice)

with the corrupt, sinful nature from which we are in the process of being extricated—and from which our deliverance should make us truly thankful. These *minha* blandishments were all to be prepared with olive oil, a picture of the Spirit of God that makes all of this possible in our lives (and without which, we’re just going through the motions).

The *selem* was not a dour, burdensome obligation. On the contrary, it was a party. The food was shared with the worshipper’s family and the priest. Yahweh was invited, too. In fact, He was the guest of honor.

When’s the last time *you* threw a “Thank You” party for God?

- (802) *Offer sacrifices to Yahweh only.* **“The priest shall sprinkle the blood on the altar of Yahweh at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and burn the fat for a sweet aroma to Yahweh. They shall no more offer their sacrifices to demons, after whom they have played the harlot. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations.”** (Leviticus 17:6-7) This is one of those places where knowing the identity of our God—by name—becomes critically important. If we know Yahweh only as “The LORD” (as it’s mistranslated in every major English Bible version) we may be a bit fuzzy as to precisely Who our heavenly benefactor is. After all, the god the Canaanites worshiped—Ba’al—had a name that *meant* “lord” (as Yahweh’s name means “I am”). And today, 1.4 billion Muslims worship a god that shows up in their scriptures as “the Lord” (as in Qur’an 5:72—*“They are surely infidels who blaspheme and say: ‘God is Christ, the Messiah, the son of Mary.’ But the Messiah only said: ‘O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.’”* I beg to differ: Yahshua said no such thing.) It’s easy to get away with lies when the truth is buried with apathy, apostasy, or treachery.

Here in Leviticus, Yahweh makes it clear that sacrifices not made to Him—as demonstrated by adherence to the guidelines He set down in the Torah—are in fact offered to *demons*. The modern canard that “It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you’re sincere,” is utter hogwash. He whom you serve *is* your master, and the one to whom you offer sacrifices *is* your god, whether true or false. And lest it slip past you, that includes vague emotions and hidden agendas. If the “sacrifices and offerings” you’re making are done to assuage a guilty conscience, fulfill a perceived religious obligation, or they’re rendered in response to unrelenting pressure from pulpit or peers, then your god is your circumstances, your feelings, even your misplaced sense of duty—not Yahweh.

- (803) *Offer sacrifices only at the Tabernacle.* **“Also you shall say to them: ‘Whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of**

meeting, to offer it to Yahweh, that man shall be cut off from among his people.” (Leviticus 17:8-9) The practical ramifications of the letter of the precept are obvious: the pagan peoples being displaced by the Israelites had erected temples, shrines, and worship groves (“high places”) all over the countryside. Yahweh didn’t want the Israelites “re-tasking” the existing pagan worship facilities to His service, or recycling their religious practices to venerate Him instead of Ba’al. He was holy—fundamentally different (being *real*) from the gods worshipped by the pagans, and utterly unique. Therefore His people must also be set apart from the world in every aspect of their lives and culture, including their worship practices. Restricting the site of sacrifices and offerings to one central location went a long way toward establishing that principle.

But as we learned in such detail in chapter 4 of this volume, the Tabernacle itself was an elaborate multi-level metaphor for the Plan of God for our redemption. Every element of its design, layout, ceremony, construction materials, furniture, decoration, even its dimensions, told us something about how Yahweh would reconcile us to Himself. Therefore, by telling us to make our offerings *only* at the “door of the Tabernacle,” He is telling us in no uncertain terms that everything we do “for Him” is to be done in the context of His revealed plan. That plan begins and ends with Yahshua and His sacrifice (the altar and the ark of the covenant). It involves our cleansing (the bronze laver), His provision for our every need (the table of showbread), our part in spreading the light of His truth to the world (the seven-branched lamp), and His desire that we would communicate with Him through prayer (the altar of incense).

- (804) *Understand the difference between defective and unclean.* **“All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to Yahweh your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock. You and your household shall eat it before Yahweh your God year by year in the place which Yahweh chooses. But if there is a defect in it, if it is lame or blind or has any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to Yahweh your God. You may eat it within your gates; the unclean and the clean person alike may eat it, as if it were a gazelle or a deer.”** (Deuteronomy 15:19-22) We saw (in Mitzvah #459) that Yahweh required the firstborn of “clean” animals and men alike to be set apart to Him, for the status of being “firstborn” was a symbol of the right to wield authority. The lesson is that the authority, power, and rights we possess by virtue of having been created in the “image and likeness of God” must be surrendered to Yahweh if we wish to share a relationship with Him. We *can* choose to retain this authority for ourselves, of course, but this will make us responsible for redeeming ourselves—something that God knows cannot be done. He would spare us

the consequences of this inevitable failure, for He loves us. But He will not force us to do things His way. The choice is ours.

However, defective animals were not to be sacrificed, even if they were firstborn males. These flawed beasts are analogous to the people who choose not to acquiesce their authority to Yahweh. If they could comprehend their condition, they might think, “I have escaped death! I may be blind or lame, deaf or diseased, but by golly, I’m free to live out my life the way I want to.” But they haven’t escaped death; they’ve only postponed it. What *have* they escaped? The “inconvenient” relationship their unblemished cousins share with God. The defectives might protest, “Some escape *that* is: they end up on the dinner table—as the main course.” I’ll admit, it’s counterintuitive. Paul explains: **“I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”** (Galatians 2:19-20) Huh? We become *alive* by *dying* vicariously in/through/with the Messiah? To the defective firstborn, it sounds like nonsense. But to us who have been made alive, the truth is self-evident (which doesn’t make it any easier to explain). Life (evolutionary hypothesis notwithstanding) originates with Yahweh. But we are not truly alive—in the eternal, spiritual sense—until and unless we have been absorbed, assimilated, become *part of* the God who made us.

And what was that about the firstborn sacrifice being available to **“the unclean and the clean person alike?”** Yahweh is telling us about what Paul called **“the life which I now live in the flesh.”** Although the firstborn sacrifice that redeems us (i.e., Yahshua) must be perfect, and we achieve perfection vicariously through association with His death, one need not first become “clean” in order to avail himself of the benefits provided to us by this sacrifice. The Hebrew word used so often to indicate a state of uncleanness, defilement, or personal impurity is *tame*. It indicates a state, not a behavior; that is, it describes our fallen position as children of Adam, not our guilt as individual sinners. Yahweh employed *tame* as a metaphor for the human condition, defining it in the Torah with a broad range of events (usually related to common biological functions) that would ceremonially “defile” a person, temporarily disqualifying him from participation in certain activities that spoke symbolically of fellowship with God. The point is that here in the law of the firstborn sacrifice, one needn’t be “clean” *already* when asking Yahweh to make him perfect—like my wife insisting the dishes be spotless *before* we run the dishwasher. God is willing to repair our defects, if only we’ll come to Him in faith. Remember, in the Tabernacle, we encounter the altar (where the blood of

sacrifice is shed) *before* we reach the laver (where cleansing occurs). When Yahweh is finished with us, we'll be both perfect *and* clean.

