

613 Laws of Torah

Laws 600 - 613

(600)

In a permissive war (as distinguished from obligatory ones), observe the procedure prescribed in the Torah. “When you go near a city to fight against it, then proclaim an offer of peace to it. And it shall be that if they accept your offer of peace, and open to you, then all the people who are found in it shall be placed under tribute to you, and serve you. Now if the city will not make peace with you, but war against you, then you shall besiege it. And when Yahweh your God delivers it into your hands, you shall strike every male in it with the edge of the sword. But the women, the little ones, the livestock, and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself; and you shall eat the enemies’ plunder which Yahweh your God gives you. Thus you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations. (Deuteronomy 20:10-15) We shall establish in a moment (Mitzvot #601 and #602) that there were seven specific people groups in the Land that were slated for total destruction because of their utter and irredeemable depravity. But Yahweh knew that here and there in and around the Promised Land were settlements of other tribes whose “iniquity was not yet (necessarily) full.” These (described in geographical terms as “very far from you”) would be given the option of surrendering to the Israelites (and their God) and paying tribute, without being utterly wiped out. Indeed, under David and Solomon, the kingdom expanded to include many such groups—notably, the Philistines.

There is a revealing story recorded in Joshua 9 about a group who took advantage of this precept (though there is no evidence that they actually knew what Yahweh had commanded). The nations slated for destruction were scared spitless when they heard what Joshua and the armies of Israel had done to Jericho and Ai (not to mention Egypt a generation before this), and they all banded together to fight against the invaders. But one good-sized Hivite city called Gibeon had a better idea. By trickery, they convinced Joshua that they were not among the local tribes slated for destruction, but were rather emissaries from a distant land—they had heard of Yahweh’s great victories, they said, and wished to ally themselves with Him and His people. Joshua and his elders bought their story, only to discover later that they were indeed local

Hivites with whom they should not have signed any kind of treaty. Israel honored their agreement, but shaped it to fit the precept at hand, making the relieved Gibeonites wood cutters and water carriers for the congregation of Israel—which they rightly saw as being far better than corpses.

Most commentators see in this only the failure of Israel to follow God's law. I see in it the incredible mercy of Yahweh. The Hivites of Gibeon—just like you and me—were slated for destruction because of our sin and depravity. Their death sentence was rightly deserved. But faced with the awesome glory of Yahweh, they repented, turned around, forsook their pagan affiliations and idolatrous practices and joined themselves by whatever means they could to God and His people. They wisely decided that it's better to be a slave in the house of Yahweh than a king in Satan's domain. And what did Israel's God do in response to their courageous repentance? He defended them against the attacks of their former allies, achieving for them the great victory recorded in Joshua 10. Will he do anything less for us if we repent? I think not.

(601)

Do not keep alive any individual of the seven Canaanite nations. "But of the cities of these peoples which Yahweh your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as Yahweh your God has commanded you, lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against Yahweh your God. (Deuteronomy 20:16-18) Maimonides is not mistaken in saying there were seven Canaanite nations that Israel was tasked with destroying, even though this passage lists only six. All of them are named in Deuteronomy 7:1-2—where they're called "seven nations greater and mightier than you." (See Mitzvot #352 and #353.) The missing group is the Girgashites, who were named in several similar lists (e.g., Joshua 3:10 and 24:11, Nehemiah 9:8). Interestingly, the territories of several nations not included in the "official" list of seven were included in the original promise Yahweh made to Abraham: the Kenites, Kennizites, Kadmonites, and Rephaim.

All these "target" nations had one thing in common: "wickedness." But they were not unique in that regard. Both the Egypt from which Israel had been so recently delivered and the Assyria and Babylon to which they would eventually be exiled were also wicked. Indeed, even at this very moment in history, Israel itself was far from perfect in God's eyes, though they had been chosen to be the instrument of Yahweh's wrath: "It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of

these nations that Yahweh your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which Yahweh swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore understand that Yahweh your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people.” (Deuteronomy 9:5-6) So Israel was bad but the Canaanites were even worse—is that the game God is playing here, judgment based on a sliding scale of morality? No. As usual, there’s more to it.

