

Torah Concepts I

containing:

Ancient Torah Standards
Commandments Before Sinai
Torah Government
Torah Law

by
Dean & Susan Wheelock

So the *Torah* is holy;
That is, the commandment is holy,
Just and good.
Romans 7:12 CJB

Hebrew Roots® Press
PO Box 400
Lakewood, WI 54138

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Other Scriptures used in this booklet are:

The Complete Jewish Bible (CJB)
Jewish New Testament Publications
Clarksville, Maryland, 1998
The Holy Bible - King James Version (KJV)
Oxford University Press
London

Published by:

Hebrew Roots Press
PO Box 400
Lakewood, WI 54138
715-757-2775

~ Introduction ~

Don't think that I have come to abolish
The *Torah* or the Prophets.
I have come not to abolish but to complete.
Matthew 5:17 CJB



God, the Almighty Creator, maker of heaven and earth, has always made known to mankind the way of life that, if followed, will bring the human inhabitants of the earth into a proper relationship with Him, thereby producing peace and prosperity as an additional benefit. The basic instructions from God are contained in writings known as the *Torah* (*Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*), the first five books of the Bible.

These instructions are also spoken about in the records of the *Prophets*, and in what are known in the Hebrew world as the *Writings* (*Psalms, Proverbs, etc.*). These books, taken together with the *Torah* comprise what is commonly called the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures.

Then *Y'shua HaMashiach* (Yeh-shoe'-ah Hah Mah-shee'-ahkh = Jesus the Messiah) came and lived out His testimony as recorded in the Gospel accounts. He taught the *Torah* instructions in the manner in which God had intended them to be kept. His *Talmidim* (Tahl-mah-deem' = Disciples) further instructed the early Believers on the proper application of the *Torah* (*nomos* or "law" in Greek). Their writings and testimony made up the Greek Scriptures or New Testament and completed the Scriptural record:

"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed

heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ..."

(Heb. 1:1-3)

This booklet contains four articles presenting an introduction to some of the basic principles set forth in the *Written Torah*. It covers a wide range of topics, however, in actual fact, they constitute a consistently uniform teaching about how individual Believers in *Y'shua* are to conduct their lives. Not only that, it also instructs a community of Believers (or even a nation) how to establish righteous rules and procedures.

The articles contained in this booklet were written over a period of years and published in the *Hebrew Roots*® periodical. They represent a variety of thoughts with the unifying thread that all righteousness is based upon concepts and/or commandments which are found in the *Written Torah*. They are being collected here in order to make them available when the last stock of the issues, in which they originally appeared, have been exhausted.

We hope you will find them a blessing in your spiritual walk.

Shalom!

Dean & Susan Wheelock

Beit Shalom,
March, 2012

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~ Ancient Torah Standards ~

Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge,
My commandments, my statutes,
And my laws.
Genesis 26:5

In the beginning *Elohim* (Eh-loh-heem' = God) not only created the heavens and the earth, He also created man and woman in His own image:

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."
(Gen. 1:27)

The fact that God put His own 'image' upon mankind is most important, although there has been much discussion about the actual meaning and significance of this act. Some say this verse teaches that God has a spiritual body with all of the same characteristics of a human body (head, arms, legs, etc.). Others say it means that man has an intellect and therefore can conduct his life with morality, reason and free will, in the same manner that God conducts His life. Still others believe that man has a spirit similar to God's Spirit. The *Stone Edition Chumash* paraphrases *Rambam* (an appellation for *Moses Maimonides*, a famous Jewish scholar of the 12th century) as follows:

"He [*man*] can know and love God and can hold spiritual communion with Him; and Man alone can guide his actions through reason. It is in this sense that the Torah describes Man as having been created in God's image and likeness."

The very same Hebrew word for 'image,' *tzelem* (tzeh-lehm'), is also used to describe *Shet* (Sheh) the third son of *Adam* (Ah-dahm'):

"And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth."
(Gen. 5:3)

One difference between this verse and Gen. 1:27 is that here *Shet* is said to not only be in *Adam's tzelem* (image) but also in his *demut* (deh-moot') or 'likeness.' The usage of both of these words here means that *Shet* is an exact physical copy of his father *Adam* in miniature form, with the capacity to grow intellectually and become like his father in every way. Exactly what our final form will be after the resurrection is yet unknown but this we do know:

"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."
(I John 3:2)

Since God is both the Designer and the Creator of man, plus the fact that He made man in His own image, God must have a special affinity for man that does not exist between Him and the rest of His creation. Therefore, it stands to reason that God would not have left mankind without proper instructions on how to live correctly.

Today we have God's Instruction Manual for mankind in written form. We call it the Bible or the Holy Scriptures. It is not known exactly how the ancient people (both pre-flood and post-flood) were given the Instructions of God prior to the codification of the *Torah* at Mount Sinai. One thing is clear, however, from the historical portions of the *Torah* -- God never left the people of the earth without a knowledge of how to properly worship Him and how to treat one another. *Shaul* (Shah-ool = Saul or Paul) confirmed this as being true when he wrote:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them."

"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man -- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things."

"Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."
(Rom. 1:18-25)

~ Man's Relationship With God ~

In the beginning of the creation there was only one man, *Adam*, on the face of the earth. *Adam* had no one with whom he could relate at his own level. It is clear from both experience and Scripture that the animals could not fill this deep need:

"Out of the ground the LORD [YHVH] God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him."
(Gen. 2:19:20)

Since *Adam* could not have a meaningful relationship with the animals, there was only one interpersonal relationship that existed at that time, the relationship between God and *Adam*. Like all relationships, this one required guidelines so that problems would not arise.

One on one is the simplest of interpersonal relationships because there are no outside influences from others. In such a relationship it seems to be a natural law that one of the two people involved gains dominance over the other. In this case it was no contest, for God was the Creator and *Adam* was the created. In other words, God called all the shots. Apparently *Adam* obeyed, since there is no record of any discord.

At this time there is also no record that *HaSatan* (Hah Sah-tahn' = the Adversary or Serpent) interfered in the relationship between God and *Adam*. However, the fact that *HaSatan* was able, later on, to communicate with the woman indicates that he also might have had access to *Adam* prior to her creation.

~ Human Relationships ~

The lyrics of a well known hymn state that: "*No man is an island, no man stands alone.*" The need for human relationships has existed since the beginning of recorded time, when *Adam* was first given *Chava* (Hah-vah' = Eve) to be his wife and partner:

"And the LORD [YHVH] God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.'" (Gen. 2:18)

The relationship of *Adam* and *Chava* began perfectly. First off, they were given an ideal place in which to live. According to tradition, not only was the climate in the Garden of Eden perfect, they were also clothed with the Radiance of God so they did not need to wear physical clothing or construct a physical shelter as protection from the weather. They were also given an abundance of food. All they had to do in order to eat was harvest what was growing in the garden. This idyllic lifestyle afforded them ample time to learn the ways of God:

"The LORD [YHVH] God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the LORD [YHVH] God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Gen. 2:8-9)

During this time, when *Adam* and *Chava* were first together and before they were expelled from the Garden of Eden, the rules governing their relationship with God and with each other were quite simple; they were to obey God and love and respect each other. Since God was available to them for counsel, if they had a question about their own personal behavior or their interpersonal relationship with each other, all they needed to do was ask. God also gave them one specific negative commandment, because it would not have been natural for them to know that one of the trees in the garden bore forbidden fruit:

"And the LORD [YHVH] God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" (Gen. 2:16-17)

However, even this simple command was too difficult for them to follow and they ended up committing the first recorded human sin:

"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate." (Gen. 3:6)

~ Multiplying Relationships ~

With the birth of their first two children, *Kayin* (Kah-een' = Cain) and *Hevel* (Heh-vehl' = Abel), the number of human interpersonal relationships escalated from one (*Adam/Chava*) to six.* This increase in relationships also made the possibilities for personal conflict increase six fold. Since each one of them also had a personal relationship with God, the interpersonal relationships actually totaled ten.** When *HaSatan* is added to the mix, the total becomes fifteen.***

We believe it is safe to assume that with the increase in potential conflicts came the need to establish additional rules of behavior. Only in this way could all parties live in peace with God and with one another, while not succumbing to the influence of *HaSatan*.

Although it is not recorded in Scripture, it is our opinion that God gave the first family a set of basic rules to govern their behavior. This is true throughout the history of mankind until the time when God gave the fully codified *Torah* to the nation of Israel. In fact, it is possible to argue that all of the Ten Words (commandments) can be found in the Scriptures prior to their being given at Mount Sinai. (See the next chapter.) At least some of those commands can also be shown to have existed prior to the Flood.

~ No Respect ~

Once again a member of the first family failed the test when it came to following the basic rules set down by God:

"And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD [YHVH]. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD [YHVH] respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.

"And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD [YHVH] said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.'" (Gen. 4:3-7)

It says in verse 7 that sin had a 'desire' for *Kayin*, but that he should have been able to withstand it and thereby gain rule or control over his evil inclination. But, without proper

* The six relationships were: *Adam/Chava*, *Adam/Kayin*, *Adam/Hevel*, *Chava/Kayin*, *Chava/Hevel*, and *Kayin/Hevel*.

** Add to the above six: *God/Adam*, *God/Chava*, *God/Kayin*, and *God/Hevel*.

*** Add to the above ten: *God/HaSatan*, *HaSatan/Adam*, *HaSatan/Chava*, *HaSatan/Kayin*, and *HaSatan/Hevel*.

instruction, how could *Kayin* even know which thoughts of his heart were evil and wrong, and which were good and right so that he could withstand the evil urge? Scripture teaches that all people down through history have had the same problem, for:

**"There is a way that seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death."** (Prov. 14:12)

Left to their own devices, human beings are bound to believe that some actions are good, even though God says they are evil, for:

**"The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?"** (Jer. 17:9)

Scriptural evidence indicates that a set of instructions or rules for human behavior were established by God and given to the first family so that proper behavior would be known to them. This set of rules would have included instructions on how to properly worship God, as well as training on how to treat each other.

That such instruction was given prior to the offerings brought by *Kayin* and *Hevel* is evident from the fact that *Hevel* understood that he was to bring the very best of his flock as a gift to God. This understanding is indicated by the statement in Scripture which says *Hevel* brought "their fat" (referring to the offering animals). Another way to translate this phrase would be to say that he gave the "choicest" animals of his flock. If *Hevel* understood that his offering needed to be top quality, it stands to reason that, in order to be fair, God must have also instructed *Kayin* that his offering should also be of the very best produce in order for it to have been pleasing and acceptable to God.

Kayin's sin was not that he brought an offering from the "fruit of the ground" instead of an animal, but that he did not bring of the 'choicest' items of his produce. Instead, he kept the best for himself and brought inferior produce as his offering to God. That is what caused God to not 'respect' his offering while accepting *Hevel's*. *Kayin* had not shown respect for God, therefore God did not respect *Kayin's* offering. This caused *Kayin* to experience extreme jealousy toward his brother, which, in turn, led to the first murder. His offering is a perfect example where the letter of the 'law' was kept properly, but the spirit of the 'law' was broken.

~ Other Instruction ~

If God had taken the time to explain what kind of offerings He expected *Kayin* and *Hevel* to bring, it stands to reason that He also would have taught the first family how they were to relate to and treat one another. These instructions would have constituted the 'law' (or *Torah*) for that time period and failure to live up to those instructions would have been to commit sin. Thus we see the division of instruction or 'law' into two basic parts; how to love God and how to love one's fellow man. Four thousand years later *Y'shua* (Yeh-shoe'-ah = Jesus) upheld this twofold division of the *Torah* commands when He answered the question:

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

"Jesus [*Y'shua*] said to him, "'You shall love the LORD [*YHVH*] your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment.

"And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matt. 22:36-40)

~ What Is Sin? ~

The word 'sin' in the *Tanakh* (Tah-nahkh' = Old Testament) comes from the Hebrew word *chata* (hah-tah,' Strong's #2398). Its definition is: "to sin, miss, miss the way, go wrong, incur guilt, forfeit..." Some lexicons say it means to "miss the mark." An archer cannot 'miss a mark' if there is no mark established at which to shoot. Likewise, without stated rules or standards for human behavior, sin cannot be imputed to the perpetrator:

"... by the law [*Torah* or instruction] is the knowledge of sin." (Rom. 3:20b)

"... sin is not imputed when there is no law [*Torah* or instruction]." (Rom. 5:13b)

This definition of *chata* (sin) in the *Tanakh* exactly matches one of the Biblical definitions found in the *Brit Chadasha* (Breet Hah-dah-shah' = New Testament):

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." (I John 3:4 KJV)

Kayin did not heed God's warning that "sin lies at the door." Instead of mustering control over his evil inclination and bringing a proper offering, he took out his frustration over God's rebuke by first hating his brother *Hevel* for bringing an acceptable offering and then acting upon that hatred by allowing it to become murder:

"Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him." (Gen. 4:3-8)

It stands to reason that God would have previously communicated to the first family that killing one another was wrong, for He is a just God and would not punish someone for something they did unless He had previously told them such an act was sin:

**"And there is no other God besides Me,
A just God and a Savior;
There is none besides Me."** (Isa. 45:21b)

~ Just Punishment ~

Since our God is a just God, the punishment He meted out to *Kayin* must also have been just:

"Then the LORD [*YHVH*] said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?'

"He said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?'

"And He said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its

strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth." (Gen. 4:9-12)

Of course God knew what had occurred, but He gave *Kayin* an opportunity to repent of his evil act by asking the rhetorical question; "Where is Abel your brother?" Instead of seizing the opportunity to clear his conscience through repentance, *Kayin* took God's statement to mean that He truly did not know what had happened. Therefore, *Kayin* thought he might just get away with murder by denying knowledge of the event.

Kayin was a tiller of the ground. This was the occupation that he had chosen to follow. Farming is an honorable and much needed profession. However, history shows that farming is also a profession that is susceptible to false worship. Many people groups have stumbled down the path of nature worship because they were tillers of the soil and wanted to believe that if they appeased the proper pagan god (usually through lurid fertility rites) they would be blessed with abundant crops.

Whether or not this was a problem with *Kayin* we cannot know, for Scripture does not share that information. It is clear, however, that *Kayin* did have a direct relationship with the Creator God of all the earth and should have displayed great respect for Him by obeying His instructions.

In any case, the punishment meted out to *Kayin* was to be *karet* (kah-reht' = cut off) from God and to suffer a reduction in crop yield. The second part of this punishment is interesting because the ground had already been 'cursed' as a result of *Adam's* sin, so that *Kayin's* punishment was in addition to that original one placed upon *Adam*:

"Then to Adam He said, 'Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it:'"

"'Cursed is the ground for your sake;

In toil you shall eat of it

All the days of your life.

Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,

And you shall eat the herb of the field.

In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread

Till you return to the ground,

For out of it you were taken;

For dust you are,

And to dust you shall return." (Gen. 3:17-19)

Kayin's love affair with the soil had apparently ended and from that time forth he was forced to roam the earth, seeking food wherever he could find it.

Some might object that God's punishment was too lenient; that *Kayin* should have received the death penalty as would later be prescribed by the *Torah* given at Mount Sinai. However, it should be noted that the minimum of two witnesses for capital punishment did not exist in this case:

"Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness." (Deut. 17:6)

The only witness to the murder of *Hevel* was God, and He chose not to exact the physical death penalty at that time. However, God's act of cutting (*karet*) *Kayin* off from a

relationship with Him was a form of death, for without intimacy with God *Kayin* was a walking dead man.

~ Relationships Multiply ~

As time passed, the human race multiplied upon the face of the earth. With the increase in population came a multiplication of human relationship problems and, consequently, an increase in sin:

"Then the LORD [YHVH] saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD [YHVH] was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart." (Gen. 6:5-6)

~ Preachers of Righteousness ~

Scripture is very clear that prior to the flood the earth's people were not left without witnesses to the way of life God desired for mankind. One man, *Hanokh* (Hah-nohk' = Enoch) is specifically mentioned as being a *Tzaddik* (Tzah-deek' = righteous man):

"And Enoch walked with God..." (Gen. 5:24)

However, according to Jewish tradition there were other men who also lived and taught righteousness during those two thousand years prior to the flood. Here is a brief rundown of the men mentioned in Genesis 5. This information is taken from *The Midrash Says*, Vol. 1, pp. 73-78, by Rabbi Moshe Weissman:

- ◆ *Adam*: "In Adam's time, the world sank as a result of his sin. The *shechina* [*His glory*] which used to dwell on earth was forced to withdraw in the first of the heavens."
- ◆ *Shet* [Seth]: "In his time, the depraved descendants of *Kayin* angered *Hashem* (Hah Shem' = YHVH, the LORD)."
- ◆ *Enosh* [Enos]: "His generation was the first to desecrate Hashem's Name by propagating the idea of worshipping beings other than Hashem Himself. They initiated the worship of the Heavenly bodies, proclaiming that the sun, the moon and the constellations deserved honor as Hashem's ministers which had been appointed by Him to illuminate the universe. They therefore erected temples and altars to the stars, erroneously believing that by showing them respect, they pleased Hashem."
- ◆ *Kenan* [Cainan]: "While *Kenan* himself was a wise and mighty ruler who admonished his subjects to serve Hashem, his generation was corrupt."
- ◆ *Mahalel* [Mahalaleel]: "His generation was depraved."
- ◆ *Yared* [Jared]: "*Yered* was a righteous individual, but the rest of mankind was corrupt."
- ◆ *Hanokh* [Enoch]: "*Hanokh* also was an exception in his generation. First, he isolated himself for a long time, concentrating on *tefilla* (teh-fill'-la = prayer) and

self-improvement. He then tried to influence his contemporaries to serve Hashem."

- ◆ *Metushelach* [Methuselah]: "*Metushelach, Noah's grandfather, stood out above his contemporaries as a tzaddik [righteous man]. He repeatedly reprovved his generation. ... Due to his righteousness, Hashem waited and did not bring the mabul [flood] until after the seven days of mourning were observed for his death.*"
- ◆ *Lemekh* [Lamech]: "(This is not the *Lemekh* who killed *Kayin*. ...) In his time, a famine struck the world as a warning to mankind, but to no avail."

The last of the righteous men to live before the flood was *Noach* (Noh-ahch' = Noah):

"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD [YHVH].

"These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just [tzaddik] man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God." (Gen. 6:8-9)

If tradition is correct, then mankind could not claim the excuse that they did not know right from wrong, for God made sure there were always righteous men to teach the truth.

~ Wickedness Increased ~

As a result of the world's increasing wickedness (sinfulness*), God determined there was only one solution to the problem; destroy that entire evil generation and start over:

So the LORD [YHVH] said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' (Gen. 6:5-7)

Today, our world seems to be swiftly following the same path which the pre-flood people took. Evil is on the increase around the world, yet many do not see the decline in moral and spiritual values as being evil. Rather, many view it as progress. We should not wonder at this phenomena, for the Scriptures are plain about what dwells in the natural, unrepentant human heart:

"... those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, ..." (Matt. 15:18-20)

Many do not realize how wicked these actions really are when viewed from God's perspective. Many continue going about their daily lives seldom giving any thought to the sins that so easily beset them. That is why *Y'shua* said that at the time of His return, conditions would be much the same as they were in the days of Noah. People would be going about their daily lives, immersed in a cesspool of evil and not even be able to smell the moral and spiritual stench in which they live:

* Once again, sin or wickedness cannot be properly defined without a code of 'law' or rules. (Rom. 3:30; 5:13)

"But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."

(Matt. 24:37-39)

~ A New Beginning ~

With the receding waters of the flood came a new beginning for mankind. Now there were eight people (Noah and his three sons and their wives) giving a total of twenty-eight human interpersonal relationships. It is not known if God had a direct relationship with all eight people, or if He dealt only with Noah and, later on, with Shem. It is also not known if *HaSatan* had a personal relationship with each of the eight or if he was only an occasional player who interfered whenever the opportunity afforded itself. Nevertheless, it is clear that as soon as they came off the ark, God again began to set down rules:

"So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand.

"Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

"Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man.

"Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.

And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth And multiply in it."

(Gen. 9:1-7)

God has always been directly involved with His creation.

~ An Old Ending ~

It did not take long after the flood before sin once again entered the world, if it had ever even left. The Scriptures only hint at a handful of sins, and only those that had a direct effect on the history of mankind. Among them were:

- ◆ Noah's drunkenness and the uncovering of his nakedness (Gen. 9:20-25) which resulted in his grandson Canaan being cursed.
- ◆ The setting up of the kingdom of Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-12). While the Scriptures give very little information about Nimrod's kingdom, and a casual reading of Scripture would lead one to believe that he was not evil, tradition treats him otherwise. Nimrod, and his wife Semeramis, are thought to be the primary

progenitors of pagan worship. Almost all of the stories about the pagan gods and goddesses can be traced to them. According to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*: "*Nimrod is the prototype of rebellion against the Almighty (Hag. 13a), his name being interpreted as 'he who made all the people rebel against God' (Pes. 94b).*"

- ◆ The great rebellion of the people against God which resulted in the building of the Tower of Babel, which was designed to be: "... a tower whose top is in the heavens; ..." (Gen. 10:4).

Scripture is sketchy on detail concerning the increasingly sinful acts of mankind after the flood. Tradition, however, tells many stories about the idolatry that swept the world at that time. For example, it is taught that *Terah* (Teh-rah'), the father of *Avram* (Ahv-rahm' = Abram), actually worked for *Nimrod* and that he was a maker of idols. Thus, *Avram* is said to have grown up in an idol worshipping society; a society which he rejected in order to follow the pathways of God.

~ The Ancient Torah ~

The Hebrew word *Torah* (Strong's #8451) is generally thought to identify the 'law' or set of instructions given by God to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai. This being the case, one might expect that the word *Torah* would not appear in Scripture prior to the giving of that 'law' at Mount Sinai. This, however, is not the case. Well over three hundred years before the Mount Sinai experience God made the following promise to *Avraham's* son, *Yitzchak* (Yeet'-sock = Isaac) based upon the actions of his father many years previous:

"**And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge [mishmereth], My commandments [mitzvot], My statutes [chukkah], and My laws [torah].**" (Gen. 26:4-5)

Not only did God say that *Avraham* had kept His *Torah*, He also stated that *Avraham* kept God's *mishmereth* (meesh-meh-reht' = charge), His *mitzvah* (meets'-vah = commandments), and His *chukkah* (whok-kah' = statutes) as well. This means that *Avraham* must have received a complete set of instructions from God, instructions which he used as a guide for his relationship both with God and with his fellow man. A closer examination of these words will reveal the extent of those instructions and the depth of *Avraham's* obedience:

- ◆ מִשְׁמֶרֶת - *Mishmereth* (Strong's #4931)
Meaning: "1) guard, charge, function, obligation, service, watch 1a) guard, watch, house of detention or confinement 1b) keeping, preserving 1c) charge, injunction 1d) office, function (ceremonial)."
Usage: "AV - charge 50, ward 9, watch 7, keep 7, ordinance 3, offices 1, safeguard 1; [total] 78."

Understanding: Everything that God told *Avraham* to do, he did with all of his heart. This included: 1.) leaving his homeland to sojourn in the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:1-4), 2.) believing that God would grant him a son in his old age (Gen. 15:1-6), 3.) circumcising himself at age ninety-nine (Gen. 17), and 4.) offering that same son (*Yitzchak*) on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22) as God had commanded. Indeed, *Avraham* did keep all of the *mishmereth* (charges) that God laid upon him.

- ◆ מִצְוָה - *Mitsvah* (Strong's #4687)
Meaning: "1) commandment 1a) commandment (of man) 1b) the commandment (of God) 1c) commandment (of code of wisdom)."
Usage: "AV - commandments 177, precept 4, commanded 2, law 1, ordinances 1; [total] 181."

Understanding: *Mitzvot* (plural form), are understood to be the 'laws' or instructions by which men are to live. They cover both man's relationship with God and with his fellow man. Based upon its usage in this verse it can be concluded that not only did *Avraham* perform the specific tasks (*mishmereth*) which God asked of him, he also followed the way of life (lifestyle) which God wants all men to observe. It may also be concluded that these *mitzvot* were in some type of codified form so that *Avraham* knew God's interpretation of right from wrong. Jewish tradition teaches that *mitzvot* are laws which, in some instances, can be dictated by man's own moral sense, for the general good of society. (For example, all societies have enacted some type of laws forbidding murder, but their laws concerning adultery may vary from nation to nation.)

- ◆ חֻקָּה - *Chukkah* (Strong's #2708)
Meaning: "1) statute, ordinance, limit, enactment, something prescribed 1a) statute."
Usage: "AV - statute 77, ordinance 22, custom 2, appointed 1, manners 1, rites 1; [total] 104."

Understanding: The *chukkah* are laws which reason cannot explain but which were given as royal decrees by God to His people. A classic example of this type of 'law' is the prohibition against eating certain types of animal flesh. While modern medical science has now determined that swine flesh is not fit for human consumption (pork is one of the top ten foods cancer patients are told not to eat), it has taken nearly 6,000 years of mankind's existence for this discovery to be made through scientific means.

- ◆ תּוֹרָה or תִּרְהָ - *Torah* (Strong's #8451)
Meaning: "1) law, direction, instruction 1a) instruction, direction (human or divine) 1a 1) body of prophetic teaching 1a 2) instruction in Messianic age 1a 3) body of priestly direction or instruction 1a 4) body of legal directives 1b) law 1b 1) law of the burnt offering 1b 2) of special law, codes of law 1c) custom, manner 1d) the Deuteronomic or Mosaic Law."
Usage: "AV - law 219; [total] 219."

Understanding: The *Torah* (in this case the *Torot* or plural form) are all of the instructions or teachings of God. Rabbinic Jews teach that because it is used here in its plural form it includes both the Written *Torah* and the Oral *Torah*, both of which they believe were given at Mount Sinai. The *Torah* includes both *mitzvot* (commandments that can be supported by human reason) and *chukkah* (royal decrees).

Not only did *Avraham* believe God, he also obeyed Him:

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God."

(James 2:21-23)

~ A Continuing Tradition ~

Since *Avraham* had received and accepted God's *Torah* to guide his life, he passed this information on to his son *Yitzchak*. From there it went to *Ya'acov* (Yah ah'-cove = Jacob) and then on to his twelve sons. While all of these men knew the *Torah* of God as it existed at that time, they did not always follow its precepts, as witnessed by the selling of *Yoseif* (Yoh-safe' = Joseph) into slavery, along with other misdeeds.

There were significant differences between this early *Torah* and the one given at Mount Sinai. For example, the early form of worship allowed for individual sacrifice to be held at whatever place the people determined themselves:

"Then Noah built an altar to the LORD [YHVH], and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar." (Gen. 8:20)

"Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain." (Gen. 31:54)

"So Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it." (Gen. 35:14)

"So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac." (Gen. 46:1)

"Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and other sacrifices to offer to God. And Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God." (Ex. 18:12)

The Mount Sinai *Torah* specified that once the children of Israel were in the Promised Land they were required to bring all of their offerings to the Tabernacle (later on the Temple). They were not to offer sacrifice at locations of their own choosing:

"But you shall seek the place where the LORD [YHVH] your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes,

the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks." (Deut. 12:5-6)

When it came to interpersonal relationships, the earlier *Torah* was probably less complete because it would have dealt only with the relationships within a relatively small family or tribe and with the people around them.

Meanwhile, the *Torah* given at Mount Sinai contained much instruction on the interpersonal relationships of the many people who made up a nation. Therefore, they were much more complex than those governing a tribal unit.

~ Summary ~

It is evident from Scripture that God never left the earth's people without proper instruction on how to live peaceable and righteous lives. This included His instruction on proper worship.

God's instruction began with *Adam* and *Chava* in the Garden of Eden. It continued with *Kayin* and *Hevel*. *Hanokh* and *Noach* are both mentioned as being in a close relationship with God. If they were able to have such a relationship, certainly it was also available to others, if only they would have desired it. Tradition teaches there were also several other men in those first two thousand years, who were considered to be *tzaddikim* (pl. form). It can be assumed they tried to teach others God's way of life, but the vast majority of mankind did not want to listen.

Conditions are much the same today, with one exception. Because of the saving grace of *Y'shua HaMashiach* (Jesus the Messiah), many Believers are proclaiming to the world the need to live lives of righteousness. In addition there are the many righteous Rabbis of the Jewish faith who are teaching that the ways of the *Torah* are applicable for today.

Yet, despite all of this effort, the world in general continues to decline in moral and spiritual values. Mankind as a whole does not seem to want to hear God's message of repentance and return to His way of life. Most people seem to prefer to live a life of denial that society and the world is moving on a destructive path, or that they should change their individual lifestyle. Unless, God touches their heart, they cannot understand:

"And he said to me, 'Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.

"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last." (Rev. 22:10-13)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ Commandments before Sinai ~

Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge,
My commandments,
My statutes, and My laws.
Genesis 26:5

The Ten Words (or Commandments) are considered by both Jews and Christians to be the bedrock commands upon which their respective religions are based. Many people believe these commands were first given at Mount Sinai, some 3500 years ago. However, a careful analysis of the Scriptures indicates that all ten of these commands were actually in force prior to the Mount Sinai experience, and many of them can be traced to the time period prior to the Flood in the days of Noah. (Substantiating text is listed after each commandment.)

