

## Loving Your Neighbor

In America, it is our practice to elect people to enact laws. Then we elect or appoint judges to implement—and if necessary, interpret, amend, or invalidate—those laws. Over the course of a couple of centuries, this has resulted in an impenetrable maze of rules, procedures, guidelines, exceptions, and exceptions to the exceptions. This in turn requires the attention of armies of lawyers—most of whom are being handsomely paid by clients with personal agendas to swing the outcome in one direction or the other, regardless of what's right or wrong. And we ordinary citizens begin to wonder where the law ceased being our protector and started becoming our master. The whole idea of having laws in the first place was to make life safe and fair for all concerned. Where did we go wrong?

It has become fashionable in Christian circles to declare that although we've forgotten our roots, the Ten Commandments were the foundation for our whole system of common law, and we should therefore keep them posted on the courthouse wall. I'll agree that they *should have* been the basis of American jurisprudence, but from the very beginning, we edited the life out of God's list. In truth, only four of the Ten Commandments were *ever* the law of the land in this country: do not murder, do not commit adultery (and we've long since jettisoned that one—it's no longer considered a crime in this country), don't steal, and don't perjure yourself. None of the rest of them (i.e., worship Yahweh only, don't make idols, use the name of God with respect, keep the Sabbath, honor your parents, and do not covet) were *ever* taken seriously by our lawmakers (or the European legal traditions they built upon). So our legislators didn't exactly go wrong by abandoning the Ten Commandments along the way. Rather, they (we) went astray by failing to implement them in the first place. (I'm speaking of law in the United States because that's what I know, but I suspect that much of what I'm saying applies to most nations.)

But as Yahshua pointed out, there are two “laws” that, if heeded, would have rendered the Ten Commandments, and indeed the entire Torah, more or less redundant. First, **“You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”** (Deuteronomy 6:5) And the second is a natural result of doing the first: **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** (Leviticus 19:18) I submit to you that not only the “Torah and the Prophets” hang upon these two precepts; if we all followed them, they would also eliminate the need for ninety percent of American law. Think it through: how much of our legal system is dedicated to trying to ensure that people *act as though* they “loved their neighbors as they do

themselves?” It’s not just the obviously criminal stuff like, “Don’t mug a guy and steal his wallet.” Everything from trade and banking regulations to civil rights, consumer protection, patents and copyrights, family law, environmental protection, immigration, national defense, intellectual property, probate and taxes, malpractice and workers’ compensation law, the regulation of alcohol, tobacco, and firearms—and a score of other categories—would have no reason for being there if we all simply loved our neighbors as much (and in the same way) as we love ourselves. Most statutes would be rendered obsolete if we (and I mean *worldwide*) didn’t covet what others had, if we didn’t try to steal from them, and if we didn’t seek to murder them, whether literally or figuratively.

*I would never do that*, you protest. Maybe, but *somebody’s* doing it. Let’s play the David vs. Nathan “You-Are-The-Man” game, and see if anything rings a bell. Say you work for a bank who’s making loans to shaky customers—taking unwarranted risks with money that isn’t theirs in hopes of making a quick buck. (*The FDIC will always bail us out if we go too far.*) Or maybe you work for a manufacturer whose only reason for making their product safe or suitable, or whose only motivation for the safe disposal of their company’s waste products is that the government will fine them if they don’t do the right thing. My son just ran into this one: he put \$27 worth of gasoline on his *pre-paid* debit card, but they charged him \$60. Why? Because they can. They’re allowed to “escrow” the remainder, it turns out, until the transaction is finalized—which means he’s got his wings clipped for a week or so. (It’s all designed to trick card users into making overdrafts, engendering hefty and unexpected fees. I’m told the banking industry “earned” over fifteen billion dollars last year by doing this. Makes me want to pay for everything in pennies.) Maybe you’re guiltless here, but I’m not. I used to be a packaging designer. How many times, I wonder, did I try my best to “put lipstick on the pig” so to speak—to make a product look better than it really was? It’s one thing to put your best foot forward; it’s another to lie to your client’s customer. Sometimes it was very hard to tell where that line was. My point is, if I really *loved* the consumer, I would have found a way to let him know that this nifty energy-saving electronic light bulb I’d just sold him wouldn’t actually fit in any standard table lamp known to man.

God never specified a penalty for failing to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Good thing, too. Nobody actually attains perfection in loving his neighbor in this life, which is not to say we shouldn’t constantly try. This is clearly less “law” than instruction: a goal to aim for, like when Yahweh said, “Be holy, for I am holy.” The ability to love, like the ability to be holy, are gifts from God: we can’t really do this in our own strength. Loving people is a byproduct, a natural result, of loving Yahweh—or more correctly, reciprocating His love for us. In the end, you can’t love your fellow man without loving God, for Yahweh is the source of love in this world. The best we can achieve in our own strength is love’s negative

permutation—not showing hatred, not doing harm. Is it really *love* to refrain from robbing a man? No, it isn't. There's a big difference between not stealing his money and meeting his needs by spending yours. That's why Yahweh instructed us to love our neighbors *as we do ourselves*.

How *do* we love ourselves? We feed us, clothe us, try to keep ourselves from injury or pain. We do what we can to meet our own needs and desires. We try to make ourselves happy and healthy, and if we're smart, we'll come to the realization somewhere along the line that the happiness we seek is best achieved through fellowship, intimate contact with other people and with God. (That's why solitary confinement is considered such a harsh form of punishment.) If you think about it, love is always a transaction: it requires two parties, a giver and a recipient (who can and do—and *should*—swap roles). When we “love *ourselves*,” it actually means our souls are providing what our bodies want or need—and conversely, our bodies are giving our souls sustenance. (When the body gives the *body* what it wants, it's not love at all—it's lust, and the soul is likely to “regret it in the morning.”) “Loving our neighbors” therefore implies a transference of the same kind: doing for other people what we can to make them happy, safe, fulfilled, or contented—whether physically or spiritually. Consider the alternative: the refusal to love puts *both* the potential giver and his recipient into a solitary confinement of sorts—it carries with it its own punishment: isolation.

Though Yahweh didn't designate a specific penalty for failing to love one's neighbor, He did lay out detailed rules delineating what should happen in the wake of various key indicators of that absence of love: murder, kidnapping, rape, adultery, theft, criminal negligence, and so forth. Maimonides addressed some of these, of course, which we covered in turn, primarily in Volume 1, Chapter 8. Here we'll pick up the precepts that fell through the cracks. I've broken these down by type: retaliation, retribution, recompense, restitution, restoration, redemption, and respect. These seven “R's” reveal God's remedy for our failure to love—a progression that in itself teaches us something about Yahweh's method for reconciling us to Himself and for leading us into His love.

Man's laws and the Bible generally consider the same sorts of things to be right or wrong. Paul explains why: **“When Gentiles, who do not have the law [i.e., the Torah], by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.”** (Romans 2:14-15) In other words, a man's conscience normally tells him the difference between right and wrong, whether he's got actual laws to guide him or not. (It's an artifact of having been made in the image and likeness of God.) There isn't a society on earth that considers murder, theft, or adultery to be good things (within their own social unit, that is). Since we (mankind and God) basically agree on what's right and what's not, it's instructive to examine the ways with

which Yahweh instructed society to deal with criminal sins and compare them against our own man-made solutions. We aren't remotely close to being on the same page here. Man's solutions tend to be socio-centric, that is, they endeavor to make things better for the group by (1) punishing the wrong-doer, (2) rehabilitating him, or (3) insulating the community from him so he can cause no further harm. God's solutions, in contrast, are victim-centric: they address the wrongs done to individual people, doing what can be done to make restitution, minimizing the impact of the crime. Punishment in Yahweh's economy is invariably reserved for cases in which restitution cannot be made—you can't undo a murder, for example. In addition, there is always a spiritual undercurrent in Yahweh's criminal laws, a reflection of how He restores us as victims of Satan's crimes against God and humanity.

There is some overlap in these stated purposes of jurisprudence, of course. God's law, like man's, seeks to confront wrongdoing, rehabilitate the sinner, and protect society. But the methods employed to achieve these goals are poles apart. Man's basic tool for dealing with crime is incarceration—prison. In theory, the worse the crime, the longer the sentence. The cost to society is staggering: over sixty billion dollars per year in America alone—that's \$88 per prisoner per day. Currently in America, over seven people out of every one thousand are behind bars—almost one percent of the population! Granted, that's four or five times the average among western democracies, but that's probably because we've become as adept at catching criminals as we are at creating them. *Creating* them? Yes, that's precisely what we've done. You can't systematically suppress God's precepts in your society (as we have) and expect people to behave in a godly manner. Like I said, loving one's neighbor is an outgrowth of loving God.

Yahweh, in contrast, mandated no prison system in Israel. The closest He came was to institute cities of refuge (see Mitzvot #292-#295), which were actually designed to prevent unauthorized revenge killings—think of them as “protective custody.” So how did He expect to maintain law and order among His people? The answer sounds absurdly simple when compared to the legal labyrinth we are asked to negotiate these days. Yahweh merely gave teeth to the golden rule. For all intents and purposes, He told His society to *assume* that people treated others as they wanted to be treated. If you stole, you “obviously” wanted to be stolen from in return, and society was to oblige the thief. If you murdered someone, you were “requesting” to be slain by your victim's closest kin, and he was authorized to do as you had “asked.” If you betrayed your spouse by committing adultery, you were declaring your desire to be betrayed in turn. As we have seen (and will again) the institution of slavery had a part to play in Yahweh's system of practical justice, though He didn't institute the practice—He merely made use of it. Prisons today can fulfill the role slavery played in theocratic Israel, but these days jail sentences are pressed into service to punish

virtually any kind of offense—while “being sold into slavery” was resorted to in the Torah only in rare instances where restitution couldn’t be made. God’s wisdom virtually guaranteed that there would be no such thing as a “career criminal” in Israel.