By now we should be comfortable with the concept that the Torah’s ubiquitous symbols are ultimately there to teach us about God’s plan for our redemption, salvation, and reconciliation with Himself. And although it may not look like it at first glance, the conquest of Canaan is one of those symbols—an important one. Israel was a covenant people—that is, they were the recipient of unilateral promises from Yahweh. As such they metaphorically represent Yahweh’s family—believers, whether Jews or gentiles, of every age of man, recipients of God’s grace. These believers are not perfect in themselves, but they are holy, that is, separated from the world and joined instead to God by receiving in faith His gift of imputed righteousness, enabling them to stand in the very presence of God. The Canaanites, on the other hand, represent the world from which the believers have been separated. Seven nations tell us that God means for them to represent the complete picture—the whole world. This world (as we all know from experience) has some good things in it and some bad: the Canaanites had a relatively advanced civilization for its day, a robust economy and highly developed technology, arts, and agriculture. But they were, in God’s words, “wicked.” I’ll explain precisely what that means in the following mitzvah.

The point of the symbol is that Yahweh will not allow His people and the world’s to dwell side-by-side forever. Yahweh’s conquest of Canaan (with the Israelites functioning as His arm of retribution) was meant to be a dress rehearsal for the eventual conquest of the whole earth by the returning Messiah (accompanied by His resurrected saints). Remember, God had “given” the Land to Abraham hundreds of years before this time. It belonged to Israel, whether or not they had previously occupied it. They were returning to it—just as their Messiah will. It’s not just a nice-sounding expression: “The meek—those who trust in Yahweh—shall inherit the earth.” God is in the process of separating His people from those who choose not to know Him. Since “The earth is Yahweh’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein,” (Psalm 24:1) it is His prerogative to remove from it those who don’t wish to be His people, who don’t wish to receive His inheritance. So when we read, “You shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them,” we are merely getting a preview of what Yahweh is about to do in the world as a whole—clean it out so His people may live there in perfect peace. His planet, His rules.

(602)

Exterminate the seven Canaanite nations from the land of Israel. “But of the cities of these peoples which Yahweh your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as Yahweh your God has commanded you, lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against Yahweh your God. (Deuteronomy 20:16-18) Maimonides seems to be drawing a distinction between killing the individual Canaanites and eliminating their national entities. Okay, whatever—they’re both supposed to be “utterly destroyed.” This whole subject is one that today’s shades-of-gray secular humanists really choke on—the idea that a “loving” God would direct one group of people to annihilate another. They complain that it opens the door to anybody to engage in genocidal war if they perceive that “God is on their side.” Their observation, moreover, is not without merit: evil men have been doing precisely that since the dawn of history. What makes this any different?

Quite a bit, as it turns out. Note first that Yahweh’s instructions were quite specific: seven nations, all located within the confines of well-defined borders (see Numbers 34, cf. Future History, Chapter 6: “Ground Zero”) were slated for “utter destruction” by the generation of Israelites led into the land by Joshua. It wasn’t an open-ended command to kill anybody, anywhere, at any time, who doesn’t believe exactly like you do (which is pretty much what Muhammad told his followers to do if they got the chance). Second, a very good reason was given for this attack: “...lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against Yahweh your God.” Whether they realized it or not, Israel had been chosen by Yahweh to be the vehicle for the salvation of all mankind—a task that would be that much harder to achieve if they became infected with the very disease for which they were supposed to be delivering the cure. I realize that atheists don’t find this a compelling rationale. Too bad. The heart of the issue (in the historical sense) was the little phrase “their abominations which they have done for their gods.” What in the world were the Canaanites doing “for their gods” that was so bad Yahweh would call it an “abomination”? As it turns out, He had a very specific list of behaviors in mind, and He told us what they were (as will I, in a moment). Moreover, He told the Israelites that if they began practicing these same things, He would kick them out of the Land just as He had the Canaanites. This, then, is not a case of punishing the heathen for their sins while blessing the Israelites in spite of them, but rather of cleansing the land from an evil that had matured, grown rotten, turned toxic, and begun to stink.

The Israelites in this context weren't predators; they were scavengers. They weren't invaders; they were God's biohazard containment team.

Like most ancient civilizations, the Canaanites were a very religious culture. And, perhaps in a more direct lineage than most, their gods were derivatives from, or permutations of, the original Babylonian "mystery" religion of Nimrod, Semiramis and Tammuz. I described this seminal false religion in detail in *Future History*, Chapter 3, "In a Manner of Speaking," and Chapter 14, "Mystery Babylon." There I described how the original Babylonian religion spread to virtually every corner of the earth, mimicking and replacing Yahweh's intended familial relationship with a counterfeit religion that took on a plethora of forms and spawned scores of "gods," though in reality there was only one—Satan.