First Commandment:

"**I am the LORD [YHVH] your God.**" (Ex. 20:2)

"**Then the LORD [YHVH] God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.**" (Gen. 2:15)

"**And behold, the LORD [YHVH] stood above it and said: 'I am the LORD [YHVH] God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; ...'**" (Gen. 28:13)

Second Commandment:

"**You shall have no other gods before Me.**" (Ex. 20:3)

"**And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments.'**" (Gen. 35:2)

Third Commandment:

"**You shall not take the name of the LORD [YHVH] your God in vain, for the LORD [YHVH] will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.**" (Ex. 20:7)

"**And Pharaoh said, 'Who is the LORD [YHVH], that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD [YHVH], nor will I let Israel go.'**" (Ex. 5:2)

Fourth Commandment:

"**Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.**" (Ex. 20:8)

"**And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.**" (Gen. 2:2-3)

"**Then he said to them, 'This is what the LORD [YHVH] has said: 'Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD [YHVH].''"** (Ex. 16:23)

(Note: this was prior to Mount Sinai.)

Fifth Commandment:

"**Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD [YHVH] your God is giving you.**" (Ex. 20:12)

"**Then Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him, and kissed him.**" (Gen. 50:1)

"**So his sons did for him just as he had commanded them. For his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as property for a burial place.**" (Gen. 50:12-13)

Sixth Commandment:

"**You shall not murder.**" (Ex. 20:13)

"**Then the LORD [YHVH] said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?'**

"**And He said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.'**" (Gen. 4:9-11)

Seventh Commandment:

"**You shall not commit adultery.**" (Ex. 20:14)

"**And it came to pass, about three months after, that Judah was told, saying, 'Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; furthermore she is with child by harlotry.' So Judah said, 'Bring her out and let her be burned!'**" (Gen. 38:24)

Eighth Commandment:

"**You shall not steal.**" (Ex. 20:15)

"**...she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.**" (Gen. 3:6b)

"**Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father's.**" (Gen. 31:19)

Ninth Commandment:

"**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**" (Ex. 20:16)

"**So she kept his garment with her until his master came home. Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, 'The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me; so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside.'**

"**So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, 'Your servant did to me after this manner,' that his anger was aroused.**" (Gen. 39:16-19)

Tenth Commandment:

"**You shall not covet...**" (Ex. 20:17)

"**So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, ..."** (Gen. 3:6a)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ Torah Government ~

For the LORD is our Judge,
The LORD is our Lawgiver,
The LORD is our King;
He will save us.
Isaiah 33:22

Past events in Afghanistan have pointed out in a rather dramatic fashion the wide divergence in the forms of government which can be found among the nations of the earth. For example, the type of government found in Afghanistan under the *Taliban* regime was diametrically opposed to the governments that currently exist in Western style democracies. Under the *Taliban*, the Afghan people were not allowed to elect their nations leaders and personal freedoms were extremely limited, especially for women. In the United States (and other democracies), free elections are held periodically and individual freedom is a highly prized right for all its citizens.

It is clear that with different forms of government come varying degrees of personal freedom. In the Western countries, the right to elect the nation's leaders through democratic elections and individual freedom rank very high on the list of what people want and expect of their governments, however, this is not true of all cultures. Some cultures put more value on strong leaders who are able to bring pride and strength to their nations, even at the cost of their own personal freedom and free elections.

When assessing the manner in which the nations of the world govern themselves, it must be remembered that all of the current governments on earth are man made. There is not a single nation on the face of the earth which is truly being ruled by God in the manner in which He intended mankind to be governed.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the various types of man made governments and compare them with what God ordained in the Bible.

~ Governments Today ~

In today's modern world, the preferred form of government in the West is commonly known as democracy. However, this is a bit of a misnomer, since pure democracy requires the participation of all the eligible voting citizens in the actual passing of new laws.

In the United States, this pure form of democracy is found only at the local (township) level and only in a few states, primarily those of New England, where the famous Town Meetings are held. Town Meetings are gatherings of the citizenry of the township for the purpose of voting on the passage of certain laws and budget matters.

For the laws of a nation to be voted on in this manner is neither feasible nor practical, although it has been proposed that the Internet might be a vehicle through which this pure form of democracy might be accomplished. If a pure

democracy were to be established on a national scale, it would be the ultimate form of government by public opinion. As such, it would be highly susceptible to the spin doctors who try and manipulate public opinion to achieve the goals of those who pay them.

Most governments, which call themselves Democracies, really have a Republican form of government. A Republic is democratic to the extent that the citizens are allowed to elect their government representatives:

"A republic is a form of government in which sovereignty rests in those people entitled to elect, either directly or indirectly, representatives who hold office for limited periods of time. In a republic the head of state is a nonhereditary officer most often called a president. The president may also be the actual chief executive, or such power may reside with a prime minister or premier." (*1996 Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia*)

A country may or may not be democratic depending upon its voting qualifications. If only a very limited number of citizens are allowed to vote, or if there is only one candidate from which to choose, that country is not really democratic even though it might have the outward appearance of being one.

Republics are classified into three types of governments:

- ◆ *Presidential* systems, in which the head of state is also the head of the government.
- ◆ *Parliamentary* systems, in which the head of state (often called a President) is largely a ceremonial function while the Prime Minister or Premier holds the actual executive authority. The Prime Minister or Premier is not elected by popular vote, but is the leader of the party that gains a majority in the legislature.
- ◆ *Presidential - Parliamentary* systems, where the President and the Prime Minister share the executive powers.

The nation of Israel has a fourth type of government which is a hybrid of the *Presidential* and *Parliamentary* systems. In Israel's case both the President (a ceremonial function) and the Prime Minister (the chief administrator) are elected by popular vote, but a new government cannot be formed unless the newly elected Prime Minister can also obtain a majority of supporters in the legislative body called the Knesset. This usually requires the establishment of coalitions with several small parties. If the Prime Minister elect fails to gain a majority, then new elections are called.

One other form of government, which is a democracy but not a republic, is the *Constitutional Monarchy*. This is where one individual is sovereign, usually for life, most often receiving their power as a result of heredity. In a *Constitutional Monarchy*, the monarch is subject to the provisions of a constitution and the acts of an elected legislature. Great Britain has a *Constitutional Monarchy* and is therefore democratic but not republican.

Other forms of government which are not democratic in nature are:

- ◆ *Oligarchy* - which means, "rule by the few." Oligarchies are usually run by those who own property or hold positions of power in society.
- ◆ *Aristocracy* - which means, "rule by the 'best' people of the country." Aristocracies are usually formed by the landowning nobility, the intellectuals, and/or the rich people of society.
- ◆ *Absolute Monarchy* - a system where one individual is sovereign, usually for life, and receives his/her power as a result of heredity. An absolute monarch is above the law and is not subject to a legislative body.
- ◆ *Despotism* - a form of government in which the ruler has unlimited and absolute power. Originally, the term *despot* (tyrant; oppressor) came from its usage to designate the master of slaves. There is no constitutional control over the powers of a despot.
- ◆ *Dictatorship* - is similar to despotism in that the ruler has all authority to make decisions for the country. Often the dictator takes control of a country through the aid of the military establishment with the claim that he/she is going to bring stability to the country so that popular democratic elections can be held in the future.

There is some overlap among the various non-democratic forms of government. For example, an *Absolute Monarch* may also be a *Despot*.

~ Theocracy ~

Another form of government is the *Theocracy*. This type of government can take on certain aspects of any of the forms listed above, but the paramount and overriding principle in a *Theocracy* is that ultimately the nation must submit to divine authority. This means that religious leaders play a predominant role in the government of the nation. The word *Theocracy* was initially used by the first century Jewish historian Josephus, to describe the type of government found in ancient Israel. The chief characteristic of a *Theocracy* is the close working relationship between its religious and state leaders.

Of all the types of government listed above, the one which most closely fits the Biblical model found in the *Torah* is *Theocracy*. An interesting characteristic of the original *Theocracy* of ancient Israel is that it gave the individual families, who were citizens of Israel, a great amount of freedom from governmental intrusion in their lives.

Theocracy is sometimes used to depict several modern Islamic nations who are under the control of Islamic fundamentalists. Often, however, what they really have is not a *Theocracy* but *Despotism* or an *Oligarchy* disguised as a *Theocracy*.

~ Biblical Government ~

To understand the concept of government that God established for the children of Israel, we must go back and examine the origin of that nation. When *Moshe* (Mow-shay' = Moses) brought the children of Israel out of Egypt under the

strong arm of God, the people had a slave mentality. They needed a strong leader to tell them what to do and when to do it. There were two reasons for this need:

- ◆ First of all, the children of Israel had been living in Egypt for 210 years* and had been in slavery minimally for the last 80 ** of those years. They were not yet mentally prepared to establish their own laws or form of government because they had no real experience as a unified nation. They were merely twelve tribal groups living under Egyptian law.
- ◆ Secondly, Egypt had no written law to serve as an example for the Israelites to follow. In Egypt they had what was called a 'living law,' which was embodied in the person of the Pharaoh. He was considered to be a god on earth and his word (whim?) laid down the law for the nation.

Being slaves, as well as residents of Egypt, meant the children of Israel did not know how to properly govern themselves as free people. This may be the reason God initially gave them two strong leaders in *Moshe* and *Yehoshua* (Yeh-hoh'-shoe-ah = Joshua). However, there was a body of 'elders' already in existence which must have had some limited decision making role within the community, even during their years of slavery. This is evident from the direction God gave to *Moshe* when he first returned to Egypt after his forty years of exile:

"Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The LORD [YHVH] God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, 'I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt; ...'" (Ex. 3:16)

"So Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD [YHVH] who had sent him, and all the signs which He had commanded him. Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel." (Ex. 4:28-29)

~ The Elders ~

One of the primary keys to understanding the government which God established for the children of Israel is to discover the source and nature of the Elders.

The Hebrew word for elder is *zaken* (zah-kehn', Strong's #2205, pl. = *zakenim*). The primary meaning of *zaken* is "old,"

* A chronological examination of the lives of the Patriarchs reveal that the children of Israel were in Egypt for a total of 210 years. The 430 years, mentioned in Ex. 12:40-41, must be calculated from the *Covenant Between the Parts* (Gen. 15:13) which occurred during the days of *Avraham*, long before the children of Israel went to Egypt.

Thus, the 430 years of *sojourning*, mentioned in that verse, refer to the number of years *Avraham* and his descendants existed but were not a nation. During that time they were merely sojourning among the nations of the world, first in Canaan and then in Egypt. It was not until after God took them out of Egypt that they became a nation under His rule and truly became free men in a free society.

** The slavery of the children of Israel was at least 80 years in length since the children of Israel were already in slavery when *Moshe* was born and he was 80 years old when he led them out of Egypt.

but it also carries the implication of "one having authority." It is used both ways in Scripture:

"Now Abraham and Sarah were old [zaken] and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women." (Gen. 18:11)

In this passage it is clear the meaning of the word *zaken* is that Abraham and Sarah were physically old and could no longer have children. However, in the next passage it is equally clear that only those people of high esteem in the Israelite community were witnesses to *Moshe* striking the rock to produce water for the people:

"And the LORD [YHVH] said to Moses, 'Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders [zakenim] of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.' And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel." (Ex. 17:5-6)

There is no definitive Scriptural evidence, but it seems apparent that the elders consisted of the heads of major family units within the tribes of Israel.

In addition to the Elders, there were individual heads of each of the twelve tribes. Those men would most likely have been selected from among the Elders of the tribal families and installed as heads or chiefs. Again, there is no indication in Scripture as to how they were selected. Also, there could have been multiple heads for each Tribe; sort of like a Tribal Council:

"So it was, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, that you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders." (Deut. 5:23)

This point is reiterated later at the very time when the children of Israel were poised to enter the Promised Land:

"All of you stand today before the LORD [YHVH] your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, ..." (Deut. 29:10)

Instruction was given to the children of Israel that once they had settled in the Promised Land, they were to establish Elders in each of their cities. These men were to assume responsibility for what took place within their community:

"But if anyone hates his neighbor, lies in wait for him, rises against him and strikes him mortally, so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities [cities of refuge], then the elders of his city shall send and bring him from there, and deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die." (Deut. 19:11-12)

Another category of people who had a leading role in the society were the 'officers':

"Gather unto me all the elders [zakenim] of your tribes, and your officers [shoterim], that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them." (Deut. 31:28)

The English word 'officers' is a little misleading, since the Hebrew word *shoter* (shoh-tehr', Strong's #7860, pl. = *shoterim*) does not refer to a military officer but to a magistrate or scribe. The basic meaning of the word is "to write." Thus, the officers were probably public officials who kept records of the events taking place. Today they might be called 'government officials.'

~ A Patriarchal Society ~

Scholars agree that although the nation of Israel granted more freedom to their women than the surrounding nations, it was still a patriarchal society; the affairs of the community being managed by the men. Thus, the elders of the community would most likely have been made up exclusively of men.

The leaders, or Elders, of the community are often characterized in Scripture as gathering at the gates of the city to discuss matters of importance to the community:

**"Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sits among the elders of the land."** (Prov. 31:23)

It seems evident from this passage that women were not a part of this community gathering of Elders, since the Proverbs 31 woman (the epitome of a virtuous wife -- who ran a business and dealt in real estate) did not sit at the gate along with her husband. A notable exception would be Deborah, who led Israel against the oppression of the Kenites because there was not a man to be found in the nation who was both willing and able to lead them:

"Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time." (Judges 4:4)

**"Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel,
Until I, Deborah, arose,
Arose a mother in Israel."** (Judges 5:7)

No doubt, Deborah would have been considered to be an 'Elder' in Israel as well as the chief Judge.

