

613 Laws of Torah

Laws 200 - 249

(200)

Do not surrender a slave who has fled to the land of Israel to his owner who lives outside Palestine. “You shall not give back to his master the slave who has escaped from his master to you. He may dwell with you in your midst, in the place which he chooses within one of your gates, where it seems best to him; you shall not oppress him.” (Deuteronomy 23:15-16) Unlike Maimonides, Yahweh doesn’t actually specify the origin of the slave or his master here, for a very good reason. This is a poignant picture of flight from the oppression of slavery under sin to a new life under Yahweh’s protection. One dealing with a runaway slave had three logical options: he could return the slave to his former master, re-enslave the runaway for his own use, or set him free. Yahweh is hereby commanding His people to take door number three.

This is, at its core, a scathing denunciation of religion—all sorts of organized religious practice.

Most people follow what they were taught as children: whether their parents were Hindus or Buddhists, atheists or Muslims, Catholics or Protestants, they naturally start out doing and believing the same kinds of things their parents did. But now and then, a person notices the neshamah, the “God-shaped vacuum” within him and endeavors to delve beyond the humdrum going-through-the-motions existences being lived by those around them. At this point, they have “escaped from their masters.” But what happens to them? All too often, they are simply re-enslaved into something worse than the existence from which they were fleeing. If a nominal Muslim looking for a deeper faith doesn’t leave Islam, he becomes a terrorist or suicide bomber. The Buddhist seeker ceases being a productive member of his society and becomes a holy parasite, a monk, a living contradiction of outward asceticism achieved through total self-absorption. And what happens to those who wish to turn to Yahweh? As often as not, they are told to exchange their slavery to sin for another form of servitude—rules, rituals, and traditions, or worse, submission to ecclesiastical tyranny under self-appointed religious leaders. As Yahshua put it, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.” (Matthew 23:15) But the Torah says to stop oppressing the runaway slave; let him enjoy his freedom. “Jesus answered [the Pharisees], ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever

commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” (John 8:34-36)

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Do not wrong a runaway slave. “You shall not give back to his master the slave who has escaped from his master to you. He may dwell with you in your midst, in the place which he chooses within one of your gates, where it seems best to him; you shall not oppress him.” (Deuteronomy 23:15-16) The rabbis have drawn a distinction here between not returning a runaway slave to his owner and treating him well. Okay, whatever. More specifically, the Law says not to treat him as a second-class citizen because he used to be a slave, but accept him without prejudice. I personally know two pastors with checkered pasts—drugs, crime, prison—who are now serving Yahshua with enthusiasm and gratitude. Where would their congregations be if Christians had held their former bonds of slavery against them? If Yahweh has redeemed a person, if he has fled from his old life of slavery to sin, then according to Yahweh, he may “dwell in our midst.” Let’s face it: we have all been slaves at one time or another. If we exclude the one with obvious sins in his past, we must exclude ourselves as well. To the heavenly Gardener, the best slug in the yard is pretty much the same as the worst one.

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Don’t muzzle a beast while it is working: allow it to eat and enjoy. “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” (Deuteronomy 25:4) Yes, Yahweh is concerned with the welfare of animals as well as of men. This precept, however, is not talking exclusively about “livestock rights.” Paul quoted this twice (in I Timothy 5:18 and in the following passage) to demonstrate that one who works in ministry has a right to derive a living wage from such work. This is why we have salaried pastors today. Note, however, that although the ox had a right to munch on some grain as he worked, he was not given the deed to the wheat field, nor was he given the authority to plow the whole thing under and put up trendy condos to sell at an obscene profit to rich yuppies. Rather, his “living” was predicated on his participation in providing nourishment to the community.

Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth about his rights as an Apostle (rights he freely relinquished in order to avoid becoming a stumbling block): “Don’t we have the right to live in your homes and share your meals? Don’t we have the right to bring a Christian wife along with us as the other disciples and the Lord’s brothers and Peter do?” This sentence sets the remuneration bar high enough to support one’s family, not just a subsistence wage for the pastor himself. “Or is it only Barnabas and I who have to work to support ourselves? What soldier has to pay his own expenses? And have you ever heard of a farmer who harvests his

crop and doesn't have the right to eat some of it? What shepherd takes care of a flock of sheep and isn't allowed to drink some of the milk? And this isn't merely human opinion. Doesn't God's law say the same thing? For the law of Moses says, 'Do not keep an ox from eating as it treads out the grain.' Do you suppose God was thinking only about oxen when he said this? Wasn't he also speaking to us? Of course he was. Just as farm workers who plow fields and thresh the grain expect a share of the harvest, Christian workers should be paid by those they serve...." I couldn't have said it better myself. It's handy when scripture provides commentary on scripture, don't you think?

"We have planted good spiritual seed among you. Is it too much to ask, in return, for mere food and clothing?" Paul's point is that spiritual nourishment should be rewarded with physical sustenance. Yet he didn't capitalize on that principle. "If you support others who preach to you, shouldn't we have an even greater right to be supported? Yet we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than put an obstacle in the way of the Good News about Christ...."

He then reminds us that this is nothing new in God's economy: "Don't you know that those who work in the Temple get their meals from the food brought to the Temple as offerings? And those who serve at the altar get a share of the sacrificial offerings. In the same way, the Lord gave orders that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it." (I Corinthians 9:4-14 NLT)

Vows, Oaths and Swearing

(203)

A man should fulfill whatever he has uttered. "That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to Yahweh your God what you have promised with your mouth." (Deuteronomy 23:23) This points out something few understand these days: when you say something, you've said it before Yahweh Himself. If you make any "statement of fact," it's as if you're "swearing on a stack of Bibles." You've automatically "sworn" that your words are true. If you've said you'd do something, your words are a promise you've made to God—even if you weren't promising anything to Him, but merely to some other human. Yahweh, in short, expects us to keep our word, to tell the truth—whether we're "under oath" or not. A promise to the least of men is a promise to Him.

Not surprisingly, Yahshua sounds irritated as he discusses the hypocrisy of swearing on this or that as though the greater the thing sworn upon, the more truthful the statement must be: "You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Do not break your vows; you must carry out the vows

you have made to the Lord.’ But I say, don’t make any vows! If you say, ‘By heaven!’ it is a sacred vow because heaven is God’s throne. And if you say, ‘By the earth!’ it is a sacred vow because the earth is his footstool. And don’t swear, ‘By Jerusalem!’ for Jerusalem is the city of the great King. Don’t even swear, ‘By my head!’ for you can’t turn one hair white or black. Just say a simple, ‘Yes, I will,’ or ‘No, I won’t.’ Your word is enough. To strengthen your promise with a vow shows that something is wrong. (Matthew 5:33-37 NLT). That’s pretty clear, isn’t it?

(204)

Do not swear needlessly. “You shall not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain, for Yahweh will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.” (Exodus 20:7) It’s interesting that this verse was chosen to support the idea of not swearing needlessly: it has almost nothing to do with taking oaths. As we saw in the previous mitzvah, in fact, it is God’s will that we don’t swear at all (that is, don’t make vows or give testimony that must be backed by things that are more reliable than our own word). The “need” for swearing or taking an oath should never arise.

But since the rabbis brought it up, let’s look at what the actual Hebrew words of this most enigmatic of the Ten Commandments really means: “You shall not take (nasa: lift up, accept, advance, bear, tolerate, respect, regard, or yield to) the name (shem: the position, individual nature, designation, honor, authority, character, mark, fame, name, reputation, or report) of Yahweh your God (elohiym: supreme and mighty one, deity) in an evil (shav: destructive, beguiling, false, evil, ruinous, idolatrous, harmful, devastating, wasteful, immoral, deceptive, or dishonest) way. For Yahweh will not exonerate (naqah: cleanse, acquit, hold blameless, or leave unpunished) him who accepts (nasa: lifts up, accepts, advances, bears, or tolerates) His character (shem: position, individual nature, designation, honor, authority, character, mark, fame, name, reputation, or report) being used in a deceptive (shav: destructive, evil, devastating, desolate, wasteful, beguiling, immoral, idolatrous, false, deceptive, or dishonest) way.” (Exodus 20:7)

The Third Commandment therefore has nothing to do with taking oaths or swearing (not directly, at least), and everything to do with using the name of God—Yahweh—properly and with respect. The unfortunate English translation of the Hebrew word shav (destructive, false, evil, ruinous, idolatrous, harmful, devastating, wasteful, immoral, deceptive, dishonest, etc.) as “vain” (which in this context means empty or frivolous) is part of the problem. This erroneous word choice has led generations of people to believe that saying the name of God (a name most people don’t even know) in a flippant or irreverent way is what He’s prohibiting here. They believe that the commandment merely means that we shouldn’t say things like “God damn it” or “I swear to God....” While profanity—using His name in a common or disrespectful way or taking

Him lightly—is indeed a bad thing, implied here and warned against explicitly elsewhere in scripture, the Third Commandment has a far deeper meaning: we are not to accept or advance anything that is false, deceptive, or destructive in Yahweh’s name, or associate these things with His character, or say that they’re His word. He won’t ignore it when we choose to worship counterfeit gods, for He is holy—separate from His creation.

