

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

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A Study for Judaism • Christianity • Islam

DOCUMENT 300

TROUBLE BY STATUTE

A Covenant Deep Dive into *amal alei choq* (trouble framed by statute) — Egypt, Babylon, and the Courts of the Nations in the Tanakh

Do the Kingdoms the Prophets Condemned Live On in Modern Legal Systems, Has American Justice Moved from Constitution to Revenue, How Has Law Been Turned on the Covenant People, and Are We in the Latter Days of Micah 4 and Joel 2? — A Three-Religion Covenant Response

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The Message is Sent to the World

REACHING JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

✡ JUDAISM	✝ CHRISTIANITY	☪ ISLAM
The written covenant requires judges who take no bribe and one rule of judgment for the stranger and the native (Deuteronomy 16:18–20; Leviticus 24:22). Rabbinic tradition later ruled that <i>“the law of the kingdom is law”</i> (Talmud Bava Kamma 113a) and limited that rule to laws that fall on all alike. The Tanakh speaks first: what makes a decree unjust, and how the faithful lived under Egypt, Babylon, and Persia.	The New Testament tells believers to be subject to the governing authorities (Romans 13:1–7) and also says <i>“We must obey God rather than men”</i> (Acts 5:29). It names Rome <i>“Babylon”</i> (Revelation 17–18) and quotes Joel 2 as spoken of <i>“the last days”</i> (Acts 2:16–21). Every one of those texts is built from the Tanakh, so the Tanakh must be heard first.	The Qur’an makes Pharaoh the pattern of the tyrant who <i>“exalted himself in the land and made its people into factions”</i> (Q. 28:4). It commands believers to stand firmly for justice even against themselves (Q. 4:135), forbids using wealth to sway rulers and judges (Q. 2:188), and holds that knowledge of the Hour is with Allah alone (Q. 7:187). On each point it stands close to the prophets of Israel.

DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY — STANDING RULE OF MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

The sole binding authority of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Institution is the *Tanakh* — the written covenant of **Yahweh**. No Talmudic tractate, Church council decree, papal encyclical, hadith collection, or extra-biblical tradition carries doctrinal weight equal to or greater than the written Torah. Where any tradition conflicts with the written covenant, the written covenant governs without exception. The Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an are cited as historical reference and comparative witness — never as superseding authority. Miqdash Bethel uses the Written Tanakh as its sole source for four reasons: it is the only text Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recognize as originally given by **Yahweh**; it predates and underlies the Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an, so testing those traditions against it follows the evidentiary direction of **Deuteronomy 19:15** — the earlier witness governs the later commentary; every later tradition that departs from the Tanakh does so by addition or reinterpretation, never by overturning the text itself, so the text remains the fixed standard; and **Yahweh's** own words declare the covenant unchanging (Malachi 3:6; Psalms 119:89), making the written covenant — not evolving institutional interpretation — the only stable ground for doctrine. All three great covenant traditions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — are addressed simultaneously and equally in every Miqdash Bethel document, because **Yahweh's** covenant belongs to every nation that will receive it. The **Deuteronomy 19:15** two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard governs all textual claims in this document.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document applies the sole authority of the written *Tanakh* to four questions: whether the kingdoms the prophets condemned form a pattern that can recur, whether the justice system of the United States has moved from its Constitution toward law used for revenue, how law has been and could be turned on the covenant people, and whether this generation stands in the latter days of Micah 4 and Joel 2. **Yahweh** (יהוה) and **Elohim** (אֱלֹהִים) appear in bold throughout. Tanakh books and personal names are given in English. Hebrew transliterations appear in *bold italic* with the English meaning in parentheses at every occurrence. Scripture references are bold. **Verse numbers follow the English version. In a few chapters the Hebrew Bible divides the chapter at a different point, so the same verse carries a different number in the Hebrew text. Where that happens, the Hebrew number is given in brackets on first citation, for example Numbers 30:13 [Hebrew 30:14].** Scripture is rendered in a literal working translation from the Hebrew. Each finding from the text is graded under the two-or-three-witness standard as **Corroborated** (two or more independent Tanakh witnesses), **Single witness**, or **Not in the text**. Claims about present-day courts are a different kind of claim: they are graded **Corroborated** only where two or more independent

documented sources carry them, and **Not corroborated** where they do not. The Tanakh names no modern nation, so every application to a modern nation is this Institution’s reading and is labeled as such. Three audiences are addressed simultaneously: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rabbinic commentary, New Testament texts, the Qur’an and hadith, court rulings, and research reports are cited as historical and comparative reference — not as binding authority. The Written Tanakh governs all conclusions.

TANAKH BOOKS CITED IN THIS DOCUMENT

DIVISION	BOOKS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Torah	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy	Egypt as the pattern of bondage; the covenant’s standard for judges, fines, pledges, witnesses, and punishment; the first use of <i>“the latter days”</i>
Nevi’im (Prophets)	1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Malachi	The king who takes; Naboth’s vineyard; the charges against Assyria and Babylon and against Israel’s own courts; the latter-days oracles of Micah 4 and Joel 2
Ketuvim (Writings)	Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 2 Chronicles	The throne that frames trouble by statute; wisdom on bribes and fines; law turned on the faithful in Babylon and Persia; life under foreign rule

COMPARATIVE TEXTS CITED — HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE REFERENCE ONLY

CATEGORY	TEXTS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
New Testament	Matthew 23:23; Romans 13:1–7; Acts 2:16–21; 5:29; 1 Peter 2:13–17; 5:13; Revelation 17–18	Submission and its limit; <i>“Babylon”</i> as a name for Rome; Joel 2 quoted of <i>“the last days”</i>
Qur’an and hadith	Q. 2:188; 4:58; 4:135; 7:187; 28:4; Sunan Abi Dawud 4344	Pharaoh as the pattern of tyranny; justice in judgment; a word of truth before an unjust ruler; the Hour known to Allah alone
Rabbinic literature	Mishnah Avot 2:3; 3:2; Talmud Bava Kamma 113a; Bava Batra 54b; Maimonides, Mishneh	<i>“The law of the kingdom is law”</i> and its limits; caution

CATEGORY	TEXTS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
	Torah, Laws of Robbery and Lost Property, chapter 5	toward rulers; prayer for the government
United States law	U.S. Constitution, Article VI and Amendments I, V, VI, VIII, XIV; Tumey v. Ohio (1927); Ward v. Village of Monroeville (1972); Bearden v. Georgia (1983); Bowen v. Roy (1986); Employment Division v. Smith (1990); Religious Freedom Restoration Act (1993); City of Boerne v. Flores (1997); Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (2000); United States v. Benabe (7th Cir. 2011); Missouri v. Frye and Lafler v. Cooper (2012); Timbs v. Indiana (2019); Cain v. White and Caliste v. Cantrell (5th Cir. 2019); Groff v. DeJoy (2023); Mahmoud v. Taylor (2025); Catholic Charities Bureau v. Wisconsin Labor and Industry Review Commission (2025); Louisiana Revised Statutes 37:2163	What the Constitution promises, where practice has moved from it, where the courts have corrected it, and where religious practice is protected or exposed
Research and reporting	U.S. Department of Justice, Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department (2015); American Bar Association, Plea Bargain Task Force Report (2023); Pew Research Center (2017, 2019); Heritage Foundation and Mercatus Center, Count the Code (2022); Governing, Addicted to Fines (2019); ProPublica and Louisiana Illuminator (2023); Institute for Justice, Policing for Profit, 3rd edition (2020); Fines and Fees Justice Center (2021); Prison Policy Initiative (2026); ACLU of Louisiana, Justice Can't Wait (2020); White House Council of Economic Advisers (2015–2016); Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (April 2026)	The documented record tested in Section VI and the state of war tested in Section VIII
European rulings	Court of Justice of the European Union, Centraal Israëlitisch Consistorie van België (2020); European Court of Human Rights, Executief van de Moslims van België v. Belgium (2024)	General laws that restrict covenant slaughter, noted in Section VII

I. FRAMING THE QUESTION — FOUR QUESTIONS, ONE MEASURING LINE

I-A. The Parallel as It Is Usually Drawn

The study sheet behind this document draws a parallel. Egypt, Babylon, and Rome were systems of state bondage, perverted courts, and arrogant wealth, and the prophets used them both as real kingdoms and as patterns for any nation that abuses its power. From that parallel four questions are put to this Institution:

First: do the kingdoms the prophets condemned form a pattern that can appear again in a modern nation?

Second: has the justice system of the United States moved from its Constitution toward codes that raise money and do not care for the citizen?

Third: how has law been turned on the covenant children of **Yahweh**, and how could it be again?

Fourth: many today say this generation is living in the latter days of Micah 4 and of Joel 2. What do those two chapters actually say?

This study builds on earlier work in the Library and does not repeat it. **Doc 221** (*The Law Written and the Law Made*) compared covenant law with human civil law and set out the prophets' charge that law can become a means of revenue. **Doc 285** (*Righteous Statutes and Judgments*) examined **Deuteronomy 4:8**, where the nations are to see the righteousness of Israel's statutes. **Doc 142** and **Doc 215** examined the mountain oracle of Isaiah 2 and Micah 4, and **Doc 181** and **Doc 182** examined the latter days. **Doc 292** applied the prophet test of **Deuteronomy 18:20–22** to those who set dates. The present document tests the parallel itself, measures the modern record against the covenant's own standard for a court, and corrects several points in the earlier material (Section XI).