In Hebrew, the words that best describe the patriarchal family are *beit av* (bait ahv = house of the father). The father's importance was recognized by the fact that genealogies were traced through his line; only occasionally was the mother mentioned. After a person's own brother, a paternal uncle was considered to be the closest relative, followed by a male first cousin:

"One of his brothers may redeem him; or his uncle or his uncle's son may redeem him; ..." (Lev. 25:48-49)

The father not only had control over his own household (his wife and children being subject to his rule) but even married sons and their wives were also expected to defer to him. This is apparent in the story of *Tamar*, who married the eldest son of *Yhudah* (Yeh-who'-dah = Judah). Even though she was no longer married when she became pregnant (*Yhudah's* first two sons had died leaving her childless), *Yhudah* still had the authority to demand the death penalty:

"And it came to pass, about three months after, that Judah was told, saying, 'Tamar your daughter-in-law has

played the harlot; furthermore she is with child by harlotry.' So Judah said, 'Bring her out and let her be burned!'"
(Gen. 38:24)

As can be seen from the genealogical list of *Ya'acov's* (Yah-ah'-cove = Jacob) descendants, Scripture recognizes his family as including three generations (see Gen. 46:8-26). As a man's family grew into succeeding generations and multiplied in numbers, they became known as a *mishpachah* (meesh-pah-khah', Strong's #4940), an extended family or Clan. Multiple *mishpachot* (pl. = meesh-pah-khoht'), or Clans, might live together in a community. In this setting it is likely that the body of 'Elders' for the community would have been comprised of the patriarchal heads of each family or Clan.

Although we cannot know for sure, it is quite likely that the body of Elders would determine when a younger member of the community became eligible to sit with them as an Elder. Only when an individual was mature enough to make responsible decisions would such an invitation have been extended. This practice would have been consistent with that which was later found in the synagogues, where new 'Elders' were chosen by the existing Elders rather than being elected by the popular vote of the congregation in a democratic election.

~ The Seventy ~

In addition to the Community Elders, there was also a body of National Elders who were selected from the individual tribes. Scripture identifies them as being seventy in number:

"So the LORD [YHVH] said to Moses: 'Gather to Me seventy men of the elders [zakenim] of Israel, whom you know to be the elders [zakenim] of the people and officers [shoterim] over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you.'"

(Num. 11:16)

These National Elders were to be the cream of the crop of the Clan or *Mishpachot* Elders. They were responsible for assisting in the guidance of the national government. During *Moshe's* time, one of their chief responsibilities would probably have been to communicate to their respective people what was taking place when *HaShem* (Hah-Shem' = The Name [YHVH]) spoke directly with *Moshe*. Correct communication would have been of the utmost importance when dealing with a group of people as large as the children of Israel.

It is important to recognize that the seventy National Elders were approved by God to function in their prescribed roles. They were not elected by the people. Confirmation of the seventy came in the form of the *Ruach* (Roo'-ahkh = Spirit) being placed upon them:

"Then the LORD [YHVH] came down in the cloud, and spoke to him [*Moshe*], and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again."

(Num. 11:25)

Two Elders did not appear before *Moshe* as requested:

"But two men had remained in the camp: the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them. Now they were among those listed, but who had not gone out to the tabernacle; yet they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, and said, 'Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.'"
(Num. 11:26-27)

Jewish tradition records that *Moshe* selected six Elders from each of the twelve tribes, making a total of seventy-two rather than the required seventy. He did this in order not to personally offend two of the Tribes by selecting only five Elders from them.

In order to pare the group down to the required seventy, *Moshe* had them draw lots to see which two of the seventy-two would not serve. Eldad and Medad, for some unknown reason, did not attend this ceremony at the Tabernacle. Jewish tradition teaches that perhaps they did not feel qualified to be Elders and did not wish to suffer the humiliation of picking the two blank lots. In any case, two other men received the blank lots and God showed His approval of Eldad and Medad by placing His *Ruach* upon them, causing them to prophesy while they were still in the camp.

This event led to a complaint by Joshua. He apparently felt that because Eldad and Medad declined to attend the lot drawing ceremony they had automatically disqualified themselves from National Eldership. In reality, their feelings of unworthiness to serve in this capacity displayed a humble spirit which probably made them all the more worthy of the honor:

"So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, one of his choice men, answered and said, 'Moses my lord, forbid them!'"

"Then Moses said to him, 'Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD's [YHVH] people were prophets and that the LORD [YHVH] would put His Spirit upon them!'"
(Num. 11:28-29)

Moshe understood that it was God's desire that all of the people should rise to a spiritual level that would make them suitable to be Elders and Prophets. This event reminds us of the statement God made at Mount Sinai concerning all the people of Israel:

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.""
(Ex. 19:5-6)

By taking these two verses together, the implication is that the seventy Elders were men who obeyed the voice of God and kept His covenant. This is what made them worthy to receive the *Ruach* (Spirit) of God and the responsibility to be National Elders.

~ Lines of Communication ~

It has been estimated that between two and three million Israelites left Egypt in the Exodus. With this large a group of people it was essential that formal lines of communication were kept open so the people would know what was going on. Even if the communication was only from *Moshe* to the men of military age, there were still over six hundred thousand of them. Anyone who has ever attended a sporting event with a crowd of one hundred thousand knows that, without a modern public address system, communication between the announcer and the crowd would be absolutely impossible. Consider the following:

"And Moses said to the people: 'Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD [YHVH] brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten.'"

(Ex. 13:3)

Are we to believe that all of the three million people personally heard *Moshe* make that statement? We believe that this phrase must be understood to mean that *Moshe* spoke the words to the National Elders, who then delivered them to the people through the lower level Tribal, Clan, and family Elders. The only other explanation would be that *Moshe* was given a supernatural voice that could be heard throughout the entire camp. While a miracle of this magnitude is certainly within the realm of possibility (for with God all things are possible), the Scriptures do not even hint that such was the case.

~ The Administration of Judgment ~

It was not long after the children of Israel left Egypt when it became apparent that not only Elders were needed to assist *Moshe* in the administration of the nation, but that Judges were also needed to help resolve disputes and interpret the *Torah* laws. This decision was made out of necessity, for *Moshe* had taken it upon himself to hear every matter of disagreement that arose between individual Israelites in order to make a judgment based upon the instructions of God. As word spread throughout the camp that *Moshe* was willing to hear their cases, the line of people desiring judgment no doubt grew long:

"And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening.

"So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, 'What *is* this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?'

"And Moses said to his father-in-law, 'Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws.'"
(Ex. 18:13-16)

Jethro, *Moshe's* father-in-law saw immediately that this situation would be the undoing of both *Moshe* and the people, for one man could not hear the cases of three million people

without becoming totally exhausted. Meanwhile, the people no doubt became frustrated because of the long wait for the resolution of their conflicts:

"So Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you do *is* not good. Both you and these people who *are* with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing *is* too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself."

(Ex. 18:17-18)

Jethro's solution was both simple and wise:

"Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you 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. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be *that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge.* So it will be easier for you, for they will bear *the burden* with you.

"If you do this thing, and God *so* commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace."

(Ex. 18:19-23)

Moshe immediately saw the wisdom of this plan and implemented it. This was the beginning of the judicial system in Israel, and the pattern established there is believed to have been followed, not just while they were in the wilderness, but after they came into the land as well:

"So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers [*sarim*] of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.

"So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves."
(Ex. 18:24-26)

It is important to note that the passage in Exodus 18 does not actually refer to these men as 'Judges,' but as 'Rulers' or, in Hebrew, *Sarim* (Sah-reem,' Strong's #8269). In Israel the men who judged the people held enormous power, for they had the power to develop 'case law' based upon the judgments they rendered. This pattern for Judges is similar to the one used by many nations today. A case is first brought before the lowest level judge. In Israel's case this would have been a judge that had jurisdiction over ten men. If this judge could not resolve the issue it would move up the ladder to a judge over fifty. The case would keep moving up the ladder until it could be resolved properly at one of the upper levels.

Using a round figure of 600,000 men, simple mathematics reveals there would have been 60,000 judges at the lowest level, 12,000 judges at the level of 'fifties,' 6,000 judges of 'hundreds,' and 600 judges of 'thousands.' *Moshe* was not included in this number, for he stood alone at the very top. Thus, 78,601 men, or 13.1 percent of all male Israelites

between the ages of 20 and 60, were judges (or rulers) in Israel during the wilderness wandering.

Moshe functioned as the 'Supreme Court,' since only the most difficult cases would arrive at his door. It was his responsibility to make the final decision on any of the cases that were brought to him. Those he could not decide, given his own understanding of the *Torah*, he would take to God for resolution.

"Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God." (Ex. 18:19)

~ A Pattern Emerges ~

The pattern that was established for both the administration of leadership and the administration of justice is intrinsically the same. Initially one man, *Moshe*, was at the head of both. He was over the seventy National Elders, and he was also the Supreme Judge of the nation over a system of lesser judges. In this context one must consider whether the 'rulers' or 'judges' established in Exodus 18 might not be the same men who comprised the Community Elders that worked within the Tribes to keep lines of communication open. In our opinion it is likely that those appointed as *Sarim* (Judges or Rulers) first had to be Elders of their Clans or families in order to qualify.

Although it is apparent from the context of Exodus 18 that those 78,601 men were chosen to function in the role of 'Judges,' making decisions based on the *Torah*, they are not called 'Judges' in any of the most popular English translations. The Hebrew word *Sarim* is most often translated in the King James Version as 'Prince' (208 times), or 'Captain' (130 times.) In other words, these men were given authority beyond just that of being Judges in the sense that we think of a Judge today as one who presides over a court of law. They were, in fact, Elders, Princes, Judges, Administrators, Leaders, Chiefs, Captains, and/or Heads of their respective family groups all rolled into one.

Thus, because of the form of government found in ancient Israel, the *Sarim* functioned in these multiple roles in direct opposition to the manner in which authority is dispersed in democratic governments today. For example, the United States government is divided into three distinct and separate categories:

- ◆ The *Executive* branch consists of the President and all of the Cabinet members and their staffs. These people make up the Administration. It is the responsibility of the *Executive* branch to enforce the laws of the land and administer the day to day functions of the government.
- ◆ The *Legislative* branch consists of the two houses of Congress. It is their responsibility to make the laws which the *Executive* branch is supposed to execute, and to approve the budget.
- ◆ The *Judicial* branch consists of all of the courts and judges of the land. It is their responsibility to see that the penalties of the law are properly applied to those who break the law, and that the innocent are set free. In the case of the Supreme Court, their task is to

determine whether the laws passed by Congress are within the parameters set forth in the Constitution.

~ Israel's Governments ~

There were four different periods of government in the history of ancient Israel:

- ◆ *The Slavery Period* - As already noted, when the children of Israel were subjected to slavery in Egypt they were primarily under the laws of Egypt, although they apparently had a group of Elders who made some decisions at the tribal and family levels.
- ◆ *The Transition Period* - During the forty years in the wilderness, the children of Israel were under the direct rule of *Moshe* who received his marching orders directly from God. This was also true of the approximately twenty-five years that *Yehoshua* ruled. During these sixty-five years the children of Israel were taught how to live as free men.
- ◆ *The Period of the Judges* - After the death of *Yehoshua*, the children of Israel entered a period of about four hundred years during which they were supposed to live under the *Theocracy* that had been established by God. Instead of having a single man at the head of the government, they were all supposed to follow the *Torah* as interpreted by the Judges and look to God as their Chief Ruler and King. This was their period of greatest freedom, commonly called the Time of the Judges.
- ◆ *The Period of the Monarchy* - Eventually, the children of Israel demanded, and were given, a human king to rule over them. While this arrangement brought greater unity to the nation, it also meant they had to give up many of the individual freedoms they had enjoyed while under the rule of God through the Judges.

The period of time we are most interested in, as we explore *Torah Government*, is that of the *Judges*. We believe this was the type of government God planned and intended for the children of Israel. If they had continued to live according to the precepts of the *Torah*, they would not only have been the freest nation of people to ever have lived, they would have developed into the greatest nation the world would have ever seen:

"Therefore be careful to observe *them*; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD [YHVH] our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:6-8)

Sadly, the children of Israel failed in this endeavor, and eventually God agreed to set up a *Monarchy* over them.

~ Torah Government ~

Now let us examine in more detail the governmental system that was given by God for the children of Israel once they were established in the Promised Land. The main focus here will be upon the Executive or Administrative form of Israel's government. The Legislative and Judicial branches will be covered in the following articles.

As already noted, the Executive function of government in Israel was initially given by God into the hand of *Moshe* and after him to *Yehoshua*. However, God did not relate to *Yehoshua* in exactly the same manner as He had with *Moshe*, for God spoke directly to *Moshe*, but to *Yehoshua* He spoke only through the High Priest. In this manner God began to wean the children of Israel away from a single human leader:

"But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD [YHVH] knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the LORD [YHVH] sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel." (Deut. 34:10-12)

God spoke to *Moshe* face to face. He did not speak to him through visions or dreams:

"Then He said,

'Hear now My words:

If there is a prophet among you,

I, the LORD [YHVH], make Myself known to him in a vision;

I speak to him in a dream.

Not so with My servant Moses;

He is faithful in all My house.

I speak with him face to face,

Even plainly, and not in dark sayings;

And he sees the form of the LORD [YHVH]."

(Num. 12:6-8a)

The main thrust of God's communications to *Moshe* was to impart the instructions of the *Torah* and to render righteous judgments concerning the people. These judgments also served as examples of how judgments should be rendered in the future.

In *Yehoshua's* case, God's directions were primarily concerned with the conquering of the Promised Land:

"After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD [YHVH], it came to pass that the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying: 'Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them -- the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses.'" (Josh. 1:1-3)

~ A Division of Duties ~

There was a division in the Executive realm almost right from the beginning. *Moshe*, was a Levite and he was allowed to perform certain religious rites (in particular the consecration

of *Aharon* and his sons as Priests). However, his primary responsibility was to teach the children of Israel concerning their relationships with God and with other people, both internal and external. Even though *Moshe* was involved in the religious process, it was *Aharon* (Ah hah-rohn' = Aaron) who had the primary responsibility for religious matters and he was the one responsible for interfacing between God and the people when it came to the Tabernacle and its services.

This situation changed after *Moshe* was gone and *Yehoshua* took over. One reason for this change was the fact that *Yehoshua* was an Ephramite. Therefore, he was not qualified to serve in the Tabernacle. For this reason, after *Moshe* was gone, the Priesthood began to take on added importance. It became very important that the High Priest and *Yehoshua* work together closely, so that the people would not be led to favor one over the other and cause party spirit and division to rear its head.

After the death of *Yehoshua* the Elders were given the task of administering the affairs of the nation. Apparently the initial group of Elders did a good job of running the nation, for the children of Israel continued to serve God:

"Israel served the LORD [YHVH] all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the LORD [YHVH] which He had done for Israel." (Josh. 24:31)

The transferring of the administration of the nation from a single individual (*Yehoshua*) to a group of Elders required a whole new set of governance rules. To complicate matters, sometime after the death of *Yehoshua* the High Priest also died:

"And Eleazar the son of Aaron died. They buried him in a hill belonging to Phinehas his son, which was given to him in the mountains of Ephraim." (Josh. 24:33)

Thus, in what appears to be a relatively short period of time, the two chief leaders of the children of Israel died. This initiated a crucial test to determine whether the children of Israel were going to be able to function as free men in a free society under the rulership of God. Apparently, as seen in Josh. 24:31, they succeeded quite well until that first generation of *Zakenim* (Elders) died out.

