

613 Laws of Torah

Laws 250 - 299

(250)

That, in capital cases, one who had argued for acquittal, shall not later on argue for condemnation (Ex. 23:2) (negative).

In capital cases, one who had argued for acquittal shall not later on argue for condemnation. “You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice.” (Exodus 23:1-2) This mitzvah is not only unscriptural, it’s stupid. The facts of criminal cases are not necessarily all apparent at the outset. Witnesses come forward, clues develop, and evidence surfaces. With each new development, an honest judge must reevaluate his position. He must critically evaluate each piece of evidence and each word of testimony, without being swayed by public opinion. As written, this mitzvah would tend to favor the accused (which is not in itself a bad thing); it shelters him from late-appearing evidence. But that is not the same thing as mercy—and it’s a long, long way from justice. I think in this world God would rather see a guilty man set free than an innocent man punished. However, the ideal is still justice tempered by mercy—a man being held responsible for his own crimes, but ultimately relying on Yahweh for his eternal redemption.

(251)

To treat parties in a litigation with equal impartiality (Lev. 19:15) (affirmative).

Treat parties in a litigation with equal impartiality. “You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.” (Leviticus 19:15) This is the first of three mitzvot the rabbis wrung out of this verse. Impartiality is a key to rendering justice, but exercising it is easier said than done. Prejudice (in the positive sense) comes in two basic flavors, unwarranted favoritism toward the underdog, or obsequious fawning over the rich, famous, or powerful. The first, especially in our liberal American society, follows some really convoluted logic: the defendant is a poor, under-educated member of a minority group, so we should consider “society” as being at fault for any

crimes he's committed. Dumb. The second is every bit as twisted: the defendant is famous, so "they" are trying to railroad him out of spite and jealousy. "Stars" like O.J. Simpson, Kobe Bryant, and Michael Jackson seldom go to prison, no matter how much trouble they get into. Of course, there are negative counterparts to these two types of prejudice as well. Sometimes it's Hang the nigger on general principles (excuse the epithet, but that's how these people think) or Wouldn't you just love to see Martha Stewart get her comeuppance? It's all wrong, and God said so. "In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor." Let the evidence and testimony speak for itself, and don't even consider the social status of the person being tried.

(252)

Not to render iniquitous decisions (Lev. 19:15) (CCN69).

Do not render iniquitous decisions. "You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor." (Leviticus 19:15) This mitzvah is awfully broad and slam-dunk obvious, but okay. Don't sin (commit iniquity) when making judicial decisions. That would imply warnings against partiality, against assumptions of guilt or innocence (rushing to judgment), and against failure or refusal to take pertinent evidence (whether positive or negative) into account. In America, we have a real problem with rules. Unless evidence was discovered, gathered, and transmitted in precisely the proper manner, a lawyer can easily get it thrown out of court—and in the process pervert justice. A word to the wise: Yahweh knows what's going on, even if our courts refuse to see it. It's a real shame the lady in the toga with the scales has a blindfold on.

What we need is a system of justice that recognizes the truth when it sees it.

(253)

Not to favor a great man when trying a case (Lev. 19:15) (CCN70).

Don't favor a great man when trying a case. "You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor." (Leviticus 19:15) Once again, a person's social status, fame, prestige in the community, wealth, or good looks should not become a factor in determining their guilt or innocence. Let the facts of the case speak for themselves. The same principle holds true in sentencing: if an inner city gang member and a Wall Street millionaire commit the same crime, they should receive the same punishment.

(254)

Not to take a bribe (Ex. 23:8) (CCN71).

Do not take a bribe. “You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute. Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked. And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous.” (Exodus 23:6-8) In a dispute between a rich man and a poor man, it’s obvious that only the rich man is in a position to offer a bribe to the judge in an attempt to swing the decision his way. So at its heart, this mitzvah is a practical corollary to the previous one. Yahweh here relates conflicts of interest and the perversion of justice to killing the innocent—it’s more serious in God’s eyes than the mere theft of their meager resources. He reminds us that even if the bribe-taking judge lets the guilty man go free, He will not.

(255)

Not to be afraid of a bad man, when trying a case (Deut. 1:17) (CCN72).

Do not be afraid of a bad man when trying a case. “You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man’s presence, for the judgment is God’s.” (Deuteronomy 1:17) This one has become a significant factor in American courtrooms. The gangster (whether crime boss, gang banger, wealthy industrialist, or powerful politician) goes on trial, only to let it be known in manners subtle or overt that whoever testifies against him is as good as dead. Witnesses, jurors, prosecutors, and judges all fall prey to this kind of pressure. Yahweh is calling for courage here—for the character to stand up for truth in the face of death threats.

I might add that the principle applies to the court of public opinion as well. We need to be willing to stand up and speak out against evil in the world wherever we find it. I’m not talking about cramming our personal opinions down everybody’s throats, but refusing to tolerate real evil. The most blatant bully on the planet right now is Islam, a satanic religion whose scriptures demand that they kill or enslave every non-Muslim on earth as they gain the strength to do so—starting with Jews and Christians. Oil money is now giving them the power to do what they could only dream of in times past, and not just militarily. They have intimidated the media, hoodwinked the politicians, and bribed the universities until the truth about their deadly agenda is smothered under a mountain of fear and ignorance. But Yahweh says, “You shall not be afraid in any man’s presence, for the judgment is God’s.”

(256)

Not to be moved in trying a case, by the poverty of one of the parties (Ex. 23:3; Lev. 19:15) (CCN66).

Do not be moved in trying a case by the poverty of one of the parties. “You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.” (Exodus 23:3); “You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.” (Leviticus 19:15) In the same way we should not show partiality to a man because of his wealth or fame, we are to be impartial toward everyone—even if they’re poor and downtrodden. A person’s wealth or poverty, fame or obscurity, power or insignificance has nothing at all to do with their guilt or innocence. There is no correlation. Poverty doesn’t cause crime any more than wealth cures it, and vice versa.

(257)

Not to pervert the judgment of strangers or orphans (Deut. 24:17) (CCN68).

Do not pervert the judgment of strangers or orphans. “You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow’s garment as a pledge. But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and Yahweh your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this thing.” (Deuteronomy 24:17-18) Along the same lines we’ve seen in the past few mitzvot, those with no social standing or influence in the community are not to be denied justice because of their helplessness. They are not to be taken advantage of simply because they can be. In this case, Yahweh gave the Israelites a reason, though He certainly didn’t owe them one: He reminded them of their former status as exploited and oppressed slaves in Egypt, where the most “exalted” of them was a fourth-class citizen. There is no place for the pride of position in God’s economy. That, if you think about it, also forbids “religious” pride—the holier than thou attitude some are tempted to assume when confronted with the failures of others. Yahweh is reminding us that without His grace, we’re all slaves to sin.

It’s worth noting that this egalitarian system of justice Yahweh instituted was absolutely unique among nations at this time. Yes, there were degrees of wealth, power, and influence in Israel, but God’s instructions mandated that no one’s social condition was to have any bearing on the judgment of disputes that arose among them—either positively or negatively. Any semblance of this type of even-handed justice we enjoy today can be traced directly back to our Judeo-Christian heritage.

(258)

Not to pervert the judgment of a sinner (a person poor in fulfillment of commandments) (Ex. 23:6) (CCN67).

Do not pervert the judgment of a sinner (a person poor in fulfillment of commandments). "You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute. Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked." (Exodus 23:6-7) As you can see, making sure sinners get the punishment that's coming to them is not what Yahweh was talking about here. Boy, you've gotta watch these rabbis like a hawk. We've seen this passage before (and will again). It merely says that the poor are to receive justice like everybody else. The following verse (see #254) warns judges against taking bribes from the rich so they'll rule against their poor adversaries in spite of testimony and evidence to the contrary.

(259)

Not to render a decision on one's personal opinion, but only on the evidence of two witnesses, who saw what actually occurred (Ex. 23:7) (negative).

Do not render a decision on one's personal opinion, but only on the evidence of two witnesses who saw what actually occurred. "Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked." (Exodus 23:7) I can't imagine why this passage was quoted to support the mitzvah at hand. The rabbis are not incorrect but they could have picked better supporting evidence: "One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established." (Deuteronomy 19:15) Or how about "Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness." (Deuteronomy 17:6) Opinions are like chins: everybody's got at least one. In themselves, they're worthless in establishing the truth of a matter. He strikes me as an unprincipled scalawag; he must be guilty of something. Refraining from condemning someone on the basis of personal opinion (as opposed to hard evidence and multiple-eyewitness testimony) is an underlying tenet of this entire discussion.