In its grossest incarnation, this religion became what was being practiced in Canaan. The behaviors it fostered, and their consequences, were listed in one of the nastiest passages in the Bible, a passage that explicitly told the Israelites not to do what the Canaanites were doing: Adultery. "You shall not lie carnally with your neighbor's wife, to defile yourself with her." Human sacrifice—of one's own children. "And you shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech." Blasphemy. "Nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am Yahweh." Homosexuality. "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination." Notice that Yahweh calls it an abomination—the strongest epithet in Scripture. Finally there's bestiality. "Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion...." I can't even believe there's a word for it.

These are all things the Canaanites were doing in the practice of their sick religion, things from which the Israelites were warned to be separated. "Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled which I am casting out before you. For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you. For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people." (Leviticus 18:20-29) The Israelites didn't throw the Canaanites out, not exactly—the land itself "vomited out" its evil inhabitants. Unfortunately, that category later included the very Jews who had been tasked to be the instruments of God's housecleaning project. They, too, eventually began to practice these same abominations, and they too were expelled for doing so. But they, unlike the Canaanites, couldn't say they hadn't been warned. Review Mitzvot #82 through #105.

“Alas, those poor stupid Jews,” you may be thinking. “They suffered the consequences of their actions, just like the Canaanites they replaced. What were they thinkin’?” Yes, they blew it, but are we (the rest of the world) any better? Do we not deserve to be “vomited out of our land”? Look at that last sentence again: Yahweh isn’t talking about Israel, necessarily—He’s talking about anybody. “Whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people.” But I’d never do these things, you protest. Maybe not personally, but nationally? Do we tolerate and foster Canaanite/Babylonian practices in our society? Look at the list again.

(1) Adultery: it’s so rampant, it’s almost considered acceptable, even semi-inevitable, in our society. But it’s a stoning offense in the Torah. God calls it the only legitimate reason for divorce, and He hates divorce (see Malachi 2:14-16).

(2) Human sacrifice: How barbaric! I agree, but we do it all the time. There are about 1,300,000 reported legal abortions performed in the United States each year, some 22 million worldwide. Add to that the unreported legal abortions and clandestine illegal procedures, and the annual number climbs to somewhere between 36 and 53 million abortions each year. (They’re perfectly legal in 54 countries, whose populations represent about 61% of the world’s total.) And why are so many babies murdered in the womb? The number one reason given (in America, anyway) is that having the child would interfere with work, school, or other responsibilities. Number two: financial stress. Number three: relationship issues with the child’s father. Let me put it bluntly, folks. Every year, 50 million children are sacrificed on the twin altars of convenience and irresponsibility. You tell me: how is that any different from Canaanites placing their infants into the red-hot arms of a bronze statue of Molech or Chemosh in return for a promise of bountiful crops?

(3) Blasphemy: to be guilty of this—profaning the name of Yahweh—all you really have to do is ignore Him, pretend He doesn’t exist, live your life as if you’re not personally accountable to an Almighty Creator God whose self-revealed name means “I Am,” i.e., the One who exists eternally. Of course, you can do worse—you can give your allegiance to a “god” of another name, whether it’s Ba’al, Allah, or Lucifer himself.

(4) Homosexuality: this is a fundamental and purposeful perversion of the God-instituted family unit. There’s more to this than merely wanting to put your sexual apparatus where it wasn’t designed to go. Yahweh created our entire mammalian biology to reflect His nature: a Father (representing Yahweh—the ultimate authority figure), a Mother (representing the Holy Spirit—Ruach Qodesh in the Hebrew tongue, a feminine noun, the nurturing, comforting—and convicting—spirit), and the Child (representing the “Son of God,” Yahshua, who walked among

us as a human being, a manifestation of and representative for Yahweh, voluntarily bereft of His heavenly glory as well as several dimensions that were His by right of His divinity).

Homosexuality destroys this biological picture of a spiritual reality, obfuscating God's plan and purpose. To hear them tell it, "gays" (a misnomer if ever there was one) number ten percent of the population. (In reality, it's between one and two percent, which is scary enough.) But with Satan's help they exert an influence far beyond what their numbers would suggest. Am I a homophobe? You bet I am. I'm scared spitless of being within a hundred miles of anything that Yahweh has promised to "cut off from among His people." I mean, look what He did to Sodom.