I-B. The Questions in the Tanakh's Own Terms

The Tanakh has a phrase for what the study sheet describes. The psalmist asks:

“Shall the throne of destruction be joined to You, which frames trouble by statute? They band together against the life of the righteous, and they condemn innocent blood” (Psalms 94:20–21).

The phrase is *yotser amal alei choq* (*framing trouble by statute*), יִצֵּר עֲמָל עַל־חֹק. The wrong it names is not lawlessness. It is harm done through law, by a throne that keeps the forms of justice. That is the subject of this study, and the four questions become these:

1. What does the Tanakh say such a throne looks like?
2. By what line does the covenant measure any court, Israel's own included?
3. Where has the written law of a kingdom been used against those who keep **Yahweh's** law, and how did they stand?
4. And when does **Yahweh** say He will judge between the nations Himself?

Every finding below is graded. A finding from the text is corroborated when two or more independent Tanakh witnesses carry it (**Deuteronomy 19:15**), Single witness when only one does, and Not in the text when it is taught but the Tanakh does not say it. A claim about a modern court is corroborated only when two or more independent documented sources carry it. The same rule that binds a court binds this document: **"You shall not carry a false report" (Exodus 23:1)**. A charge against a nation must be proven like any other charge.

I-C. The Study Sheet's Seven Texts Tested

The sheet rests on seven passages. Each was checked against the Hebrew and against its own setting. All seven say what the sheet says they say. One thing must be added: three of the seven are not addressed to a foreign empire at all.

TEXT	ADDRESSED TO	WHAT THE TEXT SAYS	RESULT
Exodus 1:11–14	Egypt	Chiefs of forced labor set over Israel; service <i>"with rigor"</i> ; lives made bitter	Confirmed
Habakkuk 2:12	The Chaldeans, that is, Babylon (Habakkuk 1:6)	Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity	Confirmed. Micah 3:10 lays the same charge on Zion's own rulers
Jeremiah 51:13	Babylon	Rich in treasures; her end has come, the measure of her unjust gain	Confirmed
Isaiah 10:1–2	The covenant people's own lawmakers (the oracle begins at Isaiah 9:8 [Hebrew 9:7])	Decrees of iniquity written to rob the poor of their right	Confirmed. <u>Not</u> addressed to a foreign empire
Amos 5:11–12	The northern kingdom of Israel	Grain exactions from the poor; payoffs taken; the needy turned aside in the gate	Confirmed. <u>Not</u> addressed to a foreign empire

TEXT	ADDRESSED TO	WHAT THE TEXT SAYS	RESULT
Isaiah 47:6	Babylon	No mercy shown; the yoke made very heavy on the aged	Confirmed. The text names the aged
Ezekiel 34:4	The shepherds of Israel	The weak not strengthened; rule with force and with rigor	Confirmed. <u>Not</u> addressed to a foreign empire

That addition changes the parallel. The sharpest words the prophets spoke about unjust law were aimed at the covenant people’s own courts. Before the Tanakh lets its reader point at Egypt or Babylon, it asks whether Egypt has been rebuilt at home.

II. THE WORD STUDY — WHAT THE HEBREW SAYS

The vocabulary of oppression and of justice is precise. The table sets out the terms this study relies on.

HEBREW TERM	STRONG’S	CORE MEANING	KEY TEXT
<i>perekh</i> (<i>rigor / crushing harshness</i>), פָּרֶךְ	H6531	Harshness that breaks a person; six uses in the Tanakh	Exodus 1:13–14; Leviticus 25:43; Ezekiel 34:4
<i>sarei missim</i> (<i>chiefs of forced labor</i>), שָׂרֵי מִסִּים	H8269 / H4522	Officers over a labor levy; the state office that carries out the policy	Exodus 1:11
<i>noges</i> (<i>driver / exactor</i>), נָגַשׁ	H5065	One who drives labor or exacts payment; used of Egypt’s taskmasters and of debt collection	Exodus 3:7; Deuteronomy 15:2; Isaiah 14:4; 60:17
<i>lachats</i> (<i>oppression / pressure</i>), לָחַץ	H3906	A squeezing; pressure applied to a people	Exodus 3:9
<i>anah</i> (<i>to afflict / humble</i>), עָנָה	H6031	To bring low; the stated purpose of Egypt’s labor system	Exodus 1:11–12; Genesis 15:13
<i>choq</i> (<i>statute / decree</i>), חֹק, from <i>chaqaq</i> (<i>to inscribe / decree</i>)	H2706 / H2710	What is cut in or written down as binding	Isaiah 10:1; Psalms 94:20; Isaiah 33:22
<i>amal</i> (<i>trouble / misery</i>), עָמַל	H5999	Toil and misery; what the unjust statute produces	Isaiah 10:1; Psalms 94:20

HEBREW TERM	STRONG'S	CORE MEANING	KEY TEXT
<i>aven (iniquity / harm)</i> , אָוֵן	H205	Wrong that brings harm; <i>chiqqei aven (decrees of iniquity)</i>	Isaiah 10:1
<i>mishpat (judgment / justice)</i> , מִשְׁפָּט	H4941	The ruling of a court; a person's right; justice itself	Deuteronomy 16:18–19; Leviticus 24:22
<i>shochad (bribe)</i> , שֹׁחַד	H7810	A gift that turns a judge	Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 16:19; Micah 3:11
<i>kofer (ransom / payoff)</i> , כֹּפֶר	H3724	A price paid to settle a matter; in Amos, a payoff taken by the court	Amos 5:12
<i>betsa (unjust gain)</i> , בְּצֵעַ	H1215	Profit cut off from another; what a judge must hate	Exodus 18:21; Jeremiah 51:13; Ezekiel 22:27
<i>anash (to fine)</i> , עָנַשׁ, and <i>onesh (a fine)</i>	H6064 / H6066	To lay a money penalty	Exodus 21:22; Deuteronomy 22:19; Amos 2:8; Proverbs 17:26
<i>sha'ar (gate)</i> , שַׁעַר	H8179	The city gate, where the elders sat as a court	Amos 5:12, 15; Deuteronomy 16:18
<i>ol (yoke)</i> , עֹל	H5923	The bar laid on a working animal; the burden a ruler lays on a people	Isaiah 47:6; 1 Kings 12:4; Leviticus 26:13
<i>acharit ha-yamim (the latter days)</i> , אַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים	H319 / H3117	The after-part of the days; the time that follows	Genesis 49:1; Deuteronomy 4:30; Micah 4:1
<i>acharei khen (afterward)</i> , אַחֲרֵי־כֵן	H310 / H3651	After this; the time marker of Joel's promise	Joel 2:28 [Hebrew 3:1]

Four lexical observations govern what follows.

First, the word for Egypt's harshness, *perekh (rigor)*, appears six times in the Tanakh. Two describe Egypt (Exodus 1:13, 14). Three forbid an Israelite to rule a brother that way (Leviticus 25:43, 46, 53). The sixth charges Israel's own shepherds with doing it (Ezekiel 34:4). The Tanakh's own usage makes "*Egypt*" a way of ruling and not only a place.

Second, Isaiah and the psalmist use the same pair of words. Isaiah speaks of *chiqqei aven* (*decrees of iniquity*) and of scribes who write *amal* (*trouble*) (Isaiah 10:1). The psalmist speaks of a throne that frames *amal* (*trouble*) by *choq* (*statute*) (Psalms 94:20). Two witnesses name the same thing: misery produced by written law. The same root gives the answer. Isaiah calls Yahweh *mechoqeqenu* (*our lawgiver*), מְחֻקֵּקֵנוּ (Isaiah 33:22).

Third, the Torah uses *anash* (*to fine*) twice, and both times the money goes to the injured household: to the husband of the woman who was struck (Exodus 21:22), and to the father of the young woman who was slandered (Deuteronomy 22:19). Section V-C follows the word through the rest of the Tanakh.

Fourth, *noges* (*exactor*) is the word for Egypt’s taskmasters (Exodus 3:7; 5:6) and for the king of Babylon (Isaiah 14:4). It is also the verb the covenant uses when it limits debt collection among brothers: in the year of release a creditor “shall not exact it of his neighbor” (Deuteronomy 15:2). The covenant took the taskmaster’s own verb and put a limit on it.

III. EGYPT — THE PATTERN OF BONDAGE

III-A. How Bondage Was Built: Fear, Policy, Office

Egypt’s bondage did not begin with a whip. It began with a ruler’s fear, and the fear became a policy.

“Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply” (Exodus 1:9–10).

The policy then became an office:

“So they set over them chiefs of forced labor, in order to afflict them with their burdens. And they built store cities for Pharaoh, Pithom and Raamses” (Exodus 1:11).

Three things stand in that verse. There is a named office, the *sarei missim* (*chiefs of forced labor*). There is a stated purpose, *anah* (*to afflict*). And there is a benefit to the crown, the store cities. The system served the state’s treasury, and it was aimed at a people the state feared. The text then names its character twice in two verses:

“And the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor, and they made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and in brick and in every kind of service in the field; all their service in which they made them serve was with rigor” (Exodus 1:13–14).