Justice under God was swift, sure, and designed to fit the crime perfectly—being neither too harsh nor too lenient. False accusations were punishable by the same sentence the innocent accused would have suffered, and perjury was such a serious matter, it rated a spot in the Ten Commandments. Judges were to be chosen for their character, not their cunning or charisma, and bribery was strictly forbidden. More than one witness was required to convict someone of a capital offense. All things considered, Yahweh’s justice system was engineered to deliver justice to the guilty, restitution to the victim, and peace to the community, while systematically giving the benefit of the doubt to the accused in questionable situations. But we should not forget that this kind of merciful justice is only possible in a society that honors God, for it depends on those two baseline principles being endemic in the community: loving Yahweh with their whole heart, soul, and strength, and loving their neighbors as themselves. That’s why the Psalmist declares of Yahweh, **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face.”** (Psalm 89:14)

#### RETALIATION

(865) *Employ the death penalty for murderers.* **“Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death.”** (Leviticus 24:17) The translation “kill” here falls somewhat short of the true meaning of the Hebrew expression *nakah nephesh*. *Nakah* is a verb meaning “to strike, smite, hit, beat, scourge, slay, kill, give a thrust, attack, destroy, conquer, subjugate, chastise, send judgment upon, or punish.” (Strong’s) And *nephesh* is the familiar designation for one’s soul, the “self, life, person, appetite, mind, living being, desire, emotion, passion; that which breathes, the breathing substance or being, soul, the inner being of man; the living being (with life in the blood); the man himself, the person or individual; the seat of emotions and passions, or the activity of mind.” (S) So a more precise translation might be, “Whoever strikes at the soul of any man” or “Whoever attacks a person’s life...” “Murder” would be a far more accurate translation than “kill,” and it’s clear that the *intent* to do harm, and not merely one’s success at accomplishing this evil, is condemned. Murder and attempted murder are seen as virtually the same crime. The idea is that of trying to destroy someone’s life, with malice and purpose.

It’s clear from the Bible’s many warnings against false teachers that this “murder” need not be physical, the slaying of the body—technically,

the separation of someone's body from his soul. Of much more far reaching significance is the murder of someone's soul—preventing the victim from having a relationship with Yahweh, thus robbing him of the opportunity to be indwelt with God's eternal Spirit. Let's face it: murder of the body may deprive someone of a few years of mortal life in a fallen world, but murder of the soul is a matter with perpetual ramifications.

As we shall see, Yahweh distinguishes between murder and accidental homicide (manslaughter), though both have serious consequences. But there are no "degrees" of murder in His view that qualify the perpetrator to greater or lesser degrees of punishment depending on his state of mind, circumstances, weaponry, or age. There are no "plea bargains" to be made, only guilt or innocence to be determined. And there is only one penalty prescribed for the murderer: death.

I am not unaware that the death penalty is out of fashion in our world. According to Amnesty International, 137 nations have abolished the death penalty. Though seventy countries still have provision for it on the books, only twenty-four of them carried out executions in 2007 (1,252 souls, down from 1,591 in 2006), while there are upwards of 20,000 prisoners on death row worldwide. (There's currently a twelve-year lag, on average, between sentencing and execution in the U.S.) But compare these statistics to the numbers of *murders* worldwide—520,000 reported in 2000 alone—and you begin to see the problem. People who don't ascribe to Yahweh's wisdom here, who think that the death penalty is immoral because it does not serve as a deterrent (an idea that's by no means proven), are missing the fact that the statistics tell the would-be murderer, "Go ahead—even if you get caught, there's only a 0.02% chance you'll die for your crime." But if the 18,000 murders per year in the U.S. (more or less) resulted in the arrest, conviction, and *execution* of, say, 10,000 criminals, *then* you'd be able to tell if the "deterrent effect" of capital punishment was real.

All of this misses the point, of course. Yahweh never even hinted that executing murderers should be done to deter others from committing the same crime (although deterrence *is* mentioned as a factor in the execution of idol worshippers). It was to be done simply because justice demands it: it's not only *not* immoral, it's the only possible moral course of action, if the victim is figured into the equation. As I said, there's no way to restore one's mortal life after you've murdered him, so restitution is impossible. Retaliation is the only just measure available: a life for a life.

But, "*What ever happened to mercy?*" you ask. "*Doesn't God love murderers too?*" Yes, so much so that He sent His only Son, His Messiah, to die for our sins—to be executed in our place: again, a life for a life.

Why, then, does He still require the death penalty for murderers? It's because flesh is flesh: the things done in the flesh must be answered in the flesh if justice is to be served. The things done in the spirit will likewise be answered in the spirit. We will under no circumstances carry the deeds of the flesh (whether bad or good) into the afterlife, the world of the spirit. In fact, we will not enter "the afterlife" at all if our souls are not indwelt with an eternal Spirit. Our bodies are not built to last forever: they are "alive" only so long as they are made so by their soul (the *nephesh*). But the *nephesh* cannot survive without a body unless it in turn is made alive by an eternal indwelling spirit (Hebrew: *ruach*).

That's why Yahshua told Nicodemus, **"Unless one is born again [literally: from above], he cannot see the Kingdom of God.... That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.... For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."** (John 3:3, 6, 16-18) Condemned *already*? Yes, because the only way to make one's soul truly alive—the only way to receive the Spirit of Yahweh—is to **"believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God,"** Yahshua the Messiah. This "condemnation" of which Yahshua speaks has two possible manifestations. First, the default: one may be spiritually dead (or perhaps more accurately stated, spiritually non-living or inert). His soul has no indwelling spirit to give it life after the body's death, so his physical demise is the end of his existence, for all practical purposes. But second, there is a horrible alternative type of condemnation: his soul *can* be indwelt with a demonic or satanic spirit (if he has put his trust in Satan as he should have in God)—he can be "born *from below*." This will make his sojourn in the afterlife a living, eternal hell. Yahshua spoke of this "option" when He called the scribes and Pharisees a "brood of vipers," that is, the spiritual offspring of the serpent, Satan. Thus there are *three* doors to the eternal state, not just two (as is usually taught): life, death, and damnation.

Therefore, the only deeds that follow us into eternity are those done "in the spirit" (whether Yahweh's Spirit or Satan's). Deeds (whether "good" or "bad") that are done by dead (i.e., spiritless) people don't really exist beyond the mortal realm. That explains why justice must be served *in the flesh* for crimes perpetrated in the flesh. But it's also why murderers are not necessarily precluded from coming to faith, from accepting the

grace of God. True, Yahweh won't bail them out of their self-imposed troubles in this life, but He has *already* paid their debt in the next.

- (866) *Distinguish between murder and manslaughter.* **“He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die.”** (Exodus 21:12-14) The institution of the six “cities of refuge” in the Promised Land facilitated the judicial distinction between murderers and those guilty of manslaughter. If a man killed someone, he was to flee to the nearest city of refuge, where he would be protected from possible avengers from the victim's family (see Precept #869) until his case could be tried in an impartial hearing. If the wrongful death was found to be an accident or unintentional, the killer was required to remain in the city of refuge (see Precept #870) until the death of the High Priest, after which time he was free to return to his own home. But if the court (see Precept #868) found him guilty of murder—of purposely and maliciously slaying his victim—then the city of refuge would offer no further protection. The avenger of blood would be allowed to slay the slayer no matter where he went to hide, even if he appealed to Yahweh Himself (seen here as clinging desperately to the altar of sacrifice at the Sanctuary, pleading for mercy).

As I pointed out in Mitzvah #260, we are all guilty of the death of Yahshua the Messiah. Whether intentionally murdering Him (by rejecting His mercy and allying ourselves with the adversary) or “merely” violating Yahweh's standard of holiness (necessitating Yahshua's atoning sacrifice), we are all guilty of something. The city of refuge represents mortal life. If we are guilty of Son-of-Man-slaughter, we dare not leave this city without the protection afforded by the death of the High Priest (a role also played by Yahshua). And if we “leave” the city—this life—without availing ourselves of the amnesty provided by the High Priest's death, we are no longer protected from the avenger of blood, the slain Yahshua's “next of kin”—Almighty Yahweh Himself.

In a very real sense, leaving unprotected from the city of refuge is a picture of the Great White Throne judgment. John reports, **“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.”** (Revelation 20:11-12) The dead, those guilty souls who have left the “city of refuge,” are to

be judged “according to their works.” That is, since their names are not recorded in the Book of Life, the divine Judge is reviewing the evidence of each case to determine which defendant is guilty of murder and which of manslaughter. Then, having made His determinations, He passes sentence: **“Anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”** (Revelation 20:15) Both accidental manslaughter (those not indemnified by the death of the High Priest) and malicious murderers are consigned to the lake of fire—*everyone* not found in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

What, then, was the point of judgment? After all, being “judged” (Greek: *krino*) implies separation (to decide, select, choose, or determine), in this case, one type of unatoned guilt from another. In *Future History*, Chapter 29, I explored the little-known (but scripturally ubiquitous) principle of God’s separation of the *dead* (those whose souls will be destroyed or annihilated—something I dubbed “Door Number Two”) from the *damned* (those whose indwelling with Satan’s spirit has delivered them into everlasting torment in hell, sharing Satan’s eternal destiny—i.e., “Door Number Three”). Allow me to quote a couple of paragraphs:

**“Who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to Yahweh an offering in righteousness.”**

(Malachi 3:2-3) This refining process is primarily one of separation—removing the worthless dross from the pure metal by heating it to a liquid state and letting the impurities float to the top. But here beyond the Great White Throne, the precious metal has already been removed and put in a safe place. So in the case of the “lake of fire,” the separation is that of one kind of dross from another—the merely worthless from the toxic waste—door number two from door number three.

