

A Holy God—A Holy People

The relationship that should exist between God and man is laid between every line of the Torah. Maimonides—who approached the Law as a list of rules to be followed or an obstacle course to be run—didn't really comprehend this, I'm afraid. It can be a paradigm-bending epiphany when we finally realize that Yahweh doesn't want to be our opponent in the game of life, but rather our Father, the source of life—on every level. When He instructs us, it's not to impose His will upon us but to keep us out of harm's way, called out from the world and set apart for His pleasure. Knowing God by name, operating under His power, representing Him before the world, and following His directions in faith are all outgrowths of this epiphany.

SETTING GOD'S PEOPLE APART FROM THE WORLD

(653) *Don't fear God.* “**After these things the word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”** (Genesis 15:1) Sorry about that provocative topic summary: I couldn't help myself. While being told hundreds of times in scripture we are to “fear God,” (See Mitzvah #8) here is a verse that clarifies the issue. The same Hebrew word that is employed here, *pare*, is used in the majority of “fear God” passages. So we would be wise to consider its range of meanings. *Pare* means “to fear, revere, be afraid; to stand in awe of, be awed; to reverence, honor, respect; to be fearful, be dreadful, be feared; to cause astonishment and awe, be held in awe; to inspire reverence or godly fear; or to make afraid, terrify.” (*Strong's*) The *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* defines it: “be afraid, be frightened, i.e., be in a state of feeling great distress, and deep concern of pain or unfavorable circumstance; revere, venerate, i.e., show profound respect for one, that borders on fear of the object; be awesome, dreadful; respect, revere, i.e., show high status and honor to one in authority even bordering on fear, without necessarily worshiping as deity.”

The bottom line, in the simplest of terms, is that while we are to revere, honor, respect, and even stand in awe of Yahweh, He does not want us to be afraid of Him, cringing like a whipped dog in His presence. Such obsequious obeisance is no fun—for us *or* for Him. I've used this illustration before, but it bears repeating: the relationship Yahweh wishes

to share with us is like that of a loving father with his small child. Papa is big and strong. He takes care of us, defends us, and teaches us. Even if we kids don't fully understand how he does it, he makes sure there's always food to eat and a roof over our heads. We wouldn't hesitate to jump off the jungle gym into his arms if he called to us, for we know his love, and we trust beyond reason that he is able to keep us from falling. In short, Papa is **"our shield, our exceedingly great reward."** Therefore we respect Him with a whole heart. The only reason we'd ever have to be afraid of Him is our recognition that we've disobeyed Him, but even then, He stands ready to forgive us, if only we'll ask.

- (654) *Remain under God's protection even in times of stress.* **"Now the Angel of Yahweh found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. And He said, 'Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?' She said, 'I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai.' The Angel of Yahweh said to her, 'Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand.' Then the Angel of Yahweh said to her, 'I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude.'"**
(Genesis 16:7-10) Nobody's guiltless in this scene (except for the Angel of Yahweh, of course). First, Sarai gets impatient waiting for the child of promise to appear; so she suggests a manmade alternative to God's revealed plan. Then Abram listens to the bad advice of his wife and sleeps with Hagar. (Anybody remember the lesson of Eden? See Precept #617.) Hagar parlays pregnancy into pride, making everybody's life miserable and bringing out the worst in Sarai. Then Abram wimps out on his leadership responsibilities. Sarai pushes Hagar to the breaking point. Hagar bolts. Abram shrugs. Sarai steams. And God's thinkin' (if I may read between the lines), "If this keeps up, these two will *never* have a kid."

The solution? Everybody needs to go back and remember what they were supposed to be doing in the first place. Hagar needs to humble herself and return to Sarai's service. Sarai needs to stop scheming and learn to wait upon Yahweh. And Abram needs to be responsible for the leadership of his family. He's eighty-five years old, for cryin' out loud; it's time to grow up. This entire domestic tempest can be traced back to one bad idea. But bad ideas are ubiquitous in our world, and their consequences plague all of us. What are we to do when evil surrounds us on every side and there seems to be no way out? Run from reality? No. Though we are to flee from spiritual falsehood—"Babylon," in the scriptural metaphor—we are not to allow temporal adversity to drive us from the place of Yahweh's protection. It's suicidal. We are, rather, to humble ourselves, look to Yahweh instead of man for answers, and remain in (or return to) the place of His provision.

(655) *Restore the Prophet's wife.* “And God said to [Abimelech] in a dream, ‘Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore, restore the man’s wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.’” (Genesis 20:6-7) We tend to read these Bible stories as separate, unrelated incidents, so we often miss the significance of the larger context. The “Abimelech” episode is sandwiched between the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the birth of Isaac. If you’ll recall, Abram (now called Abraham) had been visited by three angelic messengers (one of whom was apparently a theophany), with whom he bargained for the safety of his nephew, Lot. At that time, it was announced to Abraham that during the next year, his wife Sarah would bear a child—the son of promise who would carry on Abraham’s line, through which the Messiah would come. Upon seeing all that smoke on the horizon in the direction of Sodom, Abe prudently packed up and headed south for a while, visiting, among other places, the city of Gerar, where Abimelech was king. And Satan saw a golden opportunity to make God a liar—cutting off the line of the Messiah before it even began.

Years before this, Abram had sojourned in Egypt, and at that time he had suggested that Sarai, a very beautiful woman, tell a half truth about her relationship with Abe—that she was his sister. That was true enough (same father, different mothers), but Abe figured that if they knew he was *also* her husband, they’d kill him to get to her. Now, in late middle age (Sarah was ninety, which is perhaps equivalent to fifty of fifty-five with today’s shortened life expectancies) she was still good looking, and Abraham used the same paranoid prevarication to protect himself: “She’s my sister.” And—big surprise—the same thing happened in Gerar that had happened in Egypt: the king noticed her beauty and promptly added her to his harem. If she had been taken to the king’s bed, God’s promise to Abraham would have been sabotaged, so Yahweh warned Abimelech about Sarah in a dream, giving him the instruction in our text above. Abimelech was obedient, and restored Sarah to her “brother” Abraham. Perhaps absence *does* make the heart grow fonder, for shortly thereafter, Sarah became pregnant with Abraham’s child. And Satan, like a black-caped villain in a melodrama, grumbled, “Curses! Foiled again!” Or words to that effect.

There’s the background. Now we need to figure out if Yahweh’s instructions to Abimelech still apply to us in some way today. I think they do. If I’m right, this is a prophetic dress rehearsal. Abraham plays the part of Yahshua the Messiah: *prophet* (identified as such in the vision), *priest*

(since he was asked to intercede for Abimelech and his people), and *king* (as evidenced by the homage and deference Abimelech showed to him). Sarah plays the role of Yahshua's bride, the called-out assembly of His people, called the *Ekklesia* in Greek—the “Church,” if you're willing to use a term laden with so much errant baggage. And Abimelech and his citizens represent the world and its leaders.

Early in the fourth century, the Roman Emperor Constantine looked at Yahshua's bride and noticed how attractive she was. And as emperors are wont to do, he brought her into his “harem,” a place already populated with the imperial cult, paganism (with more permutations than you can shake a stick at), Greek philosophies, rabbinical Judaism, Zoroastrianism, you name it. Only Yahweh can judge whether Constantine *meant* to usurp Yahshua's role as the Ekklesia's husband, but that was what transpired. And the bride? Not that she had much choice, but the church didn't put up much of a struggle. Did she realize what was going on? Did she comprehend that she was being seduced, or worse, raped? Sadly, the very first assembly in Revelation's prophetic mailing list to the seven Asian congregations was chastised for having “left her first love.”

Remember, the warning instruction is to the “king,” the one in charge. In every generation and every culture, every person who possesses some degree of temporal power crosses the same bridge: Yahweh says, “You're a dead man if you take the woman for yourself, if you don't restore my prophet's bride to him—*without touching her*.” And I'd resist the temptation to apply this only to governments. Popes, priests, and pastors, those directly involved in the leadership of “the Church” must become cognizant of their own guilt or innocence in the matter of her well being: has she been restored to her Messiah under your leadership, or has she been used for your own pleasure and profit? You've made mistakes; we all have. But can God truthfully say of you, “**I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart**”? Think carefully before you answer.

- (656) *Abandon man's plan while embracing God's.* “**But God said to Abraham, “Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called.”** (Genesis 21:12) Fast forward a few years. Isaac, the child of promise, has been born, and he's now old enough to be weaned. Sarah has come to terms with her disastrous plan to use Hagar as her surrogate. Ishmael, Hagar's son, is a teenager, proudly aware that he is in fact Abraham's first-born—and that the old man dotes on him. So when Pop throws a big party for little Isaac, Ishmael can barely contain his contempt for the toddler. Genesis 21:9 reports that Ishmael “scoffed” at

his half-brother, but we get a clearer picture in Galatians 4:29, where Paul uses the Greek word *dioko* to describe what happened. It means: to persecute, to cause to flee, to pursue in a hostile manner, to harass, trouble, or molest. Ishmael, in short, was mistreating the little guy, bullying him. And Sarah—fully aware that her folly had come full circle—knew it was time to separate the child of slavery from the child of promise: Hagar and Ishmael had to go.

The problem was that Abraham had grown quite fond of both Ishmael and his mom, and was reluctant to take such a drastic step. It took a memo from Yahweh to make him see the light. The lesson for us is that we, like Abraham, must be willing to abandon our own flawed plans and solutions—no matter how good they feel, how well they seem to be working, or how long we’ve been pursuing them—in the light of Yahweh’s provision and revelation. A building contractor must get the foundation signed off before he’s allowed to complete the house. The same rule should apply to our spiritual lives.