(260)

Not to execute one guilty of a capital offense, before he has stood his trial (Num. 35:12) (negative).

Do not execute one guilty of a capital offense before he has stood his trial. "You shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there. They shall be cities of refuge for you from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die

until he stands before the congregation in judgment.” (Numbers 35:11-12) Numbers 35 describes the mechanism for dealing with murder in Israel. The guilty one was to be slain (yes, retribution: a life for a life) by an appointed “avenger” from the victim’s family. But to protect the “suspect” in cases of accidental manslaughter, cities of refuge were set up throughout the country. The killer would flee to the city of refuge, and he would then be tried to determine whether he was guilty or merely unfortunate: “Anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there” (verse 15). If found guilty, the killer was to be slain by the avenger (verses 16-21); the city would offer no protection. If not—that is, if he were responsible for a fatal accident or “wrongful death” but not of murder—then he had to stay and live in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest, after which time he was free to return to his home. This was as close to “jail” as the Hebrews got. It was more like house arrest. If the manslayer, however, left the city of refuge early, the avenger could legally take his life.

The point of the mitzvah is that the avenger could not slay the killer until his guilt had been established by the word of at least two witnesses at a legal trial held before the congregation—in other words, publicly. As usual, we see the instructions of God being fair, practical, and relatively simple—erring in practice on the side of mercy rather than retribution. It’s pretty obvious that Yahweh had a lesson for us in mind when he structured things this way. We—all of us—are the “defendants,” the manslaughterers. Yahshua is the one who was slain—by us, through our sins. Whether by accident or purposely remains to be seen. There were six cities of refuge, three in the Land of Promise, and three on the other side of the Jordan. If I’m reading the symbols correctly, I’d take that to mean these cities, these places of temporary refuge, are our mortal lives, six being the number of man. They are found on both sides of the Jordan, i.e., whether we’re Jews or gentiles, and whether we’re saved or lost.

Since we’re all guilty of something, there are three ways this can end for us. First, if we have purposely “murdered” the Messiah through our blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, there is no safe place for us; our eternal doom at the hands of the Avenger (Yahweh) is assured. The “witnesses” against us, by the way, are Yahshua, His works, Yahweh, and His Word (see John 5:31-38). Second, if we are Son-of-Man-slayers, having slain the Messiah in our ignorance, but we leave the city of refuge (our mortal life) without being immunized from the Avenger’s wrath by the death of the High Priest (Yahshua), then we are similarly subject to destruction: we have voluntarily left our place of safety, for the pardon His death affords us is available to anyone. Third, if our sins have been removed from us by the death of our High Priest, then we may safely leave the city of refuge (this life) in the assurance that we can and will legally enter our inheritance—eternal life.

Somehow, I get the feeling Maimonides didn’t comprehend much of this.

(261)

To accept the rulings of every Supreme Court in Israel (Deut. 17:11) (affirmative).

Accept the rulings of every Supreme Court in Israel. “If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which Yahweh your God chooses. And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment. You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which Yahweh chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you. According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you.” (Deuteronomy 17:8-11) Although the error is subtle, this mitzvah is in reality just another unauthorized power grab on the part of the rabbis. Moses is describing what to do if an issue proves too difficult for the judges in the local community to decide. Wherever the Tabernacle and Ark of the Covenant were at the time, priests and Levites were there, tasked to attending to the liturgical needs of Israel, offering up their sacrifices, and so forth. As in any community, there were judges as well. (The “place which Yahweh chooses” moved about occasionally until David brought the Ark to Jerusalem and his son Solomon built the first Temple on Mount Moriah.) Yahweh, through Moses, is telling the people to bring their issues directly to Him to decide: the priests, Levites, and judges were not to decide these matters based on human wisdom, but were to enquire of Yahweh. That’s why their answers were binding on the participants in the dispute.

The Sanhedrin, or Supreme Court, of which Maimonides spoke did not come into existence until well into the second temple period. Consisting of seventy-one influential Jews, it was spoken of often in the New Covenant scriptures, where it was dominated by the Sadducees and chief priests. Indeed, it was this group that “tried” and convicted Yahshua of blasphemy—couching their verdict in terms of sedition for Roman ears so they could engineer His execution. Though the rabbis claimed that the line of semicha (the transmission of authority) descended in an unbroken line from Moses down to them, there is no scriptural evidence that this authority extended beyond Joshua. Maimonides and other medieval Jewish commentators asserted that although the line of semicha had been broken when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, the sages of Israel could promote their own candidate as the new Nasi (leader, literally: prince). No need to bother “He-who-must-not-be-named” with these mundane details, right? Further,

they said, the one they picked would have semicha, and could pass it on to others—thus re-establishing the Sanhedrin. Like I said, this mitzvah is a naked power grab on the part of the rabbis.

But according to the Deuteronomy passage, the difficult issues needed to be decided not by politicians and religious teachers but by “the priests, the Levites, and...the judge there...in that place which Yahweh chooses.” You can’t just appoint yourself, or even train and prepare for the job; you have to be appointed by God—in the case of priests and Levites, you have to be born into it. And it’s not a position of power anyway—it’s a place of responsibility and service.

(262)

Do not rebel against the orders of the Court. “According to the sentence of the law in which they [the priests, Levites, and judges] instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you.” (Deuteronomy 17:11) This is merely the negative restatement of affirmative Mitzvah #261. I would only reiterate that Yahweh’s definition of “the court” and Maimonides’ description would differ somewhat. And that’s understandable. Israel made a fatal judgment error in 31 AD, and they haven’t understood a word Yahweh said ever since that time.

It’s fascinating, however, to note what Yahshua did with this passage when confronted with the judgment of the “Court” of his day. Without quibbling over the legality of the judicial assembly, He did precisely what is commanded here: He submitted to the decision of the Sanhedrin. They determined that He must die, so rather than defending Himself (which was well within His power, both verbally and angelically), He opened not His mouth, but willingly picked up His cross and gave up His life so that we could live. He Himself had said that not the smallest letter of the Law would pass away until all of it was fulfilled. That had to include the parts that were “inconvenient” for Him. Like death.

Injuries and Damages

(263)

Make a parapet for your roof. “When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your household if anyone falls from it.” (Deuteronomy 22:8) Because we are given a reason for the precept “make a parapet” in the Torah, we may safely extrapolate this principle to a general prohibition against creating unnecessary hazards that might endanger innocent bystanders. Yahweh is not advocating the idiotic American pipedream of creating a risk-free society, but merely of taking reasonable steps

to ensure the safety of people in your sphere of influence. The definition of “reasonable,” of course, shifts with the available technology. There was a time when it was unheard of to put a taillight or a rear-view mirror on an automobile. Now seat belts (excuse me: technologically advanced passive occupant restraint systems), ABS brakes, and air bags are ubiquitous, and GPS navigation and infrared reverse-gear warning systems are making inroads. “Reasonable” is in the eye of the beholder.

Beyond controlling our environmental risks, however, we should also be on guard against bringing “guilt of bloodshed” upon ourselves through our spiritual negligence. In Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8, for example, Paul talks at length about how to avoid putting pitfalls and stumbling blocks in the way of our less mature believing brothers and sisters. Inevitably what is called for is some small personal sacrifice on our part—building a parapet, so to speak—designed to prevent our neighbors from falling down and hurting themselves. It’s not merely good manners; it’s the law.

(264)

Do not leave something that might cause hurt. “When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your household if anyone falls from it.” (Deuteronomy 22:8) Again, by making a separate negative mitzvah corresponding to a previous affirmative one, Maimonides has reminded us of the contrived nature of his Laws list—the self-conceived system of finding so many “do-this” precepts and so many “don’t-do-this” instructions, when a simple perusal of the Torah reveals literally hundreds of things he missed. So if you’re looking for commentary on Deuteronomy 22:8, see Mitzvah #263. If you’ll forgive me, I’m going to take off on a tangent. The subject: redundancy.