- (805) *Be consistent in the observation of Yahweh's precepts. "Thus it shall be done for each young bull, for each ram, or for each lamb or young goat. According to the number that you prepare, so you shall do with everyone according to their number. All who are native-born shall do these things in this manner, in presenting an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to Yahweh."* (Numbers 15:11-13) The "thus" refers to verses 4-10 (which we reviewed in chapter 12 of Volume I)—where the principle was presented that grain offerings (*minha*) and drink oblations (*neseq*) were to accompany every burnt offering (*olah*) and peace offering (*selem*). These, you'll recall, were the two types of offerings that were completely voluntary, given as pure homage to Yahweh, as an outpouring of thankfulness, or to punctuate a vow being made before Him. A different amount of grain and wine was specified for each type of sacrificial animal, in rough proportion to its size. The instructions were precise and specific, meant to be followed consistently the same way every time a burnt offering or peace offering was made—for Yahweh's love for us is as constant and unchanging as it is varied in its manifestation.

The *minha* and *neseq* were prophetic of the coming Messiah, as were the blood sacrifices they accompanied. To review: the grain offering speaks of Yahweh's provision for our needs—the foremost of which is reconciliation with our Creator. The *minha* was always to be presented with a specific amount of olive oil, symbolic of the *Ruach Qodesh* who permeates the lives of believers, comforting, convicting, and providing for us "all things that pertain to life and godliness." And the wine of the *neseq* or drink offering is a transparent metaphor for the blood of Yahshua, shed for the remission of our sins. These should be familiar and obvious symbols to all of us by now.

What isn't so obvious is the restriction shoehorned in there sideways: the people who were to observe this precept are described as "**all who are native-born.**" This isn't a "get out of compliance free" card for Jews whose parents have been thrown out of the Land for bad behavior, bereft of their Temple and priesthood—who now couldn't conform to the letter of the Torah even if they wanted to. (Our first clue that something else is afoot here comes from the realization that when the precept was given, the Israelites hadn't yet crossed the Jordan. There was no such thing as an Israelite who was "native-born" in the Land.) As happens so often, though, we'll have to get into our Hebrew lexicons to see what God is trying to teach us. "Native-born" is the Hebrew noun *'ezrah*. The surprise is its root

verb, *zarah*, which means “to arise, rise up, or shine.” Thus the east, the place of the sunrise, is called *mizrah*, and *'ezrah* is one who arises (*zarah*) out of the land (*eretz*), hence, a native. But consider the use of our root word in this millennial passage from Isaiah: **“Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of Yahweh is risen (*zarah*) upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people. But Yahweh will arise (*zarah*) over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising (*zarah*, the noun based on *zarah*).”** (Isaiah 60:1-3) What’s being said in our Precept then, ever so subtly, is this: offerings of praise and homage to Yahweh are to reflect the sacrifice of Yahshua the Messiah in the heart of the worshipper. This is reality for people who have a personal relationship with God through His Son, people over whom “the glory of Yahweh is risen” and upon whom “His glory will be seen.” But those who refuse to receive the light of Yahweh into their lives cannot “arise and shine.” Their light has *not* come, for they dwell in darkness. Their offerings are subsequently *not* a “sweet aroma to Yahweh” but rather an offensive stench in His nostrils. They shouldn’t have bothered trying to “butter up” God. Their butter has turned rancid.

- (806) *One law applies to all.* **“If a stranger dwells with you, or whoever is among you throughout your generations, and would present an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to Yahweh, just as you do, so shall he do. One ordinance shall be for you of the assembly and for the stranger who dwells with you, an ordinance forever throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the stranger be before Yahweh. One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you.”** (Numbers 15:14-16) Because Yahweh chose to reveal His plan of redemption through the nation of Israel, some have gotten the idea that salvation is only for the Jews—that one must first become a Jew and keep the Torah if he is to taste the mercy of God. Passages like this one seem at first glance to support that view. And in the absence of any conflicting instruction, this position might seem a rational and logical extrapolation to make. But there *is* conflicting instruction. It’s not contradictory, mind you, but there is another side to this—and we must consider the whole body of scriptural instruction if we hope to arrive at the truth.

Let’s look at the historical background. The crowd who left Egypt under Moses’ leadership were not all Israelites. They are described in Exodus 12:38 as a “mixed multitude.” The vast majority were Israelites, but there were a few gentiles among them. Some were serious about adopting the ways of Yahweh—the mighty Caleb was apparently one such individual, a Kenizzite (i.e., an Edomite; cf. Joshua 14:6) who had attached himself to the tribe of Judah. But some among the mixed multitude were merely a gentile rabble who had seized upon the Passover

opportunity to escape from Pharaoh's iron-fisted tyranny. It was these who first complained about the lack of dietary variety in Yahweh's miraculous provision of manna (cf. Numbers 11:4). Whether dedicated to Yahweh or mere opportunists, these "strangers" among Israel are now being informed that if they wish to live before Yahweh and among His people, His precepts and instructions will apply to them just as they do to the chosen race. One size fits all.

Unfortunately, we have scant information concerning individual gentile believers in the Old Covenant Scriptures. While the prophecies predicting the eventual redemption of the gentile nations (as in the Isaiah 60 passage we quoted above) are numerous indeed, there are few examples of gentile saints in the Old Testament, and we are given only circumstantial evidence concerning their adherence, if any, to the Torah. Rahab, the heroic harlot of Jericho, and Ruth, the faithful Moabite widow, assimilated into Israelite society so thoroughly they both show up in Yahshua's family tree. On the other hand, Naaman, the cured Syrian leper, and the Sidonian widow who fed Elijah (the prophet who subsequently raised her only son from the dead) were mentioned prominently by Yahshua (in Luke 4:24-27) as examples of gentiles who had shown more faith than anyone in Israel, but we have no indication that either of these folks attempted any sort of Torah observance. Then we have the disturbing example of Uriah the Hittite, a gentile who was by all accounts a faithful and devoted worshiper of Yahweh, a valiant soldier for His cause, who was betrayed and murdered by no less a Biblical hero than King David, a guy who was described as "a man after God's own heart." Ouch.

The final laying to rest of the "you've-gotta-become-a-Jew first" theory is presented in Acts 15, where the new gentile believers in Yahshua were told by the council in Jerusalem that they would not have to "be circumcised and keep the law." When they heard the news, the gentiles "rejoiced over its encouragement." And why had the leaders of the ekklesia determined this to be the proper course? Because these gentile believers, having come to faith, had been given the Holy Spirit—long before any of them had even considered keeping the Torah. Their trusting belief in God's promise of salvation had been counted as righteousness, just as Abraham's faith had so many years before.

