

Sacrifices: Time, Place, and Attitude

There's a fascinating conversation, recorded in all three synoptic Gospels, that sheds valuable light on the distinction between keeping the Law and attaining salvation. **"As he was starting out on a trip, a man came running up to Jesus, knelt down, and asked, 'Good Teacher, what should I do to get eternal life?'"** Good question. One to which the whole world wants an answer.

Allow me to read between the lines a bit, to flesh out the plot a little. Yahshua and His disciples were on their way out of town, and the man (let's call him "Rich," 'cause he *was*), was desperate. He'd been too distracted to visit Yahshua during His stay in that city—running the family business, discussing matters of significance at the city gate with the other influential men of the community, and participating in worship and study at the local synagogue—and now the young rabbi was leaving. Richard's question had been on his mind for some time, bothering him, nagging him, worrying him. For his own peace of mind, he needed an answer, and everybody said this itinerant preacher was the guy to ask. So he ran up to Yahshua and blurted out his question.

Yahshua sized him up. Rich was well dressed, slightly out of breath, and bore an earnest, hopeful expression on his face. Remarkably, he knelt before Yahshua, though he knew Him only by reputation. *A study in contrasts, this one is*, Yahshua might have thought. *Wealthy, but without the arrogant demeanor so common to rich men. Busy doing good things in this world, but focused on eternity. I like him! But he's relying on observance of the Law to save him—and it can't. I need to show him where he's going wrong.*

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good." Rich didn't know Yahshua from Adam. He was just being polite, figuring a little respect might yield an encouraging answer. So Yahshua began his revelation by gently reminding him that "good" isn't a relative term as far as Yahweh is concerned. You either are or you aren't—and *none of us* are truly good if God's righteousness isn't standing in for ours. Yahshua then set about defining what it would take to be "good" in reality. For starters, **"But as for your question, you know the commandments: 'Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not testify falsely. Do not cheat. Honor your father and mother.'"** The Master was charitable, not willing to let Rich down too abruptly. He didn't mention covetousness, a test He knew Richard couldn't pass. Abstaining from making idols to worship, refraining from taking Yahweh's name lightly, and keeping the Sabbath were all relatively easy to give lip service

to in that society (though they're practically impossible in ours). Yahshua listed only those Commandments that, on the literal surface, any morally upright person (like Richard) could feel reasonably certain they'd never broken—not realizing that in God's eyes, hate was tantamount to murder, lust might as well be adultery, and covetousness is just as bad as actual theft.

“Teacher,’ the man replied, ‘I’ve obeyed all these commandments since I was a child.” *Yes, I believe you think you have,* Yahshua thought. *You certainly try to do the right thing, and I love you for that. But I must show you where you’ve broken the Law, because you can’t see it, can you?* **“Jesus felt genuine love for this man as he looked at him. ‘You lack only one thing,’ he told him. ‘Go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”** (Mark 10:17-21) You missed that one in the Ten Commandments, didn’t you? *Give your wealth away? Is that in there?* Okay, it doesn’t say this in so many words, but for Richard it loomed large, right there at the beginning of the list: **“You shall have no other gods before Me.”** (Exodus 20:3) Yahshua knew, even if Richard hadn’t realized it until now, that the man’s *trust* was in his money, not his Creator. In asking him to sell his possessions, Yahshua was telling him to turn his back on a false and deceitful god—one he wasn’t even aware he was serving. And in telling Rich to “follow Me,” Yahshua was equating Himself to **“Yahweh your God, who brought you...out of the house of bondage,”** (Exodus 20:2) the One before whom we are to have no other gods. He was saying, “Dump your false god and embrace the true One—Me.”

The shock was too much for poor Rich. **“At this, the man’s face fell, and he went sadly away because he had many possessions.”** (Mark 10:22) More to the point, he was sad because he now realized how important—how *vital*—his possessions were to him. Even if eternal life was at stake, he didn’t think this was something he was prepared to do. At this juncture, it is appropriate to ask ourselves, quite seriously, if there is anything in our lives we would be reluctant to give up if God asked us to. Not bad things, necessarily, just *things*. Possessions, attitudes, the security of a job or career, the comfort of our habits or traditions. I’m not saying that God automatically demands that we give up what we enjoy most in this life. I’m saying the same thing David said: **“Delight yourself also in Yahweh, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to Yahweh, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.”** (Psalm 37:4-5) It’s a horse-before-the-cart sort of thing: if our delight is in Yahweh, the desire of our heart will be more “face time” with Yahweh. But this doesn’t occur in a vacuum; we have lives in this world—aptitudes and talents, interests and gifts, duties and responsibilities. God hasn’t called us to retreat from these things, like a monk in a cell. One whose delight is in Yahweh will (in my experience) be given opportunities to use both his gifts and his challenges in Yahweh’s service, just as Rich was challenged to do with his riches.

One example: I know a guy whose “delight is in Yahweh” who happens to be Rich—not “Richard,” but *wealthy* with a capital R. As far as I can tell, however, he never gives money a second thought. It’s just *there*, like the air he breathes. He uses it—sometimes a *lot* of it—in God’s service. But his real delight is studying God’s Word—getting into the nitty gritty of it, discovering new things he didn’t know before. How did God give him the desires of his heart? By removing him, forcibly, even painfully, from the world of business—something he was very, very good at. Does he miss his old life? Not even remotely.

Another example, this time personal: I picked up the guitar when I was a teenager, and never put it down. At one time, I considered “turning pro,” but observed that I didn’t really like smoky bars (which is where working musicians most often had to earn their livelihood). Now in case you haven’t noticed, my delight is in Yahweh. In the matter of the guitar, even though I haven’t earned much of my living with it since I was in my early twenties, I have still been given “the desires of my heart”—I get to play praise and worship music with my friends a couple of times a week, and have counted it a privilege to do so for the past thirty or forty years. Did Yahweh ask me to give up the guitar because I enjoy it so much? No. Just the business end of it—leaving nothing left but the fun part. If it had been an impediment to my faith, however, it might have been a different story.

