

Messianic Messages II: The Egyptian Experience

The family of Abraham had been selected by Yahweh to be the vehicle through which “all the families of the earth would be blessed.” As it would turn out, this “vehicle” would have to be something of an “all terrain” model, for there would be bumps in the road, obstacles to overcome, detours into uncharted territory, and hijackers to elude. This wouldn't be a drag race—a sprint in a straight line from point A to point B. It would be more like a cross between a steeplechase and an explorer's expedition: the destination was defined (sort of), but not the path leading to it. The chosen family had no road map, no instructions to speak of, no Bible to go by. Their knowledge of the God who had set them apart was limited to treasured stories of the brief and sporadic encounters their patriarchs had had with Him. He had given them sweeping but imprecise promises, and equally vague instructions: *separate yourselves from the nations around you; go to a land I'll show you; walk blamelessly before Me.*

As time went on, the promises would become more specific, and the Instructions would eventually be so explicit they'd take on a life of their own. But even in the hazy and indistinct beginning of this journey, glimpses of the goal were given to God's people. Like dabs of paint in an impressionist's masterpiece, each new spot of color contributed to the lucidity and definition of the overall picture, though it may not have seemed particularly significant on its own. At the time, only the Artist knew what each brushstroke would mean. But we, having the privilege of standing back and seeing the finished work from the proper perspective, are in a position to comprehend how all those seemingly unimportant and unrelated details work together to form a cohesive and comprehensive whole.

The question is, do we? What do we see in the finished picture? Do we perceive it at all? The painting, a portrait of the Son of Man, is entitled: “Yahweh is Salvation.” Here it is, hanging in a public place for all to see. And here we are, for whatever reason, in the same place. Some of us intended to come here to see it, and some happened upon this place quite by accident. But we're all here now. So let's do a man-on-the-street interview with some of these folks...

“You, sir, what do you think of the picture?” *I don't have an opinion.* “Is that from ignorance, or apathy?” *I don't know, and I don't care.*

“Okay, moving along then. You, Ma'am?” *Oh, it's lovely. I'd like to have something like this hanging in my spare bedroom. It would go nicely with the drapes in there.*

“Alrighty, then. You, sir, with the magnifying glass. Any opinion you’d like to share with us?” *I’m the art critic for the Times. Of course I have an opinion. I’ll admit: the brushwork is remarkable—the craftsmanship, the juxtaposition of color, the richness of the texture...* “So you like the painting?” *Like it? No, don’t be an idiot. It’s too pedestrian to be taken seriously—too simplistic and unsophisticated. He paints as if there’s such a thing as absolute truth. I’m told this is a self portrait—a subject I find beneath the calling of a true artist. I’ve never even heard of this guy. What’s his name? Yahweh? If he wanted to put “Salvation” in the title, he should have painted something of great social importance, you know, like saving the whales or finding a cure for AIDS!*

“I see. Well then. You, young man. Can you tell me what you think?” *Yes, I’ll tell you, he says, as a tear rolls down his cheek. This is the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen. I took two busses and a subway to get here. And now that I’m here, I don’t think I can ever go home again. You see here, where the Artist sacrificed Himself so that I could live? I’ve been looking for this all my life. If you stand back far enough, you can see that it’s not just a picture of a man—it’s Love, Mercy, and Truth personified. And when you look more closely, every brushstroke, every highlight, every shadow, contributes something wonderful to the story. It’s almost as if it’s alive—and the Life within it is contagious.*

Yes, we don’t all see the same thing when we look at Yahweh’s portrait of His Anointed Redeemer. What we see, or don’t see, depends as much on our own attitudes as upon what God has placed before our eyes. In short, we see what we want to see—we see what we *choose* to see. This portrayal of God’s was not always as clear as it is today. During the age of the patriarchs, it was only seemingly random brushstrokes on an otherwise blank canvas. Progress on the painting, slow and sporadic, was made between Moses and Malachi. But then, early in the First Century, Yahweh labored with sudden intensity to finish His work, though the gallery (our world) was restricted by its architecture and hampered by its lighting. But now, two thousand years later, we are no longer handicapped by poor sight lines and dim oil lamps—we are blessed with an unrestricted view of God’s finished work, lit with brilliant sunlight, for “the Sun of righteousness has arisen with healing in His wings.” At this late date, we (and I mean the whole human race) can see Yahshua more clearly than we ever could before, if only we’ll choose to look at God’s portrait through eyes of faith and trust.

But let us not forget that the Yahshua of history and faith is only a mortal representation, a *picture* of the love of God. Though He’s God incarnate, Yahshua is not *all there is* of God, but is only a pale shadow of Yahweh’s actual being. The day is coming, however, and soon, when Yahweh will actually walk among us as King Yahshua, the reigning, glorified, undiminished personification of God’s Love. The Picture will no longer be mankind’s sole source of insight about

Yahweh's salvation, for we will rejoice in the very presence of the One about whom the Picture was painted. The reality will have overtaken the symbol. The very *dimensions* that He laid aside in the process of communicating Yahweh's love to us will be restored. And we will at last know as we are known.

In the present world, however, we must content ourselves with what we can see, if not with the eyes of understanding, then with the eyes of faith. Until King Yahshua walks the earth in glory, we must continue to study the portrait that Yahweh left behind. After all, false Christs abound. If we don't know what the real Messiah looks like, we won't be able to identify the phony ones.

JOSEPH

(943) *The Messiah's authority will breed animosity among men.* **"Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. So he said to them, 'Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.' And his brothers said to him, 'Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?' So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words."** (Genesis 37:5-8) The story of Joseph is a rich repository of parallels to the life of the Messiah. One commentator counted forty-two places where Joseph is seen as a "type" of Christ. I don't intend to examine them all, but we would do well to explore some of the more obvious Messianic Messages in Joseph's story. Joseph's brothers were already envious of him, for his father Israel had given him a tunic of many colors, a gift that betrayed his special affection for the son of his old age, and more to the point, the firstborn son of Rachel, the wife he actually loved. Singling out Joseph for blessing was thus seen by Joseph's brothers as an insult to their mothers. Between the lines, a subtle truth emerges: God's affection for those indwelt by His Holy Spirit is seen as an affront to those who have some other spirit within them. Just as Israel loved all of his children but had special fondness for Rachel's son Joseph, Yahweh loves all people—so much so that He sacrificed Himself to save them—but He has a special bond with His Spirit-indwelt children. It's a different kind of relationship altogether, not Creator to creature, but Parent to child. And the world hates and envies us as a result.

So with one strike against him already, Joseph announced that, according to his dream, his brothers would bow down to him. Neither he nor his brothers had any doubt as to what the imagery meant. Strike two. He then had another dream, and as before, immediately spoke of it to

those who might be expected to see themselves as being on the losing end of this thing. **“Then [Joseph] dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, ‘Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me.’ So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, ‘What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?’ And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind.”** (Genesis 37:9-11) Strike three. If Joseph had been a bit more mature or circumspect, he might have kept the matter to himself, but he was just a kid, and a spoiled one at that—he (apparently) had no idea what effect such talk might have on his family. Israel was the only one who perceived that the dreams came from somewhere—or rather, some One—and that God might indeed be telling them all something important.

What that “something” was would become apparent as the events of Joseph’s life transpired. We’re all familiar with the story. Through a series of unforeseeable incidents and remarkable “coincidences,” Joseph’s faith in Yahweh elevated him to the top position of leadership in the kingdom, second only to Pharaoh himself—putting him in a position in which he could save his “world,” if only they’d heed his warning and take his advice—which they did. His brothers did indeed end up bowing down to him, just as his dream had predicted. What’s not so obvious is that all of this was a dress rehearsal for a much larger drama. God’s Son would, like Joseph, announce His destiny to His brothers, find Himself betrayed and sold for the price of a slave, unexpectedly rise to receive the throne of the Kingdom, and offer salvation to a hungry, dying world. The only question yet to be answered is, will *our* world welcome His reign and accept His provision for the spiritual famine that’s ravaging the land, or will we, in our jealous envy, continue to hate and resent Him? One way or another, every knee *will* bow before Yahshua.