Any thoughtful person will admit that we’ve lost something of the meaning of our scriptures through the process of translation and the morphing of language over time. Cultural nuances have been lost; word meanings in the target languages have shifted; and translators have made (gasp!) mistakes. The classic biblical blunder is the consistent mis-translation of the divine name: Yahweh. Every popular English translation renders YHWH as “the LORD,” not just once or twice, but 6,868 times in the Old Covenant scriptures! (Actually, there is evidence that Yahweh told us His name an even 7,000 times—the other 132 instances are places where Jewish scribes removed YHWH from the texts and replaced it with adonay, meaning lord.) Words should be translated. Names, however, should be merely transmitted (if the target language will accommodate them) or at worst, transliterated—making small phonetic adjustments to fit a new alphabet. But changing “Yahweh” (which literally means “I Am”) to “the

LORD” is neither—it is a blatant and misleading substitution of one thing for something completely unrelated. It is, to put it charitably, a mistake.

Systematic sabotage like that is rare, however. Usually, we get ourselves in doctrinal trouble by merely taking a sentence or a phrase out of context and mis-applying it. But the LORD—just kidding: Yahweh—built a failsafe system into His scriptures, the same one NASA uses when they design a Space Shuttle: redundancy. Every important truth in the Bible is explained twenty different ways in twenty different places. God will use different words to describe something, or He will employ a different symbol, metaphor, or prophetic dress rehearsal. If we are familiar with and receptive to the whole of scripture, we can't miss what Yahweh wanted us to know.

There isn't a single essential doctrine in the New Testament that wasn't introduced and explained in the Old. That's why it's possible to come to a saving knowledge of the Messiah through nothing more than a tiny scrap of scripture from John or Paul's writings, and yet one can spend a lifetime studying the Scriptures and never really get to the bottom of it.

This type of back-up system redundancy is not what Maimonides and his fellow rabbis employed, however. Theirs was nothing but an annoying repetition of the same basic facts (or fables) restated as affirmative and negative propositions in order to arrive at a predetermined number of rules. Oy vey.

(265)

Save the pursued even at the cost of the life of the pursuer. “If two men fight together, and the wife of one draws near to rescue her husband from the hand of the one attacking him, and puts out her hand and seizes him by the genitals, then you shall cut off her hand; your eye shall not pity her.” (Deuteronomy 25:11-12) The rabbis are on another planet here, but I'll admit that the supporting passage for this mitzvah (and the next one) isn't exactly easy. Most commentaries just skip over it. At first glance, it looks uncharacteristically harsh. As a matter of fact, this is the only instance in the Torah where physical mutilation was prescribed as punishment for an offense, though Yahweh's law was unique in its restraint on the subject. (For example, Assyrian law said a man who kissed a woman who wasn't his wife was supposed to get his lips cut off.)

Note that the Israelite wife wasn't prohibited from defending her husband in general. There was no problem (in theory) against smashing hubby's attacker over the head with a chair. Nor was this a thinly veiled euphemism for adultery (which carried its own penalty); it clearly describes something drastic done in the heat of a disagreement in order to gain the upper hand. A little word study might help us get to the heart of matter. The original Hebrew text includes the word 'ach (brother or countryman), making it clear that the husband's adversary is a fellow Israelite—

thus potentially metaphorical for a fellow believer. The word translated “seize” (chazaq) doesn’t so much mean “to take or grab an object” as it is a denotation of seizing power. It means: “be strong, strengthen, conquer, become powerful, harden one’s defenses.” We need to realize that the precise scenario that’s pictured in this precept is extremely unlikely. In fact, not a single occurrence is recorded in the Bible. So to me at least, it’s pretty clear that Yahweh was using this hypothetical sequence of events to illustrate something that does happen on a fairly regular basis. Yahweh seems to be saying, “Don’t emasculate (metaphorically or otherwise) a fellow believer, even in the well-intentioned defense of what you hold dear. If you destroy his ability to have a fruitful ministry in the future merely to gain a temporary advantage now in some dispute, I will in turn remove your ability to manipulate and control your world. I have provided ways (see mitzvot #227-252) to settle your disputes—you are not to take matters into your own hands.” At least, that’s what I think it means.

(266)

Do not spare a pursuer; he is to be slain before he reaches the pursued and slays the latter, or uncovers his nakedness. “If two men fight together, and the wife of one draws near to rescue her husband from the hand of the one attacking him, and puts out her hand and seizes him by the genitals, then you shall cut off her hand; your eye shall not pity her.” (Deuteronomy 25:11-12) Huh? The rabbis have clearly taken the ball and run with it—out into left field. This mitzvah is merely the negative permutation of the one we just saw; in other words, it’s very existence is pointless. See #265.

Property and Property Rights

(267)

Do not sell a field in the land of Israel in perpetuity. “The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me.” (Leviticus 25:23) As we saw in Chapter 6, this is part of the Law of Jubilee. Although the land was “given” to Israel, both in general terms (Genesis 12:7) and specific (Numbers 26-27 and Joshua 13:21), ownership of the land remained Yahweh’s. Tribes were assigned their regions and individuals had custody of individual tracts of land, but they couldn’t “sell” them in perpetuity, since they belonged to God. Rather, they could only “lease” them out to their neighbors, and then only for a limited period of time: until Jubilee. Automatic release of encumbered inheritances came once every fifty years—once in a lifetime, for all intents and purposes.

The symbols, in light of the rest of scripture, are patently obvious. Our inheritance is eternal life, but through our sin, we have fallen into spiritual poverty, “selling” our souls to Satan. But

Yahweh has pre-arranged the opportunity for us to recover our inheritance, because after all, our lives (like the lands of the Israelites) are not really our own; we were redeemed with a price—the precious blood of Yahshua. So what happens when Jubilee comes? Some will accept the gift of Jubilee and retake possession of their inheritance, eternal life. But others will despise this once-in-a-lifetime chance and sell their souls back to Satan.

(268)

Do not change the character of the open land about the cities of the Levites or of their fields. Do not sell it in perpetuity; it may be redeemed at any time. “If a man purchases a house from the Levites, then the house that was sold in the city of his possession shall be released in the Jubilee; for the houses in the cities of the Levites are their possession among the children of Israel. But the field of the common-land of their cities may not be sold, for it is their perpetual possession.” (Leviticus 25:33-34) There were slightly different rules for the Levites (compared to the other tribes of Israel) which help us understand the bigger picture. Levites

(that is, the tribe of Moses and Aaron) were characterized as those whose inheritance was Yahweh Himself. Thus they were assigned no personal, temporal lands, but rather were given cities throughout Israel in which to live, in which they could “own” homes, and they had communal lands (not individual family plots) they could farm. Here we see that their homes could be leased to other Israelites, just like any property (again signifying their spiritual poverty through sin, and again redeemed at Jubilee), but their community fields could not be disposed of because they did not belong to any one individual, but to the tribe.

Levi as a tribe symbolically represents the true believers among God’s chosen people—either among Israel or the gentile Ekklesia, the wheat among the tares as it were. It’s not that the Levites were all “saved” while the others were not; they as a group are simply a picture, a symbol, of those who are. Thus though individual believers have an inheritance that needs to be redeemed, the “perpetual possession” of the inheritance (eternal life) of the saints as a group is secure.

(269)

Houses sold within a walled city may be redeemed within a year. “If a man sells a house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year he may redeem it. But if it is not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house in the walled city shall belong permanently to him who bought it, throughout his generations. It shall not be released in the Jubilee.” (Leviticus 25:29-30) The rabbis missed the entire point here. Any piece

of property could be redeemed—not only during the first year but anytime. Its redemption value would be determined by how much time had elapsed between one Jubilee and the next. The point here is that houses within walled cities weren't really considered part of one's inheritance. Thus there was a "grace period" of one year during which the original owner could exercise "seller's remorse" and buy his house back for its full purchase price, but after that, the sale was finalized: permanent ownership passed to the buyer. The only exception to this rule was houses owned by Levites; theirs could be redeemed anytime and reverted automatically to their possession at Jubilee, because for them, their homes were their only temporal inheritance.

We should ask ourselves: what is the significance of a home's location within or outside of a walled city? After all, houses outside, even if they were in established villages, were subject to the same Jubilee rules as any other property. Remember, this is all being addressed to an agrarian society: the distinction seems to be that houses in villages or in the countryside were assumed to be associated with plots of land upon which crops could be grown—fields, orchards, or vineyards. City houses were not. Thus the issue is fruitfulness: the only meaningful inheritance is one that can be expected to bear fruit. Our inheritance as believers is the Spirit of Yahweh living within us, and its fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see Galatians 5:22-23). If we aren't enjoying this harvest, maybe it's because we've sold our inheritance.