III-B. The Quota: Bricks Without Straw

Exodus 5 shows how such a system works day to day. When Moses asked for the people's release, Pharaoh did not answer the request. He raised the burden. The straw was withheld and the quota of bricks was kept (**Exodus 5:6–9**). The Israelite foremen who could not meet it were beaten (**Exodus 5:14**). When they appealed, they were told the fault was theirs:

“You are idle, idle; therefore you say, Let us go and sacrifice to Yahweh” (Exodus 5:17).

The marks are these: a rule that cannot be met, a penalty for failing it, an appeal turned back on the one who appeals, and a ruler whose first response to a request for worship is to add to the load. They are the marks of *lachsats (oppression)*, and **Yahweh** says He saw it (**Exodus 3:9**).

III-C. Egypt Remembered as Law

The covenant does not leave Egypt in the past. It turns the memory into Israel's own law.

“You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the soul of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 23:9).

The same reason is given for honest courts and honest weights:

“You shall do no injustice in judgment ... I am Yahweh your Elohim, who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 19:35–36).

It is given for the stranger's equal standing (**Leviticus 19:33–34**), for the widow's garment (**Deuteronomy 24:17–18**), and for release from debt-service (**Deuteronomy 15:12–15**). Israel was brought out of Egypt in order to be a people whose courts were not Egypt's.

III-D. Egypt Inside Israel

The Tanakh then records that Israel rebuilt it. Samuel warned what a king *“like all the nations”* would do. In **1 Samuel 8:11–17** the phrase *“he will take”* comes four times and *“he will take a tenth”* twice, and the warning ends: **“and you shall be his servants” (1 Samuel 8:17)**. Doc 221 examined that chapter in full.

Solomon raised a labor levy out of all Israel (**1 Kings 5:13** [Hebrew 5:27]). When he died, the people used Egypt's own language to his son:

“Your father made our yoke hard. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you” (1 Kings 12:4).

Rehoboam answered that he would add to it (**1 Kings 12:14**), and the kingdom was torn in two. Later Ezekiel used the Exodus word itself against Israel's rulers:

“The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought; but with force and with rigor you have ruled them” (Ezekiel 34:4).

Finding — Egypt as a pattern: Egypt is the Tanakh’s first and fullest picture of state bondage: a ruler’s fear, a policy, an office, a benefit to the treasury, and service with rigor (Exodus 1:9–14; 3:7–9; 5:6–17). **Corroborated.** The Tanakh itself applies Egypt’s vocabulary to rulers inside Israel (Leviticus 25:43; 1 Kings 12:4; Ezekiel 34:4). That the pattern can recur in another nation is therefore the Tanakh’s own teaching. **Corroborated.**

IV. ASSYRIA, BABYLON, AND PERSIA — THE KINGDOMS THAT FOLLOWED

IV-A. The Rod and Its Judgment

The prophets say two things about the empires, and both must be kept.

First, Yahweh used them. Assyria is called **“the rod of My anger” (Isaiah 10:5)**, sent against a people who had corrupted their own justice.

Second, the empire is judged for what it did with the power it was given: **“I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria” (Isaiah 10:12)**. Jeremiah sets the kingdoms in order:

“Israel is a scattered sheep; lions have driven him away. First the king of Assyria devoured him, and now at last Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has gnawed his bones. Therefore ... behold, I am punishing the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria” (Jeremiah 50:17–18).

The order was announced to Abram before any of it happened:

“your seed shall be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them ... and also that nation whom they shall serve I will judge” (Genesis 15:13–14).

The affliction comes first and the judgment of the afflicting nation follows, and that order holds through the Tanakh.

IV-B. The Charges Against Babylon

The prophets bring specific charges.

No mercy. **“I was angry with My people; I profaned My inheritance and gave them into your hand. You showed them no mercy; on the aged you made your yoke very heavy” (Isaiah 47:6).**

Arrogance that answers to no one. “You said, I shall be mistress forever ... I am, and there is none besides me” (Isaiah 47:7–8), and “You trusted in your wickedness; you said, No one sees me” (Isaiah 47:10).

Wealth from what belongs to others. “Woe to him who increases what is not his — how long? — and loads himself with pledges” (Habakkuk 2:6).

“Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house” (Habakkuk 2:9).

“Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity” (Habakkuk 2:12).

“O you who dwell by many waters, rich in treasures, your end has come, the measure of your unjust gain” (Jeremiah 51:13).

Captives never released. “All who took them captive have held them fast; they have refused to let them go. Their Redeemer is strong; Yahweh of hosts is His name. He will surely plead their cause” (Jeremiah 50:33–34).

The taunt over the king of Babylon says the same: he “**did not let his prisoners go home**” (Isaiah 14:17).

IV-C. The Same Charges at Home

Each charge the prophets bring against the empires they also bring against the covenant people’s own rulers, often in the same words.

THE CHARGE	AGAINST THE FOREIGN KINGDOM	AGAINST ISRAEL’S OWN RULERS
Rule with rigor	Exodus 1:13–14	Ezekiel 34:4
A heavy yoke	Isaiah 47:6	1 Kings 12:4, 14
Building with blood	Habakkuk 2:12	Micah 3:10; Jeremiah 22:13
Unjust gain	Jeremiah 51:13; Habakkuk 2:9	Jeremiah 22:17; Ezekiel 22:27
Exactors over the people	Exodus 3:7; Isaiah 14:4	Isaiah 3:12; 2 Kings 23:35
Harm done by written decree	Esther 3:8–12; Daniel 6:7–9 [Hebrew 6:8–10]	Isaiah 10:1–2; 1 Kings 21:8–13

Isaiah goes as far as a prophet can. Speaking to Jerusalem, he says: **“Hear the word of Yahweh, you rulers of Sodom” (Isaiah 1:10)**. The name of the condemned city is put on the covenant city’s own government. The prophets do use a kingdom’s name as a pattern, and they use it first on their own.

IV-D. Is “Babylon” a Symbol in the Tanakh?

The study sheet says that in later writings Babylon becomes a symbol for any global power. This needs to be stated exactly. In the Tanakh, Babylon is Babylon: the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar on the Euphrates, judged and fallen (**Isaiah 13:19; Jeremiah 51; Daniel 5:30–31** [Hebrew 5:30–6:1]). The Tanakh does widen the lens. The oracle against Babylon says, **“I will punish the world for its evil” (Isaiah 13:11)**, and Jeremiah calls Babylon a golden cup that **“made all the earth drunk” (Jeremiah 51:7)**. But the Tanakh never put the name “Babylon” on another empire. That step is taken in the New Testament, which uses the name for Rome (1 Peter 5:13; Revelation 17–18), and it is noted in the Three-Religion Audit as comparative reference.

Finding — the kingdoms as a pattern: the charges against Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon (rigor, a heavy yoke, unjust gain, building with blood, captives not released) are laid on Israel’s own rulers in the same words. The Tanakh therefore teaches the pattern and tests every government by it. **Corroborated.** That the Tanakh calls any later empire “Babylon” is Not in the text. That the Tanakh names the United States, or any modern nation, as Egypt or Babylon is Not in the text. A modern nation is measured by the same line. It is not identified by prophecy.

IV-E. How the Faithful Lived Under the Kingdoms

The Tanakh records how **Yahweh**’s people lived under foreign law, and the record is not one of blanket refusal. To the exiles in Babylon **Yahweh** sent this word:

“Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit ... And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to Yahweh for it; for in its peace you shall have peace” (Jeremiah 29:5, 7).

Joseph governed Egypt (**Genesis 41:40**). Daniel served Babylon and Persia so faithfully that his enemies **“could find no ground of complaint or fault, because he was faithful” (Daniel 6:4** [Hebrew 6:5]). Nehemiah was cupbearer to the Persian king and built Jerusalem’s wall with the king’s letters in his hand (**Nehemiah 2:7–8**). **Yahweh** calls Cyrus of Persia **“My shepherd” (Isaiah 44:28)**.

The proverb says: **“My son, fear Yahweh and the king, and do not join with those who are given to change” (Proverbs 24:21).**

The same people also knew they were not free. The returned exiles prayed: **“Behold, we are servants this day; and the land that You gave to our fathers ... behold, we are servants in it. Its**

abundant yield goes to the kings whom You have set over us because of our sins; they rule over our bodies and over our cattle at their pleasure, and we are in great distress” (Nehemiah 9:36–37).

They did not pretend the kingdom was just, and they did not rise against it. They prayed, built, kept the covenant, and waited for **Yahweh**.

There was one limit, and it was narrow. When the king’s command required a sin against **Yahweh**, they did not obey. The Hebrew midwives “**feared Elohim and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them**” (Exodus 1:17). The three in Babylon would not bow (**Daniel 3:16–18**). Daniel prayed as he had before (**Daniel 6:10** [Hebrew 6:11]). Section VII returns to how they stood.

