

The Law of Love

The relationship Yahweh seeks to establish between Himself and mankind is defined in the Torah, bit by bit, piece by piece. Thousands of His “puzzle pieces” fit together seamlessly to form a clear picture of God’s plan, and like any jigsaw puzzle, the whole is far greater than the sum of the parts. The picture that emerges as we “work” this puzzle is much more significant than what the sum total of the individual pieces seems to be—a list of regulations that must be followed to the letter. Rather, it is a portrait of a loving Creator whose “rules” are there to teach us about His love, to protect us, to comfort us, and to keep us healthy, both physically and spiritually. We shouldn’t be too surprised, then, to see that He gets angry with those who would obfuscate His instructions.

Yahshua spoke of such people: **“Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep, but are really wolves that will tear you apart.”** While appearing to be pious and godly, they are really dangerous and destructive. **“You can detect them by the way they act, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit. You don’t pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles. A healthy tree produces good fruit, and an unhealthy tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, the way to identify a tree or a person is by the kind of fruit that is produced.”** (Matthew 7:15-20 NLT)

And what is this fruit? A “good tree” produces love, further defined by Paul as **“joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”** The apostle puts two and two together and observes, **“Against such things there is no law.”** (Galatians 5:22-23) The fruit of “bad trees” is defined in the same passage as **“adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like.”** (Galatians 5:19-21) These New Testament “lists” are in no way contradictory to the Torah, for the same God inspired both of them.

Yahshua spoke of the difference between doing good things and obeying Yahweh: they’re not necessarily the same thing. **“Not all people who sound religious are really godly. They may refer to me as ‘Lord,’ but they still won’t enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven. On judgment day many will tell me, ‘Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Go away; the things you did were unauthorized.’”** (Matthew 7:21-23 NLT) Huh? Prophecy

is listed among the gifts of the Holy Spirit, is it not? Casting out demons and performing miracles are good things, aren't they? Yes, but that doesn't mean they're automatically the work of God. As Yahshua put it, **"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."** (John 6:29) Our trusting belief in Yahshua establishes a relationship with God—without which all the good works in the world are nothing but filthy rags. We must "know" each other—there must be a familial relationship between us—if our works, however well intended, are to have any value. Think about it: how "proud" are you when your neighbor's kid gets an "A" in school? You're only proud of your own child when he does well.

If you're looking with despair at the Law of Moses and the Galatians lists, saying to yourself, *I can't do all this, as much as I want to—it's too hard, and I fall on my face every time I try*, then congratulations; you're starting to figure it out. You're right: you *can't* do it. None of us can. It is only through our relationship with Yahshua, whose Spirit abides within us, that we can find rest from the burden of the Law. **"Jesus said, 'Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light.'"** (Matthew 11:28-30 NLT) It's not that the Law shouldn't be kept. It's that we can't pull its weight by ourselves. We need to be "yoked" with Someone who can, Someone who *has*: Yahshua.

So as we return to our study of the 613 mitzvot, let us be mindful that our burden isn't meant to be heavy. If we try to shoulder the weight of the Torah in our own strength, we'll find it impossible to carry, but if we allow Yahshua to do the heavy lifting, what little burden He allows us to assume will be carried joyfully, thankfully, and with a sense of honor for having been entrusted with the task. It's a privilege to serve Him, not a duty—and certainly not a payment we must make for services rendered.

PRAYER AND BLESSINGS

(22) *Pray to God.* **"So you shall serve Yahweh your God, and He will bless your bread and your water."** (Exodus 23:25) **"You shall fear Yahweh your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name."** (Deuteronomy 6:13) I didn't see "prayer" anywhere in there. But Tracey Rich writes, "According to the Talmud, the word 'serve' in these verses refers to prayer." Oh really? The word in both cases is *'abad*, "a verb meaning to work, to serve. "This labor may be focused on things, other people, or God.... This term is also applied to artisans and craftsmen.... When the focus of labor is the Lord, it is a religious "service" to worship Him. Moreover, the word does not have connotations of toilsome labor but instead of a joyful experience of

liberation.” (B&C) Apparently, “serve” means *serve*, and the Talmud rabbis have blown it again. There is no Mosaic commandment to pray to God.

There is a word for prayer, of course, but surprisingly, it’s used very sparingly—only twice—in the Pentateuch. *Palal* means to pray, to intercede, to entreat or make supplication. The word was used when Abraham interceded with Yahweh for Abimelech and when Moses interceded for the snake-bitten Israelites. Both times, you’ll notice, the prayer was a plea to Yahweh to provide a remedy for sin. The opinion of the rabbis notwithstanding, prayer is not some task you perform or favor you do for God so He’ll bless you. Yahweh knows who we are and what we’ve done: the first prayer He wants to hear from us is a cry for mercy, an acknowledgment that we’ve sinned against Him.

But in the New Testament, we’re admonished to “pray without ceasing.” The question, then, is why *weren’t* the Old Covenant Jews told to pray? What changed? The whole Torah revolves around the tabernacle and the priesthood Yahweh set up. These were not ends in themselves, but an exquisite and detailed picture of God’s plan of redemption: the innocent sacrificial lamb, the altar of judgment, the priest entering the holy place with the incense of prayer—and once a year the high priest going behind the veil to sprinkle the blood of atonement on the mercy seat. It’s all an elaborate metaphor for the sacrifice of Yahshua our Messiah. But now, the veil has been torn in two (Matthew 27:51); access to Yahweh through prayer has been made available to us through Christ’s death. Now, if we need to talk with our Father (and we *do*), all we have to do is ask.