(270)

Do not remove landmarks (property boundaries). "You shall not remove your neighbor's landmark which the men of old have set, in your inheritance which you will inherit in the land that Yahweh your God is giving you to possess." (Deuteronomy 19:14) Landmarks delineated the boundaries of a family's property—their inheritance. The Hebrew word for "remove" in this passage is *nasag*, which is indicative of retreat, not removal. So if a sneaky person (a *ganab*: see #274) wanted to reap a few more bushels of barley, he could conceivably move the boundary marker a few yards onto his neighbor's side of the line—effectively stealing his land, his inheritance.

Therefore, it is equally incumbent on us not to encroach upon our neighbor's spiritual inheritance—his eternal life. How could we do that? By retreating from the truth, by tolerating false and errant doctrines, by moving the landmarks of our faith: God's scriptures determine the correct position of our doctrinal inheritance, but alas, much of today's religious establishment (both Jewish and Christian) has gone into the business of "landmark removal," the subtle shifting of what is presented as "God's truth." By the way, the rabbis can take no comfort in the idea that "men of old" have set the landmarks—a term they would be tempted to apply to

themselves in a doctrinal sense. The word is ri'shon in Hebrew: it means "first in place, time, or rank." (S) In other words, Yahweh Himself set up the landmarks of truth at the very beginning of our existence.

(271)

Do not swear falsely in denial of another's property rights. "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another." (Leviticus 19:11) Although the rabbis are certainly justified in condemning perjury, the verse supporting their mitzvah is far broader in scope. It is not restricted to property rights but is applicable to every facet of life among God's people. In fact, this is but one example of how to fulfill the overall summary commandment of the passage, stated in verse 1: "You shall be holy, for I, Yahweh your God, am holy." Holy (qadosh or qodesh) means set apart, consecrated, sacred; in other words, not common or profane. Thus one facet of being holy as Yahweh is holy is abstaining from theft, deception, and falsehood. Lest you think that this is so obvious no one could possibly miss it, I hasten to point out that all three of these things were expressly authorized—even encouraged—in the Islamic scriptures.

Maimonides assigned separate mitzvot to each of these three things (see also #272 and #274), so it behooves us to look at the Hebrew roots for each of the prohibited activities. This is apparently the second of the list, translated "deal falsely" in the NKJV. The Hebrew word is kahash or kachash, a verb meaning: "to lie, to cringe, to deny. It means to deal falsely about something or with someone, the opposite of being truthful, honest. It is used of denying or disavowing something, of deceiving or lying to a person with respect to something. It naturally takes on the meaning of concealing something.... It takes on the meaning of cringing or fawning before the Lord." (B&C) That's right, folks, Yahweh hates the obsequious obeisance that so often passes for religious observance—He calls it a lie, and pointedly instructs us not to do it.

(272)

Do not deny falsely another's property rights. "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another." (Leviticus 19:11) Same precept, different mitzvah. This time Maimonides is focusing on: "lie to one another." The Hebrew word is saqar—"a verb meaning to engage in deceit, to deal falsely. The notion of a treacherous or deceptive activity forms the fundamental meaning of this word. It is used to describe an agreement entered into with deceitful intentions; outright lying; and the violation of a covenant." (B&C) A major part of "being holy as God is holy" is being forthright and truthful with people. Yahshua was described as a man in whom there was no guile.

(273)

Never settle in the land of Egypt. “When you come to the land which Yahweh your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom Yahweh your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for Yahweh has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’ (Deuteronomy 17:14-16) The rabbis have concocted a rule that isn’t really there in scripture (except in a metaphorical sense). In a delicious bit of irony, Maimonides himself, a Spaniard by birth, eventually settled in Cairo. What was he thinkin’? Anyway, the context shows that he wasn’t paying attention to the main point. Moses here is giving the people instruction concerning their future kings—instructions most Israelite monarchs blatantly ignored: don’t rely on your own military might (symbolized by horses bought from Egypt), and don’t make marriage alliances (symbolizing compromise—see v.17) with the surrounding pagan nations.

We’ll search the scriptures in vain for a prior prohibition against Jews ever re-settling in Egypt. What we do find is, “According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do.” (Leviticus 18:3) Egypt, as we have observed, is a consistent biblical metaphor for the world and its values. Israel was brought out of Egypt—they were set apart from the other nations, consecrated as Yahweh’s holy people. So yes, they were not to “go back” to Egypt in the sense that they were not to return to the world’s ways. But that one went right over Maimonides’ head. One wonders if the twisting of God’s precept here is an attempt to discredit Yahshua—who did indeed (as an infant) “settle” in Egypt for a short time. Hosea prophesied it, sort of: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.” (Hosea 11:1) Not the most definitive of prophecies, but then again, prophecy seldom drops truth into your lap like ripe fruit—you have to climb the tree to get it.

Speaking of prophecy, one of the most indicting prophetic passages in the entire Bible speaks of “going back to Egypt.” If Israel did not keep Yahweh’s precepts, He said, they would be warned, then chastised, then punished, and finally, if they did not repent, they would suffer unspeakable deprivations, all of which were totally avoidable. The very last thing on the list—the worst thing that could possibly happen—was, “And Yahweh will take you back to Egypt in ships, by the way of which I said to you, ‘You shall never see it again.’ And there you shall be offered for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you.” (Deuteronomy 28:68) It is my sad duty to report that this very thing happened to the Jews within a generation of the rejection and crucifixion of Yahshua—and as a direct result. Titus’ Roman legions sacked Jerusalem in 70 AD. A million Jews died during the siege—600,000 of them

from starvation. Josephus reports that 97,000 were shipped off to Egypt to be sold as slaves, creating such a glut in the market that their value fell to almost nothing. God had done precisely what He'd warned them He'd do if they rebelled, but the rabbis of Israel refused to see the connection between their crime and the punishment they received.

(274)

Do not steal personal property. "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another." (Leviticus 19:11) This is the last of the series of three mitzvot wrung out of this one verse (also see #271 and #272). The first two had very similar meanings (don't lie or deal falsely), and as we'll see, this prohibition is far closer to the first two than the English translation "steal" would imply. The Dictionary of Bible Languages with Semantic Domains defines the verb ganab as to: "(1) steal, be a thief, i.e., take items without permission by the owner, but usually by stealth and not force; (2) kidnap, i.e., seize a person for sale or servitude; (3) do secretly, i.e., act in a manner that is not publicly known; secretly steal into an area; (4) blow away, sweep away, i.e., a motion of the wind to make linear motion of an object; or (5) deceive, i.e., cause another to hold a mistaken view, and so wrongly evaluate a situation." It's clear, then, that the word's emphasis is not on the taking, but on the sneaky manner in which the thief works. (Ganab can also be used as a noun: a sneaky thief.) Again, part of "being holy" is being straightforward, open, and honest with your neighbors.

(275)

Restore that which one took by robbery. "If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep. If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed. If the sun has risen on him, there shall be guilt for his bloodshed. He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double." (Exodus 22:1-4) The verse that was cited by Judaism 101 to support this mitzvah (Leviticus 5:23) doesn't exist, so I've taken the liberty of choosing an appropriate substitute. As we've seen before, restoration, not incarceration or mutilation, is Yahweh's primary strategy for dealing with property crimes in Israel. The rabbis got that part right. But it's not a simple case of Okay, you caught me, so I'll give back what I stole. There are penalties, appropriate and in kind. If you still have the evidence in your possession, you must return it, plus another one just like it. In God's economy, crime doesn't pay—it doesn't even break even.

But what if you've already sold the bleating booty, or eaten it? If you stole a sheep, you'd have to return four of them. And if you stole an ox, you'd give back five. The difference, apparently, is

that in addition to stealing property, when you take a man's ox, you've also stolen the victim's ability to cultivate his land—you've taken his tractor as well as next month's barbecue. Moreover, the government doesn't receive the "fine." It's the victim who's reimbursed for his trouble. Then there's the question of what to do if the thief is as broke as he is stupid. If he doesn't have enough to pay the victim double or four or five times the value of what was stolen (depending on the circumstances we've outlined) then he himself is sold into slavery. There's no such thing as having nothing left to lose. If only American jurisprudence worked this logically.

Further, we're given instructions on what to do if the thief is caught in the act. He is presumed to be armed and/or dangerous; therefore, the victim is not held to blame if he kills the thief while protecting his property. But there are limits: the victim can't come back and murder him in cold blood the day after the crime has been committed. Yahweh demands restoration, not retribution.

(276)

To return lost property (Deut. 22:1) (CCA69).