- (944) *Innocence breeds insight.* **“And Joseph said to [Pharaoh’s chief cupbearer], ‘This is the interpretation of [your dream]: The three branches are three days. Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler. But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon.’”** (Genesis 40:12-15) There is an interesting theme that recurs sporadically throughout the Bible. Lots of folks are given dreams and visions, but only those who are spiritually attuned are able to determine what they mean. Joseph’s rise from prison to palace was fueled by just such an ability. Another

remarkable example is Daniel, whose interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's "statue" dream not only kept his head on his shoulders, but also gave us invaluable information about the future course of world history—including events that haven't to this day come to pass. Yahshua Himself was so spiritually astute, He didn't even need to wait for someone to have a dream. He knew what people were thinking before they did—even if they weren't willing to admit the truth to themselves.

The gift of insight, the ability to see the needle of truth in a haystack of mere information, seems to me to be directly proportional to a person's willingness to surrender to the leading of the Holy Spirit. I'm not talking about flawless behavior, you understand, but having a heart for God. The calling of the prophet Isaiah is telling. **"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory!' And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke."** In theory, anybody might have received a vision like this, but only one (like Isaiah) who was both spiritually responsive and acutely aware of his inadequacy before God would have reacted as he did. **"So I said: 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of hosts.'" Fortunately, Yahweh has a remedy for our uncleanness. "Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips. Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.' Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'" (Isaiah 6:1-8)** That's the common thread that runs through the stories of spiritually aware men and women from one end of the Bible to the other—a willingness to be cleansed by God and sent out to a lost world on His behalf. To these people, Yahweh gives insight, which I would define as the ability to perceive the true nature of things, regardless of an ocean of "conventional wisdom" to the contrary.

It might be instructive to review a few instances of the converse: where Yahweh *withheld* the ability to perceive truth in response to a rejection of His Spirit. First, we see the stubborn and arrogant attitude of the Pharaoh of the exodus, and note that God "hardened his heart." (Exodus 10:27, etc.) Isaiah's first task upon making himself available to Yahweh was to go to the rebellious house of Israel and pronounce spiritual blindness upon them: **"And He said, 'Go, and tell this people: "Keep on hearing,**

but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.” Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.” (Isaiah 6:9-10) Then, we are reminded of Paul’s dire warning to those “who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” He says that they “became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.... Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness... [and] vile passions.... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind.” (Romans 1:18-28) In other words, because of their active unwillingness to accept the truth, Yahweh relieved all of these people of the ability to see it at all. He didn’t abrogate their free will; on the contrary, He determined to forever honor the disastrous choice they had already made.

Like Joseph in prison, we today—if we’re sensitive to the voice of Yahweh’s *Ruach Qodesh*—have the opportunity to interpret the disturbing “dreams” of a lost and searching world. Joseph was able to give Pharaoh’s butler good news, but the baker wasn’t so lucky, though his dream had been superficially similar. If we listen to the Spirit’s testimony within us, we can say to some today, “Take heart. Even though things may look impossibly bleak right now, the King is preparing to vindicate you, for He knows you, and He knows that you trust in Him.” But as Joseph had nothing but bad news for the baker, we too must caution the unbelieving world, “Beware, for your trials are just beginning. The King has perceived that you are neither His friend, His servant, nor His child. Therefore, repent, I beg you, before He locks the door you have already slammed in His face.”

- (945) *God will place Someone wise and discerning over the affairs of the world.* “Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:33) At this point, Joseph had interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams, and told him the good news and the bad news: the land would see seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Having delivered the data, he now proffered the advice: *do something* about it, while there’s still time. “Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine.” (Genesis 41:34-36) Christ has also told us (today’s world) that the time of abundance will end, to be followed by seven years of spiritual famine. And He has added to the raw data this wise counsel: “Do not lay up

for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19-21) His advice to us is thus more or less the same as Joseph’s was to Pharaoh: *Take whatever is necessary to sustain your life and put in a safe place—somewhere where the uncertainties of the world cannot affect it.*

“So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?’” This is one of those delicious moments where the scriptural record lets us sort of fill in the blank with our own imaginations. The vizier looks sideways at the captain of the guard, who trades glances with the chief cupbearer, as if to say, “You’re kidding me, right? The guy who read his dream and figured out how to prepare for it is standing right in front of him. Yeah, I think we can find somebody like that. . . .” “Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.’ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.’” (Genesis 41:37-41) What we tend to forget is that we still have a “recommendation” to make to our King, Yahweh. Who would we like to see put in charge of saving Egypt—or the world? Are we going to vote that the One who single-handedly provided the means of salvation for all mankind be “set over” the kingdom (which is so slam-dunk obvious it’s silly), or are we going to recommend that somebody else—or nobody at all—be made responsible for our destiny? In the end, just as in Joseph’s day, God lets us decide who we’d like to be in control. But now, as then, He’s going to do what’s right. He’s going to set Yahshua “over all the land,” and “all His people shall be ruled according to His word.”

- (946) *A ministry of salvation begins at the age of thirty.* “Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:46) It doesn’t mean much by itself, I suppose, but taken in tandem with a thousand other details, the age of the commencement of Joseph’s service is one more indication that his life was meant to be a dress rehearsal for the Messiah’s—and is therefore significant. We read in Luke’s Gospel, “Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age.” (Luke 3:23)

This could be a coincidence, of course, but I don’t think it is. Yahweh went out of His way to reinforce the idea when He defined the service period of the Levites (the priestly tribe) as beginning at thirty years of age:

“All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel numbered, by their families and by their fathers’ houses, from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who came to do the work of service and the work of bearing burdens in the tabernacle of meeting—those who were numbered were eight thousand five hundred and eighty.” (Numbers 4:46-48)

Interesting, how that’s phrased: “the work of service and the work of bearing burdens in the tabernacle” began at thirty. The whole point of the tabernacle, as we have seen, was to present a complex and beautiful picture of our approach to God through the work of Yahshua the Messiah. His work was one of service (healing the sick, raising the dead, and so forth) and of bearing the spiritual “burden” of the tabernacle (fulfilling its symbols, especially giving His life as a sacrificial ransom for many).

One didn’t *become* a Levite at thirty, of course. One was a “Levite” on the day he was born. Moreover, Levites actually began working in their assigned roles at the age of *twenty-five* (see Numbers 8:24 and Precept #983). But they weren’t *numbered* into the Levitical ranks until they turned thirty. In the same way, Yahshua was Yahweh’s Son on the day He entered the world, and being found as a man, He humbled Himself, learning His adoptive father’s trade and studying the scriptures like any devout young Israelite man would have done. It was only when He turned thirty that His identity could be verified through performing the specific ministry God had assigned to Him. It was only at this age that He could officially begin to fulfill the destiny that His heritage had assigned to Him—becoming the Savior of Mankind.

(947) *Our sin against God requires a blood sacrifice.* **“Then they said to one another, ‘We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.’ And Reuben answered them, saying, ‘Did I not speak to you, saying, “Do not sin against the boy”; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.”** (Genesis 42:21-22) Over twenty years had gone by, and Joseph’s brothers still harbored the guilt of their secret sin, as if they had betrayed him only yesterday. Reuben, Israel’s firstborn, understood as none of the others did that a sin against Joseph was in fact a sin against their father (Genesis 37:22, 30). He also understood that even though his intentions toward Joseph had not been quite as evil as those of the other brothers, all of them were equally guilty before God, and Joseph’s blood was now required of them.

But how? Their lives were not in immediate danger. At this point in the story, the vice-Pharaoh (the incognito Joseph) had demanded that to prove they weren’t spies, they must bring their youngest brother back to

Egypt with them—Benjamin, the only living son (as far as they knew) of Israel’s late beloved wife Rachel. Israel’s hope had been reflected in the name he gave his infant boy: “son of the right hand.” One’s “right hand” was the place of honor and strength; there was no question of Israel’s affection, even obsession, for the lad. Having lost Joseph, he would do *anything* to protect Benjamin. So as the famine in Canaan wore on, Israel adamantly refused to send young Benjamin to Egypt with his brothers—until it became clear that without Egyptian grain, his whole family, including Benjamin, would perish.

