

# The Owner's Manual

*What Every Christian should know about  
The Law of Moses*

Volume One:  
The 613 Laws of Maimonides

By

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## Instructions and Signs

It's one of the stickiest conundrums in Scripture: are we today supposed to keep the Mosaic Law, or aren't we? On the one hand, He gave Moses hundreds of specific instructions that govern everything from how to approach Almighty God to what to do if a wall develops a stain that won't go away. On the other hand, the New Covenant scriptures clearly teach that the Law is powerless to deliver us from the curse of sin. What does Yahweh want us to do?

Some today would say (with ample scriptural backing) that we are no longer expected to keep the Law—that Yahshua's sacrifice on Calvary did away with these requirements. Others would insist (with ample scriptural backing) that these are the unabrogated precepts of the Eternal God, recorded for our benefit and enlightenment, the observation of which is essential if we wish to lead a life pleasing to Yahweh.

A third group of believers—the vast majority—has only a vague idea that something called “the Law of Moses” or the “Torah” even exists. They have no clear concept of what it prescribes, what it will do for them, or what will happen if they don't “keep it.” As a former member of group three, whose daily life betrays an affinity to group one but whose conscience (or is that the Spirit?) constantly prods him toward group two, I have no facile answers for you. I'm convinced, however, that the solution will present itself if we prayerfully take a close look at the “Laws” themselves in light of the balance of scripture. The New Testament has quite a bit to say about how the Law of Moses functions in the post-resurrection world. Now and then in our study, we'll take a break from the list of “laws” to delve into relevant commentary from the Apostles, Prophets, and indeed, from Yahshua Himself.

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First, however, we need to define our terminology and discuss our sources. The Hebrew word we translate “law” is *torah*. Strong's defines it as: “a precept or statute, especially the Decalogue [the Ten Commandments] or Pentateuch [the five books of Moses]—law.” But there's more to it than that. Here's Baker and Carpenter's definition: “*torah*: a feminine noun meaning instruction, direction, law, the whole Law. It comes from the verb *yarah*, which has as one of its major

meanings, to teach, to instruct. The noun means instruction in a general way from God.... It is used regularly to depict priestly instruction in general or as a whole.... The term takes on the meaning of law in certain settings.... [It is] used as a summary term of various bodies of legal, cultic, or civil instructions.... The word can refer to a single law—for example, the law of the burnt offering.”

It is clear, then, that the spirit of the word *torah* leans less toward rigid legality than it does toward instruction. It is less a laundry list of dos and don'ts than it is a prescription for successful living—an Owner's Manual, if you will, directing us toward our Creator's intended purpose and function.

Perhaps stretching that metaphor a bit will help to clarify things. My car's owner's manual includes a "*torah*" that says I am to get the oil changed every 3,000 miles using a particular type of lubricant. If I do that "religiously" I will have "kept the law" of the oil change. But I have to keep the *whole* law. If I use the right oil but wait until I've driven 30,000 miles, or if I get the car lubed on schedule but use Aunt Jemima's Pancake Syrup instead of Mobil One, I have "broken the law" of the oil change, even though I have actually kept part of it. Now here's the question: who gets hurt if I break the law of the oil change? *I do*—I have shortened my engine's life to some degree or caused it to run at less than optimum efficiency. Thus breaking the "law" carries a penalty with it. But does "god" (in this case, the Chairman of General Motors) get hurt? No. Even if he were omniscient—somehow knowing that I'd gone past my 3,000-mile schedule—all he might feel would be sadness or disgust because in some distant way it's a poor reflection on him if my car falls apart in months instead of decades. Does he *want* me to follow the instructions? Of course he does. That's why they were provided. But they are there for *my* benefit, not his.

The foregoing metaphor is admittedly oversimplified. God's Torah goes far beyond keeping our bodies healthy. Quite a bit of it has no temporal value whatsoever, but is there purely for its instructional significance—its spiritual value. Do you remember the old movie *The Karate Kid*? The kid wanted to learn karate moves from the old master, but ended up out back waxing cars: *wax on, wax off*. He didn't realize until later that going through the motions of waxing the cars was in fact training him in martial arts maneuvers. Much of the Torah is like that. It's full of rituals, holidays, feasts, and offerings that don't seem to do much for anybody in the near term. As rules go, they're not as "practical" as (for example) the one instructing us not to eat buzzards. Rather, they're there to teach us specific things about Yahweh's plan of redemption, the depth of His love for us, and His schedule—His to-do list. They're prophecy, if you will, most of which was fulfilled in the atoning sacrifice of Yahshua the Messiah.

Because the Torah is less a list of rules than it is an instruction manual from our Maker, it should come as no surprise that coming up with a straightforward

inventory of all the “Laws of Moses” is easier said than done. Both Christians and Jews include the Pentateuch in their scriptures, but since Christians (to our detriment) pay comparatively little attention to the Torah, we will defer to the Jews in the matter of coming up with a definitive list. Have they done this? (Does the pope wear a funny hat?)

The most widely accepted listing is that of Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, a.k.a. Maimonides, a.k.a. the Rambam (1135-1204 A.D.). A physician from Moorish Cordoba, Maimonides eventually became a leader in the Jewish community in Cairo. He was deeply influenced by Aristotle and Greek thought in general. Maimonides authored the massive *Mishneh Torah*, a compilation of every conceivable topic of Jewish law, arranged by subject. It provided contemporary Jews with an easy-to-understand plain-language rendition of the prevailing view of the Torah’s meaning. The rabbis of his day, of course, didn’t appreciate the fact that the *Mishneh Torah* went a long way toward demystifying the Talmud—encroaching on their territory, as it were. There’s nothing like a good old-fashioned mystery religion to keep the sheeple in line and paying their salaries.