So where does that leave our Precept? Has it been abrogated? No, for the simple reason that the keeping of the Torah has never saved anyone, Jew or gentile, nor was it designed to. As Peter had put it to the Jerusalem council, "**Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the [gentile] disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?**" (Acts 15:10) The

point of the Precept is simply this: there is but one path to God. It is not determined by one's religion or cultural heritage, but it is defined by something that can look quite similar: *what one believes, whom one trusts*. Where our salvation is concerned, there is no difference between Israel and the gentiles. The very Law of offerings that both the Israelites and the gentile "strangers" living among them were instructed to observe proclaimed the coming Messiah between every line—His sinless life and selfless sacrifice. That is why Yahshua could declare, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."** (John 14:6)

TRESPASS OFFERINGS: CASES IN POINT

- (807) *The spiritual status of your victim can affect your punishment.* **"Whoever lies carnally with a woman who is betrothed to a man as a concubine, and who has not at all been redeemed nor given her freedom, for this there shall be scourging; but they shall not be put to death, because she was not free. And he shall bring his trespass offering to Yahweh, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, a ram as a trespass offering. The priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering before Yahweh for his sin which he has committed. And the sin which he has committed shall be forgiven him."** (Leviticus 19:20-22) Yahweh isn't condoning slavery here, but He is once again using it as a teaching aid, employing a cultural situation to demonstrate a spiritual truth. In other words, just because we don't have concubines any more in our society (or the means to present trespass offerings to Yahweh, for that matter), we aren't free to ignore what Yahweh is saying to us.

We need to sort out the symbols in order to get to the heart of the matter. The nature of the offense is sexual contact with someone you're not married to, but with a twist. Normally, this kind of thing would fall under another precept, either (1) rape (the penalty for which is death); (2) adultery, i.e., sexual relations with someone legally joined to another (the penalty for which is also death); or (3) fornication, i.e., sex with someone *not* promised to another (the penalty for which is the payment of a dowry, accompanied, if the woman's father allows it, by marriage with no possibility of parole—no divorce, for any reason, *ever*).

The twist here is the status of the woman: she is (1) a slave, human property belonging to another man; and (2) betrothed, that is, engaged to be married (tantamount to being legally married, though the marriage has not been consummated), whether to her owner, her owner's son, or to a third party, e.g., another slave. The word translated "concubine" in our text (*shiphchah*) really just means "maid-servant," but the supporting

description (that she “has not at all been redeemed nor given her freedom”) makes it clear that she is a slave, and not merely hired help.

This distinction is important to comprehend, for sexual contact is a ubiquitous metaphor in scripture for spiritual relationships. Israel is portrayed time and again as Yahweh’s unfaithful wife because of her liaisons with Ba’al and other false gods; Paul speaks of the ekklesia as Yahshua’s spotless bride: **“For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”** (II Corinthians 11:2) Yahweh refuses to share our affections. He loves us, and wants us all for Himself—an exclusive, monogamous, lifelong, unswervingly faithful relationship. What, then, does our text’s reference to the violated concubine mean? I believe it is a metaphor for people who are *already* in spiritual bondage, “owned” by someone other than Yahweh. “Lying carnally” with someone in this state is thus a picture of presenting *someone else’s* false doctrine to them. Example: a Muslim is told by a Catholic priest that he must accept the authority of the Pope. Or, a Catholic converts to the Mormon faith (or Jehovah’s Witnesses, or Orthodox Judaism, or *you fill in the blank*) in the belief that this other religion is the road to salvation. We’re talking about jumping out of the frying pan into another frying pan. The “concubine’s” position may have changed, but it has not improved. She is still a slave, still in bondage, still in need of redemption. The only solution that would have actually helped her would have entailed her marriage to Yahshua, clothed in a wedding garment of pure light, with a bridal gift of her freedom from slavery to sin. But the false lover/rapist/seducer has only made a bad situation worse.

However, we’re only halfway done with the precept. Unlike the case of the common “adulterer,” the seducer isn’t guilty of his victim’s spiritual downfall, since she was already in bondage. You can’t murder a corpse, though it is possible to desecrate one. So his life is not forfeit, but he is to be punished—“scourged.” Forgiveness is possible (though by no means automatic) in this case. Upon repentance, a trespass offering (the *asham*, appropriate for “mistakes”) may be brought. The ram of the trespass offering, of course, is actually Yahshua the Messiah. His blood alone atones for our trespasses at “the door of the Tabernacle”—the Plan of God. How does this work? Perhaps the best example we have of a repentant “concubine seducer” is the Apostle Paul, a Pharisee who ceased trying to convert pagans to rabbinical Judaism and began leading them to the Messiah instead. I know of former Mormons, former Catholics, and even a few former Muslims, who no longer lead the lost astray but now serve Yahweh with gratitude and commitment. Their sins have been

atoned by the blood of Yahshua. No longer do they “seduce concubines.” Now they “present them as chaste virgins to Christ” if they can.

- (808) *Things given to Yahweh are His, and are not to be “retasked.”* “If a man eats the holy offering unintentionally, then he shall restore a holy offering to the priest, and add one-fifth to it. They shall not profane the holy offerings of the children of Israel, which they offer to Yahweh, or allow them to bear the guilt of trespass when they eat their holy offerings; for I Yahweh sanctify them.” (Leviticus 22:14-16) God keeps His promises, and He expects us to do the same. Things we have dedicated to Yahweh are Yahweh’s, and that includes intangibles like our time and service. We are not to make promises to Him we can’t or won’t keep (nor does He ask us to). In Israel under the Torah, of course, it was possible to make “mistakes” concerning intended offerings. Most everybody’s wealth consisted of agricultural increase, whether animals or crops. A farmer who had set aside a lamb because it was a firstborn male, for instance, might find it on his dinner table some evening, ’cause one sheep looks pretty much like another, and somebody goofed. The divine solution falls somewhere in between slitting your wrists and shrugging it off. Yahweh, in short, knows we’re as fallible as He is holy.

Once the worshipper realizes his error, he is to rectify it by replacing what was “eaten” by mistake, and add twenty percent to it. This is more than just a penalty for having encroached upon what belonged to Yahweh. It’s a reminder of our humanity, for the total comes out to six fifths of the original offering—six being the number of sinful man, falling short of God’s perfection. The point, reiterated four times in these two short sentences, is that the offerings we make to Yahweh are *holy*. That is, they are set apart for His exclusive use and purpose. They’re not a “slush fund” we can feel free to dip into when we find ourselves with too much month left at the end of our money. (How did I know what you were thinking? Because I’ve thought the same thing myself from time to time. I’m preaching to the mirror here.)