Using the reaction of poor Richard as an opportunity to teach His disciples (and through them, us) Yahshua noted how easy it was for the things of this world—even good things—to block our path to the Kingdom of Heaven by tempting us to rely on, or merely devote our love to, “other gods.” **“Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it is for rich people to get into the Kingdom of God!’** I suppose He could have said, “How hard it is for serious guitarists to get into the Kingdom of God,” or filled in the blank with whatever potential object of devotion presses *your* buttons. I suppose wealth is the most universal example of a stealthy “other god.” But even this was surprising to His disciples. **“This amazed them.”** Why? Because they recognized wealth as a blessing, a good thing given to some of us by the hand of God. False gods were supposed to be bad things, weren’t they? They fostered cruelty, arrogance, lust, or greed, didn’t they? But here was a guy who was to all appearances a good man, an enthusiastic devotee of the Torah, blessed by material possessions and serious about his eternal destiny. And yet Yahshua had demonstrated—*proved*—that his very blessings were blocking the door to eternal life. In other words, the “other gods” we had been warned against in the First Commandment could be *anything*, good, bad, or neutral. Nothing was to come between us and our God. And specifically, this meant that Richard was indeed a “lawbreaker,” even though he had tried his best to keep the Commandments.

It wasn't just rich people, though, who had problems with this concept. **"But Jesus said again, 'Dear children, it is very hard to get into the Kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!'"** There have been attempts to make this saying mean that rich people had to put aside their wealth in order to be saved (based on the erroneous assumption that the "needle" here is one of the narrow gates in a city wall, one that couldn't be entered by a camel unless the beast had been unloaded). That theory doesn't hold up to scrutiny, however, because the word for "needle" is the Greek "raphis," meaning a sewing needle.

Did Yahshua really say "camel"? The Aramaic word that Yahshua probably used—*gamla*—means both "camel" and "rope," since ropes were often made of camel's hair. But you can't get a rope through the eye of a needle any more that you can a whole camel. Either way, the point was just as the disciples interpreted it: *that ain't happenin'*. **"The disciples were astounded. 'Then who in the world can be saved?' they asked. Jesus looked at them intently and said, 'Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God.'" (Mark 10:23-27 NLT)** Here's the key to the whole conundrum. Entering the Kingdom of God is *impossible* for men to achieve—especially those who possess something in this life that insulates them from the world's woes, making the need for reliance on God's grace that much harder to perceive. We can't work our way in, buy our way in, or impress Yahweh with our qualifications or devotion. **"It is impossible."** The only way in is for God to bring us in. In that case, it's not only *possible* to enter, we have an engraved invitation to do so.

It was not lost on the disciples that they had actually done what "Rich" had been challenged to do. They hadn't been rich, of course, but they hadn't been down and out, either. They had had businesses, homes, families—all of which were now taking a back seat to the calling they had embraced. Naturally, it was Peter who blurted out the obvious: **"Then Peter began to mention all that he and the other disciples had left behind. 'We've given up everything to follow you,' he said."** Well, they hadn't given up *everything* yet, but Yahshua knew they eventually would, suffering persecution and martyrdom for His sake. **"And Jesus replied, 'I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, will receive now in return, a hundred times over, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—with persecutions. And in the world to come they will have eternal life.'" There's the item that our friend Richard had been so concerned about—eternal life. Note that once again, Yahshua ties it to our willingness to give up the good things of this life for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven—something He Himself personified. It's not a barter agreement, however—a hundred-for-one deal: *get 'em while they're hot*. Rather, Yahshua is describing the outcome of doing this the way the disciples had—spontaneously, with no thought of reward, simply because it was the right thing to**

do—simply because their delight was in Yahweh. This brings into focus the reason the rich man’s adherence to the Law couldn’t promise eternal life (beside the fact that he hadn’t really kept the Law): His Torah observance had been done out of a sense of duty, cultural tradition, and racial pride, not because He honored the God who had issued the Commandments.

Note also that Yahshua promised “persecutions” along with the rewards. He, more than anyone, knew that doing the right thing for the right reason would earn us as many enemies as it would friends. If Richard had overheard Peter’s remark and Yahshua’s reply, how would he have reacted? It would have stung a bit, and people don’t like to get stung.

“But many who seem to be important now will be the least important then, and those who are considered least here will be the greatest then.” (Mark 10:28-31 NLT) In direct contradiction to popular expectations, Yahshua described the hierarchy of heaven, or rather, described what it was *not*: a reflection of our status here in this life. In the Kingdom, your relative importance (indicated by the responsibility you’d be given) was determined by how faithful you were with the gifts and enlightenment you’d received as a mortal man or woman—It wasn’t the gifts you’d received, but what you’d done with them. Richard had been in a unique position to feed the poor, to alleviate suffering. He declined to do so, not trusting Yahweh to keep him from becoming one of the poor himself. His greatness among men in this life would not translate into a similarly privileged position in the next.

The disciples, on the other hand, with no more evidence of Yahshua’s divinity than Rich had received, had given up the lives they’d led in order to follow the man whom they believed to be the promised Messiah. Matthew’s account records that when Peter asked Him flatly what his reward would be, Yahshua gave him a straight, and surprising, answer: **“Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”** (Matthew 19:28) That’s like being suddenly promoted from pauper to prince—not in terms of wealth, but in terms of authority, of responsibility. As Yahshua had said, they would gain precisely the same kinds of things they had relinquished for the sake of the Good News.

As we return to our study of the Torah, we are reminded that the purpose of the sacrificial portion of the Law was to point the way to the Messiah—to illustrate His mission and demonstrate His love. Thus keeping its precepts for their own sake is pointless. And the individual directives we receive from Yahweh’s Spirit (for instance, **“Go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor,**

and you will have treasure in heaven”) are meaningless as well if not carried out in emulation of our Messiah’s example.

SCHEDULED SACRIFICES

(536) *Offer up the regular sacrifices daily (two lambs as burnt offerings). “My offering, My food for My offerings made by fire as a sweet aroma to Me, you shall be careful to offer to Me at their appointed time.... This is the offering made by fire which you shall offer to Yahweh: two male lambs in their first year without blemish, day by day, as a regular burnt offering. The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, and one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering mixed with one-fourth of a hin of pressed oil. It is a regular burnt offering which was ordained at Mount Sinai for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh. And its drink offering shall be one-fourth of a hin for each lamb; in a holy place you shall pour out the drink to Yahweh as an offering. The other lamb you shall offer in the evening; as the morning grain offering and its drink offering, you shall offer it as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to Yahweh.”* (Numbers 28:2-8) Israel was *as a nation* to bring certain offerings to Yahweh at specified times. None of these were to be consumed by the priests or the worshippers. The animal sacrifices were *olah*, or burnt offerings, to be completely consumed on the fires of the altar, as were the *minha* or grain offerings that accompanied them. Likewise, the wine of the *nesek* drink offering was to be poured out upon the ground—no one was to drink it. “Observant” Jews today don’t observe any of this—they *can’t* without a priesthood and a sanctuary. But the symbols presented are palpably obvious to us who believe in the Jewish Messiah, Yahshua: He is the Lamb. The grain is His provision for our salvation, permeated with the “oil” of His Holy Spirit. And the wine poured out upon holy ground is the blood He shed on our behalf at Calvary. You’d have to be blind to call yourself “Torah-observant” and not be able to see these things.