“The lake of fire, then, is a graphic portrayal of a place or state where lost souls enter a refining process—a *krino*-judgment that separates the dead from the damned. The lightweight worthless dross floats to the top of the ‘lake’ and spills out into dissipation, annihilation, destruction—what we’ve been calling door number two. But the weightier Satanic spirit-laden souls sink to the bottom of this eternal abyss, never to escape, never to rest, never to forget. The bottom of the lake of fire is door number three.” Even though we’re all guilty of one thing or another, both of these fates—one a tragic waste of life and the other a horror beyond human comprehension—are completely avoidable. “Door Number One” is eternal life, freely and graciously offered to sinners who stay in the city of refuge,

leaving only when the death of Yahshua the High Priest has rendered them innocent in the eyes of the Avenger of Blood—Yahweh.

- (867) *Weigh factors such as weaponry and attitude when determining the nature of the crime.* **“If he strikes him with an iron implement, so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. And if he strikes him with a stone in the hand, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. Or if he strikes him with a wooden hand weapon, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.”** (Numbers 35:16-18) Yahweh makes determining the nature of the crime (murder vs. manslaughter) relatively straightforward. The use of a potentially lethal weapon to intentionally kill someone cannot be construed as an “accident.” It doesn’t really matter if you “merely” lashed out in anger with a baseball bat without thinking about the consequences. “Second Degree Murder” in this country, which typically carries with it a lesser punishment than premeditated homicide, is defined as “an intentional killing that is not premeditated or planned, or a killing caused by dangerous conduct and the offender’s obvious lack of concern for human life.” God, who recognizes that the victim can’t really see the distinction, doesn’t split hairs: murder is murder.

Moses continues: **“If he pushes him out of hatred or, while lying in wait, hurls something at him so that he dies, or in enmity he strikes him with his hand so that he dies, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death. He is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.”** (Numbers 35:20-21) All it takes is a bad attitude. If you meant to merely hurt someone and he dies, you’re a murderer. If the gun you were waving around to intimidate someone goes off “accidentally” and kills him, you’re a murderer. Because Yahweh considers the victim, states of diminished responsibility such as substance abuse or post traumatic stress disorder are inadmissible as defenses. The dead victim doesn’t really care if you were “temporarily insane” when you shot him. Nor does he care if you ever “get over it” and start to “feel better” as long as you take your meds. He doesn’t care if you stabbed him once or forty-seven times. He’s dead, so forgiveness, understanding, reason, and mercy are beyond his ability. God’s justice isn’t being served on behalf of the courts, the victim’s loved ones, or society at large. His justice serves the victim. Why doesn’t ours?

I should reiterate that the same criteria apply to *spiritual* murder or manslaughter—the prevention of someone forming a relationship with Yahweh. It’s bad enough (though theoretically forgivable) to be guilty of spiritual manslaughter—through carelessness, ignorance, or apathy leading someone to the conclusion that Yahweh needn’t be the center of

their lives. (This is the primary danger with the practice of religion, whether nominal “Christianity” or something else.) But it is infinitely worse to do it on purpose, to “push him out of hatred” (or greed, or lust for power), or to “lie in wait” for your victim, purposely “hurling” deadly lies designed to lead him away from Yahweh’s love. That explains Yahshua’s scathing rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees: **“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.”** (John 8:44) John later provided commentary: **“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”** (I John 3:14-15) I hasten to point out that retribution was to be carried out not by society, but by the victim’s near kin. We are not to go on “crusades,” declaring “holy war” on people we perceive are spiritual murderers or manslayers, killing them physically for their spiritual crimes. Yahweh reserves that right for Himself.

- (868) *The congregation shall determine the nature of the crime.* **“However, if he pushes him suddenly without enmity, or throws anything at him without lying in wait, or uses a stone, by which a man could die, throwing it at him without seeing him, so that he dies, while he was not his enemy or seeking his harm, then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood according to these judgments.”** (Numbers 35:22-24) This is the Torah’s description of non-intentional homicide—manslaughter—for which crime the guilty party had to seek shelter in the city of refuge, remaining there until the death of the High Priest. Because he didn’t mean any harm or demonstrate any aggression, he is not guilty of murder, but there is still a corpse to answer for, and an avenger of blood to deal with.

As we saw previously, this “judging,” done to determine whether the slayer is guilty of manslaughter or murder, is a picture of the coming Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20. The Hebrew word for “to judge” (*shaphat*) is the rough equivalent of the Greek *krino*: to judge, decide, adjudicate a matter between two parties, to decide a controversy. But at first glance, there appears to be a glitch to this theory...

At the Great White Throne, the One doing the judging is obviously God: He “from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away.” But here in the Torah, it says “the *congregation* shall judge.” Once again, we must turn to our Hebrew lexicons to discover the amazing solution to a seeming Biblical contradiction. The word for “congregation” is *edah*—a gathering or assembly. And I have no doubt that in theocratic Israel, the congregation—the people—were indeed meant by Yahweh to be

responsible for figuring out what had really happened in cases of homicide. But there is a second *'edah* in Hebrew, also a feminine noun, spelled and pronounced exactly the same way. This one means “testimony or witness.” Baker and Carpenter note that “this term refers to the act of testifying to a fact or an event.” This would put the second meaning of *'edah* in perfect sync with the criteria by which the Great White Throne defendants are to be judged: the evidence, their works, what they did, and why they did it. After all, their sins have not been atoned—*covered*—by the blood of the Messiah. The only thing left upon which to judge them, and indeed the only fair and just criteria, is the witness of the facts in the case, the testimony of the evidence—none of which is hidden from Yahweh or inadmissible in His court.

- (869) *The avenger of blood shall serve as executioner. “The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death.”* (Numbers 35:19) Within Israel, some punishments were to be carried out by “the congregation.” For instance, stoning was prescribed in cases of Ba’al or Molech worship, or when a betrothed virgin had had sex with another man (if a case of rape, only he was stoned; if consensual, both of them). The crime in these cases, Yahweh is saying, was against society as a whole, and therefore must be addressed by the whole congregation. But in the case of homicide, a single individual, a close relative of the slain person, was to serve as executioner. Murder was not to be seen as a “crime against humanity” or an affront to the nation of Israel. It was personal. And that should give us pause, for the “homicide victim” about whom all of this is designed to teach us—the One of whose blood we are all guilty—is Yahshua, the “Son” of God. Thus His “avenger of blood” is going to be Yahweh Himself. This means there’s no place to run unless He Himself provides it.

The term “avenger of blood,” while describing his *function* in this scenario well enough, isn’t a particularly accurate translation. “Avenger” is from the Hebrew verb *ga’al*, which means to redeem, to buy back, to free from captivity or release from blame or debt. The related noun *go’el* was the “kinsman redeemer” whose privilege and duty it was to extricate a near relative from debt or servitude. A more direct translation might be, “One redeeming of the blood.” The “blood,” of course (Hebrew: *dam*), is where the life is (Leviticus 17:11, 14). The idea is that of a near relative “buying back” the life of the victim with the blood of his murderer. It’s not so much vengeance as it is redemption. It’s not so much punishment as it is justice.

The avenger/redeemer was instructed to put the murderer (or the manslayer, if he left the city of refuge—see Precept #870) to death *when he meets him*. Yahweh has so far chosen not to “meet” with us for the purpose of judgment as long as we inhabit these mortal bodies—our “cities of refuge,” as it were. (Being God Almighty, He *could* have exercised His prerogative for wrath at any time, but He has other plans.) The time is coming, however—and soon—when Yahweh will finally begin to scour the “cities of refuge” to deal with the murderers who have been hiding out there for the past two millennia. I’m speaking, of course, of the coming Tribulation, the impending seven-year period of God’s overdue wrath upon mankind. Those manslaughterers indemnified by the death of the High Priest (i.e., the *ekklesia*, the world’s believers in Yahshua) will have already left the “cities.” They will have been raptured—“caught up”—before the manhunt begins. The “murderers,” however, those who purposely aligned themselves against Yahweh, will find themselves being told, **“Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels, ...And these will go away into everlasting punishment.”** (Matthew 25:41, 46) In other words, the divine Avenger/Redeemer, when He has finally chosen to “meet” the murderers, will have put them to death—the *second* death—just as the Torah requires.

- (870) *The manslayer must stay within the city of refuge to be legally protected.* **“But if the manslayer at any time goes outside the limits of the city of refuge where he fled, and the avenger of blood finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood, because he should have remained in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest.”** (Numbers 35:26-28) The manslayer—one who was responsible for the death of another though it hadn’t been intended or precipitated by malice—was safe as long as he remained where Yahweh had provided shelter for him. But if he chose to ignore the protection afforded by God’s law and prematurely leave the city of refuge, then the “avenger of blood” could kill him “when he met him” without himself becoming guilty of murder. In fact, the *only* thing that would “buy” for the manslayer safe passage outside the city of refuge was the death of the High Priest.

At the very least, we are all manslaughterers—we are all complicit in the death of God’s Messiah. It is our sins that sent Him to Calvary’s pole, though we intended no harm and bore him no malice. (Oh, we *sinned* on purpose, alright; we just didn’t factor in the consequences. We had no idea it would all get so *personal* between us and our Creator.) So we are safe only as long as we remain in the city of refuge. But here’s the rub: this city represents our mortal life, which means we can’t stay there forever. Everyone eventually dies; that’s what mortality means (Latin: *mortis* =

death). But the *first* death, the death of the body, is not the real problem. The problem is what can happen afterward—the *second* death, as we saw above: the death of the soul for lack of the eternal Spirit of God indwelling it—death, legal and justified, at the hands of Yahshua’s “avenger of blood.” That’s the life that’s indemnified by the death of the High Priest—the Anointed Savior, Yahshua the Messiah.