The *Babylonian Talmud* (in tractate Makkoth 23b) asserts that according to Rabbi Simlai, the Torah contains 613 *mitzvot*. (“*Mitzvot*” is the plural of *mitzvah*, meaning “precept,” from *tzavah*: “to command.”) Of these, 248 are *mitzvot aseh* (positive commandments)—equal to the number of bones in the human body (okay, so he missed it by a tad: an infant has 275 bones, and some of these fuse together as he grows, making a total of 206 in the adult human)—and 365 *mitzvot lo taaseh* (negative commandments)—equal to the number of days in the solar year. With the Midrash, the Talmud calculates that the numerical value (gematria) of the word Torah is 611, so one might (following this tortured line of reasoning) expect there to be 611 laws, or *mitzvot*. Au contraire! The Torah itself states that Moses transmitted the Law (presumably this first 611 *mitzvot*) from God to the Jewish people: “**Moses commanded a law for us, a heritage of the congregation of Jacob.**” (Deuteronomy 33:4). And God *Himself* directly delivered two more *mitzvot*—the first two of the Ten Commandments, phrased in the first Person—directly, written with His own finger upon tablets of stone. The grand total is thus  $611+2 = 613$ . Get used to this kind of convoluted, unfounded logic—a sure sign that the men foisting it upon us have something to hide. We’re going to see a lot of it in the coming pages.

Anyway, Maimonides accordingly formulated a list of precisely 613 laws comprising the “Jewish Law,” or *halakhah*. (Of course, if you worked at it, you could identify thousands. The 613 target is a transparently man-made construct.) Others have compiled similar lists, but that of Maimonides is considered the most “authoritative.” As we’ve seen, some *mitzvot* are positive (“do this”), and some are negative (“don’t do this”). Some apply only within Israel, some apply only to

specific populations or within specific historical timeframes, and some are universal. Some cannot be observed today because they relate to the Temple, its sacrifices and services (since the Temple does not exist at the present time). And the criminal procedures mandated in the Torah can't be performed because the theocratic state of Israel is no longer extant—and hasn't been for two and a half millennia. Anybody who tells you that he's keeping the Torah today is lying to you. It can't be done. Those Jews who claim to adhere to the Torah today are generally using Maimonides' list, not the Torah. They accept it as authoritative. Therefore, we will be using it as the roadmap for our study, a convenient structural skeleton to flesh out with Yahweh's actual instructions. The telling little differences and ominous gaps will become apparent as we proceed.

An excellent resource for all things “Judaic” is [www.jewfaq.org](http://www.jewfaq.org), home of “Judaism 101,” a vast repository of information on the subject. Its author, Tracey R. Rich, has some cogent things to say about the “keeping of the Law.” He writes, “Judaism is not just a set of beliefs about G-d [he means God, a title for deity translated from the Hebrew *El* or *Elohim*—heaven forbid he should use “God’s” actual name, Yahweh], man and the universe. Judaism is a comprehensive way of life, filled with rules and practices that affect every aspect of life: what you do when you wake up in the morning, what you can and cannot eat, what you can and cannot wear, how to groom yourself, how to conduct business, who you can marry, how to observe the holidays and Shabbat, and perhaps most important, how to treat G-d, other people, and animals. This set of rules and practices is known as *halakhah*. The word ‘halakhah’ is usually translated as ‘Jewish Law.’ A more literal translation might be ‘the path that one walks.’ The word is derived from the Hebrew root *heh-lamed-kaf*, meaning to go, to walk, or to travel.”

He continues: “Some non-Jews and non-observant Jews criticize this legalistic aspect of traditional Judaism, saying that it reduces the religion to a set of rituals devoid of spirituality. While there are certainly some Jews who observe halakhah in this way, that is not the intention of halakhah, and it is not even the correct way to observe halakhah. On the contrary, when properly observed, halakhah increases the spirituality in a person's life because it turns the most trivial, mundane acts, such as eating and getting dressed, into acts of religious significance. When people write to me and ask how to increase their spirituality or the influence of their religion in their lives, the only answer I can think of is: observe more halakhah. Keep kosher or light Shabbat candles; pray after meals or once or twice a day. When you do these things, you are constantly reminded of your faith, and it becomes an integral part of your entire existence.”

Just when he seems to be getting near the heart of Yahweh in the matter, Rich swerves off course. Yes, the mitzvot were designed to draw their observer into a closer relationship with Yahweh. But they were never intended to be an end in

themselves. The path to deeper spirituality is not to smother God's influence under a mountain of religious minutiae—it is, rather, to open your heart to God's will and teaching. Seeking for “religious significance” is the surest way to obfuscate the one-on-One relationship Yahweh is seeking to establish and maintain with us.

We can be drawn closer to Yahweh via the Torah only because it is *His* precepts, *His* instructions. So Mr. Rich's explanation of what constitutes the halakhah is truly heartbreaking: “Halakhah is made up of mitzvot from the Torah *as well as laws instituted by the rabbis and long-standing customs*. All of these have the status of Jewish law and all are equally binding.” I would beg to differ. For that matter, so would Yahshua: **“He answered and said to [the Pharisees and scribes], ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.’ He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.”** (Mark 7:6-9) I submit to you that “laws instituted by the rabbis and long-standing customs” carry no weight at all; only God's word counts. Thus although we will employ Maimonides' list of mitzvot as an organizational starting point, the Torah will be our sole authority in this study.

Does this mean that I think the scholars of Judaism can have nothing to bring to the party? Not necessarily. If and when a Jew acknowledges his Messiah, when he becomes a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, he is in a position to add depth to our knowledge of God's will. As Yahshua said, **“Every teacher of religious law who has become a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a person who brings out of the storehouse the new teachings as well as the old.”** (Matthew 13:52) The best example we have of this is undoubtedly the Apostle Paul. Therefore we will, from time to time, consult with this learned rabbi. His writings are our clearest expositions on how the Law of Moses relates to the practice of Christianity. As we shall see, they are a hand in a glove, two sides of the same coin, part A and part B of the spiritual epoxy that Yahweh has given us to hold our mortal lives together as we live here awaiting the return of His Messiah in glory.