In a remarkable and tragic miscalculation (and I’m probably being far too kind here—it smells more like purposeful and satanic deception) the rabbis eventually took this verse to mean that the name “Yahweh” couldn’t be spoken at all, for fear of inadvertently “taking it in vain.” The inevitable result was that the nation of Israel eventually forgot who their God was. Jews today call Him HaShem—“the Name.” And the loss was not confined to Israel: virtually every English Bible translation consistently renders the revealed name of God (Yahweh, which means: “I am”) as “the LORD”—neither a translation nor transliteration; it’s a blatant fraud. Thus Christians usually don’t know who God is, either. Not by name, anyway. It’s enough to make you swear.

(205)

Do not violate an oath or swear falsely. “You shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am Yahweh.” (Leviticus 19:12) This is more serious than the rabbinical wording suggests. “Swearing by Yahweh’s name falsely” is tantamount to “profaning” the name (shem: the character or reputation) of God. The Hebrew word for “to profane” is chahal: “to bore, that is, by implication, to wound, to dissolve; figuratively to profane a person, place or thing, to break one’s word.” (S) In other words, when we as believers in Yahweh don’t keep our word, we are inflicting wounds upon the very reputation of our God in the eyes of the world. Paul pointed out the damage such hypocrisy causes: “You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,’ as it is written.” (Romans 2:23-24; cf. Ezekiel 36:22-23)

Yahshua also had something to say about breaking your word, and it wasn’t pretty: “Blind guides! How terrible it will be for you! For you say that it means nothing to swear ‘by God’s Temple’—you can break that oath. But then you say that it is binding to swear ‘by the gold in the Temple.’ Blind fools! Which is greater, the gold, or the Temple that makes the gold sacred?” Tell you what: Let’s take the Temple out of the equation. Look out for a guy named Titus Vespasian. “And you say that to take an oath ‘by the altar’ can be broken, but to swear ‘by the gifts on the altar’ is binding! How blind! For which is greater, the gift on the altar, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? When you swear ‘by the altar,’ you are swearing by it and by everything on it. And when you swear ‘by the Temple,’ you are swearing by it and by God, who lives in it. And when you swear ‘by heaven,’ you are swearing by the throne of God and by God, who sits on the

throne.” (Matthew 23:16-22 NLT) His point, as usual, was to stop playing games with the truth. Our “yes” should mean yes, and our “no” should mean no.

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Decide in cases of annulment of vows according to the rules set forth in the Torah. “If a man makes a vow to Yahweh, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. Or if a woman makes a vow to Yahweh, and binds herself by some agreement while in her father’s house in her youth, and her father hears her vow and the agreement by which she has bound herself, and her father holds his peace, then all her vows shall stand, and every agreement with which she has bound herself shall stand. But if her father overrules her on the day that he hears, then none of her vows nor her agreements by which she has bound herself shall stand; and Yahweh will release her, because her father overruled her.” (Numbers 30:2-5) There are other specific cases, which we’ll look at in a moment, but I think we can see what’s going on from these first few verses. Note first that the rabbinical mitzvah is one hundred percent correct for a change: follow the Torah. Good call, guys. The most striking thing about this passage is there are slightly different rules for women than there are for men in the matter of making vows. The knee-jerk reaction of the feminists, of course, is to cry “foul!” But as usual, Yahweh is using our family relationships to teach us deeper truths about His love, protection, and covenants. This has nothing to do with “keeping women in their place.”

Basically, this is the rule: men who make vows must keep them. Period, end of story.

However, under certain circumstances, women’s vows may be annulled by the men whom Yahweh has assigned to protect them—their husbands or fathers. But there are limits even here. A protector has only a limited time to annul the vow his wife or daughter has made: he must decide on the day he hears of the matter; he may not “sleep on it.” This would have the effect of weeding out the “annulment material” to obviously frivolous, emotionally driven vows. Examples we might relate to: (1) A daughter vows to quit the cheerleading squad in order to spend more time on her studies—Dad knows there are pros and cons to weigh here; he would probably honor his daughter’s decision and let the vow stand. (2) A daughter promises to kill herself if Johnny doesn’t ask her to the big dance—Dad doesn’t have to think about it; he’ll annul the vow immediately.

Moses lists several other cases, all of which are similar: “If indeed she takes a husband, while bound by her vows or by a rash utterance from her lips by which she bound herself, and her husband hears it, and makes no response to her on the day that he hears, then her vows shall stand, and her agreements by which she bound herself shall stand. But if her husband overrules

her on the day that he hears it, he shall make void her vow which she took and what she uttered with her lips, by which she bound herself, and Yahweh will release her. Also any vow of a widow or a divorced woman, by which she has bound herself, shall stand against her.

“If she vowed in her husband’s house, or bound herself by an agreement with an oath, and her husband heard it, and made no response to her and did not overrule her, then all her vows shall stand, and every agreement by which she bound herself shall stand. But if her husband truly made them void on the day he heard them, then whatever proceeded from her lips concerning her vows or concerning the agreement binding her, it shall not stand; her husband has made them void, and Yahweh will release her. Every vow and every binding oath to afflict her soul, her husband may confirm it, or her husband may make it void. Now if her husband makes no response whatever to her from day to day, then he confirms all her vows or all the agreements that bind her; he confirms them, because he made no response to her on the day that he heard them. But if he does make them void after he has heard them, then he shall bear her guilt.”

(Numbers 30:6-15)

Okay, so what’s the point of all this? God isn’t saying, “Women are silly, emotional creatures who need a man around to keep them from doing stupid things.” Anybody who’s ever known a man knows that women don’t have a monopoly on stupid. This isn’t about men and women—it’s about Yahweh and us. As we have seen, He has ordained a structure for the family that symbolizes the relationship we share with Him. In this metaphor, Christ is the Head of the family, and we believers are His bride. Or put another way, Yahweh is our Father, and we are His children. The Father/Husband gives us a great deal of freedom, but because He loves us He’s willing to protect us from our own emotions, doubts, faults, wishful thinking, and yes, even stupidity. At one end of the spectrum, men say, “I love you, Father. I promise never to let you down again,” and they mean it; but He knows they won’t keep that promise, no matter how hard they try. On the other end of the spectrum, men go through periods of despair when God seems a million miles away, and in their darkest moments they deny that He even exists. But Yahweh is patient and merciful, willing to open the door of His kingdom to repentant, seeking hearts even at the eleventh hour. Did you catch the Messianic overtones in the last sentence? “If he does make [the vows] void after he has heard them, then he shall bear her guilt.” Our Protector (Yahshua) will bear the guilt we have incurred through our rash oaths and actions— actually, He already has.

(207)

Do not break a vow. “If a man makes a vow to Yahweh, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of

his mouth.” (Numbers 30:2) Whether a man’s vow is to Yahweh or to another man, he must not break his word. In point of fact, a vow to a person is a promise before God—He sees no difference. Of course, no one is forcing you to give your word. So consider carefully what you promise to do, including the implied promises of daily life—the “written-between-the-lines” stuff. Stand behind your workmanship. Be on time. Read the contract. Give your employer a full day’s work for a full day’s pay. Don’t take out a loan if you’re not sure if you can repay it— and that includes slapping down your credit card for something beyond your budget.

(208)

Swear by His [Yahweh’s] name truly. “You shall fear Yahweh your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name.” (Deuteronomy 10:20) When we take oaths, when we give our word, we are doing it before Yahweh, whether we realize it or not. As we saw in the Matthew 5 and 23 passages quoted above (#203 and 205), the Jews of Yahshua’s day had developed a complicated hierarchy of things you could “swear on” that gave you greater or lesser wiggle room in your truthfulness, depending on how exalted the object of the oath was perceived to be. Yahshua and Moses both condemned this practice. Here Moses says, in so many words, “When you swear, do it in Yahweh’s name. That way, you’ll be serious about telling the truth.” Of course, the rabbis subsequently arranged it so you couldn’t even speak His name, which made taking oaths on it a little difficult. But the verse at hand makes it clear: God’s people were to revere Him, serve Him, cling to Him, and appeal to Him as the absolute standard of truth.