- (23) *Read the Shema in the morning and at night.* **“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 6:6-7) If you look at the world through a microscope, you’re going to miss the big picture. This mitzvah, of course, refers to the same “Hear, O Israel...” passage we saw before (#21, etc.)—called the “*Shema*.” All the rabbis saw was “lie down” and “rise up,” and they made a mathematical equation out of it. But look at the whole thing: Yahweh wants them to have this truth in their hearts; He wants them to think about His love, and how they can love Him, all day long—when they wake up in the morning and fall asleep at night and every moment in between. In a personal sense, “separation of church and state” is at its core a principle that Yahweh despises. We are rather to make the One True God, Yahweh, the focal point and the motivation for everything we do. He is the background, the foreground, the air we breathe, the light by which we find our way through the world. As I said, He wants to have in our hearts what

they call in the advertising business “top-of-mind awareness.” Such a thing has never come cheap: you can’t buy Him off by mechanically reciting a few Bible verses twice a day.

- (24) *Recite grace after meals.* **“When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless Yahweh your God for the good land which He has given you.”** (Deuteronomy 8:10) How could you go wrong with this one? Being thankful is pretty much axiomatic, isn’t it? You’d think so, but once again that telltale word “recite” gets the rabbis into trouble. You see, according to the Talmud, you can’t just thank Yahweh. Oh, no! Rather, you must *recite* four specific “blessings” included in the *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, or “grace-after-meals” formula. These were all composed during the second-temple period: the *Birkat Hazan*, the blessing for providing food; the *Birkat Ha-Aretz*, the blessing for the land—something of a bad joke for the last two thousand years; the *Birkat Yerushalayim*, the blessing for Jerusalem, which prays for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the coming of the Messiah (words which, coming from the Jews who murdered Him and who continue to reject Him, must *really* impress Yahweh); and the *Birkat Ha-Tov v’Ha-Maytiv*, the blessing for Yahweh’s being good and doing good—and let’s face it: in light of God’s prophetic promises this is the only possible reason the Jews haven’t gone the way of the Philistines.

Enough of this foolishness. Let’s let God Himself provide commentary on the verse above: **“Beware that you do not forget Yahweh your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget Yahweh your God... then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’”** (Deuteronomy 8:11-14, 17) He says in effect, *Don’t bother me with ritual prayers that don’t have any bearing on your present reality. I want you to thank Me by name for My daily provision simply because it is in your interests to do so. If you don’t do this, you’ll eventually forget Who I Am and what I’ve done for you.*

- (25) *Do not lay down a stone for worship.* **“You shall not make idols for yourselves; neither a carved image nor a sacred pillar shall you rear up for yourselves; nor shall you set up an engraved stone in your land, to bow down to it; for I am Yahweh your God.”** (Leviticus 26:1) This is actually a subset of the second commandment (see Mitzvah #312) in which Yahweh prohibited the making of images for the purpose of worship—even of Himself. Here it seems God used about every word for “idol” in the entire Hebrew language trying to get His point

across: His people were not to have anything to do with them, in any form, in any way.

If we amplify the verse with our Hebrew dictionaries, we'll perceive this quite clearly: **"You shall not make** (*asah*: accomplish, advance, appoint, bear, bestow, bring forth, have charge of, commit, deal with, do, execute, exercise, fashion, follow, fulfill, furnish, gather, get, keep, labor, maintain, make, observe, offer, bring to pass, perform, practice, prepare, procure, provide, serve, set, show, take, work, yield to, or use) **idols** (*eliyl*: something that's good for nothing, vanity, an idol) **for yourselves; neither a carved** (*pesel*: carved or engraved as an idol) **image** (*tselem*: a phantom, that is, an illusion, resemblance, a representative figure—an idol or image) **nor a sacred pillar** (*matstsebah*: something stationed, that is, a column or memorial stone; an idol, standing image, pillar) **shall you rear up** (*qum*: accomplish, confirm, continue, decree, enjoin, get up, make good, help, hold, lift up, make, ordain, perform, pitch, raise up, rear up, remain, set up, establish, cause to stand, strengthen) **for yourselves; nor shall you set up** (*nathan*: give, put, make, add, apply, appoint, ascribe, assign, bestow, bring forth, cast, cause, commit, consider, count, direct, distribute, fasten, grant, hang up, lay up, lift up, offer, ordain, perform, place, put forth, render, send out, set forth, show, thrust) **an engraved** (*maskiyth*: a figure, carved on stone, the wall, or any object—imagination, conceit, image, or picture) **stone** (*eben*: building material, a stone—precious or non-precious—plumb weight) **in your land, to bow down** (*shachah*: to depress, that is, prostrate, especially reflexively in homage to royalty or God, bow down, crouch, fall down, humbly beseech, do or make obeisance, do reverence, make to stoop, worship) **to it; for I am Yahweh your God."** Yeah, that would about cover it.

LOVE & BROTHERHOOD

- (26) *Love all human beings who are of the covenant.* **"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am Yahweh."** (Leviticus 19:18) The mitzvah is worded to convey the idea that Jews must love their fellow Jews, but that it's okay to hate everybody else. However, if we let scripture comment on scripture we find that this is not the whole story. On one side of the coin is the negative admonition not to take vengeance or bear a grudge against Jews: Yahweh says, **"Is this [i.e., the sin of Israel] not laid up in store with Me, sealed up among My treasures? Vengeance is Mine, and recompense."** (Deuteronomy 32:34-35) Jews aren't to take vengeance against their fellow Jews because God reserves judgment for Himself—especially when it comes to Israel. The second half of the equation, "love your neighbor," was shown by Yahshua

to refer not only to those “who are of the covenant,” but to anyone who *needed* our love—potentially every soul on the planet (see the parable of the good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37). And what, precisely, does it mean to love your neighbor as you do yourself? If you truly love yourself, you meet your own needs. You feed, clothe, and shelter yourself, keep yourself from danger and pain, and do what you can to maintain your health and happiness. If you’re smart, you’ll know that that includes more than just meeting physical needs, but spiritual needs as well. Therefore, if we encounter another human being in need, we are to do what we can to meet that need. And we should not forget that in Yahshua’s parable, the one in need would have normally considered the one who stopped to help him his mortal enemy.