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A few notes on our format: the order of this version of the Rambam's list is courtesy of Judaism 101; I find Mr. Rich's order and grouping system more logical than those of Maimonides (who listed affirmative and negative mitzvot in separate places, regardless of their subject matter). The mitzvot are not

necessarily listed in order of their importance (although there are some critically foundational entries near the top of the list). A summary of each rabbinical mitzvah is shown in italics at the beginning of the entry. These mitzvot use a pronoun (e.g. “His”) to identify Yahweh; I have replaced it with His actual self-revealed name. Each mitzvah is followed by the scripture(s) from the Torah that supports it, the words in bold. That’s the part you really want to pay close attention to. Following all of that is my commentary. I am using Strong’s (marked “S”) and Baker and Carpenter’s (“B&C”) Hebrew dictionaries (among others) to help us define the salient words. Be aware that I have taken the liberty of abridging their definitions as needed for clarity.

## GOD

- (1) *Know there is a God.* **“God spoke all these words, saying, ‘I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.’”** (Exodus 20:1-2, cf. Deuteronomy 5:6) The very first mitzvah is the most basic of all, and the heart of the First Commandment: the realization that there is indeed a supreme being who is personally involved in our lives. The rabbis suppressed an essential element of this, however, in refusing to acknowledge His name, Yahweh (or Yahuweh), a failing that is reflected in virtually every English translation, where He is erroneously called “The Lord.” The point is that the God who brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt is the One True God, whose self-revealed name, Yahweh (literally, “I Am”), indicates His eternal, self-existent nature. His provision of salvation extends beyond Israel: all of us can be “brought out of the house of bondage,” if only we will accept His gift. Yahweh is not only our Creator; He is our Emancipator. Moreover, the rabbinical emphasis on knowing that God exists, rather than knowing Him personally by name, sucks all the life out of the mitzvah. As James put it, **“You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!”** (James 2:19) It doesn’t do you much good to know *about* God if you don’t *know* Him.

However, once we come to terms with the fact that God exists and that we owe our existence and allegiance to Him, the obvious question—the question that precipitated this study and thousands like it—is: **“What does God want us to do?”** God Himself provided a succinct answer to this question when Yahshua said, **“This is what God wants you to do: Believe in the one he has sent.”** (John 6:28-29 NLT) Again, it’s not just acquiescence to the fact of His existence, but a trusting belief, a personal relationship. A child may be aware that his friend’s father exists, but he *believes in* his own father.

- (2) *Do not entertain thoughts of other gods besides Yahweh.* **“You shall have no other gods before Me.”** (Exodus 20:3) This is the payoff line of the first commandment, the whole point of Yahweh identifying Himself by name, so there would be no mistaking Him for other locally worshipped gods (Ba’al, for example, whose name, not coincidentally, meant “the Lord”). A “god” in this context, however, isn’t restricted to carved idols in Caanan: it is anything or anyone we place before Yahweh in our affections and devotion. And the “You” here isn’t restricted to Israel, though they would be the only people to be entrusted with His name for some time. He’s instructing all of us: worship Yahweh alone. Put nothing ahead of Him.
- (3) *Do not blaspheme.* **“You shall not revile God.”** (Exodus 22:28) There is a penalty for doing so: **“Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. And whoever blasphemes the name of Yahweh shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of Yahweh, he shall be put to death.’”** (Leviticus 24:15-16) “Revile” and “curse” are the same Hebrew word: *qalal*. It means “to be or to make light (literally swift, small, sharp, etc., or figuratively easy, trifling, vile)—to abate, bring into contempt, curse, or despise” (S). B&C say the verb means “to be slight, to be trivial, to be swift. The basic idea of this word is lightness. In it’s most simple meaning, it referred to the easing of a burden, lightening judgment, lessening labor, or lightening a ship.... When describing an event or a circumstance, it means trivial. In many instances it is used to describe speaking lightly of another or cursing another person, people cursing God, or God cursing people.” Blasphemy uses a different word, *naqab*, meaning “to puncture, to perforate, or figuratively, to libel—blaspheme, bore, curse, express, pierce, strike through.” (S)

Yahweh is being very specific here. He who thinks lightly of God, he who would shrug off the weight of Yahweh’s glory from his life, refusing to take Him seriously, shall bear (literally, lift or carry) his sin (*chet*: a crime or offense). The lack of appropriate reverence will *in itself* be a heavy burden to him, because man must bear one thing or another: love for Yahweh or the curse of sin. That’s why Yahshua invited us to **“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”** (Matthew 11:29-30) The “heavy burden” we put down when we become “yoked” with Yahshua is sin itself. If you yoke an impala with an ox, you *know* who’s going to be doing all the work.

In contrast, speaking out in direct opposition to Yahweh—*naqab*: libeling and verbally lashing out at Him—carries a more direct and

immediate punishment: death by stoning. This penalty was to be carried out by “the congregation,” that is, the children of Israel in their theocratic assembly, so the penalty cannot be meted out today. But the lesson is clear. Slandering Yahweh is a heinous offence, one worthy of death. The difference between *qalal* and *naqab* is that of spiritual indifference vs. false teaching—the first merely hurts us; the second endangers those around us—something Yahweh despises.