Was Yahweh’s conundrum any different? The spiritual famine that was ravaging the earth could not be solved by ignoring it in heaven, and it was clear to Him (as all things are) that only by sending His beloved Son into the world—into harm’s way—that those who depended upon Him could be saved. Moreover, just as Benjamin was perceived as a substitute for Joseph, Yahshua would be offered up as a substitute for Adam and all of his progeny—us. Reuben had correctly noted that Joseph’s blood would be required of the brothers. But who would actually be making the sacrifice? Not the brothers, and not even young Benjamin. It was *Israel*, who by sending Benjamin, the Son of his right hand, was a type of Yahweh sending Yahshua, the Son of *His* Right Hand.

- (948) *Yahweh can use man’s evil as an agent for the greater good.* **“Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph; does my father still live?’ But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Please come near to me.’ So they came near. Then he said: ‘I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.’”** (Genesis 45:3-5) It was one of the most dramatic and emotional moments in the entire Bible: Joseph, after concealing his identity for what must have seemed like an eternity to him, at last took the “mask” off and told his brothers who he really was. Why had he waited? I believe he wanted to find out how they felt about their treachery after all these years. Were they repentant, or did they still harbor hatred and envy? Did they acknowledge their guilt, or were they glad Joseph was gone? His question was answered with the exchange recorded in our previous precept: **“We are truly guilty concerning our brother... Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.”** However, having seen God’s hand at work in his life, Joseph wasn’t thinking about revenge, but about forgiveness.

This scene is another dress rehearsal, this time for a play that still is yet to be performed in our day—the final reconciliation of the nation of Israel with her Messiah. The parallels are stunning. Having betrayed their

Kinsman for the price of a slave, Israel has now fallen into a state of spiritual famine: they are starving for their God, who over the last two millennia has become a total stranger to them. He didn't leave them, however—*they left Him*, when they crucified His Messiah and traded in the Torah for the rabbinical fables of the Talmud. Long before Joseph and his brothers met face to face, he had *already* provided the means for their salvation. And before he finally revealed his true identity, he had *already* delivered the sustenance they so desperately needed. In the same way, salvation was provided long ago by Yahshua's sacrificial act. But He will also physically deliver them from national extinction *before* He unveils His identity to them—during the battle of Magog. (See Ezekiel 38 and 39.) His unveiling—His *revelation*, if you will—will take place four or five years later, if I've got the timeline right.

What am I talking about? Zechariah describes the scene: **“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem.”** (Zechariah 12:10-11) Who did the inhabitants of Jerusalem “pierce”? It was Yahshua. The same thoughts that raced through the minds of Joseph's brothers when they finally realized who he was will strike the Last-Days Jewish remnant like a thunderbolt: *Oh my God! We killed the Messiah! Will they be “dismayed,”* like Joseph's brother's were? Yeah, I can pretty much guarantee it.

When will this take place? On the definitive Day of Atonement (October 3, 2033, if I'm not mistaken), when Yahshua the Messiah returns to earth as its glorified King, splitting the Mount of Olives, from which He ascended 2000 years previously. (See Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:9-11.) The remnant's very prophesied reaction to Yahshua's return is the definitive requirement of *Yom Kippurim*: **“And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before Yahweh your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people.’** (Leviticus 23:26-30) Joseph forgave his brothers because they were repentant, “afflicted in soul” for their crimes, and they were more than willing to rest in Joseph's provision, for they had wisely concluded that they could not save themselves.

But the story's not quite done. After the death of Israel their father, the brothers once again came to fear that their past misdeeds would be held against them—that Joseph's kindness toward them was but a temporary reprieve designed to honor the old man who had loved him so much. So they sent emissaries to Joseph to plead for forgiveness, though it had already been granted long before this. **“I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you. Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.’ And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, ‘Behold, we are your servants.’”** Gee, I guess the dreams he'd had all those years ago were true after all. **“Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?’** Well, that's refreshing, I must say. Most powerful politicians these days think they *are*. **“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.”** (Genesis 50:17-21) Again, the parallels to scriptural history are too blatant to ignore. The Jewish religious leaders too intended “evil” against Yahshua. In getting the Romans to execute Him, they meant to be rid of Him forever, maintaining their own pitiful status quo in the process. But Yahweh used their animosity to bring about good—the ultimate good for all mankind. Through Yahshua's death the promise Yahweh had made to Abram would at last be fulfilled. Every family on earth *would* be blessed: a way had been found to restore the fellowship lost through Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, available through trust in Yahshua to every man who had ever lived. **“Now therefore, do not be afraid.”**

THE EXODUS

- (949) *The Passover Lamb must enter the household of Israel on the tenth day of Nisan.* **“Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household.... Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.’”** (Exodus 12:3, 6) We discussed this briefly in Mitzvah #460, but it really deserves a more detailed explanation. Passover (a.k.a. “the Day of Preparation” for the Feast of Unleavened Bread—the day upon which the paschal lamb was to be slain in the late afternoon) was to fall on the 14th day of the month of Nisan. In the year 33 A.D., that day fell on Friday, April 1.

Using the day by day record in the Gospel of Mark, we can work backwards to reconstruct the events leading up to this, and determine the days upon which they took place. Mark 14:1 says, “**After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.**” He’s referring to the events of chapters 12 and 13—in which Yahshua confounded the Pharisees and taught His disciples—notably, delivering the Olivet Discourse. Since Passover fell on Friday Nisan 14, he’s talking about Wednesday and Thursday (*after which* came the Passover). Wednesday Nisan 12, then, begins at Mark 11:20—“**Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.**” So these next words mark the commencement of the events of Tuesday, Nisan 11: “**Now on the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry.**” (Mark 11:12) Seeing a fig tree with no fruit on it, He cursed it, the results of which were noted the following morning.

Mark notes that this was the “next day.” The next day after *what*? What happened on Monday, Nisan 10? Mark records that as Yahshua walked with His disciples toward Jerusalem from Bethany, He asked them to borrow a donkey’s colt for Him (See Zechariah 9:9). Mounted upon it, He entered Jerusalem amid a throng of worshippers who had gathered along the road to witness the High Priest bringing the “official” Passover lamb into the city from Bethlehem—as required in Exodus 12:3. Recognizing Yahshua, the crowd turned their attention to Him, crying out, “**Hosanna!** [that is, “Save now!”] **Blessed is He who comes in the name of Yahweh! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!**” (Mark 11:9-10; cf. Psalm 118:26) The throng recognized that Yahshua had indeed come in the name of Yahweh. His recent miracles had proved it beyond the shadow of a doubt. What they didn’t understand (yet) was that *He* was to be the very Passover Lamb they had come to see—as John the Baptist had put it, “**the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**” (John 1:29)

So the precise requirements of our present precept were met by Yahshua: He entered the household of Israel on the tenth day of Nisan, allowing the people of Jerusalem to become thoroughly familiar with Him—in person, not just by reputation—just as the Law prescribed. But there is more to it: the timing of the Triumphal Entry fulfills more than just Exodus 12:3. Daniel had been told: “**Seventy weeks** [literally, *sevens*] **are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two**

weeks.” (Daniel 9:24-25) A “week” is seven of something, in this case, a specified time unit. It could be a day, a year, or some other length of time. By reverse-engineering some of the prophecies that are expressed in the terms of this system (note that “time, times and half a time,” 42 months, and 1,260 days all seem to refer to the same span of time) it is apparent that Daniel’s “week” is seven 360-day “prophetic” years. The prophecy is given in terms of one of several calendars in use simultaneously in the world Daniel was familiar with—a schematic 360-day “year” of twelve 30-day months, with a five day compensator tacked onto the end. (The Babylonians, like the Jews, knew perfectly well that a solar year was about 365¼ days long, but the schematic year made dates and schedules far easier to keep track of than either a lunar calendar or a goofy system like the one we use.) Interestingly, Yahweh never actually calls this time period a “year.”