(5) Bestiality: c'mon, does anybody really do this? Whether or not they do physically, they certainly will spiritually. It's not by accident that an evil world leader prophesied to appear in the last days (who's more or less equated with the demon that inhabits him) is called "the Beast," nor is this prophecy insignificant: "All the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?' And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." (Revelation 13:3-8) There it is—spiritual bestiality, coming soon to a world near you.

Are you starting to get the picture? The Israelite conquest of Canaan was nothing short of a prophetic dress rehearsal for the coming destruction of Satan's kingdom on earth at the hands of the returning Messiah, King Yahshua. It matters not that the Jews failed to achieve their mission parameters. Yahshua most certainly will not fail. If you think the "poor Canaanites" were treated unfairly by God back in Joshua's day, you probably think adultery, abortion, homosexuality and secular humanism are all acceptable human foibles, even if you don't personally practice these things, and in all likelihood you'll welcome the Antichrist—a.k.a. "the Beast"—as the politician to end all politicians. As mistakes go, that one's about as wrong as you can get.

One final thought: the Hebrew word for "land," *erets*, has a broad range of meanings—no doubt by God's design: "land, earth, the whole earth (as opposed to part), earth (as opposed to heaven), the inhabitants of earth, country, territory, district, region, a piece of ground, the land of Canaan (i.e., Israel), the inhabitants of the Promised Land, Sheol (the land without return—the underworld), a city or city-state, ground, the surface of the earth, soil, the land of the living, or

the ends of the earth.” (S) In other words, the language itself supports my hypothesis that “the land of Canaan vomiting out its inhabitants” because of their evil can rightly be construed as a prophetic microcosm of the coming worldwide judgment. It’s Yahweh’s erets. He wants it back.

(603)

Do not destroy fruit trees (wantonly or in warfare). “When you besiege a city for a long time, while making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them; if you can eat of them, do not cut them down to use in the siege, for the tree of the field is man’s food. Only the trees which you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, to build siege works against the city that makes war with you, until it is subdued.”

(Deuteronomy 20:19-20) The disposition of resources is one key to the mindset of God. Man’s agenda (and Satan’s) in war is: “defeat the enemy.” This may seem to make sense until we compare it to God’s agenda in warfare: “Cleanse the land of evil.” Killing the bad guys isn’t the point—in fact, Yahweh doesn’t really want anyone to perish, though He leaves the choice of whether to live or die up to us. During the conquest of Canaan, as with the coming global cleansing, the land (whether Israel or Earth) would have to support a population of the redeemed after the smoke had cleared. God’s not done with the planet quite yet. There’s the little matter of Christ’s Millennial Kingdom to prepare for.

It seems ironic that Muhammad’s tactics when besieging the Jewish Beni al-Nadir tribe of Yathrib (Medina) included cutting down their date palms (cf. Qur’an Sura 59:5; Al-Tabari, Volume II:158; Ibn Ishaq:437). This, of course, left his faithful followers no way to make an “honest” living on their newly stolen lands—they had to continue to rely on piracy, kidnapping for profit, the slave trade, and murder. And some things never change: when the “Palestinian” Muslims finally bamboozled the pathetically naïve Sharon/Olmert Israeli government out of the Gaza strip in 2005, the first thing they did was destroy the productive hydroponic farms the Israeli settlers had no choice but to leave behind. Muslims apparently don’t have the sense God gave geese.

(604)

Deal with a beautiful woman taken captive in war in the manner prescribed in the Torah. “When you go out to war against your enemies, and Yahweh your God delivers them into your hand, and you take them captive, and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and desire her and would take her for your wife, then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails. She shall put off the clothes of her captivity, remain in your

house, and mourn her father and her mother a full month; after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife.” (Deuteronomy 21:10-13)

Maimonides may finally be getting it: “Do what the Torah says.” This is a precept that applies to Israelite warfare with pagan nations other than the seven Canaanite tribes who were supposed to be completely destroyed—man, woman, and child, “everything that breathes” (see Mitzvot #601 and #602). God knew there would be cases when an Israelite army took captives, and among them, beautiful women. And on that basis alone, a soldier might “desire to take her for his wife.” Never mind the fact that physical beauty shouldn’t rank above tenth or twelfth on the list of things a guy should logically consider when choosing a bride—if a man expects to live a long, happy life with her. Yahweh was dealing with reality here: having designed man’s endocrine system, he knows how hormones work. On a practical note, He didn’t want the conquest of Canaan devolving into an ongoing enterprise of rape and pillage—the idea was to cleanse the land.