The reason He considers our offerings holy is that *His* offering—Yahshua—was holy. Though mortal like we are, there was no confusion or divided purpose in His approach to the task He came to fulfill. We’re told His adoptive father, Joseph, was a carpenter (or perhaps a stonemason), so we can presume that as a youth Yahshua was taught the same trade. I realize we’re reading between the lines here, but it’s pretty clear that from the time Yahshua was old enough to pick up a hammer, His unwavering attitude was that He “must be about His father’s business,” as He told the learned teachers in Jerusalem (Luke 2:49). But

He wasn't talking about Joseph's business; He was talking about Yahweh's. Did He, as a twenty-something journeyman craftsman, go to work in the morning, build things, and earn money to help support His earthly family until He began His teaching ministry? Most certainly. But His thoughts, His plans, and His focus, were always on His *real* job.

And what is the application for us today? What are we to learn from this? As Yahweh's offering turned out to be Himself—Yahshua, God incarnate—*our* offering, in the end, must also be *ourselves*. Once set apart for Yahweh's glory, we are not to be “retasked” to some other purpose. Following Yahshua's example, our single-mindedness in Yahweh's cause does not preclude our earning a living, materially supporting ourselves and our families. He knows we have needs, and He has promised to meet them if we'll only seek His kingdom first. But although we have to work *in* the world, we don't have to work *for* it. What is a man to do, then, if he wakes up one morning only to realize that he has lost focus and “unintentionally eaten the holy offering,” that which had been dedicated to Yahweh? That is, what if he comes to appreciate that he has inadvertently reneged on his whole-hearted devotion to Yahweh, chasing instead the “good life,” the “American dream,” or whatever you want to call it? (Don't look so pious: we've all been there.) He is to “**restore a holy offering to the priest** [read: Yahshua], **and add one-fifth to it.**” In other words, he is to unconditionally render his humanity to the service of Yahweh (just as Yahshua did). To fail to do so is to “**profane the holy offering.**”

THE TITHE

- (809) *The tithe is based on one's increase. “You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year.”* (Deuteronomy 14:22) We discussed what the Torah had to say about tithing in Chapters 10 and 11 of Volume I. Somehow, Maimonides missed much of the salient teaching on the subject, failing to reference significant passages (like this one in Deuteronomy 14:22-27) and shamelessly tilting what he did find to the advantage of the rabbinical class. So let's take the opportunity to examine Moses' recounting of the topic for the generation about to enter the Promised Land, with an eye toward filling in the spots we might have missed. The Hebrew word translated “tithe” is *'asar*, a verb derived from the number ten: i.e., to “tenth” something. Not coincidentally, its consonant root (that is, without the vowel pointing) is identical to *'ashar* (to be or become rich) and *'osher* (wealth or riches). Simply stated, the Israelites were instructed to tithe, that is, to render back to Yahweh one

tenth of whatever they had increased in their agricultural wealth, year by year.

We've seen this principle before, but it bears repeating: the tithe was based on the increase that Yahweh had *already* provided—past tense. The concept of “increase” seems simple enough, but there are some fascinating lessons in the linguistics of the word. *Tebua* indicates one's produce or increase, his harvest, gain, or yield. The word is sometimes used poetically in scripture, as when a personified “Wisdom” says, “**My fruit is better than gold, yes, than fine gold, and my revenue [*tebua*] than choice silver.**” (Proverbs 8:19) Or “**Great wealth is in the house of the righteous, but trouble is in the income [*tebua*] of the wicked.**” (Proverbs 15:6) It may seem strange at first glance, but *tebua* is based on the Hebrew word *bo'*, the fourth most oft occurring verb in the Old Testament. It means “to go in, arrive, come to, or enter,” as in “**Blessed is He who comes [*bo'*] in the name of Yahweh.**” (Psalm 118:26) The “increase” that Yahweh has provided us, then, is all prophetic on some level of the ultimate expression of benefit to us—our Messiah. It is only fitting that we reciprocate the blessing, as we've been instructed to do.

One further thought: I was raised a city kid, but as the Last Days approach, my wife and I are trying to become “country folk” of sorts, hoping to be a bit less dependent on “the system” for the basic necessities of life. So we're planting fruit trees, growing veggies in back yard gardens, and so forth. Some like-minded friends of ours pointed out that some of the things they've planted—potatoes, for example—are expected (according to the research) to yield an increase of “ten times” what has been planted. It struck all of us, more or less simultaneously, that this says it all: *we invest by planting something in the ground. Yahweh provides a tenfold increase. Then He asks us to render back to Him only as much we were prepared to invest for ourselves in the first place—leaving us ninety percent richer in the bargain. And that's only after our crop has come in.* Who wouldn't want a God who works like this to run the world?

- (810) *Tithes and offerings are to benefit giver and recipient alike. “You shall eat before Yahweh your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to revere Yahweh your God always.”*

(Deuteronomy 14:23) Three parties were always involved in the Torah's giving process: (1) the giver—the one who had been blessed, whose flocks, herds, and crops had “increased” and who wished to answer Yahweh's provision with obedience; (2) the recipient—the one to whom the tithes or offerings were given: Yahweh Himself; and (3) the Levites—

the ones whom God designated as surrogate recipients, set apart from Israel with no inheritance of their own—a subset of which was the priesthood who ministered before Yahweh at the Tabernacle. The same sort of symbiotic triad exists today: Yahweh blesses the giver, who in turn shows his thankfulness to Him by supplying the needs of people He has put in his way—people whom He has designated as recipients.

I believe that's why Yahweh made a point of bringing all three parties together when the gift was given. The worshipper didn't *send* his tithe; he *brought* it. Three times a year every man in Israel was to make the short journey to "the place where Yahweh chooses to make His name abide," where the Tabernacle (read: the Plan of God) stood. Offerings like the *selem*, the firstborn offering, and the token of the tithe, were to be shared by the worshipper, the priests, their families, and Yahweh Himself (through the fat burned upon the altar). It was a big party. Everyone benefited; everyone was blessed. And today, even though there's no temple or priesthood, this triad of blessing still holds true: Yahweh blesses His people by providing them with "all things that pertain to life and godliness." We then respond in thanksgiving by supporting those few who have been precluded by God's express calling on their lives from earning a living in the normal manner—or those who find themselves in material need through no fault of their own—with gifts which will (or at least *should*) be seen as divine mercy by those whose lives they touch.