The coming of “Messiah the Prince,” then, would occur precisely 69 “sevens” of “prophetic years,” that is, 483 of them, after a “command to restore and build Jerusalem” was issued. That multiplies out to 173,880 days. This very decree was recorded in Nehemiah 2:1-6, dated to **“the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes.”** When? Allow me to quote from *Future History*:

“Most scholars (including the esteemed Sir Robert Anderson, whom I believe was the first to calculate this) peg the twentieth year of Artaxerxes at 445 B.C. It’s simple arithmetic. His father, Xerxes (a.k.a. Ahasuerus, husband of Queen Esther) died in 465; add twenty years to that and you come to 445. But they fail to take into account the little drama that transpired following the death (okay, *murder*) of Xerxes. The king had been killed in his sleep by an ambitious fellow named Artabanus, the king’s vizier or bodyguard, who also (according to Aristotle) killed the heir apparent, Darius. Another royal son, Hustapis, was out of the country, safe for the moment. That left Artaxerxes, a mere teenager at the time. Artabanus left him alive, figuring he could rule through him as regent. Then, seven months later, he changed his mind and tried to kill him, too. But as luck would have it, the lad killed Artabanus instead. Hustapis showed up shortly thereafter and tried to claim the throne, so Artaxerxes killed him as well. These guys needed a Constitution in the worst way. Anyway, all this maneuvering took the better part of a year: thus Artie wasn’t able to assume the throne until 464. That would make the starting date of Daniel’s prophecy the 1st of Nisan, 444 B.C.

“From this date, we must count **“seven weeks and sixty two weeks.”** That is, there would be forty-nine years until Jerusalem’s “street and wall” were

built, “even in troublesome times”—the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah relate just how troublesome they were—and another 434 years, or 483 years total, “until Messiah the Prince.” 483 years times 360 days—the length of the Hebrew prophetic year—comes out to 173,880 days, or 476 solar years and 25 days inclusive, i.e., to the 10th of Nisan, or March 28, A.D. 33. And on March 28, A.D. 33, if my calculations are correct, Yahshua of Nazareth rode into Jerusalem on a donkey amid the adulation of a teeming throng of Jewish worshipers in town for the Passover holiday. Messiah the Prince had come.”

The 10th of Nisan is the very day Yahweh had specified for the Passover lamb to be brought into the household. So Yahshua not only fulfilled the day required by prophecy, but also the year. The fact that it would be centuries before anybody figured this out doesn’t make it any less amazing. But it all conspires to disqualify any rival claimant to the title “Messiah the Prince.” Jews today looking for their Messiah are required by scripture to consider *only* candidates who (1) announce their anointing precisely 173,880 days after a decree matching that of Artaxerxes, (2) enter Jerusalem for their inspection on the 10th of Nisan, and (3) offer themselves up as atonement sacrifices four days later on Passover. Any takers? (Other than the obvious, I mean.) I didn’t think so.

(950) *Note the symbolic connection between slaying the Passover Lamb and the removal of leaven. “So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to Yahweh throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.”* (Exodus 12:14-15) Yahweh is careful to separate the imagery of Passover (on Nisan 14) from that of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (on Nisan 15—a designated Sabbath). *Pesach* speaks of the death of the lamb, whose blood, smeared on the doorposts and lintels of the Israelites’ houses, was to keep the Death Angel at bay. *Chag Matzah*, by contrast, speaks of an ongoing state where leaven or yeast (symbolic of sin) is absent. The days seem quite different in symbolic purpose. But in reality, Yahweh is merely distinguishing cause from effect. What happened on Passover made possible the reality of the sinless state symbolized by the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In practical terms, it is impossible to separate the celebration of Passover from Unleavened Bread, for each relies upon the other. First, the actual meal when the lamb is consumed takes place after sunset—technically pushing it into the next calendar “day,” since sunset marks the

beginning of each new day. Thus technically, the Passover meal is not eaten on Passover, but rather on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Second, the deadline for having killed the Passover lamb was the same as that for removing the leaven from the household. By sundown on the 14th of Nisan, both jobs had to be done, plus one more: the fire upon which the lamb was to be roasted had to have been kindled by this same hour, for it was illegal to start a fire on the Sabbath day. So the judgment that would fall upon the substitutionary sacrifice on Nisan 14 is linked to the removal of sin from our lives, while the protection, nourishment, and vindication this judgment would bring in its wake could only be enjoyed after that—and as a result of it—on and following Nisan 15. You’d have to work awfully hard not to see the Messianic connection to all of this. By being crucified (on Passover), Yahshua removed the sin from our lives. The subsequent ongoing state of sinlessness we enjoy (in spiritual fact if not in physical experience) is the direct result of His sacrifice and the judgment He endured in our stead. That’s why Yahweh made the Feast a weeklong event: our sinlessness has become a permanent feature (seven days symbolizing completion) of our relationship with God. In fact, our permanent sinlessness is what makes that relationship possible.

Fine tuning the symbols, Yahweh continues: **“On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you.”** (Exodus 12:16) Normally, you couldn’t prepare food on a Sabbath, but here we’re given an exception. The lesson is clear. We can’t take the place of the Lamb—we can’t accomplish our own salvation. Nor can we do anything to enhance, add to, or complete the work He began on our behalf. Rather, **“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”** (Hebrews 12:1-2) But although Yahshua is both “the author and finisher of our faith,” we still have a part to play. In the time allotted to us, we are to “prepare that which everyone must eat.” That is, “laying aside the sins which so easily ensnare us,” we are to provide spiritual sustenance—truth and light—to the world we’re leaving behind. **“So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance.”** (Exodus 12:17)

- (951) *The elders of Israel are to kill the Passover Lamb. “Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Pick out and take lambs for yourselves*

according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb.” (Exodus 12:21) As a practical matter at the first Passover, Moses gathered the elders in order to pass the word of God along to the individual families they represented, and the heads of those families would have selected unblemished lambs from their own flocks. But the letter of the Torah stands: the *elders* were instructed to “pick out” and “kill the Passover lamb.” *They* were responsible for choosing who would be sacrificed to secure Israel’s salvation.

So we read the Gospel account, amazed at the utter precision of God’s word: **“Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, ‘Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?’ For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.... But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.”** (Matthew 27:15-18, 20) Yes, as required in the Torah, it was the job of the elders of Israel to choose who would be sacrificed on Passover. They chose Yahshua: the very “Lamb” whom God had sent, John had identified, and their citizens had acclaimed. Why they couldn’t see the irony in all this (and still can’t) is beyond me.

A fascinating study in contrasts is the comparison of the death of Yahshua to that of the only man ever to be declared the messiah by the elders of Israel: Simon ben Kosiba. The power of the chief priests was a thing of the past by his day, usurped by the rabbis early in the second century. The influential Rabbi Akiba declared this arrogant and brutal warlord to be the fulfillment of Balaam’s messianic prophecy: **“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.”** (Numbers 24:17) So Akiba renamed ben Kosiba “Bar Kochba,” that is, “son of a star.” To this day, Bar Kochba is the Jewish ideal of the Messiah: he came within a whisker of defeating the Romans, even taking back Jerusalem for a short time. But he did not prevail: he (and Akiba) were slain in 135. Orthodox Jews may protest, “So what? Yahshua didn’t prevail either. He too was slain by the Romans.” Good point, so it behooves us to determine what the scriptures require concerning the Messiah’s death.

It is my contention that the whole Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread scenario makes no sense unless it is meant to be a preview of a larger event, one of universal significance—the offer of salvation to all mankind through the sacrifice of the Messiah, the “Lamb of God.” Therefore, the

Messiah *must* be slain on Nisan 14. Yahshua was. Further, the location of His sacrifice must be in “the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide.” There isn’t a Jew on earth who would deny that this place is Jerusalem, and indeed, Yahshua was slain in this city—on Mount Moriah, no less. Daniel too (in 9:26) intimates that Jerusalem is the city where “Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself”—i.e., not for His own crimes. But how does this stack up against the death of Bar Kochba? He was not slain on Nisan 14, but on the 9th of Av (the same date both the first and second temples were razed, which ought to be a clue). And where did he die? Not in Jerusalem, but in Betar, some six miles to the southwest (a place not even mentioned in the Tanach). The name means “fortress” (literally, “house of the enemy”) in Aramaic. The carnage he brought upon his people was outrageous. Cassius Dio reported that 580,000 Jews were killed in Bar Kochba’s rebellion; 50 fortified cities were taken and 985 villages were destroyed. The Talmud claims that the Romans “kept on killing until their horses were submerged in blood to their nostrils,” and it reports that for seventeen years, the Romans did not allow the Jews to bury the dead of Betar. Yahshua, in contrast, lost none of His disciples in the wake of His sacrifice (see John 17:12), except for Judas, and *that* had been prophesied in Psalm 41:9.