The moral of the story: don’t leave your mortal life unless you’re protected by the atoning death of Yahshua.

- (871) *The manslayer’s sentence is to remain in protective custody in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest. “But after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession. And these things shall be a statute of judgment to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings.”* (Numbers 35:28-29) Son-of-Man-slaughter carries with it a life sentence, but it’s not the *manslayer’s* life. The life and death of the anointed High Priest (read: the Messiah) determines when (or whether) the guilty party is safe to leave the city (i.e., his mortal life). But what does it mean to “return to the land of his possession?” Yahshua told His disciples about it: “In My Father’s house are many mansions.... I go to prepare a place for you.... I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:2-3) The writer to the Hebrews explained further: “All these faithful ones [Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah] died without receiving what God had promised them, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed the promises of God. They agreed that they were no more than foreigners and nomads here on earth. And obviously people who talk like that are looking forward to a country they can call their own. If they had meant the country they came from, they would have found a way to go back. But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a heavenly city for them.” (Hebrews 11:13-16 NLT) We manslayers are but “foreigners and nomads” while we live in the “cities of refuge” of our mortal lives. It is not until we embrace the freedom afforded to us by the death of the High Priest, Yahshua the Messiah, that we can at last go home.

#### RETRIBUTION

- (872) *Adultery is to be punished with death. “If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die—the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel.”* (Deuteronomy 22:22) These days adultery is commonly regarded as grounds for divorce, but it’s not considered a crime, much less a capital offense. Our society says, “Okay, so you caught you spouse with someone

else. They're only human, and you're not perfect either. I can see where you might not trust 'em anymore, but life goes on: get over it already!" God, meanwhile, looks at the very same act and says, "This is treachery—a form of betrayal that pollutes my people like a cancer, destroying them from within. So both the adulterer and adulteress must die." Clearly, Yahweh and modern society are not on the same page here. What does God know that we apparently don't?

It's not sex He objects to. He created us as males and females who reproduce sexually, and He Himself commanded us to **"Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth."** (Genesis 1:28) In fact, it was the very *first* thing He told us to do. But almost immediately, He put boundaries about it: **"A man...shall be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."** (Genesis 2:24) That is, a man shall not be joined to someone else's wife, only his own. Over the course of centuries, it would become clear that Yahweh was crafting a metaphor describing His relationship with His own "wife," the people on this earth with whom He shared a familial bond, one of trust, faith, love, intimacy, and fruitfulness.

Notice that when adultery is described in the Bible, it is invariably couched in terms similar to those we see here: "a man found lying with a woman married to a husband." Is it not possible for adultery to be committed between an unmarried woman and a married man? Indeed it is, but in the reality that Yahweh's metaphor represents, the husband—*Him*—is *never* unfaithful. The same cannot be said of the wife, unfortunately. So if Yahweh is the Husband, and His people the wife, who is the "man" with whom the "wife" is being unfaithful? "He" by definition is *that which is not God*—in other words, false objects of worship. It could be the "graven images" that plagued the ancient world, representations of false gods like Ba'al and Astarte, Isis and Osiris, or Zeus and Diana. But the most seductive would-be adulterers over the ages would prove to be far more subtle—intangibles we find ourselves placing before Yahweh in our affections before we even know we're doing it: pride, tradition, possessions, pleasure, and comfort—in other words, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Like sex, none of these things are necessarily bad in themselves. We *should* maintain a certain amount of self respect, for we are made in the image of God. Traditions *can* be useful, helping us get through the day without having to re-invent the wheel every time we turn around. We are mortal, having physical needs for which we must work—food, clothing, and shelter. Pleasure is the same emotion Yahweh felt when He looked at His creation and called it "very good." And comfort—the lack of pain—is

the underlying condition that defines being in the center of God's will: **"All these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you because you obey the voice of Yahweh your God."** (Deuteronomy 28:2) But it is incredibly easy to let any of these "good" things become "gods" in their own right—that is, to become the objects of our affection, our goals. When we allow that to happen, it is tantamount to spiritual adultery, betrayal of Yahweh.

We should not be unmindful that *both* guilty parties are to be put to death. Not only will the unfaithful "wife" be forever separated from her "Husband," bereft of His eternal Spirit, but the things of the world that people so often put before Yahweh in their affections are also destined for destruction. One could work his whole life seeking wealth or power for himself, pursuing the elusive goddess of pleasure, chasing vindication through intellectual pursuit, or searching for solace through penance and pious tradition, only to find in the end that all such would-be substitutes for Yahweh—riches, lust, pride, and even religion—are all blind alleys, "adulterers" that cannot and will not endure in the light of God's glory.

(873) *Kidnapping is to be punished with death. "If a man is found kidnapping any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and mistreats him or sells him, then that kidnapper shall die; and you shall put away the evil from among you."*

(Deuteronomy 24:7) The word for "kidnapping" in Hebrew is *ganab*, a verb simply meaning to steal (whether an object or a person), the emphasis being on the deceptive nature of the crime. (The noun—"kidnapper"—is virtually the same word but with different vowel pointing.) So technically, the basic admonition against kidnapping is covered in the Eighth Commandment, "You shall not steal." (See Precept #878.) Here we are told of the penalty for this particular type of theft. Yahweh's victim-centric instructions demand the death penalty, even if the abductee was not killed.

I'm told there's a technical difference in English Common Law between "kidnapping" and "abduction." (It's called abduction when the victim is a woman.) Yahweh makes a different distinction, based not on the gender of the victim but upon the intentions of the kidnapper. Anticipating a phenomenon that must have been exceedingly rare in theocratic Israel (but is quite common in our own dysfunctional society), God withholds capital retribution for those whose motive is not harm or profit. In America today, instances of child stealing by strangers are outnumbered by a margin of over five to one by kidnappings perpetrated by *parents* who don't have legal custody. These inter-family kidnappings, however misguided, are usually carried out in a perceived effort to *protect* the children from the estranged spouse—not to harm them, but to keep

them from harm. The perceptions of such a kidnapper may be skewed, but his (or her) motives are not. Such “innocent” abductions, justified or not, do not carry the death penalty.

That leaves two basic types of “real” kidnapping, both of which earn the penalty of death, even if the abductee gets rescued or is returned unharmed in the end. (Criminals don’t get bonus points for either skill or incompetence.) The first type is kidnapping for ransom (whether the intended “redeemer” is the victim’s family, a slave buyer, or a third party targeted for extortion). This crime has a long and nefarious tradition going back to the age of the patriarchs (see Genesis 14). It has become a thriving cottage industry in many third world countries today. The motivation is usually greed, fueled by covetousness and sloth, though occasionally the perpetrators are seeking political leverage, their impetus being hatred, pride, or envy. Second (and even more disturbing) are the kidnappings committed out of lust, whether twisted sexual proclivities or the unnatural desire to exert power over one’s victim. These two broad categories are not mutually exclusive, of course. They can and do overlap or morph from one to the other. Muhammad, the founder of Islam, was an avid proponent of both (or should I say, all) of these forms of kidnapping. He not only financed his rise to power through kidnapping for ransom and torture for fun and profit, he also raped scores of captive women, teaching his followers to do the same. His methods were the very antithesis of “loving your neighbor as yourself.”

As always, there is a spiritual component to this. The potential victim who’s protected by the law is called “any of [the kidnapper’s] brethren of the Children of Israel.” This identifies both the victim and the perpetrator as “Israelites,” a euphemism for people who purport to be of the household of faith, people who profess a belief in God. The crime is “stealing a person.” In spiritual terms, this would equate to taking them away from their spiritual “families,” the people who love and care about them (and remember, the verb *ganab* implies stealth or deceit). But the crime is further defined by two factors. First, is it the intention of the kidnapper to “mistreat” his captive? That is, is the kidnapper’s exercise of dominion over his victim the point of his action? Is the result of “stealing” this person likely to cause the victim harm, whether physically, mentally, or spiritually? Second, is the kidnapper hoping to enrich himself through the captivity of his victim? Is there money to be made or status to be achieved?

These conditions fairly *scream* a warning to those who would sneak in and take you away from your life in Yahweh’s close-knit family and

replace this relationship with religion—placing you in bondage to ecclesiastical hierarchy, the rules and traditions of man, and a system of penance, alms, and works designed to obfuscate—and compete with—the finished work of Christ. This sort of thing isn't merely unfortunate or inconvenient for God's people: it's a *crime* against them—it's kidnapping, spiritual abduction, the penalty for which, specified in the Torah, is *death*. God is very serious about us avoiding religion if it gets in the way of a relationship with Him. (Religion *can* be useful as a matrix or medium through which one can express his faith in Yahweh, but it is of no use whatsoever in establishing the relationship we must have with our God. In fact, it all too often masquerades as that very relationship, preventing the real thing from happening.)

Paul informed Timothy, his young protégé, that this kind of “spiritual kidnapping” would become a virtual crime wave in the last days. **“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”** (II Timothy 3:1-7) Here we've been given a clear “mug shot” of the potential “kidnappers” of our day. We've also been informed that avoiding their snare is our prerogative. We can—we *must*—stop being gullible, stop getting carried away by our lusts, and stop confusing information with truth.

#### RECOMPENSE

- (874) *Evil inflicted is to be paid back with the equivalent evil.* **“If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him—fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him.”** (Leviticus 24:19-20) Whether through malice or negligence, injuries inflicted are to be met with payment in kind. The stark logic and equity of God's law can be somewhat startling when compared with the anemic shadow we see in our own legal statutes. Consider this hypothetical scenario: a guy walks into a bar (no, this isn't the beginning of a joke) and has a few too many beers. Another patron comes in and says something that offends him, so our drunken subject expresses his opinion to the contrary with a pool cue, breaking the man's arm.