(657) *Return to the Land of Promise.* **“Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, ‘Jacob.’ And I said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, ‘Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks are streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.’”** (Genesis 31:11-13) We all take the occasional detour in our lives, sometimes on our own volition, and sometimes because God ordains it in order to teach us something. But every believer eventually needs to go back to the “Land of Promise,” the center of Yahweh’s will for our lives. Note three facts here: (1) No matter where we are, God is fully aware of our situation and is capable of amending it. (2) Yahweh gives us reminders of Who He is, what He’s done for us, and the relationship we share. And (3) the circumstances and timing of our return are at Yahweh’s discretion, not ours.

The process of “returning to the Land of Promise” is akin to repentance, but there are differences. Return is a physical act; repentance is a spiritual attitude. Returning requires God’s direction, permission, and enabling; repentance can (and should) be done *by us* any time we’ve fallen out of fellowship with our Creator—the sooner the better. Returning entails obedience; repentance requires choice. Return involves our walk through the world; repentance is concerned with our walk with God. Jacob was not free to return to the Land on his own schedule any more than the Israelites could have left slavery in Egypt or walked out of their captivity

in Babylon whenever they felt like it. The timetable, as I said, is strictly in Yahweh's hands.

The subject comes up again a few chapters later: **"Then God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother.' And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.'" (Genesis 35:1-3)** Jacob's response to Yahweh's call was precisely correct. *Before* he returned to Bethel (which means "the house of God"), he instructed his household to repent, separate themselves from the world's false doctrines, and "clean up their act"—live in purity before Yahweh. The changing of garments foreshadows the marriage supper of the Lamb, where the pure and spotless "bride" (that's us!) is seen wearing garments of **"fine linen, clean and bright—the righteous acts of the saints."** (Revelation 19:8)

All of this leads me to one inescapable conclusion: the ultimate "return to the Land of Promise" for today's believers will be the rapture of the church. What did Jacob say? **"Let us arise and go up to the House of God!"** The conditions characteristic of the rapture and its approach are identical to the three points I made above concerning Jacob's return to Bethel.

(658) *Trust Yahweh's detour signs.* **"So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. Then God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, 'Jacob, Jacob!' And he said, 'Here I am.' So He said, 'I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes.'" (Genesis 46:1-3)** Jacob's travels are again being pressed into service to illustrate Yahweh's instructions to us. In the previous Precept, we saw Jacob's obedience in "returning to the Land of Promise." Here, many years later, Yahweh is telling him to take another detour—one that will take his people *430 years* off the main road. This begs the questions: was he not already where God had told him to go? Was Beersheba not in the Land of Promise? Was Yahweh not capable of staving off the famine in the land of Canaan? No, all these things were perfectly true. So why did He tell Jacob/Israel to go to Egypt?

It's because Yahweh was in the process of calling out of the world a holy nation—a people set apart for His name and His glory, a people through whom the entire human race would witness the power and love of God—in dramatic and unmistakable fashion. That much is abundantly

clear in our scriptures. What may not be so clear is that Yahweh uses the same process with us when He's calling us out for His purposes. (The reason it's not quite as clear these days is that we are all too often deaf and blind to His leading: we don't see where the journey was supposed to lead because we never take the first step.) My own life demonstrates the principle, and many believers could cite similar detours that all seem to lead in the same direction.

Like Jacob, I worked for Laban (if you know what I mean) for sixteen years, meanwhile serving Yahweh in whatever small way I could. I then left, under similarly strained circumstances, to work in the Promised Land (running my own small business) for nine more. After seven years of plenty, God sent a famine, so to speak, and with it a detour sign and a promise to take care of my family. But my detour, like Jacob's, ended up looking like an utter disaster in the world's eyes: three years after moving 3,000 miles from my home, the spectacularly successful dot-com I'd helped invent was toes-up, the laughing stock of the commercial world. Was God wrong to lead me here? No. I was right where He wanted me. At fifty-four, I found myself forcibly retired, unemployable, blessed with just enough money to live comfortably (if I was frugal), and burning with a desire to study God's Word as I had never had the opportunity to do before. The result is the book you're now reading, and several that preceded it. (If you'd like to read about the fascinating but ill-fated roller coaster ride I experienced, check out *In the Company of Good and Evil*, co-authored with Craig Winn, linked free from this site. It's a fascinating, horrifying tale of corporate seduction and betrayal.)

RELEASING GOD'S PEOPLE FROM BONDAGE

- (659) *Investigate the Light with reverence.* **“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, ‘I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.’ So when Yahweh saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’ Moreover He said, ‘I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.”** (Exodus 3:1-6) As far as we know, this is only the second time in history Yahweh had ever manifested

Himself before men in a form other than as a human. The first was when God spoke to Job (probably a near contemporary of Abraham) “out of the whirlwind.” But other than this, we are told of no other early face-to-face encounters between man and God in which Yahweh manifested Himself as something other than a man—the pre-incarnate Messiah. We are told that Adam, Enoch, and Noah all “walked with God,” and that **“God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him.”** (Genesis 10:8) Abraham received Yahweh as a house guest in Genesis 18, accompanied by two angels, but all three figures are introduced to us as “men.” God spoke to Abimelech and Jacob in dreams. Audible instructions were given to Abraham, Hagar, and Isaac by an Entity enigmatically identified as “the Angel (Hebrew: *malak*—a messenger, representative, or envoy) of Yahweh.” And Jacob wrestled with a “man” who turned out to be God (compare Genesis 32:28 with 35:10). Theologians refer to these appearances of God to mankind as “theophanies.”

It’s patently obvious why Yahweh uses theophanies when He wishes to manifest Himself to us visually or audibly. If He allowed His full glory to shine through, we’d survive the encounter about as long as a daisy in a nuclear holocaust. God must “dial down” His glory if He wants us to live to tell the tale. That’s the whole point of manifesting Himself as a human being: *He wants us to live*. When Yahweh delivered the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai (a.k.a. Horeb), the folks down below were so terrified by the “thunderings, lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking,” He promised instead to appear to them in a form with whom they could relate without being frightened to death: **“Yahweh your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me [Moses] from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of Yahweh your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of Yahweh my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’”** (Deuteronomy 18:15-16) That “Prophet” would turn out to be the Messiah, Yahshua.

It is no coincidence that Moses’ first encounter with Yahweh had happened at the very same place, Mount Horeb (located in Midian, in today’s northwestern Saudi Arabia). At that time, God manifested Himself as a burning bush—something calculated to draw Moses’ attention, attracting him, intriguing him. Moses investigated the light, and when it became apparent that Yahweh, the God of Creation, was speaking to him through it, he showed appropriate reverence. Men are still attracted to and intrigued by the light of God. Whether they approach Him in reverence or in foolhardy arrogance (or ignore Him altogether) is a matter of personal choice and eternal consequence.

(660) *Relate to God by using His name.* “Then Moses said to God, ‘Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you,” and they say to me, “What is His name?” what shall I say to them?’ And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you.”’” (Exodus 3:13-14) It was not an accidental oversight on Maimonides’ part when he neglected to include this most basic of tenets in his compendium of 613 Mitzvot. He skipped this one on purpose, for it is not in the temporal interest of the rabbis to allow their people to be on a first-name basis with God. So they call Him *Elohim* (denoting deity in a generic sense) or “*Ha Shem*” (which means, “the Name”), or *Adonay*, the Hebrew word for “Lord.” The “Name” itself, however, is considered by the rabbis to be ineffable, unutterable, inexpressible. And that’s just plain weird: Yahweh saw to it that His Name was inscribed in the Tanach 7,000 times (6,868 of which survived scribal tampering, plus 132 instances where textual scholars have determined that YHWH has been *replaced* with ’DN—rendered *adonay*, or lord). If someone tells you their name 7,000 times, you can bet that they want you to know it, remember it, and use it to relate to them. They *don’t* want you to consider it “ineffable.”

Although Hebrew names invariably have meaning and significance, proper names should not be translated, but rather transmitted (and failing that, transliterated) into other languages. True to this principle, the translators here have rendered Yahweh’s words here as *explanations* of what His name means, though they’re not the Name itself. (*That* is something they’ll handle—and botch—in the next verse.) “I AM” is the Hebrew *’ehayah*, derived from the verb *hayah*, meaning to be, to exist. “I AM WHO I AM” is the Hebrew phrase *’ehayah ’asher ’ehayah*. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, this is probably more correctly rendered “I am He who is,” or “I am He who exists.” Being self-existent is an attribute God shares with no one. It is this element of His nature that above all makes Him holy—set apart from His creation.

God’s actual name was given to Moses in the next verse: “**Moreover God said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: “Yahweh, God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.”**” This is where it becomes obvious that rendering YHWH (Yahweh) as “The Lord” (as in most English translations) is a colossal blunder, for God then said, “**This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.**” (Exodus 3:15) “The Lord” is not a name but a title, nor does it have any linguistic link to the “tetragrammaton,” YHWH (יהוה), that appears in the text. It’s a mistake, a lie, a *fraud* perpetrated upon generations of honest searchers in an attempt to obscure God’s name and

character. His “memorial to all generations” is *not* that He is Lord (though our desire to obey His precepts does in fact make Him our lord); rather, His “memorial” is that He is *self-existent*. He is the Source, the Creator, the One from which all things material and immaterial in earth and heaven are derived—a concept infinitely more majestic.

Unfortunately, there isn’t much scholarly consensus as to how God’s name is pronounced. I’ve been writing it “Yahweh” because that is the most commonly recognized form, but most agree that it should be pronounced with three syllables—stretching out the W as a vowel sound: “Yah-oo-weh.” The vowels, however, are also a source of controversy: it could be “Yahuwah” or “Yahoweh.” The ASV’s rendition “Jehovah” might be close *if* you pronounce the J as a Y and the V as a W—both shifts being endemic in the northern European languages from which modern English was derived: “Yehowah.” We need to remember that the letter “J” is a very late innovation—it didn’t even show up in the “Authorized” or King James Version of the Bible until the 1629 edition. “J” was unpronounceable in both Hebrew and Koine Greek. If you think about it, this fact would make the name *Jesus* “ineffable” in the original Biblical languages.