- (952) *Yahweh will strike down whoever in the world is not protected by the blood of the Lamb. “And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. For Yahweh will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, Yahweh will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you.”* (Exodus 12:22-23) What is the price of freedom? Americans today tend to regard Abraham Lincoln as our greatest president—not because he preserved the Union (something we take for granted these days) but because he freed the slaves—prosecuting a long and bloody war to do so. Freedom is widely regarded as our most important asset—a commodity well worth fighting for. How odd it is, then, that many of the same people who venerate Lincoln today vilify Yahweh for striking down the Egyptian firstborn in order to obtain liberty for the Israelite slaves. They characterize Him as a bloody and vindictive God, a celestial bully who won’t hesitate to kill anyone who gets in His way.

The hypocrisy (and shortsightedness) of this position is stunning. Even though Egypt had no right or reason to enslave Israel in the first place, Yahweh in His patience let four centuries pass before He made a move to free them. Then He gave the Egyptians nine golden opportunities to let

His people go, before finally resorting to the angel of death. God is nothing if not patient. But patience is not the same thing as senility: Yes, Yahweh is longsuffering. He's also acutely aware of what we're doing with His earth, even if He doesn't constantly throw His weight around. There is a limit to His patience, and He has told us so in a number of different ways—one of them right here in the Passover account. In so many words, He's saying, "I will give you ample opportunity to recognize my sovereignty and provision. But if you opt not to do so, I will at some point close the door, leaving you to suffer the fate that you yourself have chosen. Count on it."

While prosecuting what was by some measures the bloodiest war ever fought by Americans, Lincoln came to realize two things: that one man's freedom does not include the right to enslave someone else, and that securing freedom is a terribly costly endeavor. Yahweh never had any illusions about these things. Bloodshed had always been the price of liberty: this had been the sad reality as far back as the Garden of Eden. Here in Egypt, the principle of substitutionary sacrifice—an innocent life, free of sin, being the ransom for a guilty one enslaved to iniquity—was reiterated. We're all guilty; we've all fallen into sin (well, some of us *jumped*)—we've become slaves to it. And not only slaves, but prisoners. We're living under the death sentence of our fallen mortality: nobody gets out of here alive. The question is, will *we ourselves* pay the penalty for having fallen short of Yahweh's standards of perfection or would we rather somebody else pay the penalty for us? On Passover, *somebody* had to die—either the firstborn son or an innocent lamb. In every family in Egypt that night, a choice was made: pay the price of freedom personally—or vicariously.

The lessons are still germane today. There is still a penalty to be paid, for we have all fallen short of God's perfect standard. And the choice remains the same: try to atone for your sins yourself, or allow Yahweh to do it for you. No amount of charity, dedication, piety, or penance will suffice. The price of redemption is blood. Always was; always will be.

- (953) *Remember what was accomplished by the Passover. "You shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which Yahweh will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of Yahweh, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.'" (Exodus 12:24-27) If the Passover sacrifice wasn't fraught with perpetually meaningful symbolism, it is*

inconceivable that Yahweh would have directed Israel to observe it forever. If we understand what the symbols mean, the significance of the act in its larger context becomes clear. The children of Israel are symbolic of believers in Yahweh, whatever our actual genetic heritage happens to be. Egypt is the world, its values and idolatrous practice. The slavery from which the people were to be delivered represents our bondage to sin. The angel of death that slew the firstborn of the Egyptians is metaphorical of the divine judgment that still looms like the sword of Damocles over a lost and unrepentant world. And the Passover lamb whose blood was smeared on the doorposts and lintels of the Israelites' dwellings is symbolic of Yahshua the Messiah, whose blood was similarly applied to a cruel Roman *stauros*, the cross of Calvary.

So in reality, what are the Israelites being instructed to tell their children about the Passover rite? They *should* be saying, "It is a picture of Yahweh's sacrifice of His own Firstborn Son, the anointed One, our Salvation—Yahshua. Yahweh shelters and protects those of us who trust and believe in Him, and He delivers us from slavery to sin in this fallen world—a world upon whom God's wrath still rests."

- (954) *Remember what was accomplished by the Feast of Unleavened Bread.* "You shall tell your son in that day, saying, 'This is done because of what Yahweh did for me when I came up from Egypt.' It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that Yahweh's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand Yahweh has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year." (Exodus 13:8-10) Just as Yahweh had instructed Israel to memorialize Passover (see Precept #953), He made a separate point out of doing the same sort of thing for the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Moses had just finished saying, "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand Yahweh brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. On this day you are going out, in the month Abib. And it shall be, when Yahweh brings you into the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service in this month. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to Yahweh. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters." (Exodus 13:3-7)

Though Passover could be seen merely as a "preparation day" for the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed immediately on its heels, different realities were to be celebrated and memorialized on each of these

two days. Whereas *Pesach* stressed Yahweh's sacrifice and the life it bought for Israel, *Chag Matzah* was to be remembered for the freedom that resulted from having been given this life, and the vehicle for the lesson is repeated no fewer than five times in this passage: *the absence of yeast in their bread*.

Bread was (and is) the foundation of the Middle Eastern diet—as ubiquitous as rice is in Asia or tortillas are in Latin America. It would be a normal part of every meal. Normally, it would be made with yeast, or leaven, which makes it “rise.” This property made leaven a handy and unmistakable metaphor for sin. Just as even a small amount of leaven added to a lump of bread dough would eventually permeate the whole loaf, permanently changing its character and altering its chemical composition, sin would permeate and transform the whole *life*. Sin, if you'll recall, is not technically bad behavior, evil deeds, or a rebellious attitude. This is a marksmanship term: it simply means “missing the target.” What is the target? Perfection. And who defines perfection? Yahweh, our Creator.

Most of us at least *try* to “hit the target” in our daily lives. We generally heed the conscience God placed within us, or even study His Word in an attempt to do the right thing. Do we succeed? Sometimes, but not always. Somewhere along the way—invariably very early in our lives—we all miss the target of moral perfection—we let just a few grams of “leaven” into our lump of life. Nobody *starts* by bombing Poland and opening concentration camps in Auschwitz. No, the first little bit of leaven is more likely to be a moment of defiance against mommy, or selfishly seizing a sibling's toy—little things, “normal” human foibles. But the leaven is now there in our lives, and there's no way to stop it from spreading, no way to turn back the clock. Why do we do these things? Why do we miss the target of perfection? Because we're not perfect. It's not in our nature to shoot straight. It's in our nature, rather, to rebel and covet. Blame it on mom and dad if you want to, or on Adam and Eve. It doesn't change the fact that *all of us* have missed the mark—we have all fallen short of God's perfect standard. We are all walking around with a nasty yeast infection, so to speak. Our sin nature is rising within us, and there's nothing we can do about it.

Or is there? Yahweh told the children of Israel to remove the leaven from their homes for the duration of the festival. That should tell us that it is possible—even necessary—to expel the sin from our lives. But how? They were instructed, in so many words, to have the leaven out of their houses *at the same time* the Passover lamb was being slain and its blood

applied to their doorposts. “Twilight” on the 14th day of Nisan was the deadline for both symbolic acts. These two things are related; they’re equivalent in effect. The sacrifice of the Lamb of God *is* what removes the sin from our lives, if we’ll apply its blood where we live. And the fact that the Feast of Unleavened Bread lasts for seven days tells us that this removal of sin is permanent.

(955) *Judgment is coming.* **“And it came to pass at midnight that Yahweh struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead.”** (Exodus 12:29-30) What happened to those whose households were not indemnified by the blood of the Passover Lamb? The firstborn offspring of every man and beast was slain. God could, of course, have slain *every* Egyptian, but His purpose was not to destroy the world, but save it. By slaying only the firstborn, He was revealing His plan: His own Firstborn would be sacrificed in order that others might live and walk in freedom. Yes, there was a “great cry in Egypt” when their loss was discovered—but no lesser a cry went up in heaven, I’m thinking, when Yahweh purposely turned His back on His only begotten Son for our benefit.