God’s instructions are a perfect balance between the realities of bronze age warfare and the gruesome task He had set for His holy people. He says to the love-struck soldier, “You think she’s a beauty, and you want to marry her? Okay, but first, you have to see her at her worst for an entire month—shorn of all the trappings of fashion—forget hair style: she’s got to shave her head so you can see her as ugly as she ever gets. She’ll be in mourning for her lost life and loved ones—expect tears and depression—and she’ll be living right in your face under these conditions. You’ll have her under your roof for a whole month, so you’ll even get to see what she’s like with PMS. If you’re still smitten with her after all that, go ahead and marry her. At least you’ll be going into this with your eyes wide open.” Okay, that’s a paraphrase.

(605)

Do not sell a beautiful woman (taken captive in war). “...And it shall be, if you have no delight in her, then you shall set her free, but you certainly shall not sell her for money; you shall not treat her brutally, because you have humbled her.” (Deuteronomy 21:14) This is a continuation of the previous mitzvah. What if the captured beauty queen doesn’t look so hot to the lovestruck soldier after her one-month visit to the ugly parlor? What then? Can he sell her as a slave to somebody else? No. It’s not her fault she’s pretty (or was). And it’s not her fault the smitten Israelite soldier has no perseverance, no imagination, and no common sense. She’s suffered enough humiliation; she must be set free.

Although the text doesn’t spell it out, I believe it is understood that the marriage has not been consummated at this point—i.e., she has not become the soldier’s legal wife—when and if he decides not to “keep” her. If she had been married to him, and only after that did he decide that

he “had no delight in her,” then the ordinary rules of divorce would apply: a man may divorce his wife only if “he has found some uncleanness in her.” (Deuteronomy 24:1) Yahshua later defined this as meaning adultery and nothing less. Women are not a man’s disposable possessions (which is how Islam portrays them). They are his equal—though instructed to submit to their husbands primarily because they symbolize the Church’s unique role in relationship to her Messiah—she is the Bride of Christ.

(606)

Do not degrade a beautiful woman (taken captive in war) to the condition of a bondwoman. “And it shall be, if you have no delight in her, then you shall set her free, but you certainly shall not sell her for money; you shall not treat her brutally, because you have humbled her.”

(Deuteronomy 21:14) Part III of the Captive Bride saga.... Suppose our smitten soldier thinks like Muhammad, deciding his beauty-queen captive would make a fine sex slave, married or not. He has no intention of making her his partner, only his plaything. Yahweh’s precept has cut this one off at the knees, for a “marriage” of this sort is no marriage at all in His eyes. It’s serial rape. The Hebrew word for “treat brutally” is amar, meaning “to manipulate, to deal tyrannically with, to treat as a slave.” (S)

The vast majority of Torah instructions dealing with slaves or bondservants deal with Hebrews who have sold themselves into bondage (until the sabbatical year or Jubilee) in return for the payment of their debts, and Yahweh’s admonition is invariably to treat them with kindness and respect, for everyone is a slave to sin at some point in their lives. The present precept is one of the very few that deal with what to do with captives of war, and there is a simple reason for that—Yahweh expected this scenario to be very rare. The seven Canaanite nations who populated the Land (see Mitzvot #601 and #602) were to be utterly destroyed—no captives at all were to be taken. But as we saw in Mitzvah #600, there was a proper procedure for dealing with pagan communities who were not of these seven specific nations: they had the option of surrender and servitude. If they chose instead to fight, the men were to be slain and the women and children enslaved. The “beautiful woman” of which these last three mitzvot have spoken is the rare standout among this already rare category.

We have seen this kind of thing before: God spending inordinate amounts of Torah text on situations that would rarely if ever actually occur in the normal course of Israelite life in the Land, and invariably we have come to the conclusion that some larger issue is being addressed. What, then, is Yahweh trying to tell us here? Let’s examine the scenario. First, the woman is a member (through no fault of her own) of a rebellious pagan society, one whose leaders have chosen to fight against God rather than submit, surrender, and repent. (Sound familiar?)

Second, she's a captive, a slave with no power or privileges of her own. Third, she is naturally attractive to God's Man, but he is required by God to disregard her beauty. And fourth, God's people may not abuse or misuse her.