Actually, it’s even worse than it looks at first glance for those in denial concerning these symbols. Not only does Yahweh call the burnt offerings “a sweet aroma” to Him (i.e., something that gives Him pleasure), He says they’re His *food*—that which sustains Him, nourishes Him, and strengthens Him. It isn’t the sacrifice of His Messiah *per se* that does these things—it’s what that sacrifice makes possible: the reconciliation and redemption of people like you and me who choose to reciprocate God’s love. Yes, I know Yahweh is omnipotent and self-existent. That doesn’t mean He doesn’t have needs: He hungers for our love.

- (537) *Offer up an additional sacrifice every Shabbat (two lambs).* “**And on the Sabbath day two lambs in their first year, without blemish, and two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, with its drink offering—this is the burnt offering for every Sabbath, besides the regular burnt offering with its drink offering.**” (Numbers 28:9-10) The lambs of the daily sacrifice were offered up one in the morning and the other in the evening, telling us that from beginning to end Yahweh is focused on providing our reconciliation. That principle is doubled on the Sabbath, for this day is symbolic of our rest in Yahweh, the final destination of His plan of redemption. The Sabbath tells us that in the end, we cannot work for our salvation. It is a gift—paid for by the Lamb Himself.
- (538) *Offer up an additional sacrifice every New Moon.* “**At the beginnings of your months you shall present a burnt offering to Yahweh: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, without blemish; three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, for each bull; two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, for the one ram; and one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour, mixed with oil, as a grain offering for each lamb, as a burnt offering of sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh. Their drink offering shall be half a hin of wine for a bull, one-third of a hin for a ram, and one-fourth of a hin for a lamb; this is the burnt offering for each month throughout the months of the year. Also one kid of the goats as a sin offering to Yahweh shall be offered, besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.**” (Numbers 28:11-15) Genesis 1:14 tells us that the “lights in the expanse of heaven” were to function as signs. The phases of the moon are thus a constant reminder of the renewal that’s possible through Christ’s sacrifice. The first sliver of the new moon was to mark the beginning of each of Israel’s months, and with this sign were to come a group of sacrifices marking the renewal that was at hand.

By now we should be quite familiar with the sacrificial elements and what they represent. The two young bulls stand for human pride, the antithesis of spiritual awareness. The “bulls” of temporal power and intellectual arrogance must be offered up first if the other sacrifices are to hold any significance for us. (I have reason to believe that the reason *two* of them are specified is because these evils exist in both Jewish and gentile camps. See Mitzvah #540 for some illuminating evidence.) The ram symbolizes the reigning Messiah—Yahshua in the authority of His kingdom. Seven Lambs are also reminiscent of the Messiah, but this time the emphasis is on His innocence and the perfection and sufficiency of His sacrifice. Fine flour is metaphorical of God’s provision of our redemption—refined by crushing pressure, with no worthless chaff present. The oil mixed with the fine flour represents the Holy Spirit (see

Zechariah 4). The wine for the drink offering is the blood of Christ (see Mark 14:23-24). And finally, a young goat is offered up as a picture of the death of sin in our lives.

All of this was to happen every month. God knows we need constant reminders of our place and His plan. (That's why He calls us sheep.) One wonders if anyone between Moses and Malachi stopped to ask why these sacrifices had been commanded. It was enough, I suppose, to understand this: **"The law of Yahweh is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of Yahweh is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of Yahweh are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of Yahweh is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of Yahweh is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of Yahweh are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward."** (Psalm 19:7-11) Still, twenty-twenty hindsight is a wonderful thing.

- (539) *Bring an additional offering on Shavu'ot.* **"Also on the day of the firstfruits, when you bring a new grain offering to Yahweh at your Feast of Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. You shall present a burnt offering as a sweet aroma to Yahweh: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, with their grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for each bull, two-tenths for the one ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; also one kid of the goats, to make atonement for you. Be sure they are without blemish. You shall present them with their drink offerings, besides the regular burnt offering with its grain offering.** (Numbers 28:26-31)
- The next few mitzvot will describe the "extra" national offerings required on the Feasts of Yahweh. Though Moses discusses the Passover-Feast of Unleavened Bread sacrifices in verses 16-25, Maimonides forgot to mention them, sort of. You see, he thought he covered it in Mitzvah #522, but got it wrong—that one's actually dedicated to the Feast of Tabernacles (see also Mitzvah #542). (Passover, you'll recall, marked the killing of the family's personal Lamb, which was to be eaten amid ceremony fraught with portent after sundown—that is, on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This feast as a national holiday lasted from Sabbath through Sabbath, and each day of the feast, national sacrifices were brought, identical to that of the new moon offerings. Neither Moses nor Maimonides specifically mentions the Feast of Firstfruits (see Mitzvah #560, but it fell within the week-long celebration of Unleavened Bread, so the instructions are implicit.)

Here Moses discusses the national sacrifices specified for *Shavu'ot*, or the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost). Notice that they are identical to that

commemorating the new moon festivals and the Feast of Unleavened Bread-Firstfruits. Review Mitzvah #538 for a discussion of what the individual sacrificial symbols mean. Once again, we are being told to drop our pride and pretensions, accept and honor Yahshua the Messiah, be thankful for God's provision of salvation, mourn for the blood He shed on our account, welcome the Holy Spirit into our lives, and die to sin.

- (540) *Offer up an additional sacrifice on Rosh Hashanah. "And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. For you it is a day of blowing the trumpets. You shall offer a burnt offering as a sweet aroma to Yahweh: one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, without blemish. Their grain offering shall be fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, to make atonement for you; besides the burnt offering with its grain offering for the New Moon, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, as a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh."* (Numbers 29:1-6) First, note that Maimonides' *Rosh Hashanah* designation is wrong. It means "head of the year," or "New Year's Day" in our parlance. The first day of the first month was way back in the spring (Nisan 1), and it wasn't set apart as a *mow'ed miqra*, one of the seven appointed Feasts of Yahweh, for it had no particular divine significance other than the fact that it was a new moon, the one prior to Passover (Nisan 14). The day Moses is talking about here is *Yom Teruah*, the Feast of Trumpets, the fifth *miqra*, first of the three autumn convocations—and the next one we'll see fulfilled on God's prophetic calendar.