Jesus’ actual name, Yahshua (or Yahushua), contains the contraction of Yahweh found in so many Hebrew names: “Yah.” (It’s a component of Joshua, Elijah, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Obadiah, Zephaniah, and Zechariah, for instance.) Yahshua means “Yah is salvation.” And in an astounding confirmation that Yahshua *is* Yahweh, we read the words of the risen Christ in Revelation 1:8: **“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord** [Greek: *kurios*, a placeholder for Yahweh, a name that can’t be transmitted accurately in Koine Greek], **“who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”** Past, present, and future, the First and the Last: Yahshua has just described Himself as “I am He who exists.” Sound familiar?

At any rate, the name by which Moses was told to represent the true and living God to the world—both to Israel and Egypt—was Yahweh. **“Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, ‘Yahweh, God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me’... Then they will heed your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt; and you shall say to him, ‘Yahweh God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to Yahweh our God.’”** (Exodus 3:16-18) Nothing has changed in that respect: we are still to relate to God—and represent Him before the world—using the name He has revealed to us: Yahweh.

(661) *Know the name of Yahweh.* “And God spoke to Moses and said to him: ‘I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty [Hebrew: *El Shadday*], but by My name Yahweh I was not known to them. I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Therefore say to the children of Israel: “I am Yahweh; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.”’” (Exodus 6:2-6) I find it fascinating that Yahweh did not reveal His name until He purposed to release His covenant people from bondage in the world. Not even Abraham, the one to whom the covenant was delivered, knew Yahweh’s name, although he most certainly acknowledged His deity. Jacob, after his all-night wrestling match, even asked God what his name was, and got stonewalled: “Why is it that you ask about my name?” (Genesis 32:29) It is only when we find ourselves in bondage—to the world, to sin, and to our own fallen natures—that knowing God’s self-revealed *shem*, His name, character, and reputation, becomes of critical importance to us.

Once we have come to realize that we are in bondage, however, the significance of the name of Yahweh never diminishes. From this point on, we see the formula “I am Yahweh” punctuating the text of the Torah, incessantly reminding us that our Deliverer is the self-existent Creator, that He is holy—set apart from the worlds he has made—and that we are therefore to be set apart from the world as well. In reality, this setting apart, this calling out, is the essence of His promise, “I will rescue you from...bondage.”

(662) *Use whatever tools Yahweh provides.* “Then Moses answered and said, ‘But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, ‘Yahweh has not appeared to you.’” So Yahweh said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ He said, ‘A rod.’ And He said, ‘Cast it on the ground.’ So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Reach out your hand and take it by the tail’ (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), ‘that they may believe that Yahweh God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.’” (Exodus 4:1-5) I’m not suggesting that Yahweh is poised to invest the ordinary appurtenances of our lives with miraculous powers, as He did with Moses. But God used what Moses had handy for His own glory and purpose. Moses had only to make it available for Yahweh’s use: what had once been a shepherd’s rod was transformed into a tool perfectly suited for the job Yahweh had assigned to him. This, I believe, is a

universal principle: God will condescend to use only those things in our lives that we surrender to Him in trusting reliance. He respects our choices: the things we reserve for ourselves will be left untouched and unused by God. That should be a sobering thought.

This principle applies not only to things, objects, but also to our own bodies: Yahweh will employ as tools only what we make available for His glory. **“Furthermore Yahweh said to him, ‘Now put your hand in your bosom.’ And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow. And He said, ‘Put your hand in your bosom again.’ So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his other flesh. ‘Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign....”** If Moses had not trusted Yahweh completely, he never would have performed this sign before Pharaoh. *What if it stays leprous this time? No way! I won’t risk it.*

“And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour it on the dry land. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry land.” (Exodus 4:6-9) Even an ordinary glass of water can be a powerful tool if surrendered to the will of Yahweh.

(663) *Respect God’s schedule.* **“Now Yahweh said to Moses in Midian, ‘Go, return to Egypt; for all the men who sought your life are dead.”** (Exodus 4:19) We tend to forget that God spent *eighty years* preparing Moses for the job He had in mind—forty getting an education in the courts of Pharaoh, and another forty in the desert of Midian tending somebody else’s sheep. Yahweh calls us to do the tasks He’s ordained on *His* schedule, not ours. And as I pointed out before, He reserves the right to be “inefficient” with His use of our time, preparing and training us for years, sometimes, to serve for what seems like only a few moments. But those few moments, if played out on His schedule, can have far-reaching repercussions. I am reminded of the 1956 mission endeavor of Nate Saint, Jim Elliot, and company, who, after training for years in preparation for bringing God’s light to the Auca Indians of Ecuador, were murdered by the very people they had tried to reach—only three months after making their initial contact. The world would call that a dismal failure, but they were precisely on God’s schedule. Because of the incident, the entire tribe eventually came to faith.

Another example from my own life: I have had a burning desire to get a handle on God’s prophetic message for the last thirty-plus years. But having a family to provide for, I never had the time to explore the subject as deeply as I wished to, having to content myself with reading scripture

and other people's opinions about it. But in 2000, after having been prepared professionally for many years to analyze a subject and communicate its core message, I found myself forcibly retired. The final piece of the puzzle fell into place on September 11, 2001. Without the Twin Towers disaster, I never would have fully appreciated Islam's pernicious role in the Last Days—though it's all over the place in prophetic scripture. I was finally ready to write the book Yahweh had been putting on my heart for decades: *Future History—a Comprehensive Guide to Biblical Prophecy*, linked free from this website.

- (664) *Work miracles and issue personal warnings at Yahweh's discretion. "And Yahweh said to Moses, 'When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says Yahweh: Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn."'"* (Exodus 4:21-23) *I'm going to kill your firstborn son?* That's a really stupid thing to say to a king if you're working in your own strength or upon your own volition. But if Yahweh is calling the shots, then telling the unvarnished truth—warning the world of the coming disaster—is the only logical or merciful thing one can do. As we have seen, Yahweh had given Moses a small repertoire of miraculous signs with which to validate his initial message to Pharaoh. All three signs declared, "Yahweh says, 'Life and death—the power to bless or kill—are in My hand.'" Only after Pharaoh refused to acknowledge the sovereignty of Yahweh would the final deadly sign be brought to bear. Some things never change.

The point is that Moses was working in the power of Yahweh, not the power of the world. His job was not to address injustice or free slaves—it was to implement Yahweh's plan. So human methods that could have been employed were not. The house of Israel numbered about 600,000 able bodied men at this time, plus women and children; they probably totaled around two million souls. Pharaoh's army was vastly outnumbered. But Moses didn't arm and train his people for battle; he didn't call for wildcat strikes and civil disobedience. Nor did he reason with Pharaoh, negotiate with him, lobby him, threaten him, plot against him, or form alliances with his enemies. Moses merely passed along Yahweh's demands and communicated the penalty for noncompliance—ten times in a row, raising the stakes with each round.

The time would come when Israel would be allowed to participate in the battle of life. But their deliverance—the thing that made life worth fighting for—was God's affair alone. The miracles and wonders that

Moses “worked” were not his idea, nor were they done in his power, and he knew it. He was merely the messenger. People are still being held in bondage in this world. They still labor under the lash of cruel taskmasters. And they are still powerless to effect their own release. Freeing them will take a miracle. Can we help? Yes, but only as Yahweh empowers us. “Onward Christian Soldiers” is a dangerous myth. We need to be singing “Onward Christian Servants.”

- (665) *Tell the world that Yahweh demands the release of His people. “I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am Yahweh your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am Yahweh.’ So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel; but they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage. And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the children of Israel go out of his land.’ And Moses spoke before Yahweh, saying, ‘The children of Israel have not heeded me. How then shall Pharaoh heed me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?’ Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them a command for the children of Israel and for Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 6:7-13)* In our natural state, we are so oppressed by our “anguish of spirit and cruel bondage,” we can’t even imagine being set free—much less achieve our liberty through our own efforts. Nor is the world willing to free us from our chains—we are far too valuable as slaves to the system, “bearing the burdens of the Egyptians.” Even our most visionary leaders are impotent to effect our freedom, stopped cold by our inertia and the world’s agenda. Only Yahweh can help us, redeem us, buy our release—and He has.

Blood has been spilled on our account: the price of freedom has been paid. Now the choice of whether to leave our chains behind is up to us. Will lethargy, habit and tradition, misplaced loyalty, or the blandishments of a life of slavery in Egypt—the leeks and onions of our existence—prevent us from receiving our liberty? Yahweh has demanded our release. In the not-too-distant future, the world will be forced to comply. The question remains, will we whose fetters Yahweh has broken choose to linger in Egypt, or will we follow God to the Promised Land?

- (666) *Speak that which Yahweh commands, but don’t expect the world to like it. “So Yahweh said to Moses: ‘See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you. And Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of his land. And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt*

and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.’ Then Moses and Aaron did so; just as Yahweh commanded them, so they did.” (Exodus 7:1-6) *Oh, swell*, Moses must have thought. It’s one thing to deliver God’s message with some hope or expectation of its acceptance. But Yahweh flatly told Moses that His words would *not* be heeded, and that He would “harden Pharaoh’s heart” because of his rebellious pride. This is where the concept of “I am Yahweh” becomes so vitally important. Yahweh wasn’t “trying to free His people” or “negotiating a settlement with Pharaoh.” He is self-existent, omniscient, and omnipresent in time. In His purview, the whole story was a *fait accompli*. It had already happened. The whole ten-plagues thing was to be a sign for the spiritual benefit of the children of Israel, not a ploy to achieve some temporal short-term objective. It would tell them in no uncertain terms that Yahweh effortlessly held ascendancy over the most powerful human government of their day, over the “gods” of the Egyptians, and over the very forces of nature itself. The process would supply evidence of Yahweh’s character for all who were willing to look. **“Now Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son’s son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am Yahweh.’”** (Exodus 10:1-2)

Yahweh, of course, has the power to do things “the easy way,” to provide instant, comprehensive solutions to our problems. But He almost never does this. Why? Does He derive some perverse pleasure out of making everything difficult? No, the answer is wrapped up in His love for us, and in His primary gift, that of free will. If God made the temporal circumstances of every believer safe, prosperous, fulfilling, and painless, while making those of the world dangerous, ugly, pointless, and brutish, what would happen? People would be coming to Him for all the wrong reasons—choosing not to reciprocate His love but merely to enhance their standard of living. He would, in effect, be *curtailing* their freedom of choice. (Remember, the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden looked as tasty as any, and it wasn’t hedged about by thorns or other impediments to procurement or enjoyment. The whole point was free will.) So Yahweh didn’t deliver Israel the easy way (by squashing Pharaoh and his army like bugs), or the *really* easy way (by simply preventing the famine from touching Canaan in the days of Joseph in the first place). Rather, He allowed His people to endure hardship for a season in order to teach them

(and ultimately, us) what it really meant to be released from bondage—how difficult, painful, and costly it is.