Here's the lesson (I think). The beautiful woman represents the world—spiritually neutral, but presumably having both positive qualities (obvious to everybody) and negative ones (maybe not so much). She has no intrinsic power over God's people, but they are attracted to her nevertheless. Yahweh wants to make sure that His people see the unvarnished truth about whatever the world has to offer, the good and the bad alike. Surprisingly, He is not necessarily forbidding a union between His people and the world, for some are called and equipped to make a successful home with her—the occasional believing businessman, pastor, or

(extremely rare) politician who is gifted with the ability to work within the world's corrupt system to advance Yahweh's cause. But God doesn't want any of His children to be seduced by her beauty and charm while being blindsided by her less obvious shortcomings. Now here's the interesting part: even if the believer decides after a while that the world isn't so attractive after all, and he doesn't wish to form a union with her (which ought to be the case with most of us), he isn't to “manipulate her, deal tyrannically with her, or treat her as a slave” (Hebrew: amar). In other words, just because “Christians” may find themselves in positions of power or influence (as they did in Europe for over a millennium following Constantine's 313 AD Edict of Toleration) they have been specifically warned not to abuse the world they find under their control (as the Catholics subsequently did). Rather, they are to “set her free”—in other words, they are to let the world make her own spiritual choices.

(607)

Do not offer peace to the Ammonites and the Moabites before waging war on them, as should be done to other nations. “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of Yahweh; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of Yahweh forever, because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. Nevertheless Yahweh your God would not listen to Balaam, but Yahweh your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because Yahweh your God loves you. You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever.” (Deuteronomy 23:3-6) Maimonides has conjured up a nonexistent corollary to the rules concerning going to war with nations other than the Canaanite Seven (see Mitzvah #600). He has conveniently forgotten that Ammon, Moab, and Edom had been specifically declared off-limits to territorial conquest by Yahweh back in Deuteronomy 2. There He says quite plainly, “Do not harass

Moab” (verse 9), and “When you come near the people of Ammon, do not harass them or meddle with them” (verse 19). Of course, refraining from attacking your neighbors is not remotely the same thing as purposely getting chummy with them. Moab and Ammon (today’s Jordan, along with Edom) had proved their undying antagonism to Yahweh and His people through the “Balaam episode,” recorded in Numbers 22:1-25:2, in which the Israelites were seduced into Ba’al worship after it became clear that they couldn’t be cursed. That explains why Ammonites and Moabites were not to be admitted to “the assembly of Yahweh,” that is, the fellowship of believers. They had a history of leading people astray into the worship of false gods, which is about the worst thing you can do—a stoning offense in Israel.

At issue here is what believers are to do with people who attempt to entice Yahweh’s children into denial of their God. First, we are to be alert to the danger, and remember the lessons we’ve learned from our past contact with them. At this point, it would be instructive to compare Yahweh’s words concerning Edom with those about Ammon and Moab. Later in the same passage we’re studying, Yahweh says, “You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land. The children of the third generation born to them may enter the assembly of Yahweh.” (Deuteronomy 23:7-8) Both the Edomites and the Egyptians had been hindrances to Israel: Egypt had enslaved the Jews for hundreds of years, and Edom had refused them peaceful passage to the Promised Land. But neither nation had attempted to lead them away from Yahweh into the worship of false gods as Ammon and Moab had. God is really serious about this. In fact, as I demonstrated in Future History chapter 29: “The Three Doors,” it is this issue that separates the victims from the perpetrators, the merely “lost,” doomed to destruction, from the damned, destined to eternal torment in hell.

Second, we are instructed not to “seek their peace nor their prosperity.” Don’t make treaties with them, trade with them, or have anything to do with them. We are not told to attack them. On the contrary, we are told to avoid contact altogether, as much as possible. (If they attack us, of course, it’s perfectly okay to defend ourselves. But we aren’t to be the aggressors.) The bottom line is the same as that repeated several times in scripture when we are being told how believers are to deal with “Babylon,” the collective influence that seeks to lead us away from Yahweh’s love: “Flee from the midst of Babylon, and every one save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, for this is the time of Yahweh’s vengeance; He shall recompense her.”

(Jeremiah 51:6) Don’t fight it, don’t negotiate with it, don’t work within the system trying to fix it — just flee! Yahweh Himself will deal with Babylon, and you don’t want to be anywhere nearby when that happens.