Return lost property. "You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep going astray, and hide yourself from them; you shall certainly bring them back to your brother. And if your brother is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it to your own house, and it shall remain with you until your brother seeks it; then you shall restore it to him. You shall do the same with his donkey, and so shall you do with his garment; with any lost thing of your brother's, which he has lost and you have found, you shall do likewise; you must not hide yourself." (Deuteronomy 22:1-3) Finders keepers, losers weepers doesn't cut it with Yahweh. Love your neighbor is more His style. In an agrarian society, one's most valuable possessions can tend to wander off all by themselves. Yahweh's instructions, if you should happen across somebody's lost fuzzy four-hoofed Rolex, are to return it immediately if you know who it belongs to. If you don't, you're to keep it safe, alert the neighborhood, try to find the rightful owner, and give it food and water as if it were your own. It's the golden rule all over again: handle lost property you've found just as you'd want done to something of yours that got lost.

(277)

Not to pretend not to have seen lost property, to avoid the obligation to return it (Deut. 22:3) (CCN182).

Do not pretend not to have seen lost property, to avoid the obligation to return it. "...You shall do the same with his donkey, and so shall you do with his garment; with any lost thing of your brother's, which he has lost and you have found, you shall do likewise; you must not hide

yourself.” (Deuteronomy 22:3) The temptation for the ganab, of course, is to try to convince yourself that whatever your neighbor lost is actually yours—or more to the point, that given enough time, no one will remember whose it really is. That’s nothing but theft in slow motion, and like any theft, it betrays a lack of trust in Yahweh’s provision. As we’ve seen, there was to be no theft, deception, or falsehood among Yahweh’s people. We are to be holy, for our God is holy.

Criminal Laws

(278)

Not to slay an innocent person (Ex. 20:13) (CCN32). See Life.

Do not slay an innocent person. “You shall not murder.” (Exodus 20:13) Here we go again. You wouldn’t think the rabbis could screw up anything as simple as the Sixth Commandment, but they did. There is no such thing as an “innocent person.” Yes, there are people who have done nothing to merit a death sentence. (On the other hand, read the list below—I could be wrong about that.) But that isn’t what Maimonides said. A harmless mistake? No. This mitzvah was purposely designed to confuse the issue of innocence versus guilt (obfuscating the need for a Redeemer) and to elevate the self-appointed arbiters of holiness, the rabbis, in the eyes of their victims—excuse me, their followers. As Solomon put it, “For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.” (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

Yahweh had written with His own finger, “You shall not murder.” That is, you are not to take the life of a fellow human being without just cause—a cause defined by Yahweh in the Torah. These causes include murder, adultery, incest, bestiality, homosexuality, extra-marital sex (usually), the rape of a betrothed virgin (the rape of a non-betrothed virgin was punishable by marriage without the possibility of parole; see #301), kidnapping, witchcraft, offering human sacrifice, striking or cursing a parent, blasphemy, Sabbath desecration, prophesying falsely, propagating false doctrines, sacrificing to false gods, refusing to abide by the decision of the court, treason, and sedition. Warfare in a just cause (such as clearing the Land of Ba’al-worshipping Canaanites) was not considered murder. Clearly, the Sixth Commandment doesn’t mean “Thou shalt not kill,” as it reads in the King James Bible.

Murder, however, also has an underlying, metaphorical meaning, pointing out a deeper truth. Yahshua makes it clear in His tirade against the Pharisees: “If God were your Father [as you claim], you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was

a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." (John 8:42-47) A "murderer" in this sense is someone who prevents a person from having life through a relationship with Yahweh.

Yahshua here is saying that the Pharisees (read: rabbis) are children of the devil because of their false teaching. Their lies are "murdering" people in a spiritual sense, defining the Pharisees as the offspring of the original murderer, Satan. This explains why prophesying falsely and propagating false doctrines were offenses punishable by death in theocratic Israel. In fact, each of the "death penalty" crimes listed above has a similar symbolic counterpart in the spiritual realm. As Moses discovered at Kadesh (Numbers 20:11-12), it's not a good idea to mess with Yahweh's metaphors.

(279)

Not to kidnap any person of Israel (Ex. 20:13) (according to the Talmud, this verse refers to stealing a person, distinguished from Lev. 19:11, regarding the taking of property) (CCN33).

Do not kidnap any person of Israel. "He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death." (Exodus 21:16) Judaism 101 refers the Eighth Commandment ("You shall not steal") but notes: "According to the Talmud, this verse refers to stealing a person, distinguished from Leviticus 19:11, regarding the taking of property." The Hebrew text begs to differ. The word for "steal" or "kidnap" is the same in all three passages: ganab, meaning to steal, kidnap, or deceive. The emphasis of the word is on being sneaky or secretive. The Exodus 21 passage I've quoted specifically prohibits stealing a man (Hebrew ish: a human being, male or female), so kidnapping is clearly meant there.

The passage does not specify the nationality or race of the prohibited kidnapping. No one was to be kidnapped, for any reason. It didn't apply exclusively to Israelites. It's ironic, though, that Muhammad financed his rise to power through the kidnapping for ransom, rape, and the slave trade of Jews living in the Arabian city of Yathrib. In fact, it's hard to find a precept in the Torah whose violation isn't extolled by command and example in the Islamic scriptures.

(280)

Not to rob by violence (Lev. 19:13) (CCN35).

Do not rob by violence. “You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him.” (Leviticus 19:13) A corollary to the Sixth Commandment is stated here. Where ganab there is a broad term whose emphasis is on sneaky theft, this verse uses two other words to get the point across. “Cheat” is the Hebrew word ashaq, meaning “to oppress, violate, defraud, obtain through violence or deceit, to wrong, or extort.” (S) “Rob,” on the other hand, is gazal: to tear away, seize, plunder, rob, or take by force. Yahweh isn’t leaving the potential thief any wiggle room here. We aren’t to take (or even covet—see Exodus 20:17, Mitzvah #282) what doesn’t belong to us. One’s neighbor, as Yahshua pointed out, is anyone who falls within our sphere of acquaintance. If he’s close enough to steal from, he’s your neighbor.

(281)

Not to defraud (Lev. 19:13) (CCN37).

Do not defraud. “You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.” (Leviticus 19:13) Moses goes on to give an example of ashaq and gazal—one that the ordinary Israelite might not have considered to be such a heinous crime: keeping a hired man’s wages beyond the customary deadline. In that world, if a man went and labored in your field or vineyard, he expected to be paid at the end of the workday. He counted on it. Yahweh says that to withhold his wages—even just overnight—was tantamount to stealing from him. Even if you eventually paid him the money he was owed, you had still robbed him of his peace of mind.

This of course has applications in today’s world. Pay your bills when they’re due (or even before they’re due—see our discussion on Matthew 5:38-42 above). If you’re a merchant, don’t “price-gouge.” If you’re an employer, pay your employees and vendors on time. Pay your taxes. Don’t take—even temporarily—what isn’t yours, whether by stealth, dishonesty, force, or extortion. If God is truly Yahweh Yireh (our provider), then trust Him to provide for your needs—all of them.

(282)

Not to covet what belongs to another (Ex. 20:14) (CCN40).

Do not covet what belongs to another. “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.” (Exodus 20:17) The Tenth Commandment is a biggie for us Americans. We have a multi-billion dollar advertising industry designed to promote covetousness. Yahweh is telling us to be satisfied with what we have—with what He has provided—and to rely on Him to take care of us in the future. He designed us; He knows we

have needs. Covetousness, however, goes beyond the meeting of needs. It is looking at the world around us and wishing other people's possessions were ours—and that's wrong.

The word translated "covet" is the Hebrew *chamad*. Literally, it means to desire, to take pleasure in, to delight in, to covet, or to lust after. There is a fine line between appreciating something for its intrinsic worth or beauty and desiring to own it. I could admire a shiny, sleek, chrome-encrusted custom motorcycle all day long. But I don't want to own one. Especially yours. Covetousness is like sheol—there's no bottom to it. Somebody's wife (or husband) will always be prettier than yours; there will always be someone with a better car, job, house, or whatever. Learn to appreciate and be thankful for what Yahweh has already given you. Remember, he who is faithful with little will be entrusted with more.

(283)

Not to crave something that belongs to another (Deut. 5:18) (CCN41).

Do not crave something that belongs to another. "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's." (Deuteronomy 5:21) Maimonides has been caught padding the list again. This is merely the restatement of the Tenth Commandment (#282) for a new generation of Israelites—the Deuteronomy restatement of the Exodus 20 list. Moses used the very same word for covet: *chamad*. There is nothing new here. Although I must admit that the warning bears repeating.