(209)

Do not delay in fulfilling vows or bringing vowed or free-will offerings. “When you make a vow to Yahweh your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for Yahweh your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to Yahweh your God what you have promised with your mouth.” (Deuteronomy 23:22) For the umpteenth time: keep your word. Fulfill your promises. Perform your vows promptly. Don’t make promises you can’t keep, and if you can avoid it, don’t make commitments based on uncertain future events, for you don’t know what will happen tomorrow. Whatever you say or do will be weighed against Yahweh’s perfect standard of righteousness, so don’t take these matters lightly.

(210)

Let the land lie fallow in the Sabbatical year. “When you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a sabbath to Yahweh. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years

you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to Yahweh. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of rest for the land. And the sabbath produce of the land shall be food for you: for you, your male and female servants, your hired man, and the stranger who dwells with you, for your livestock and the beasts that are in your land—all its produce shall be for food.” (Leviticus 25:2-7). As we have seen (#170, 171, 190193, 199), the entire 25th chapter of Leviticus instructs the Children of Israel about the Sabbatical year and its heavy-duty, industrial-strength cousin, Jubilee. On the surface, this is a simple, low-tech way to ward off soil depletion. If the Sabbath was practiced faithfully, the land could be expected to produce more bountiful crops in six years than it would in seven if worked all the time without a break. Beyond that, it taught the Israelites to trust Yahweh. It took real faith to abstain from planting, or gathering the volunteer crop, and relying instead on Yahweh to make the provision of the previous year’s sufficient for their needs. In other words, the Law of the Sabbath Year flies in the face of human logic. It requires faith, just as abstaining from gathering manna on the Sabbath day required faith on the part of the exodus generation. It’s the same lesson, scaled up.

Sadly, there’s no Biblical indication that Israel ever systematically kept the Law of the Sabbath Year or Jubilee. As a matter of fact, the Israelites’ eventual expulsion from the land was due in part to their failure in this very thing. We read in II Chronicles 36:20-21: “And those who escaped from the sword he [Nebuchadnezzar] carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.” In other words, the Jews had neglected the Sabbatical Year and Jubilee for 490 years.

Was God really that concerned about soil nutrient depletion, or was there something else, something deeper, at stake here? Yahweh often comes down hard on Biblical “players” when they mess up His pictures. For example, Moses was denied entrance to the promised land because he struck the rock (a picture of Christ) instead of speaking to it to obtain life-giving water, as he had been told to do (Numbers 20:7-13). And I think that’s what’s going on here. Israel’s failure to let the land enjoy its sabbaths destroyed a picture, a prophetic metaphor, of something Yahweh was trying to teach us about His plan of redemption. The whole idea of the Sabbath Year was to trust God for our provision when it seemed more logical to work for it ourselves. If we apply this principle to our reconciliation with Yahweh, it all becomes clear. Every religion on earth says you’ve got to work for it, either with the giving of alms, or the

performance of rituals, or the practice of self-denial, etc. But Yahweh says, “In the end, you can’t work for it. You can only trust Me to provide for you.” Provide what? Eternal life—an everlasting relationship with our loving Heavenly Father.

But what’s the meaning of the six-plus-one formula? We saw it in God’s description of the creation, and again in the Fourth Commandment (the Sabbath day), and now here in the Sabbath Year. What is Yahweh’s point? Taking into account Psalm 90:4 and II Peter 3:8, where the principle is stated that with Yahweh one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as one day, it appears that God is telling us about the timing of His redemptive plan. Man will have six thousand years to work, learn, grow, and figure things out. But on the seventh day (i.e., the seventh millennium) our work will be superfluous. We will enter the Kingdom through the graciousness of the King, or not at all.

(211)

Cease from tilling the land in the Sabbatical year. “Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat.” (Exodus 23:10-11) If you’ll recall from the previous mitzvah, what grew voluntarily, either grain or fruit, was to be left unharvested during the Sabbatical year. This mirror passage in Exodus refines our understanding a bit. It seems that though the landowner wasn’t to harvest what grew of its own accord for profit, the poor could still gather what they needed to keep body and soul together. It makes sense: since they didn’t own the land, it didn’t matter how bountiful the crops had been in the previous years—they still didn’t have any reserves. The rules, presumably, were unchanged from other years—they couldn’t harvest with a sickle as if they owned the place. But neither they nor the beasts of the field would starve to death, either.

Is there a counterpart to the “poor” in Yahweh’s plan of redemption as pictured in the Law of the Sabbatical Year? Perhaps. The “poor” of the earth are those who haven’t formed a saving relationship with Yahshua—not those actively opposed to Him, but rather the merely “lost,” the searching, the hungry. They see the servants of the Landowner (Yahweh) working busily doing “religious things” most of the time: giving alms, gathering for worship, seeking for the Master’s lost sheep—that sort of thing. Though the servants know about and rely on His grace, this fact is sometimes hard for outsiders to see because of all their busyness. But the Landowner instructs them to occasionally leave the work and trust His provision—to favor Mary over Martha. If the “servants” do this, the “poor” will have an opportunity to see the trusting relationship the servants have with their Master. If, however, the servants ignore the

Landowner's directives and keep on practicing "churchianity," the trust that should be evident will be hidden, and the poor will remain hungry and destitute.

(212)

Don't till the ground in the Sabbatical year. "In the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to Yahweh." (Leviticus 25:4) This is merely the negative statement of affirmative Mitzvot #210 and #211. It's not really a separate precept.

(213)

Do not do any work on the trees in the Sabbatical year. "[In the seventh year] you shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. (Leviticus 25:4) This isn't a separate precept either. Yahweh didn't provide an exhaustive list of the things you couldn't do during the Sabbatical year because His intended meaning was quite clear and simple: Don't provide for yourself—I will provide for you. Just relax and trust Me. His precepts are usually detailed enough for us to understand the concept, but not so detailed that "religious practice" is required to carry them out. That is man's fault.

(214)

Do not reap the aftermath that grows in the Sabbatical year in the same way it is reaped in other years. "What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of rest for the land." (Leviticus 25:5) Maimonides, it seems, is trying to pull a fast one here. Yahweh is not talking about not harvesting the aftermath, that which is left over after the first pass by the reapers. He's saying "During the Sabbatical Year, leave the fields, vineyards and orchards untended—period." For that matter, even in a normal year, going back over the fields with a fine-tooth comb wasn't supposed to be done, because the gleanings were to be left for the poor. See Mitzvah #41: "...nor shall you gather any gleanings from your harvest." (Leviticus 23:22) If we trust Yahweh, we won't obsess over every bushel—or every dollar. When we purposely let some of our income "slip through our fingers" in the interests of our fellow man, trusting God to look after us anyway, Yahweh is honored.

(215)

Do not gather the fruit of the tree in the Sabbatical year in the same way it is gathered in other years. "You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of rest for the land." (Leviticus 25:4-5) Again, the precise wording of the rabbinical mitzvah is calculated to provide a possible loophole for the landowner. The "way it is gathered" has nothing

to do with it. God's precept is clear: don't harvest your crop at all during the Sabbatical year. The poor may come in and gather the volunteer crop to sustain themselves, but no work is to be done by the landowner or his staff, and no profit is to be made from the bounty of the land. "The seventh year you shall let [your land] rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove. (Exodus 23:11) The principle applies equally to all of the fruit of the soil—grain fields, orchards, vineyards, and olive groves. We are to be reminded that all of this is a gift from Yahweh. We have nothing that He did not provide. Including our salvation.

(216)

Sound the Ram's horn in the Sabbatical year. "Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you." (Leviticus 25:9-10) The ram's horn, or shofar, was not blown to inaugurate the Sabbatical year

(as the mitzvah says), but rather Jubilee—the fiftieth year, or more to the point, a special

Sabbath year immediately following the seventh Sabbatical year in the series. (We'll discuss Jubilee more fully under mitzvot #221-226.) Although Yahweh's mandated calendar year began in the spring (on the first day of Nisan, two weeks before Passover—see Exodus 12:2), Yahweh set the beginning of Jubilee at the sixth miqra, the Day of Atonement, on Tishri 10—in the fall. It should be noted that this is not the day celebrated as "Jewish New Year," a.k.a. Rosh Hashanah, which is a rabbinical error left over from the Babylonian captivity set to coincide with the fifth miqra, the Feast of Trumpets. Sufficiently confused?