Those unwilling to see the big picture may criticize Yahweh for killing all those innocent people. But we should be aware of two things, related to each other. First, none of them were in fact innocent. All have sinned. It is through God’s mercy alone that we are not consumed on any given day. Second: in truth, they were *already* dead—that is, they were mortal, subject to corruption. Their physical deaths were inevitable. Even if God had left them alone, none of them would have lived another century. Yahweh merely moved up the schedule a little, reminding us that we never really know how much time we have left to walk the earth. As so often happens in scripture, physical death here is “merely” a metaphor for spiritual death. (I know, it didn’t seem particularly “metaphorical” at the time.) The point is that the blood of the Lamb of God, Yahshua, is necessary to shield us from spiritual death, just as the blood of the Passover lambs protected the Israelites from physical death.

Though at this late date the symbolism explaining the tenth plague is patently obvious, only one reason for sending it is actually stated in scripture: **“that you [Pharaoh] may know that Yahweh does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.”** (Exodus 11:7) God distinguishes between His own children and those of the world. Moses (in 11:5) told Pharaoh

quite plainly what would happen if (actually, *when*) he refused to free Israel following the ninth plague. In the same way, Yahweh wants today's world to know what awaits those who reject His word. If the blood of the Lamb of God has not covered their sins, then their own blood will be required of them. Judgment awaits. It's only a matter of time. If you are not set apart for Yahweh's honor, then you will be set aside from His presence.

- (956) *Only God's people can celebrate God's salvation. "And Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, 'This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it.'*" (Exodus 12:43) It may seem obvious when you say it out loud, but it's not. Salvation is only for those who choose to be saved, who agree to the terms of Yahweh's Plan, who become part of His family. The word for "foreigner" is *ben nekar*, literally, "son of a foreign land," that is, one who has no ties of kinship—someone who is not of your own family. You need not be *born into* the family, however: that is, you don't have to be a physical descendant of Israel to be saved through Yahshua's blood (nor, for that matter, does being born an Israelite necessarily assure your status as a child of Yahweh. As I said, Israel is only a metaphor for familial relationship with God). It is possible to become a member of a family through adoption (and if my own family experience is any indication, it's even more likely—nine of my eleven children were adopted).

Moses explains how a "foreigner" might be transformed into a family member: **"But every man's servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it. A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat it. In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to Yahweh, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you."** (Exodus 12:44-49) Requirement #1: He must "dwell with you." That is, the stranger must share the son's reverence and affection for his Father Yahweh. He cannot merely be a sojourner or hireling, one whose involvement is contrived, coincidental or commercial. #2: He must "want to keep the Passover"—he must desire to be covered and protected by the atoning blood of the Lamb, meaning that he must also trust in its efficacy. #3: He must be circumcised, meaning that he must agree to be permanently separated from his sin through a process involving blood and pain. #4: He must change his identity. He will no longer be a "foreigner" or "stranger," but will be "as a native of the land." That is a picture of being adopted into the family of Yahweh. One thing is perfectly clear in

all of this: either you are, or you aren't, a family member. There is no middle ground, no gray area. It's a question of holiness—being set apart. Family members keep the Passover. Strangers do not.

(957) *Do not break the bones of the Passover Lamb. "...nor shall you break one of its bones."* (Exodus 12:46) Crucifixion was designed to be a deterrent as much as a punishment. The idea wasn't merely to kill the victim, but to do it in such a way as to prolong the public suffering of execution as long as possible. There are cases on record where the victim remained alive for as long as three days—in extreme agony the whole time. In order to stay alive, the victim had to get enough air into his lungs for one more breath. But since his shoulders had been ripped out of their sockets, the only way he could do this was to push up with his legs—an extremely painful proposition if his feet were nailed to the *stauros*—the upright pole. If he did, he might live for another twenty seconds, after which he would have to start the process all over again. The agony was as much mental as it was physical: the victim was forced to choose the moment of his death. The message was, *you see what excruciating pain I am enduring for my misdeeds. I beg you, don't do anything that will put you in this position. Obey those in power or they will do this to you.*

The rule, then, was to prolong the torture. But there were exceptions to the rule. We read of one in John's Gospel: **"Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs."** (John 19:31-33) The Feast of Unleavened Bread was always a "high" Sabbath, a specially designated holy day, no matter what day of the week the 15th of Nisan fell upon in any given year. Apparently it didn't bother the Jewish religious leaders too much if a criminal remained hanging on cross over a regular weekly Sabbath. But this was different. Because of the special nature of the approaching festival, the chief priests went to the Procurator Pilate and requested that he get those three criminals off their crosses and into their graves before the holiday began, at sunset. Pilate didn't have a problem granting a request that didn't cost him anything, so he sent soldiers to break the legs of the victims—the point being that if they couldn't push up with their legs, they would suffocate almost immediately.

We aren't told if the chief priests knew that breaking Yahshua's legs would disqualify Him as being God's Passover Lamb. I get the feeling that they didn't really understand the ramifications of what they were doing.

But the fact remains, Yahweh had declared that *not one* of the Lamb's bones were to be broken—a prophecy borne out with precision. By the way, the prophecy was repeated by David: **“He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken.”** (Psalm 34:20) By the time the soldiers came to carry out Pilate's orders, the Messiah was already dead: problem solved.

John's notice that **“That Sabbath was a high day”** helps to confirm the April 1, 33 A.D. date of the Passover crucifixion (making Daniel's prophecy—see Precept #949—precisely accurate). John didn't say that **“the high day was a Sabbath,”** as if to remind us that there were special rules for the seven *miqrym* of Yahweh. No, he was telling us that the high day, the first day of Feast of Unleavened Bread, actually fell on a natural Sabbath, a Saturday, that year—which it did in 33. It is not without significance that of the four *miqrym* already fulfilled in history, the only one required by the Torah to be an actual Sabbath (and not merely a Sabbath *observance*—a *sabbaton*) did indeed fall on the last day of the week in the year of its definitive fulfillment. It's just one more of a thousand tiny details that conspire to identify Yahshua of Nazareth as the Messiah, Yahweh's promised Anointed One.

- (958) *The firstborn belong to Yahweh.* **“Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine.’”** (Exodus 13:1-2) To “consecrate” is to set apart for someone's honor or use—especially to deity. And the “firstborn,” though it technically indicates the initial offspring born to a set a parents, in this context it means something more: that which is preeminent, honored, the beginning of one's strength, the focus of one's hopes. The firstborn was always an “only child” at some point—seen as being special. After all, there was no guarantee of any more offspring. Therefore, to “consecrate to Yahweh all the firstborn” was to express your complete trust in Him—to place the entire future of your family and nation, your financial prospects and political posterity, in God's care, without reservation and without doubt.

The converse is also true: to withhold the consecration of your firstborn to Yahweh is to declare your mistrust of and independence from Him. This is precisely what Egypt had done, which explains Yahweh's selection of the firstborn of Egypt, both man and beast, as the focus of the Death Angel's grim attentions. But the metaphor goes even deeper: the innocent lambs the Israelites were told to sacrifice, though not necessarily “firstborn” themselves, prophetically represented Yahweh's “Firstborn” Son, Yahshua—as He phrased it in John 3:16, “His *only* begotten Son.”

This explains why Yahweh limited the sacrificial firstborn function to males: **“The males shall be Yahweh’s.”** (Exodus 13:12)

There were three categories of firstborn males: men, clean animals, and unclean animals (their status as clean or unclean being determined by the Levitical dietary laws). (1) Clean domestic animals that opened the womb (sheep, oxen, and goats) were to be sacrificed. (2) Unclean animals (horses, camels, donkeys, etc.) were to be either exchanged for lambs or “wasted.” The principle was that if they weren’t redeemed, no benefit was to be derived from their life. The animal who was both unclean and unredeemed could not be sacrificed, provide nourishment or resources, or perform labor benefiting mankind. He was to be of no value to anyone, not even to himself. **“But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck.”** This, of course, is the perfect picture of us. It doesn’t matter how “good” a specimen we might be: we’re still unclean. We’ll either be exchanged for the Lamb of God who has died in our place, or we’ll die for our own uncleanness. And finally (3), **“All the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem.”** (Exodus 13:13) firstborn men were to be bought back. They were not to be slain as sacrifices, but were to be redeemed (their lives were exchanged for innocent lambs) and then substituted for Levites, who would henceforth be the unique “property” of Yahweh. (This fact proves that the consecration of the “firstborn” was symbolic of a larger truth: it wasn’t the actual firstborn son God was interested in—only what, *or Who*, he represented.)