~ Making National Decisions ~

The first test for the new administration came when the children of Israel had to decide which Tribe was going to lead them into battle against the Canaanites:

"Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass that the children of Israel asked the LORD [YHVH], saying, 'Who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?'"

"And the LORD [YHVH] said, 'Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land into his hand.'"

(Judg. 1:1-2)

A number of questions need to be asked at this point:

- ◆ How was the decision made too inquire of God?

- Did the heads of the twelve Tribes come together in council to formulate this question? Or,
 - Did the seventy National Elders meet to decide? Or,
 - Was some other method or group of leaders used?
- ◆ Where did they go to inquire of God?
 - ◆ Once God had given the answer, how were the leaders chosen who were to organize and lead the forces?

Some of these questions are quite difficult and no conclusive answer can be derived directly from the Scriptures. The best we can do is speculate that the seventy National Elders met (perhaps along with the Tribal leaders, although they could have been included in the seventy) and decided to make inquiry of God as to how they should proceed.

~ Inquiring of God ~

It is much easier to determine how inquiry of God was made. That was done through the auspices of the High Priest who possessed the *Urim* and the *Thummim*. These were objects which were inserted into a pouch in the Breastplate that he wore. Even *Yehoshua* had been required to make his inquiries of *HaShem* through the office of the High Priest, rather than going directly to God as *Moshe* had done:

"And the LORD [YHVH] said to Moses: 'Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the LORD [YHVH] for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him -- all the congregation.'" (Num. 27:18-21)

Thus, when the National Elders of Israel "...asked the LORD..." it would have been done through the High Priest. According to tradition, the *Urim* and *Thummim* could only be used "for the king, the high court, or someone serving a need of the community." (*Encyclopedia Judaica*) They could not be used to solve personal problems.

Apparently, it was God's desire that the children of Israel always inquire of Him whenever an important decision concerning the nation had to be made. Thus, God became the Chief Executive Officer or King, the One who made all of the really important decisions:

"Then the children of Israel arose and went up to the house of God to inquire of God. They said, 'Which of us shall go up first to battle against the children of Benjamin?'"

"The LORD [YHVH] said, 'Judah first!'"

...

"So the children of Israel inquired of the LORD [YHVH] (the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, ...)" (Judg. 20:18, 27)

Much later, the Scriptures tell us there were three legitimate ways in which inquiry could be made of God:

"And when Saul inquired of the LORD [YHVH], the LORD [YHVH] did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets." (I Sam. 28:6)

There is no indication as to why God, at a later date, began to communicate more through individual prophets rather than through the *Urim* and *Thummim* of the High Priest. Perhaps it was because certain High Priests were beginning to act corruptly in the conduct of their office and duties.

It is interesting to note that the books of *Joshua* and *Judges* (along with *Samuel* and *Kings*) are considered by the Jews to be part of the *Prophets* rather than the *Writings*.

~ A Theocratic Federation ~

It seems apparent that the type of government God initially established for the children of Israel was a *Theocracy* in the form of a loose *Federation* or a *Theocratic Federation*. According to historian and Bible scholar Roland De Vaux, the nation of Israel was composed of a *Federation* of the Twelve Tribes of Israel who:

- ◆ "Acknowledged one and the same God, ...
- ◆ "Celebrated His feasts at the same sanctuary, ...
- ◆ "Shared a common statute and a common law, by
- ◆ "Appealing to a Judge whose authority was generally recognized, ..."

(*Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, p. 93.)

To this we might add:

- ◆ They had no common human ruler as their head (God was their ruler), and
- ◆ Their Tribal territories had secure borders which had been assigned to them by God so that no disputes over land should arise.

Decisions concerning the lives of the people were primarily made at the local level by the Elders (*Zakenim*) of the community. Julius Wellhausen, a nineteenth century Biblical scholar, sums up the Israelites form of government in the following manner:

"What there was of permanent official authority lay in the hands of the elders and heads of the houses. In times of war they commanded each his own household, and in peace they dispensed justice within his own circle." (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. V, p. 92))

By today's standards, this would seem to be a poor way to run a country, but when the children of Israel were obeying God by following the precepts found in the *Torah*, it worked wonderfully.

~ Charismatic Leadership ~

Roland De Vaux makes the following comment concerning the 'Super Judges':

"However much these 'judges' differed from each other, they had one trait in common: they were chosen by God for a mission of salvation, and they were endowed with the spirit of ... [YHVH]. The only authority manifest in Israel at that time was charismatic." (p. 93)

What De Vaux means by the word 'charismatic' is that only those individuals who were directly called by God, through a vision or by the visit of an angel, were allowed to wield power over the nation as a whole. These were the 'Super Judges' whose exploits are recorded for us in the Book of Judges. Among others, they include: Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, and Samson.

The following passage shows how the cycle worked:

"Nevertheless, the LORD [YHVH] raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the LORD [YHVH]; they did not do so.

"And when the LORD [YHVH] raised up judges for them, the LORD [YHVH] was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD [YHVH] was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them.

"And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way." (Judg. 2:16-19)

Israel found peace and security only during those times when they explicitly followed the *Torah*, for the simple reason that God had promised He would protect them from their enemies if they would do so:

"So you shall observe My statutes and keep My judgments, and perform them; and you will dwell in the land in safety. Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill, and dwell there in safety."

(Lev. 25:18-19)

Whenever the children of Israel fell away from following the *Torah*, they were brought into subjection by the other people living in the land or by an external nation. For example:

"And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD [YHVH]. So the LORD [YHVH] strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD [YHVH]. Then he gathered to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek, went and defeated Israel, and took possession of the City of Palms. So the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years." (Judg. 3:12-14)

No doubt during these times of subjugation, the Israelites had to pay tribute and follow many of the laws of their oppressors.

When the children of Israel would repent and cry out to *HaShem*, then He would send a 'Super Judge' to free them from their oppression. For example:

"When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD [YHVH], the LORD [YHVH] raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

"The Spirit of the LORD [YHVH] came upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD [YHVH] delivered Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim.

"So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died." (Judg. 3:9-11)

For over four hundred years this cycle continued to play out. When the children of Israel stopped following the *Torah* and did evil in God's sight they would go into subjection to a foreign power. After a period of time they would learn their lesson and cry out to God for deliverance. Then He would send another 'Super Judge' to deliver them and return them to some degree of *Torah* observance. That would cause them to have peace and freedom until they once again did evil and stopped following the *Torah*. Then they would again succumb to oppression.

It seems as though nearly every generation had to learn this lesson anew.

~ Sovereignty ~

The key ingredient that made individual freedom possible within God's *Theocratic Federation* form of government was the fact that it allowed each individual family to be sovereign. In other words, each family unit was self-governing and independent and responsible to see that all its members followed the *Torah*.

Being free and sovereign was the exact opposite of the condition in which the children of Israel found themselves while dwelling in Egypt. Now, instead of slavery, they had true freedom. They were not ruled over by a strong central government, either nationally or within their own tribe. Almost all decisions that affected day to day life were made at the family and Clan level.

In order to remain free and sovereign, the children of Israel were given the following stipulations. They were to:

- ◆ Drive out the pagan people who were then living in the land.
- ◆ Offer sacrifice only at the prescribed place and in the prescribed manner.
- ◆ Submit all disputes to the system of Judges which God had established.
- ◆ Follow all the precepts of the *Torah* explicitly.

If they had only done these four things they would have been totally sovereign (and therefore free) for all of their generations. The last item on this list really covers the other three as well, for as long as the family units obeyed the *Torah* they would have had little or no outside interference in how

they conducted their affairs within the family and would have achieved ultimate freedom.

~ Cleansing the Land ~

The Israelites first fatal mistake was not doing what had to be done to rid the land of the pagan people who were defiling it through their idolatrous worship:

"And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.

...

"Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.

"Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries.

"Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho, nor the inhabitants of Zidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob: ...

"Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh, nor the inhabitants of Bethanath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Bethshemesh and of Bethanath became tributaries unto them.

"And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley: ..." (Judg. 1:21, 29-31, 33-34)

Because the children of Israel did not obey in this matter and instead made covenants with the Canaanites, God decided to leave the remainder of those pagan people in the land so that Israel could be forever tested by their idolatry to see if they would remain faithful to Him:

"Then the Angel of the LORD [YHVH] came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: 'I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, "I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars." But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this?'

"Therefore I also said, "I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you."" (Judg. 2:1-3)

~ Offering Sacrifice ~

Not only did the children of Israel not drive the pagans out, they committed an even worse abomination by learning and following their heathenish ways and by offering sacrifices to the pagan gods. Thus, idolatry became the chief sin of the Israelites after they were moved into the Promised Land. Idolatry and pagan sacrifice remained a constant problem because the children of Israel now had to dwell right along side the pagans. If only they had just followed God's instructions and driven out those people the temptations would not have been so great. Because they kept getting snared into the pagan

practices they also began to forsake making their offerings at the Tabernacle.

No doubt God knew ahead of time that idolatry would be the chief sin of the Israelites. This may be why He emphasized this prohibition immediately after giving the Ten Words (Commandments):

"Then the LORD [YHVH] said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: "You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make anything to be with Me -- gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves."' (Ex. 20:22-23)

It seems as though paganism is always attractive to those who do not love the *Torah*.

~ Obeying the Judges ~

Order was to be kept in Israel through the system of Judges that had been established during the time of *Moshe*.

"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates [*cities*], which the LORD [YHVH] your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment." (Deut. 16:18)

The administration of justice is only as good as the Judges who administer it. If the Judges become corrupt, fail in their charge to correctly interpret the law, or look the other way, then the nation will be likely to fall into sin and become susceptible to punishment by God.

While there is no direct statement in Scripture indicating that the Judges failed to properly fulfill their responsibility during this time, it is quite likely this was part of the reason why the children of Israel kept doing evil in the sight of God and causing Him to bring them into subjection to foreign powers. If the Judges had been circumspect in their rendering of judgments, those who practiced idolatry would have been eliminated and the problem would have been solved. The Book of Judges records that this is not what happened:

"Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD [YHVH], and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the LORD [YHVH] and did not serve Him.

"So the anger of the LORD [YHVH] was hot against Israel; and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon. From that year they harassed and oppressed the children of Israel for eighteen years -- all the children of Israel who were on the other side of the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, in Gilead." (Judg. 10:6-8)

Here is what the Prophet Micah had to say about how corruption in society and in judging go hand in hand:

"Woe is me!

...

**The faithful man has perished from the earth,
And there is no one upright among men.
They all lie in wait for blood;**

Every man hunts his brother with a net.
That they may successfully do evil with both hands --
The prince asks for gifts,
The judge seeks a bribe,
And the great man utters his evil desire;
So they scheme together." (Micah 7:1-3)

~ Following Torah ~

The bottom line was that the children of Israel were to follow all of the precepts of the *Torah*. If they had just done that, their lives would have been easy and joyful and they would have lived in peace and prosperity.

Keeping the *Torah* should not have been too difficult for them since it had been specifically designed, by our Creator, to be the instruction book for the children of Israel on how to live a blessed and happy life. While it is certainly true that it is impossible to live one's entire life without breaking some of the *Torah* commands, it is equally true that the *Torah*, if followed for the most part, would have brought enormous blessings to the children of Israel and allowed them to become the greatest of nations.

Moshe told the children of Israel that the *Torah* was something they would be able to follow if they put their minds and hearts too it:

"For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it." (Deut. 30:11-14)

The *Torah* is the book of life. Its precepts are holy and therefore set apart from the laws of men. King David recognized this when he composed the longest Psalm in the Bible, Psalm 119, in which he extolled the virtues of the *Torah* and spoke of the blessings that would accrue for following its precepts:

**"Blessed are the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the LORD [YHVH]!
Blessed are those who keep His testimonies,
Who seek Him with the whole heart!
They also do no iniquity;
They walk in His ways.
You have commanded us
To keep Your precepts diligently."** (Psalm 119:1-4)

~ Summary ~

Today the world has many forms of government. Currently, the most popular form of government among the Western nations is *Democracy*, for it provides the most freedom for the people and the most protection from harassment by the government. Nevertheless, *Democracy* is still a man made invention and is far from perfect. As Winston Churchill once said: "Democracy is the worst form of

government and the best form of government. So far, there is nothing better."

However, we believe there has been a better form of government; the *Theocratic Federation* that God established in Israel immediately after the death of *Yehoshua*. What made it the best of all governments was that the Creator God of the Universe, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was the head of all three of its branches. He was the King who made all of the important administrative decisions, He was the Lawmaker who established the principles of right and wrong, and He was the Judge who made the righteous judgments that were too difficult for a human judge to decide.

But God did not micro-manage the *Theocratic Federation* of Israel. In fact, He only intervened when the decisions or the fights were too difficult for the people to resolve on their own. Most of the time the people were allowed to rule themselves and make their own decisions. This worked well as long as they made their decisions based upon the precepts of the *Torah*. Whenever they drifted away from that standard, they found themselves in deep trouble.

The *Theocratic Federation* form of government allowed the people of Israel to have the most freedom of any people who ever existed under any government, for the vast majority of the decisions were made at the family or *Mishpachot* (Clan) level. This meant that every family in Israel had a high degree of Sovereignty. Government in ancient Israel did not intrude into every facet of an individual's life.

However, one area that it did impact was that of religion. It was imperative in Israel's *Theocratic Federation* that all the people of the nation worship the one true God in the manner that He prescribed. To do otherwise meant being *karet* (kah-reht = cut off) from the camp or nation of Israel and from one's people and family. But then, which is better, to be a slave to a man made government or to be a slave to the One God and His true religion?

"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16)

Let our answer be that of King David:

**"But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy;
In fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple."** (Psalm 5:7)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ Torah Law ~

Gather the people together, ...
That they may hear and that they may learn
To fear the LORD 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 the LORD your God
As long as you live in the land
Which you cross the Jordan to possess.
Deuteronomy 31:12-13

God gave the children of Israel the perfect form of government, one that allowed for a great amount of personal freedom while still offering a high degree of security for the people. Not only was it perfect at its inception, it also had the potential of enduring throughout the generations, if only the children of Israel could have kept from corrupting it. The one catch, which caused the downfall of the *Theocratic Federation*, of the children of Israel, was that, both individually and corporately, they were required to observe all of the *mitzvot* (meets'-vote = commandments of God) found in the *Torah*:

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD [YHVH] your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD [YHVH] your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess."