Finding — life under the kingdoms: the covenant people are told to seek the peace of the city where they live, to serve faithfully, and to refuse only what commands sin against **Yahweh** (Jeremiah 29:7; Daniel 6:4, 10; Exodus 1:17; Proverbs 24:21). **Corroborated.**

V. THE MEASURING LINE — WHAT THE COVENANT REQUIRES OF A COURT

A charge of injustice needs a standard. The covenant gives one, and it gives it to Israel first. Every court, ancient or modern, can be laid against it.

#	MARK OF A JUST COURT	WHAT THE COVENANT REQUIRES	TEXT
1	Judges of character	Able men who fear Elohim , men of truth, who hate unjust gain	Exodus 18:21; 2 Chronicles 19:6–7
2	No gain from the case	No bribe, for the bribe blinds the clear-sighted	Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 16:19; 27:25
3	One law for all	One rule of judgment for the stranger and the native; no leaning toward the poor or the great	Leviticus 24:22; 19:15; Exodus 12:49
4	A real inquiry	Two or three witnesses; the judges inquire diligently; the false witness bears the penalty he sought	Deuteronomy 19:15–19; 13:14
5	Measured punishment	According to the wrong, by number, with a ceiling, so that a brother is not degraded	Deuteronomy 25:1–3; Exodus 21:23–25

#	MARK OF A JUST COURT	WHAT THE COVENANT REQUIRES	TEXT
6	Payment to the injured	Restitution and fines go to the one who was wronged	Exodus 21:22; 22:1–4 [Hebrew 21:37–22:3]; Numbers 5:6–7
7	Limits on seizure	No taking the millstone or the widow’s garment; the poor man’s cloak returned by sunset	Deuteronomy 24:6, 10–13, 17; Exodus 22:26–27 [Hebrew 22:25–26]
8	Liability follows harm	The builder makes the roof safe; the owner who was warned answers for the injury	Deuteronomy 22:8; Exodus 21:29, 33–34
9	A law the people can know	Read aloud to all; near, in the mouth and in the heart	Deuteronomy 31:10–13; 30:11–14
10	The ruler under the law	The king writes his own copy and may not lift his heart above his brothers	Deuteronomy 17:18–20

V-A. The Judge Must Have No Stake

Jethro’s standard for a judge ends with a money test: men **“hating unjust gain”** (Exodus 18:21). The covenant then forbids the bribe and gives the reason: **“you shall take no bribe, for the bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the words of the righteous”** (Exodus 23:8; repeated at Deuteronomy 16:19). The reason is the point. The covenant does not say the bribed judge is always a wicked man. It says money in the matter blinds even the clear-sighted.

King Jehoshaphat charged his judges with the same: **“Consider what you do, for you judge not for man but for Yahweh ... there is no injustice with Yahweh our Elohim, nor partiality, nor taking of bribes”** (2 Chronicles 19:6–7).

V-B. Punishment Is Measured, and a Brother Stays a Brother

“If the wicked man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall cause him to lie down and be beaten before him, according to his wickedness, by number. Forty he may give him; he shall not add, lest, if he should add to beat him beyond these with many stripes, your brother be degraded in your eyes” (Deuteronomy 25:2–3).

Four limits stand in two verses. The penalty is fitted to the wrong: *kedei rish’ato* (*according to his wickedness*), כְּדֵי רִשְׁעָתוֹ. It is counted. It has a ceiling. And it is carried out before the judge, who

must watch what he orders. The stated reason is the offender’s standing: after his punishment he is still **“your brother.”** A penalty that follows a person for the rest of his life has no place in that verse.

V-C. Where the Money Goes

Under the covenant, what a wrongdoer pays goes to the person he wronged. The thief restores double, or four and five times, to the owner (**Exodus 22:1, 4** [Hebrew 21:37; 22:3]). The one who has wronged another **“shall make restitution for his wrong in full, and add a fifth to it, and give it to the one he has wronged”** (**Numbers 5:7**). Only when the wronged person has no kinsman does the restitution go to **Yahweh** for the priest (**Numbers 5:8**). The two Torah uses of *anash (to fine)* follow the same rule (Section II).

Outside the Torah the word appears where that rule has been broken. Amos charges the northern kingdom:

“They lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and they drink the wine of those who have been fined in the house of their god” (**Amos 2:8**).

The fines had become the court’s own wine. When Pharaoh Necho took Judah, he **“laid a fine on the land, a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold”** (**2 Kings 23:33**), and King Jehoiakim **“exactd the silver and the gold from the people of the land, each according to his assessment”** (**2 Kings 23:35**). The verb there is the taskmaster’s verb. And the proverb says plainly: **“Also to fine the righteous is not good”** (**Proverbs 17:26**).

Finding — fines: the covenant directs restitution and fines to the injured party (**Exodus 21:22; 22:1–4; Numbers 5:7; Deuteronomy 22:19**). **Corroborated.** A fine kept by the court or the crown as its own income appears in the Tanakh only as a charge or a burden (**Amos 2:8; 2 Kings 23:33–35**). **Corroborated.** A command that fines be paid to the judge or the treasury is **Not in the text**.

V-D. No Sentence of Prison

The Torah knows custody. The man who cursed the Name and the man who gathered wood on the Sabbath were each kept under guard until **Yahweh**’s decision was known (**Leviticus 24:12; Numbers 15:34**). The custody was short and it ended with a ruling. But the Torah lists no term of imprisonment among its penalties. Its penalties are restitution, measured stripes, and for the gravest crimes, death on the word of two or three witnesses. The manslayer’s city of refuge is the nearest thing, and it existed to protect him (**Numbers 35:11–12**).

Prisons in the Tanakh belong to others. Joseph was put in the king’s prison in Egypt (**Genesis 39:20**). The kings of Israel and Judah imprisoned prophets who displeased them (**1 Kings 22:27; 2**

Chronicles 16:10; Jeremiah 37:15–16). The Persian decree lists “**death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment**” (**Ezra 7:26**). Of **Yahweh** it is said: “**Yahweh sets the prisoners free**” (**Psalms 146:7**).

Finding — imprisonment: the Torah prescribes no sentence of imprisonment; custody is brief and awaits a ruling. **Corroborated** (**Leviticus 24:12; Numbers 15:34**). This is a finding about what the text contains. It does not by itself settle what a modern society may do with a dangerous person.

V-E. The Covenant’s Building Law

One statute bears directly on the building trades:

“When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you do not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone falls from it” (**Deuteronomy 22:8**).

The word is *ma’aqeb* (*parapet*), מַעֲקֶה, H4624, used only here. Three things should be seen. The covenant does regulate building, and its reason is human life. The duty lies on the builder and owner. And the consequence is *damim* (*bloodguilt*), דָּמִים: responsibility for the person who is actually hurt. **Doc 245** examined bloodguilt in full. The laws of the goring ox and the open pit work the same way. The owner who “**has been warned**” and did nothing bears the heavier liability, and the man who leaves a pit uncovered “**shall make it good**” (**Exodus 21:29, 33–34**).

This matters for honesty in both directions. A rule that a roof must be safe is not Babylon. It is in the covenant. But the covenant’s method is responsibility for harm, owed to the neighbor who was hurt. It does not contain a fee paid to a ruler for leave to do the work.

Finding — building: the builder’s duty to make his work safe for others is commanded (**Deuteronomy 22:8**) and matched by the law of the pit (**Exodus 21:33–34**). **Corroborated** as a principle. A requirement to obtain a ruler’s permission before building or repairing is **Not in the text**. That silence does not make such a requirement a sin to obey (Section IV-E).

V-F. The Verdict of the Line on Israel Itself

Measured by this line, the covenant people failed, and the prophets said so.

“Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves; everyone loves a bribe and chases after payments. They do not judge the fatherless, and the cause of the widow does not come to them” (**Isaiah 1:23**).

“The prince asks, and the judge judges for a payment, and the great man speaks of the desire of his soul; so they weave it together” (**Micah 7:3**).

“Who make a man an offender by a word, and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, and turn aside the righteous with an empty plea” (Isaiah 29:21).

“For I know how many are your transgressions and how mighty your sins: you who afflict the righteous, who take a payoff, and who turn aside the needy in the gate” (Amos 5:12).

Habakkuk’s first complaint was about Judah’s own courts: **“the law is numbed, and justice never goes forth; for the wicked surrounds the righteous; therefore justice goes forth perverted” (Habakkuk 1:4).** Yahweh’s answer was to raise up the Chaldeans (**Habakkuk 1:6**). The corrupt court at home came first, and the foreign empire came because of it.

The prophets also show the repair. When the nobles of Judah were taking their brothers’ fields and children for debt, some of it borrowed **“for the king’s tax” (Nehemiah 5:4)**, the governor did not write a new code. He called an assembly, named the wrong, and required the fields to be restored that same day (**Nehemiah 5:7–12**). He gave his own reason for refusing the governor’s allowance:

“the former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people ... but I did not do so, because of the fear of Elohim” (Nehemiah 5:15).

And Yahweh’s promise for Zion begins at the bench: **“I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning; afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness” (Isaiah 1:26).**

VI. THE MODERN RECORD — THE UNITED STATES MEASURED BY THE LINE

This section leaves the text and looks at the present. Its claims are not doctrine. They are matters of record, and each is graded by whether two or more independent documented sources carry it. Where the record does not support a common claim, that is said as plainly as where it does.