- (4) *Sanctify Yahweh’s Name.* **“I will be hallowed among the children of Israel. I am Yahweh who sanctifies you.”** (Leviticus 22:32) There’s an exchange or reciprocation here that gets lost in the English. “Hallow” and “sanctify” are the same word in Hebrew: *qadash*. It means, “to be clean (i.e., to make, pronounce or observe as clean, ceremonially or morally)—to appoint, consecrate, dedicate, hallow; to be or keep holy [that is, set apart], prepare, proclaim, purify, or sanctify” (S). B&C define it as “a verb meaning to set apart, to be holy, to show oneself holy, to be treated as holy, to dedicate, to be made holy, to declare holy or consecrated, to behave or act holy, or to dedicate oneself.” Gee, I guess we’d better look up “holy.” It’s a related word, *qodesh*, meaning a sacred place or thing—a consecrated, dedicated, or hallowed thing, holiness, sacredness; something set aside for sacred use, not to be put into common or profane use. Here’s what Yahweh is saying then: “I have set Israel apart for My sacred purpose—the salvation of the world through the atoning sacrifice of My Messiah, who will come through Israel. Therefore, it is essential that Israel in turn holds Me to be holy and sacred—not one god among many, but the sole deity of the universe.” There is also a prophetic aspect to this. When Yahweh says, “I *will be* hallowed among the children of Israel,” He means it. Though they have in fact turned their backs on Him for almost three millennia now, their eventual national repentance and restoration is predicted in hundreds of Old Covenant passages. It is, in fact, the most often repeated prophetic theme in the entire Bible.
- (5) *Do not profane Yahweh’s Name.* **“I am Yahweh. You shall not profane My holy name.”** (Leviticus 22:31-32) This is roughly the same thought as the previous mitzvah, “Sanctify His name” (#4), but stated as a negative. In the worst sort of misinterpretation imaginable, the rabbis eventually twisted this to say in effect, “You shall not *use* My holy name (for fear of profaning it).” It’s like my “law-of-the-oil-change” metaphor: I could decide that the only way I could be absolutely sure of not exceeding the recommended mileage was never to start the engine. I would be keeping the “law,” of course, but in the process my car would become a useless piece of expensive junk to me—which is sort of what Judaism without Yahweh is to the Jews.

There are a few words we need to examine to get the full import of this. First, “name.” The Hebrew word is *shem*: “an appellation, as a mark or memorial of individuality; by implication honor, authority, character—name, renown, or report.” (S). It is what you are called, to be sure, but it also implies your reputation; it reflects your character. In the case of Yahweh, His *shem* speaks not of being our lord or owner, but of being eternally self-existent: it means “I am,” an infinitely more majestic concept. Thus by replacing “Yahweh” with “the Lord” in speech or writing, we *automatically* profane His holy name. And what does “profane” mean? The Hebrew *chahal* denotes “properly to bore, that is, by implication, to wound, to dissolve; figuratively to profane (a person, place or thing), to break one’s word, defile, pollute, prostitute, slay, sorrow, stain, or wound” (S). Not a very pretty word. But when we hold Yahweh’s name and character to be something common, something less than sacred to us, we do all these things to his name. We can’t wound Yahweh, of course, but we can defile His *shem*, His reputation, among our fellow men—most dramatically if we deny His very existence by refusing to speak His name. That’s what this mitzvah warns against. How horribly ironic it is that the very people tasked by Yahweh to transmit His name to the world have systematically profaned it through neglect.

- (6) *Know that Yahweh is One.* **“Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one!”** (Deuteronomy 6:4) When Christians sing of a “God in three persons, Holy Trinity,” knowledgeable Jews think of this verse and throw up their hands in disgust—as well they should. Maybe it’s semantic nitpicking, but the fact is, there is *one* God, not three divine persons. His name is Yahweh. The Holy Spirit living within us is Yahweh. And the Messiah, Yahshua of Nazareth, is Yahweh’s human manifestation—voluntarily bereft of one or more of the dimensions that ordinarily make His deity impossible for mortal man to comprehend or relate to. The word for “one” here is the Hebrew *’echad*, meaning “united, alike, alone, altogether, first, one, only, or together.” (S) This word makes it clear that God is not restricted to a single form or manifestation: He is a “unity,” not a “singularity.” So it’s clear that calling the Messiah Immanuel—“God with us”—is not a problem in Yahweh’s theology. Yahshua and Yahweh are in no way separate “persons”: He is united, together, alone as deity—Yahweh is One.
- (7) *Love Yahweh.* **“You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”** (Deuteronomy 6:5) In a fascinating historical account, the Bible records the deeds of one king of Judah who was said to have done this—just one, and it wasn’t David; it was Josiah. Read his story in II Kings 23. He was what we today would call a religious extremist, a narrow-minded, intolerant, and politically incorrect radical fundamentalist who “turned to Yahweh” (verse 25) with every fiber of his being, doing

everything he could to keep his countrymen from following the false teaching prevalent in his day. According to this commandment, that's what we are supposed to do—every one of us. Yahshua identified this as the “first and great” commandment of the Torah, one of only two upon which all of the truth of scripture depended (see Matthew 22:36-40) I should note, however, that in the end, our love of Yahweh is an outgrowth of our personal relationship with Him; it's not a magic pill to cure the world's ills: Josiah's fervor did not permanently stem the tide of apostasy in Judah, and our corporate end is a prophetic *fait accompli* as well. We are not called to force people to behave themselves; we are called to love Yahweh.

- (8) *Fear Yahweh.* “**You shall fear Yahweh your God.**” (Deuteronomy 10:20, cf. Deuteronomy 6:13) The obvious question is, what does “fear” mean—to be “afraid of,” or to “respect”? Actually, it's both, though leaning heavily toward the latter. The Hebrew word is *yare*. Strong's defines it: “to fear; morally to revere; causatively to frighten—affright, be or make afraid, to dread, (to be held in) reverence.” B&C expand this: “A verb meaning to fear, to respect, to reverence, to be afraid, to be awesome, to be feared, to make afraid, to frighten.” The Greek verb *phobeo* (Luke 12:5) carries exactly the same dual connotation.

In light of the command to love Yahweh and in view of His constantly demonstrated love toward us, it's obvious that God doesn't want dread or terror to define our relationship. So we naturally lean toward the “respect” or “reverence” definitions. But there's more to it. I think the key to the conundrum is in the common New Testament characterization of Yahweh as our “heavenly Father.” (He is called our Father very few times in the Old Covenant scriptures. In Isaiah 9:6, the Messiah is clearly in view: “**Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**” And in Deuteronomy 32:6 the Messianic act of redemption is stressed: “**Do you thus deal [perversely] with Yahweh, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?**”) If we see our relationship with Yahweh as small children (ideally) see their loving fathers, an accurate picture of “fear” emerges: Father is awesome, big and powerful; He uses His power to protect us and provide for us, so it's obvious that He loves us. His authority is unquestioned, and as long as we respect that authority we will see nothing but His “good side.” But if we defy Him, he will become angry and raise His voice (a terrifying prospect), and if we willfully disobey Him, He might even spank us (and believe me, brothers and sisters, we *don't* want that to happen!)