(Deut. 30:15:16)

~ High Standards ~

If the children of Israel had followed God's form of government, as set forth in the *Torah*, and loved God with all of their heart and all of their might, they would have experienced boundless blessings and true freedom; a degree of freedom and blessing that is totally unknown today by the people of any nation, including the 'democratic' nations who claim to have a free citizenry. Of course, as every Bible student knows, the children of Israel did not observe the high *Torah* standards required to live totally free and blessed lives, even though God said it would not be too difficult to accomplish:

"The LORD [YHVH] your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand ... if you obey the voice of the LORD [YHVH] your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the LORD [YHVH] your God with all your heart and with all your soul. For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it."

(Deut. 30:9-14)

It is our opinion that the *Torah Concepts* given to the children of Israel, as both a form of government and a way of life, will be the very same foundation which will be reestablished during the one thousand year reign of King Messiah:

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ [Messiah], and shall reign with him a thousand years." (Rev. 20:6)

For this reason, we believe it is important for all Believers, to study and understand God's *Theocratic Federation* form of government; both as a way of preparing for the *Malkut Shamayim* (Mahl-kuht' Shah-mahy'-eem = Kingdom of Heaven) and as a means of personal hope for the future:

"For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach] at His coming?" (I Thess. 2:19)

~ Rules Are Needed ~

Whenever a large body of people live together there must be some type of rule based structure to govern that society, lest it degenerate into mob rule and/or anarchy. When a society is very small, a few verbal rules may suffice. As time unfolds, and the society grows, it may become necessary to codify those rules into written form. It was in this manner that the concept of 'Law' was first established among the various civilizations of the world.

In the context of the ancient Scriptures, it was one thing to work with a handful of people, such as *Avraham* (Ahv'-rah-ham = Abraham) and the first three generations of his descendants, and another to work with the 600,000 men of Israel (plus women and children) who came forth from Egypt some 430 years later.

When *Ya'acov* (Yah ah'-cove = Jacob or Israel) moved with his eleven sons and their children to join *Yoseif* (Yoh-safe' = Joseph) in Egypt, his entire family consisted of only seventy descendants:

"Now these are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt; ...

"All those who were descendants of Jacob were seventy persons (for Joseph was in Egypt already)." (Ex. 1:1, 5)

A written law was not necessary for such a small group of people who were all family and lived under a patriarchal structure, for the oral traditions of the elders would have been sufficient to keep order in the tribal family. However, by the time the children of Israel left Egypt they were a multitude of people, probably nearing three million in number:

"Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children." (Ex. 12:37)

With such a large group of people, the need for a written, codified law became of great urgency.

~ Working With the Family ~

God had been working with the descendants of *Avraham* for over two hundred years prior to their move into Egypt. During this time His teachings were handed down from father to son (with occasional additional instruction given by God to the Patriarchs as it was needed) so that the entire family could come to know God's *Torah* (instruction) as it applied to them at that time.

Another unifying element can be found in the tradition that both *Avraham* and *Yitzhak* (Yeets'-sock = Isaac) studied with *Shem*, the son of *Noach* (Noh-ach' = Noah), for *Shem's* life overlapped both of their lives and he actually outlived *Avraham* by thirty-five years. *Shem's* input into the 'laws' of the children of Israel is extremely important, since he predated the Flood and was privy to all of the traditions and instructions that had been handed down since the time of *Adam*. (For more information on the connection between the pre-Flood and post-Flood worlds, request our recorded message: *Roots of the Faith - Part I.*)

No doubt the instructions passed down through the patriarchs contained many of the *mitzvot* (meets'-vote = commandments of God) which were later incorporated into the complete *Torah* (instruction) given at Mount Sinai, although there were some differences. For example, *Ya'acov* was allowed to marry and have continuing sexual relations with two sisters, *Rachel* (Rah-khel') and *Leah* (Lay'-ah). This practice was later forbidden under the *Torah* (instruction) given at Mount Sinai:

"Nor shall you take a woman as a rival to her sister, to uncover her nakedness while the other is alive."
(Lev. 18:18)

It is generally accepted that as the children of Israel multiplied in Egypt, they continued to hand down many of the instructions which had previously been given to the Patriarchs, especially the prohibitions against idol worship. Whether they were able to maintain a purity of worship toward *HaShem* (*YHVH* or the LORD) during their entire time in Egypt is doubtful, since they were dwelling in what was one of the most idolatrous nations that ever existed. Also, the readiness of many to participate in the sin of the Golden Calf argues that at least some had strayed from true worship during their slavery years in Egypt:

"And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: "Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?""
(Acts 7:41-42)

~ Codified Law Needed ~

Because of their sheer numbers, and the fact that they had been living in a pagan society, it was imperative for God to bring to the children of Israel a codified set of instructions so they could all walk the same righteous path. If each family or tribe had been allowed to develop their own set of rules (as the nations around them did), it would have weakened Israel as a nation and made them more susceptible to attack by others.

Such diversity of law among the tribes could also have led to intertribal dissension:

"But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: 'Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls.'" (Luke 11:17)

It was this body of codified 'law' or instruction, which God gave to the children of Israel through *Moshe* (Mow-shay' = Moses) that is today called the *Torah*.

~ Sources of Law ~

There is a key ingredient in the Biblical model of government which is missing from all of the forms of government in today's world. That missing ingredient is the manner in which laws are established. When studying the Scriptures on this matter it becomes clear that in ancient Israel there was no legislative body nor individual human lawmaker. The Israelites did not make their own laws, because they accepted God as their Lawgiver:

"The LORD [*YHVH*] is our Lawgiver ..." (Isa. 33:22)

Ya'acov (Jacob or James), the brother of *Y'shua*, confirmed that God, not man, is the Lawgiver:

"There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy." (James 4:12)

In today's modern world, laws are derived in a variety of ways, but all of them are man made. In Democratic Republics (such as the United States) the laws are made by men and women who are elected to that office by the citizenry. They meet as a body on a regular basis and consider proposals for new laws and/or changes to existing laws. The driving force behind new laws often is necessity (some wrong needs to be righted) or money (those who donate large sums of money to political campaigns often apply pressure upon legislators to vote in favor of bills that will benefit them personally or the company they represent). Needless to say, this form of law making can sometimes corrupt the legislative process and, when sizable campaign contributions are accepted by lawmakers, it may be considered a form of bribe. However, it is written:

"And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous."
(Ex. 23:8)

When God is the Lawmaker, there can be no doubt that the Laws are just and equitable, for He is not susceptible to bribery.

~ Totalitarian Law ~

In *Absolute Monarchies*, *Despotic* regimes, and *Dictatorships* (see the third chapter, *Torah Government* for definitions of these terms), laws are often made by one individual or a small body of advisors to the person in charge.

Egypt had no lawmaking body and archeologists have uncovered no written laws by which that nation was ruled. Instead, the Pharaoh ruled by decree. Thus, the laws could be changed at the whim of any Pharaoh. This was a common

method of lawmaking in the ancient world and led to any number of very unwise decisions on the part of heads of state. It was because of this type of legislative practice that the children of Israel went from being a respected element of Egyptian society during the lifetime of *Yoseif* into sudden slavery when the new Pharaoh took office:

"Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, 'Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.'" (Ex. 1:8-10)

Another example cited in Scripture was the situation in ancient Persia (described in the book of *Esther*) when a decree was made that almost led to the genocide of the Jewish population. This happened because the king listened to *Lashon Hara** (Lah-shone' Hah-rah' = the Evil Tongue) about Mordecai the Jew, who had refused to bow down and worship *Haman*, the king's chief advisor. At that time it was a law in Persia that if the king issued a decree it could not be rescinded, even by the king himself:

"... 'for whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring no one can revoke.'" (Esther 8:8)

Because the original decree to annihilate the Jews could not be rescinded, it was necessary to write a new decree which gave the Jews the right to eliminate their enemies prior to the date which had been set for the elimination of the Jews.

This is a prime example of how anytime man gets his hand into the making of laws there is a rise in the probability that perversions of justice will take place. This is not to say that all manmade laws are corrupt, for many of them are just and good and we need good manmade laws so that anarchy does not prevail and society is not destroyed as a result. For this reason *Shaul* (Shaw-ool' = Saul or Paul) instructed Believers to obey the laws established by the society in which they live:

"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." (Rom. 13:1)

However, manmade laws may not be in agreement with the precepts set forth in the *Torah*:

"So Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, 'Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive.'" (Ex. 1:22)

"You shall not murder." (Ex. 20:13)

When such a conflict arises it is our responsibility to follow the higher authority:

"But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men.' (Acts 5:29)

Because manmade laws do not always conform with the will of God, it was necessary for Him to reveal His own set of laws when establishing the children of Israel as His Chosen People. While some of God's laws had been revealed previously, the bulk of them were given at Mount Sinai in the form of a covenant.

When a covenant is made, it is customary for all parties to carefully read and negotiate the Terms and Conditions of that covenant before agreeing to it. However, the children of Israel did not do it that way. They agreed to follow the Terms and Conditions God laid down for them even before they had heard all of them. Although the children of Israel did have an inkling as to what God wanted included in the Terms and Conditions of the Mount Sinai Covenant because a number of *mitzvot* had already been established and handed down to them from previous generations. In addition, they had also received some *mitzvot* by direct revelation just prior to their arrival at Mount Sinai. These later ones included:

- ◆ The celebration of the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. Several *mitzvot* were given covering this special time and the manner in which it was to be observed. (Ex. 12)
- ◆ The sanctification of all firstborn, both human and animal. (Ex. 13)
- ◆ A reiteration of the sanctity of the Sabbath day. (Ex. 16)
- ◆ The choosing of able men to judge the people. (Ex. 18)

It is likely that because the children of Israel had already been introduced to many of the *mitzvot*, they had a certain degree of confidence that God would not place any impossible demands upon them with the advent of this new Mount Sinai Covenant. Of course, the awesome displays of power that God had exhibited in bringing them out of Egypt was also a factor in their willingness to place their lives into His hands without question. In other words, they had been psychologically prepared to accept whatever God might require of them.

So it was, when the moment came for them to receive God's offer of the Mount Sinai Covenant, they were more than ready to accept it; especially since that covenant included a promise to make them a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation,":

"And Moses went up to God, and the LORD [YHVH] called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.'

"So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD [YHVH] commanded him." (Ex. 19:3-7)

* For more information on *Lashon Hara* request a copy of our booklet, *Guarding the Tongue*.

At that time the children of Israel had such great trust (faith) in God, they knew that He would not place a burden upon them that would be impossible for them to carry. Therefore, their response was unanimous:

"Then all the people answered together and said, 'All that the LORD [YHVH] has spoken we will do.' So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD [YHVH]." (Ex. 19:8)

In Hebrew the literal meaning of the above underlined phrase is: "All that the LORD speaks we agree to do even before we hear it."

It was after their agreement to do all of God's commands that the children of Israel heard the Ten Words (Commandments) with their own ears:

"These words the LORD [YHVH] spoke to all your assembly, in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and He added no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me. So it was, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, that you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders.

"And you said: 'Surely the LORD [YHVH] our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that God speaks with man; yet he still lives.'" (Deut. 5:22-24)

However, the children of Israel were so frightened by that experience they asked that, in the future, God speak only to *Moshe* so that he could communicate the remainder of God's commands back to them:

"Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood afar off.

"Then they said to Moses, 'You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.'" (Ex. 20:18-19)

~ Understanding Covenant Terminology ~

It is important to understand that a covenant between two parties is their agreement to join together in that covenant relationship. The covenant is not the terms and conditions, for those can be altered at any time by the mutual agreement of the parties involved. The covenant is the agreement. Once again, here is the agreement or covenant which God made with the children of Israel:

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Ex. 19:5-6)

And here again is the agreement or covenant which the children of Israel made with God:

"All that the LORD [YHVH] has spoken we will do." (Ex. 19:8)

By agreeing to do whatever God instructed them to do, the children of Israel abdicated any role they might otherwise have had in determining what the terms and conditions of the Covenant would contain. For this reason, the Terms and Conditions of the Sinai Covenant were established unilaterally by God.

The same holds true for the 'New' Covenant:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD [YHVH], when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah -- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD [YHVH]."

(Jer. 31:31-32)

There is no indication that the basic Terms and Conditions of the New Covenant are any different than were the Terms and Conditions of the Sinai Covenant. This is consistent with the statement made by God through the prophet Malachi:

"For I *am* the LORD [YHVH], I do not change;

Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob."

(Mal. 3:6)

The primary difference between the Mount Sinai Covenant and the New Covenant is the writing of those same Terms and Conditions upon the heart of each individual member of the House of Israel:

"But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD [YHVH]: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD [YHVH],' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD [YHVH]. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

(Jer. 31:33-34)

In both cases God was not only the One who established and guaranteed the efficacy of the Covenant, He was also an actual party and participant in the Covenant.

~ Ratification ~

Later on, after some more terms and conditions had been set down (which the children of Israel had already agreed to do before hearing them), the covenant between God and the children of Israel was ratified with blood. Once again, the children of Israel confirmed their agreement to perform everything that God instructed:

"So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD [YHVH] and all the judgments [*mishpat*]. And all the people answered with one voice and said, 'All the words which the LORD [YHVH] has said we will do.'"

"And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD [YHVH]. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the

twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD [YHVH]. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the LORD [YHVH] has said we will do, and be obedient.'

"And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD [YHVH] has made with you according to all these words.'" (Ex. 24:3-8)

This time, at least, the children of Israel had heard a portion of the *Torah* read to them (Ex. 20-23) before they agreed to the final ratification of the Blood Covenant at Mount Sinai.

~ The Commandments of God ~

The *Mitzvot* (commandments) of God are designated, in Scripture, by a number of different terms. Some of these terms were revealed when God spoke approvingly to *Yitzchak* concerning *Avraham's* devotion to His way of life:

"**Because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge [mishmereth], My commandments [mitzvah], My statutes [chukkah], and My laws [Torah]."** (Gen. 26:5)

These four directives of God to *Avraham* have been covered in some detail in the first chapter: *Ancient Torah Standards*. Briefly they are:

- ◆ *Mishmereth* (meesh-meh-reht' = charge; Strong's #4931). These were the commands God gave specifically to *Avraham*, such as when He told *Avraham* to leave his father's country and move to Canaan. The *mishmereth* did not apply to anyone other than *Avraham*.
- ◆ *Mitzvah* (meets-vah' = commandments; Strong's #4687). These are understood to be God's revealed instructions to the people. However the *mitzvot* could also be deduced through human reason.
- ◆ *Chukkah* (Who-kah' = statute, ordinance; Strong's #2708). These are the instructions which cannot be deduced through human reason but are Royal Decrees which God has given to His people and expects them to obey, even if they do not understand why.
- ◆ *Torah* (Toe-rah' = instruction or direction; Strong's #8451). This term is used to cover all of the various forms of instruction given by God. Thus, *Torah* would encompass *mishmereth*, *mitzvah*, and *chukkah*.