VI-A. What the Nation Promised

The Constitution calls itself *“the supreme Law of the Land”* (Article VI). Among its promises are these. No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law (Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments). In all criminal prosecutions the accused shall have a speedy and public trial by an impartial jury, shall be confronted with the witnesses against him, and shall have counsel (Sixth Amendment). Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed (Eighth Amendment).

Several of these stand close to the measuring line of Section V: a real inquiry, witnesses face to face, measured penalties, and limits on what the ruler may take. The bell that hung in the Pennsylvania State House was ordered in 1751 with a verse of the covenant cast into it: **“Proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants” (Leviticus 25:10).** The Constitution is not the covenant. Unlike all fifty state constitutions, it never explicitly mentions God (Pew Research Center, 2017), and this Institution does not treat it as a holy text. It is the nation’s own promise, and a nation may fairly be measured by its own promise.

The question as it was put to this Institution sets the Constitution against **“codes.”** That contrast needs care. A code is simply the statutes arranged by subject. The United States Code was first published in 1926, and Louisiana has been governed by a civil code since 1808, before it was a state. Codes are enacted under the Constitution, and courts still strike down parts of them that violate it, as the cases below show. What has changed is the practice. In documented ways the daily working of the courts has moved away from what the Constitution describes, and that movement is what the following pages test.

VI-B. From Trial to Plea

The Sixth Amendment describes a trial. The record describes something else. The Supreme Court itself has written that **“ninety-seven percent of federal convictions and ninety-four percent of state convictions are the result of guilty pleas”** (Missouri v. Frye, 2012), and that criminal justice today is **“for the most part a system of pleas, not a system of trials”** (Lafley v. Cooper, 2012). Pew Research Center found that only 2 percent of federal criminal defendants went to trial in fiscal year 2018. In 2023 a task force of the American Bar Association, made up of prosecutors, judges, defense lawyers, and scholars, reported that trials have become **“rare legal artifacts”** and that there is **“substantial evidence”** that innocent people are pressed into pleading guilty by the threat of far heavier sentences.

The covenant’s fourth mark is a real inquiry: **“the judges shall inquire diligently” (Deuteronomy 19:18).** A system in which the inquiry is the rare exception has moved a long way from that mark, and from its own Sixth Amendment. The covenant’s warning stands over every such bargain: **“Keep far from a false matter, and do not kill the innocent and the righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked” (Exodus 23:7).**

VI-C. Laws No One Can Count

A 2022 study by the Heritage Foundation and the Mercatus Center estimated 5,199 crimes in the United States Code as of 2019, an increase of more than a third since 1994. It counted only statutes.

The far larger body of federal regulations that carry criminal penalties was not counted, and the authors report that no one has been able to count it. State codes and local ordinances lie on top of that.

The covenant's ninth mark is a law the people can know. It was to be read aloud to **“men, women, and little ones, and the stranger within your gates”** every seventh year (**Deuteronomy 31:12**), and Moses said of it:

“This commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, nor is it far off ... the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it” (Deuteronomy 30:11, 14).

Isaiah's woe is spoken to **“the writers who keep writing trouble” (Isaiah 10:1)**. When no citizen can know the law, every citizen can be found in breach of it, and the choice of whom to charge becomes the real law.

VI-D. Courts That Live on What They Collect

This is the best-documented drift, and the one closest to the prophets' charge.

Ferguson, Missouri. In 2015 the United States Department of Justice investigated one city's police and court. It found that ***“Ferguson's law enforcement practices are shaped by the City's focus on revenue rather than by public safety needs.”*** The city had budgeted \$3.09 million in fines and fees out of \$13.26 million in general revenue, about 23 percent. It had issued about 90,000 citations and summonses in four years in a city of 21,000 people, and it used arrest warrants as a means of collecting. The weight fell hardest on the city's Black residents, who were 67 percent of the population and 93 percent of those arrested.

The national picture. In 2019 the journal *Governing* reviewed thousands of local audits. It found nearly 600 local governments drawing more than a tenth of their general revenue from fines and forfeitures, and 284 drawing more than a fifth. It also found that for the great majority of local governments fines are less than 5 percent of revenue. The problem is real, and it is concentrated.

Louisiana. In that review Louisiana had 70 local governments above a tenth, 49 above a fifth, and 25 above half. The village of Fenton reported more than \$1.2 million in fines, 91 percent of its general fund revenue. Many of these towns hold a ***“mayor's court,”*** found only in Louisiana and Ohio, in which the mayor who runs the town's budget also sits as judge. A 2023 review by ProPublica and the Louisiana Illuminator found 91 Louisiana municipalities with mayor's courts that took in a tenth or more of their revenue from fines and forfeitures in a single year.

The courts' own verdict. The Supreme Court ruled in 1927 that it violates due process to try a man before a judge who has *“a direct, personal, substantial, pecuniary interest”* in convicting him (Tumey v. Ohio), and in 1972 it applied that rule to a mayor whose court supplied a substantial part of his village's income (Ward v. Village of Monroeville). In 2019 the federal appeals court for Louisiana ruled twice against the criminal court of New Orleans. About a quarter of that court's Judicial Expense Fund, which the judges themselves controlled, came from the fines and fees they imposed, and people had been jailed for nonpayment with no inquiry into whether they could pay (Cain v. White). The magistrate who set bail drew between 20 and 25 percent of the same fund from bond fees (Caliste v. Cantrell). Both arrangements were held unconstitutional. The same year a unanimous Supreme Court applied the ban on excessive fines to every state, observing that *“fines are a source of revenue”* and so may be imposed for reasons that have nothing to do with justice (Timbs v. Indiana).

The debt. The Fines and Fees Justice Center asked every state in 2021 how much court debt its people owed. Only half the states could answer in whole or in part, and their answers alone came to at least \$27.6 billion.

A statutory court fee is not, in law, a bribe. But the covenant's reason for banning the bribe is that money in the matter blinds the one who judges (**Exodus 23:8**), and that is the very reason the Supreme Court gave in 1927. Where a bench is paid out of its own convictions, the second and sixth marks of the line are both broken: the judge has a stake, and the payment goes to the court and not to anyone who was wronged. Amos described it: **“they drink the wine of those who have been fined”** (Amos 2:8). So did Micah: **“Her heads judge for a bribe”** (Micah 3:11). The proverb names what it does to a country: **“The king by justice establishes the land, but a man of exactions tears it down”** (Proverbs 29:4).

VI-E. Jail Before Judgment, and Jail for Being Poor

The Supreme Court ruled in 1983 that a person may not be imprisoned for failing to pay a fine unless a court first asks whether he was able to pay (Bearden v. Georgia). The Ferguson investigation and the New Orleans case both found people jailed without that question being asked. By the Prison Policy Initiative's 2026 figures, about four of every five people held in local jails under local authority have not been convicted of the charge that holds them, and Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate of any state, 1,067 for every 100,000 people. The ACLU of Louisiana, working from jail records, found the state's rate of pretrial jailing to be three times the national average, with people held on average five and a half months before any trial.

The covenant's custody was brief and ended in a ruling (Section V-D). It forbade a creditor to keep a poor man's cloak overnight: **“If he is a poor man, you shall not sleep in his pledge; you shall**

surely return the pledge to him when the sun goes down” (Deuteronomy 24:12–13). A system that holds the poor man himself, for months, because he cannot buy his release, has no witness in the covenant and a ruling of its own highest court against it.

VI-F. Property Taken Without a Conviction

The Institute for Justice gathered forfeiture records from 45 states and the federal government. From 2000 to 2019, governments forfeited at least \$68.8 billion. Under civil forfeiture, which is the more common form at the federal level, the case is brought against the property, and it can be kept without the owner ever being convicted. In most states the agency that seizes the property keeps some or all of the proceeds.

The Tanakh’s witness here is Naboth. The king wanted a vineyard that its owner would not sell, and a legal proceeding delivered it (**1 Kings 21:1–16**). Yahweh’s word to the king was: **“Have you murdered, and also taken possession?” (1 Kings 21:19)**. Micah speaks of those who **“covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house” (Micah 2:2)**. The law for the prince in Ezekiel’s vision is direct: **“The prince shall not take any of the inheritance of the people, thrusting them out of their possession” (Ezekiel 46:18)**.

VI-G. Permission to Work

In the 1950s about one American worker in twenty needed a government license to do his job. By 2015 the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that 22.4 percent held one. The building trades are among the most heavily licensed. In Louisiana, home improvement work above \$7,500 requires a state license or registration, and contracting without one is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of up to \$500 for each day or three months in prison, or both. The statute directs the fines to the contractors’ educational trust fund created by the same law (Louisiana Revised Statutes 37:2163). Cities and parishes add their own permits and inspections.

Honesty requires two things to be said together. First, these laws have a purpose the covenant shares. A roof that fails in a storm can kill, homeowners are defrauded by dishonest contractors, and **Deuteronomy 22:8** puts the duty of safe building on the builder. A permit or an inspection is not unrighteous in itself, and obeying such a law is no sin (Section IV-E). Second, the method is not the covenant’s. The covenant answers to the builder whose work actually harms someone, and the payment goes to the one who was harmed (Section V-C and V-E). The modern offense is often complete when no permission was bought, though the work was sound and no one was hurt. The penalty can be arrest, and the fine goes to the authority that issues the permissions.