- (9) *Do not put the word of God to the test.* “**You shall not tempt [i.e., test] Yahweh your God as you tempted Him in Massah.**” (Deuteronomy 6:16) What happened

at Massah? In Exodus 17 we read that a few months after they left Egypt, Yahweh led the Israelites to Rephidim, where there was no water to drink (or so they thought). The prospect of dying of thirst should have led them to enquire of Yahweh. But instead, it turned them into a riotous mob threatening to stone Moses. So God instructed him to take some of the elders (as witnesses) to Horeb (which means “desolate”) and strike the rock there. Moses did this, and an abundant water supply gushed out—plenty for a million thirsty Israelites and their flocks. The people were saved, but Moses named the place Massah (literally, “temptation”) to commemorate their lack of faith.

The incident sheds some badly needed light on what it means to “tempt” or “test” Yahweh. Note first that they didn’t simply inform Moses that there was no water in that place so he could petition Yahweh about it. They angrily questioned his motives (verse 3) while ignoring the fact that Yahweh Himself, who had recently demonstrated His power on their behalf a dozen times, was leading them. Their sandals were still squishy from their little stroll across the floor of the Red Sea and they had dined sumptuously on quail and manna-cotti, but they still didn’t bother to ask God for help. Second, notice that this all happened *before* the “Law” was given, so failure to keep the rules of the Torah was not what “tried” God. Third, the incident (as we can see in retrospect) was a dress rehearsal for the crucifixion of the Messiah: by striking God’s Rock (see I Corinthians 10:4) before the elders of Israel, life was given to the world. The next time they came to a similar situation, Moses was instructed to *speak* to the rock (Numbers 20:7-13) but he lost his temper and struck it a couple of times with his rod instead—goofing up the picture of how we can now petition the Rock of our Salvation in prayer.

The word “tempt” is from the Hebrew *nasah*: to test, try, prove, or assay. At issue is our faith: we are not to demand that Yahweh perform for us—to show us signs and wonders because of our unbelief, just to prove that He’s there. Yahshua flatly stated that only an “evil and adulterous generation” would ask for such a sign. In the context of established belief, however, it’s another matter: the example of Gideon’s fleece (Judges 6:36-40) demonstrates the proper attitude. And in Malachi 3:8-10 Yahweh specifically challenges Israel to test Him in the matter of tithing—again, a testing based on trust, not unbelief.

- (10) *Imitate Yahweh’s good and upright ways.* **“Yahweh will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of Yahweh your God and walk in His ways.”** (Deuteronomy 28:9) As is often the case with these mitzvot, the rabbis have tweaked the words of God to say

something different, something that fits their agenda a bit better. Yahweh didn't actually tell them to imitate or emulate Him. We are to be godly, not god-like. What does it mean to "walk in His ways?" *Halak* is a "verb meaning to go, to come, to walk. This common word carries with it the basic idea of movement: the flowing of a river, the descending of floods, etc. The word is also used metaphorically to speak of the pathways (i.e., behavior) of life." (B&C) "Ways" picks up on the metaphor. *Derek* means "path, journey, way, the path that is traveled. The word may refer to a physical path or road or to a journey along a road, but it more often refers metaphorically to the pathway of one's life, suggesting the pattern of life, whether obedient and righteous or wicked and in darkness." (B&C)

As we go through life, then, we are to follow the path Yahweh has clearly set before us in His Scriptures. Significantly, the text for this mitzvah was taken from a long and painful recounting of how Israel would be blessed only if they "walked in His ways" and cursed if they did not—a list of dozens of very specific consequences for national obedience or unbelief. The subsequent history of Israel demonstrates that they stubbornly refused to "walk in His ways" through most of their existence, and they suffered greatly as a result. It didn't have to be like that.

## TORAH

- (11) *Honor the old and the wise.* **"You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am Yahweh."** (Leviticus 19:32) The children of Israel didn't really have to be told to honor their elders. They normally did that anyway; it was engrained into their traditions. (We have regrettably forgotten this in today's youth-oriented culture.) What we need to notice here is that Yahweh connected respect for our fathers with reverence for Himself. Why do you suppose our Creator built us with such a convoluted reproductive process? Why a mother *and* a father, requiring such sophisticated plumbing, such a long gestation period, and such a prolonged and nurture-intensive childhood? It's because He wanted us to have the same deep kind of parent-child relationship with Him. If we see him merely as "Lord" we will miss the loving, mentoring aspects of a relationship between a father and son, or between a teacher and pupil. Wisdom is a hard-won commodity; we should value it above strength or beauty. And the wisdom of Yahweh is to be valued above the best human understanding.
- (12) *Learn the Torah and teach it.* **"These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."** (Deuteronomy 6:7) Deuteronomy is a series of sermons Moses

delivered to the nation of Israel immediately before they were to enter the Promised Land. It is a restatement and summation of the instructions Yahweh had given them during the wilderness wanderings. This admonition comes directly on the heels of two of the most fundamental mitzvot: to know that God is One (#6) and to love Him (#7), and it comes shortly after a full recounting of the Ten Commandments. Moses is saying that God's word should not be an inconvenient interruption to their daily lives (i.e., something to be practiced only on Sabbaths and holidays), but rather woven into the very fabric of their existence, second nature, a way of life. It is to be discussed, taught, and meditated upon, as much a part of life as the air we breathe. Moreover, we are not to leave our children's education concerning Yahweh's commandments in the hands of others, but we are to teach them with our own lips and demonstrate them with our own actions.