(284)

Not to indulge in evil thoughts and sights (Num. 15:39) (CCN156).

Do not indulge in evil thoughts and sights. "Again Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of Yahweh and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God.'" (Numbers 15:37-40) Yahweh knew what temptations the Israelites were going to be faced with as they entered Canaan. He knew their hearts and eyes would be inclined toward the harlotry of the Land. So rather than merely commanding them to avert their eyes and don't think evil thoughts, He gave them a means by which they would be constantly reminded of who they were—and Whose they were: Yahweh's set-apart people. He instructed them to sew tassels on

the corners of their garments, and to put a single blue thread within the tassel representing their ultimate salvation through the Messiah (see #18 for a full discussion of these tsitzit). Since everybody in Israel was to wear the tsitzit with the blue thread, it was a system designed to make it hard for God's precepts to slip your mind.

God's provision for our needs is thus demonstrated—even our need to avoid temptation. It reminds us of what Paul wrote: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." (1 Corinthians 10:12-14)

Punishment and Restitution

In the matter of punishment and restitution, I would like to offer the following New Testament vignette to illustrate the concept of restitution. I do so because Maimonides barely mentions it. That's a shame, because restitution—not punishment—is at the heart of Yahweh's system of civil jurisprudence. Punishment was reserved for those cases where a spiritual principal was at stake, whether metaphorically or literally. At any rate, pay close attention to what Zacchaeus did, and what Yahshua's reaction was.

"Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was one of the most influential Jews in the Roman tax-collecting business, and he had become very rich. He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowds. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree beside the road, so he could watch from there. When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. 'Zacchaeus!' he said. 'Quick, come down! For I must be a guest in your home today.' Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the crowds were displeased. 'He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,' they grumbled."

Here's the punchline: "Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have overcharged people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!'" The Roman system of tax collection in Judea employed Jewish tax-gatherers in the exaction of a dizzying variety of levies, duties, customs, and fees. They were authorized to collect a fraction in excess of the proper tax, which was their commission, their profit—an amount they frequently padded—adding to the already considerable ire they had earned among their countrymen. These men are called *telones* in Greek.

Zacchaeus was an *architelones*, a chief among or supervisor of a number of *telones*.

Confronted and convicted by Yahshua's holiness, he did two things. Knowing he had personally

defrauded people, he promised to repay them as if he had stolen their sheep (see Exodus 22:1)—fourfold. But also knowing that much of his wealth had been derived from underlings who had extorted money from people in transactions he could neither trace nor set right, he did what he could to rectify the situation: he gave half of his wealth to the poor. In other words, Zacchaeus repented, changed his mind and changed his ways. And recognizing his guilt before God, he did what the Torah prescribed. He made restitution.

Here's Yahshua's reaction: "Jesus responded, 'Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a son of Abraham. And I, the Son of Man, have come to seek and save those like him who are lost.'" (Luke 19:1-10) Zacchaeus wasn't saved because he gave the money back. He was saved because he "showed himself to be a son of Abraham," that is, he believed Yahweh and his faith was accounted unto him to be righteousness. Punishment was the last thing on Yahshua's mind as he called to the diminutive tax collector. He wanted to save Zack from that. Restitution does what can be done to undo a crime.

Punishment in the Torah is invariably an earthly picture of what can happen in the eternal state—a warning to those who would rebel against Yahweh's sovereignty.

Early in the first century, Israel's Roman overlords caused the "scepter to depart from Judah," that is, they took away from the Jewish ruling council the legal right to impose the death sentence. This, of course, was a fulfillment of the prophecy that Shiloh, "He to whom the scepter belongs," had come (see Genesis 49:10). It is therefore sad and ironic that Maimonides' list of "Restitutions and Punishments" is fixated on the minutiae surrounding capital punishment, to the exclusion of the victim-centric body of law concerning restitution.

(285)

That the Court shall pass sentence of death by decapitation with the sword (Ex. 21:20; Lev. 26:25) (affirmative).

The Court shall pass sentence of death by decapitation with the sword. "If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." (Exodus 21:22-25) Also, "And if by these things [previously listed plagues sent upon a disobedient Israel] you are not reformed by Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins. And I will bring a sword against you that will execute the vengeance of the covenant; when you are gathered together within your cities I will send

pestilence among you; and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy.” (Leviticus 26:23-25) Huh? The “proof texts” offered do not under any circumstances authorize “the Court to pass a sentence of death by decapitation with the sword.” It’s another bald-faced rabbinical power grab—all the worse because the only wielding of the sword (and even there it is evidently symbolic of any weapon) in these verses is to be done by Yahweh. The Court, a.k.a. the Sanhedrin, has no such authority.

The circumstances under which the “Court” was to make decisions concerning retaliatory punishment are very clearly defined in the Exodus passage. Frankly, the circumstances described are so unlikely as to be laughable. (Two guys get into a fight; somehow a woman who happens to be late in her pregnancy gets in the way and gets hurt, resulting in her baby being born prematurely—c’mon: did that ever happen?) Yet the whole world latches onto the phrase “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” and jumps to the erroneous conclusion that since God is just itching for vengeance and retribution, we can feel free to dish it out as well, never mind what the Torah actually said.

As far as bringing a “sword” to bear on a situation, that is Yahweh’s prerogative, not the Sanhedrin’s. In fact, the very tampering with scripture evidenced in the mitzvah at hand would qualify as reason enough for the sword of Yahweh to be applied to Israel—and especially its rabbis. Rewriting God’s instructions is nothing if not “walking contrary to” Him. However, there is one instance (recorded in Exodus 32:27-28) where the swords of men were used to punish Israelites. The occasion? The golden calf debacle at the foot of Mount Sinai. But it wasn’t an execution; it was a small-scale civil war—the faithful men of Levi against the idolaters of Israel. The “Court” had nothing to do with it. In fact, since the Babylonian captivity, the Sanhedrin have been the ones promoting the bull.

(286)

That the Court shall pass sentence of death by strangulation (Lev. 20:10) (affirmative).

The Court shall pass sentence of death by strangulation. “The man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death.” (Leviticus 20:10) Again, the “Court” isn’t part of the picture. It’s another blatant power grab on the part of the rabbis. Nor is strangulation. The Torah has nothing to say about the mode of execution in this particular case, though a few verses back, it specifies death by stoning for a worshiper of Molech: “The people of the land shall stone him with stones.” (Leviticus 20:2) But here, no method of execution is specified. The word for “put to death” is the Hebrew *mut*, a generic word meaning kill, slay, put to death, even assassinate.

From the New Covenant scriptures, however, it is clear that stoning was the accepted method of execution for this offense. John records (in Chapter 8) a scene where the religious leaders wanted to stone a woman caught in adultery. (It was the scribes and Pharisees who specified the method of execution, claiming Mosaic authority, but as we have seen, Moses had said nothing about it. Even here, they were making up their own rules, just as Maimonides would a thousand years later.) What I want to know is where was the adulterer? If she was “caught in the act,” they should have caught him as well, ’cause it’s real hard to commit adultery by yourself. Selective justice is injustice.

Lest we gloss over the underlying truth, remember that adultery is a violation of the God-ordained family structure. This is more significant than it appears at first glance. We are to be organized in family units—father, mother, and children—because that’s the way Yahweh reveals Himself to us. He’s our heavenly Father: Creator, Provider, and ultimate Authority. His Holy Spirit is our spiritual Mother: Comforter, Teacher, Conscience and Guide. And His “Son” is Yahshua our Messiah: Yahweh’s human manifestation, His representative among men, our Master and Savior. Adultery, then, being a perversion of the God-ordained family structure, is a picture of false belief—of unfruitful and destructive spiritual relationships. At the very least, it messes up Yahweh’s metaphor.

(287)

That the Court shall pass sentence of death by burning with fire (Lev. 20:14) (affirmative).

The Court shall pass sentence of death by burning with fire. “If a man marries a woman and her mother, it is wickedness. They shall be burned with fire, both he and they, that there may be no wickedness among you.” (Leviticus 20:14) Only the rabbis could look at this verse and see nothing but an opportunity for the Sanhedrin to flex their muscles by imposing a particular form of capital punishment—in this case, burning at the stake. The whole passage is a litany of various sexual sins and the consequences Yahweh has ordained. It has nothing to do with rabbinical authority.