Once again, the Israelites are told that Yahweh’s instructions are there to elicit questions from their children. He knows these things look counterintuitive. That’s the whole point. The kids are *supposed* to look at all this and ask, “Why, Daddy?” **“So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is this?’ that you shall say to him, ‘By strength of hand Yahweh brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that Yahweh killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to Yahweh all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’ It shall be as a sign on your hand and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand Yahweh brought us out of Egypt.”** (Exodus 13:14-16) Let us once more paraphrase this according to the symbols God has revealed. He’s saying, for those of us who have ears to hear it, “Yahweh did a great and wonderful thing when He called us out of the world, away from our slavery to sin. The false god of this world did not want to let us go. All of his plans depended on keeping us in submission and servitude. The world’s death grip upon us was broken only by the love of Yahweh. To

obtain our freedom He invested the most precious thing there was—His own firstborn Son, Yahshua—who defeated our adversary’s hopes and aspirations on the day of our release from bondage. So now we consecrate our firstborn males to Yahweh in homage and gratitude for what He did to free us from our sin. Everything we do and think should demonstrate our understanding of the power of God and our appreciation of His love.”

(959) *Our survival depends on a tree that Yahweh shows us.* “**So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’ So he cried out to Yahweh, and Yahweh showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet.**” (Exodus 15:22-25) It is said that we can live three minutes without air, three days without water, or three weeks without food. At this point in the life of Israel, Yahweh had only recently provided air for the Israelites to breathe by opening a path through the Red Sea, while Pharaoh’s army had perished in presumption: their three minutes without air were up. You can’t live long without the breath of life (read: Spirit) that God provides. We’ll discuss going without food a bit later. For now, let’s talk about our need for water.

They were three days in, and the Israelites were already at the end of their rope. They couldn’t go another day without water before folks began dying, and they knew it. I for one am willing to cut the ex-slaves a little slack here. Yes, they had seen the power of God over and over again at this point, but it had been manifested only in the selective destruction of their enemies. They knew their God could send plagues and kill people, but could He, and *would He*, also do miracles of provision? ’Cause, that’s what it was going to take, and making things is a whole lot harder than destroying them. Now that they were rid of the Egyptians, they found that they still had a deadly enemy stalking them—their own human mortality. Their big mistake was complaining against Moses, as if *he* were providing the miracles. They should have cried out to Yahweh, but they were new to this whole freedom thing. I honestly don’t think it even occurred to them. We, on the other hand, have no excuse. Do we complain against our national leaders when things go wrong? Incessantly. But why in the world would we assume that they have any real power or wisdom, or exert any actual control over world events? What makes us think they can solve our problems? Only Yahweh can do that. We should be taking the matter up with Him.

“*Marah*” is a play on words. *Marah* (or *mar*: Strong’s #4751) is an adjective that means bitter—having an astringent, pungent, or disagreeable taste; or being poisonous—noxious or deadly. Thus *mar nephesh*, literally “bitter of soul,” means discontented, in a state of unhappiness or mental distress. But there is another *Marah* in Hebrew (Strong’s #4785, spelled the same way). It’s a verb that means to be rebellious against or disobedient toward someone. So in one word, Moses named the place after the foul taste of the water *and* the subsequent rebellion and discontent of the people—something that must taste pretty foul to Yahweh.

The history of this incident is relatively straightforward. **“So he cried out to Yahweh, and Yahweh showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet.”** What we have to ask ourselves is, “Why is this in scripture? Is it meaningful, symbolic, or prophetic?” Since throwing a tree into a fetid pond isn’t normally efficacious in making its waters potable, I’d have to guess that God was trying to tell us something. And indeed, the imagery appears elsewhere in scripture, informing us as to what Yahweh wanted us to understand.

There are two elements, the water and the tree. Of the former, Yahshua Himself promised, **“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”** The phrase “living water” was a common euphemism for fresh, flowing water, the way someone might describe a gushing spring or mountain brook. John explains what this living water consisted of: **“But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”** (John 7:37-39) Is water symbolic of the Holy Spirit, then? Not exactly. It’s more a metaphor of what God’s Spirit would do in and for a believer. The prophet Isaiah clarifies the subject for us: **“Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; For YAH, Yahweh, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation. Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”** (Isaiah 12:2-3) All three times the word “salvation” is used here, the Hebrew word actually identifies the Messiah—by name. The word is *yāshuw`ah*—that is, “Yahshua.” So what is the prophet saying? (1) God is Yahshua, in whom we can have confidence; (2) Yahweh, who is his strength and song, has *become* Yahshua. (Note that Yahweh is also referred to as Yah—the shortened form of the divine name used forty-nine times in the Tanach, though transliterated properly in most English versions only once—here.) And (3) believers (“you”) will draw water from the wells of Yahshua. What water? John already told us: the living water is the Holy Spirit living within us. The bottom line is that “water” is

symbolic of *salvation*—personified in Yahshua the Messiah and witnessed within us by the indwelling Spirit of God.

Okay, then. What is the “tree,” without which the salvation we seek is only a bitter and unfulfilled promise? If you think about it for a nanosecond, it becomes perfectly obvious. Let’s begin with the function of this tree: **“If a man [Actually, that’s “if man....” The article is missing in the Hebrew] has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.”**

(Deuteronomy 21:22-23) We’re being told that if (in truth, *when*) mankind does something worthy of our collective death penalty (and our goose was cooked in that regard in the Garden of Eden), and a man is hanged on a tree (Hebrew: *ets*, the same word used in Exodus 15:25) to pay for that crime (as was Yahshua on Calvary), then his body is not to be left hanging there overnight. The Romans, of course, left victims hanging on crosses overnight all the time. The land was well and truly defiled. But Yahshua’s corpse would not be among those polluting the place that Yahweh our God had chosen to make His name abide. As we saw in Precept #957, there was a rush to make sure Yahshua was dead and down from His “tree” before the Feast of Unleavened Bread began at Passover sunset, though I can pretty much guarantee that the chief priests didn’t comprehend the ramifications of Deuteronomy 21. Yahshua the Messiah was “accursed” by God for our sakes, because of our sins. But even in death, He did not defile the Land, but cleansed it.

Let us, then, put the pieces together. The “tree” is the cross of Christ—the *stauros* or upright pole pointing the way toward heaven. Hundreds of people were crucified over the years, however. So as with Moses, Yahweh has gone out of His way to show us precisely which “tree” He’s talking about. The “water” into which the tree is thrown is the potential for the salvation of mankind, personified by Yahshua and achieved through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This water is “bitter”—that is, it remains unavailable for our needs—*until and unless* the cross enters it. Yahshua’s death is what makes the prospect of our salvation sweet and life-giving. Without it, the promise of salvation would have been nothing but a poisonous myth, a bitter fraud. Those who today wish to drink the water of life while despising the tree of sacrifice are making a fatal error.

- (960) *To obtain salvation, strike the rock. “And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you*

there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." (Exodus 17:5-6) So, the next time the Israelites found themselves in a place with no water, they trusted Yahweh to provide for their needs, and wisely entreated Moses to intercede for them, right? No, sorry. Israel apparently had a learning disability. They blamed Moses *again*, this time threatening to stone him. Sigh. Funny thing, though: if they *had* stoned him, they *would have* died of thirst out there in the desert.

It turns out that there was a reason—a prophetic object lesson—for which Yahweh had led them into a dry place. It wasn't that He wanted them to suffer; He merely wanted them (and us) to learn. We've discovered that water is Yahweh's metaphor for salvation. So what did He instruct Moses to do in order to deliver the life-giving fluid to His people? Mo was told to walk up to a big rock outcropping and strike it with his shepherd's rod—the same rod (perhaps better translated "staff") that he had used to demonstrate Yahweh's power to Pharaoh. Significantly, the same word (*mateh*) is used to describe a staff of governance—a scepter, so to speak—in Psalm 110:2 **"Yahweh shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!"** We've therefore established that the authority of God was to be exercised in bringing water—salvation—to the people.