The covenant also commands something that such law can come to forbid. **“You shall not see your brother’s donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and hide yourself from them; you shall surely help him lift them up again” (Deuteronomy 22:4).**

“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do it” (Proverbs 3:27).

When Jerusalem’s wall lay broken, it was rebuilt by families working side by side, many of them **“opposite his own house” (Nehemiah 3:10, 23, 28)**. A neighbor’s help with a neighbor’s house is the covenant’s ordinary life.

Finding — licenses and permits: that a growing share of ordinary work requires government permission, and that working without it can be a crime, is **Corroborated**. That a law requiring safe building is contrary to the covenant is **Not in the text**; the covenant has such a law. That the covenant punishes a builder who has harmed no one, or directs any penalty to the ruler, is **Not in the text**.

VI-H. What the Record Does Not Show

The two-or-three-witness rule cuts both ways, and four things must be said for the other side.

First, the record does not show every American court, run for revenue. The same study that found the towns that depend on fines found that most local governments do not.

Second, the Constitution is still being used against these practices. Every ruling cited in VI-D and VI-E is a court applying the Constitution to stop a court or a city. The promise has not been repealed. It is being kept in some places and broken in others.

Third, **“designed to make money”** is a claim about intent. In Ferguson the Department of Justice documented intent: the city budgeted for rising fines and pressed its officers to produce them. For the justice system of the whole nation, no such design has been shown. What has been shown is an incentive, present wherever a court or a town is funded by what it collects, and an incentive does not need a designer to do its work. The covenant banned the bribe for that reason.

Fourth, there is a body of teaching which says that the United States became a private corporation in 1871, that statutes bind only those who consent to them, that a person is separate from a **“straw man”** whose name is written in capital letters, or that the courts are secretly courts of admiralty. None of it is true, and no court has ever accepted any of it. A federal appeals court has said such theories **“should be rejected summarily, however they are presented”** (United States v. Benabe, 7th Cir. 2011). People who rely on them do not go free. They lose the hearing they had, and some have added charges to the ones they came in with. A covenant person does not answer an unjust proceeding with untrue papers: **“A false witness shall not go unpunished” (Proverbs 19:5).**

VI-I. The Record in One Table

CLAIM	WHAT THE RECORD SHOWS	GRADE
Codes have replaced the Constitution as the law of the land	Codes are statutes enacted under the Constitution; courts still strike them down under it	Not corroborated
The practice of the courts has moved away from the Constitution's description	Trials replaced by pleas; uncounted offenses; jailing before judgment	Corroborated
Trial by jury has become the rare exception	Supreme Court (2012); Pew (2019); American Bar Association (2023)	Corroborated
No one can count the federal crimes	Heritage and Mercatus (2022): 5,199 in statute alone, regulations uncounted	Corroborated
Some courts and towns are funded by the fines they impose	Department of Justice (2015); Governing (2019); Cain v. White (2019); ProPublica (2023)	Corroborated
Federal courts have ruled such funding unconstitutional	Tumey (1927); Ward (1972); Cain and Caliste (2019)	Corroborated
People are jailed before conviction and for inability to pay	Bearden (1983); Department of Justice (2015); Prison Policy Initiative (2026); ACLU of Louisiana (2020)	Corroborated
Property is forfeited without a conviction	Institute for Justice (2020); Timbs v. Indiana (2019)	Corroborated
The whole system was designed to make money and not to care for the citizen	Intent documented in particular cities; an incentive documented widely; no national design shown	Not corroborated as stated
The United States is a corporation and its statutes bind only by consent	Rejected by every court that has heard it	Not corroborated

Finding — the modern record: the documented drift is real. Courts in many places have a money stake in conviction, the inquiry has been replaced by the bargain, the poor are held because they are poor, and the law has grown past any citizen's knowledge. Each of these breaks a mark of the covenant's line, and each also breaks the nation's own Constitution. The prophets' words in **Isaiah 10:1–2**, **Amos 2:8**; **5:12**, and **Micah 3:11** describe such practices exactly. That is the parallel, and it is **Corroborated**. It is a parallel of conduct. It is not an identification by prophecy (Section IV-D).

VII. LAW TURNED ON THE COVENANT PEOPLE

VII-A. Who Is Meant

By *“the covenant children of Yahweh”* this document means what the Tanakh means: Israel, and with Israel **“the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to Yahweh, to serve Him and to love the name of Yahweh”** (Isaiah 56:6), for whom there is **“one law”** with the native-born (Exodus 12:49). Doc 299 examined the house of Jacob and the house of Israel.

VII-B. Six Times the Tanakh Shows It

#	THE PATTERN	TEXT	HOW THE LAW WAS USED
1	A people targeted out of fear	Exodus 1:9–22	A policy of forced labor, then a secret order to the midwives, then an open decree to all the king’s people
2	A court used to take property	1 Kings 21:1–16	Letters under the king’s seal; a fast proclaimed; two worthless witnesses; a charge of cursing Elohim and the king; execution; possession
3	Worship compelled by a uniform decree	Daniel 3:1–6	One command to all “peoples, nations, and languages” ; neutral on its face; a furnace for refusal
4	A law written to catch a known practice	Daniel 6:4–9 [Hebrew 6:5–10]	Officials who could find no fault drafted a thirty-day ban on prayer and had the king sign it
5	A people accused because their laws differ	Esther 3:8–13	The charge: their laws are different and they do not keep the king’s laws. Silver was offered to the treasury, and the decree was sent to every province
6	The messenger charged with a crime	Jeremiah 26:8–11; 37:13–15; Amos 7:10–13	The prophet’s word restated as treason, conspiracy, or desertion; beating and prison without a finding

The fourth is the clearest, because the officials said aloud what they were doing:

“We shall not find any ground of complaint against this Daniel unless we find it against him in the law of his Elohim” (Daniel 6:5 [Hebrew 6:6]).

The fifth gives the accusation in its permanent form:

“There are certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of every people, and they do not keep the king’s laws, so it is not worth the king’s while to let them remain” (Esther 3:8).

Five features recur. The form of law is kept: a seal, witnesses, a written decree. The charge is put in terms of public order or loyalty, never as a quarrel with **Yahweh**. Money stands close by, whether store cities, a vineyard, or ten thousand talents of silver (**Esther 3:9**). The ruler is often not the author; Darius and Ahasuerus signed what others had drafted, and Darius regretted it the same day (**Daniel 6:14** [Hebrew 6:15]). And the one accused had done no wrong to the kingdom: **“before Him innocence was found in me; and also before you, O king, I have done no wrong” (Daniel 6:22** [Hebrew 6:23]).

Finding — the pattern: the Tanakh shows written law and court procedure used against those who keep **Yahweh**’s law, in Egypt, in Israel itself, in Babylon, and in Persia. **Corroborated.**

VII-C. Where Things Stand Now

Applied to the present, the pattern must be handled with the same care as any other charge.

What protects. The First Amendment forbids any law prohibiting the free exercise of religion. The Religious Freedom Restoration Act (1993) requires the federal government to show a compelling reason before it burdens a person’s religious practice, and more than half the states have a like statute. A federal law of 2000 protects religious assemblies in zoning disputes. In 2023 a unanimous Supreme Court ruled for a postal worker who would not work on his day of rest, holding that an employer must show substantial cost before refusing to accommodate a religious practice (Groff v. DeJoy). In 2025 the Court ruled for religious parents (Mahmoud v. Taylor) and, unanimously, for a religious charity (Catholic Charities Bureau v. Wisconsin Labor and Industry Review Commission). At this hour the law of the United States protects covenant practice more strongly than the law of almost any kingdom in the Tanakh did.

What is exposed. The Supreme Court held in 1990 that a law which is neutral and applies to everyone may be enforced even when it burdens a religious practice (Employment Division v. Smith), and in 1997 it held that the federal statute passed in answer does not bind the states (City of Boerne v. Flores). It held in 1986 that the government’s own use of an identifying number for a person does not violate that person’s religion (Bowen v. Roy). In Europe, general animal-welfare laws that forbid slaughter without stunning have been upheld against Jewish and Muslim objections by the Court of Justice of the European Union (2020) and the European Court of Human Rights (2024). These are the forms of **Daniel 3** and **Daniel 6**: a general law, neutral on its face, with a covenant practice inside its reach.

What the instruments are. Section VI is the list. When the offenses cannot be counted, almost anyone can be charged with something, and the decision of whom to charge is made by officials. That is the opening Daniel’s accusers used. They did not need a law against Daniel. They needed a law broad enough to hold him.

Finding — the present: that American law is now being used as a system against those who keep the covenant, because they keep it, is **Not corroborated**. The protections are real and have recently been strengthened. That general laws can reach covenant practice, and that the instruments described in Section VI can be turned on any person an official chooses, is **Corroborated**.