At first glance, the list of sacrificial animals appears the same as for the new moon festival, the Feast of Unleavened Bread/Firstfruits, and the Feast of Weeks. But on closer examination, we see one change, and it could turn out to be significant. At issue is the number of bulls to be sacrificed. Up until the Feast of Weeks, there were two. Now, there's only one. As we have seen, bulls represent human power and pride leading to false doctrine, teaching, and worship. Further, since the bulls are specified as an element of worship among believers (of which Israel is symbolic in the Torah), I believe Yahweh is specifically drawing attention to false teaching *within the assembly of faith*. We are given ample warning that such would be the case within the Church, and history tells us that false teaching within Israel has been its constant curse practically from the beginning. So there are two flavors of "Babylon bouillabaisse," Jewish, and gentile, and they both smell mighty fishy.

Why, then, are there two bulls until the Feast of Weeks, and only one here at the Feast of Trumpets? It's because (as we saw in Mitzvah #520) the assembly of believers we call the Church, though entirely Jewish at its inception, has become predominantly gentile today. During these last two millennia (since 33 AD), Yahweh has not been dealing with Israel separately as a nation, but rather has gathered together an assembly of saints in which functionally "there is neither Jew nor Greek." That will cease to be the case when the Tribulation begins (on Saturday, November 14, 2026, unless I've misread the signs). The last septade of Daniel's remarkable Chapter 9 prophecy will have begun, and Yahweh will finish the process of Israel's restoration.

And the Church? We will be caught up (which is what "raptured" means) out of the world on the Feast of Trumpets in some year prior to the commencement of Daniel's final seven-year period. There will be no more gentile bull (so to speak) within the Church, for the Church will have departed the earth—leaving only the bull of Jewish heresy for God to deal with. If this theory is correct, of course, there should be only one bull specified for the next convocation on Yahweh's list. Is there? Read on...

- (541) *Offer up an additional sacrifice on Yom Kippur.* **"On the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall afflict your souls; you shall not do any work. You shall present a burnt offering to Yahweh as a sweet aroma: one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year. Be sure they are without blemish. Their grain offering shall be of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the one ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, besides the sin offering for atonement, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings."** (Numbers 29:7-11) There it is: the same list, but only one bull—representing Israel's pride-driven false doctrines. *Yom Kippur*, or the Day of Atonement, is predictive of the day when Israel—as a nation—will finally "get it." They'll witness the return of King Yahshua to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, and at last they'll understand the truth: He is Yahweh in the flesh—He is their Messiah, whom their fathers crucified. Zechariah paints the vivid picture in Chapter 12, verses 10-14. It's the great *oy vey!* There's no Church-age bull to deal with here, only Israel's disastrous two-thousand-year-old miscalculation.
- (542) *Offer up an additional sacrifice on Sukkot.* **"On the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work, and you shall keep a feast to Yahweh seven days. You shall present a burnt offering, an offering made by fire as a sweet aroma to Yahweh: thirteen young bulls, two rams, and fourteen lambs in their first year. They shall be without**

blemish. Their grain offering shall be of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for each of the thirteen bulls, two-tenths for each of the two rams, and one-tenth for each of the fourteen lambs; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering.”

(Numbers 29:12-16) *Sukkot*, or the Feast of Tabernacles, is prophetic of the Millennial reign of Yahshua the Messiah. Like Unleavened Bread, it's an eight-day feast, from Sabbath to Sabbath inclusive. Note that it begins just five days after Israel's great awakening predicted by *Yom Kippur*. For reasons I explained in *Future History*, I believe they'll both be fulfilled in the same year—2033.

Though the types of sacrificial animals and other offering elements are the same as we saw for the other six *miqrym*, the numbers are off the map. Numbers 29:17-38 provides the schematic, as we saw in Mitzvah #522: (1) a declining number of bulls from 13 on the first day to seven on the seventh, down to one on the eighth; (2) two rams each day with one on the eighth; (3) 14 lambs each day with seven on the eighth day; and (4) one goat per day. As usual, we (or is it just me?) need to ask *why*.

The answer, I believe, lies in the nature of the Millennium. Its original population will be the survivors of the Great Tribulation—believers one and all, but theological greenhorns—neophytes in the fine points (or even the broad outlines) of Biblical doctrine. After all, they will have missed the rapture (their numbers won't include pre-rapture believers or their young children. The scriptures will almost certainly be suppressed during the Tribulation, so they'll be operating for the most part on conscience alone, with a little assistance from 144,000 Jewish messengers and a bit of angelic preaching. They'll escape death during the Tribulation by dumb luck for the most part, for multiplied millions of their fellow neo-believers will have been slain for their new faith, and multitudes more will have died in the generalized mayhem of the times. They'll be deemed worthy to enter the Millennial Kingdom as mortal survivors primarily because they stuck out their necks to aid other believers—especially Jews—during the darkest days of earth's history. But it wasn't an altruism calculated to gain them an advantage. They simply did what their consciences told them was the right thing to do. These will repopulate the earth with mortal children, who, like everybody else who's ever lived, will have to be born again—born from above with Yahweh's Spirit—if they are to enjoy the eternal life God wishes to grant us all.

What does all that have to do with sacrificial bulls—a diminishing number of them as the week of the Feast of Tabernacles wears on? As the Millennium begins, knowledge among mortals of King Yahshua's

character—and even His identity—will be sketchy. And mistakes will be made, errant doctrines will be put forward concerning who He is. But as time goes on, **“many shall run to and fro, and knowledge will increase.”** (Daniel 12:4) So by the end of the Millennium—by the commencement of the eternal state—error in spiritual matters will have been greatly reduced. On the other hand, the rest of the sacrifices all continue unabated until the final Sabbath (see #543)—notably including the goat for the sin offering. As long as mortals populate the earth, sin will have to be dealt with, and the salvation story of Yahshua’s atoning sacrifice will have to be taught to each succeeding generation.

- (543) *Offer up an additional offering on Shemini Atzeret, which is a festival by itself. “On the eighth day you shall have a sacred assembly. You shall do no customary work. You shall present a burnt offering, an offering made by fire as a sweet aroma to Yahweh: one bull, one ram, seven lambs in their first year without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bull, for the ram, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; also one goat as a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering.”* (Numbers 29:35-38) *Shemini Atzeret* means “the eighth (day) of assembly,” referring to the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. One question looms large here: why does the number of lambs and rams get halved on the last day? The eighth day—the last Sabbath—represents the commencement of the eternal state following the Millennium. Since the Levitical sacrifices representing the Messiah were to be split up between the morning and evening (see Mitzvot #536-7), it’s clear what is being prophesied: we will never reach the time of the evening sacrifice; the eternal “day” will never end.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

- (544) *Bring all offerings, whether obligatory or freewill, on the first festival after these were incurred. “But you shall seek the place where Yahweh your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before Yahweh your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which Yahweh your God has blessed you.”* (Deuteronomy 12:5-7) Maimonides has made an extrapolation here, but I think he’s right. All the men of Israel were required to journey to the central place of worship (which of course eventually settled at Jerusalem) three times a year, for the Feasts of Passover/Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and finally

the Feast of Tabernacles. (This wasn't really the hardship it sounds like, for practically everybody in Israel lived within 70 or 80 miles of the central worship location, and the appointed times are all in typically fair-weather months.) Yahweh had said quite clearly that He didn't want any do-it-yourself religious practice going on in Israel (see the following few mitzvot). Any formalized rituals were to be done as He said, when He said, and where He said. This would tend to cut down on Satanic and man-made encroachments into their worship practices—something specifically dealt with in the sacrifices themselves as the offering up of bulls. As we realize in retrospect, the sacrifices and offerings specified for Israel all prophesied the coming Messiah, one way or the other—picturing either what He would be, what He would do, or from what He would rescue us.