We need to ask ourselves: what's the connection (in Yahweh's mind) between Jubilee and the Day of Atonement? As we shall see, Jubilee is the day of liberty—a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have the slate wiped clean. Debts are forgiven, captives are set free, and lands revert to their original owners. And the Day of Atonement is its spiritual counterpart: the sins of the nation of Israel were covered—atoned for, counted as having been satisfied—through the sacrifices offered on this day, once each year. What we see is a picture of total freedom, total forgiveness, provided by Yahweh through the sacrifice of His Anointed, Yahshua, in the year 31 A.D. Yahshua Himself predicted this in His Nazareth sermon recorded in Luke 4:16-21, in which He applied Isaiah 61 to Himself. That was 28 A.D. which was a Sabbatical year.

“Jubilee,” by the way, is a transliteration of the Hebrew yobel, meaning “the blast of a horn, specifically the signal of trumpets; hence the instrument itself and the festival thus introduced: —jubilee, ram’s horn, trumpet.” (S)

(217)

Release debts in the seventh year. “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called Yahweh’s release.” (Deuteronomy 15:1-2) Part of the Sabbatical Year program was the general release of debts. There are some underlying assumptions that need to be kept in mind, of course: first, this was designed to be done within the borders of the Land, among Israelites exclusively, in the simple, closely knit agrarian society that existed in the centuries after the exodus. It’s clear from the verses immediately following these that gentile borrowers were not to be released from their debts (see #57 and 58). Second, it’s also pretty clear that

the precept was never intended to be pressed into service in a society with the culture of debt to which we have subjected ourselves today. Yahweh wasn’t advocating buying a new car on credit or running up the balance on your credit card just before the Sabbath year so you’d be “forgiven” under the Law. This wasn’t a license to steal. Third, there were no such things as institutional lenders in those days. If someone borrowed some money or provisions from his neighbor, it was because he had fallen on hard times—presumably through no particular fault of his own (laziness, drunkenness, etc.), and apparently as a temporary condition—as in “Loan me a few shekels until the barley harvest.”

Still, I’d like to see those who insist that we must all keep the letter of the Torah in order to work our way into Yahweh’s good graces toe the line on this one. They’re generally all too happy to abstain from pork, wear the tzeit, and worship on the seventh day—and deride those who don’t. But loaning freely and then turning around and forgiving the debts just because a date on the calendar has passed is generally considered to be too much to ask. Sorry, guys. You can’t have it both ways. Even Maimonides, who weasels out of the underlying principle in favor of the letter of the Law every chance he gets, has this one right.

It’s the underlying principle, of course, that runs no risk of being rendered obsolete by changing times and cultural shifts. It’s the underlying principle that will endure forever with “every jot and tittle” intact. In the case of the Law of the Sabbatical Year, the principle is that the day is coming when all who belong to Yahweh will be forgiven their debts and freed from their chains.

(218)

Do not demand return of a loan after the Sabbatical year has passed. “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called Yahweh’s release.” (Deuteronomy 15:1-2)

Maimonides is extrapolating here, but okay, he’s made a good point. A debt forgiven under this Law is not just postponed for a year. It’s eliminated, erased from the books, permanently expunged. Yahweh holds no grudges. If he has forgiven our sins, they are indeed forgiven, past, present, and future, never to be remembered or used against us ever again. The only way this is possible is that the debts are not technically forgiven—rather, they’re paid off. If a bank “writes off” a bad debt, the loss is eventually spread over the whole customer base in the form of higher interest rates (or if the government has absorbed the loss, in the form of a hidden tax called inflation). Everybody pays; everybody suffers. But in God’s economy, the debt isn’t written off. Rather, God’s own Son has paid our debt Himself—paid it off in full with the most valuable commodity in existence, His own blood.

(219)

Do not refrain from making a loan to a poor man because of the release of loans in the Sabbatical Year. “Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,’ and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to Yahweh against you, and it become sin among you. You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing Yahweh your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.’”

(Deuteronomy 15:9-11) We’ve already seen this passage in the context of taking care of the poor (#51). It should be an embarrassing indictment to the preachers of the “Health and Wealth” doctrine (i.e., that God wants all His followers to be rich and successful in every way, and if you’re not, you haven’t shown enough faith—by giving generously so this TV ministry of ours might stay on the air; hallelujah, praise Jee-suzz). In stark contrast with this sort of foolishness, Yahweh says, “The poor will never cease from the land.” Why does He allow some of His followers to suffer poverty while He blesses others with riches? It should be obvious by now: He wants those of us that He’s blessed with this world’s goods to give freely to His children without them, for by doing so, we are reflecting the attributes of the God whose mercy has been freely given to us.

In the context of the prophetic underpinnings of the Sabbatical Year, the lesson seems clear: as the time grows short, let us not cease to freely distribute the real wealth—the truth concerning the salvation Yahweh has made available to us. The “poor” in this case are those without this truth—the lost world. As with Yahweh’s entire “welfare” program, the poor aren’t forced to accept a handout. They are, rather, to be active participants in their own redemption. Belief is their prerogative. Remember, Yahweh never abridges our right to choose Him—or not to.

(220)

To assemble the people to hear the Torah at the close of the seventh year (Deut. 31:12)
(affirmative)

Assemble the people to hear the Torah at the close of the seventh year. “And Moses commanded them, saying: ‘At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before Yahweh your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear Yahweh your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear Yahweh your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.’” (Deuteronomy 31:10-13) It’s significant that a periodic public reading of the Torah—the whole shootin’ match—was timed to coincide with the forgiveness and freedom wrought by the Law of the Sabbatical Year. And it’s doubly significant that this rehearsal of the Law was to take place at the Feast of Tabernacles. Three separate concepts have been woven together by the command of Yahweh—our release from debt, the Word of God that releases us, and the seventh and final miqra, prophetic of God’s promise to “tabernacle” or camp out among us for a thousand years upon the earth. The closer you look, the more seamlessly flawless the plan of God is shown to be.

But wait: it gets better. Remember back in Mitzvah #216 where we observed that Jubilee? If you’ve been keeping score, you’ve noticed that many of the same things are mandated for both the Sabbatical Year and Jubilee—the release from debt, freedom from servitude, the rest from our labors, and the miraculous provision of our needs by Yahweh (see #226 for the one exception). But with the association of the Sabbatical Year with the Feast of Tabernacles, as we see here, it becomes clear that Yahweh is implying a significant distinction.

In practice, by the time Jubilee rolled around (the year immediately following the seventh Sabbatical Year), there would have been precious little left to restore or forgive. Jubilee should seem like a mere continuation of the same blessed state of affairs. And that is precisely what

we find in Yahweh's prophetic program. After the thousand-year Millennial reign of Christ (beginning with Aviv) the redeemed of God will move—after a few hiccups—directly into eternity. (The hiccups? Yahshua has a few last-minute details to take care of—the last of man's rebellions, the Great White Throne judgment, and Satan's final incarceration.) Whereas the Feast of Tabernacles (corresponding to the Sabbatical Year) is prophetic of God dwelling with man during the Millennium, the Day of Atonement speaks of the forgiveness of sin—that which enables us to dwell forever in sweet fellowship with our God in His new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem. Like the scapegoat of old, our transgressions will have been eternally banished. And we shall at last be holy, separated from our sin and separated to our Heavenly Father.

In 2009 at Sukkot in Jerusalem, myself and three other men read the entire Torah at the place where the water gate once stood near the Gihon Spring . We fulfilled the command to read the Torah at Sukkot during the Sabbatical year. Many walked by and wondered what we were doing and some listened for a moment.

(221)

To count the years of the Jubilee by years and by cycles of seven years (Lev. 25:8) (affirmative).

Count the years of the Jubilee by years and by cycles of seven years. "You shall count seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven sabbaths of years shall be to you forty-nine years. Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants." (Leviticus 25:8-10) Here we see the timeline of Jubilee. Presumably commencing when the children of Israel entered the Land of Promise (verse 2) they were to keep track of time in "septades," cycles of seven years —six years of regular activity followed by one "Sabbatical" year in which the land was to rest, etc. After seven of these seven-year cycles, an extra Sabbath year, called yobel or Jubilee, would be celebrated. Thus as we reckon time in terms of decades and centuries in our culture, the Hebrews related to the passing of years in terms of septades and Jubilees. The last Jubilee year was 1996 CE.