As to the near future, this document will not prophesy. The Tanakh gives a test for anyone who says what will happen (**Deuteronomy 18:21–22**), and **Doc 292** applies it. What the Tanakh gives in place of prediction is watchfulness: **“A prudent man sees evil and hides himself; the simple pass on and are punished” (Proverbs 22:3)**. The verb at the end of that proverb is *anash (to fine)*.

VII-D. Who Bears It Now

The record of Section VI names who carries the weight of fines, bail, and warrants today: the poor of every faith and of none. The covenant has always named the same people: **“to turn aside the needy from judgment and to rob the poor of My people of their right, that widows may be their spoil” (Isaiah 10:2)**. The covenant community’s duty therefore begins before the gate closes on its own members.

“Open your mouth for the mute, for the cause of all who are passing away. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8–9).

“Learn to do good; seek justice; set right the oppressor; judge the fatherless; plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:17).

Yahweh once looked for one such person in a whole city: **“I sought for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the breach before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none” (Ezekiel 22:30)**.

VII-E. How the Faithful Stood

WHO	WHAT THEY FACED	WHAT THEY DID	TEXT
The midwives	A royal order to kill	Feared Elohim and did not carry it out	Exodus 1:17–21
Naboth	A king’s demand for his fathers’ inheritance	Refused, and was killed by a false court; Yahweh judged the king	1 Kings 21:3, 19

WHO	WHAT THEY FACED	WHAT THEY DID	TEXT
Jeremiah	A demand for his death	Stood before the princes and the people, gave his defense, and put himself in their hands	Jeremiah 26:12–15
The three in Babylon	Bow, or the furnace	Answered the king openly: our Elohim is able to deliver, “ but if not, ” we will not serve your gods	Daniel 3:16–18
Daniel	A thirty-day ban on prayer	Prayed three times a day “ as he had done before ”	Daniel 6:10 [Hebrew 6:11]
Esther and Mordecai	A decree of destruction	Fasted, petitioned the king by lawful means, and obtained a second decree	Esther 4:16; 7:3–4; 8:5–11
Nehemiah	Heavy burdens and hostile officials	Worked under the king’s letters, corrected the wrong among his own people, and would not hide	Nehemiah 2:7–8; 5:9–12; 6:11

The Tanakh does not make one rule out of these. David fled from Saul, and **Yahweh** hid Jeremiah and Baruch from the king (**Jeremiah 36:26**). But some things are common to all of them. None of them denied **Yahweh** to satisfy the decree. None of them raised his hand against the ruler; David had Saul in his power and said, “**Yahweh forbid that I should stretch out my hand against him**” (**1 Samuel 24:6** [Hebrew 24:7]). Where a lawful path was open, whether a hearing, a petition, or a letter from the king, they took it. And they did not avenge themselves:

“**Do not say, I will repay evil; wait for Yahweh, and He will save you**” (**Proverbs 20:22**).
“**Vengeance is Mine, and recompense**” (**Deuteronomy 32:35**). Doc 293 and Doc 295 examined these commands.

Naboth and the three in Babylon set the limit of what may be promised. Naboth was not delivered in his lifetime, and the three said “**but if not**” before they knew the outcome. The Tanakh does not promise that the faithful will win in the gate. It promises that the gate itself is watched:

“**To crush under foot all the prisoners of the earth, to turn aside the right of a man before the face of the Most High, to subvert a man in his cause — does the Lord not see it?**” (**Lamentations 3:34–36**).

“If you see the oppression of the poor and the wresting of judgment and righteousness in a province, do not be astonished at the matter; for one higher than the high is watching, and there are higher ones over them” (Ecclesiastes 5:8 [Hebrew 5:7]).

VIII. ARE WE IN THE LATTER DAYS OF MICAH 4?

VIII-A. The Phrase

Acharit ha-yamim (the latter days) occurs thirteen times in the Hebrew of the Tanakh and once in Aramaic (Daniel 2:28). Its sense is *“the after-part of the days”*: the time that follows the time being spoken of. It does not by itself mean the end of the world. **Doc 181** and **Doc 215** treated the phrase at length.

In the covenant’s own law the phrase is joined to distress and to return:

“When you are in distress and all these things have found you, in the latter days you will return to Yahweh your Elohim and listen to His voice; for Yahweh your Elohim is a compassionate El. He will not fail you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers” (Deuteronomy 4:30–31).

Hosea uses it the same way: **“Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek Yahweh their Elohim ... and they shall come trembling to Yahweh and to His goodness in the latter days” (Hosea 3:5).** In both places the latter days are the time of a people’s return to Yahweh.

VIII-B. What Comes Just Before Micah 4

Micah 4 cannot be read without the three verses before it. They are about courts.

“Hear this, heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and twist all that is straight, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. Her heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets divine for silver; yet they lean on Yahweh and say, Is not Yahweh in our midst? No evil shall come upon us. Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest” (Micah 3:9–12).

The next words are **“But it shall be in the latter days” (Micah 4:1)**. The mountain that is brought down to a forest because its judges were bought is the mountain that is raised up. The latter-day oracle is **Yahweh’s** answer to the bought court, which makes it the answer to the question of this whole document.

VIII-C. The Oracle

“And it shall be in the latter days that the mountain of the house of Yahweh shall be established as the head of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills, and peoples shall flow to it. And many nations shall go and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh and to the house of the Elohim of Jacob, that He may teach us of His ways and that we may walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem. And He shall judge between many peoples and decide for strong nations far off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more. And they shall sit, each man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of Yahweh of hosts has spoken” (Micah 4:1–4).

At the center stands a court: “He shall judge between many peoples.” The Judge is one who cannot be bought, and what His judging produces is the end of war and the end of fear. The closing phrase, *ein macharid (none shall make afraid)*, אֵין מַחְרִיד, is the covenant’s own blessing for a people who walk in Yahweh’s statutes: “you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid” (Leviticus 26:6). The vine and the fig tree are the picture of that peace in Solomon’s best years (1 Kings 4:25 [Hebrew 5:5]) and again in Zechariah 3:10.

The oracle then names who is gathered: “In that day, declares Yahweh, I will gather her who is lame, and her who was driven away I will assemble, and her whom I have afflicted. And I will make the lame a remnant, and her who was cast far off a strong nation; and Yahweh shall reign over them in Mount Zion from now and forever” (Micah 4:6–7). The kingdom is given to those the gate had driven out.

VIII-D. The Oracle Tested Against the Present

WHAT THE ORACLE SAYS	VERSE	THE PRESENT CONDITION
The mountain of the house of Yahweh established as head of the mountains	4:1	No house of Yahweh stands on the mountain (Doc 215)
Peoples flow to it; nations go up to be taught His ways	4:1–2	The nations do not go up to Zion for instruction
Yahweh judges between many peoples	4:3	The disputes of nations are settled by power and by the courts of men

WHAT THE ORACLE SAYS	VERSE	THE PRESENT CONDITION
Swords into plowshares; war no longer learned	4:3	World military spending reached a record \$2,887 billion in 2025, the eleventh year of increase in a row (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 2026)
Each under his vine and fig tree; none makes afraid	4:4	Section VI of this document is a record of fear in the gate
The lame and the driven-away gathered; Yahweh reigns in Zion	4:6–7	Not seen

Finding — **Micah 4:1–7:** not one of the six elements is present. On the text’s own terms the latter days of **Micah 4:1–7** have not arrived, and **Isaiah 2:2–4** is the second witness to the same oracle. **Corroborated.** A teaching that this generation is living in the fulfilled latter days of Micah 4 is **Not in the text**.

VIII-E. The “Now” of Micah 4

The chapter does not end at verse 7. It turns from “*in the latter days*” and “*in that day*” to another word, *attah* (*now*), עַתָּה, four times (**Micah 4:9, 10, 11; 5:1** [Hebrew 4:14]).

“Writhe and labor, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor; for now you shall go out of the city and dwell in the field, and you shall come to Babylon. There you shall be rescued; there Yahweh will redeem you from the hand of your enemies. And now many nations are gathered against you ... But they do not know the thoughts of Yahweh, nor do they understand His counsel; for He has gathered them as sheaves to the threshing floor” (Micah 4:10–12).

Micah prophesied in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (**Micah 1:1**), more than a century before Babylon took Jerusalem (**2 Kings 24–25**) and before the return under Cyrus (**Ezra 1:1–4**). The Babylon of **Micah 4:10** is that Babylon, and the going and the rescue both took place. The chapter itself therefore sets two times side by side: a “*now*” of labor pains, exile, and nations gathered, and a “*latter days*” that lie beyond it.

The elders of Judah later remembered how Micah’s own generation received his word. **“Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah ... Zion shall be plowed as a field ... Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear Yahweh and entreat the favor of Yahweh, and Yahweh relented of the evil He had spoken against them?” (Jeremiah 26:18–19).** A word of judgment is spoken so that it may be turned (**Jeremiah 18:7–8**).

Finding — the “now”: Micah 4 distinguishes a present of distress from the latter days that follow it. **Corroborated** by the chapter’s own wording. That the Babylon of **Micah 4:10** is the United States or any modern nation is **Not in the text**. Whether the distress of this generation is the labor that comes just before the latter days, the text does not say. It gives an order of events and gives no date (**Deuteronomy 29:29** [Hebrew 29:28]).