(608)

Anyone who is unclean shall not enter the Camp of the Levites. “When the army goes out against your enemies, then keep yourself from every wicked thing. If there is any man among you who becomes unclean by some occurrence in the night, then he shall go outside the camp; he shall not come inside the camp. But it shall be, when evening comes, that he shall wash with water; and when the sun sets, he may come into the camp.” (Deuteronomy 23:9-11) We discussed the issues of “clean” versus “unclean” in detail in Chapter 15 of this book. There we concluded that being “ritually defiled”—the kind of thing being spoken of in our present mitzvah—is not a picture of overt sin, but of the inevitable uncleanness to which we are subjected merely by virtue of being human. Thus no sacrifices are necessary for its atonement, but cleansing is required anyway if we are to dwell within “the camp,” that is, be a useful and effective member of God’s faithful army. When Yahweh speaks of “going out against your enemies,” he’s ultimately talking about living our daily lives in this filthy world: we must endeavor to prevail against it while we “do battle,” while at the same time remaining untouched by “every wicked thing” we find there. It’s a tall order, but contamination by the world can easily render us unclean—unfit for active duty, if only temporarily.

Note that Maimonides has thrown a monkey wrench into the works by calling the assembly “the Camp of the Levites.” Levi, the priestly tribe, has not been mentioned in this context.

Tracey Rich explains the rabbinical view: “According to the Talmud, in the present day this [“the Camp of the Levites”] means the Temple mount.” That’s something of a tasteless joke these days. The temple mount is controlled by the Muslims (who according to the Torah’s definition aren’t exactly “clean”), and it has been since long before Maimonides began codifying his 613 hallucinations. Incredibly, even when the victorious Israeli army’s re-took Jerusalem in the 1967 Six Day War, their top general, Moshe Dayan, gave the temple mount back to the Muslims (I still can’t believe he did that) in exchange for a hollow promise of equal access. We all know how well that’s worked out in the intervening half-century. Needless to say, the Talmud’s take on what this precept means is (as they say in theological parlance) dumb as a bag of hammers.

(609)

Have a place outside the camp for sanitary purposes. “You shall have a place outside the camp, where you may go out; and you shall have an implement among your equipment, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and turn and cover your refuse.” (Deuteronomy 23:12-13)

Warfare from the dawn of time has been accompanied by disease. As recently as the American Civil War, far more soldiers died of disease (mostly dysentery, diarrhea, typhoid, and malaria) than from wounds sustained on the battlefield (in the Union army alone, 560,000 dying of disease vs. 200,000 from trauma). And yet here we are reading simple instructions written some 3,500 years ago that would go a long way toward keeping disease in any mobile military encampment to a minimum. It seems basic and obvious now, but it wasn't until quite recently: when you set up camp, assign a place some distance from the troops' bivouac to serve as a latrine, and make sure every soldier is equipped (with a shovel or some other means) to cover his excrement, so germs won't easily be spread by insects or get into the local water supply. Was Moses really that smart, or do you think he might have been getting help with this from the One who designed not only the human body but the microbes that could make us sick?

We continue in the category of Politics

(610)

Keep that place sanitary. "...For Yahweh your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you. (Deuteronomy 23:14-15) Yahweh didn't have Moses explain the science of the latrine thing, of course. The world wasn't quite ready for that. He merely offered a plausible reason for the need to properly dispose of human waste, one a devout bronze age Israelite could easily understand—and no less true just because it's a spiritual explanation for a physical issue. An Israelite soldier didn't have to know his microbiology; he only had to trust Yahweh to know what was in his best interests, and having faith in his God, to act on that trust in obedience to His word.

And is there a lesson here for us who are blessed with indoor plumbing, who must battle the world with words and ideas instead of swords and spears? Yes, I believe there is. We, like the Israelites of old, need to "cover our refuse." For the sake of a lost world, we need to make sure the evidence of our fallen human condition doesn't pollute our environment. In practical terms, this translates into modesty, chastity, propriety, sobriety, and responsibility—all those "boring" attributes that are becoming so rare, so out of step with our unclean society as we barrel headlong toward the End of Days. Yes, the lost are going to "step in it" as they walk through the world. Let us at least make sure that what's defiling them isn't us.

(611)

Always remember what Amalek did. “Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God.” (Deuteronomy 25:17-18) The last three mitzvot on Maimonides’ list of 613 have to do with the nation of Amalek—a sub-tribe of Edom. Amalek was a grandson of Esau, listed in Genesis 36:16 as one of Edom’s chiefs. The name is apparently derived from a word (’amal) meaning labor, toil, trouble—with an emphasis on the drudgery and grievous frustration of pointless work (as in Ecclesiastes 1:3). It may be instructive to re-read the passage at hand (including verse 19, quoted below), rendering the name “Amalek” as “pointless works.” Interesting, no?