Any firefighter will tell you that a blaze can be extinguished by removing any one of its three components—heat, fuel, or oxygen. The influence of the Spirit of God can also be quenched (see I Thessalonians 5:19) by removing just one leg of the giving triad—Yahweh (the Heat), the giver (the oxygen, for he as a believer is indwelled with God's Spirit), or the surrogate recipient (Levites, i.e., God's servants and the needy "opportunities" He places in our path)—the "fuel" of our motivation. Obviously, nothing happens if nothing is given: the fire of testimony dies out if believers don't tangibly demonstrate their thankfulness. Yahweh is "removed" from the giving triad if our alms are given with the wrong spirit or motive (compulsion, self-aggrandizement, guilt, etc.). And what if the fuel turns out to be non-combustible? If the one receiving the offerings is inert to God's word, the flame of God's love will smolder and die, failing to provide its light and warmth. (Examples: an apostate cleric out to line his own pockets; a big "charity factory" that's more a business than a ministry; any number of "causes," worthy or otherwise, that aren't in line with Yahweh's agenda—Saving harp seals and spotted owls is a fine thing, I suppose, but not at the expense of human souls.)

- (811) *Tithes are not restricted to payment in kind.* **“But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where Yahweh your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when Yahweh your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which Yahweh your God chooses.”** (Deuteronomy 14:24-25) It wasn’t always practical to bring a tenth of the *actual* increase to Yahweh. If you had forty acres of wheat fields or grape vines, the weight of ten percent of your harvest could be far more than your family could carry to Jerusalem. So Yahweh provided a practical alternative: sell the crop (something you were probably planning to do with the other ninety percent anyway) and bring the cash proceeds to the Tabernacle. Today, of course, we are typically paid in money (i.e., some form of symbolic wealth that the society agrees has a specific value—in stark contrast to the barter system in common use in the bronze age). The “money” the early Israelite would have used, unlike ours, had intrinsic value of its own, being made of gold or silver, not paper and promises (or the more cynical analysis: debt and delusion). Nevertheless, the principle is the same: the tithe may be “laundered,” exchanged for its equivalent in some other form than that in which the giver’s increase in wealth was originally received. Use your imagination—but don’t enlist this precept as a way to rationalize *not* tithing. If you’re not thankful, if you don’t trust God to meet your needs, then don’t tithe—don’t give at all. Yahweh doesn’t need or want your money.
- (812) *Enjoy tithing.* **And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before Yahweh your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household.”** (Deuteronomy 14:26) When the worshipper showed up in Jerusalem (or wherever the Tabernacle was at the time) to present his tithe, a token amount of it was used to celebrate before Yahweh. The worshipper’s family and the priests would get together and have a big barbecue—a party in honor of the God who provided the “increase” in the first place. They didn’t spend the whole tithe, you understand, for it was the remuneration of the Levites, and through them, the priests and the poor. But it is significant that the very first thing the money was to be used for was to facilitate the rejoicing of the community in recognition of God’s bounty. That should tell us something about Yahweh’s priorities. Why does God love a “cheerful giver?” (cf. II Corinthians 9:7) Because He wants us to **“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”** (Philippians 4:4)

You may be thinking to yourself, *“Easy for him to say. He’s got it made—lives in a nice house, drives a nice car, has a wife who’s stuck by him through thick and thin for forty years, and gets to sit around all day writing lofty platitudes about this God he serves. But I just lost my job, my spouse left me, my dog hates me, the truck won’t start, and I’m so broke I can’t even pay attention. And God wants me to rejoice? Yeah, picture that.”* I’ve got a better idea: let’s let the prophet Zechariah “picture that.” Here he’s talking about Yahshua’s Millennial kingdom, and the restoration of Israel subsequent to their national repentance. They *need* to be restored, Yahweh says, because **“For thus says Yahweh of hosts: ‘Just as I determined to punish you when your fathers provoked Me to wrath,’ says Yahweh of hosts, ‘And I would not relent, so again in these days I am determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear.”** (Zechariah 8:14-15) How does He intend to “do good” to them? By turning their mourning into gladness, their sorrow into rejoicing. Where they used to fast and weep on the anniversaries of their greatest national tragedies, they will now, under Yahshua, rejoice! **“Thus says Yahweh of hosts: ‘The fast of the fourth month [commemorating the severe famine during the Babylonian siege], the fast of the fifth [the destruction of Solomon’s temple], the fast of the seventh [the treachery and flight into exile of Judah’s royal family], and the fast of the tenth [the commencement of Nebuchadnezzar’s siege against Jerusalem], shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.”** (Zechariah 8:19)

You think *you’ve* got trouble? You don’t *feel* like rejoicing? Try walking in Israel’s rebellious shoes for a while. But as rough as their road had been, when they finally come to terms with what Yahweh has done for them (and for us), their mourning will be turned into thankful celebration. And that’s why rejoicing is to accompany our giving. In the end, our giving is nothing more or less than a picture—a reflection—of God giving to us. It is, like so many things in the Torah, a symbol of a greater reality, a means Yahweh employs to teach us about Himself. As Paul says, **“The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”** (Galatians 3:24)

- (813) *Do not forget who and what the tithes are for. “You shall not forsake the Levite who is within your gates, for he has no part nor inheritance with you.”* (Deuteronomy 14:27) Yahweh’s structuring of Israelite society is kind of a dare—with a lesson attached. We begin with a hunk of Land and thirteen tribes (including Joseph’s double portion). But the Land is not divided up among all thirteen, but only twelve—the tribe of Levi has been removed from the pool. Why? So Israel can demonstrate their trust in Yahweh—

who had *already* proved Himself worthy of their trust, in spades. He's challenging them to be good stewards of what He's already given them.

If you do the math, God is telling each tribe that instead of giving them 100% of their inheritance, He's giving them each 108.3%—thirteen shares divided twelve ways. The land, moreover, is a gift, something they didn't have before and for which they didn't pay. All they have to do is receive it in faith. (Yes, there are battles to be fought, but Yahweh has promised to fight their battles for them, if only they'll trust Him and keep themselves separate from the nations they're displacing, nations who have forfeited their right to the Land through their abominable satanic worship practices.)

For all practical purposes, then, each of the twelve tribes is getting its own piece of land, plus 8.3% of Levi's land to hold for them in trust. So (for you bean counters out there), all He's really asking of them in the law of the tithe is 1.7% of *their* annual increase. Bear in mind that *all* crops that grow on their lands are due entirely to the provision of Yahweh. In fact, He provides for all His creatures, including sinful man, without discrimination, rarely interfering (and then only with good reason and ample warning) with the natural processes He ordained at creation. As Yahshua said, “[Your Father in heaven] makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matthew 5:45) Does any of this sound unfair or harsh to you? Does it sound at all like the caricature of a wrathful, vindictive, demanding God the world tries to paint? Yahweh says, “Give me *only* what I've caused to grow on the land that by all rights should have gone to my servants the Levites, plus less than two percent of that with which I've blessed you on your own land—land I gave you. If nothing grows, you owe me nothing. But if you get bumper crops, remember where they came from and Who you have to thank for them.”