Under our laws, he might be arrested for being drunk and disorderly with a side order of assault, jailed for a month at taxpayer' expense, slapped with a fine (which goes to the county, not the victim), and released on parole (again, at taxpayers' expense). The victim, meanwhile, goes to the hospital to get his arm set, misses four days of work, sticks his insurance company with the bill (after paying a hefty deductible), and then weighs the option of hiring a lawyer to sue his assailant for damages, deciding in the end that since the inebriate with the pool cue is probably as broke as he is stupid, suing him would be an expensive exercise in futility. The insurance company spreads out their loss over the future premiums of a hundred thousand policy holders, the county uses the perp's fine to cover court costs and police salaries, and the victim's employer builds the cost of his recovery time into the price of their product, passing it on to you and me.

Yahweh's law works a bit differently. The witnesses would take the offender to the town's elders and explain what happened. Upon confirmation of the facts, he would be required to (1) pay out of his own pocket all of his victim's medical expenses; (2) make good the loss of income the victim (or his employer) would have incurred due to his injuries (see Mitzvah #299, Exodus 21:18-19); and then (3) have his own arm broken with a pool cue. Direct, just, and dare I say, downright poetic. At this point, of course, the perp (having sobered up) is thinking to himself, *I think I'm losing my taste for beer. Thank God I didn't shoot him in the kneecap.*

The whole thing could have turned out quite differently under our laws, of course. Yahweh's instructions prevent *this* scenario as well: the victim *does* decide to sue, and hires the slickest lawyer he can find. He wins his civil case and is awarded four thousand dollars in actual damages (though neither his insurance company or employer ever get reimbursed for their expenses) and *four million* in punitive damages. The offender's insurance company negotiates it down to two point five mil and passes the loss on to their policyholders. Justice has not been served here. It has been mugged and left for dead on the sidewalk.

The inevitable spiritual application looks like this: if your handling of spiritual matters (doctrine, exegesis, interpretation, etc.) is used maliciously or negligently to harm or exert control, hindering someone's search for God's truth, expect the "weapons" you use to be turned back against you. I know you're probably getting tired of hearing me say this, but religion is often the single biggest impediment to forming a

relationship with Yahweh. If your philosophy blinds your brother to the truth of Yahweh's love, you'd better start getting used to life in the dark.

- (875) *One law shall apply to all people in the Land. "You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I am Yahweh your God."* (Leviticus 24:22) If non-Israelites chose to live among God's people in the Land (and many did) they were to live by the same standards of behavior as Israel. This precept was precipitated by an incident in which the son of a mixed marriage (Egyptian father, Israelite mother) had blasphemed the name of Yahweh. The question naturally arose, "Should we relax our stance concerning God's law in the face of cultural diversity?" The answer was an unequivocal No! Everyone in God's country was to live by God's Law. Why? Because He said, "**I am Yahweh your God.**" I hasten to point out that we're talking about conduct *among God's people* here, folks who purport to follow Yahweh, not the world. He's not advocating going back and forcing Egypt to toe the line, imposing Yahweh's rules and morals upon people who don't want or claim to have a relationship with Him.

Remember that our customs and traditions, even (or should I say, *especially*) our religious traditions, are not necessarily the same thing as God's Law. A silly example might shed light on this truth. Congregations have very different "cultures" when it comes to music worship styles. One employs a piano, organ, and robed choir. Another has a loud, boisterous "praise band," complete with drums and electric guitars. Another allows no instrumental music at all, but sings its praises to God *a cappella*. Who's right? Actually, all of them, if done in the spirit of reverent, joyful honor to Yahweh, not pinch-faced legalism or fawning emulation of the world's ways. For that matter, music need not be a part of the congregational experience at all. It's not a matter of Law; it's a matter of taste, of style, of personal preference, even of God's provision.

But then take two congregations with identical forms of expression and compare their doctrine. One might play fast and loose with the First or Second Commandments, piously exercise politically correct "tolerance" toward what Yahweh considers abominable religious practices, or *de facto* worship gods of pride, prosperity, popularity, or power. The other assembly, meanwhile, strives only to honor Yahweh and his Word, love each other, and be light and salt to their community. To the untrained ear, they may *sound* the same, but they're not. One is following God's Law; the other isn't.

There is another facet to this precept that we should not overlook. We believers often think in terms of a double standard—the very thing Yahweh is warning us against. We brush off our own sins as somehow

inconsequential, since we're "saved by grace" and "washed in the blood." But at the same time, we *act as if* we believe the searching world should be compelled to embrace "Christian" standards of morality and behavior, as if such outward performance is the door to eternal life. While I'll admit that life would be considerably safer and more pleasant if everyone were to refrain from murder, theft, adultery, perjury, and covetousness, the outward observance of these Commandments brings one no closer to the family of Yahweh. Only God's grace—the very thing we so stupidly recruit to excuse our own bad behavior—can reconcile us to Him. No, the believer and the "stranger" alike have but one Law, and as we have seen, this Torah points toward one thing above all others: our utter hopelessness in trying to reach God through our own merits. The grace we take so lightly is the only lifeboat aboard this sinking ship. Without it, we would all—passengers and crew alike—drown in our sins. You'd think we'd treat it more carefully.

- (876) *Do not mistreat a slave who belongs to you. "And if a man beats his male or female servant with a rod, so that he dies under his hand, he shall surely be punished. Notwithstanding, if he remains alive a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he is his property."* (Exodus 21:20-21) Western Christians, awash in a sea of political correctness, would be either puzzled or horrified to learn (though most never get that far) that Yahweh doesn't specifically condemn slavery as an institution. Rather, his Torah regulates it, mitigates its abuses, and arranges for people to be extricated from it. But He never says anything remotely resembling, "There shall be no slavery in Israel." Why would God "tolerate" such an obvious evil?

Let me answer the question with another question. Why would God tolerate *death*? The answer is the same. Death, like slavery, is a temporary evil that serves as a pungent illustration of a far greater spiritual truth. Just as physical death (the separation of the soul from the body) warns us about spiritual death (the separateness of God's eternal Spirit from one's soul), so the institution of slavery informs us of a universal spiritual reality: all of us serve someone or something. Who we serve is our master; we are by definition slaves to whatever or whomever we obey (see Romans 6:16). Like death, slavery is universally understood (at least by those who are subject to it) to be a bad thing, and yet Yahweh lets it stand (for the moment, anyway) to teach us valuable lessons about master-slave relationships: (1) We are not our own: we have all been bought and paid for; (2) He who has bought us is entitled to our service; (3) If we disobey our Master, discipline is His prerogative; (4) If we flee from His service, we are fleeing from the shelter and provision of His household as well; (5) Running away from our rightful Master (the One who paid for us) never

results in real liberty, but in either the tyranny of a precarious future or slavery to another master, a usurper; (6) The only one who can legally grant us freedom is the Master who paid for us; and (7) perhaps the most surprising fact of all—voluntary service to a kind and loving Master is actually better than emancipation into an uncertain and hostile world.

Our *real* Master, of course—the One who paid for our souls with the most precious substance in existence, the blood of His own “Son”—is Yahweh. Actually, it’s worse than it seems: Yahweh first created us (which defines us as His possessions) after which we sold ourselves into bondage to Satan, an act that made our subsequent redemption necessary. So He is in reality our Owner twice over. Most epistles in the New Covenant Scriptures make reference to the writer being a “slave” or “servant” or “prisoner” of Christ—though not with chains of legal authority, for they (and we) have long since been granted our freedom. No, our “chains” are gratitude, loyalty, and love, things that bind us more securely than any physical restraint ever could. This is pictured beautifully in the Torah in Exodus 21:5-6 (see Mitzvah #189 and Precept #887): the bondservant, having been freed, may opt rather to remain in his master’s service for life.

So who does the abusive slave master in our present precept represent? It’s not Yahweh, for He always treats His servants with respect—even when He finds discipline necessary. No, this is a cruel master to whom a disobedient and rebellious slave has fled—Satan or one of his agents. Satan’s agenda is to force man’s submission, and he’s not above using the rod to obtain it. So what if he kills a few of us? We were only chattel to him anyway, a means to an end, disposable. Think of the disobedient slave as a runaway teenager irrationally rebelling against the authority of her parents; and think of the “cruel master” as the pimp who gets his hooks into her when she hits the big city. She has made a bad bargain, whether she knows it or not. The freedom she sought has proved to be an illusion. That’s what it’s like when we run from God. Survival and restoration are possible, but by no means guaranteed, and many runaways never realize that Satan, the pimp, has no real power over them. The amazing truth is, all we have to do to free ourselves is get up, swallow our pride, and return to our Father Yahweh. But make no mistake: we are not safe on our own. Even if we flee from Satan’s clutches, if we don’t then go home to our Father Yahweh, the devil will hunt us down and kill us. He’ll do whatever he can to prevent us from having eternal life in Christ. Yahweh, however, promises that the murderer, whether Satan or his agent, *will* receive justice—death for death.

But what about this enigmatic alternative scenario, “If he [the slave] remains alive a day or two, he [the slave owner] shall not be punished; for he is his property.” I believe this is telling us that even though someone misleads Yahweh’s servant, if he fails to completely and permanently separate the runaway from God’s love, his status as a “spiritual murderer” will not have been legally established. By usurping Yahweh’s place as the Master, this “pimp” has taken a terrible risk, of course. With ownership comes responsibility, and even though you can’t really *own* another person, possession is, as they say, nine tenths of the law: if you control a person’s spiritual outlook, you are responsible for his spiritual welfare—his very life.