There are two other Scriptural terms which are also used in relationship to the above four. The first of these is *mishpat* (meesh-pah't') or judgments (see Ex. 24:3 quoted above).

- ◆ מִשְׁפָּט *Mishpat* (Strong's #4941)

Meaning: "1) judgment, justice, ordinance 1a) judgment 1a1) act of deciding a case 1a2) place, court, seat of judgment 1a3) process, procedure, litigation (before judges) 1a4) case, cause (presented for judgment) 1a5) sentence, decision (of judgment) 1a6) execution (of judgment) 1a7) time (of judgment) 1b) justice, right, rectitude (attributes of God or man) 1c) ordinance 1d) decision (in law) 1e) right, privilege, due (legal) 1f) proper, fitting, measure, fitness, custom, manner, plan."

Usage: "AV - judgment 296, manner 38, right 18, cause 12, ordinance 11, lawful 7, order 5, worthy 3, fashion 3, custom 2, discretion 2, law 2, measure 2, sentence 2, misc. 18; [total] 421."

Origin: from Strong's #8199

Understanding: The *mishpatim* (pl. form) tend to be instructions that were given by God to answer specific questions or problems that arose (or might arise) among the children of Israel. They usually relate to civil and criminal law. They are directly connected with the other terms in numerous places in Scripture. For example:

"**These are the statutes [chok] and judgments [mishpat] and laws [torah], which the LORD [YHVH] made between him and the children of Israel in mount Sinai by the hand of Moses.**" (Lev. 26:46)

~ Oral Judgments ~

An interesting thing about the *mishpatim* (judgments) is that they did not all come directly from God. They also legitimately came from ordained Righteous Judges properly interpreting (binding) the principles which were laid down in the *Torah*:

"**You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD [YHVH] your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment [mishpatim]."** (Deut. 16:18)

If the Judges could not reach a decision based upon the *Torah* (instruction), which they had been given up to that time, they would then go before God for clarification. The basis for the binding of *mishpatim* (judgments) is found in the practice established by *Moshe* at the behest of his father-in-law, *Yitro* (*Yee't-row* = Jethro) during their journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai:

"**So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves.**" (Ex. 18:24-26)

This command from God, to obey the *mishpatim*, meant that 'case law' was to become an important factor in the establishment of a code of law for the nation of Israel.

~ The Testimonies ~

One final term which is also used in connection with the *Torah* (instruction) of God is *Edah* (ay-dah):

◆ עֵדָה *Edah* (Strong's #5713)

Meaning: "1) testimony, witness 1a) always plural and always of laws as divine testimonies"

Origin: from Strong's #5707

Another form of this word is *Edoth* (ay-doh't):

◆ עֵדוּת *Edoth* (Strong's #5715)

Meaning: "1) testimony"

Origin: from Strong's #5707

Usage: "AV - testimony 55, witness 4; 59"

Understanding: *Edah* or *edoth* is a 'testimony' or 'witness' to God's faithfulness to His people. All of God's *mitzvot* (commandments) are *edah* (testimonies) to His faithfulness in giving a righteous set of laws to His people to govern their behavior both towards Him and towards each other. The Ark of the Covenant is also referred to as the Ark of the Testimony (*edoth*) sixteen times in Scripture:

"And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony [*edoth*] that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony [*edoth*], of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel."

(Ex. 25:21-22 KJV)

The *edah* are directly linked to the other terms for God's instructions in several places in Scripture. One example:

"Now this is the law [*Torah*] which Moses set before the children of Israel. These are the testimonies [*edah*], the statutes [*chok*], and the judgments [*mishpat*] which Moses spoke to the children of Israel after they came out of Egypt."

(Deut. 4:44-45)

While each one of these terms has its own unique meaning, they are also used somewhat interchangeably. It is common practice to refer to all the instructions of God as *mitzvot* or commandments. This makes for ease of use and unity of understanding and it is the way in which we refer to them in this series of articles.

~ How Many Laws Are Needed? ~

The actual number of laws which were officially "on the books" for the ancient nation of Israel were very few compared to today. An attorney from California has provided us with the following information concerning the number of Federal laws in the United States:

◆ "The 2000 Edition of the United States Code (USC) (unannotated) is 24 bound volumes, which takes up 2 shelves at the law library."

◆ "The United States Code Annotated (USCA), which includes a variety of case citations and other

annotations, takes up 14 standard library shelves. Both the USC and the USCA are printed on extremely thin paper."

◆ "The 2002 Code of Federal Regulations, which contains all of the regulations that the Executive branch has promulgated to enforce the United States Code, consists of 228 paperback volumes, which take up 14 standard library shelves."

◆ "This does not include the room full of hard bound volumes that contain the reported decisions of the Supreme Court, Circuit Courts of Appeals, and the US District Courts that construe the statutes and regulations."

Add to this the state, county and local laws, and we have a staggering number of laws to be enforced upon the people. No wonder we have so many lawyers!

With this many laws, the average citizen is simply unable to represent himself in court without spending an enormous amount of time trying to prepare a defense. In addition, modern law is so complex most people would be unable to prepare a proper defense even if they had an unlimited amount of time to do so.

Israel's Law, which was given by God, is not nearly as complex as the human law of modern nations. In fact, the total number of written laws (commandments) on the books of the *Torah* (first five books of the Bible) are only 613. Are we then to believe that this handful of commandments and statutes are enough to run an entire world, or even an entire nation?

Our answer is a qualified yes. It would have worked perfectly for Israel, and will work perfectly for the future kingdom, but only when both the people and the government conform totally to the precepts and conditions laid down by the Almighty. In fact, the children of Israel were specifically instructed not to add nor take away from the 'law' that had been given by God for their benefit:

"Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD [*YHVH*] God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD [*YHVH*] your God which I command you."

(Deut. 4:1-2)

Israel was called and chosen by God to be a very special nation. Not only were individual members of Israel expected to follow the precepts of the *Torah*, the nation as a whole (corporately) was to do so as well. When the leaders of the nation failed to follow the laws governing the land, it created a cynicism among the people that enticed them to also ignore the law in their own personal lives. Their failure, as a society, teaches us that it is very important for the leadership to live righteously so that the people might see their example and desire to emulate it. Thus, the real key to the development of a righteous society under *Torah* Law is for everyone to be committed to following its precepts. This was where the children of Israel failed, for too many of them treated God's Law the same way many people today treat man's law; as something to 'get around.'

In the *Malkut Shamayim* (Kingdom of Heaven) the leadership will be totally righteous for it will be headed by King Messiah. He will not only instruct the people of the earth on how to live righteously, He will also have the power to enforce their compliance when necessary:

"She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne."
(Rev. 12:5)

~ Learning Torah Law ~

The Scriptures teach that if a man strives to obey the *mitzvot* of the *Torah* he will indeed be blessed:

**"Blessed is the man whom You instruct,
O LORD [YHVH],
And teach out of Your law,
That You may give him rest from the days of adversity,
Until the pit is dug for the wicked."** (Psalm 94:12-13)

**"Praise the LORD [YHVH]!
Blessed is the man who fears the LORD [YHVH],
Who delights greatly in His commandments."**
(Psalm 112:1)

Sometimes Believers express dismay at the idea that they should observe the instructions (*mitzvot*) found in the *Torah*, for they feel that trying to keep all 613 commandments would be impossible. Of course, in this respect they are correct, for no one was ever required to keep all of them. People were only required to keep the *mitzvot* which applied to them. For example, many of the laws apply only to the Priesthood, and those apply only when there is a functioning Tabernacle or Temple service being performed at the location where God placed His name:

"But you shall seek the place where the LORD [YHVH] your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks."
(Deut. 12:5-6)

As long as there is no sanctified *Torah* service available in the location chosen by God, the descendants of *Aharon* (Ah hah-rohn' = Aaron) are unable to observe the *mitzvot* pertaining to the Priesthood. In addition, those specific laws never did and never will apply to people who are not descendants of *Aharon*. This means that the vast majority of people on earth have no need to ever observe any of the commands that apply to the Levitical Priesthood. However, this does not mean that we should not study them, for:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."
(II Tim. 3:16-17)

In like manner, there are specific *mitzvot* (commands) which apply only to the Levites. Some apply only to men and

others only to women. Still others are to be observed only by those who physically live in the land of Israel.

~ Universal Mitzvot ~

However, there are a number of *mitzvot* which apply to everyone in every age; no matter where they live. Therefore, it is important that everyone learn *Torah* Law sufficiently in order to be able to discern which *mitzvot* apply in today's world. By studying the *Torah* on a regular basis one comes to better understand the mind of God. This, in turn, can lead to a more accurate understanding as to which *mitzvot* apply to individuals today. This is why Psalm 1 equates a 'Blessed Man' as one who 'delights in *Torah*!'

**Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law [Torah] of
the LORD [YHVH],
And in His law he meditates day and night."**
(Psalm 1:1-2)

~ Religious Law ~

First and foremost, the *Torah* is a religious document that sets forth a religious law. This is quite opposite from the United States Constitution which expressly forbids the establishment of a State Religion.* Not only does the *Torah* specify which religion is to be established, it is very specific about how the worship of that religion is to be conducted. In addition, all other forms of religion were expressly forbidden. They were not to be practiced within the borders of Israel "lest it be a snare," as it is written:

"Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD [YHVH], whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods." (Ex. 34:12-16)

The *Torah* teaches explicitly how the Israelites were to relate to God:

- ◆ The Israelites were to worship using a specified ritual structure (Ex. 26 - 27; Lev. 1 - 7), at a specified location (Deut. 12), with specified accouterments. (Ex. 31)

* While we believe that the original intent of the framers of the Constitution was to allow the citizenry to worship in peace as they saw fit, without being coerced by the government to join a particular religion, it is now being interpreted by the judicial branch to mean that all references to God must be removed from all public places and activities, thereby inviting Atheism to become the Religion of the United States of America.

- ◆ Services were to be conducted by a specific group of people, the descendants of *Aharon*. Priests could not be self appointed or attain their position through schools of learning, but only through heredity. (Ex. 28)
- ◆ No individual or tribe was permitted to perform ritual offerings at any other location. (Deut. 12; Josh. 22:10-34)
- ◆ Worship was to be conducted daily. (Num. 28:1-8)
- ◆ Specific days were set apart (made holy) for the purpose of worshipping God in special ways. These included the weekly Sabbath (Num. 28:9-10), the New Moons (Num. 28:11-15) and the Festivals (Lev. 23).
- ◆ Laws relating to the ritual purity of the individual were established as a prerequisite to worshipping at the Tabernacle. (Lev. 11-15)

~ Civil Law ~

A second body of laws, contained within the *Torah*, relate to civil matters. These included guidelines on how people were to relate to each other and how non-criminal disputes were to be handled.

While these *mitzvot* are primarily civil in nature, many of them also have a religious aspect. For example, chapter 18 of Leviticus details the laws of prohibited sexual relationships (including the laws of incest) because the practice of these forms of sexual union defile (make unholy) both the people and the land:

"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." (Lev. 18:24-25)

However, there is a practical side to these laws as well, for many of them help reduce the risk of birth defects by preventing close relatives from conceiving children. A second benefit to society is that their observance helps prevent intra-family strife by prohibiting relationships that might provoke profound jealousy. For example:

"None of you shall approach anyone who is near of kin to him, to uncover his nakedness: I am the LORD [YHVH]."

...

"You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law -- she is your son's wife -- you shall not uncover her nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, nor shall you take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness. They are near of kin to her. It is wickedness. Nor shall you take a woman as a rival to her sister, to uncover her nakedness while the other is alive. ..."

"Moreover you shall not lie carnally with your neighbor's wife, to defile yourself with her. ..."

"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination." (Lev. 18:6, 15-18, 20, 22)

While none of these particular relationships risk giving birth to a child highly susceptible to birth defects, all of them, if practiced, could lead to extreme jealousy, hatred, and possibly murder. God considers obedience to these *mitzvot* to be not only a way to prevent hatred and murder, but He also reiterates their observance as being a form of holiness; a religious act if you will:

"Therefore you shall keep My ordinance, so that you do not commit any of these abominable customs which were committed before you, and that you do not defile yourselves by them: I am the LORD [YHVH] your God." (Lev. 18:30)

The nineteenth chapter of Leviticus contains numerous commands which pertain to social order. Yet mixed in along with these *mitzvot* are a number of specifically religious ones as well. The following is an example where both social and religious *mitzvot* are given in the same verse:

"You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the LORD [YHVH]." (Lev. 19:14)

Social welfare is the subject of the following example. It too ends with a direct reference to God:

"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the LORD [YHVH] your God." (Lev. 19:9-10)

This is a good example of how succinctly God presents the principles that were intended to govern His nation of Israel. From this short passage the basic principles of social welfare can be deduced. When other passages are added to it, the picture becomes more complete:

"He [God] administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing." (Deut. 10:18)

Caring for the widows and orphans is also part of New Testament doctrine:

"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27)

Perhaps one of the most difficult of human problems is determining who is liable when someone is injured or property is damaged. Once again, the *Torah* does not go into great detail on such matters, rather, it gives the principles to be used when deciding such cases:

"When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your household if anyone falls from it." (Deut. 22:8)

This simple passage indicates that it is necessary for landowners to make sure their property is safe from defects that might cause injury or death to someone visiting the property. This precept was used as a guideline for the righteous judges of Israel when they had to make a decision concerning liability.

But what about damages? The *Torah* also addresses this issue in yet another passage:

"If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, then the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be acquitted.

"But if the ox tended to thrust with its horn in times past, and it has been made known to his owner, and he has not kept it confined, so that it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death." (Ex. 21:28-29)

What about monetary judgments in cases of liability? That issue is also covered in principle:

"If there is imposed on him a sum of money, then he shall pay to redeem his life, whatever is imposed on him. Whether it has gored a son or gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him." (Ex. 21:30-31)

No specific amount is stipulated in this example, that is apparently left to the discretion of the Judge.

~ Criminal Law ~

A third body of laws contained in the *Torah* relate to actions by individuals that are criminal in nature. The most obvious of these concern actions such as murder, adultery, and theft:

"He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die." (Ex. 21:12-14)

This passage makes the distinction between premeditated murder and manslaughter. Other passages indicate that the death penalty could not be imposed unless there were at least two witnesses to the crime:

"Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness." (Deut. 17:6)

Modern society does not place adultery into the realm of criminal law, unless a man actually marries more than one woman at a time. However, by assigning the death penalty in cases of adultery, the *Torah* places it directly into criminal law.