The world, then and now, doesn't want to hear it. Yahweh is fully aware of this. But we are to tell the truth anyway, popular or not; we are to reiterate God's command to set His people free, even though we suspect the world won't listen, nor will it heed God's warning.

- (667) *Demand spiritual freedom for the people of Yahweh.* **“And Yahweh spoke to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh and say to him, “Thus says Yahweh: Let My people go, that they may serve Me.””** (Exodus 8:1) **“Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Go in to Pharaoh and tell him, “Thus says Yahweh, God of the Hebrews: Let My people go, that they may serve Me.””** (Exodus 9:1) **“So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, ‘Thus says Yahweh, God of the Hebrews: “How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me.””** (Exodus 10:3) Note a few salient facts: first, Yahweh wasn't reluctant to issue His demands over and over again. After each plague, He gave Pharaoh a chance to repent and humble himself before the God of gods, and each time, the king refused (though his resolve was clearly shaken a couple of times).

Second, Yahweh demanded freedom only for *His* people, not the whole Egyptian populace. Nor did He demand to be worshipped by the Egyptians: He respected their prerogative to choose their own gods, poorly or not. He was introduced merely as “the God of the Hebrews.” I find it encouraging that when the Israelites finally left, they didn't leave alone: quite a few Egyptians, having witnessed the power of Yahweh on the Israelites' behalf, decided to join them and their God in their departure from the only world they knew, and they were welcomed. This “mixed multitude” became absorbed into the cultural fabric of Israel, worshipping their newly rediscovered God and joyfully accepting their new Laws.

Third, the reason given for the departure of Israel was that they might “serve Yahweh.” Pharaoh, in his pride, choked on the idea of his slaves “serving” anyone but him. So we see the pointed rebuke in Exodus 10:3, **“How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?”** Good question, one Pharaoh might have sarcastically answered, “Until You dry up the Red Sea,” meaning “never,” or so he thought.

- (668) *Don't take the “safe” route when Yahweh leads elsewhere.* **“Now Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, “They are bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.” Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh**

and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am Yahweh.' And they did so." (Exodus 14:1-4) The popular fiction that the Israelites crossed nothing more formidable than a shallow marsh called the "Reed Sea" is destroyed by the text. Yahweh had Moses lead them down a wadi snaking southeast through the rugged and mountainous eastern Sinai Peninsula that empties out onto a large beach—the alluvial fan of this seasonal river emptying into the Gulf of Aqaba at about the 29th parallel. The beach, easily big enough to accommodate two or three million Israelites and their flocks, is located at the present seaside city of Nuweiba. "*Pi Hahiroth*" describes the egress point: it literally means "mouth of the cave," reflecting the high canyon walls that hem in the wadi. *Migdol* means "tower," referring to an Egyptian fortification, the ancient remains of which lie to the north of the beach, blocking the Israelites' escape in that direction. South of the beach, the mountains reach down to the shoreline, making passage impossible. So basically, the Israelites at this point were stuck between the devil (or at least the Pharaoh) and the deep blue sea. *Baal Zephron*, a Midianite fortress Moses knew well (having tended sheep on the east side of the Gulf of Aqaba for forty years) lay directly across the gulf from the beach—you could see it on a clear day, since the Gulf of Aqaba is only about ten miles wide at this point.

Yahweh, it seemed, had led them into a trap. Short of a miracle, no escape was possible. That's why I just *love* Yahweh's response: **"And Yahweh said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward.' Oh, and I guess we'd better do something about all that water. 'But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.'** Why didn't Yahweh take them on the "safe route," around the northern tip of the Gulf, the way Moses had gone when traveling back and forth between Egypt and Midian? Because He wanted to show these people that He was not a God who was intimidated by "impossible" situations. The Israelites feared Pharaoh—he was the ruling monarch of the most powerful kingdom on earth. Yahweh needed to show His people who held the *real* reins of power: **"And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."** (Exodus 14:15-18)

We naturally seek the "safe route," don't we? We plan, calculate, and scheme in our efforts to escape the world's problems. We go the long way around if we see obstacles in our way. But Yahweh was taking His people back to Mount Horeb, to the place where He had revealed Himself to

Moses, the place where He would soon reveal His instructions to Israel. Yahweh sees no obstacles. Armies and oceans mean nothing to Him. The moral of the story: when approaching the Law of God, one should always take the direct route.

- (669) *Comprehend the difference between faith and presumption.* “Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen.’ And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it [Hebrew: *nus*—taking flight, driving hastily]. So Yahweh overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” (Exodus 14:26-29) The difference between opportunity and temptation lies in who is offering what to whom, and why. Yahweh parted the sea for the fleeing Israelites, and He told Moses to hold out his rod as a sign that this phenomenon was Yahweh’s doing and not merely a freak weather occurrence. Moved by something even more compelling than the terror of Pharaoh’s pursuing armies, Israel proceeded in faithful obedience to God’s word, fully aware that the parting of the waters was not just an oddity of nature, a happy coincidence. The Egyptians, on the other hand, simply presumed it was safe to follow the Israelites across the sea floor—if *they can do it, we can too!* Either they failed to see the hand of God in the obviously miraculous phenomenon, or they were trying to appropriate a gift that had been given to someone else—stealing God’s miracle for themselves, as it were. Either way, their error proved disastrous.

There is a rather obvious object lesson about our salvation here (but it’s not so obvious I won’t bother explaining it). Israel and the mixed multitude fleeing Egypt (a.k.a. the world) were following Yahweh’s direction and were under His protection. Further, they were putting their lives in His hands, knowing intuitively that the laws of gravity and hydrodynamics had only temporarily been suspended—the sea didn’t ordinarily behave like this. However, following Yahweh’s counter-intuitive instructions didn’t require a blind leap of illogical faith, for He had *already* demonstrated His power on their behalf on ten different occasions. Crossing the Red Sea is a picture of our stance as we accept Yahweh’s grace toward us. He provides the miracle of atonement, and we—fully realizing that we did nothing to merit or achieve our salvation—move forward in faith, even if we can’t fully comprehend the means by which God is providing our deliverance.

But what about the pursuing Egyptians? To all appearances, they did precisely the same thing the Israelites had done. They too were trusting unseen forces they didn't fully understand. They too moved forward, suspending reason and ignoring danger. They were brave, obedient, and loyal soldiers who were just trying to do what they thought was right, doing their duty, obeying their king. Why then was their fate so radically different from that of the Israelites? It's because salvation depends not upon *what we do*, but upon *Whom we trust*. The Egyptians had no relationship with Yahweh. It therefore did them no good at all to follow in the footsteps of Yahweh's people—doing the very same things being done by those who walked before them (or as Paul would later put it, “having a form of godliness, but denying its power”). The difference is that of religion versus relationship, of presumption versus faith, of yielding to temptation versus faithfully obeying Yahweh's instructions, and of seizing a temporal opportunity versus accepting God's eternal gift. “Good works,” symbolized by the Egyptians' foray into the Red Sea, are of no value at all unless they're done in the context of one's relationship with Yahweh.

WINNOWER WHEAT FROM CHAFF

- (670) *Honor Yahweh even over your own brother.* “Now when Moses saw that the people were unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies), then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, ‘Whoever is on Yahweh's side—come to me!’ And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. And he said to them, ‘Thus says Yahweh, God of Israel: Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.’ So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. Then Moses said, ‘Consecrate yourselves today to Yahweh, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother.’” (Exodus 32:25-29) This was Israel's first civil war. A cynic might deduce that it was a move to consolidate power in the hands of the “ruling” Levite tribe (the one from which Moses and Aaron had come), but it was nothing of the sort. At this point in Israel's history, the tribe of Levi had not yet been set apart for Yahweh's service from the other tribes. (Moses had received instruction concerning the Aaronic priesthood, but he had not yet delivered it to the people—he was on his way down the mountain with God's instructions when this incident—the golden calf debacle—occurred.) The issue, rather, was whether Israel was going to do things as Yahweh directed, or as the world did them. The Levites sided with Yahweh right here at the outset, setting aside the natural ties of blood and

culture and slaying the three thousand ringleaders of the golden calf rebellion (but sparing their clueless pawn, Aaron). One wonders if perhaps Levi's faithfulness in this matter led to Yahweh's subsequent assignment of the tribe as honored keepers of the Tabernacle (Numbers 1:47-54).

Loyalty to family and nation are, in themselves, a good thing. But we must never lose sight of the fact that we as believers have a higher duty, a more pressing calling: to honor Yahweh. The essence of our walk is, in fact, an outworking of the spiritual choice we have made—to side either with Yahweh or the world—for we cannot side with both. As Yahshua Himself said, **“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”** (Matthew 10:34-39, cf. Micah 7:6)

(671) *Prepare something for Yahweh to write upon.* **“And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke. So be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself to Me there on the top of the mountain. And no man shall come up with you, and let no man be seen throughout all the mountain; let neither flocks nor herds feed before that mountain.”** (Exodus 34:1-3) In his anger at seeing the idolatry of the people with their golden calf, Moses (in Exodus 32:19) lost his temper and threw down the tablets of stone upon which Yahweh had written the Ten Commandments, shattering them to smithereens. (I've heard of breaking the law, but this is ridiculous.) Yahweh didn't chastise Moses for this, however. He merely told him to make two new tablets, upon which Yahweh would write the precepts anew—leaving us an object lesson.