Yahweh has never forced mankind to believe in Him. He has always arranged things so that trust was an essential element in the formation of a relationship with Him. To do otherwise would abridge our ability to choose to love Him, and that's what He desires—fellowship with people who have chosen to love Him, who want to be with Him. This explains why He has been somewhat coy in communicating His plan of redemption to us. If he left us no intellectual or emotional wiggle room, we would have no choice but to accept Him. So He used metaphors,

pictures, types, symbols, and dress rehearsals to demonstrate His plan: they're available, even obvious, to honest and diligent seekers after truth, but opaque and mysterious to those who don't really care. The pattern of sevens we see here is ubiquitous in scripture, from God's description of creation in Genesis to the bowl judgments of Revelation. The number seven (including sevenfold, sevens, and seventh) occurs over 600 times in scripture, more than any other number. To dismiss the recurrence of the six-plus-one pattern as coincidence is therefore highly presumptive.

But what does it mean? I can't claim to have all the answers, but it seems obvious and unavoidable to me that Yahweh is telling us (those who will listen) that He has ordained seven thousand years as the time of man upon the earth—that is, seven thousand years will pass from the fall of Adam to the Last Judgment. In other words, His plan of redemption will take seven thousand years to unfold. And the six-one split? For the first six thousand years, God will reveal Himself primarily through the pictures and symbols I mentioned earlier. But during the seventh Millennium, He Himself will dwell on earth among us, reigning as King of kings.

Where we used to live by faith, we will then live by sight, for God will dwell among us.

It's conceivable, of course, that I've missed the whole point, that there's some other explanation. But if I'm right, you should be aware that the seventh millennium is due to begin on Aviv in the year 2045 which is also the Year of Jubilee.

(222)

To keep the Jubilee year holy by resting and letting the land lie fallow (Lev. 25:10) (affirmative).

Keep the Jubilee year holy by resting and letting the land lie fallow. "...It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family. That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee to you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of its own accord." (Leviticus 25:10-11) In this respect, as with so many others, Jubilee is just like any Sabbatical year. The point is that Yahweh has provided what's needful beforehand. It's up to the child of Israel to recognize the bounty of God during the six normal years, putting a portion of the produce of the land aside for the Sabbath year. It's up to Yahweh to make sure what was set aside is sufficient for the Israelite's needs when he can no longer work. Clearly, this is all a picture of God's plan of salvation. We rely on Yahweh's Messiah for our redemption; Yahweh makes His sacrifice sufficient for us.

(223)

Not to cultivate the soil nor do any work on the trees, in the Jubilee Year (Lev. 25:11) (negative).

Do not cultivate the soil nor do any work on the trees, in the Jubilee Year. “That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee to you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of its own accord, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine.” (Leviticus 25:11) This is basically the negative permutation of the previous mitzvah. The rules apply equally to fields, orchards, groves, and vines: don’t plow, don’t plant, don’t prune, don’t harvest, and don’t gather. When you’ve reached the Sabbatical year (read: the Millennium) or the year of Jubilee (read: the eternal state), it’s too late to cultivate a relationship with Yahweh, or harvest the fruit of the Spirit. You will have already made your choice (during the “normal” years) to trust Him or not.

(224)

Not to reap the aftermath of the field that grew of itself in the Jubilee Year, in the same way as in other years (Lev. 25:11) (negative).

Do not reap the aftermath of the field that grew of itself in the Jubilee Year, in the same way as in other years. “That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee to you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of its own accord, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine.” (Leviticus 25:11) If this Jubilee precept sounds like déjà vu all over again, it’s because we’ve already seen the identical mitzvah when discussing the Sabbatical year (see #214). The point is, Yahweh’s lessons for mankind are practically identical for Jubilee and the Sabbatical year: it’s too late to start trusting God after the big day has arrived. The minor differences we see are due to the fact that during the Millennium, there will still be mortal, earthbound populations—the progeny of the Tribulation believers who somehow made it through to the end alive—in addition to the immortals, those who, whether dead or alive, were gathered together with their Savior. In the eternal state, however, every believer will inhabit his immortal, incorruptible, resurrection body (see I Corinthians 15).

(225)

Not to gather the fruit of the tree in the Jubilee Year, in the same way as in other years (Lev. 25:11) (negative).

Do not gather the fruit of the tree in the Jubilee Year, in the same way as in other years. “That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee to you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of its own accord, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine.” (Leviticus 25:11) Yeah, like I said, trees, vines, fields—it’s all the same metaphor. Aren’t you glad Maimonides made a separate and distinct “law” out of this? We might have missed it altogether.

(226)

To grant redemption to the land in the Jubilee year (Lev. 25:24) (affirmative).

Grant redemption of the land in the Jubilee year. “The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me. And in all the land of your possession you shall grant redemption of the land.” (Leviticus 25:23-24) This is the sole functional difference between the Sabbatical year and Jubilee: “leased” land did not revert to its original owners at the end of the Sabbatical year. This only happened at Jubilee. Therefore, it behooves us to determine what the land symbolized. To me, it can mean only one thing in the grand scheme of things: the land symbolized the earth itself—the whole world. It is our inheritance, to be sure, but “The earth is Yahweh’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.” Beyond that, we, through the sin of our father Adam, “sold” the earth to Satan back in the Garden of Eden. Through the law of Jubilee, Yahweh is arranging for us to get it back, to reclaim our inheritance. In case you haven’t noticed, Satan hasn’t been a very responsible tenant for the last six thousand years. And in anticipation of Yahshua’s return, he intends to trash the place even more than he already has.

Now, here’s the scary part. Satan’s time isn’t up when Christ returns to reign in glory. He’ll still have a thousand years left to go before his lease expires. That’s the bad news. The good news is that his lawlessness has finally caught up with him, and he’s going to prison for the duration of his lease. When he gets out, however, he’s going to go right back to his old tricks, deceiving the nations and unifying them in battle against Yahshua and His people—it’s the battle of Magog all over again; with the same results, I might add (see Revelation 20:7-9). Only then will Satan’s “lease” be up, and he will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 20:10).

The Law of Jubilee teaches us that our spirits won’t be the only thing in creation that God will redeem. He will also buy back the very earth beneath our feet.

The Court and Judicial Procedure

The Rule of Law

The Torah covers more than lofty theological issues. It also condescends to teach us how Yahweh feels about the little things, the intimate facets of our lives, through the most mundane details of human interaction. His Law shows us that God values fair play, justice, and honesty in our dealings with one another. As usual, we could pretty much just skip this section if we were able to master one basic principle: love one another.

(227)

To appoint judges and officers in every community of Israel (Deut. 16:18) (affirmative).

Appoint judges and officers in every community of Israel. “You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which Yahweh your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which Yahweh your God is giving you.” (Deuteronomy 16:18-20) God knew that when His people had settled in the Land, disputes would arise from time to time. He therefore instructed that in any settlement big enough to have a city wall and a “gate” where the men of the place could come to discuss their issues, judges and officers would be appointed to settle these issues. A judge (Hebrew: shaphat) is one who pronounces sentence (either for or against); by implication he is one who vindicates or punishes. An officer (shoter), properly speaking, is a scribe, who would function in this case as a magistrate of the court. So the first thing we see is that Yahweh is requiring that lawful justice be readily available to all. Vigilante justice—doing what is right in your own eyes, taking the law into your own hands—was not to be practiced in Israel. These judges and officers would be chosen not by God but by the people of their cities: “You shall appoint...” It would thus behoove the citizens to choose their judges wisely.

Moses gives the simplest of instructions to the judges and officers: they were to judge fairly, justly, without being influenced by conflicts of interest. Bribes of any kind were strictly forbidden, including the subtle or hidden pressures to pervert justice—family relationships, wealth, or social influence. They were not to show partiality, but were to judge strictly on the facts of the case and the Law of God.

(228)

Not to appoint as a judge, a person who is not well versed in the laws of the Torah, even if he is expert in other branches of knowledge (Deut. 1:17) (CCN64).

Do not appoint as a judge a person who is not well versed in the laws of the Torah, even if he is expert in other branches of knowledge. “...So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and knowledgeable men, and made them heads over you, leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, leaders of tens, and officers for your tribes. Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, ‘Hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. 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 1:15-17) In this passage, Moses is recounting how and why judges and officers were originally appointed among the Israelites in

the days following the exodus. (See Exodus 18:13-26. Interestingly, the original idea of “regional” judges was not Yahweh’s but Jethro’s—Moses’ father-in-law. It’s pretty clear that God likes it when we think creatively within the framework of His truth.) The permanent judicial system outlined in #227 is an outgrowth and extension of this system.

All Israelites were to be well versed in the Torah, being steeped in its truths from childhood. So there is a subtle perversion in the rabbinical mitzvot here. Knowledge of God’s Law was never intended to be the domain of the privileged few, the “ruling class” for whom divine knowledge brought power, wealth, and prestige. Granted, certain men are naturally more gifted in wisdom and discernment (the ability to perceive the truth of a judicial case) than others, and it was these who were to be selected as judges. But everyone was supposed to know the Torah backward and forward. I can’t honestly say I disagree with Maimonides’ mitzvah, because it’s patently good advice. But it’s man’s wisdom, not God’s instruction: Yahweh never actually said this.