In reference to this very thing, Yahshua provided commentary: **“You have heard that the law of Moses says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust, too. If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.”** (Matthew 5:43-48 NLT) So if our Father Yahweh is to be emulated in this matter, how does He show His love, and to whom, His friends or His enemies? **“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** (Romans 5:8) We are to show God’s love to both our friends and enemies alike. I would hasten to add, however, that “love” does not include tolerating false doctrine. It’s a poor love indeed that encourages its object to commit spiritual suicide.

- (27) *Do not stand by idly when a human life is in danger. “You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 19:16) I think the rabbis missed the point, though their version seems generally consistent with Yahweh’s admonition to “love your neighbor as yourself.” What is being said here, however, gets closer to the heart of the matter. The KJV rendition is closer to the literal meaning: don’t “stand against the blood of thy neighbor.” And the NLT addresses the thought for modern ears: “Do not try to get ahead at the cost of your neighbor’s life.” At issue here is human pride—something Yahweh detests. It is the antithesis of the love spoken of in #26. Pride says: *I’m better than this other guy. If I trash his reputation I will be exalted by comparison. And if his death—physically, professionally, socially, or spiritually—will enhance my relative position, then he must die.* This attitude of pride was endemic among the scribes and Pharisees of Yahshua’s

day. It was what drove them to demand His death, relying on “talebearers” to witness against Him. How ironic it is that they had been specifically warned not to do this.

- (28) *Do not wrong any one in speech.* **“Therefore you shall not oppress one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am Yahweh your God.”** (Leviticus 25:17) This says nothing about speech, but the rabbis asserted that this verse meant “Don’t *wrong* one another,” and then they applied it exclusively to speech. Thus it became the basis for silly Talmudic rules like: “You may not call a person by a derogatory or embarrassing nickname, even if he is used to it,” or “You may not ask a merchant how much he would sell something for if you have no intention of buying,” or “You may not compliment a person if you do not mean it.” Once again, the rabbis in their unending quest for self-justification have missed (or purposely obfuscated) what Yahweh had to say. The Hebrew word for “oppress” is *yahah*: “to rage or be violent, to suppress, to maltreat, destroy, oppress, be proud, vex, or do violence.” (S) It’s *way* beyond unkind speech. We need to pay attention to the context (since the rabbis didn’t). What is the “therefore” there for? Checking the surrounding verses, we find that this is the “bottom line” of the law of Jubilee. Once every fifty years—kind of a Sabbath of Sabbaths—all leased land was to revert to its original owners, all indentured servants would receive their freedom, and the land would be given an extra year of rest. The rabbis knew that talk is cheap, but keeping the terms of Jubilee could cost them. So they figured that if they could confuse the issue of Jubilee, they could extract more labor from their servants, more grain from their land, and more rent payments from their properties. Yahweh wanted His people to live free; the rabbis wanted to subjugate them and reap the financial rewards. Oppression is the opposite of reverence for Yahweh.
- (29) *Do not carry tales.* **“You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 19:16) Once again (see #27) we see that we miss the impact and importance of these mitzvot if we look at them only under a microscope, isolated from one another. Yes, it’s naughty to whisper gossip into the ears of a gullible and impressionable audience. But the issue here is pride: the purposeful demeaning of another person—going so far as to be a threat to his life—with the express intent of elevating oneself in comparison. Why do you suppose God punctuated so many of these instructions with a reminder of who He is? I believe it’s to remind us that in His eyes, we’re all pretty much the same—sinners in need of grace. To us, the best garden slug looks pretty much the same as the worst one. I imagine it’s sort of like that when God looks at us in our unredeemed state. We would find it ludicrous to observe one slug demeaning the others in order to gain prestige among the other backyard

vermin. *I hear he's got inferior slime.* The Gardener has every right to salt us all down and watch us shrivel, the good slugs and the evil slugs alike—'cause let's face it, who can tell the difference? Amazingly though, He would rather transform us into gardeners a bit like Himself. Granted, my poor *limax maximus* brain has a hard time comprehending that.

- (30) *Do not cherish hatred in your heart.* **“You shall not hate your brother in your heart.”** (Leviticus 19:17) Could it be that the rabbis actually got one right? This is apparently a no-brainer, the converse of #26, “You shall love your neighbor as you do yourself.” But look at what follows: it almost sounds like a contradiction: **“You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.”** In light of this close contextual connection, we shouldn't automatically assume Moses has moved on to a different subject. Actually, I believe the second phrase *defines* what it is to “hate your brother.” And the truth that emerges if we make this connection has stunning relevance for us today: we are not to be tolerant of false teaching, but are rather to “rebuke” those in error—to neglect this correction is to hate our brother. Remember the rabbinical mitzvah (#27) that said *Do not stand by idly when a human life is in danger?* This is the practical outworking of the principal: if your brother is in spiritual error, if he espouses doctrines that Yahweh's Word says will kill him in the end, then to withhold rebuke and admonition is to hate him. By tolerating his heresy, you are sending him to hell, like indulging a diabetic's sweet tooth.

What does it mean to “bear” sin? The Hebrew word is *nasa*, meaning to lift, or carry. It is “used in reference to the bearing of guilt or punishment for sin” leading to the “representative or substitutionary bearing of one person's guilt by another.” (B&C) Yahweh did not want false teaching tolerated in Israel because the guilt—and thus the punishment—incurred would eventually be borne by the entire nation. He would have spared them that pain. He would spare *us* that pain.

This ought to shed new light on Yahshua's confirmation of the principle that loving Yahweh and our fellow man is the path to life. **“One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: ‘Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?’ Jesus replied, ‘What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?’ The man answered, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ‘Right!’ Jesus told him. ‘Do this and you will live!’”** (Luke 10:25-28 NLT) Friends don't let friends fall prey to false teaching.