That being said, death by burning is authorized twice in the Torah, here and in Leviticus 21:9, where the daughter of a priest who has turned to harlotry must be executed by fire. The ubiquitous connection (metaphorical and otherwise) between sexual sin and the worship of false gods should not be overlooked. Every single mention of execution by fire in the entire Bible (whether advocated by Yahweh or not) is associated in some way with either sexual sin, the worship of false gods, or both. In God’s economy, one is a picture of the other.

(288)

That the Court shall pass sentence of death by stoning (Deut. 22:24) (affirmative).

The Court shall pass sentence of death by stoning. “If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor’s wife; so you shall put away the evil from among you. (Deuteronomy 22:23-24) As usual, this has virtually nothing to do with the authority of the Sanhedrin. This is one of several places, however, where death by stoning was the divinely prescribed punishment. Other instances include the overt worship (or merely the advocating of such worship) of false gods like Molech or Ba’al, and “cursing” Yahweh (which in one instance literally manifested itself in simply ignoring His Sabbath rest instructions—demonstrating the guilty party’s flippant attitude toward God). In the present case, the punishment is, once again, in response to adultery, since a “betrothed virgin” was legally married, even though the union had not yet been consummated.

In a fascinating display of wisdom, Yahweh built in a safeguard against a virgin being unfairly executed for being the victim of a rapist. If she were “in the city” when the sexual attack/encounter occurred, she would have been obligated to cry out for help. If she did not, it was to be presumed that she was a willing participant—hence an adulteress. (This system wouldn’t work in New York, you understand. It was designed for “cities” like bronze-age Beersheba or Shechem, close-knit communities where if you cried out for help, half a dozen guys would instantly come to your aid.) But what if the attack/encounter took place where no one was likely to hear her cries? Yahweh gave the virgin a get-out-of-stoning-free card: “But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. [Note that rapists get the death penalty.] But you shall do nothing to the young woman; there is in the young woman no sin deserving of death, for just as when a man rises against his neighbor and kills him, even so is this matter. For he found her in the countryside, and the betrothed young woman cried out, [it is presumed] but there was no one to save her.” (Deuteronomy 22:25-27) As far as Yahweh’s metaphor of adultery/fornication equating to the worship of false gods is concerned, it is clear that it isn’t the sexual contact per se that condemns someone (because that can be forced), but rather the willing offering of one’s affection to an illicit lover. To me, this just screams that it’s not so much one’s mode of religious observance (or lack of it) that God is looking at, but the attitude of the heart. Note further that Yahweh’s justice, when administered by men, is supposed to err on the side of mercy if it errs at all. One wonders why Maimonides was so fixated on the Court’s legal authorization to impose the death penalty.

(289)

To hang the dead body of one who has incurred that penalty (Deut. 21:22) (affirmative).

Hang the dead body of one who has incurred [the death] penalty. “If a man 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) Yahweh is not saying the Jews must hang the body of an executed criminal on a tree, but is rather giving instructions as to what to do, and why, if they do so. He is looking forward to an event that wouldn’t take place for another fifteen hundred years or so—the crucifixion of His Son, the Messiah. Although crucifixions in first-century Judea were common enough, it was rare indeed for “you (that is, an Israelite) to hang him on a tree,” since the authority to impose the death penalty had been taken away from the Sanhedrin by the Romans, and besides, the preferred method of execution for them was stoning. It was the Romans who crucified their victims. But in the case of Yahshua, it was the Jewish leadership who caused Him to be “hanged on a tree,” making Him (as they well knew) “accursed of God.” What the Jews didn’t realize (and still don’t) is that Yahshua endured this curse for our sins, so that we might have life. “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace [i.e., in our covenant relationship with Yahweh. Shalom also means welfare, health, prosperity, or soundness] was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:4-5)

(290)

The dead body of an executed criminal shall not remain hanging on the tree overnight. “If a man 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) The second lesson Maimonides gleaned from these verses is that you couldn’t leave the “criminal’s” corpse hanging on the tree overnight. The majority of the Sanhedrin in Yahshua’s day, of course, would have gladly let this one slide. The only reason they wanted Yahshua and his two crucified companions off their crosses before sundown was that the Feast of Unleavened Bread was starting.

(291)

Inter the executed on the day of execution. “If a man 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) Milking the passage for all it's worth, Maimonides squeezed a separate mitzvah out of the burial of the criminal's corpse. History informs us that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, both members of the Sanhedrin and both believers, stuck their necks out with the Roman authorities and arranged for Christ's body to be removed from the tree of execution so they could properly inter Him before the sundown deadline. It seems that even in death, Yahshua observed the Torah flawlessly. Again, we turn to Isaiah for illumination: “For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.” (Isaiah 53:8-9)

(292)

Do not accept ransom from a murderer. “Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. And you shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the priest. So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I Yahweh dwell among the children of Israel.” (Numbers 35:31-34) We dealt in detail with the “city of refuge” concept in the previous chapter (Mitzvah #260). The principle stressed here is that there is no substitute for the life of a murderer. His blood must be shed, for until it is, the land of promise remains defiled by his guilt. In the ultimate sense, of course, the “land” is the whole world, and our sin is what defiles it. But it's the nature of our sin that determines whether or not a remedy is available for us. We all have blood on our hands. But was it unintentional manslaughter, or was it cold-blooded murder? In other words, have we merely fallen short of God's standard of perfection, or have we willfully and maliciously prevented our brothers and sisters from forming a relationship with Yahweh?

Here's what I'm getting at: John writes, “He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” (1 John 3:14-15) The Greek word for “murderer” here (anthropoktonos) is found only one other time in scripture, in a passage we reviewed earlier in this chapter. In Mitzvah #278, we read, “You [Pharisees] are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer [anthropoktonos] from the beginning...” (John 8:44) How was Satan a murderer from the beginning? He deceived Adam and Chavvah (a.k.a. Eve), leading to

their fall from innocence. He didn't kill them physically (separating body from soul). Rather, he murdered them, spiritually. After the fall, their neshamah—that uniquely human capacity for spiritual indwelling (see Genesis 2:7) was emptied of life. And Adam and his bride remained spiritually lifeless until blood was shed on their behalf, and they accepted Yahweh's sacrifice by wearing the animal-skin garments He had made to cover their nakedness. God still provides a garment—one of light—to cover the sins of all who wish to have a relationship with Him based on the sacrifice of His Son. But those who would prevent this relationship from being formed—those who block the doorway to the Kingdom of Heaven—are characterized as murderers. John notes their hatred for their brothers and says that they therefore “live in death.” So, getting back to our mitzvah, we see that ransom for “murderers” is impossible. And common “manslayers” (that's everybody else) can be redeemed from the curse of our sin only by the “death of the [high] priest.” Who? “Having been perfected, [Yahshua] became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest ‘according to the order of Melchizedek.’” (Hebrews 5:9-10)

(293)

Exile one who committed accidental homicide. “The congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood according to these judgments. So the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall return him to the city of refuge where he had fled, and he shall remain there until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil.” (Numbers 35:24-25) The tone of

Maimonides' mitzvah is all wrong. This is not characterized as a lesser form of punishment for a lesser crime—exile in place of execution. In context, I'd rephrase it, “Protect the one who committed accidental homicide.” Most of Numbers 35 is concerned with the establishment of the six cities of refuge and with the precise definition of what constitutes murder as opposed to accidental homicide. It's all pretty straightforward. The upshot here is that if a man has accidentally killed someone, the congregation of Israel is to protect the manslayer from the designated “avenger of blood” until he can be brought safely to the nearest city of refuge, where he must live until the death of the High Priest if he wishes to be sheltered from retribution.

When you work out the prophetic metaphor here, a remarkable truth emerges. Ultimately, we through our sin are the manslayers. The slain party, then, is Yahshua. And the “avenger of blood” can be none other than Yahweh Himself. Judgment—even wrath—properly belongs to Him alone.

But the “congregation” is instructed to safely convey the guilty party to the city of refuge so the “avenger” won't harm him before he has had a chance to avail himself of the redemption

afforded by the “death of the High Priest (who, as we have seen, represents Yahshua again—note the reference to his being anointed).”

Who, then, is the congregation? It’s the believers, the “saints,” the family of God—indeed, the family of the very “avenger of blood” from whose wrath we are trying to shelter the manslayer! Yahweh is saying that He is counting on us to shelter the lost, guilty soul from His wrath. (We’re not to shelter the murderer, you understand—the malicious child of Satan who’s trying to lead souls astray—but only the accidental manslayer, a description that fits every one of us until we’re redeemed through the “death of the High Priest.”) What we have here is the Great Commission! We are to love the lost, show compassion on them, draw them in to a place of safety, and show them how they can be saved from wrath. After that, it’s up to them to either stay in the city of refuge or take their chances with the Avenger outside.