(229)

To adjudicate cases of purchase and sale (Lev. 25:14) (CCA67).

Adjudicate cases of purchase and sale. “In this Year of Jubilee, each of you shall return to his possession. And if you sell anything to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor’s hand, you shall not oppress one another. According to the number of years after the Jubilee you shall buy from your neighbor, and according to the number of years of crops he shall sell to you.

According to the multitude of years you shall increase its price, and according to the fewer number of years you shall diminish its price; for he sells to you according to the number of the years of the crops. Therefore you shall not oppress one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am Yahweh your God.” (Leviticus 25:13-17) “Adjudicate” is not a word we use much anymore. It means: “to sit in judgment; to give a judicial decision.” The context of the supporting passage for this mitzvah, however, doesn’t even suggest a judicial party or arbitrating authority who’s supposed to be in charge of setting prices. Am I reading too much into this, or do we have another rabbinical power grab going on here?

I’m sure you’ll recognize this as part of the Law of Jubilee. All Yahweh is saying is that the value of the piece of land being “sold” should be based on the number of years left (or more to the point, the number of crops it will yield) until Jubilee, for at that time it will revert back to its original owner. The passage refers only to land, not to other items or commodities that might be purchased, and Yahweh makes it quite clear that there is no such thing as a land

“purchase” or “sale” in theocratic Israel—there are only leases. No “adjudication” is called for; this is a matter of private agreement between the lessee and the lessor. See Mitzvot #210-226 for a more complete discussion of the Laws of the Sabbatical Year and Jubilee.

(230)

To judge cases of liability of a paid depository (Ex. 22:9) (affirmative).

Judge cases of liability of a paid depository. “If a man delivers to his neighbor money or articles to keep, and it is stolen out of the man’s house, if the thief is found, he shall pay double. If the thief is not found, then the master of the house shall be brought to the judges to see whether he has put his hand into his neighbor’s goods. For any kind of trespass, whether it concerns an ox, a donkey, a sheep, or clothing, or for any kind of lost thing which another claims to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whomever the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor. If a man delivers to his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep, and it dies, is hurt, or driven away, no one seeing it, then an oath of Yahweh shall be between them both, that he has not put his hand into his neighbor’s goods; and the owner of it shall accept that, and he shall not make it good. But if, in fact, it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to the owner of it. If it is torn to pieces by a beast, then he shall bring it as evidence, and he shall not make good what was torn.” (Exodus 22:7-13) First, let us note that the supporting passage says nothing about the depository (the one to whom the goods were entrusted for safe keeping) necessarily being paid, although he could be. The issue here is trustworthiness, whether in a professional capacity or not.

Here’s the scenario. Party A needs someone to look after his valuables, so he entrusts them to Party B (who in modern terms could be a banker, a house-sitter, a pet-groomer, a friend who has a little extra space in his garage or pasture—any number of things). Alternately, Party B temporarily needs something Party A has, so Mr. A either loans or rents the necessities to Mr. B. But then Party A’s belongings get stolen or damaged while they were in Party B’s custody.

Who’s responsible? Who makes up the loss? It depends.

In cases of theft, the thief must repay the owner double (see #275). The rub is, the thief isn’t always apprehended. There’s also a possibility that the theft is an “inside job,” that Party B himself has stolen it. It becomes a matter for the impartial judge to decide who is guilty. In cases of lost livestock (which was a primary concern to Moses’ immediate audience because livestock constituted most of the wealth), the evidence of the case had to speak for itself—if there was any. In the absence of any clear cut evidence, the trustee was required to swear an oath before Yahweh attesting to his innocence in the matter. It was presumed in this society that no one

would perjure himself before God Almighty merely to steal a sheep. Too bad we can't presume things like this any more.

The rules are pretty self-explanatory, and they're the epitome of fairness. Revenge is not part of the formula, nor is the "rehabilitation" of the guilty party, but restitution is. It's an eye opener to compare the Law of God to the alternative. In America, we throw an embezzler in prison, leaving the wronged party high and dry and costing the taxpayers a fortune. In Islam, he'd get his hand chopped off, a cruel and pointless waste of life. Yahweh's instructions are practical, fair, and, in comparison with the alternative, merciful to both victim and perpetrator.

(231)

To adjudicate cases of loss for which a gratuitous borrower is liable (Ex. 22:13-14) (affirmative).

Adjudicate cases of loss for which a gratuitous borrower is liable. "...But if, in fact, it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to the owner of it. If it is torn to pieces by a beast, then he shall bring it as evidence, and he shall not make good what was torn. And if a man borrows anything from his neighbor, and it becomes injured or dies, the owner of it not being with it, he shall surely make it good. If its owner was with it, he shall not make it good; if it was hired, it came for its hire." (Exodus 22:12-15) This is a continuation of the previous mitzvah. At its heart, the principle is that a man shall be held responsible for things that are entrusted to his care, but not for events that are entirely outside his control. Negligence is penalized; misfortune is not. Dishonesty is punished; bad luck is forgiven. And there's another principle: with profit comes risk. A man who rents out his team of oxen is less likely to be entitled to restitution if

one gets hurt than a man who loans his neighbor his team with no thought of profit. In the end, though, each case had to be weighed on its own merit. That's why it was so important to choose wise judges.

(232)

To adjudicate cases of inheritances (Num. 27:8-11) (CCA73).

Adjudicate cases of inheritances. "If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the relative closest to him in his family, and he shall possess it. And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, just as Yahweh commanded Moses." (Numbers 27:8-11) As we will see in so many of the mitzvot in this section, no judge is necessary to "adjudicate" what is being instructed here.

The customs concerning inheritance were well established: the estate was normally to be divided among the sons, with the firstborn receiving a double portion—even if the firstborn was the son of an unloved wife (remember Leah?). See Deuteronomy 21:17. The Numbers passage describes the order of succession in those rare cases where the father had no sons. The main idea was to keep the land in the family, so it would go to the nearest relative— starting with the man’s daughter. (Daughters were not second-class citizens in Israel. Yahweh took care of them. But normally, they would marry men who had received inheritances of their own.)

Why was all this so important to Yahweh? The law of inheritance was designed to keep the land in one family generation after generation, and we’ve already seen in the law of Jubilee that lands could not permanently change hands. The Land, one’s inheritance, is symbolic of our salvation, our eternal life. It is a gift from God. But the children do not take possession of the inheritance until the father dies. Thus the inheritance of the land is a metaphor for Yahshua’s death enabling us to come into our inheritance of everlasting life—a legacy that’s guaranteed. Just as the Land belongs to Yahweh and He gave it to Israel as a permanent possession, life itself is Yahweh’s as well, and He gives it as a permanent possession to those who choose to abide in Him.

(233)

To judge cases of damage caused by an uncovered pit (Ex. 21:33-34) (affirmative).

Judge cases of damage caused by an uncovered pit. “And if a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls in it, the owner of the pit shall make it good; he shall give money to their owner, but the dead animal shall be his.” (Exodus 21:33-34) In another example of Yahweh’s practical fairness in all things, here is God’s take on negligence. “You break it, you bought it,” or words to that effect. Looking on the bright side, though, the negligent landowner got to keep the carcass. He couldn’t eat it, however, even if it was kosher (oxen were, donkeys weren’t). As we saw in Mitzvah #156, animals that died by accident could be sold to gentiles, but they weren’t to be consumed by Jews. Bottom line: don’t create conditions that are potentially hazardous.

There is a spiritual application as well, if only we’ll bother to look for it. We should be careful not to place “stumbling blocks” before our brothers. If what we do in the name of “Christian liberty” creates a pitfall for him, a crisis of conscience, we just might find ourselves with his spiritual carcass on our hands.

(234)

To judge cases of injuries caused by beasts (Ex. 21:35-36) (affirmative).

Judge cases of injuries caused by beasts. “If one man’s ox hurts another’s, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide the money from it; and the dead ox they shall also divide. Or if it was known that the ox tended to thrust in time past, and its owner has not kept it confined, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead animal shall be his own.” (Exodus 21:35-36) Here is another facet to the law of negligence, this time requiring a judgment call: was the offending ox a repeat offender? And if so, did its owner make any provision for keeping it where it couldn’t cause any damage? Responsibility is based upon what the owner knew (or should have known) and what he did with that knowledge. Every parole board member should have these words engraved in his mind. For they are responsible for the “dumb brute beasts” they release upon an unsuspecting society. Beyond that, there are a myriad of modern practical applications. Has your pet dog shown aggressive tendencies? Are you driving a car with bad brakes or worn tires? Do you send your children to school knowing that they’re coming down with a cold? Your knowledge of potential problems makes you responsible to prevent them from becoming real ones. Yahweh is not impressed with what you consider convenient or easy; He’s only concerned with what’s right.