It needs to be pointed out that adultery, as defined by studying various passages of the *Torah*, is the taking of another man's wife, whether betrothed or fully married. It does not include sexual relations with an unbetrothed female. The penalty for that act of fornication is marriage without the possibility of divorce (Deut. 22:28-29). Thus, by *Torah* definition, adultery is an act of stealing what belongs to

another. The penalty for adultery was equally severe as that for murder:

"The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death." (Lev. 20:10)

However, once again at least two people must witness the crime. What this meant in actual practice, was that very few people were put to death because most of these crimes were committed without witnesses.

Y'shua added another element to this mix when a woman was brought to Him that had been caught in the very act of adultery:

"Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?'

"This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus [*Y'shua*] stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, 'He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.'

"And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus [*Y'shua*] was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

"When Jesus [*Y'shua*] had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, 'Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?'

"She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus [*Y'shua*] said to her, 'Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.'" (John 8:3-11)

It was customary in Jewish law for the witnesses, who brought the accusation against a person, to cast the first stones in the convicted person's execution.

~ Laws Against Stealing ~

Theft was quite a different matter and not punishable by death unless the theft was a kidnapping (Ex. 21:16). In the case of ordinary theft, the punishment was restitution with an added penalty:

"If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep.

"If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed.

"If the sun has risen on him, there shall be guilt for his bloodshed. He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.

"If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double."
(Ex. 22:1-4)

Several principles are to be found in this short passage:

- ◆ Restoration was to be fivefold or fourfold depending on the size of the theft and whether or not the original item was recoverable. Larger thefts required larger restitution.
- ◆ A person had the right of self defense if he caught someone in the act of stealing and his own life was threatened. According to *halacha* (hah-lah-cah' = the Rabbinic interpretation of the law), one may not kill a thief if one's life is not in danger, since he would be able to identify the thief and recover the stolen goods.
- ◆ If the "sun has risen upon him," means that it is possible to identify the thief. In this circumstance the owner did not have the right to kill him (unless, of course, his own life was in danger).
- ◆ If the stolen item was recovered, the thief also had to pay an amount equal to the value of the item(s) he had stolen.
- ◆ If the thief could not pay he would be taken into custody and sold as a slave so that the owner might receive proper restitution.

Placing a thief into a position of slavery in order to pay his fine is much different from modern jurisprudence where thieves seldom restore the value of the goods they stole, much less pay double.

~ Types of Torah Law ~

Many scholars break down the laws found in the *Torah* into two categories according to their style.

Casuistic form is usually introduced by a conjunction such as 'if' and is then followed by the solution to that particular situation:

"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."
(Ex. 22:5)

Casuistic form is typically used for the civil or secular laws.

Apodictic form gives positive commands or prohibitions in second person personal:

"The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD [YHVH] your God."
(Ex. 23:19a)

"You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk."
(Ex. 23:19b)

Apodictic form is usually, but not always, used for the laws pertaining to worship.

An interesting facet to *Torah* law is that many laws are supported by a justifying motive. According to Roland DeVaux, on page 149 of his book *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*, there are four types of justifying motives.

1.) *The common sense motive:*

"If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor's wife; so you shall put away the evil from among you."
(Deut. 22:23-24)

2.) *The moral motive:*

"And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous."
(Ex. 23:8)

3.) *The religious motive:*

"You shall have no other gods before Me. ... For I, the LORD [YHVH] your God, am a jealous God ..."
(Ex. 20:3, 5)

4.) *The appeal to history:* These types of laws usually reference the Israelite oppression in Egypt. God wanted the children of Israel to learn from that experience and not mistreat alien residents in the same cruel way they were treated:

"Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt."
(Ex. 23:9)

~ Law of Liberty ~

*Ya'acov** (Jacob, also known as James; the brother of *Y'shua*), did not view the *Torah* as being a "law of enslavement," rather, he considered it to be the only real way to obtain true freedom and liberty. He spoke of it as being "the perfect law of liberty:"

"But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."
(James 1:25)

The *Torah* was a "law of liberty" in a number of different ways:

- ◆ Every family owned land which could not be sold in perpetuity. Every fiftieth year (Jubilee) all land that had been sold was returned to the family which originally owned it.
- ◆ All unpaid debts were forgiven every seventh year.
- ◆ There were virtually no taxes. There was no national military conscription.

* *Ya'acov* followed the *Torah* so closely he was considered by the Pharisees of the first century to be one of the most righteous men of his time. He was known as *Ya'acov the Just*, and when he was martyred by a wicked and corrupt High Priest, the entire Pharisaic community mourned his death.

- ◆ There was no king to take sons and daughters to serve in the royal court.
- ◆ The laws governing slavery (indentured service) were liberal.
- ◆ Every stranger living in the land had the same protection under the *Torah* as did native born Israelis.

King David also believed the *Torah* granted liberty to those who followed its precepts:

**"So shall I keep Your law continually,
Forever and ever.
And I will walk at liberty,
For I seek Your precepts."** (Psalm 119:44-45)

~ Detail Vs Concept ~

It is a characteristic of man made laws to focus on detail. Such close attention to the letter of the law allows unscrupulous individuals to find loopholes in the detailed law and thereby get around the conceptual intent of the law. This is one reason why modern nations have so many laws; they have to keep plugging the loopholes.

God, on the other hand, focuses on the concepts of law. In Scripture some detail is given, but only to serve as an example of the concept set forth. This is true for both the religious and civil aspects of the law. While all of the various offerings are set forth in the *Torah*, the actual details of how those services are to be conducted* are not given. Those details fall into the province of *oral traditions*, which were passed down from generation to generation among the priests and Levites.

A similar situation exists in the *Torah's* civil law. For example, only a few representative examples are given concerning the laws of liability, yet from those few examples, a Judge (who truly wants to serve in a righteous manner) is able to discern the proper course of action in any given situation.

Probably the greatest problem for a Righteous Judge is not being able to determine whether a witness is telling the truth or a lie. This was the very attribute which king Solomon requested of God:

"Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" (I Kings 3:9)

In the *Malchut Shamayim* (Kingdom of Heaven) this problem will be alleviated, for *Y'shua HaMashiach* will be able to discern motives:

"So the scribes and Pharisees watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against Him. But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Arise and stand here.' And he arose and stood." (Luke 6:7-8)

* Such details as the actual method of killing the animal, the manner in which the blood was handled, the prayers that accompanied the service, etc., etc.

~ The Torah Distilled ~

While it is true that many of the *Torah mitzvot* can be arrived at through human reasoning, that is not the way in which they were presented to the children of Israel. The fact that other nations developed some similar laws, such as prohibitions against murder, does not preclude the fact that Israel received all of her laws directly from a Sovereign Lawgiver. Yet in some ways the *mitzvot* of the *Torah* seem incomplete, for there are little or no direct instructions on matters such as personal piety, philanthropy, or charity. Such things are said to have been "committed to the heart" (or conscience) of each individual.

According to George Foote Moore, in Vol. II of *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, "Wherever something is thus left to conscience, the Scripture says of it, 'And thou shalt revere the Lord thy God.'" (p. 82)

Most philosophers tend to generalize their ethical teachings into a number of 'virtues,' thus distilling the conduct of man down into a handful of generalized principles. This has also been the case with other writers of Scripture in both the Prophets and the Writings.

According to Rabbi Simlai (as quoted by G.F. Moore on p. 83), by taking the 613 commandments and reducing them down, the *Torah* can be comprehended in the following ways:

1.) "David came and comprehended them [*the 613 commandments*] in eleven:"

"A Psalm of David.

**LORD [YHVH], who may abide in Your tabernacle?
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?**

- [1] **He who walks uprightly,**
- [2] **And works righteousness,**
- [3] **And speaks the truth in his heart;**
- [4] **He who does not backbite with his tongue,**
- [5] **Nor does evil to his neighbor,**
- [6] **Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;**
- [7] **In whose eyes a vile person is despised,**
- [8] **But he honors those who fear the LORD [YHVH];**
- [9] **He who swears to his own hurt and does not change;**
- [10] **He who does not put out his money at usury,**
- [11] **Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.**

He who does these things shall never be moved." (Psalm 15)

2.) "Isaiah came and comprehended them in six:"

- "[1] He who walks righteously and [2] speaks uprightly,**
- [3] **He who despises the gain of oppressions,**
 - [4] **Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes,**
 - [5] **Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed,**
 - [6] **And shuts his eyes from seeing evil:**
- He will dwell on high;
His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks;
Bread will be given him, His water will be sure."**

(Isa. 33:15-16)

3.) "Micah came and comprehended them in three:"

**"He has shown you, O man, what is good;
And what does the LORD [YHVH] require of you**

[1] But to do justly,

[2] To love mercy,

[3] And to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic. 6:8)

4.) "Isaiah further comprehended them in two:"

"Thus says the LORD [YHVH]:

'[1] Keep justice, and [2] do righteousness,

For My salvation is about to come,

And My righteousness to be revealed.'" (Isa. 56:1)

5.) "Amos came and comprehended them in one:"

**"For thus says the LORD [YHVH] to the
house of Israel:**

'Seek Me and live; ...'" (Amos 5:4)

6.) "Another finds the one comprehensive word in Habakkuk:"

"But the just shall live by his faith." (Hab. 2:4)

This final virtue is repeated twice in the New Testament (Rom. 1:17 and Gal. 3:11).

Y'shua also 'comprehended' the *Torah* in two:

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

"Jesus [*Y'shua*] said to him, "You shall love the LORD [YHVH] your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment.

"And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.'" (Matt. 22:36-40)

Finally, there is the distillation of the *Torah* as given by *Shaul* (Paul) into the nine fruits of the Spirit:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law." (Gal. 5:22-23)

All of these distillations and summaries of the *Torah* commands are useful as personal guidelines for behavior, but they do not negate the need for the larger body of 613 *mitzvot*. Instead, they have the opposite effect, for the larger body of instructions are needed to clarify how one is to "love God" and "love neighbor." G.F. Moore comments on this very thing:

"Such condensations of the essentials of the moral law into a dozen great precepts or into one comprehensive rule are of interest to us as exhibiting a sound estimate of religious and moral values, and for the intrinsic unity of fundamental principle. They were never meant to be taken for sufficient regulatives of conduct, for which, indeed, they are wholly inadequate, and the broader and more elevated they are, the less they are adapted to any such end. ... For the actual conduct of life, and above all for

the practical morals of a community or a people in any age, explicit rules, ... are indispensable." (p. 88)

~ The Fruits of Keeping Torah ~

History tells us that the children of Israel did not keep the *mitzvot* of God and as a result were eventually sent into captivity. They had an opportunity that no other nation has had before or since. The promises of God were very specific. First of all, they were promised the prolongation of days:

"Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD [YHVH] your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the LORD [YHVH] your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.'" (Deut. 6:1-2)

In addition, they were promised that the nation of Israel would be set high above all the other nations of the world and that Israel would become a light and a beacon for all people:

"This day the LORD [YHVH] your God commands you to observe these statutes and judgments; therefore you shall be careful to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. Today you have proclaimed the LORD [YHVH] to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice.

"Also today the LORD [YHVH] has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the LORD [YHVH] your God, just as He has spoken."

(Deut. 26:16-19)

Both the House of Israel and the House of Judah failed in their attempts to live up to the Royal Law they had been given by God. But the story has not ended, for Scripture teaches that the time will come when the children of Israel will once again be established in the land, under the rule of the *Torah*, when King Messiah returns to establish His Kingdom:

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days

That the mountain of the LORD's [YHVH] house

Shall be established on the top of the mountains,

And shall be exalted above the hills;

And all nations shall flow to it.

Many people shall come and say,

'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of

the LORD [YHVH],

To the house of the God of Jacob;

He will teach us His ways,

And we shall walk in His paths.'

For out of Zion shall go forth the law,

And the word of the LORD [YHVH] from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations,

And rebuke many people;

They shall beat their swords into plowshares,

**And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore." (Isa. 2:2-4)**

~ Summary ~

The children of Israel came out of Egypt after having spent over two hundred years in a highly paganized society. They possessed a body of oral traditions which had been passed down to them from the Patriarchs: *Avraham*, *Yitzhak*, and *Ya'acov*; most of which would have been originally derived from the Patriarch's direct contact with God. However, they also undoubtedly had other, less lofty, traditions which were not from God, but had been derived from their years in Egyptian slavery.

For this reason, and because of the sheer number of people involved in the Exodus, it was necessary for God to give the children of Israel a codified set of laws or commandments by which they could conduct their individual lives as well as their nation. This law consisted of 613 *mitzvot* (commandments), all of which were found in the *Torah*. All of them came from God, for He was their one and only Lawgiver.

Along with the set of commandments came a covenant. It was essentially a unilateral covenant in that God had the sole prerogative of setting the terms and conditions. The children of Israel agreed to do everything God required of them, even those Terms and Conditions which were to be revealed in the future.

The *Torah mitzvot* are essentially religious law, even though many of them instruct us on how we are to relate to each other. All the law was given in the context of Israel being a holy (set apart) people. The law contains three basic parts: Religious law, Civil law, and Criminal law. Rather than detailing every possible scenario (the way modern law is written) *Torah* law gives general principles which righteous Judges were to use in order to rightly decide specific cases.

It is our opinion that the *Torah* law of 613 *mitzvot* will be the very same one used when the Messianic Kingdom is established on this earth. The difference between that age and the age of ancient Israel, is that in the Messianic age the *Torah* will be written on the hearts of all the people, thereby enabling them to "know the Lord" and keep His commandments.

As Believers, we can begin now to learn the law of the Messianic Kingdom. Our research and study into the Law of God gives us a vision and a hope for the future, as we see how wonderful the world will be in that golden age when *Y'shua*, the King Messiah, rules over all the earth.

**"The law [*Torah*] of the LORD [*YHVH*] is perfect,
converting the soul;
The testimony [*edoth*] of the LORD [*YHVH*] is sure,
making wise the simple;
The statutes [*pekud*] of the LORD [*YHVH*] are right,
rejoicing the heart;
The commandment [*mitzvah*] of the LORD [*YHVH*]
is pure, enlightening the eyes;
The fear of the LORD [*YHVH*] is clean,
enduring forever;**

**The judgments [*mishpat*] of the LORD [*YHVH*] are
true and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
Moreover by them Your servant is warned,
And in keeping them there is great reward."**

(Psalm 19:7-11)

Let us claim that "great reward" by keeping the *mitzvot* (commandments) of God.

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