We too are to prepare something upon which Yahweh can engrave His Word—not tablets of stone, but our very hearts, the home of our emotions and affections. As Solomon put it, **“Let not mercy and truth forsake you. Bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.”** (Proverbs 3:3-4) And later, **“Keep my commands and live, and my law as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.”** (Proverbs 7:2-3) What is to be written there? Mercy, truth, and the Law of God—each of which defines the other.

And Yahweh wasn't done with the metaphor. In a prophecy yet to be fulfilled, Jeremiah reports Yahweh's incredible promise to the future spiritually restored nation of Israel: **"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know Yahweh,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says Yahweh. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."** (Jeremiah 31:33-34) As this study has shown, the "Law" in the minds of Israel today is but a pale and twisted caricature of the Torah Yahweh actually handed down. They do not "know Yahweh." They won't even say His name. Jeremiah assures us that this is not a permanent condition.

In the same vein, Ezekiel explains the disconnect between the Old Covenant—written on tablets (and hearts) of stone—being replaced (or more precisely, *fulfilled*) with the New Covenant to which Jeremiah alluded—a covenant that can only be written on the soft, receptive hearts of living flesh: **"I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God."** (Ezekiel 11:17-20) That glorious day in Israel's destiny is right around the prophetic corner. Note that the spiritual return of Israel must *follow* the physical return of the people to the Land of Promise—which establishes beyond the shadow of a doubt that the traditional Orthodox Judaism that Israel has practiced since the days of Rabbi Akiba is a "detestable abomination" to Yahweh, written on a "heart of stone." Now that the regathering has begun, a new spiritual dawn for the nation of Israel is about to break. But neither Jews nor gentiles need wait for it. The day of God's grace is here *today*. If we provide receptive hearts, He will write His Word there.

- (672) *Record Yahweh's instructions.* **"Then Yahweh said to Moses, 'Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.' So he was there with Yahweh forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments."** (Exodus 34:27-28) The heart of the rabbinical claim to spiritual authority lies in the myth of an "oral Law" given to Moses to flesh out and explain the Torah. This oral Law was supposedly handed down intact from generation to generation until gathered and codified by the followers of Rabbi Akiba in the second century A.D. (See

the introduction to Chapter 10 of *The Owner's Manual* for a more complete explanation.) On the contrary, Moses was told to *write down* whatever Yahweh told him. The human brain is an amazingly complex and capable organ, a miracle of creation, but it is far more adept at comprehension than rote memorization. Anyone who has ever played the parlor game where a secret sentence is passed from one person to the next around the room knows what can happen with oral transmission. The message invariably becomes hopelessly garbled. That's why God told Moses to create a written record of His instructions. An "oral Law" isn't worth the paper it isn't printed on.

Yahweh chose to communicate His plan of redemption to us using human language, which in itself is an imperfect tool. Languages are like living organisms, bending and shifting over time. They have a life cycle: they grow and mature, spawn children of their own, and eventually die from disuse. Along the way, words can lose their meaning or pick up new connotations. Worse, nuances (or even basic meanings) are lost when texts are translated into other languages. It helps a great deal that every major doctrine is repeated several times in scripture, approached from different angles, stated in different ways. But without the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Who teaches us the truth latent in our flawed texts and half-understood vocabulary, we would be hard-pressed to know who God is or what He wants. But at least we *have* texts—written copies of Yahweh's scripture that we can study and analyze. Oral traditions are nothing but a fleeting vapor, at best paraphrases and at worst prevarications.

But Yahweh is not issuing new instructions to His people today. So is the precept we've gleaned from this passage beside the point? From where I sit, the answer is no. There's still the little matter of testimony to consider, mentoring others, making disciples, bringing the joy of God's Word to a wider audience, and compensating for our own flawed memories. Speaking for myself, I write down what I've discovered because I want to remember what God has said *to me* through His Word. (At my age, I can't remember what I had for breakfast.) If somebody else gets edified along the way, that's a good thing, but I'm primarily recording these things for my own enlightenment.

- (673) *Be set-apart to Yahweh.* **"For I am Yahweh who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy."** (Leviticus 11:45) This is about as basic as it gets. Four facts are being brought to bear to support the precept: (1) The One issuing the instruction is Yahweh, whose self-revealed name indicates that He is the self-existent Creator-God without whom nothing—especially us—would exist. (2) He brings us

“up out of the land of Egypt.” Egypt, as we have seen, is a consistent Biblical metaphor for the world and its values. Thus to be brought out of Egypt implies a spiritual paradigm shift, a new world view, a radically revised value system. (3) He intends to be our God. That is, the reason He has brought us to this new place is so that we might revere Him alone as deity, without competing for our affections with the things of this world. (4) He Himself is “holy,” an adjective (Hebrew *qadosh*) that implies a state of being set apart (its root verb means “to separate”). *The Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* defines *qadosh*, as it refers to Yahweh: “Pertaining to being unique and pure in the sense of superior moral qualities and possessing certain essential divine qualities in contrast with what is human.” Being “holy,” then, is a component of Yahweh’s very nature (being self-existent). He is not part of space/time or matter/energy, but exists beyond them, outside of them, independent of them—unique and pure.

That makes “being holy” for us an extremely tall order, for as we have seen, it is the very antithesis of our natural state as human beings. We tend to think of it as being “well behaved,” but that is a pale and shallow reflection of the word’s true meaning. “Set-apart” is closer to the heart of it: we are brought “out of Egypt” to be set-apart for Yahweh’s pleasure and purpose as we are set-apart from the world. Thus there are connotations of consecration, dedication, sacredness and devotion in the word *qadosh* when applied to us.

There are further hints as to how “being holy” works: **“And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am Yahweh your God. And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I am Yahweh who sanctifies you.”** (Leviticus 20:6-8) “Holy” here is a term related to *qadosh*. It’s *qodesh*, a noun meaning “Apartness, holiness, sacredness, separateness.” (S) The interesting new wrinkle here is how this “apartness” is to be achieved: it is Yahweh’s doing. The word translated “sanctifies” is the Hebrew verb from the same consonant root: *qadash*. It is defined: “To consecrate, sanctify, prepare, dedicate, be hallowed, be holy, be sanctified, be separate; to be set apart.” (S) The point is that we cannot really make ourselves “holy.” But if we honor Yahweh and obey His instructions, *He* will make us holy.

How? I believe that He will in the end *absorb* us who love Him into Himself, in nature if not in physical reality. (I said I *believe* it; I didn’t say I *understand* it.) Remember, the holiness of God consists in His being

“unique and pure.” Listen to the words of John: **“He who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us— eternal life... Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”** (I John 2:23-25, 3:2-3) Becoming “like God,” seeing Him “as He is,” requires a type of perfection we will never attain on our own. But that is not cause for despair; it is cause for hope—a hope that encourages us to “purify *ourselves*” in anticipation of our being made pure by God. In other words, **“Be holy, for I am holy.”**

(674) *Stone a medium to death.* **“A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood shall be upon them.”** (Leviticus 20:27) In Chapter 8 of *The Owner’s Manual*, Maimonides touched on several possible modes of capital punishment in the Torah, focusing not on the offenses that would engender such punishment, but on the erroneous idea that the Council, the Sanhedrin, was to make the call. In our next few precepts, we’ll review some specific instruction from Yahweh on the matter of capital crimes. First we see the case of mediums and those with familiar spirits—necromancers and ghost conjurers. We saw the prohibition against them in Mitzvot #337 and #338. Here we see the penalty for committing this crime: death by stoning.

It’s never explained in scripture, but we should ponder the method of execution and how it relates to the crime. The unifying factor for these crimes seems to be that, one way or another, they are perpetrated against the entire nation; they’re an attempt to undermine and circumvent the authority of Yahweh within Israel. Thus the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes, “This method of capital punishment [*ragam*, stoning] is specified for idolaters, soothsayers, and a blasphemer of the sacred name. The legal act of stoning was a corporate one.... It is the participation of all members of the society which is important; since all persons regardless of sex or age could throw stones, it became the total act of the whole population in obedience to God’s command.” An act against the holiness of the nation demanded the nation’s unified response.

Capital crimes of a sexual nature (see Precept #676) were punished by burning at the stake. So it is with interest that we note that rapists of betrothed or married women (Mitzvah #288) were to be executed not by fire but by stoning. This, to my mind, demonstrates that rape is not really a

sexual crime at all, but rather the brutal imposition of one's domination upon another, forcing their submission. And in the case of a betrothed woman, it is also the usurpation of her husband's role. Since the human family is a picture of our relationship with Yahweh (He is the Husband, and we believers are the "bride" or wife) rape is a symbol of the religions, governments, or societies of man usurping the authority of God. Such "rape" is, in point of fact, a crime against humanity at large. It is not a crime of passion; it is treason.

- (675) *Stone to death one who curses Yahweh.* "Now the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel; and this Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel fought each other in the camp. And the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the name of Yahweh and cursed; and so they brought him to Moses... Then they put him in custody, that the mind of Yahweh might be shown to them. And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. Then you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. And whoever blasphemes the name of Yahweh shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of Yahweh, he shall be put to death.'" (Leviticus 24:10-16) The crime for which the man was condemned had nothing to do with the fight, but rather with his blasphemy against Yahweh—which, being an affront to the nation which was under Yahweh's protection, was punishable by stoning—the whole congregation was to participate. It thus behooves us to review what it means to "blaspheme" and "curse." "Blaspheme" is from the Hebrew word *qabab*. It means "To curse: invoke an oath, i.e., speak a verbal wish of ill-will toward another, with the force of invoking divine retribution of evil upon the object." (*Dictionary of Bible Languages with Semantic Domains*) The word connotes uttering a magical formula designed to do harm to its object, so it is akin to sorcery. The supposedly "divine" retribution in this case was actually an appeal to demonic forces.