- (13) *Cleave to those who know Him.* **“You shall fear Yahweh your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast.”** (Deuteronomy 10:20) Confused? You should be. The passage says to cleave to Yahweh, not to “those who know Him.” What gives? This is a case of man's law attempting to supersede God's. The Talmud, believe it or not, states that cleaving to scholars is equivalent to cleaving to God. *Oh really?* This phony mitzvah might have a shred of credence (not really) if it were coming from someone other than the scholars themselves; as it is, it's merely a confession of damnable arrogance, the kind Yahshua railed against in Mark 7:6-9, quoted above. So let's start over: *Cleave to Yahweh.* Yeah, that's more like it. “Cleave” is the Hebrew *dabaq*: “to cling to, join with, stay with. It is used of something sticking to or clinging to something else.... It depicts relationships created as an act of joining together, to follow.” (B&C) We are to stick to Yahweh as if our lives depended on it (because they do), following wherever He leads us. That being said, let us not forget the admonition: **“Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”** (Hebrews 10:24-25) If we're all cleaving to Yahweh, we'll all be together, won't we?
- (14) *Do not add to the commandments of the Torah, whether in the Written Law or in its interpretation received by tradition.* **“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for Yahweh your God is testing you to know whether you love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”** (Deuteronomy 13:1-3) The whole second half of this mitzvah is a perfect example of what the first half (the part actually supported by the scriptural

text) is warning against. The mitzvah should simply read: *Do not add to the commandments of the Torah.* Period. Do not add other scriptures (e.g. the Talmud) or “interpretation received by tradition,” a.k.a. the Oral Law (e.g. the Mishna). And what was supposed to happen to the one who added to the commandments of the Torah? **“That prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from Yahweh your God.”** (Deuteronomy 13:5) The rabbis who took it upon themselves to declare their interpretations of equal (or greater) weight with Yahweh’s words should have been stoned on the spot.

- (15) *Do not take away from the commandments of the Torah.* **“If there arises among you a prophet [who says], ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet.”** (Deuteronomy 13:1-3) This is the converse of the previous mitzvah, supported by the same scripture (edited here, ironically—see #14). Yahshua gave a good example of how the Pharisees (read: rabbinical scholars) did precisely that. **“He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’ and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban’—(that is, a gift to God), ‘then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.’”** (Mark 7:9-13) You have to read between the lines to see what’s happening here: the rabbis had devised a “wealth preservation” scheme that *legally* allowed selfish Jews to shirk their budget-bending family responsibilities, in direct defiance of the spirit of the Torah. Well did Yahweh say through the prophet Hosea, **“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.”** (Hosea 4:6). This was written to people who thought that by keeping their own traditions they were observing the “law of their God.” How wrong you can be.
- (16) *Every person shall write a scroll of the Torah for himself.* **“Yahweh said to Moses... [v.16] ‘Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel.’”** (Deuteronomy 31:19) Once again, the rabbis have seen something that just isn’t there—thereby adding to the Torah (see #14). As I said, the book of Deuteronomy is a series of sermons, and Moses had been the one preaching them. Here Yahweh was instructing Moses to write down for posterity what he had just finished saying—his obedience is recorded in verses 9, 22, and 24, and it’s confirmed by the obvious fact that we still have his words to this day. Yahweh uses the plural pronoun

“yourselves” because Moses is about to die: Joshua’s role is in view. God had just gotten through telling them how badly the children of Israel would fail in the coming years. The written record Moses and Joshua were to produce would remind future Jews that they had been warned in no uncertain terms to “cleave to Yahweh.” **“This song will testify against them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants.”** (Deuteronomy 31:21)

Okay, so it’s not a legitimate mitzvah (except for Moses and Joshua). Still, it seemed like a pretty good idea anyway for everybody to write down a copy of the Torah for themselves, doesn’t it? At first glance, maybe. But think about it. These were the children of ex-slaves. They had been wandering in the wilderness all their lives. The majority of them were semi-literate at best and illiterate at worst. (The “officers,” a select group mentioned in Numbers 11:16, were *shoter*, scribes, making it clear that the general population were not literate.) The last thing Yahweh wanted was to have a couple of hundred thousand error-packed parchments floating around. His words are precise, and Paleo-Hebrew was not the simplest language ever invented.

## SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

It’s no secret that Yahweh uses sign and symbols to communicate deeper truths than we would understand if He just stated everything in a matter-of-fact fashion. I believe, in fact, that most of the Torah is symbolic of something far greater than what appears on the surface: it all points, one way or another, to the coming of the Messiah in the role of our Redeemer. But the religious leaders of Yahshua’s day couldn’t see this. **“One day the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus’ claims by asking him to show them a miraculous sign from heaven. He replied, ‘You know the saying, “red sky at night means fair weather tomorrow, red sky in the morning means foul weather all day.” You are good at reading the weather signs in the sky, but you can’t read the obvious signs of the times! Only an evil, faithless generation would ask for a miraculous sign, but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah.’ Then Jesus left them and went away....”** The entire Torah had pointed directly to Him, but the religious leaders, being evil and faithless, couldn’t comprehend the signs God had already given them. Yahshua said He would offer only one more sign, that of the prophet Jonah: three days in the heart of the earth, followed by resurrection.

**“Later, after they crossed to the other side of the lake, the disciples discovered they had forgotten to bring any food. ‘Watch out!’ Jesus warned them. ‘Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’ They decided he was saying this because they hadn’t brought any bread. Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he said, ‘You have so little faith! Why are you worried about having no food? Won’t you ever understand? Don’t you**

remember the five thousand I fed with five loaves, and the baskets of food that were left over? Don't you remember the four thousand I fed with seven loaves, with baskets of food left over? How could you even think I was talking about food? So again I say, beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' Then at last they understood that he wasn't speaking about yeast or bread but about the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (Matthew 16:1-12 NLT) In finally grasping the significance of the symbol Yahshua has used (yeast or leaven representing sin), the disciples had been given a lesson in the nature of the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees: a stubborn rejection of the signs Yahweh had *already* given them concerning their Messiah.

As we look at these signs then, let us not fall into the same trap. Let us dig beneath the surface to explore what Yahweh was teaching us through his signs.