- (31) *Do not take revenge.* **“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 19:18) The rabbis are on safe ground when they say

precisely what the Torah does. They ought to do that more often. We've seen this verse before (#26) and we shall see it again (#32). The word for "take vengeance" here is *naqam*: to avenge, punish, or take one's revenge. As we have seen, that's Yahweh's prerogative. Therefore, for men to take for themselves the right of revenge is to usurp the authority of God. Later in this study we shall see that there are certain mitzvot that carry explicit punishments with them. Because these punishments were specified in the Torah, men were not guilty of "taking revenge" when they carried them out—the authority remained with Yahweh. But to avenge a wrong, real or imagined, personal or national, that is not delineated in God's Word, is to overstep our bounds. And lest there should be any confusion, Yahshua clarified our instructions in the matter: **"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise."** (Luke 6:27-31) To insist on collecting our due, to demand that life be "fair" to us, is to betray a lack of trust in Yahweh's wisdom and love.

- (32) *Do not bear a grudge.* **"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am Yahweh."** (Leviticus 19:18) Here's another facet of the same diamond. "Grudge" is from the Hebrew verb *natar*: "to keep, to take care of, to be angry, to maintain a grudge. It means to hold something against another person, to disdain him or her." (B&C) This speaks not of outbursts of righteous indignation, something Yahshua Himself was known to display at appropriate moments. Rather it warns against the kind of simmering resentment that eats away at the soul—the opposite of a forgiving spirit. To cherish hatred in our hearts is the antithesis of the last part of the admonition: "love your neighbor." Also note that whereas the primary thought is warning Jews not to bear grudges against their fellow Jews, the "neighbors" clause (as we have seen) broadens this to a universal principle.
- (33) *Do not put any Jew to shame.* **"You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him."** (Leviticus 19:17) We've seen this verse before (#30), and once again, the Rabbis have been caught extrapolating. In fact, the verse implies just the opposite of their mitzvah: to *refrain* from rebuking your brother who is living in sin or idolatry—even though such a rebuke might shame him—would be tantamount to hating him. It would be like refusing to throw a drowning man a life preserver because you're afraid he'd be ashamed of his poor swimming technique. I think God is saying: *Go ahead, throw the life*

preserver. If he receives it, your “rebuke” will have saved him, and even if he doesn’t, his shame is not your fault. Either way, you will be innocent of his blood.

- (34) *Do not curse any other Israelite. “You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 19:14) The rabbis figure it this way: if you mustn’t curse those who cannot hear, then you *really* shouldn’t curse those who can. While they would no doubt do well by refraining from cursing their brothers, it’s obvious to me that Yahweh has something more fundamental, more significant, in mind here. The deaf and the blind are representative of people who have been hindered by society and circumstances from hearing and seeing the truth. That’s practically everybody, or at least it was when the Torah was handed down. The Jews, on the other hand, were gifted with sight and hearing—it was they who were tasked with the transmission of Yahweh’s truth to the nations. God’s redemption was never intended to be the exclusive possession of Israel. Rather, they were to display the *menorah* and blow the *shofar* that would lead the gentiles to salvation. Israel was chosen to be the keeper of the signs, the celebrants of Yahweh’s seven prophetic appointed feasts, and the family through which God’s Messiah would come.

By recasting the Torah as an impenetrable maze of rules, regulations, dos and don’ts, the Jews did precisely what Yahweh was telling them not to do—cursing the deaf and tripping the blind. The Torah told them to conduct themselves as children of God, to show the world outside what it was like to have a personal relationship with Yahweh. Instead, they told the orphan gentiles that God demanded that they keep their rooms tidy and their shoes polished. They shouted lies and half-truths into ears that were straining to hear the truth, and they concealed the light from a vision impaired world. It’s no wonder the goyim didn’t want to be adopted into Yahweh’s family.

- (35) *Do not give occasion to the simple-minded to stumble on the road. “You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am Yahweh.”* (Leviticus 19:14) Based on the same verse as the previous mitzvah, this permutation betrays the pride of the rabbis. They interpreted this as a prohibition against doing anything that would cause another to sin. This is a fine thing in itself, of course, but it was based on an arrogant presupposition: they considered anyone who hadn’t steeped themselves in their oral traditions to be “simple minded,” and thus in dire need of their deep wisdom and impeccable discernment. Yahshua took one look at them and observed, **“They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.”** (Matthew 15:14) He knew their condescending arrogance was nothing but a “stumbling block before the blind.” As for us

simple-minded folk, Yahweh's grace is sufficient for us. David put it this way: **"The law of Yahweh is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of Yahweh is sure, making wise the simple."** (Psalm 19:7) It was never the rabbis' job to look after the simple minded anyway; it's God's job: **"Yahweh preserves the simple."** (Psalm 116:6) Notice again that the mitzvah is underscored with the reminder: "I am Yahweh." His omniscience and omnipotence leave no room for our arrogance.

- (36) *Rebuke the sinner.* **"You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him."** (Leviticus 19:17) We saw this passage in #30 and again in #33. I would only reiterate here that to be tolerant of your neighbor's sinful attitudes—to withhold the truth from him through some misplaced sense of political correctness or open-mindedness—is to hate him. That's right: God calls religious tolerance a hate crime! When we see our brother in sin, we are to rebuke him, not out of self-righteousness but in a spirit of meekness, knowing that but for the grace of God, we too might fall. It's also worth mentioning the flip side of this principle: if and when we are rebuked for the sins of our own life, we need to immediately repent. The classic example is David in II Samuel 12—rebuked by Nathan, acknowledging his sin, and turning to Yahweh in repentance. Nathan did the right thing in confronting the king with his sin, rebuking him in terms that David was sure to understand. We should do no less when we encounter a brother fallen into sin.

That doesn't mean we are to set ourselves up as the arbiters of morality in our communities. We aren't called to force unbelievers to behave themselves. But those who claim a relationship with Yahweh are another matter: they are "our brothers," whom we are told not to "hate" through our neglect or misplaced tolerance. Paul addresses these same issues in I Corinthians, Chapter 5.