The word we see translated "cursed" is one we've seen before: *qalal*: "To be slight, be swift, be trifling, be of little account, be light; to be insignificant; to be lightly esteemed; to make despicable; to curse; to treat with contempt, bring contempt or dishonour." (S) The guilty man had spoken of Yahweh with contempt, while calling upon Satan to be the undoing of his foe. If I may be allowed to extrapolate a bit, the man's genealogy suggests that he had a foot in both worlds—one in Israel and one in Egypt. Unlike the faithful "mixed multitude," gentiles who had left their old life behind to follow Yahweh, this fellow was trying to straddle

the spiritual fence, so to speak. He had not turned his back on Egypt but rather was trying to drag it with him into the Promised Land. Such an attitude is a deadly cancer if allowed to fester and grow among God's people. Thus Yahweh directs us to take it "outside the camp" and kill it. As John reminds us, **"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."** (I John 2:15-17)

- (676) *Burn at the stake a priest's daughter who has become a harlot. "The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, she profanes her father. She shall be burned with fire."* (Leviticus 21:9) We first explored burning at the stake as a mode of punishment in Mitzvah #287. There I noted, "Every single mention of execution by fire in the entire Bible (whether advocated by Yahweh or not) is associated in some way with either sexual sin, the worship of false gods, or both. In God's economy, one is a picture of the other." (It should be noted that the word "burning," the Hebrew: *sarap*, stresses destructive burning, consuming or destroying something by fire, not necessarily the actual execution, though it doesn't preclude it, either.) Here we see an example rich with symbolism—the daughter of a priest becoming a ritual prostitute in one of the pagan temples of Canaan. As usual, Yahweh's metaphor far outweighs the temporal reality. In the end, a "priest" is one who serves Yahweh and who intercedes for His people—and thus is symbolic of a true believer. He in turn represents God the Father in the family structure.

His "daughter," then, is one to whom the close familial relationship of the priest has brought an expectation and responsibility of faithfulness—one in the priest's household and under his protection, yet not a priest. The "priest's daughter" is physically in the household of faith (that is, she purports to be a believer) whether or not her life bears witness of this relationship. At issue here is whether or not she honors her father (and respects herself) or whether she treats their relationship as a common or profane thing. The ultimate evidence of the latter case, of course, would be to join herself—and by extension, her family—to false gods. "She," of course, need not be somebody's *daughter* at all, but could be anyone or anything in this position. Christianity as a religious institution did this wholesale at the time of Constantine (early in the fourth century), though she had been specifically warned to flee such compromise with paganism in Revelation 2 and 3. We are still dealing with the legacy of that betrayal.

We should once again explore what this particular mode of execution had to do with the nature of the crime. Unlike stoning, fire represents judgment, that is, a judicial separation of good from evil, of the valuable from the worthless, of the pure metal from its useless or toxic dross. The precept is teaching us that mere proximity to the household of faith is of no consequence. If one embraces falsehood, judgment—separation from God—awaits.

(677) *Do not tolerate the falsehood of Molech.* “Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given some of his descendants to Molech, to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name. And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives some of his descendants to Molech, and they do not kill him, then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people, and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech.’” (Leviticus 20:1-5) As we saw in Mitzvah #286, the punishment specified for Molech worshippers was death by stoning. And as we have recently learned (Precept #674) stoning implied a crime against the entire nation, and it therefore required a response from the whole congregation. *Who* was to stone the worshipper of Molech? “**The people of the land!**” Thus it is with a great deal of chagrin that I observe that it does very little practical good for a tiny minority to denounce such falsehood. The whole community must rise up in defense of the truth. Note that Yahweh will “set His face against” the defenders of falsehood and idolatry—and *their families*. Theirs is a national—a *universal*—crime; the consequences transcend personal punishment.

So what was Molech? Also known as Chemosh, Ba’al, Milcom, and Kronos, among others, this brutal god of fire was the national god of the Ammonites. His name simply means “king,” just as Ba’al means “lord,” betraying a legacy derived from the first self-deified king, Nimrod. His image was a large, hollow bronze figure with a bull’s head and outstretched arms which were designed to receive its victims when it was heated to a glowing red state. Molech’s human sacrifices—preferably first-born children—were roasted alive in the idol’s outstretched arms in an attempt to appease his insatiable blood lust, inducing him to grant bountiful harvests or victory in battle. The wails of the doomed children were drowned out with drums and flutes, while their parents were forbidden to openly mourn for them.

Yahweh mentioned Molech by name four times in these few verses. But my research indicates that “Molech worship” is actually far broader in scope than the homage a few Semitic tribes paid to one moldy Canaanite deity. A century ago, Alexander Hislop, exploring the unbiblical Roman Catholic doctrine that insisted that “every man must be punished for his own sins, and that God *cannot be satisfied* without groans and sighs, lacerations of the flesh, tortures of the body, and penances without number on the part of the offender, however broken in heart, however contrite the offender might be,” (in other words, justification by works, not grace) ties the origins of this error to, you guessed it: Molech (also spelled Moloch). Hislop goes on to say, “Now, looking simply at the Scripture, this perverse demand for self-torture on the part of those for whom Christ has made a *complete* and *perfect* atonement, might seem exceedingly strange; but looking at the real character of the god whom the Papacy has set up for the worship of its deluded devotees, there is nothing in the least strange about it. That god is Moloch, the god of barbarity and blood. Moloch signifies ‘king,’ and Nimrod was the first after the flood that violated the patriarchal system, and set up as a ‘king’ over his fellows. At first he was worshipped as the ‘revealer of goodness and truth,’ but by-and-by his worship was made to correspond with his dark and forbidding countenance and complexion. The name Moloch originally suggested nothing of cruelty or terror; but now the well-known rites associated with that name [which I have briefly described above] have made it for ages a synonym for all that is most revolting to the heart of humanity, and amply justify the description of Milton: ‘First Moloch, horrid king, besmeared with blood / Of human sacrifice, and parents’ tears, / Though, for the noise of drums and timbrels loud, / Their children’s cries unheard, that passed through fire / To his grim idol.’” (Quoted from *Paradise Lost*, Book I. Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, pp.150-151. Italics his.)

Hislop erred only in that he saw no further than the flawed doctrine of Roman Catholicism in tracing Molech’s legacy. But I detect the echoes of Molech worship in any religion or philosophy that demands self sacrifice as a condition for god’s blessing (and that includes such “religions” as atheistic secular humanism, whose “god” is man). At its core, Molech worship is any system that holds that the grace of Yahweh is insufficient to effect our salvation—that works, preferably painful or costly to us in some way, must be added to the equation. God says of the man who teaches such things—and his family, and the people who tolerate his disastrous heresy—“**I will set my face against that man.**” I think we’re in trouble, world.

(678) *Keep Yahweh's statutes.* **"You shall therefore keep all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them, that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out."** (Leviticus 20:22) In a heavy handed hint that tells us the entire Torah is really only about one thing—being set apart from the world as Yahweh's people—Moses here is being told *why* Gods statutes and judgments were to be kept. What is the "therefore" *there* for? The entire passage leading up to this conclusion is a litany of abuses and their corresponding punishments: (1) stoning for Molech worship, (2) the "cutting off" of occultists, (3) death for those who curse Yahweh, and (4) death for certain sexual sins—adultery, homosexuality, bestiality and incest—all of which symbolize, one way or another, man's betrayal of his relationship with Yahweh.

The things Yahweh warned about were the very things that were, in His colorful parlance, causing the Land to "vomit out" its Canaanite inhabitants. His caution to Israel was designed to prevent them from sharing the same fate—a caution that ultimately fell on deaf ears: Israel would be "vomited out" of the Land not once, but twice.

(679) *Distinguish between the clean and the unclean.* **"But I have said to you, 'You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey. I am Yahweh your God, who has separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore distinguish between clean animals and unclean, between unclean birds and clean, and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. And you shall be holy to Me, for I Yahweh am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.'" (Leviticus 20:24-26)** It's so easy to focus on the practical aspects of God's dietary laws (see *The Owner's Manual*, Chapter 5) that we miss the foundational lesson contained there: we, like Yahweh, are to be judgmental about the world in which we live. We are to discern what is "clean" from what is "unclean," distinguishing that which is good for us from that which is harmful. And having identified the difference, we are to avoid the unclean.

It is revealing that Yahweh ties our discernment of good from bad, clean from unclean, with His own purpose of separating His people from the world. One is a picture of the other. His metaphor centers upon what will nourish us, as opposed to what will poison us—thus we may eat cows or sheep, but not pigs or horses. We often miss the significance of the metaphor: God will bring into His "body," that is, His fellowship of believers, only those things that will benefit the body, nourish it, edify it, and strengthen it—not the things that will make it weak, ill, or ineffective. The wisdom of God must be brought to bear here, for just as bacon and

shrimp can be deceptively delicious, so can certain poisonous doctrines (for example, that good works or penance can be efficacious in securing our salvation) seem attractive to our logic, intellect, and ego. Looks can be deceiving, and deceit can be deadly.

The bottom line? We are to be holy—set apart from the world and consecrated instead to our walk with Yahweh. We can't bring the attractive toxins of the world in with us. God is holy: He won't allow it.