That place of safety we have been telling you is the city of refuge by the name of Jerusalem and or the others. This is why we must get there before His wrath is poured out.

(294)

Establish six cities of refuge (for those who committed accidental homicide). “When Yahweh your God has cut off the nations whose land Yahweh your God is giving you, and you dispossess them and dwell in their cities and in their houses, you shall separate three cities for yourself in the midst of your land which Yahweh your God is giving you to possess. You shall prepare roads for yourself, and divide into three parts the territory of your land which Yahweh your God is giving you to inherit, that any manslayer may flee there.” (Deuteronomy 19:3) We covered the subject of the six cities of refuge under Mitzvot #260, #292, and #293, based on Numbers 35. Here we see the inevitable restatement in Deuteronomy—speaking specifically of the three cities that were to be established in the actual Promised Land. (The other three were on the east side of the Jordan, territory that was never given to Israel by Yahweh.) Since Maimonides wrote in the tenth century A.D., it’s clear that this mitzvah is an anachronism (at least as far as he was concerned). It no longer applies (except in a prophetic and metaphorical sense) because Israel already conquered the Land, set up the requisite cities of refuge, and then got their sorry assets kicked out—twice. In a literal sense, this mitzvah has no more relevance to keeping “God’s Law” today than the Torah’s instructions on building the wilderness Tabernacle do (though the spiritual implications are as significant as ever). Since Maimonides didn’t appreciate the spiritual application of any of these instructions, why did he include this one in his list? He had to know that literal compliance was impossible. What was he thinking?

(295)

Do not accept ransom from an accidental homicide, so as to relieve him from exile. “And you shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the priest.” (Numbers 35:32) Once again, for the learning impaired: it wasn’t exile—it was protection from the “avenger of blood.” That being said, the manslayer couldn’t buy his way out of his predicament, for though he wasn’t guilty of murder, he was guilty of something. There was to be no pardon for him until the High Priest died. Yahweh is telling us that we can’t earn or buy our own salvation. No amount of good works or alms will change the fact that we’re guilty. Only the death of the High Priest, Yahshua the Messiah—accepted as a sacrifice made on our behalf and received as a gift from God—can buy us our freedom.

(296)

Decapitate the heifer in the manner prescribed (in expiation of a murder on the road, the perpetrator of which remained undiscovered). “If anyone is found slain, lying in the field in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you to possess, and it is not known who killed him, then your elders and your judges shall go out and measure the distance from the slain man to the surrounding cities. And it shall be that the elders of the city nearest to the slain man will take a heifer which has not been worked and which has not pulled with a yoke. The elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with flowing water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and they shall break the heifer’s neck there in the valley.” (Deuteronomy 21:1-4) A murderer’s blood must be shed in order to cleanse the land of the blood of his victim. For as we read, “Blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.” (Numbers 35:33) That’s all fine in theory, as any homicide detective will tell you. But what if you can’t find the perp? What if the case goes cold? Yahweh knew this would happen from time to time, so He provided an object lesson to serve in lieu of justice.

The odds were that the murderer lived somewhere nearby. So the “elders and judges” were to determine what city, town, or village was closest to the scene of the crime. That town was to provide a heifer—a cow-calf, that is, an eglah, an adolescent but mature female bovine—taking it down to a nearby creek, where its life would serve as a substitute for the murderer’s. There its neck was to be broken (or it was to be decapitated—the Hebrew word araph can mean either thing) in atonement for the murder.

Why a heifer, one that has never pulled a plow? And why a valley that has not been cultivated? I believe that Yahweh is telling us how He feels about murder: it is above all a terrible waste of potential. The victim has been cut off prior to contributing to society what might have been the fruit of a great life. Even the valley has yet to show its potential. We were created to love and

live with Yahweh. If we choose not to, it's a shame. But if someone prevents us from doing so, it's a crime—one Yahweh takes as a personal affront.

(297)

Do not plow nor sow the rough valley (in which a heifer's neck was broken). "The elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with flowing water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and they shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley. Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near, for Yahweh your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to bless in the name of Yahweh; by their word every controversy and every assault shall be settled. And all the elders of that city nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley. Then they shall answer and say, 'Our hands have not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen it. Provide atonement, O Yahweh, for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, and do not lay innocent blood to the charge of Your people Israel.' And atonement shall be provided on their behalf for the blood. So you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you when you do what is right in the sight of Yahweh. (Deuteronomy 21:4-9) The lesson of Mitzvah #296 continues. On behalf of their citizens, the elders of the town nearest the unsolved murder, in addition to providing the heifer, are to swear that they had nothing to do with the crime (presuming, of course, that this was actually true. If they knew who was responsible, this would have been the time to come forward, or be guilty of "bearing false witness"). The whole process is supervised not by the Sanhedrin, but by the priests and Levites—whose positions were strictly hereditary (so one could not aspire to a position of power in this context). The whole point of the exercise was to "put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you." In the same way, our sins can only be "put away" from us through the shedding of innocent blood—that of Yahshua.

(298)

Adjudge a thief to pay compensation or (in certain cases) suffer death. "If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep.... He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double." (Exodus 22:1, 3-4) "He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death." (Exodus 21:16) Contrast should be drawn between God's system of criminal justice and man's. If you're a thief, western nations generally send you to prison, which takes you out of polite society for a while, but does no practical good for your victim. Prisons are expensive—a wasteful and inefficient use of public funds. Worse, they often serve as trade schools for criminals.

But other systems are even worse: Islamic sharia law says that the thief's hand is to be chopped off. This might be an effective deterrent, I suppose. But it hardly fits the crime, and again, it's a punishment that does nothing to relieve the victim's plight.

Only Yahweh's law makes sense for everybody concerned—thief, victim, and tax-paying bystander. If you steal something and it's found in your possession, you are to give it back to your victim, plus another just like it. But if you've already disposed of it, you must repay him four times its value. And that's if it's value is only intrinsic (money or jewelry, for example). If the stolen item also has functional value—if its owner used it to earn his livelihood or function in society (today that would be one's car, tools, or computer) you'd have to repay five times the booty's value. Repayment begins by selling what you own—your own home, car, or possessions. But what if you don't have enough to pay the victim back? Obviously, you're not allowed to steal to make restitution. Under the Mosaic Law, you yourself would be sold into slavery, the proceeds going to the victim. I guess in today's world that might translate into prison time, but with a twist on our flawed system. We allow inmates to work in prison industries and earn themselves a small income, because we're fixated on rehabilitation for criminals, not restitution for their victims. Under God's economy, whatever the thief earned would be returned to his victim, until the entire debt was paid. If you've stolen a \$50,000 Mercedes Benz, you're on the hook for a cool quarter mil. Let's see. At six bucks an hour....

Gee, looks like crime really doesn't pay.

Not all crimes are financial, of course. We should point out that if you steal a person, there is no restitution—whether or not your abductee is ever released unharmed. In God's consistent metaphor of what kidnapping and murder really mean, it is your intention to prevent people from having a relationship with Yahweh that determines your guilt, not your success in pulling it off. Try it and your life is forfeit.

(299)

He who inflicts a bodily injury shall pay monetary compensation. "If men contend with each other, and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist, and he does not die but is confined to his bed, if he rises again and walks about outside with his staff, then he who struck him shall be acquitted. He shall only pay for the loss of his time, and shall provide for him to be thoroughly healed. (Exodus 21:18-19) Again, the spirit of restitution—as opposed to punishment—drives this precept. It's a little misleading to translate this as saying the attacker shall be "acquitted." The Hebrew word *naqah* doesn't so much mean "found to be innocent" as it does "pardoned," or "left unpunished." There are still consequences. The "winner" of the fight has to see to it that his adversary is not financially disadvantaged. He must pay the "loser's" salary and medical

expenses until the man is fully recovered. The worse you hurt him, the more expensive it's going to be.

Yahweh doesn't seem to care who started it, or why. He wants us to love each other, not get into fistfights. So He arranged it so that even if you win, you lose. This is not a call for mindless pacifism, however. There are times when fighting is necessary and appropriate. (For example, see Exodus

32:26-28.) But don't get into it with your brother-in-law over who's the best shortstop in the National League. Just smile, turn the other cheek, and remember Psalm 116:6 —“Yahweh preserves the simple.”