To put things in perspective, how loudly would you protest if the government suddenly announced that your *total* annual tax—including everything from income tax to Social Security to personal property and sales taxes—would from now on be only 1.7% of your income? If you made \$50,000 a year, you'd owe only \$850. Think you could live with that? Apparently, the tax rate during Yahshua's Millennial kingdom will be somewhere in this neighborhood: “**This is the tax you must give to the prince: one bushel of wheat or barley for every sixty you harvest, one percent of your olive oil, and one sheep for every two hundred in your flocks in Israel. These will be the grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings that will make atonement for the people who bring them, says the Sovereign Yahweh.**” (Ezekiel 45:13-15 NLT) It's amazing how efficient government could be if it

wasn't spending your money on armed forces and police, disaster relief, welfare, social security, or interest on the national debt. In the Messiah's kingdom, none of those things will be needed.

And the Levites? How do they figure into all of this? Ask yourself this: what has Yahweh left in "trust" with us in the present age? If the Israelites were to act as trustees for the Levites' share of the national wealth, what have we believers in the church age been given for safekeeping? The answer is prophesied in the Levites' job description, that with which they were tasked instead of being given farmland in Israel: they were "appointed over the Tabernacle of the Testimony" and its furnishings (cf. Numbers 1:50). They were to carry it forth and encamp around it. The Tabernacle, as we have seen, is a multi-faceted metaphor for the Plan of God. So the neo-Levites are those who carry forth His Plan in today's world, who announce it, advocate it, and guard it. And who are represented by the "tribes" who were to support these Levites with the 8.3% of the "increase" on land that was a gift to begin with? These are all the believers who benefit from the labors and dedication of the neo-Levites, the new servants of God. I'll leave it to you to figure out which group you belong to, if either. But remember this: the Levites in turn tithed to the priests, who are (on another level) a symbol for believers in general. Bottom line: we are *all* to be invested in God's work, one way or another. This is no place for bystanders, innocent or otherwise.

OFFERINGS FOR CLEANSING

- (814) *Cleansing is neither free nor priced out of reach. "If [a woman who has given birth] is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons—one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean."* (Leviticus 12:8) It is never Yahweh's agenda to cause us financial hardship. But in hundreds of different ways, He instructs us that our cleansing, our atonement, is not free. In fact, it's so expensive only He could pay the ultimate price to reconcile us to Himself. Our sacrifices, then, are but shadows. We could neither comprehend nor identify with His selfless act if our purification cost us nothing. So here, the ritual cleansing of a poor woman who has given birth, something that would normally have entailed the sacrifice of a lamb, is given a mercifully inexpensive alternative. Two doves or pigeons—far less costly than a lamb—may be sacrificed instead. One was to be used as a burnt offering—pure homage to Yahweh—and the other sacrificed as a sin offering.

The classic example of this precept in practice, of course, is Mary, the mother of Yahshua. She was so poor she couldn't have paid for a lamb if her life depended on it (the wise men with their gold, frankincense, and myrrh were still a long way off), but she and her husband Joseph did manage to buy a couple of turtledoves, as required in the Torah and recorded in Luke 2:24. (The odd Roman Catholic notion that Mary was sinless is proved false here: one of the doves was brought as a *chata't*—a *sin* offering.) The irony is, as it turned out, she actually *had* “brought a lamb,” the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” More ironic still, since she couldn't pay for a lamb, the Lamb paid for her.

- (815) *We are declared clean before Yahweh, not before men. “And on the eighth day he [the cleansed leper] shall take two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and one log of oil. Then the priest who makes him clean shall present the man who is to be made clean, and those things, before Yahweh, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.”* (Leviticus 14:10-11) In Mitzvah #578, I referred briefly to the passage that will take us though to the end of this chapter. There and in the surrounding mitzvot, Maimonides was busy skirting the core issues concerning the Law of leprosy, spelled out in Leviticus 13 and 14. If you'll recall, the Israelite who had contracted leprosy and had been healed was to go before the priest to be pronounced clean, offering certain sacrifices. Now it's time to get into the details concerning these offerings. I should reiterate right up front that the phrases “**makes him clean**” and “**to be made clean**” are grossly misleading translations. The verb here is *taher*, and the connotation is that the leper (who has *already* been healed—Hebrew: *rapha*) is not *made* clean through this ceremony, but is rather being *pronounced* or *declared* to have been cleansed.

Leprosy, if you'll recall, is the Torah's metaphor for spiritual sickness, of which there are dozens of different permutations in our world—reflected in the wide variety of ailments and symptoms discussed in Leviticus. There was a formula involving cedar, hyssop, and scarlet that the leper was to follow during the first seven days of the cleansing procedure that verified his healing—the seven days prophetically referring to what happens to cleanse us during our mortal lifetimes. This precept picks up where we left off—on the eighth day—which I believe indicates that which follows our mortal lives: the eternal state. Our text provides a summary of what is to be offered (all of which, one way or another, speaks of Yahweh's cleansing work on our behalf through Yahshua the Messiah and the Holy Spirit.) We'll discuss each of these elements in turn as we proceed. For now, however, notice the circumstances of the ceremony.

The ex-leper, the one who has already been healed and is in the process of being pronounced clean, is presented by the priest to Yahweh at the door of the Tabernacle. To anyone attuned to what these symbols mean (as we all should be by this time) the ramifications are breathtaking.

We were once afflicted by a spiritual disease, one that kept us alienated from God and His people, made us odious to those around us, and would have, if left untreated, killed us in the end. We were brought to the priest—our great High Priest, Yahshua, who examined our affliction and verified that we were indeed spiritually ill. By Law, we were then required to live outside the camp, isolated from God’s people. Worse, we searched the Torah in vain for a cure, for no remedy is to be found in the Law. It’s not until we encounter the Messiah, Yahshua, that we are healed. Now, and only now, does the Law become of use to us, for it is at this point—*after we’ve been healed*—that its provisions facilitate reconciliation with Yahweh and His Congregation.

First, during our mortal lives (the first “seven days”) the priest who once declared us unclean (Yahshua) condescends to go to where we have been exiled, for we can’t legally approach Him in our ritually unclean state. Two clean birds are brought. One is slain within an earthen vessel over running water—a transparent metaphor of Yahweh being clothed in mortal humanity in the person of Yahshua, according to the living Word of God, and then sacrificed on our behalf. The priest then takes cedar wood (a symbol of our irrational pride), hyssop (our irrelevance apart from Yahweh) and scarlet thread (a picture of the indelible stain of our defilement), and dips them along with the second bird (the living one) into the blood of the slain bird. Finally, he sprinkles the blood on us (the cleansed lepers) and releases the live bird to enjoy its freedom. In other words, Yahshua has died so that we might freely live. He has taken our pride, our irrelevance, and our sin with Him to the tomb.