It is instructive to compare the Torah’s slavery scenario with Paul’s course of action when dealing with Philemon’s runaway slave, Onesimus, who had come to Christ under Paul’s ministry. Paul could have “kept” Onesimus in his own service, but knowing the Torah, he realized that the slave’s service was not his to use, nor was freedom his to grant. Philemon (who, by a remarkable coincidence, had also come to faith through Paul’s teaching) was asked to receive Onesimus back, accept his repentant heart, and display a merciful spirit. After all, that’s precisely what Yahweh does, receiving us runaways back into his household when we repent. But we can only repent if we leave those cruel masters to which we have foolishly fled—those who would enslave, mistreat, and kill us if given the chance.

(877) *Man is responsible for the punishment of crimes against man.* “**Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.**” (Genesis 9:5-6) It’s a logical question to ask: why doesn’t God punish criminals Himself? Why does he require man to provide justice for other men? After all, it is *He* who “demands a reckoning” when a man’s blood is spilled, when a life is taken. This line of inquiry will lead us to some very fundamental truths.

The atheistic secular humanists who control our public policy these days insist that man is nothing but a highly evolved animal, one whose basic nature is not all that different from an ape, a salamander, or a garden slug. We find ourselves at the top of the food chain, they say, because we have, over eons of evolution, developed into a smarter, more “fit” species than our ecological contemporaries. God’s word, on the other hand, states that man is a fundamentally unique kind of being: we alone are “made by God in His image.” We alone have been placed on earth to relate to and fellowship with our Creator. It’s not my purpose here to debate the issue.

(I think you know where I stand.) Rather, I would like to explore just one key indicator, comparing what we observe in nature against these two competing “theories.” That subject is justice.

Animals have no sense of justice, no concept of fair play, no notion of moral right and wrong. Though some have greater cognitive ability than others, they are all motivated by instinct, biological imperatives like hunger, reproduction, self preservation, and the continuance of the species. It’s hard to say what gazelles and wildebeests think when one of their own is run down by lions and killed, but it’s safe to say they don’t find the lions morally culpable. They apparently feel no sense of injustice or righteous outrage that one of their group has been “murdered.” In fact, once the kill has been made, the herd very quickly goes back to business as usual, knowing that for the moment, their adversaries are not interested in pursuing them.

Men, on the other hand, have an inbred sense of right and wrong. One of the first complaints our children are likely to express in verbal terms is, “It’s not *fair!*” Remarkably, they’re often right—it’s *not* fair—but how would a three year old know that? It would require an innate biological *need* for justice, a built-in moral compass, something the Bible indicates every child was born with (e.g. Romans 2:14-15). This sense of justice is not merely a highly developed pain-avoidance mechanism, either, for it transfers to others. We “feel sorry” for people who are being mistreated—people we don’t even know. Our species is uniquely “wired” to seek justice. That so many of us eventually learn to suppress our inborn need for fair play in order to gratify our carnal desires doesn’t change that fact. Like it or not, we are “made in the image and likeness of God.”

If we *were* mere animals, all driven by the same evolutionary imperatives, our entire concept of law (whether God’s law, man’s, or the law of our consciences) would be detrimental to the survival and advancement of the species. In seeking justice, we are in effect protecting the weak from the strong. But evolution can only advance (so the theory goes) if the strong prevail and the weak are eliminated. According to the humanist creed’s bottom line, then, every act of kindness or mercy not motivated by our own survival or short term gratification is a nail in the coffin of the human race—every act of justice weakens the species.

But we are *not* mere animals. Not only are we made “in the likeness of God” (which is a maddeningly nebulous description), we have within us a mechanism, unique to man, by which Yahweh’s eternal Spirit can dwell within us, described in Genesis 2:7 as the “breath of life,” the *neshamah*. This is neither the soul (the *nephesh*, something any animal possesses),

nor the spirit itself (the *ruach*), but a capacity for life of an entirely different paradigm than that of your ordinary dung beetle or chimpanzee. Yes, our bodies are mortal—subject to decay—but *we* can live forever! This explains why Yahweh is so protective of the sanctity of human life—why He takes it personally and demands retribution when a man’s blood is spilled, whether by another man or by a beast.

But why, if He feels this way, does God insist that we mortals execute justice in the mortal realm, rather than dispensing it Himself? There are two reasons (at least). First, His standards are absolute and perfect, while we are frail, fallen creatures. In this world, if Yahweh were to take it upon Himself to right every wrong according to His own standard of holiness, none of us would survive past breakfast. And He *wants* us to survive, for our life is essential to His agenda (boiled down to one word, Love); which brings us to the second reason, the very reason provided in our Genesis text: **“For in the image of God He made man.”** We are to deal justly because the One after whom we are patterned is just. We are to be holy, because He is holy (that is, we are to be set apart *in* the world because Yahweh is separate *from* it). We are to treat human life with reverence and respect because God sacrificed The Perfect Human Life to redeem us from our fallen state. If Satan can convince us that human life is cheap, Yahshua’s awesome sacrifice will be rendered insignificant in our eyes. I assure you, it is nothing of the sort. His blood is the most precious substance known to man.

#### RESTITUTION

- (878) *Don’t steal. “You shall not steal.”* (Exodus 20:15) Maimonides scoured the Talmud to extract the “613 laws” that Jews are supposed to follow. Somehow, he managed to miss this one. Considering what we’ve seen in the last few precepts, I can’t help but wonder if that was a Freudian omission. Like so many of the other Commandments of the Decalogue, this one, the eighth, has ramifications that go far beyond the surface prohibition against taking other people’s stuff. Is Yahweh really all that concerned about purloining a candy bar from a convenience store? In principle, He is, for theft makes a statement. First, stealing betrays a lack of respect for a fellow child of God, the absence of the love of our neighbor that’s so important. Second, it’s an indication that we don’t really trust Yahweh to supply our needs. Third, in a way, theft is idolatry, for it shows that we desire the material possessions of this world more than we do fellowship with our God.

But as I said, it isn't just *stuff* God is concerned with. His primary, overarching goal is to establish a loving relationship with mankind. Restricting or preventing the formation of this liaison is the worst sort of stealing: it's the theft of the soul. This explains why Yahshua was so angry at the religious elite of His time: **"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves."** (Matthew 23:12-15) We don't hear Yahshua condemning prostitutes or publicans like this, though by definition, they were law-breaking sinners, and at some level they all knew it. He invariably encouraged them to "Go and sin no more." To a belatedly repentant thief, caught and in the process of being punished for his crimes, He said, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise." But these guys, the scribes and Pharisees, were, as far as the man on the street could tell, *good* people, law-abiding and religious. They gave alms, paid their tithes, and prayed eloquently in public. What were they doing that was so upsetting to the Messiah? They were stealing the opportunity God had given to honest searchers to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. They were stealing life itself.

- (879) *Restore what has been stolen, plus twenty percent.* **"If a person sins and commits a trespass against Yahweh by lying to his neighbor about what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or about a pledge, or about a robbery, or if he has extorted from his neighbor, or if he has found what was lost and lies concerning it, and swears falsely—in any one of these things that a man may do in which he sins: then it shall be, because he has sinned and is guilty, that he shall restore what he has stolen, or the thing which he has extorted, or what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or the lost thing which he found, or all that about which he has sworn falsely. He shall restore its full value, add one-fifth more to it, and give it to whomever it belongs, on the day of his trespass offering."** (Leviticus 6:2-5) I'll admit that the law of restitution can get a little complicated. Back in Exodus 22, we learned that if someone stole a sheep and sold or slaughtered it, he had to pay back four sheep in restitution, and if it was an ox he stole, the payback was five oxen (the idea apparently being that the ox was not only valuable property, but was also a "tool" its owner needed to earn a living—it was the man's tractor, so to speak). On the other hand, if the thief was found with the goods still in his possession, he "only" had

to pay back double. Clearly, the mental anguish of the victim is as important in God's restitution formula as is the financial loss.

Here we see a case in which the owner/victim is paid back not two, four, or five times what was stolen, but only twenty percent more than what was taken. What's different? The type of theft in view here is not the type perpetrated by a violent criminal (armed robbery, burglary, hijacking, mugging, etc.) but rather what we might call "white-collar crime." Examples in our sort of society might be tax or insurance fraud, cooking the books to defraud shareholders, overbilling, selling pirated entertainment media, the use of substandard materials to cheat on the terms of a contract, insider trading, pension fund shenanigans, bait and switch advertising—you get the idea. It's any kind of dishonest dealing where the victim wasn't even supposed to know he'd been cheated.

This kind of theft is positively endemic in our godless society today. Individuals and businesses have made "shady dealing" a way of life—effectively demonstrating a refusal to honor God and trust Him for provision. Creditors or utilities purposely send their bills too late for the customer to avoid incurring late fees. Manufacturers tweak their packaging to hide price increases. (Have you tried buying a "gallon" of paint lately? It can't be done.) Livestock and poultry is fed sub-therapeutic levels of antibiotics—not to ward off disease, but to cause water weight retention, in effect, invisibly cheapening the product. Employers often schedule their employees almost—but not quite—enough hours to let them qualify for benefit packages, and then they wonder why these same employees show no loyalty to them at all. As with violent crime, these sneaky, underhanded practices would cease if everyone loved Yahweh and loved his neighbor.

- (880) *A thief may obtain forgiveness after restitution by making a trespass offering. "And he shall bring his trespass offering to Yahweh, a ram without blemish from the flock, with your valuation, as a trespass offering, to the priest. So the priest shall make atonement for him before Yahweh, and he shall be forgiven for any one of these things that he may have done in which he trespasses."* (Leviticus 6:6-7) Okay, so the merchant succumbed to temptation to make a quick shekel, made a transaction using dishonest scales, got caught, and then made restitution by paying the defrauded customer back in full plus twenty percent. Is he *no longer guilty* under the law at this point? Is he *forgiven*? No, he's merely a thief who got busted. His restitution has made his neighbor whole, but his guilt before God remains. What can he do? He can (and must) bring a trespass offering (*asham*) to the Sanctuary as an expression of his repentance before Yahweh. The sacrificial animal

specified for this transgression is a ram without blemish—a symbol (whether he knows it or not) that the authority of Yahweh’s Messiah has been recognized by the offender.