(17) *Circumcise your male offspring.* "God said to Abraham: 'As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised (*mul*); and you shall be circumcised (*namal*) in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised (*Arel*) male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.'" (Genesis 17:9-12) "Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, saying: "If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child... on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.'" (Leviticus 12:1-3) The surgical removal of the foreskin of the male penis was said to be a sign of the covenant Yahweh made with Abraham. The eighth-day rule, by the way, is astounding confirmation that Yahweh knows how we're built because He built us. The blood's clotting mechanism for an infant doesn't fully stabilize until the eighth day after birth. The obvious question is: why would God require a surgical alteration to a part of the human male anatomy that any urologist will tell you was flawlessly—even ingeniously—designed to begin with? Some assert that there are hygienic advantages to circumcision, but the evidence for that is far from conclusive. Indeed, it may even result in a mitigation of sexual response to some small degree. So what gives?

The answer again is in the words themselves. The word used for the act of circumcision is *namal*: "to become clipped; to be cut down or off." (S)

But there is an entirely different word used for the state of *being* circumcised: *mul* is “a verb meaning to cut short, to cut off... To ‘circumcise the heart’ was to remove the hardness of heart and to love God. Used in the causative sense, the verb gives the meaning to cut off, to destroy.” (B&C) We gain a bit more insight when we consider the alternative. The word for “uncircumcised” is *arel*, which comes from a verb meaning “to consider uncircumcised, forbidden, to be exposed. It indicates setting aside or apart as not available for regular use.” (B&C) Circumcision, then, signified that the barrier of sin that separated us from Yahweh had been removed, cut off, destroyed—a process that involved blood and pain, but one that made us available for God’s use.

Paul alludes to this quintessential sign of God’s covenant with man: **“When you came to Christ, you were ‘circumcised,’ but not by a physical procedure. It was a spiritual procedure—the cutting away of your sinful nature. For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to a new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins. He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ’s cross. In this way, God disarmed the evil rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross of Christ.”** (Colossians 2:11-15 NLT)

It should also be noted that just as physical circumcision was an irreversible procedure (there was no way to regain or replace one’s foreskin), so is spiritual circumcision. When our sins are removed from us through our acceptance of the atoning power of the blood of the Messiah, there is no way our future sins can ever become part of us. Our sinful nature cannot be restored. It’s a strong argument for eternal security: once saved, always saved. The salient question becomes: are you indeed *mul*, or are you *arel* and faking it? Only an examination of our most private spiritual anatomy will tell the tale.

Because circumcision was to be sign, it was commanded to be implemented only by the people who were set apart to bear the signs: the Jews. In Acts 15, we are told quite plainly that gentile believers are not required to “become Jews” or to keep the mitzvot in the Torah (specifically including this one) as a precondition for following Yahshua. We will see this hundreds of times in the following pages: the children of Israel—and they alone—were set apart to bear the signs of Yahweh’s redemption throughout their generations. They are, through their rehearsal of the signs, the living testimony of Yahweh’s provision of life for all men. The gentile

believers, for their part, were to thankfully comprehend and heed what those signs meant, blessing the Jews for their role in delivering the message and the Savior to them.

- (18) *Put tsitzit on the corners of your clothing.* **“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of Yahweh and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. I am Yahweh your God.’”** (Numbers 15:37-41) Again, this is a sign through which Yahweh meant to convey an everlasting truth to the world, a sign the “children of Israel” alone were to bear. The word “tassels” is the Hebrew *tsiytsith*, or *tsitzit*, as it’s spelled nowadays. Yahweh Himself told us what this was all about. The tassels were to remind the wearers of His instructions (which is, not coincidentally, the whole point of this book). The idea was that an Israelite (being human) would be tempted to sin—to fall short of Yahweh’s holy standard—if he weren’t constantly reminded of God’s presence and provision for him. In other words, he might be tempted to take Yahweh lightly (see #3). So he was to attach these fringes with blue threads onto the corners of his garments. Every time the blue cord caught his eye, he would be reminded of Yahweh’s precepts.

Why blue? For one thing, it was almost the only game in town. Remember, the Israelites had no chemical or aniline dyes. The manmade part of their world was rather bland. Yellows were non-existent. The greens of nature weren’t stable as dyes. Their basic red pigment was iron oxide—a rusty brown, and scarlet or crimson (*toleah*) was apparently made from crushed crimson grubs—again, not a very vibrant color. But blue was doable—at a price. The cerulean mussel, the murex, yielded a blue or purple dye that was indelible and relatively bright. The terms blue and purple (Exodus 25:4) are both descriptive of a single ill-defined color derived from this source. Harvesting and processing the substance was a difficult and expensive proposition, however—thus for millennia purple was considered the color of royalty, who were the only people who could afford to wear it. Yahweh specified that a single thread in the *tsitzit* was to be dyed “blue.” It was a picture of Him whose unique and costly royal sacrifice would be required to purchase our salvation. (Modern orthodox Jews don’t include the blue thread in their *tsitzit* because they fear that the dye might not have come from the “right” species of cerulean mussel. So once again, they violate God’s law and the picture it paints so they can observe their man-made tradition instead. It’s so sad. By removing the blue thread, they’ve

removed the symbolism of the Messiah—they've subtracted *salvation* from their religion.)

Yashua, being a Jew (and one of royal blood), wore these *tsitzit* fringes: **"But as He went, the multitudes thronged Him. Now a woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any, came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped. And Jesus said, 'Who touched Me?'"** (Luke 8:42-45) This is a direct fulfillment of Malachi 4:2, where Yahweh said, **"To you who fear My name the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings."** A "wing" is a *kanaph*: an edge or extremity, a corner, flap, or border—a pretty good physical description of the *tsitzit*. When the woman touched His *tsitzit*; He asked who had touched Him—not His garment, but *Him*. The blue thread, as I said, was symbolic of the Messiah. After He had healed her, He said, **"Your faith has made you well. Go in peace."** He wasn't just talking about healing her body. It was her spirit that had been made whole, for as Malachi had specified, she revered (see #8) the name of Yahweh. That's the only way any of us may go in peace.