But now we come to the eighth day, the eternal state, where we, the cleansed lepers, are brought to stand before Yahweh. Who brings us? Our High Priest, Yahshua, who by virtue of his sacrifice enjoys unlimited and unfettered access to the throne of God. (He *is* God, of course, but for the purpose of this illustration, He plays the part of our advocate and intermediary.) He stands beside us and declares that we are no longer defiled, leprous outcasts, but have been cleansed, made well, rendered fit to join the Congregation of Yahweh. Where does all this take place? At the doorway to the Tabernacle, which speaks in detail of the Plan of God we have followed—the *only* way God has provided for us to reach Him. And Yahweh sees us standing in clean, white linen garments in the

company of His Son, and asks (though He knows the answer) “What gives you the right to stand before Me?” And we (because we’ve been coached) reply, “I’ve brought **‘two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and one log of oil,’** all of which represent Yahshua Your Son, Your Spirit, Your sustenance. It is only by virtue of the blood of His sacrifice that we stand before You, cleansed and whole.” And Yahweh smiles and says, “Good answer. Welcome, my children.” Or something like that.

- (816) *Use the first lamb as a trespass offering in the cleansing process.* **“And the priest shall take one male lamb and offer it as a trespass offering, and the log of oil, and wave them as a wave offering before Yahweh. Then he shall kill the lamb in the place where he kills the sin offering and the burnt offering, in a holy place; for as the sin offering is the priest’s, so is the trespass offering. It is most holy. The priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering, and the priest shall put it on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.”** (Leviticus 14:12-14) The first male lamb is an *asham*, or trespass offering. If you’ll recall from Volume I Chapter 12, the *asham* was offered up for our mistakes, our inevitable lapses in holiness (in contrast to our bad behavior, which was covered via the *chata’t*, or sin offering; see Precept #818). The *asham* is acknowledgment of our fallen state, the human condition, a recognition that our most sincere efforts and dedicated devotion will inevitably fall short of God’s perfect standard. And since we’re still in the context of “pronouncing lepers clean,” we by offering up the *asham* are declaring our reliance upon the blood of the Messiah to inoculate us against error, just as it atones for our sin.

Notice next what the priest is to do with the blood of the trespass offering: he is to apply some of it to the former leper’s right ear, right thumb, and right great toe. This, of course, is going to seem like *déjà vu* to the priest, for he experienced the very same procedure during his ordination ceremony (cf. Exodus 29:20—Precept #754). Anointing the right ear with the blood of the lamb is a picture of the former leper’s hearing and acceptance of the truth (whereas the left ear would presumably symbolize listening to lies or heeding false teaching). Similarly, the right thumb indicates doing the right thing (as opposed to the wrong thing), and the big toe on the right foot would mean walking in the right path, not in the way of the world. In a very real sense, this means that the cleansed one is being made into a priest himself, in a way. Remember, this is all after the fact. He is already cleansed of his spiritual disease; he has already (as the symbols of the first seven days of his

cleansing process attest) been set free from his pride, irrelevance, and the stain of sin. Throughout eternity, he will henceforth enjoy unrestricted access to the throne room of the Almighty Creator. Not bad for an old ex-leper.

- (817) *Use the oil to anoint the leper in the cleansing process. “And the priest shall take some of the log of oil, and pour it into the palm of his own left hand. Then the priest shall dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand, and shall sprinkle some of the oil with his finger seven times before Yahweh. And of the rest of the oil in his hand, the priest shall put some on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the blood of the trespass offering. The rest of the oil that is in the priest’s hand he shall put on the head of him who is to be cleansed. So the priest shall make atonement for him before Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 14:15-18) Olive oil, as we have seen so often before, is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. We’ve seen it used as fuel for the menorah (the only light source within the Tabernacle), as a component of the priestly anointing oil, and mixed with the flour of the *minha* grain offering. But we’ve never seen it used like this. As in the previous Precept, we see the former leper being made by the priest into something of a priest himself—not of the Levitical order, of course, but an anointed priest nonetheless. The handling of the oil here, unique in the Torah, tells us something previously unrevealed about the Holy Spirit it represents.

As with the blood of the trespass offering (indicative of atonement through Yahshua’s sacrifice), the oil is applied by the priest to the cleansed leper’s right ear, right thumb, and right big toe—this time telling us that his words, works, and walk are all to be influenced and illuminated by Yahweh’s Holy Spirit. What’s unexpected is how the priest is to go about doing this. He doesn’t just dip his right index finger into the *logh* of oil (a container or unit of liquid measure about half a liter in volume), but rather pours some of the oil from the *logh* into his *left* hand, and dips into that to perform his ritual.

Whoa! Isn’t the left side symbolic of being “wrong” or “evil” when contrasted with the right? Yes, it is. Hence the revelation: before God’s Spirit can be of use to the leper, it must be placed into a flawed, imperfect container—a human body, mortal, frail, and subject to disease and death. The human hand is a less-than-ideal container, to be sure: it doesn’t hold much liquid, what it does hold is easily spilled, and the oil, even if one is very careful, is apt to leak out through the fingers. But whose left hand is in view? It’s not the leper’s, but the priest’s. That is, Yahshua the Messiah, in order to function as High Priest on our behalf, had to assume a less-than-divine form, a frail vessel that was vulnerable to attack, pain,

weariness, and temptation—just like ours. Now you know why He was forever wandering off into the hills to commune with God—He was replenishing and refreshing the Spirit who dwelled within Him, without which His human body would not have been up to the task set before Him. The next time you’re tempted to view Yahshua’s first-century advent as somehow “easy” for Him because He was “God in the flesh, a super-human character with super-hero capabilities,” remember that. He got tired just like you do; He felt pain and struggled with temptation. He became a “left hand” so you could be anointed with the oil of Yahweh’s spirit.

But this is the eighth day, and we lepers have already been healed of our spiritual affliction. So most of the oil is used elsewhere. With His right index finger, the priest sprinkles the oil seven times before Yahweh, as if to say, “the ministry of the Holy Spirit is complete in this person’s life.” Then the rest of it—about a pint—is poured lavishly over the head of the celebrant, as if to declare that in the eternal state the cleansed one will find himself *soaked* in the Spirit of God—to coin a phrase: baptized in it!