- (37) *Relieve a neighbor of his burden and help to unload his beast.* **"If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it."** (Exodus 23:5) This has far less to do with pack animals than it does with loving one's neighbor (as we saw in #31). The point is that our love should not be restricted to our friends—to those who can be expected to love us in return. If Yahweh's love had been offered on that basis, none of us would ever have experienced it, for as we saw earlier, **"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Romans 5:8) The Exodus verse is but one example of how our love for our "neighbor" might manifest itself. Another is found in Proverbs (and repeated in Romans): **"If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and Yahweh will reward you."**

(Proverbs 25:21-22) We are to meet the needs of those we encounter, regardless of their disposition toward us. This kindness, like that of God toward us, is designed to bring the recipients to repentance (see Romans 2:4). The “coals of fire” mentioned can be one of two things: conviction (the impetus for repentance) or judgment (for refusing to do so)—depending on the enemy/neighbor’s response to our loving act.

- (38) *Assist in replacing the load upon a neighbor’s beast. “You shall not see your brother’s donkey or his ox fall down along the road, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely help him lift them up again.”* (Deuteronomy 22:4) We don’t see too many donkeys in need of assistance these days. But again, the true meaning goes far beyond the actual example. This is another corollary to “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” It could be generalized thus: *If you observe your brother in real need, don’t pretend you didn’t see it, and don’t go out of your way to avoid being confronted with it. Rather, do whatever you can to meet the needs of your fellow man.* Most of us would consider this mere good manners at the very least, an outworking of the “golden rule.”

But we have been warned that as the days of grace grow short—as the time of the end approaches—we should expect to see common courtesy become increasingly rare: **“Then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another... and because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”** (Matthew 24:10-13) This will certainly be true during the Tribulation, but we can see the trend gaining momentum in our own day. As lawlessness increases, ordinary people are becoming reticent to “stick their necks out” in defense of those in need. The incident that brought this disturbing trend to America’s attention happened on March 13, 1964, when 28 year old Kitty Genovese was brutally stabbed multiple times outside her Queens apartment. As she cried out in distress, no less than thirty-eight witnesses who could have helped stood by and did nothing as she bled to death—not wanting to get involved. America was shocked but not enough: our willingness to betray our fellow man to preserve the illusion of personal safety has only increased over the intervening years.

- (39) *Do not leave a beast unaided that has fallen down beneath its burden. “You shall not see your brother’s donkey or his ox fall down along the road, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely help him lift them up again.”* (Deuteronomy 22:4) This is based on the same passage as #38. The rabbis have drawn a distinction between helping a man get his overloaded beast of burden up and going again, and helping the beast itself—making it clear once again that they’ve missed the entire point. But okay, since they’ve brought it up, let’s look at what Yahweh has to say about the treatment of work animals. Later

in our study, we'll see that they aren't to be unequally yoked or bred with animals of other kinds, and that they aren't to be prevented from munching on grain as they work. Maimonides somehow missed the admonition that beasts of burden were to enjoy the same Sabbath rest as their owners (see Exodus 23:12). It's clear throughout scripture that animals were a significant part of the biosphere over which man was given dominion. We may safely infer from Genesis 2:19-20 that Yahweh made them Adam's responsibility—and therefore ours as well, on some level. So here in the Torah we see a caution against shirking that responsibility: if you burden your ox or donkey to the point where he collapses under the load, you're not only going to have to work harder to alleviate his suffering, but others in your society will be obligated to help you correct the mess you've made. I don't think I'm stretching the mitzvah too far to read into it a caution against plundering the environment. It's one thing to be a careful steward of God's earth, thankfully utilizing the bounty it provides; it's something else entirely to greedily rape the landscape with no regard for man or beast.

THE POOR AND UNFORTUNATE

- (40) *Do not afflict an orphan or a widow.* **“You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.”** (Exodus 22:22-24) Yahshua is sometimes criticized—invariably by people with money—for “heartlessly” observing that the poor would always be with us (which is actually a concept God first put forth in Deuteronomy 15:11). But from the beginning, Yahweh has instructed the blessed among us how to provide for those less fortunate. It's fascinating to examine how Yahweh designed the Israelites' “welfare” system, which we will examine over the next few mitzvot. Though the rabbis got this one right (because they took the words right out of the Torah), by the time of Christ they had worked out some clever ways to steal the assets of the poor without violating their oral traditions. Yahshua's scathing denouncement of them is recorded in all three synoptic Gospels: **“Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.”** (Mark 12:38-40)

Yahshua's brother James, as leader of the Jerusalem church, was all too aware of the propensity of his fellow Jews to substitute a system of rules and rituals in place of a relationship with God, for the purpose of circumventing His true intentions. **“If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not**

bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." (James 1:26-27) His point was that it wasn't enough to know the Torah; one had to *do* it—perfectly—if his religion was to be worth anything at all. **"Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."** (verse 22) James perceived that the issue of caring for widows and orphans would separate the men from the boys in this regard—*no one* kept the law perfectly, but the first place the Pharisees' hypocrisy was likely to show up was in the matter of money: taking care of Israel's widows and orphans was expensive—it required "loving their neighbors as themselves." Visiting the undeserving poor in their distress was the last thing the rabbis wanted to do. They saw it as throwing good money after bad—there was no way to get a good return on their "investment."

As a personal note, I can confirm that the Pharisees were wrong about that. God's math and man's math don't add up the same way. Over the years, my wife and I adopted nine "orphans," most of them at times when it looked like financial suicide for us to do so. But God saw to it that we never missed a meal or a house payment, no matter how broke we looked on paper. Yahweh is always faithful.