But there were reasons for worship that didn't naturally fall on the three festivals of gathering. Ewes bore their firstborn lambs. Things happened that made folks thankful to Yahweh. Wealth increased, making tithes an imperative. Were the Israelites to drop everything they were doing and scamper off to Jerusalem every time something came up? No. That would have made life chaotic and unproductive. Instead, Yahweh's system of annual national gatherings brought everyone's focus onto God's blessings at the same time. The result? The three biggest parties you've ever seen: sort of like spring break, summer vacation, and Thanksgiving, on a national scale. The whole country shut down for a couple of weeks three times a year, and a good time was had by all—including Yahweh.

If your religious experience consists of dull, boring, seemingly pointless rituals and traditions, something's wrong. If your idea of "worship" is everybody dressing up in their best clothes and sitting, all prim and proper, in pews designed by the Marquis de Sade while a man in a black suit stands behind a pulpit, shakes a stern finger in your face, and tells you (1) You're going to burn in hell if you don't start living a sinless life, (2) God needs more of your money, (3) Tolerance of other people's beliefs is a virtue because we're all children of the same God, (4) God needs more of your money, (5) Meritorious and charitable deeds are a shortcut to heaven, or (6) There's going to be a bake sale next Saturday ('cause God needs more of your money) then something's *very* wrong. Here in Deuteronomy, Yahweh has told us what worship is supposed to look like: **"You shall eat before Yahweh your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which Yahweh your God has blessed you."** That's God's idea of worship: feasting, celebration, gathering together both as a family and a called-out assembly, and joyfully giving thanks to Yahweh for His blessings.

- (545) *Do not offer up sacrifices outside the Sanctuary.* **“Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see...”** (Deuteronomy 12:13) Like I said, do-it-yourself religion was forbidden in Israel. Note that Yahweh specifically names the *olah*, or burnt offering. This, if you’ll recall, was to be completely burned on the altar in homage to God. Unlike the *selem*, for example, there was no participatory feasting with the *olah*. In other words, it was unquestionably an act of worship (whether to Yahweh or some false god) and thus could not be mistaken for an innocent backyard barbeque (which was explicitly permitted in verse 15).

Why would a God who purports to be omnipresent object to a sacrifice of homage performed somewhere other than one specific place of His choosing? There is only one possible explanation: the sacrifice—the *olah*—was supposed to be indicative of something besides the devotion of the worshipper. It was the subject as well as the object. It was a prophecy as well as an offering. And the location was a significant component of that prophecy. Yahweh insisted the place had to be Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, for that was where His own Sacrifice—His firstborn son—would be offered up.

- (546) *Offer all sacrifices in the Sanctuary.* **“...but in the place which Yahweh chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.”** (Deuteronomy 12:14) God gave His servant David the privilege of “choosing” the location for God’s capitol city. The fortress of Jebus (Jerusalem) was a perfect spot for the warrior king, situated on high ground a mere five miles from his boyhood home. Within the city, the site of the Temple was determined when a plague upon Israel (precipitated by one of David’s rare spiritual lapses) swept through Jerusalem, stopping abruptly at the threshing floor of Arunah (a.k.a. Ornan). The Temple was placed where the plague stopped, or should I say, the plague stopped where the Temple was to be—for as we have seen, the Temple is a picture of God’s redemptive covenant with man—first through the Law, and then through the grace personified by the Messiah. Where Yahshua is, the plague of sin ceases. In reality, of course, Yahweh had chosen the site a millennium before this, when He had sent Abraham there to offer up his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. There is nothing accidental (or even incidental) in the Torah. Yahweh had everything planned long before He told any of us about it.

Once again, we are reminded that the Jews are between a rock and a hard place when it comes to trying to keep the Law today. There is no sanctuary, though they know precisely where it belongs (and worse, a Muslim shrine now stands mocking their disbelief right where the temple

is supposed to be). There is no priesthood, though they claim to have evidence of an unbroken line of *Kohanim* going back 3,000 years. Today's Jews dare not ask themselves why their God has allowed this horrible state of affairs to stand for so long. If they did, they would be forced to admit one of two devastating propositions: either Yahshua of Nazareth actually was the Messiah—and when they crucified Him, they precipitated two millennia of exile and persecution upon themselves—or the God they claim to worship isn't capable of keeping His promises. Zechariah 12:10 describes which option Israel will eventually embrace, painful as it will be. It will be the definitive Day of Atonement, the ultimate affliction of the collective national soul of Israel: the long-overdue recognition of their Messiah.

- (547) *Redeem cattle set apart for sacrifices that contracted disqualifying blemishes, after which they may be eaten by anyone. “However, you may slaughter and eat meat within all your gates, whatever your heart desires, according to the blessing of Yahweh your God which He has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it, of the gazelle and the deer alike.”* (Deuteronomy 12:15) Maimonides' mitzvah bears no resemblance to what Yahweh actually said here, except for identifying who may eat the meat in question—i.e., anybody. The rabbis have cooked up a little revenue-enhancing twist that isn't even hinted at in the text. Yahweh's point is this: even though Israel was not to offer homage to God (or anybody else) by offering sacrifices (specifically burnt offerings, or *olah*) except in the central place of meeting, it was perfectly okay to slaughter and eat meat wherever you lived in Israel, whether clean domestic animals like cattle or sheep, or wild game like gazelle and deer. And one didn't have to be ceremonially undefiled to eat such meat. In fact, there was no symbolic connotation, no great truth associated with it at all. It was just food. Moses clarified the whole thing a few verses later: **“When Yahweh your God enlarges your border as He has promised you, and you say, ‘Let me eat meat,’ because you long to eat meat, you may eat as much meat as your heart desires.”** There was always lots of this sort of feasting going on at the three annual central gatherings, of course, but one didn't have to travel to Jerusalem or wait for the next miqra to have a barbeque. **“If the place where Yahweh your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, then you may slaughter from your herd and from your flock which Yahweh has given you, just as I have commanded you, and you may eat within your gates as much as your heart desires. Just as the gazelle and the deer are eaten, so you may eat them; the unclean and the clean alike may eat them.”** (Deuteronomy 12:20-22)