- (818) *Use the second male lamb as a sin offering in the cleansing process.* **“Then the priest shall offer the sin offering, and make atonement for him who is to be cleansed from his uncleanness.** (Leviticus 14:19) The second male lamb is to be offered as a sin offering, a *chata’t*, which is similar to the *asham* trespass offering, but this time the cleansed leper’s own sins, his personal lapses in behavior, are in view. The point of offering both types of sacrifices is that we are not only condemned by our fallen nature (making us incapable of avoiding the mistakes that prove us unworthy to stand in the presence of a holy God), but we’re also damned by our own sins—things we can’t logically blame on Adam, our own bites out of the forbidden fruit, as it were. This sin offering, as always, is predictive of Yahshua’s atoning work on Calvary. It is a blood sacrifice of an innocent male lamb—the symbology is hard to miss.
- (819) *Use the ewe lamb as a burnt offering in the cleansing process.* **“Afterward he shall kill the burnt offering. And the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. So the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be clean.”** (Leviticus 14:20) The last sacrificial animal listed in verse 10 is **“one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish.”** Although not specified here, this is the only candidate left for the burnt offering, or *olah*, called for in our present Precept. This conclusion is bolstered by the further instruction to bring **“three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering,”** for every *olah* was to include a *minha* grain offering mixed with oil, reminding the worshipper of the provision of Yahweh through

His Holy Spirit. Also, the fact that the lamb is a female this time stresses the only component of the Messiah's human constitution that gets passed on to His followers: the Holy Spirit of Yahweh that indwelt and empowered Him, and promises to do so for us as well.

Normally, the *olah* burnt offering was completely voluntary, a spontaneous statement of one's homage to Yahweh. But here it appears to be commanded as part of the process by which the leper is pronounced clean. What gives? Is God making the *olah* sacrifice a condition for the leper's cleansing? No. Remember when this is taking place: the "eighth day," i.e., *after* the leper has been healed of his spiritual disease. The "cure" was provided when Yahshua took our sins upon Himself. But if we are to be pronounced clean before Yahweh, we must choose to avail ourselves of the cure. After all, it is possible to ignore the gift of healing we've been given and choose to remain "outside the camp," living like the other lepers, even though we no longer have to. The Monty Python comedy troupe once did a parody of this very thing, a hilarious look at the dark side of the human condition. A leper is healed by Jesus, but all he can do afterward is complain that his lucrative career as a street beggar has been ruined by this unwanted intrusion into his life—I mean, who'd give alms to an *ex-leper*? Now if he wants to eat, he'll actually have to *work* for a living.

Another anecdote (this one historical) will illustrate what our Torah precept is saying. In Luke 17, we are given the story of ten lepers who were healed by Yahshua. But of the ten, only one—and a Samaritan at that—came back to thank his Benefactor. The other nine presumably scampered off to fulfill the letter of the Law, presenting themselves to the priests at the Temple. But this guy, who didn't even *have* the Law, fulfilled its spirit anyway with his reaction to Yahshua's kindness: "**When he saw that he was healed, [he] returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks.**" (Luke 17:15-16) This spontaneous outpouring of gratitude was the very *olah*, the burnt offering, that Yahweh had specified back here in Leviticus.

We are all lepers, and we have all been given the cure for our deadly condition. Who among us will (1) realize we've been healed, (2) return, i.e., turn around (read: repent), (3) publicly glorify God, (4) worship our Healer, and (5) give Him thanks? Only those who do will be pronounced clean before Yahweh on the eighth day, in the eternal state.

- (820) *Modify the leprosy cleansing procedure to accommodate the poor. "But if he is poor and cannot afford it, then he shall take one male lamb as a trespass offering to be waved, to make atonement for him, one-tenth of an ephah of fine*

flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, a log of oil, and two turtledoves or two young pigeons, such as he is able to afford: one shall be a sin offering and the other a burnt offering.” (Leviticus 14:21-22) As we saw above (Precept #814) with the Law of post-childbirth cleansing, it is never Yahweh’s intention to make His instructions an unbearable financial burden, though He does want us to know that our healing didn’t come cheap—it was purchased with the most precious substance known: the blood of an innocent Man. That being said (and notwithstanding the fact that not a single Israelite was cured of leprosy under the rules of the Torah until Yahshua arrived on the scene), the expense of providing three lambs was probably out of reach for most lepers. So, having established the principles and symbols for us to learn from, Yahweh provided a more affordable version of the cleansing rite as a merciful provision for the poor. Basically, the only difference is the substitution of one turtledove or pigeon for the male lamb of the sin offering, and another in place of the ewe lamb of the burnt offering (with a corresponding reduction in the amount of flour for the *minha*). Everything else appears to be the same.

“He shall bring them to the priest on the eighth day for his cleansing, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, before Yahweh. And the priest shall take the lamb of the trespass offering and the log of oil, and the priest shall wave them as a wave offering before Yahweh. Then he shall kill the lamb of the trespass offering, and the priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering and put it on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.” (Leviticus 14:23-25) The identical procedure as before (Precept #816) is followed with the lamb of the trespass offering. The same is true of the oil (Precept #817). “And the priest shall pour some of the oil into the palm of his own left hand. Then the priest shall sprinkle with his right finger some of the oil that is in his left hand seven times before Yahweh. And the priest shall put some of the oil that is in his hand on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of the right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the place of the blood of the trespass offering. The rest of the oil that is in the priest’s hand he shall put on the head of him who is to be cleansed, to make atonement for him before Yahweh.” (Leviticus 14:26-29) The difference for the poor man is the substitution of inexpensive turtledoves or young pigeons for the second and third lambs, the sin offering and the burnt offering. “And he shall offer one of the turtledoves or young pigeons, such as he can afford—such as he is able to afford, the one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, with the grain offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him who is to be cleansed before Yahweh. This is the law for one who had a leprous sore, who cannot afford the usual cleansing.” (Leviticus

14:30-32) Since atonement is the goal, blood must be spilled, for the life is in the blood.

Once again we are confronted with God's counterintuitive arithmetic. The cleansing (or the *pronouncement* of cleansing) has a cost associated with it, but that cost has no direct correlation to the severity of the disease itself. It doesn't matter if it was manifested with a tiny blemish, or your whole face was falling off. They both carry the same onus and the same curse. In a manner of speaking, all have contracted leprosy; all have fallen short of the glory God requires of us if we are to stand in His presence. But among us lepers, some of us have been given great riches, and some not so much. That is, some are blessed to live in societies where God's truth is freely available, where we can worship Yahweh openly and study His Word without fear of reprisal; others are not so lucky, for they inhabit a world of limited opportunities and suppressed truth. But blessed or not with such personal freedoms, all of us have been provided a cure for the spiritual sickness that condemns us. It is our choice to either accept and embrace the cure or not. The point of this Precept is simply that those of us blessed with opportunities to meet Yahweh openly are expected to respond in a manner consistent with our blessed status, while those who can enjoy only limited personal freedoms (or none at all) are expected to do only what they can "afford" to do. Some of us can shout the good news from the housetops; others can only scrawl their praise on the walls of the catacombs. But all of us, like the lone Samaritan leper, are expected to turn around and glorify God. We who do can look forward to an eternal anointing in the Spirit of the God who loves us.