- (41) *Don't reap the entire field.* **"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am Yahweh your God."** (Leviticus 23:22) How wasteful! How inefficient! Not really. It's one of Yahweh's ways of taking care of the poor. Landowners were instructed not to harvest their entire crop, but to leave the corners or edges of their fields untouched so that the poor could come and harvest a little grain for themselves. Note three things. First, it wasn't considered theft for a poor person to harvest what he could carry himself—he wasn't taking enough grain to sell for a profit, only that which was sufficient to keep himself and his family alive. Second, he wasn't in competition with the reapers—there were sections of the field especially set aside for the poor to harvest from. Third (and this is important for us to notice today) the poor weren't given a handout on a silver platter; they were required to work for it just like everybody else. God saw to it that they wouldn't have to starve just because they didn't own their own land, but neither could they just sit back in their government-subsidized apartments, watching soap operas on TV, eating food-stamp potato chips, and waiting for the welfare check to arrive. The poor had to go out, harvest, and process the bounty that Yahweh had provided. In modern America, if we were smart enough to follow God's law, that might translate into public works jobs—beneficial to society however

menial they might seem, paid for through the taxes of those fortunate enough to have jobs. But no work, no welfare: society should alleviate poverty, not reward it.

- (42) *Leave the unreaped corner of the field or orchard for the poor.* **“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am Yahweh your God.”** (Leviticus 19:9-10) This is the affirmative statement of the negative mitzvah we just saw. The Leviticus permutation mentions vineyards as well as fields, leading us to the conclusion that God intended the principle to be applied broadly—not exclusively to grain crops, but everywhere it made sense to leave an opportunity for the poor to help themselves. I believe Yahweh is telling us to be creative in finding ways to alleviate suffering (to love our neighbors as we do ourselves) without humiliating or financially emasculating those less fortunate than ourselves.
- (43) *Do not gather gleanings (the ears that have fallen to the ground while reaping).* **“...nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard.”** (Leviticus 19:9) This is an example of the kind of creativity I just spoke of. Not only were the edges and corners of the field to be left for the poor to harvest, the reapers were to leave whatever they missed on their “first pass” through the field, vineyard or orchard. We see this being played out in Ruth 2, where the young widow is observed following behind the reapers (verse 7) as they worked, picking up what they had left unharvested. When the owner of the field, Boaz, saw how hard she was working, he instructed his workers to provide even more opportunities for her (verses 15-16). Note that although she worked hard and was rewarded with preferential treatment for her diligence, she wasn’t getting rich—she gathered a little over half a bushel of barley a day during the peak harvest.
- (44) *Leave the gleanings for the poor.* **“And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger.** (Leviticus 19:10) This is merely the affirmative statement of negative Mitzvah #43. I get the feeling that Maimonides was milking this project in order to come up with the Talmudic requisite of 365 negative and 248 positive commandments. Note that the Torah includes something here that the rabbis left out: *strangers* were to benefit from the same system of “welfare” as poor folk. Strangers would by definition include some people whom the rabbinical Jews considered enemies or “lowlives”—gentiles and Samaritans. People who didn’t live and work in the local fields or vineyards

were free to eat a few grapes or a bit of raw grain as they passed through. Yahshua and His disciples did this very thing (Matthew 12:1-8), though the Pharisees negated the spirit of the commandment by accusing them of violating the Sabbath by “threshing” when they rubbed the kernels of wheat or barley between their hands to separate the grain from the chaff. Here we have one of our clearest illustrations of the difference between God’s intention for our observance of the Torah and man’s ideas on the subject. I find it fascinating that man’s version is hard and inflexible (and ultimately impossible to follow perfectly), while Yahweh’s is full of what we’d call loopholes—it’s user friendly and far more concerned with heart attitude than strict outward observance.

- (45) *Do not gather ol’loth (the imperfect clusters) of the vineyard. “And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am Yahweh your God.”* (Leviticus 19:10) Once again, we see the rabbis attempting to circumvent the spirit of the commandment by zeroing in on the particulars. *If God mentions only barley fields and vineyards, then we’re free to treat the poor like dirt in our orchards and gardens.* Beyond that, if they can redefine “gleanings” as “imperfect clusters,” then they won’t feel they have to leave much of anything edible behind for the poor, circumventing the spirit of love that’s supposed to underlie all of these mitzvot. But Yahshua was right: if you truly love Yahweh and love your neighbor, the rest of the Torah is second nature.
- (46) *Leave ol’loth (the imperfect clusters) of the vineyard for the poor. “When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this thing.”* (Deuteronomy 24:21-22) This is the converse of #45. The Deuteronomy restatement includes a reminder that the Israelites had been poor strangers in the land of Egypt when God had mercy on them. As they had received, they were now to give. It’s another universal truth we would all do well to heed.

The whole issue of leaving crops to be gathered by the poor for their sustenance is clarified elsewhere—from the point of view of the poor people who were to do the gathering: **“When you come into your neighbor’s vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put any in your container. When you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor’s standing grain.”** (Deuteronomy 23:24-25) In other words, they weren’t to just go in to somebody’s field or vineyard and harvest his crop for themselves, competing with the landowner or his employees. But it was okay to take

away as many grapes as you could carry—in your stomach. This put practical limits on what a poor person could take and how much impact he could have on the farmer’s livelihood. It’s the epitome of wisdom.