(235)

To adjudicate cases of damage caused by trespass of cattle (Ex. 22:4) (affirmative).

Adjudicate cases of damage caused by trespass of cattle. “If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed, and lets loose his animal, and it feeds in another man’s field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard.” (Exodus 22:5) You are responsible for the actions of the things you own. Israel, of course, was an agrarian society, so the principle was couched in agricultural terms—cattle, sheep, and goats getting out and eating the neighbors’ crops. Note that Yahweh said that the offending animal’s owner was to repay his neighbor with the best of his produce. Our neighbor must never be allowed to suffer loss because of our negligence.

(236)

To adjudicate cases of damage caused by fire (Ex. 22:5) (affirmative).

Adjudicate cases of damage caused by fire. “If fire breaks out and catches in thorns, so that stacked grain, standing grain, or the field is consumed, he who kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.” (Exodus 22:6) Another corollary to the law of responsibility is seen here. Fire is inherently dangerous and prone to accidental spreading. True, there are perfectly legitimate

reasons for starting them, but the one who does so is responsible for keeping it under control. Negligence can cause sweeping destruction and even loss of life. Yahweh makes it clear that accidental or not, losses caused by runaway fires must be paid by the one who set the fire in the first place. Restitution is not to be borne by the victim of a negligent act, and certainly not by the victim of arson.

It is not without cause that the tongue is compared in scripture to a flame. A word once spoken is as hard to contain as a prairie fire in a stiff breeze. A rumor whispered in the ear can ruin lives and destroy homes. And make no mistake, Yahweh holds us responsible for what we say: “He who kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.”

(237)

To adjudicate cases of damage caused by a gratuitous depositary (Ex. 22:6-7) (affirmative).

Adjudicate cases of damage caused by a gratuitous depositary. “If a man delivers to his neighbor money or articles to keep, and it is stolen out of the man’s house, if the thief is found, he shall pay double. If the thief is not found, then the master of the house shall be brought to the judges to see whether he has put his hand into his neighbor’s goods.” (Exodus 22:7-8) We’ve already looked at this concept (see Mitzvah #230). The rabbis are trying to draw a distinction between determining liability and assessing damage—a distinction that isn’t really there in scripture. As before, we see that the guilty party is to make reparations over and above (double in this case, as many as four or five-fold in certain others) what was taken; the victim is not to be left holding the bag. This is one of the cases where the judges (see Mitzvah #227) would be called upon to weigh the evidence and render a verdict as to the guilt or innocence of the trustee.

(238)

To adjudicate other cases between a plaintiff and a defendant (Ex. 22:8) (affirmative).

Adjudicate other cases between a plaintiff and a defendant. “For any kind of trespass, whether it concerns an ox, a donkey, a sheep, or clothing, or for any kind of lost thing which another claims to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whomever the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor.” (Exodus 22:9) This is the kind of thing that caused the whole judicial system to be set up in the first place (Exodus 18:13-26)—minor disputes between individuals that the people were bringing before Moses to decide upon. The judges that he appointed (a body which eventually morphed into the Sanhedrin) were tasked with deciding who was innocent, and who was lying. Frivolous lawsuits were probably kept to a

minimum by the provision that the losing party—plaintiff or defendant—would have to pay double the value of the “bone of contention” to his neighbor.

It’s worth noting (again) that many of the provisions of the Law did not require the

“adjudication” indicated in Maimonides’ version of things. They were cut and dried: Your goat ate my grapes, so you’ll have to make good my losses. Honesty and fair play were to be the normal state of affairs in Yahweh’s nation. Only in cases of honest dispute (It wasn’t my goat— I think it was Yakob’s) would the judges need to be called. It was never Yahweh’s intention to foster a litigious society forced to rely on an increasingly powerful judicial (read: rabbinical) class for esoteric interpretations of arcane points of law that only they were qualified to pontificate upon. It was supposed to be simple: Love Me; love your neighbor.

(239)

Not to curse a judge (Ex. 22:27) (CCN63).

Don’t curse a judge. “You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.” (Exodus 22:28) That seems simple enough, but it’s not. Maimonides and his fellow rabbis were, of course, stressing the idea that they, being the self-appointed “rulers of the people,” were not to be cursed. Their mitzvah is a self-serving expedient. But the supporting verse leads us to other conclusions, if we’re willing to look at what the words actually mean. Who is not to be cursed? The word translated “ruler” here is nasi, from a root meaning “to lift up.” It means “an exalted one, a king or sheik.” It’s usually translated “prince” in the KJV. The judges of Israel were never characterized as kings or exalted ones, however; they were supposed to judge the “small matters” (Exodus 18:22) that arose between the people. In contrast, the nasi was to (in the words of Jethro to Moses) “stand before God for the people, so that you [i.e., Moses, the de facto nasi] may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do.” (Exodus 18:19-20) That is the proper work of princes and presidents.

We saw way back in Mitzvah #3 that we aren’t to revile God—that is, to take Him lightly, bring Him into contempt, curse, or despise Him (Hebrew: qalal). The concept is obvious and ubiquitous throughout scripture. But perhaps we should take a closer look at the word “God” here. It’s the usual word for God, Elohim—the plural of a word (Eloah or El) that means god in a general sense, whether true or false. Elohim is translated as “God” 2,346 times in the Old Testament (the King James Version translates it “the gods” here, clearly an error). Four times, however, it’s translated “judges.” Significantly, all four are in this very passage, and they all

clearly mean human judges, not Yahweh. For example, a verse we looked at in the previous mitzvah says, "...the cause of both parties shall come before the judges [elohim]; and whomever the judges [elohim] condemn shall pay double to his neighbor." (Exodus 22:9) Thus it's possible, though I can't be dogmatic, that there is a secondary meaning to "You shall not revile God" here: You shall not take lightly, bring into contempt, curse, or despise a judge in Israel doing the work Yahweh appointed for Him. Maybe the rabbis were right after all. Maybe.

(240)

That one who possesses evidence shall testify in Court (Lev. 5:1) (affirmative).

One who possesses evidence shall testify in court. "If a person sins in hearing the utterance of an oath, and is a witness, whether he has seen or known of the matter—if he does not tell it, he bears guilt." (Leviticus 5:1) There is apparently some object/subject confusion here. It's a bit clearer in the NLT: "If any of the people are called to testify about something [i.e., a sin. Hebrew: chata] they have witnessed, but they refuse to testify, they will be held responsible and be subject to punishment." The rabbis got the heart of this one right.

Remember the Ninth Commandment, the one about bearing false witness? Yahweh is pointing out here that to withhold pertinent evidence is tantamount to lying under oath. Justice is perverted; the truth is compromised. In other words, when giving testimony, a truth suppressed is the same as a lie proclaimed. We are to give "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

(241)

Not to testify falsely (Ex. 20:13) (CCN39).

Do not testify falsely. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." (Exodus 20:16) As I mentioned in the previous mitzvah, the Ninth Commandment points out Yahweh's heart for justice. As stated in Micah 6:8, "He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does Yahweh require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" These three things—mercy, justice, and humility—are all interrelated. One who perverts justice by perjuring himself in order to condemn someone he hates has not only displayed a lack of mercy but has also proved his arrogance. He has in effect put himself in the place of God, who alone is qualified to judge us. In this world, Yahweh would rather let the guilty go free than see the innocent punished. Justice is tempered by mercy; it is perverted by pride.

(242)

That a witness, who has testified in a capital case, shall not lay down the law in that particular case (Num. 35:30) (negative).

A witness who has testified in a capital case shall not lay down the law in that particular case. “Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses; but one witness is not sufficient testimony against a person for the death penalty.” (Numbers 35:30) I’m not quite sure what Maimonides meant to say, but fortunately Moses is crystal clear. He makes a couple of points. First, murderers are to receive the death penalty. That’s not terribly politically correct in certain circles these days. Deal with it. If you’re against the death penalty for murderers, you disagree with God. I don’t know how you feel about knowingly contradicting Yahweh, but it would make me very uncomfortable.