As long as we're on the subject, let's address a side issue. Did you notice that wild game was never mentioned in the lists of animals that

could be offered up to Yahweh? I believe this may have ramifications beyond the obvious matter of ready availability. First, the animal being offered had to belong to you, or it wouldn't actually be a sacrifice on your part (though it certainly was on the animal's). But also, hunting for wild game involves skill, and maybe a little luck. And I'm certain Yahweh didn't want to leave the impression that you had to be talented, intelligent, skillful, fortunate, or gifted in any other way in order to be worthy of His grace or thankful for His provision. Yes, you had to be clean and holy, but those are things He provides. All we have to do is accept them.

- (548) *Do not eat of the unblemished firstling outside Jerusalem.* **“You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand. But you must eat them before Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh your God chooses.”** (Deuteronomy 12:17-18) Continuing the train of thought established by the previous few mitzvot, here we see a specific list of the things not to be offered except in the chosen place of central worship—which has been Jerusalem for the past three millennia. Moses has employed many of the generalized terms for sacrifices and offerings we reviewed near the end of Chapter 12: *ma'aser*, the tithe; *bekor*, the offering of firstborn animals or men; *neder*: the votive offering that consecrates a vow; *nedabah*: a voluntary or “freewill” offering; and the *t'rumah*: a contribution or heave offering. As usual, Maimonides has used the presence of a list as an opportunity to generate a whole series of separate mitzvot (#548-552), in this one stressing the *bekor*, or firstborn offering. Yahweh, however, was making but one point: sacrifice happens in Jerusalem. That is where Yahshua would perform His atoning work. He was God's “firstborn,” the One Yahweh had vowed would save us from our sins, *and* the One who voluntarily left His heavenly throne, becoming the wave-offering of firstfruits to ensure our eventual harvest.
- (549) *Do not eat the flesh of the burnt-offering.* (This is a Prohibition applying to every trespasser, not to enjoy any of the holy things. If he does so, he commits a trespass.) **“You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand. But you must eat them before Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh your God chooses.”** (Deuteronomy 12:17-18) Somebody's confused. The burnt offering (*olah*) was *never* eaten, by a trespasser or anybody else. But the sacrifices that were to be enjoyed by the worshippers and priests—including tithes (*ma'aser*), firstborn offerings (*bekor*), *selem* offerings (for vows or thanksgiving), or wave offerings (*t'rumah*) were supposed to be

eaten in Yahweh's designated place (eventually Jerusalem), and nowhere else. Note that although Yahweh is omnipresent, one must go to "where He is" in order to feast before Him. Since the Day of Pentecost, that location is within every believer, for that is where Yahweh's Holy Spirit abides.

- (550) *The kohanim shall not eat the flesh of the sin-offering or guilt-offering outside the Courtyard of the Sanctuary. "You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand. But you must eat them before Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh your God chooses."* (Deuteronomy 12:17-18) Moses didn't specifically mention the sin offering (*chata't*) or guilt offering (*asham*) in the cited passage. But okay, at least it's true that the priests, or *kohanim*, were supposed to eat these sacrifices, and then only in the place Yahweh would choose. The point, once again, is that Yahshua's sacrifice—in Jerusalem—would be the only thing that could adequately and permanently deal with our sin and guilt. The *asham* and *chata't* were only temporary and only symbolic.
- (551) *Do not eat of the flesh of the sacrifices that are holy in a minor degree, before the blood has been sprinkled on the altar. "You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand. But you must eat them before Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh your God chooses."* (Deuteronomy 12:17-18) *Holy in a minor degree?* That's like being a little bit pregnant. Either something is set apart to Yahweh, or it's not. That being said, the blood is always dealt with in the context of the slaying of the animal (i.e., before it was eaten), for blood was not to be consumed, so logically, Maimonides is right on that point.

Not to be picky, but the blood for different types of sacrifices was handled in slightly different ways. For the burnt offering (*olah*) the blood was sprinkled "all around on the altar." This was the instruction given for the peace offering (*selem*) as well. Under certain circumstances, the blood of the sin offering (*chata't*) was to be sprinkled seven times with the priest's finger in front of the veil before the Most Holy Place, smeared onto the horns of the altar of incense, and the rest was poured out at the base of the altar. (*Chata't* sacrifices whose blood had been brought into the Tabernacle or Temple were not to be eaten, however. See Leviticus 6:30) For the trespass offering (*asham*), the blood was sprinkled on the side of the altar, and the remainder was drained out at its base. So the

nature of the sacrifice determined how and where the blood was to be ceremonially distributed. Issues involving our homage, thanksgiving, vows, or mistakes were associated with the altar, whose fires speak of judgment, of separation of good from evil. Our sins of behavior, however, must be addressed within the sanctuary, where atonement is made and prayer is offered in the context of the ultimate sacrifice of the Messiah.

- (552) *The kohein shall not eat the first-fruits before they are set down in the Courtyard of the Sanctuary.* **“You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand. But you must eat them before Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh your God chooses.”** (Deuteronomy 12:17-18) I don’t really know why this passage was pressed into service to support the last few mitzvot. Maimonides keeps bringing up issues that aren’t raised in the actual text, though they all have something to do with making sacrifices to Yahweh only at the appointed worship location. Here the point of departure is firstfruits, which presumably came to mind because of the text’s mention of the heave offering—i.e., the *t’rumah*. This is a general word meaning “contribution.” The word “*rum*,” upon which it’s based, means “height,” so it’s easy to see where the connotation of “lifting up” an offering, a “wave offering,” or “heave offering” came from.