- (47) *Do not gather the grapes that have fallen to the ground. “And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am Yahweh your God.”* (Leviticus 19:10) This is closer to the real meaning of “gleaning,” which Webster defines as gathering something slowly or by degrees. We aren’t to obsess over every last grape (or dollar, as the case may be). Rather, we are to take it for granted that Yahweh’s provision will be sufficient for our needs—even if we make a habit of taking food off our own table and giving it to perfect strangers. Do we owe it to them? I don’t know—does Yahweh owe us our salvation? Same difference. What we give and receive are both outpourings of love from the giver to the recipient. And note that Yahweh isn’t instructing us to give away something He hasn’t already provided. It’s like He’s saying, *I gave you the vineyard, and I made your vines bear fruit. Some of that fruit is for you, and some of it is for the widows, orphans, and strangers among you. If you don’t like this arrangement, perhaps you’d prefer that your wife play the role of widow, and your children to be the fatherless* (as we saw in Exodus 22:24—#40).
- (48) *Leave peret (the single grapes) of the vineyard for the poor. “And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am Yahweh your God.”* (Leviticus 19:10) Okay, Maimonides, we get it already. This is the converse of #47, an affirmative restatement of the previous negative mitzvah. It bears notice that this arrangement between “haves” and “have-nots” is a *system*: it does no one any good to leave crops unharvested for the poor to gather if the poor don’t know they’re supposed to do that, or if the fields are inaccessible to them. The system was designed for a small homogeneous local population and an agrarian society—early Israel. It won’t work if the wheat field with the unreaped corners is in Kansas and the poor widows are in Kentucky. But we aren’t locked into the *method* of providing for the poor. Yahweh’s heart has been revealed: take care of the truly needy among you.
- (49) *Do not return to take a forgotten sheaf. “When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that Yahweh your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.* (Deuteronomy 24:19) Here’s another example of how to provide for the needy in an agrarian society like early Israel’s. Again, I believe God is showing us that (1) we should be creative in our charity, inventing new ways to give as the nature of our civilization shifts, (2) the

recipient should always have an active role in his own assistance, and (3) God's future blessings are predicated on what we do today—disobedience in the matter of charity betrays a lack of trust in Yahweh's provision for our own needs.

In a rare display of insight, the rabbis proclaimed that this mitzvah applied to all fruit trees. The Torah apparently concurs. **“When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.”** (Deuteronomy 24:20) Barley, wheat, grapes, olives, cash—it doesn't matter: leave some for the poor to collect.

- (50) *Leave the forgotten sheaves for the poor.* **When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that Yahweh your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.** (Deuteronomy 24:19) Again, we have an affirmative statement of a previous negative mitzvah. Let's face it—the last ten mitzvot have really only been one “law:” provide for the less-fortunate out of the bounty Yahweh has showered upon you already. The bottom line? If God is providing our daily bread, we won't miss a slice or two.

A byproduct of all this generosity on the part of the farmer was that he and his hired hands weren't working all that hard—certainly not as hard as they would have if they wanted to gather every last grape, olive, or ear of corn. Yahweh seems to be fostering a relaxed, there's-plenty-more-where-that-came-from attitude, based on a comfortable reliance upon Yahweh's bounty. To some people, there's no such thing as “enough.” To a child of Yahweh who's trusting his Father, there's no such thing as a shortage.

- (51) *Do not refrain from maintaining a poor man and giving him what he needs.* **“If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which Yahweh your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother.”** This is actually part of the instructions concerning the Sabbatical year: **“But you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,’ and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to Yahweh against you, and it become sin among you. You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing Yahweh your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand.”** (Deuteronomy 15:7-10) Picture this: you're an Israelite, the Sabbatical year is close, and your brother needs a loan. Ordinarily, you wouldn't hesitate, because you'd get your money back. But Yahweh had said, **“At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release: every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall**

release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called Yahweh's release. Of a foreigner you may require it; but you shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother." (Deuteronomy 15:1-3) And you're thinking, *if I loan him the money now, I'll never see it again*. Here Yahweh is telling us: don't calculate, don't scheme, and don't factor into your plans your beneficiary's inability to repay you. Just meet needs where you find them, according to the resources He has already provided, at home first, and then further afield. After all, it's only money, and Yahweh owns the universe—there's a lot more where that came from.

By the way, the Sabbatical year (as well as Jubilee, a sabbatical of Sabbaths), are prophetic of Yahweh's forgiveness of *our* debts—something all believers will experience viscerally during the seventh millennium, coming soon to a planet near you. (See Mitzvot #210-226, as well as *Future History* Chapters 26-28, and the appendix on chronology.)

- (52) *Give charity according to your means.* **"The poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'** (Deuteronomy 15:8-11) Although the scripture quoted here doesn't really support this particular mitzvah, we've seen the rabbinical principle demonstrated elsewhere in the Torah. The poor were to gather their sustenance from the crop Yahweh had *already* provided to the landowner. As Yahshua pointed out in His praise of the poor widow who contributed only a couple of pennies to the temple treasury (Luke 21:1-4), her small donation was seen by God as a fortune. As I said, His math and our math are quite different.

Before leaving this subject, we should address the problem of who, precisely, are the "poor." Who is a legitimate recipient of our charity? Clearly, it isn't just "anybody who thinks they don't have enough." Many rich men fall into that category. And God's attitude toward those who are poor because they're lazy is clear: **"How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep—So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man."** (Proverbs 6:9-11); **"The lazy man will not plow because of winter; he will beg during harvest and have nothing."** (Proverbs 20:4) So greed and laziness are deal breakers. This category would presumably include poor people who have nothing because they are living in sin—feeding a drug habit, for example. I don't believe God is asking us to facilitate their addictions. But there are people who, through no fault of their own, find themselves in dire straits. The story of Ruth has parallels in today's society. First, Boaz' charity was extended on an individual basis to someone who had already demonstrated character and loyalty without regard for her own

welfare. Second, his aid was bestowed first upon a fellow believer—there was no shortage of poor people in Israel, but Boaz perceived that any aid Ruth received would ultimately honor Yahweh. It's easy and safe for us today to ease our consciences by writing a check to some big charity factory. And it's not necessarily wrong to do that. It's God's pattern, however, that we get personally involved in people's lives—one on one. Don't worry if you can't write off your income taxes.

TREATMENT OF GENTILES

- (53) *Love the stranger.* **“Yahweh your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”**

(Deuteronomy 10:17-19) It's easy to get it right when you say what Yahweh says. This mitzvah, of course, is merely a corollary to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Yahweh lists as reasons for doing this His own authority, power, and justice. Because Yahweh loves the gentiles, His Chosen are to demonstrate that same kind of love. We should not forget why the Israelites ended up as “strangers” in Egypt: it's because God put them there. He was perfectly capable of keeping the famine from touching Canaan when Jacob and his sons lived there. But He wanted them as a nation to experience all the things that characterize the human race at large—servitude, for we're all slaves to sin at some point; deliverance, for the Messiah died so that we all could live; choice, for we're all faced with the decision of whether or not to seek God's will. Israel's four hundred years as strangers in Egypt was the first phase of their training to become the people who would deliver the Messiah to the world.