And what about the rock that was to be struck? Is this symbolic of something? (Would I ask if it weren't?) Here we have scripture to interpret scripture. First, we read in the Psalms, **"Truly my soul silently waits for God. From Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved."** (Psalm 62:1-2) "Rock" here is the same word used in our Exodus passage (*tsur*), and "Salvation" is once again *yâshuw`ah*—that is, "Yahshua." Not only is salvation *from* God, Salvation *is* God. Then, Paul writes of the Israelites and their Rock: **"All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."** (I Corinthians 10:3-4) There can be no doubt or confusion: the rock Moses was instructed to strike symbolized Yahshua the Messiah, who was struck down for our transgressions.

So are we to crucify Christ anew every time we fall into sin, or does Yahweh have something else in mind? Read on...

- (961) *To obtain salvation, speak to the rock.* **"Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.' So Moses took the rod from before Yahweh as He commanded him."** (Numbers

20:7-9) Here we go again. Another dry place, another rock, another thirsty, angry mob. Was Moses told to give the rock a whack again, like before? The record goes on to explain that that's exactly what he did—he let his anger and frustration get the better of him, and he hit the rock with his rod, *twice*. But in so doing, Moses made Yahweh very angry at him, for he had goofed up the object lesson He wanted to teach us.

No, this time he was instructed to *speak* to the rock. That Hebrew word is *dabar*, which the *Dictionary of Biblical Languages* defines, “speak, tell, say, i.e., speak or talk in verbal communication, with a possible focus on the aloud-sounds and content of verbalization.” It goes on to note, “Context in English allows for many different translation words as one fine-tunes the meaning; here are some possible translation options: address, announce, argue, ask, boast, command, complain, declare, decree, describe, direct, discuss, encourage, explain, foretell, give opinion, instruct, invite, mention, name, order, plead, pray, preach, predict, proclaim, promise, propose, recite, repeat, reply, report, say, sing, speak, state, talk, teach, tell, threaten, urge, utter.”

If our communication with God is characterized by lapsing into a mode of obsequious piety, a fawning, phony, hyper-religious exhibition in which we inexplicably shift into seventeenth century English and suppress all human feeling while telling God what we think He wants to hear, then we've missed the point of “speaking to the rock.” Sure, we should always converse with Yahweh respectfully, but He *wants us* to tell Him what's on our minds, vent our feelings, express our concerns, get it off our chests. You're thirsty? *Talk to Him*. You think life isn't fair? *Talk to Him*. You don't understand what He wants from you? *Talk to Him*. You think you're not good enough to ask Him for a favor, for forgiveness, for provision, or even for a miracle? Believe me, He knows this already. Yet His instructions stand: *Talk to Him*. Speak to the Rock.

Oh, and by the way, don't forget to listen to what He says in reply.

- (962) *God provides to each one according to his need. “This is the thing which Yahweh has commanded: ‘Let every man gather it [the manna] according to each one's need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent.’”* (Exodus 16:16) As He had with air and water, Yahweh also miraculously provided food for the Israelite hordes. We should not surprised to learn that this process began in exactly the same way—with the faithless and angry masses complaining about God's apparent shortsightedness and questioning Moses' sanity. I'm not suggesting that *we* should use this approach, you understand. Though Yahweh delivered the people, He was clearly disappointed at their

denseness, their seeming inability to connect the dots. Let's see: "God freed us from bondage... and then He has saved us from our pursuing enemies... and then He delivered us from death by thirst... *but now (sob!) it looks like we're all gonna die from starvation!*" Oh really? It would transpire that all but two people out of this 600,000-man mob would die of *stupidity*, but not a single soul would succumb to hunger. There's a lesson in there somewhere.

Here's what happened: **"And the children of Israel said to [Moses and Aaron], 'Oh, that we had died by the hand of Yahweh in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'"** In other words, "Slavery wasn't so bad. It had it's perks. At least we were getting abused on a full stomach. You guys aren't just incompetent, you're evil: you *meant* for us to die out here." At this point, I would have sent 'em back to Egypt with my sincere apologies. Good thing I'm not God. Yahweh calmly mused, "Okay, folks, you've recognized your need, and you've realized you can't meet it in your own strength. Good; we're finally getting somewhere. I'm now going to meet that need—just as I'll meet the need it was designed to teach you about: your *spiritual* emptiness." **"Then Yahweh said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you.'"** (Exodus 16:3-4) It's no coincidence that the word for "heaven," (*shamayim*) can mean either the atmospheric sky, the starry heavens, or the abode of God. For just as the "bread from heaven," manna, would sustain their physical bodies, Yahweh would send "bread from heaven" of another kind to nourish their souls—Yahshua the Messiah.

The physical bread was described like this: **"And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground. So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, 'This is the bread which Yahweh has given you to eat.'"** (Exodus 16:14-15) The spiritual "bread" was also described in scripture, and it's pretty clear that the Israelites didn't know what *that* was, either. Yahshua Himself explained the connection: **"Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father [the same One who gave you the manna] gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.... I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.'"** (John 6:32-35) The bread of God is Yahshua, Yahweh manifested in human form.

“This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day....”

When Yahweh provided manna in the wilderness, the people had to *believe* in it—on Yahweh’s word alone, they had to go out and pick it up off the ground, trusting that it was edible and would sustain life, even though it wasn’t the kind of bread they were used to. Manna wouldn’t keep them alive forever, however. Doing that would be the function of the *real* “bread from heaven,” Yahshua. **“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”** (John 6:40, 47-51) He did that very thing on Passover, 33 A.D. The Living Bread—Yahshua—is available to all of us. As with the manna, He is what we need to sustain life, if only we will follow God’s instructions and assimilate Him into our being—if only we will *believe*.

- (963) *God’s provision is a test.* **“And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.”** (Exodus 16:4-5) Yahweh didn’t force the people to gather manna, and He didn’t tell them what to make out of it. He did, however, insist that if they were going to avail themselves of His provision, they must do it *His way* in two significant respects. First, they must gather only enough for one day at a time. They couldn’t horde it, for if they did, it would breed worms and begin to stink. The lesson was that He could be trusted to take care of their needs day by day. A God who is self-existent (Yahweh), who stresses His *being* over any other attribute, will be absolutely consistent in His love and capability: His promises can be counted upon. (Contrast this to a hypothetical “god” whose character is best described by the title “the Lord.” If his whole agenda were to dominate us and make us submit to him, then our needs would always be subsidiary to his whims—making provision a matter of convenience, not promise.)

Second, the Israelites were informed that the manna would not appear on the seventh day, the Sabbath. They were therefore to gather enough for two days on the sixth day of each week. It’s as if Yahweh is telling them, “This is no mere natural phenomenon—a fortunate and timely confluence of environmental forces from which you happen to be in a position to benefit—like seasonal rainfall or the flooding of the Nile. No, it is a direct, ongoing miracle, one I will be performing on your behalf for as long as

you need it. If you'll just trust Me, if you'll obey Me in this one simple matter, you'll never go hungry." Many followed His instructions, but some did not: **"Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And Yahweh said to Moses, 'How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For Yahweh has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.' So the people rested on the seventh day."** (Exodus 16:27-30)

Since the manna was a metaphor for the Messiah's bodily advent, the true "bread from heaven," what are we to deduce from this six-plus-one pattern Yahweh has employed—for the umpteenth time? I have become convinced that the pattern is a timeline. If Psalm 90:4 and II Peter 3:8 have any literal validity (declaring that one day really *is* a thousand years in God's plan) then the pattern of sevens is telling us that His schedule of redemption—the time from Adam's sin to the conclusion of the Messiah's glorious earthly reign—will run *seven thousand years*. But within that span of time, Yahweh's provision of grace through faith in Yahshua (the availability of manna, so to speak) will be offered only during the first *six* thousand years. Why? Because during the seventh Millennium, King Yahshua will walk among us. Faith will become redundant, for His glorious presence will for all practical purposes destroy the element of "reasonable doubt" harbored by those who don't wish to acknowledge God in this age. Rebellion will still be possible, of course, just as it was possible to go out and look for manna on the Sabbath. But the element of trusting obedience, of acting in faith, will have evaporated. During the Millennium, if you want to defy God, you'll have to do it to His face.

Here's the rub. Any way you slice it, our six thousand years have just about run their course. The sun is nearing the western horizon on our sixth day. The opportunity to go out and gather manna—to act upon our trust in Yahweh's promise of salvation—is almost over. And there are multitudes who have not availed themselves of Yahweh's ongoing miracle. Perhaps we should remind them of the lateness of the hour.