The passage that most clearly defines the requirements of the Feast of Firstfruits is Leviticus 23:9-14. The salient portion says: **“When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest....You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God.”** There is no mention of setting anything down in any courtyard. Nor are the priests the only ones who are to partake of the feast. Once again, we find we have to watch the rabbis like a hawk. When they say things that purport to be the Law of God, even if they sound authoritative and reasonable, they aren’t necessarily giving us the straight story. *Caveat emptor.*

- (553) *Take trouble to bring sacrifices to the Sanctuary from places outside the land of Israel.* **“The holy things which you have [that is, the thing you have set apart for God’s purpose], and your vowed offerings, you shall take and go to the place which Yahweh chooses. And you shall offer your burnt offerings, the meat and the blood, on the altar of Yahweh your God; and the blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out on the altar of Yahweh your God, and you shall eat the meat.”** (Deuteronomy 12:26-27) The conditions of the passage at hand are defined by the first sentence of the paragraph: **“When Yahweh your God**

enlarges your border as He has promised you...” which serves to demonstrate that Maimonides is completely wrong here. The whole Temple service was designed to be a workable community endeavor for a small, agriculturally based nation, one whose borders would be enlarged as they were obedient in driving the Canaanites out of the land (borders, by the way, that were defined in excruciating detail in Numbers 34. See *Future History*, Chapter 6 for more information). Getting scattered to the four winds *themselves* was not supposed to be part of the plan. Being sent to “places outside the land of Israel” was the result of their continued disobedience and apostasy, as Moses warned them: **“Then Yahweh will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known—wood and stone. And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there Yahweh will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul.”** (Deuteronomy 28:64-65) This is where Israel is today, for the most part. But Yahweh has begun to bring them back. We have witnessed the budding of the fig tree. Summer can’t be far off.

PARSIMONIOUS PRACTICALITY

- (554) *Do not eat the flesh of beasts set apart as sacrifices that have been rendered unfit to be offered up by deliberately inflicting blemishes. “You shall not eat any detestable thing.”* (Deuteronomy 14:3) Mitzvah #510 said something quite similar, and Maimonides was wrong there, too. In context, Moses is merely defining what animals were okay for food. The passage goes on to say, **“These are the animals which you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, the deer, the gazelle, the roe deer, the wild goat, the mountain goat, the antelope, and the mountain sheep. And you may eat every animal with cloven hooves, having the hoof split into two parts, and that chews the cud, among the animals.”** (Deuteronomy 14:4-6) Deliberately inflicting blemishes to render an animal unfit for sacrifice is so devious a tactic, it apparently never even occurred to Yahweh to prohibit it. An observation from human nature: it’s my experience that whatever a self-appointed arbiter of public morality rants against is a kissin’ cousin to what he’s personally guilty of, at least in his heart. People who obsess about being ripped off are usually dishonest themselves. Those who rail against licentiousness are inevitably harboring lustful desires. And there’s nothing quite as vehement as the evangelistic zeal of an ex-smoker who’s in denial about his cravings. So what does it say about Maimonides when he condemns a legal loophole—*twice*—that God didn’t even mention?

(555) *Do not do work with cattle set apart for sacrifice. “All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to Yahweh your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock.”* (Deuteronomy 15:19) The instructions concerning the firstborn offering (the *bekor*), like all Levitical offerings, were designed to impart vital information about the coming Messiah. All “clean” male domestic animals that opened the womb were to be sacrificed: **“You and your household shall eat it before Yahweh your God year by year in the place which Yahweh chooses.”** (Deuteronomy 15:20) The *bekor* sacrifice was to be eaten by the worshipper and his family. Although the animal was “sanctified” or dedicated to Yahweh, the advantage—the nourishment, if you will—devolved back upon the one offering the sacrifice. But the firstborn was to benefit the worshipper *only* through his death. He wasn’t to pull a cart, drag a plow, or provide fleece for a loom before his trip to the altar. He had but one purpose—to die so that someone could live. He was to serve as food, nourishment, sustenance—nothing more. Furthermore, the *bekor* was to be eaten before Yahweh in the place of His choosing, at a time of His appointing—a time of feasting and celebration, one of the three annual national gatherings. In addition, it was specifically designed to be a reminder of the redemption of Israel through the death of the firstborn of Egypt (see Exodus 13).

The question, as usual, is *why*. Why was the firstborn to provide no service other than dying? I believe it was to teach us not to look upon the Messiah as a supplier of our petty temporal desires. I won’t deny that He looks after us as a shepherd tends his sheep, giving us rest in green pastures, leading us beside still waters and restoring our soul (among other things). And yes, if we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, He promises to meet our needs in this earth. But in the narrower focus of the Messiah’s primary role, we must remember that the job of the Good Shepherd is to *lay down His life for His sheep!* (John 10:11-18) Yahshua didn’t come to make His followers prosperous or powerful in this earth. He didn’t come to be the founder of a great religion, to be a respected teacher of morals and doctrine, or to show us the way to paradise. He was God’s firstborn: He came to die.

(556) *Do not shear beasts set apart for sacrifice. “All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to Yahweh your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock.”* (Deuteronomy 15:19) As usual, Maimonides has taken a precept in which Moses has offered two related illustrative examples and made two separate mitzvot out of them. There is only one “law” here, one the Rambam doesn’t remotely comprehend. See Mitzvah #555.

(557) *Do not leave any portion of the festival offering brought on the fourteenth of Nisan until the third day. "...nor shall any of the meat which you sacrifice the first day at twilight remain overnight until morning."* (Deuteronomy 16:4) I like lamb as much as the next guy, but this is just plain wrong. Maimonides, ignorant of Whom the Passover Lamb represents, has expanded his definition of "leftovers" well beyond the Torah's explicit instructions. This is a restatement of the Passover instructions originally given in Exodus: **"You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire."** (Exodus 12:10) The Passover Lamb was to be killed and roasted whole on the afternoon of the fourteenth day of Nisan, and eaten after sundown (now technically the fifteenth—the Feast of Unleavened Bread) "with unleavened bread and bitter herbs...with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand...in haste." The Israelites didn't have the whole day of Nisan 15 to munch leisurely on lamb sandwiches. By morning, they were on their way out of Egypt (see Exodus 12:29-36), the anguished wails of the lost world ringing in their ears.

I don't know—maybe Maimonides *did* realize Who the Passover Lamb represented, and just didn't want his audience to make the connection. Yahshua of Nazareth had been slain on the afternoon of Passover, 33AD, His blood smeared on the upright post (Greek *stauros*, errantly translated "cross") keeping the angel of death at bay for all mankind, if only we'll embrace the protection it provides. On the Feast of Unleavened Bread—beginning at sundown—His body lay in the tomb while His soul endured the fires of judgment for us, removing all of the leaven—the sin—from our lives. And now, at the breaking of the new day, we like the Israelites of old are free to leave Egypt—to flee the bondage of the world.

But Maimonides would have you hesitate, enjoy the perks of your slavery for one more day, and prevent the Lamb of God from enduring the consuming fire of judgment on your behalf. After all, Pharaoh has given you his solemn word. You're free to go, he says. He wouldn't change his mind, would he?