- (54) *Do not wrong the stranger in speech.* **“You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”** (Exodus 22:21) The Torah draws a distinction between mistreating and oppressing the strangers living among the Israelites. “Mistreat” here is from the Hebrew *Yanah*: “to rage or be violent; by implication to suppress, to maltreat, destroy, thrust out by oppression, vex, do violence.” (S) The word for “oppress” is *lachats*: “to press, that is, to distress: to afflict, crush, force, hold fast, oppress, or thrust.” A whole range of negative attitudes and behaviors is indicated, all of which are taken care of with the observance of Mitzvah #53. Although “wronging strangers in speech” is clearly included, the Torah goes far beyond the watered-down rabbinical mitzvah. Again, the Jews are instructed to remember their former status as slaves in Egypt and apply the golden rule with that in mind.

- (55) *Do not wrong the stranger in buying or selling.* **“You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”** (Exodus 22:21) This is based on the same verse as #54; the rabbis are extrapolating again. How ironic it is that the stereotypical Jewish foible—of being greedy and shrewd in their financial dealings with gentiles (whether or not it’s true)—is in direct violation of this mitzvah. As usual, I think that if we sacrifice the Torah’s breadth on the altar of the Talmud’s specificity we will misunderstand and misapply what Yahweh really wanted us to know. He’s speaking specifically to Israel here, telling them that their national job is going to be bearing the signs and means of Yahweh’s deliverance to the rest of the world—to the gentiles—culminating in Yahshua the Messiah. For that reason, they are to treat the “strangers” with the same kindness and sense of purpose with which Yahweh treated them. God’s salvation, in other words, may be *of* the Jews (John 4:22), but it’s not exclusively *for* the Jews: **“Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God.”** (Romans 9:4-5).
- (56) *Don’t intermarry with gentiles.* **“...Nor shall you make marriages with [gentiles]. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son.”** (Deuteronomy 7:3) Taken out of context, it looks like the Jews are supposed to act like racist bigots—too “good” in their own eyes to intermarry with the inferior goyim. But from what we now know of Yahweh’s loving concern for gentiles (see #53-55), this overly simplistic explanation won’t fly. What we have here is a call for separation, dedication, and holiness—as opposed to concession, contamination, and compromise. The Jews, as I have said, were being given a job to do, and they could only do it if they were set apart from the world’s influences. It’s like communicable-disease biochemists wearing rubber suits and face masks: they can’t save the world from disease if the germs are allowed to take up residence within them. It’s all perfectly clear when you consider the context: **“When Yahweh your God brings you [Israelites] into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when Yahweh your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son.”** And why does Yahweh want them to take these drastic precautions? **“For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of Yahweh will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. But thus you shall deal with them:**

you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire.” (Deuteronomy 7:1-5)

If the Canaanites had been believers in Yahweh, there would have been no need to keep Israel separated from them; as it was, their corruption had reached the point where, like Sodom and Gomorrah, they were beyond redemption as a civilization.

There is a parallel to this in Christian theology. **“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.”** (II Corinthians 6:14-16) This applies to any relationship, but especially to marriage. As the “body of Christ,” believers today are faced with a conundrum similar to the one the Jews faced—how to live in the world without becoming contaminated by it. We—like they—must be holy, for Yahweh our God is holy.

- (57) *Exact the debt of an alien.* **“At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called Yahweh’s release. Of a foreigner you may require it; but you shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother....”** (Deuteronomy 15:1-3) Here, the rabbis took a feature of the law of the Sabbath-year and turned it into a justification for withholding financial mercy from gentiles. Ignoring the context and the heart of God, they missed the point entirely. The law of the sabbatical year was a picture of grace. Every seven years, all debts among Hebrews were to be released, as we saw in Mitzvah #51. Debts from foreigners, however, were exempt from this particular amnesty. It’s pretty easy to see (from our vantage point on this side of the cross) what Yahweh is doing here: He’s prophesying that those whose relationship with Him enables them to enjoy his ultimate Sabbath rest will be forgiven their debt of sin. Those who are “foreign” to Him—that is, those who have no relationship with Yahweh—will bear the burden of their debt.

In practice, this mitzvah has no meaning outside of the context of the celebration of the Sabbath year. Jewish lenders who aren’t keeping the other provisions of the Sabbath year (like letting their lands lie fallow and forgiving debts to their fellow Jews) are unjustified in using this as an excuse to be greedy and conniving in their everyday business dealings with gentiles.

- (58) *Lend to an alien at interest.* **“You shall not charge interest to your brother—interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest. To a foreigner you**

may charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that Yahweh your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess.” (Deuteronomy 23:19-20) According to rabbinical tradition, charging interest to gentiles is mandatory. The Torah disagrees, although it is certainly permitted. The point of the passage, however, is that Jews were to be set apart from the world—a family who loved each other and wouldn’t take advantage of each other. Part of that was a prohibition against charging interest on loans to one’s fellow Jews (see #171).

The whole subject of lending and borrowing, on a national scale, was to be an indicator (one of many) of how well Israel was following their God. Moses promised them that if they “diligently obeyed the voice of Yahweh,” He would **“open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.”** (Deuteronomy 28:12) If they did not, they would **“not prosper in [their] ways; you shall be only oppressed and plundered continually.”** (Deuteronomy 28:29) The 3500-year history of the Jewish people reveals a sad proportion: a hundred verse-29 curses for every verse-12 blessing. The Jews need to come to terms with the fact that either Yahweh is a liar or they have *not* been “diligently obeying the voice of Yahweh their God, to observe carefully all His commandments,” (verse 1) no matter what their rabbis say.