On the other hand, nobody is to be found guilty of murder on the basis of only one person’s testimony. Yahweh has thus built in safeguards against the abuse and misuse of the death penalty. Let’s face it: perjury is easy. That’s why Yahweh had to go out of His way to condemn it (see Mitzvah #241). Perjury in a murder case could itself lead to murder if only one witness was required in order to get a conviction. And as easy as perjury is, mistakes are even easier. Eyewitnesses, even honest ones, are not infallible. Evidence is preferable. But there was no such thing as forensic science until the last century or so. Yahweh made the maintenance of a just society as simple and foolproof as possible.

(243)

That a transgressor shall not testify (Ex. 23:1) (CCN75).

A transgressor shall not testify. “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) It seems like a pretty good idea—not requiring “a transgressor to testify.” In fact, something very close to this thought is built into the American Bill of Rights, in Article V: “[No person] shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself.” But the scripture cited to support the mitzvah says nothing of the sort. The rabbis have missed the point entirely.

Yahweh here is instructing us about “mob mentality.” Having designed us, He knows that we are susceptible to suggestion and pressure. That’s why He wanted us to keep His words before us at all times (see Mitzvah #21) Our emotions can be cleverly manipulated to turn us aside from the truth; and the same thing can be done at the group level—with disastrous results. Everything from the French Revolution to the latest South American soccer riot can be attributed to this destructive phenomenon. If you think about it, Yahweh is declaring that He’s

opposed to democracy. He's saying that the rule of the majority is not necessarily a good thing. He wants us to think for ourselves, to exercise the right of choice that He gave us, to come to our own conclusions based on evidence and logic. Following the crowd is the last thing He wants us to do. Well, maybe the next-to-last thing. The last thing would be to incite the crowd ourselves, circulating lies or offering testimony that's calculated to win us popularity or favor with the ruling elite. Tell the truth, He says, even if it's unpopular. We are to act like Elijah, not the prophets of Ba'al (see I Kings 17).

(244)

That the court shall not accept the testimony of a close relative of the defendant in matters of capital punishment (Deut. 24:16) (CCN74).

The court shall not accept the testimony of a close relative of the defendant in matters of capital punishment. "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin." (Deuteronomy 24:16) Once again, the rabbis have extrapolated God's instruction until it no longer bears any resemblance to what Yahweh actually said. Even philosophically, the rabbinical mitzvah is in opposition to the general tenor of the Torah: they're saying, don't give these "hostile witnesses" a chance to defend someone in whom they have a vested interest in acquitting. God's rule is justice tempered with mercy, which would translate to: give the defendant every opportunity to clear his name. He is to be considered innocent until proved guilty. Sound familiar?

The supporting passage makes an entirely different point. No one is to be punished for the sins of others. This would have been crystal clear to the original audience—Israelites whose parents had all perished in the wilderness over the last 40 years because of their unbelief. This generation had not been a party to their fathers' rejection of Yahweh, so they had been preserved alive to enter and possess the Land. They would make their own choices, for better or worse.

The lessons extend into eternity. Adam's sin made us mortal, but each and every one of us has proved his own guilt by committing his own sins. Adam can't take the fall for us, nor can we through piety or prayer make good choices for our children. But wait a minute. Does this mean that our heavenly Father (in His human manifestation, Yahshua) couldn't have received the just punishment for our sins? No, for one very simple reason. Each of us, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, is guilty of our own crimes. We don't even have enough righteousness to help ourselves, never mind our parents and children. Only One who is sinless could be "put to death for [His] children." And that One is Yahshua.

(245)

Not to hear one of the parties to a suit in the absence of the other party (Ex. 23:1) (CCN65).

Do not hear one of the parties to a suit in the absence of the other party. “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) As we saw in #243, and will again in #248, 249, and 250, Maimonides and his buddies have built an elaborate and reasonable-sounding list of rules out of a totally unrelated passage in the Torah. It’s no doubt a fine thing to ensure that testimony is not delivered in secret, making it impossible to rebut. We should be able to face our accusers. That’s why this very precept shows up in American jurisprudence. But it’s not what Yahweh said. I’ve got no problem with making up rules and laws and instructions. But when the rabbis make their own rules and attribute them to God, I draw the line.

(246)

To examine witnesses thoroughly (Deut. 13:15) (affirmative).

Examine witnesses thoroughly. “If you hear someone in one of your cities, which Yahweh your God gives you to dwell in, saying, ‘Corrupt men have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, “Let us go and serve other gods”’—which you have not known—then you shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock—with the edge of the sword.” (Deuteronomy 13:12-15) I’ll grant you, it’s never a bad idea to “inquire, search out, and ask diligently” when trying to determine the facts of a matter. But how could the rabbis see this and nothing more from the passage at hand? Moses is describing the most serious of matters—a city in Israel that has reportedly gone over to the wholesale worship of false gods (e.g. Laish, renamed Dan—see Judges 18). If that happened, their own countrymen were instructed to utterly destroy the place—buildings, livestock, valuables, the whole shebang. Nothing was to be taken, nothing kept. The cancer of false worship was to be cut out and eliminated. Needless to say, you didn’t want to make a mistake about something this drastic. Oops, my bad. It was just some guy burning trash out in his field.

Sorry we tore down your city and killed everybody. Won’t happen again, I promise.

The lessons for us are a two-edged sword. First, don’t condemn a fellow believer of wrongdoing (as in I Corinthians 5) without rock-solid evidence. But conversely, don’t tolerate, accept, or

compromise with any kind of false doctrine, even if it looks attractive and reasonable (like some of these phony-baloney mitzvot). Of course, you've got to be familiar with the real thing if you hope to be able to spot the counterfeit.

(247)

Not to decide a case on the evidence of a single witness (Deut. 19:15) (CCN73).

Don't decide a case on the evidence of a single witness. "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) The rabbis were right, as far as they went. The testimony of one witness is not enough to convict a man under Mosaic Law: two, or better, three are needed to establish the truth of eyewitness accounts. I get the feeling from Yahshua's discussion of this principle (e.g. John 8:18) that the subsequent witnesses can be solid evidence, either documentary or forensic. For instance, He called on His detractors to search the Scriptures, for the Law and the Prophets offered testimony about Him.

But there was more to it. Eyewitnesses are not only prone to error, they have also been known to lie in order to gain an advantage. The passage goes on to describe the procedure to follow if conflicting testimony is given. "If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, then both men in the controversy shall stand before Yahweh, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." (Deuteronomy 19:16-21) In a very real sense, the witnesses are on trial, for they have the power, potentially, to punish a man unjustly. There is therefore more to the judges' job than merely ascertaining the truth. They must also determine whether the conflicting testimony was purposefully fraudulent—a "false witness"—or if it was the result of honest error (He said the fleeing man was wearing a black coat, but the subject's was actually navy blue). If the witness is found to have given dishonest testimony in order to intentionally shift blame to the defendant, the witness himself will receive the punishment he had sought to inflict upon his neighbor. It's a purposeful deterrent against perjury: "Those who remain shall hear and fear." I can't help but wonder if the guys who were recruited to testify against Yahshua (Matthew 26:59-62) thought about getting crucified?

(248)

To give the decision according to the majority, when there is a difference of opinion among the members of the Sanhedrin as to matters of law (Ex. 23:2) (affirmative).

Give the decision according to the majority when there is a difference of opinion among the members of the Sanhedrin as to matters of law. “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 is one of those instances (thankfully rare—they usually just miss the point) where the rabbis’ mitzvah is diametrically opposed to the scripture they’ve cited to support it. They’re saying, The majority opinion among us, the ruling elite of Israel, will become law. It’s the same system America uses, subject to the same abuses. And by the way, it’s the same system the Sanhedrin used to condemn Yahweh’s Anointed One to death—proving that it’s an anathema to God. Yahweh is saying something completely different: Don’t follow the crowd, and don’t lead them into falsehood, either. Seek truth, mercy, and justice, even if you’re a lone voice crying in the wilderness. Yahweh could care less about the majority opinion. In fact, He flatly stated that the majority is lost: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14)

(249)

Not to decide, in capital cases, according to the view of the majority, when those who are for condemnation exceed by one only, those who are for acquittal (Ex. 23:2) (negative).

In capital cases, do not decide according to the view of the majority when those who are for condemnation exceed those who are for acquittal by only one. “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) They’re saying a simple majority isn’t enough to condemn a man to death—you need at least two tie breakers. Sorry, guys. Wrong again. This is merely man’s flawed wisdom. In the case of the most significant trial in history, we know of only two dissenting (or was it abstaining) voices out of the seventy, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Clearly, the idea of majority rule has some holes in it. How many in that assembly were swayed by the vituperative attitude of Annas and Caiaphas? How many were nudged over the line by the false witnesses who were brought in to testify against Yahshua? How many were cowed into silence by the weight of peer pressure?