ENTERING THE LAND OF PROMISE

- (680) *Respect Yahweh's judgment.* **"No person under the ban, who may become doomed to destruction among men, shall be redeemed, but shall surely be put to death."** (Leviticus 27:29) **"Also you shall destroy all the peoples whom Yahweh your God delivers over to you; your eye shall have no pity on them; nor shall you serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you."** (Deuteronomy 7:16) I don't know where we got the odd idea that a loving God ought to have unlimited and indiscriminating mercy, patience without end, and benign tolerance for all beliefs. He's *God* already, not some clueless cosmic mushroom. On the contrary, the Scriptures picture Yahweh as a God of inflexible standards, whose patience is long but not without limits, but whose love *is* unlimited—causing Him to go to incredible lengths to reconcile our fallen race to Himself. Even though He leaves to us the choice of whether to accept His gift of reconciliation and redemption or reject it, this love remains the central fact of His character.

And tolerance? Through no fault of God's, the human race is dying. But "Doctor Yahweh" is offering us the capsule of life, the one and only cure for the human condition. He even paid for it Himself, though it was preposterously expensive. Now, all we have to do is trust Him, accept it, and swallow it (along with our pride). It is not His fault if we refuse to be healed, if we choose to believe either that we're not really sick or that the cure lies elsewhere. Believe it or not, He is perfectly tolerant of that disastrous opinion (which is not to say He'll overrule our choice and force salvation upon us in spite of our foolishness). But Yahweh becomes intolerant—downright angry—when we attempt to prevent *other people* from receiving the cure for our mortal state.

That's where the conquest of Canaan comes into play. The liberal establishment today looks at "politically incorrect" passages like our present precept and says, "How hateful God is; how unloving." They fail to see that Yahweh was perfectly happy to let any number of neighboring nations—Phoenicia, Assyria, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Midian, Amalek, and

Philistia (listed geographically clockwise)—go their own way, make their own mistakes, live with their own choices. But the seven Canaanite nations within the Land of Promise had reached a level of depravity that precluded rational thought and freedom of choice. They had crossed the line. After four hundred years of extending mercy to them in hopes of seeing their repentance, Yahweh reached the end of His patience. He allowed the land to “vomit out its inhabitants”—using the sword of Israel as an emetic. In the larger sense, wiping them out—placing them “under the “ban”—was the most merciful, loving thing He could have done for the human race as a whole.

- (681) *Know your own strength—or lack thereof.* **“Now Yahweh spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: ‘Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers’ houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above—all who are able to go to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies. And with you there shall be a man from every tribe, each one the head of his father’s house.’”** (Numbers 1:1-4)

Considering the fact that King David—hundreds of years later—would get in trouble with Yahweh for attempting to take a military census, it may seem a bit odd that Yahweh ordered not one, but two of them, among the just-freed Israelites. The first was shortly after they left Egypt, and the second was just before they entered the promised land forty years later: **“And it came to pass, after the plague, that Yahweh spoke to Moses and Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying: ‘Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel from twenty years old and above, by their fathers’ houses, all who are able to go to war in Israel.’ So Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying: ‘Take a census of the people from twenty years old and above, just as Yahweh commanded Moses and the children of Israel who came out of the land of Egypt.’”** (Numbers 26:1-4)

The stated purpose of both countings was to ascertain the military strength of the nation. In addition, the second census was supposed to be used to equitably distribute the conquered Land among the tribes and families of Israel (vs. 53-56; see Precept #686). Yahweh, of course, already knew how many men Israel had to call upon. The reason He told Israel to number themselves was that He wanted *them* to know how large their army was. Before the first census, He had fought all of their battles for them. But the time was coming when they would be allowed to participate in their own destiny. Yes, Yahweh would still defeat their enemies (if Israel followed His instructions), but now they would be wielding the weapons of war themselves. A military census was thus a

much needed confidence builder. Yahweh wished to wean the infant nation off miracles and put them instead on a diet of providence.

There are some interesting nuggets of truth hidden among the statistics. First, the Israelite army entering the Land was practically the same size as the one that had died off in the wilderness: 603,550 in the first census, vs. 601,730 in the second. And that number is even closer than it looks, for the Levites (who were not numbered among the warriors) had increased by one thousand men (though the census numbers are evidently rounded off) in the interim. Thus the numerical strength of Israel after forty years in the wilderness was virtually identical to that before the wanderings began. So much for **“You have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.... Why is it you have brought us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”** (Exodus 16:8, 17:3)

Second, if you’ll recall, the tribe of Joseph had been promised a double portion, and thus it was divided in two, according to his sons’ families: Ephraim and Manasseh. (So with Levi set apart to Yahweh, there were still twelve tribes comprising Israel’s military force.) By the second census, the ten tribes other than Joseph’s averaged out at 51,650 men each, while Ephraim and Manasseh together added up to 85,200, so “Joseph” was well on his way toward numerically achieving an actual “double portion.” If you take Judah (who was blessed on different grounds) out of the equation, Joseph was very nearly there already. But because the details of David’s unwise census (II Samuel 24, I Chronicles 21) were not recorded, we’ll never know if the reality caught up with the symbol. I don’t suppose it matters. What *does* matter is that David, who had a personal relationship with Yahweh, who knew His provision and providence first hand, had no business assessing the military strength of Israel. He of all people should have known that it’s not the size of the army that counts, but rather whether it is fighting with Yahweh’s help or without it. A handful of men empowered by Yahweh are more powerful than an innumerable horde of His enemies. God’s strength, in point of fact, is made perfect in our *weakness*.

- (682) *Exempt Levites from battle.* **“Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor take a census of them among the children of Israel; but you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its furnishings, and over all things that belong to it; they shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they shall attend to it and camp around the tabernacle.”** (Numbers 1:49-50) There were several levels “set-apartness” in Israel. First, the entire nation was set apart from the world to be Yahweh’s people, tasked to bear His signs, His

instructions, to the gentiles. But within Israel, one tribe, Levi, was set apart from the others to serve Yahweh personally—attending to the maintenance and conveyance of the Tabernacle. And among the Levites, one family, that of Aaron, was further set apart to intercede directly between God and man as priests within the Tabernacle.

None of the Levites were counted among the warriors of Israel. Their duties were elsewhere: **“And when the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up. The outsider who comes near shall be put to death. The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp, everyone by his own standard, according to their armies; but the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony.”**

(Numbers 1:51-53) Not only were the Levites tasked to be the custodians of the appurtenances of Yahweh, they were to encamp closer than anyone else to the Tabernacle—in the very front yard of God, as it were. They served as a buffer against irreverent trespassing, inadvertent or not, by the other tribes; thus by their very presence they preserved the lives of the greater community.

Was being a Levite a “good thing?” It depends on your point of view, for there were (from a strictly temporal perspective) ups and downs, plusses and minuses, to being a Levite. On the plus side (as our present precept points out), they were exempt from the military service to which *all* other Israelite males were subject. The Levites were recipients of the tithes of Israel (from which they in turn tithed to the priests). And they enjoyed a certain element of respect or deference as the keepers of “God’s stuff,” as it were.

But the perks came with a downside. They, unlike the other tribes, were given no territorial inheritance in the Promised Land, only a few scattered cities in which to live. The lack of land ownership precluded the possibility of earning a living in the traditional agrarian manner. (This explains why Yahweh instituted the tithe, rendered *to Him* through—and for the benefit of—the Levites.) Instead of waging war with the world, they were tasked with the care of God’s house. And although this was a great responsibility, there was no corresponding increase in temporal power or influence. The Levites—and even the priests—were given no authority as political leaders in Israel. Though Moses was a Levite, Joshua his successor was not (he was an Ephraimite), and the royal line—still half a millennium removed—would, as prophecy demanded, come to rest not with Levi, but with Judah.

Since practically everything in the Torah is symbolic of some greater truth, we should pause to reflect on the role of “Levites” in the modern world. Whom do they represent? Remember, the duties of the Levites were assigned by Yahweh—it was a calling, not a vocation. One could not aspire to become a Levite or a priest; he had to be chosen by God—born into the chosen tribe. I see in the Levites echoes of those today whose calling to serve Yahweh and His people precludes them from earning a living (“fighting battles,” as it were) or pursuing a normal gain-oriented career (the land-ownership metaphor). They *might* be pastors, but this is by no means automatic, for many “religious professionals” today are “called” more by the paycheck (or the power or prestige), than by God.

Still, we should not forget that the Israelites were given specific instruction as to what to do (and not to do) concerning Levites: exempt them from battle, and support them with tithes. It is no stretch at all to see in this a call to seek out those who are indeed called by Yahweh for his work and support them by whatever means is at our disposal. I’ll leave it to you to figure out who the “Levites” in your life are.

(683) *Respect tribal affiliations.* **“And Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: ‘Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard, beside the emblems of his father’s house; they shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting.’”** (Numbers 2:1-2) Judging by His creation, Yahweh enjoys variety. Diversity makes our world a fascinating place, and separation fosters diversity. At the same time, He commands that we love one another, no matter how different we might be physically or culturally. (Loving one another, I hasten to add, is not remotely the same thing as embracing each others’ errant beliefs and false doctrines.) All through the Torah’s historical record, we see Yahweh relating to Israel by their tribes and families. Since (as we’ve observed) nothing Yahweh does or says is accidental or pointless, we should examine why this is so—why would God want to keep separate groups separate, everyone “camping by his own standard?” (Beside the issue of holiness, that is—the twelve tribes were *all* set apart to Yahweh.)

I believe the answer can be seen most clearly when we look at the converse: why do men who are dominated by Satan invariably seek power? The recurring dream of ungodly men is to rule the world—creating a homogeneous universal slave class under their control, existing for their benefit alone. From Nimrod to Caesar to Muhammad to Hitler, with a thousand stops in between, top-down control of as many people as possible has been the aim of despots since the dawn of time. Their agenda and Satan’s is identical: the subjugation, enslavement, and forced

submission of others. Empire building is precisely the opposite of what Yahweh's precept here suggests: political independence.