(558) *Do not offer up a beast that has a temporary blemish. "You shall not sacrifice to Yahweh your God a bull or sheep which has any blemish or defect, for that is an abomination to Yahweh your God."* (Deuteronomy 17:1) There is nothing mentioned in the text about a disqualifying blemish being "temporary." If anything, the words are stronger than they've been translated: "to have a blemish" is literally "to be an evil thing." "Defect" is derived from the Hebrew *dabar ra*, meaning "a statement, word, or

message that is bad, wicked, malignant, or worse than others of its kind.” This all conspires to make Maimonides’ interpretation completely wrong. The idea is that even if the animal *isn’t* visibly marked or blemished in some way but is nevertheless the “bottom of the barrel,” a poor specimen of its breed, then don’t foist it off on Yahweh as an offering as if you’re doing Him some kind of favor. He sent His own Son to die for our sins—a perfect sacrifice if ever there was one. The least we could do is offer up the very best animal we could find within our flocks and herds in emulation of His provision.

This whole discussion applies to other areas of our life as well (since, let’s face it, nobody is making Levitical sacrifices at the temple these days). Do we put in our best effort at work, or just do enough to avoid being fired for laziness and insubordination? Do we study to learn a subject, or merely to pass the quiz? Does our charity consist of giving the needy what they need, or merely what we don’t want any more? Forget WWJD (*What Would Jesus Do?*). Think about WDYD (*What Did Yahweh Do?*) He is the God of the Hallmark card (if you’ll pardon the stupid expression): He cared enough to send the Very Best.

- (559) *Do not bring sacrifices out of the hire of a harlot or price of a dog. (apparently a euphemism for sodomy). “You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of Yahweh your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to Yahweh your God.”* (Deuteronomy 23:18) There is more to the epithets “harlot” and “dog” than merely sexual sin. Remember the Fifth Commandment? **“Honor your Father and your Mother, that your days may be long upon the land which Yahweh your God is giving you.”** (Exodus 20:12) I’ve capitalized “Father” and “Mother” because ultimately, our parents are merely a metaphor for God Himself—Yahweh as our Father and His Spirit dwelling within us as our Mother. Their love is what gave us existence and life. Yahweh designed us to function as families in order to teach us what He is like! And that is why Satan works so hard to dismantle families—he doesn’t want us to know, for if we did, we would understand what Yahweh has done for us.

Satan’s war on the family has many fronts: separating husbands from their wives, separating children from their parents, separating sex from marriage, blurring gender roles, and so forth. At the time of the exodus, Satan was openly worshipped in Canaan as Ba’al, Chemosh, Molech, and Dagon, among others, and in the temples dedicated to these false gods, temple prostitution—both male and female—was an essential rite, a clever attempt by Satan to obfuscate God’s pattern of familial love, faithfulness, and purpose. The harlot here was a female temple prostitute whose job it

was to destroy the family, and the “dog” her male counterpart, whether homosexual or not. In the precept at hand, Yahweh was warning His people not to adopt the ways of the people they were tasked to dispossess. Their worship practices were the very antithesis of His revealed character—an abomination in His eyes.

- (560) *Read the portion prescribed on bringing the first fruits.* “And it shall be, when you come into the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground, which you shall bring from your land that Yahweh your God is giving you, and put it in a basket and go to the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide. And you shall go to the one who is priest in those days, and say to him, ‘I declare today to Yahweh your God that I have come to the country which Yahweh swore to our fathers to give us.’ Then the priest shall take the basket out of your hand and set it down before the altar of Yahweh your God. And you shall answer and say before Yahweh your God: ‘My father was a Syrian, about to perish, and he went down to Egypt and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us. Then we cried out to Yahweh, God of our fathers, and Yahweh heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression. So Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land which you, Yahweh, have given me.’” (Deuteronomy 26:1-10) The Israelites were instructed to recount the history of their nation upon the presentation of the firstfruits. This would take place on the Feast of Firstfruits on Nisan 16, the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the sanctuary. The first instance of this is recorded in Joshua 5:10-12.

Yahweh, of course, wasn’t interested in “vain repetition,” in hearing thousands of Jews mindlessly mumble through a formula recitation once a year. He wanted them to think about what He had done for them—both in temporal and spiritual terms. Let’s take the time to explore the prescribed confession. It begins, “**I have come to the country which Yahweh swore to our fathers to give us.**” We are to realize that our position of fellowship with God (the “country” in which we live) is the result of Yahweh keeping His promises. “**My father was a Syrian, about to perish, and he went down to Egypt and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous.**” There’s more to “Syrian, about to perish” than meets the eye. In Hebrew, it’s *’abad ’Arammiy*—an Aramean (which in turn means “exalted”) who is lost, strayed, vanishing, or dying. (“Abram,” by the way, means “exalted father,” while “Abraham” means “father of many.”) In

other words, Abram our father was exalted by Yahweh when he was a lost, perishing soul—which reminds us of what Paul said: “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Egypt represents the world, a place of slavery and sin: **“But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us.”**

Recognizing we’re in trouble is an essential step in getting help. **“Then we cried out to Yahweh, God of our fathers, and Yahweh heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression.”** It does no good to appeal to Pharaoh, and even less to cry out to his false gods—they’re the ones who are trying to keep us in affliction, labor, and oppression. Only Yahweh can help us in our plight, for only He both loves us and has the power to save us. **“So Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders.”** We can’t get out of Egypt by our own strength. The word translated “terror” here is *mowra*, an awe-inspiring exhibition of power, an equally appropriate description for the ten plagues of Egypt and the resurrection of the crucified Messiah from the dead. And as I observed in my study of end-times prophecy, *Future History*, these same signs and wonders will be repeated in the last days as Yahweh separates His people from the world that enslaves them. We can expect to see the reprise of all ten plagues as well as the return of the Messiah in glory—another “awe-inspiring exhibition of power” on the part of Yahweh. The objective of this second exodus will be the same as the first: **“He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”** Once again, the promised land represents our final destination in the presence and fellowship of God—something only He can achieve for us, and that only through His “mighty hand” and “outstretched arm.”

And how are we to respond to all this? The last words of the recitation tell us: **“And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land which you, Yahweh, have given me.”** If the “land” is our position in the grace of God, then what is the crop? Is it not the peace, the security, the fellowship, and the joy of our salvation? And is it not the temporal gifts we’ve received as well as the spiritual blessings? What are we to do with the firstfruits? Share them, bring them to the priests—your fellow believers—who are to offer them up in homage and thanksgiving to God. Remember, we’re talking about *firstfruits* here: the harvest is yet to come. What we receive in this life is but a small sample of what we can expect to reap in eternity future. But our faithfulness and obedience concerning the things we receive now will be reflected in the magnitude of the harvest.