If you’ll recall from Volume I, Chapter 12, there is a subtle difference between the sin offering (the *chata’t*) and the trespass offering (the *asham*). Simply stated, the *chata’t* was rendered for lapses in behavior, while the *asham* was brought to atone for lapses in holiness. God is therefore saying here, “I don’t care if everybody in town is cheating just like you did. You have been called out of the world—you’re to be separate from it, set apart and consecrated to Me. So participate in the trespass offering by bring a perfect ram to the altar. His blood will cover your sin in My eyes, for I consider it precious: it represents the blood of My own Son, who will tell you, ‘Go, and sin no more.’”

- (881) *Lethal incidents concerning other people’s animals must be paid for.* **“Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, animal for animal.”** (Leviticus 24:18) **And whoever kills an animal shall restore it; but whoever kills a man shall be put to death.**” (Leviticus 24:21) This one flies in the face of evolutionary theory, who insists that man is nothing but a highly developed animal. Because a man is made in the image of God, the penalty for murdering him is death. But the penalty for doing the same sort of thing to someone’s animal is to merely replace it with another of the same kind and value. “Animal rights” people should note: we’re not talking about killing an animal (one you own) for food or sacrifice. Rather, it’s killing your neighbor’s dog because he barks incessantly, or killing his goat because it got into your vineyard and wiped out next year’s cabernet. Animals can be inconvenient (don’t get me started about deer in my vegetable garden), but if they belong to someone else, they’re his property—and his responsibility. If your neighbor’s goat ate your grapes, it’s up to him to restore your loss—it’s *not* up to you to execute the goat for its crimes. Once again, we see that God’s victim-centric system of jurisprudence stresses restitution over retribution.

#### RESTORATION

- (882) *One in a position to help must help.* **“If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again.”** (Exodus 23:4) Now you know where Yahshua’s revolutionary statement in the beatitudes came from: **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”** (Matthew 5:43-

45) This is but one of many ways to “love your neighbor as yourself.” But note that “your neighbor” isn’t necessarily only someone who you’d normally *want* to do a favor for—someone you’re on good terms with. No, it’s also your *enemy’s* ox or donkey you’re to return. These days, most of us don’t have “assets” that are prone to wander off by themselves, of course. But we can be creative in the application of this precept. Your rude neighbor down the street is away on vacation, but you see a van backed into his driveway at two o’clock in the morning: don’t ignore it just because he’s obnoxious. Call the cops—his house is being robbed. Of course, if we acted like this consistently, we might find ourselves unable to keep the strict letter of the precept, for we could eventually find ourselves *without* any enemies.

- (883) *Do not limit acts of love or mercy to people you know. “Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”* (Exodus 23:9) Not only must we not reserve our acts of kindness to people we like (as we learned in the previous precept), we are even responsible to love people we don’t even know—anyone we come in contact with. Remember, “oppression” in God’s eyes needn’t be a purposeful act of overt evil toward someone; simply to refuse assistance to someone whom it’s in your power to help is oppression.

This, of course, is the point of Yahshua’s familiar story about the “Good Samaritan.” A religious lawyer had asked Him what he could do to inherit eternal life. When Yahshua asked him what he saw as the Torah’s requirement, the lawyer named the same two precepts we have been discussing: Love Yahweh, and love your neighbor. And Yahshua readily agreed. “**But [the lawyer], wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’** Then Jesus answered and said: ‘**A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side....**’” By doing this, the priest and the Levite in the parable had not only violated our present precept, but also the law of mercy implied in such passages as Deuteronomy 22:4—“Don’t pretend you didn’t see the problem.” By seeing the stranger in need and refusing to help, the priest and the Levite had “oppressed” him just as surely as the thieves had.

“**But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii,**

**gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, “Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.” So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?’ And he said, ‘He who showed mercy on him.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’” (Luke 10:29-37) The Samaritan was a total stranger to the guy who’d been mugged. In fact, since the victim was coming from Jerusalem, we can assume he was a Jew, who would ordinarily (at this point in history) have considered a Samaritan, if not an enemy, at least someone to be shunned, culturally despised, and treated with contempt. From this Samaritan’s point of view, even though the cultural prejudices ran both ways, the only impetus he needed to show mercy to the man was, “He saw him.”**

There is no shortage of need—even tragedy—in the world today, and because of our advanced communications technology, we are in a position to become aware of personal catastrophes happening all over the globe. Mutilation and starvation in Africa; flood devastation in Southeast Asia; earthquakes and volcanoes, terrorist attacks and wars, rampant crime in the inner city. We look at the news reports and take note of the statistics, and we shake our heads and mutter, “Even if I sent my entire income to the Red Cross or Salvation Army, I couldn’t make a dent in this. It’s hopeless!” It is therefore instructive to study what the good Samaritan did, and what he didn’t do.

(1) He met the immediate need he saw before him, not some need he’d heard about in Capernaum or Cairo. (2) He took time out of his own busy schedule, postponing his plans but not canceling them altogether. (3) He didn’t consider the race, color, creed, or personality profile of the victim, only his need for immediate help. (4) He didn’t judge the victim for having been alone and unprotected on a notoriously dangerous stretch of road. (5) He provided what was required to get the victim back to whatever condition he had enjoyed before the bandits jumped him, but he made no attempt to change or “improve” the man’s whole life, imposing his own value system on the man. What he gave to help the victim was considerable, but not to the point that it threatened the welfare or security of his own family. In today’s terms, he went to the local Walgreen’s, bought some bandages, antiseptic, and aspirin, and then took the victim to a nearby Motel 6 and paid for his room for a few days and for food at the Macdonald’s next door while he was there. He spent maybe two or three hundred bucks, a significant sum but not his entire life savings. (6) He promised to check on the victim’s welfare, and pay for any further necessary expenses, on his return trip. In other words, he wasn’t merely throwing money at the problem in order to ease his own guilty conscience, but was investing himself in the well being of the individual he’d found in

need. And (7) He did not take up a collection, hold a telethon, or demand that the government or other passers-by contribute their “fair share,” nor did he ask the victim to reimburse him. He simply did what he did because it was the right thing to do. He got personally involved.

We needn't restrict our “rescue efforts” to the physically wounded, however. We'll meet people along the way who have been mugged spiritually through false teaching and hypocrisy, and they too need our help. The Samaritan, we are told, provided “bandages” to staunch the loss of the victim's life's blood. That is, in spiritual terms, he made available the “**fine linen, clean and bright...the righteous acts of the saints**” (Revelation 19:8) that alone could enable him to stand one day before His Creator, alive and whole. He anointed him, pouring “oil” on the man's wounds—that is, he manifested the Spirit of God's love, comforting, nurturing, and consoling him, giving him the will to live and the knowledge that someone cared deeply for him. And finally, he cleansed the victim's wounds with “wine,” a picture of the blood Yahshua shed to cleanse us from our sins. Although the Samaritan couldn't have known it, God was subtly telling us that even if the man's wounds weren't mortal, infection from the filth of the world could still kill him. He had to be washed—sterilized—in the blood of the true vine, Yahshua (cf. John 15:1-11). Religion couldn't (and didn't) help the man. Only someone willing to show him Yahweh's righteousness, Spirit, and sacrifice could be of real assistance.

#### REDEMPTION

- (884) *The life of one guilty of fatal criminal negligence may be redeemed. “If there is imposed on him [the owner of an ox who has killed someone] a sum of money, then he shall pay to redeem his life, whatever is imposed on him. Whether it has gored a son or gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him.”* (Exodus 21:30-31) The context for this precept was referenced in Maimonides' listing of dietary laws, though it has virtually nothing to do with diet: “**If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, then the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten.**” That's all the farther the Rambam went. “**But the owner of the ox shall be acquitted. But if the ox tended to thrust with its horn in times past, and it has been made known to his owner, and he has not kept it confined, so that it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death.**” (Exodus 21:28-29) The immediate point is that we are responsible for the actions of our animals. I realize that not too many people keep oxen in their back yards these days, but the same principles would apply across the board—millions of people own dogs, for instance. A distinction is drawn between an animal that

unexpectedly injures or kills a person and one who has been known to be dangerously aggressive in the past. One who keeps Pit Bulls or Rottweilers is *required* to be aware of the breeds' characteristics, and take appropriate precautions.

What is to happen if such a dangerous beast, one who has a history of aggression, attacks and kills a person? Even the most politically correct animal activist can see that the animal should be destroyed. But what about its owner? Under the Torah, his life is forfeit also, for his negligence is directly responsible for an innocent person's death. However, the family of the victim has the option of "suing" him in lieu of letting him suffer the ultimate penalty, and apparently, the sky's the limit: "*whatever* is imposed on him." From the negligent owner's point of view, when your very skin is at stake, losing your shirt may not sound so bad. The scary thing is, the *default* penalty for this type of criminal negligence is death: the option of allowing the guilty party's life to be redeemed is strictly up to the victim's kin. They are not required to do so.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see the spiritual ramifications here. The sinful world's ultimate "beast" was the Roman empire. It had been described prophetically to Daniel as "**dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet.**" (Daniel 7:8) The religious elite of Israel knew that Rome would, if properly motivated, attack and kill their inconvenient antagonist, Yahshua the Messiah, for them. So in the spring of 33 A.D., they conspired with this creature for their own evil ends. Both of these two "beasts," Rome and the Sanhedrin, were personally guilty of Christ's death: the former a raging ox, goring, slashing, and trampling, and the latter the vicious little dog nipping at its heels, driving it to madness. The "owner" of both these two beasts was *us*—Adam's fallen race—who *should have known* that both unrestrained political power and arrogant religious ambition could be deadly, especially when working together. Thus we had, under the Torah, earned the death penalty just as surely as the animals who did the actual killing.