There is a prophetic component to all of this. The Last Days will at last see realized the twisted dream of fallen man—a one-world government ruled by a single charismatic individual. But as I pointed out in *Future History*, taking over the world one country at a time is like herding cats: just when you get one cornered, another one escapes. What modern megalomaniacs need is a mechanism whereby nations can be convinced to yield their independence, defense, and economies *voluntarily* to a higher power—benign, democratic, and relatively clueless—which can then be taken over from within: world revolution without firing a shot. Thus we've seen the League of Nations and the United Nations, as well as smaller regional super-nations like the E.U. The behind-the-scenes ruling elite have similar confederations on the drawing boards for North America, Asia, and Africa. *Dar al-Islam*, of course, functions in many ways like a single (if not unified) nation already. All of this is leading to a world where the following prophecy can become a black reality: **“And authority was given him [the Antichrist] over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb.”** (Revelation 13:7-8) Mankind will have forsaken the practice of “camping by their own standards,” but in a twisted sort of way, every man will still be encamped **“beside the emblems of his father's house.”**

(684) *Make two silver trumpets.* **“And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Make two silver trumpets for yourself; you shall make them of hammered work; you shall use them for calling the congregation and for directing the movement of the camps.’”** (Numbers 10:1-2) We discussed these silver trumpets under Mitzvah #454, in Chapter 11 of *The Owner's Manual*. Unlike the ram's horn trumpets—the *shofar*—that were indicative of God's call upon our lives, these silver *'hasoserah* trumpets were man-made, and used to communicate between men when going to battle or rejoicing on feast days. They functioned much like bugles would in later times, with one important difference: Yahweh promised to “remember” the children of Israel whenever the *'hasoserah* was blown (verse 9). In a way then, this meant the use of the silver trumpets was a prayer, for Israel was aware that God would be listening when they were blown.

Two lessons come to mind. First, they remind us that Yahweh is privy to our human communication. He listens to what we say to each other—not just to what we say to Him. Would we say the things we do if we really understood that? Do we speak in love, seeking to edify and encourage our brothers, or are we just telling people what to do? Second,

Yahweh's instructions here were to *make* the trumpets: He wants us to initiate conversation, even with Him. Yahweh is not a God who says, *Shut up and do what I tell you*. Rather, He is the God who says, *Come now, let us reason together; ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; pray—converse with Me—without ceasing*.

Specific instructions were issued concerning the use of the silver trumpets: **“When they blow both of them, all the congregation shall gather before you at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. But if they blow only one, then the leaders, the heads of the divisions of Israel, shall gather to you. When you sound the advance, the camps that lie on the east side shall then begin their journey. When you sound the advance the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall begin their journey; they shall sound the call for them to begin their journeys. And when the assembly is to be gathered together, you shall blow, but not sound the advance. The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets; and these shall be to you as an ordinance forever throughout your generations.”** (Numbers 10:3-8) Note that the trumpet blasts (like bugle calls) *meant* something. This was communication, not entertainment. The sound would vary, depending upon the message and its intended audience. And the designated trumpet blowers were priests—those who were by definition and calling tasked with interceding between God and man. The lessons again seem obvious: we should listen for messages delivered by men who are in communication with Yahweh, discerning which instructions are meant for us, and which are meant for our brothers. At the same time, we need to draw a distinction between the world's meaningless noise—music, entertainment, ear-tickling auditory amusements—and what Yahweh might be saying to us through the voices of Spirit-led people. The popular entertainers of our day like to voice their opinions, but they seldom blow the *'hasoserah*.

(685) *Preview God's blessings.* **“And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.’”**

(Numbers 13:1-2) As I pointed out in Precept #635, the pre-invasion foray of the twelve spies into the Land was done with Yahweh's permission, not upon His orders. Nevertheless, He had some instructions for them: **“Spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel.”** This “land” had been defined previously as **“from the river of Egypt [i.e., the Wadi El Arish] to the great river, the River Euphrates”** (Genesis 15:18), and **“from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines [the Mediterranean], and from the desert to the River [Euphrates]”** (Exodus 23:31).

They were starting out in the Wilderness of Paran, which is some distance north of the Gulf of Aqaba, the northeastern “finger” of the Red Sea. Moses told them first to go south (Numbers 13:17), for the Red Sea was supposed to mark their southern boundary. Instead, the twelve began their spy mission in the Wilderness of Zin (13:21), miles *north* of where they’d been encamped. We aren’t told how broad a swath the spies covered, but they didn’t get anywhere near the Euphrates, stopping a hundred miles short of it. Their lack of obedience (or is that faith?) was reflected in Yahweh’s subsequent detailed description of the boundaries of the land they would occupy, delineated in Numbers 34 (see Precepts #699-702). It pares the borders down to pretty much what the spies were actually willing to go and look at. What did they lose? Only a Red Sea port, which would have given them access to Eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean in the south, and in the north, Lebanon—the jewel of the Eastern Mediterranean. All this was theirs, if only they’d go and receive it.

So where does that leave us modern-day explorers of the Torah? What are we to learn from this? I believe that we, too, have been given permission to “spy out the Land of Promise.” No, not Canaan, but rather the place *we* have been promised as believers in Yahweh’s grace: the Kingdom of Heaven. Okay, it’s not exactly a *place*, but a state of being, one in which Yahshua rules supreme, where Satan can’t touch us because he’s been incarcerated in the abyss, where we finally *get it*: we no longer feel like we have to sin against our God. I realize that we can’t live there full time yet, but there’s no reason we can’t go in and “spy out the land.” The only question is: will we, like the ten faithless Israelites of old, merely take a quick peek, make note of the obstacles looming before us, and run back to our comfortably familiar lives in the wilderness with our tails between our legs? Or will we, like Joshua and Caleb, look forward with eager anticipation to settling in this strange, wonderful new world?

- (686) *Divide the Land on the basis of participation in battle.* “Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘To these [those counted in the second census—See Precept #681] the land shall be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names. To a large tribe you shall give a larger inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a smaller inheritance. Each shall be given its inheritance according to those who were numbered of them. But the land shall be divided by lot; they shall inherit according to the names of the tribes of their fathers. According to the lot their inheritance shall be divided between the larger and the smaller.’” (Numbers 26:52-56) At the time of the second census, the smallest tribe, Simeon, numbered 22,200 men, while the largest, Judah, boasted three times that strength, 76,500 warriors. It was the epitome of fair play that the larger the tribal army, the larger the parcel of land that

would be deeded to the tribe. The location of each tribe's parcel would be determined by casting lots (Joshua 18:10), a process in which Joshua, the High Priest Eleazar, and the tribal patriarchs all participated (19:51). But the amount of acreage would depend on the size of the tribe, or more specifically, its army.

The Canaanites, of course, didn't just roll over and play dead. They put up a fight. This posed no problem for the Israelites as long as they trusted in Yahweh rather than their own strength to win their battles for them—He had promised to “go before them.” The reason I bring this up is that the *second* strongest tribe in Israel—Dan, boasting 64,400 valiant warriors—apparently didn't care much for Yahweh's leadership, and as a result found fighting for their allotted inheritance an impossible task. So what did they do—repent and seek Yahweh's assistance? Nope. They picked up the tribe, lock, stock, and barrel, and moved it to the very northern border of the Land. Remember what I said about the twelve spies stopping a hundred miles short of the Euphrates? They only made it as far as Rehob (Numbers 13:21). Judges 18:28-30 reports that Dan took over a town in the same valley as Rehob, named Laish, renamed it Dan, and promptly dropped all pretense of the worship of Yahweh. Needless to say, Dan was the first tribe to go when the Assyrians invaded Israel in 722 B.C.

But the bad news isn't quite over for the apostate tribe of Dan. First, their name is missing from the list of tribes being represented among the prophetic 144,000 witnesses of Revelation 7 and 14. Could it be that Yahweh couldn't find the requisite 12,000 descendants? While you ponder that, note that the tribe of Dan *will* still exist when the Millennial reign of Christ begins a few years later, for Ezekiel records their newly allotted territory—right where they wanted it, at the far northern end of Israel's tribal territory, up at the Entrance of Hamath (Ezekiel 48:1), that is, near Rehob. Yahweh, then, while keeping His word to restore *all* of Israel in the Last Days, also respects Dan's ancient wish to distance themselves from Him as far as possible. So what did Dan give up? Only downtown Tel Aviv, which will certainly be among the most valuable pieces of real estate in the world during the thousand-year reign of Yahshua. Oops.

In a way, our “holdings” in the Kingdom of Heaven will also be predicated upon our participation in battle—the battle of life. When we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ (II Corinthians 5:10), we will be rewarded based upon the things we did in this world. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 should give us all pause.

(687) *Be aware of your insignificance in the light of Yahweh's love. “For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God; Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people*

for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. Yahweh did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because Yahweh loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, Yahweh has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 7:6-8) One gets the distinct impression that the nation of Israel, beginning with its patriarch, Abraham, was chosen by Yahweh as a “worst-case scenario.” God seems to have said to Himself, *If I can take a complete nobody, a stubborn and insecure pagan living in a pagan land, a man so insignificant he’s not even the head of his own household, and build of him a great nation that will come to know and love Me, then there is hope for the whole human race.* The Jews have often had the mistaken impression that because God chose them, they must be special, somehow better or more worthy than the gentiles. Yahweh here states that the opposite is true: “If I can make it here, I can make it *anywhere.*”

Of course, there wasn’t an imperative anywhere in there. That comes in the next sentence: **“Therefore know that Yahweh your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them.”** (Deuteronomy 7:9-11) Did you catch the counterintuitive connection? *Because* Yahweh chose to love us even though we were insignificant—*because* of His own oath and covenant (and not for anything we’ve done)—we are to know, comprehend, and embrace the fact that Yahweh is God. If we know He is God, we must deal with the reality of His deity: faithfulness, love, and mercy for those who reverence Him, and certain destruction—retribution in kind—for those who hate Him, whether they think He’s God or not. The “commandments, statutes, and judgments” that Moses handed down are for our own benefit. We who accept and acknowledge the deity of Yahweh know that and act accordingly.