It seems every time we meet Amalek, they’re a thorn in Israel’s side, one way or another. After the Israelites put Yahweh to the test at Horeb (Exodus 17), Amalek attacked them. You remember the story: when Moses held his hands up toward heaven, Israel’s armies prevailed; when he let them fall, Amalek gained ground. It’s an obvious picture of the efficacy of prayer. When it was all over, “Yahweh said to Moses, “Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.” (Exodus 17:14) Then the twelve spies (well, ten of them) came back from Canaan with tales of “a land that devours its inhabitants.” Israel balked, refusing to trust Yahweh to give them victory, but when they found out what their lack of faith had cost them (a whole generation wandering in the wilderness), they tried to take on Amalek in their own strength—and got soundly trounced. Even in Amalek’s waning hours, as Israel’s armies were finally carrying out God’s directive to wipe them out, they were causing trouble. King Saul (who had been specifically told to “kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey”—I Samuel 15:3) couldn’t resist “swooping down on the spoil” (verse 19). His disobedience cost him his throne. Even in defeat, Amalek was bad news.

(612)

The evil done to us by Amalek shall not be forgotten. “...Therefore it shall be, when Yahweh your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.” (Deuteronomy 25:19) Notice the contrast: “Remember what Amalek did to you” (verse 17) vs. “Blot out the remembrance of Amalek.” In the literal sense, we are to be forever cognizant of Yahweh’s displeasure with those who attack His people and do not revere Him. On the other hand, the Amalekite people have been history for the past three thousand years—their “remembrance” has been well and truly blotted out.

In the symbolic sense the same contrast is germane. We are to remember what “pointless works” do to us—they obfuscate the grace of God, attacking our faith by suggesting we can work our way into the kingdom of heaven. But the time is coming—and soon—when we will no longer even be able to remember why anyone would buy into such an obviously flawed theory. What will it take to achieve that? The physical presence of King Yahshua among us.

(613)

Destroy the seed of Amalek. “...Therefore it shall be, when Yahweh your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.” (Deuteronomy 25:19) If you buy into the error most reference sources try to sell you, the geography and related history of Israel’s brushes with Amalek make little sense. They’ll tell you that the Israelites didn’t really traverse the Red Sea, but rather an ankle-deep marsh (the “Reed Sea”) north of the Gulf of Suez. (Drowning Pharaoh’s entire army in that insignificant puddle would have taken a real miracle.) They subsequently place Mt. Sinai (Horeb) where Emperor Constantine’s mommy decided it should be—in the southern “Sinai” Peninsula. But Paul states quite clearly (see Galatians 4:25) that the Mt. Sinai to which Moses led his people was in Arabia—east of the Gulf of Aqaba (the north-eastern arm of the Red Sea, immediately to the south of Edom—in other words, just south of Amalekite territory). It all starts coming into focus when we realize that the Amalekites hadn’t gone hundreds of miles out of their way to attack the Israelites, but they were merely paranoid about protecting their own turf. The Israelites had asked permission to pass through harmlessly on their way north, but Amalek, not “fearing God,” harassed them at every turn, needlessly earning Yahweh’s wrath. Remember what we learned in Mitzvah #607—All Edomite territory (having been settled by Abraham’s grandson Esau) was off limits to Israelite settlement. Furthermore, Amalek was not listed among the seven Canaanite tribes slated for total destruction (see Mitzvah #601). So what Yahweh is saying is that the Amalekites must eventually be wiped out, but their land will not fall to Israel as an inheritance.

In a way, it’s ironic that we should finish Maimonides’ list of “613 Laws” with a discussion of Yahweh’s determination to destroy Amalek. If the linguistic root of the name is what it seems to be—’amal: labor, toil, and sorrow—then God is telling us precisely what the problem is with the rabbinical approach to the Torah. They see it as a list of tasks that must be meticulously performed in order to earn God’s favor. But the reality is quite different. Yahweh has in the Torah provided us with The Owner’s Manual we need to keep our mortal bodies in good working order—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. If we follow his precepts, we will be—as the

Psalmist says—blessed! “Blessed [’esher: happy, joyful, blissful, fortunate] are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of Yahweh! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!” (Psalm 119:1-2) I pray that this study has blessed you.