- (19) *Bind tefillin on the head.* **"These words which I command you today shall be in your heart.... They shall be as frontlets between the eyes."** (Deuteronomy 6:6-8) The rabbis twisted this simple simile into a hyper-literal directive that prescribed strapping onto the forehead a leather pouch (I kid you not) that contained a small piece of parchment, upon which was written a bit of scripture. This is the rough equivalent of trying to learn chemistry by sleeping with your textbook under your pillow: any idiot can see that it won't work. Yashua, of course, perceived their motivation: **"The scribes and the Pharisees...bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders (see #18) of their garments."** (Matthew 23:1-5) The word "phylacteries" (transliterated from the Greek phylacterion) comes from a verb (*phulasso*) that means to watch, to be on guard; by implication, to preserve or save. (S) The idea is that of an amulet, which is precisely how the Pharisees thought of the *tefillin*.

Yahweh had no such thing in mind. He wanted us to put His word *in* our heads, not *on* them. Nevertheless, it's an interesting phrase, "frontlets between the eyes." What, precisely, is the function of the brain's frontal lobe, the place "between the eyes"? It controls our emotions and personality, motor function, problem solving, spontaneity, memory, language, initiation, judgment, impulse control, and social and sexual behavior. All of that is surrendered to the will of Yahweh in the life of the spirit-filled believer.

(20) *Bind tefillin on the arm.* “These words which I command you today shall be in your heart.... You shall bind them as a sign on your hand.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-8) Same song, second verse. Again, Moses wasn’t talking about strapping little leather scripture boxes to the wrists. The word for hand here, *yad*, metaphorically signifies strength, power, authority, or the right of possession. (B&C) He’s saying that God’s word must be evident in the things we do, the way we interact with people, and the things we own, for these things are all evidence (“a sign”) of our attitude toward the mind of Yahweh. With Mitzvah #19 then, the meaning is clear: what we think and what we do are to be influenced, directed, and inspired by God’s word.

Yahshua may have kept bits and pieces of the Jewish oral law out of sheer coincidence with the teaching of the Torah. But catching a glimpse of the Pharisees’ showy *tsitzit* and broad *tefillin* really set him off: “Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ‘The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the Scriptures.’” This translation misses the meaning. More literally: **The scribes and Pharisees have sat in Moses’ seat**—that is, they have taken for themselves the position of Moses’ authority. **“So practice and obey whatever they say to you [i.e., when what they say is in full accordance with the Torah, as their position demands], but don’t follow their example. For they don’t practice what they teach.”** The word translated “practice” is *ergon*, which means what you do—your business, undertakings, enterprise, acts, mindset, or thoughts. **“They crush you with impossible religious demands and never lift a finger to help ease the burden....”** He was telling us to follow the Torah, but not to bother observing the rabbinical baggage the scribes and Pharisees had loaded onto it. In short, He was telling us to do as *He* did—look for Yahweh’s truth, not blindly follow a list of rules.

He continued, **“Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes [*tefillin*, or phylacteries] with Scripture verses inside, and they wear extra long tassels [*tsitzit*] on their robes. And how they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the most prominent seats in the synagogue! They enjoy the attention they get on the streets, and they enjoy being called ‘rabbi.’”** The word “rabbi” came to be used of teachers of the Law, but that’s not what it meant. It really signified “master.” Yahshua saw right through the arrogance. **“Don’t ever let anyone call you ‘rabbi,’ for you have only one teacher, and all of you are on the same level as brothers and sisters. And don’t address anyone here on earth as ‘Father,’ for only God in heaven is your spiritual Father. [Listen up, my Catholic brothers.] And don’t let anyone call you ‘Master,’ for there is only one master, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be a servant. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you won’t let others enter the Kingdom of Heaven, and you won’t go in yourselves. Yes, how**

terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn him into twice the son of hell as you yourselves are.” (Matthew 23:1-15 NLT) We are once again reminded of the difference between taking God lightly (*qalal*) and blaspheming Him (*naqab*)—see #3. The same pride that was manifested in long *tsitzits* and broad phylacteries showed up in their desire to be called “teacher,” “father,” and “master.” God is too angry to be disgusted with them.

- (21) *Affix the mezuzah to the doorposts and gates of your house.* “**These words which I command you today shall be in your heart.... You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.** (Deuteronomy 6:6-9) As usual, the rabbis twisted what Yahweh actually said, turning knowledge and truth into semi-useless religious ritual. The Great Commandment in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is called the *shema* (“hear”) because it says, “**Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one! You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.**” (See #6 and #7.) These were words Israel was to remember at all times, taking them to heart, thinking about them with their minds (#19), and working them out with their hands (#20).

Here we see that God’s words were also to be openly displayed by writing them on the doorposts (*mezuzah*) of their private homes and in public places like the city gates. (A “gate,” or *sha’ar*, is not a small door in a white picket fence, but the main entrance to a city, where the elders met to discuss weighty matters—read: “city hall.”) In private life and public, the reality of Yahweh’s presence among the children of Israel was to be in constant evidence. His precepts and provision were to be verbally acknowledged everywhere you turned. Yahweh was instructing that His *shem* was to have what advertising agencies nowadays spend fortunes trying to achieve for their clients: “top-of-mind awareness” among the target demographic—in this case, the entire nation of Israel.

This mitzvah presupposed two things: that the children of Israel would enter the Land and establish permanent homes (since the tents they lived in during the wilderness wanderings had no doorposts), and that they would become a literate society, able to read and write God’s instructions—something they, as the children of slaves, were not—yet. Yahweh wanted His people to be reminded of Him everywhere they looked when they settled into their new homeland.

But then the rabbis came along and contradicted Yahweh, saying that instead, the *shema* had to be written on a little piece of parchment in a particular style of script, rolled up in a particular way, and stuffed into a fancy little case they called a *mezuzah* (these guys just *love* little cases). In reality, the *doorpost itself* is the *mezuzah*. Anyway, this little box would be

marked with a particular Hebrew initial (the *shin*) and attached to a particular place on your front doorpost, at a particular angle, while performing a particular ceremony called a *Chanukat Ha-Bayit*. I suspect that Yahweh finds all this religious obfuscation particularly annoying. All He wanted the children of Israel to do was keep the Word of God in front of them, one way or another, at all times. He wanted them to be constantly reminded that He was their God and that they had a Covenant relationship with Him. I get the feeling He didn't really care *how* they did it, only that they did.