The two beasts were to be destroyed: there was no equivocation in the law about that. But there was still the issue of whether or not mankind, the irresponsible "owner," would be given the chance to redeem its life. Would the victim's "next of kin"—Almighty Yahweh—allow us to be redeemed for our act of criminal negligence, and if so, what price would He demand? The answer is a good news-bad news story for anyone who desires to remain estranged and aloof from the God who made him. Yes, we may be redeemed, but the price of our deliverance is horrendous, not to

mention being impossible to obtain through our own efforts. It's the most precious substance known to man—the blood of God's only Son. The irony of ironies is that the price of redemption is the same blood that was shed by our own vicious "animals." It's as if Yahweh is saying, "Sure, you can buy your way out of this one. Just give me back the life-blood of My Son, the blood you shed at Calvary." *But that's impossible*, you say. "Yes, it is," God replies, "so because I love you, I have made the blood of My Son available for your redemption. All you have to do is accept my gracious offer. You've got three choices, then. You can either accept My gift, you can insult Me by trying to pay Me off through your own pitiful efforts, or you can die." Gee, that's a tough one.

The Torah's spiritual application in this regard isn't limited to the case of the Messiah's death, of course. Anyone, a "son or daughter," a "man or woman," who is "gored to death" by our rampaging ox receives the same consideration under God's victim-centric Law. This is just one more way of saying that preventing someone from having eternal life through the indwelling of Yahweh's Spirit is a crime punishable by death. The point is that you needn't murder people personally to merit God's wrath: doing it through an agent, something you own or control, also defines your guilt.

- (885) *Permanent possessions lost through poverty may be redeemed at any time. "If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession, and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold."* (Leviticus 25:25) This is part of the Law of Jubilee, describing, as we have seen, the things that impact the eternal state (as the Sabbatical year is prophetic of the Millennial reign of Yahshua the Messiah). "Becoming poor" is a euphemism for falling into sin, the consequence of which is "selling" our "possession"—the earth—to Satan. This has been the state of affairs since our father Adam first encountered the curse of sin in the Garden of Eden. Satan's 7,000-year "lease" will be up at the end of the Millennial Kingdom (the last thousand years of which he'll spend locked up in the abyss, thank God). The point here is that we need not wait until then to get our land back. Our "redeeming relative," Yahshua, has come to buy back what we lost. The price of redemption has already been paid. All we have to do is go back home, though few realize that our poverty and servitude need not continue one more minute.

Moses' treatise continues: "**Or if the man has no one to redeem it, but he himself becomes able to redeem it, then let him count the years since its sale, and restore the remainder to the man to whom he sold it, that he may return to his possession. But if he is not able to have it restored to himself, then what was sold shall remain in the hand of him who bought it until the Year of Jubilee; and in the**

**Jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his possession.**" (Leviticus 25:26-28) In spiritual terms, of course, none of us has proven willing or able to "redeem our own possession," for this would entail undoing what cost us our inheritance in the first place, reversing the effects of sin—becoming sinless in our own right. Moses is pointing out, however, that doing so is *theoretically* possible; that is, if one were to keep the whole Torah, one would have earned what is required to buy back the time left on the lease. The fact that no one has ever achieved this (except for our Redeemer Himself) doesn't mean it's intrinsically impossible. As a practical matter, of course, Yahweh wished to give every Israelite every opportunity to enjoy the bounty of his own inheritance for as long as possible. So he made it *legal* to buy back one's land at any time. One who had been poor did not have to wait until the Jubilee to reclaim his inheritance. Nor do we, having received the grace of God, have to wait until the end of the seventh Millennium to start enjoying our inheritance: everlasting life in Christ. Eternity begins now.

#### RESPECT

- (886) *Respect the right of the firstborn.* "If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved, and if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn. But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his." (Deuteronomy 21:15-17) Though we may find it strange (as is the case with slavery), Yahweh never specifically outlawed polygamy. The reason, we may surmise, is the same: He had lessons to teach us that could most readily be understood in the context of this practice. Israel was, of course, quite familiar with this very scenario, for Jacob had ended up with two wives and two concubines, but only one of these women was really loved. Reuben, his firstborn, was the son of his unloved wife, Leah. Yet though Jacob recognized his status as the firstborn son, we read of no double portion being bestowed upon him, but rather a curse: "Unstable as water, you shall not excel." (Genesis 49:4) (If you want to know why, read in Genesis 35:22 about what Reuben had done.) Rather, Jacob *de facto* bestowed the firstborn's double portion on Joseph, the first son of his beloved Rachel, by "adopting" Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (see Genesis 48:16).

Jacob hadn't actually violated the Torah, of course, for it hadn't yet been handed down. But Yahweh now wished to establish the normal order of things: the firstborn (even if he was the son of an unloved wife) was to receive the status of leadership and the double portion of the inheritance. Since Yahweh never supported human institutions and traditions for their own sake, we must ask ourselves *why*. What did He wish to teach us with the Law of the firstborn? Remember first that God is, in a manner of speaking, polygamous Himself. That is, He characterized the Nation of Israel as his "wife"—one who was subsequently unfaithful to him. Then, manifested as Yahshua the Messiah, God took a second "wife," the *ekklesia* or called-out assembly of believers (a.k.a. "the Church")—called the "bride of Christ." This is clearly less an "arranged marriage," and more a love match, than Yahweh's union with Israel. As part of this "bride," I can assure you that there is real passion in this romance.

What, then, is the point of the Torah's precept? I believe it's a prophecy. When Yahshua receives His kingdom, the nation of Israel—now restored and cleansed—will function as the "firstborn son" among nations, receiving a double portion of honor, authority, and blessing. The sons of the Church (the Millennial gentile believers), while enjoying the blessings of the kingdom, will look to Israel as their honored "eldest brother," holding the uncontested position of leadership among Millennial mortals. This is in direct contradiction to the "Onward Christian Soldiers" mentality so prevalent a century ago that insisted the Church had replaced Israel in the plan and the heart of God. Yahweh begs to differ.

(887) *Respect the devotion of your servants.* **"And if it happens that he [the servant who loves his master] says to you, 'I will not go away from you,' because he loves you and your house, since he prospers with you, then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also to your female servant you shall do likewise."** (Deuteronomy 15:16-17) This is part of the Law of the Sabbatical year. At the end of six years of service, the one who had been sold into servitude would be free to go, staked and supplied with whatever it would take to get him on his feet for good (verses 13-14). At this point, the only "bonds" the master might have upon the servant would be those of thankfulness, loyalty, and love. He had no legal right to expect any more service from his former bondservant. The servant, likewise, had no legal right to ask anything further from his former master. Except for one thing...

Let's back up a step. What had caused the "servant" to come into the master's household in the first place? He had become "poor," a euphemism, as I noted, for having sinned against God, incurring a spiritual

debt he could not pay. His six years of service represent his mortal life as a fallen man. So in spiritual terms, we poor servants are, until the day we die, in the debt of the Master, He who paid the price of our redemption *up front*. Since “the wages of sin is death,” we are no longer in God’s debt after we’ve died. And since He has provided us with “all things that pertain to life and godliness” while we spend our days upon His earth, He too has done everything that could be reasonably expected of Him. We could then, at the end of our mortal lives, simply part company from God, no harm, no foul. There would be neither friendship nor enmity; neither punishment nor reward; neither relationship nor responsibility. The servant’s labors cease at his death, but this state of affairs is neither heaven nor hell. It’s something else entirely: the second of “three doors”—the three possible eternal destinations I spoke of in Precepts #865 and #866 above. It is simply ceasing to exist. No more pain or sorrow. But no more joy or fulfillment, either.

But what is that “one thing” I spoke of, that loophole in the Law of the Sabbatical year? What is the servant who has fulfilled his contract legally entitled to demand of the master who has likewise kept his end of the bargain? This servant may, at his own discretion and volition, request to make his place of service in the master’s household *permanent*—extend his contract indefinitely, so to speak. Why would he do this? Isn’t freedom to be desired above all things? No, it isn’t. It all depends on what you wish to be set free *from*. Sure, freedom from tyranny, oppression, fruitless toil, and pain would be a good thing, but life under our Master Yahweh is none of those things. It is, rather, a time of joyful labor, of justice tempered by mercy, of loving, nurturing relationships—things no sane person desires to be “freed” from. You may protest that life for the vast majority of mankind answers to the former description, tyranny and oppression. True, but that’s not because Yahweh is a tyrant or oppressor. It’s because they have been serving some other master, some usurper. It is tragic indeed to spend your life serving someone or something other than the God who bought you, but *woe* to the one who is responsible for your condition.

The servant, then, may ask to serve his master forever, continuing to do the same fulfilling work, maintaining the same loving relationships, enjoying the same peace and security he or she did before. The formal procedure—piercing the earlobe with an awl—involves blood and pain, for it is a picture of the price the Master originally paid for his redemption: the sacrifice of His Son, Yahshua, upon Calvary’s pole. But it is a privilege indeed for the servant to be counted worthy to partake in that sacrifice. Note that the choice is entirely up to the servant. The master apparently has no say in the matter: he is required by law to comply with

the servant's request. Amazingly, Yahweh has put limits on His own power here. He has made it *illegal for Himself* to refuse the servant's appeal. (Of course, one who is not actually His bondservant, one who has been serving another master, has no such rights.) According to His own Law, Yahweh may neither compel the servant to stay, nor decline to honor the servant's choice to remain with Him forever. The choice to enter into eternal life, "Door Number One," is ours to make. There's only one word to describe a God who would arrange this awesome opportunity for us: Yahweh is *Love*.