IX. ARE WE IN THE LAST DAYS OF JOEL 2?

IX-A. The Order of the Book

PASSAGE	WHAT IT CONTAINS
Joel 1:2–20	A locust plague and a drought. “Alas for the day! For the day of Yahweh is near” (1:15)
Joel 2:1–11	The alarm in Zion; a day of darkness; an army that cannot be stopped. “The day of Yahweh is great and very awesome; who can endure it?” (2:11)
Joel 2:12–17	“Yet even now”: the call to return, and a solemn assembly of every age
Joel 2:18–27	Yahweh’s answer: pity for His people, grain and wine and oil, the years the locust ate restored
Joel 2:28–32 [Hebrew 3:1–5]	“Afterward”: the spirit poured out on all flesh; wonders in heaven and earth; deliverance in Zion
Joel 3:1–21 [Hebrew 4:1–21]	“In those days and at that time”: the captivity of Judah restored; the nations judged in the valley of Jehoshaphat; Yahweh dwelling in Zion

IX-B. The Center of the Chapter

The middle of Joel 2 is not a sign. It is a command.

“Yet even now, declares Yahweh, return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and with weeping and with mourning. And rend your heart and not your garments, and return to Yahweh your Elohim; for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in covenant-love, and He relents of evil. Who knows? He may turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him” (Joel 2:12–14).

The verb is *shuv* (*to return*), שׁוּב. Everything after it in the chapter is **Yahweh’s** answer to a people who returned: **“Then Yahweh was jealous for His land and had pity on His people” (Joel 2:18).** The promise of the spirit is the end of that answer. It was not given to people who were reading signs.

IX-C. The Promise

“And it shall be afterward that I will pour out My spirit on all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on the male servants and on the female servants in those days I will pour out My spirit. And I will give wonders in the heavens and on the earth: blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of Yahweh. And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be an escape, as Yahweh has said, and among the survivors whom Yahweh calls” (Joel 2:28–32 [Hebrew 3:1–5]).

Five things should be seen.

First, Joel says *acharei khi* (afterward). The phrase *acharit ha-yamim* (the latter days) does not occur anywhere in Joel. The common wording “*in the last days*” comes from the New Testament’s quotation of this passage (Acts 2:17), which is noted in the Three-Religion Audit. Joel’s own word ties the promise to what comes before it: after the return, and after the restoration of **Joel 2:18–27**.

Second, the verb is *shafakh* (to pour out), שָׁפַךְ, H8210, and other prophets carry the same promise: **Isaiah 32:15**, **Isaiah 44:3**, **Ezekiel 39:29**, and **Zechariah 12:10**. The promise of the spirit poured out is **Corroborated**.

Third, the list ends at the bottom of the household: “**also on the male servants and on the female servants.**” The people who had the least standing in any gate are named as receiving the spirit of **Yahweh**. No court had ever ranked them that way.

Fourth, the signs come “**before the coming of the great and awesome day of Yahweh.**” Malachi uses the same words of the same day (**Malachi 4:5** [Hebrew 3:23]). The day is a day of darkness in **Isaiah 13:9–10**, **Amos 5:18–20**, and **Zephaniah 1:14–15**. **Corroborated**.

Fifth, the deliverance is for “**everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh.**” There is no other condition of nation or rank. Deliverance is located: *peleitha* (an escape), פְּלִיטָה, H6413, in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem.

IX-D. What Follows: Yahweh’s Own Court

Joel’s next chapter answers the third question of this document more directly than any other passage.

“For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat; and

I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people and My inheritance Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations. They have divided My land, and they have cast lots for My people, and have given a boy for a harlot, and sold a girl for wine, and drunk it” (Joel 3:1–3 [Hebrew 4:1–3]).

The valley’s name means **“Yahweh judges.”** The charge is what the nations did to the covenant people when they had power over them: scattered them, parceled out their land, and sold their children for the price of a drink. The Tanakh’s last word on kingdoms that turn their power on the covenant people is that **Yahweh** will hold court over them Himself. Until then the nations do the reverse of Micah’s vision: **“Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears” (Joel 3:10 [Hebrew 4:10]). Doc 202 examined the two sayings together. For His own people the promise is: “Yahweh will be a refuge for His people and a stronghold for the children of Israel” (Joel 3:16 [Hebrew 4:16]).**

IX-E. The Promise Tested Against the Present

Joel’s **“afterward”** has stated contents: the spirit on all flesh, wonders in the heavens and the earth, an escape in Zion, the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem restored, all nations judged, and **Yahweh** dwelling in Zion so that **“Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall pass through her no more” (Joel 3:17 [Hebrew 4:17]).** These have not been seen together in any generation, this one included. Movements in every century have claimed the outpouring for themselves. Each such claim must meet the whole passage, and none has.

One more witness must be heard, because it stands in the same chapter as the study sheet’s own text. The people of Amos’s day, whose courts **“turn aside the needy in the gate” (Amos 5:12),** were looking forward to the day of **Yahweh**. The prophet answered them:

“Woe to you who desire the day of Yahweh! Why would you have the day of Yahweh? It is darkness, and not light” (Amos 5:18).

What he required of them was this: **“Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; perhaps Yahweh, the Elohim of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph” (Amos 5:15),** and **“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24).**

Finding — Joel 2: the promise of the spirit and the coming of the day of **Yahweh** are each **Corroborated** by other prophets. That Joel calls his promise **“the last days”** is **Not in the text;** his word is **“afterward.”** That this generation is living in Joel’s **“afterward”** is **Not in the text;** the passage gives an order and gives no date, and its stated contents are not present.

IX-F. What Can Be Said, Then

Many sincere people believe this is the last generation. The Tanakh neither confirms it nor rules it out. Four things can be said from the text.

First, the latter days of Micah and the afterward of Joel are certain. They rest on “**the mouth of Yahweh of hosts has spoken**” (Micah 4:4) and “**as Yahweh has said**” (Joel 2:32).

Second, their time is not given. “**The secret things belong to Yahweh our Elohim, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law**” (Deuteronomy 29:29 [Hebrew 29:28]).

“**For the vision is yet for an appointed time ... though it tarries, wait for it**” (Habakkuk 2:3).

Doc 181 set out how every generation since the Second Temple fell has had voices that named itself the last, and **Doc 292** applied the prophet test to those who set dates.

Third, the conditions that the prophets say bring a nation under the day are the conditions of Section VI: the bought bench, the needy turned aside in the gate, wealth built on what was taken. A nation whose gates look like **Amos 5** has no reason to desire the day.

Fourth, both chapters put the same thing in the reader’s hand. Joel’s word is “**yet even now, return**” (Joel 2:12).

Micah’s is “**He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does Yahweh require of you but to do justice, and to love covenant-love, and to walk humbly with your Elohim?**” (Micah 6:8). Neither is a question about the calendar.

X. THREE-RELIGION AUDIT — RULERS, UNJUST LAW, AND THE LATTER DAYS

The table sets the three traditions against the Tanakh’s own findings. Comparative texts are cited as historical reference only, in keeping with the standing rule of this document.

ELEMENT	☆ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	✱ ISLAM
Teaching on rulers and their law	Rabbinic tradition holds that <i>“the law of the kingdom is law”</i> in civil and money matters (Talmud Bava Kamma 113a; Bava Batra 54b). Maimonides limits the rule to laws a king lays on all alike; what he takes from one person outside a known law is robbery (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Robbery and Lost Property, chapter 5). The sages also said <i>“Be careful with the ruling power”</i> (Mishnah Avot 2:3) and <i>“Pray for the welfare of the government”</i> (Avot 3:2).	Romans 13:1–7 and 1 Peter 2:13–17 teach submission to rulers as servants for good. Acts 5:29 sets the limit: <i>“We must obey God rather than men.”</i> Revelation 17–18 pictures Rome as <i>“Babylon,”</i> whose cargo includes <i>“bodies and souls of men”</i> (Revelation 18:13).	The Qur’an commands that judgment between people be given with justice (Q. 4:58) and that witness be borne for justice even against oneself (Q. 4:135). It forbids consuming another’s wealth by carrying it to the rulers (Q. 2:188). Pharaoh is its standing picture of tyranny (Q. 28:4). A hadith calls a word of justice before an oppressive ruler the best striving (Sunan Abi Dawud 4344).
Covenant strength	Maimonides’ line between a king’s law and a king’s robbery is the line of Isaiah 10:1–2 and Ezekiel 46:18 . Avot 3:2 keeps the command of Jeremiah 29:7 .	It holds together what the Tanakh holds together: Daniel’s faithful service and Daniel’s refusal. Revelation’s charges against its <i>“Babylon”</i> are drawn from Isaiah 47 and Jeremiah 50–51 .	It makes justice in judgment a command that binds the believer first, even against himself and his kin. That is the direction of the prophets, who spoke first to their own people (Section I-C).

ELEMENT	☆ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	✡ ISLAM
Covenant departure	<i>“The law of the kingdom is law”</i> is a ruling of the sages and not a verse. Where it has been used to counsel silence before plain injustice, it goes past Jeremiah 29:7 , which commands prayer and peace and does not command approval.	Romans 13 has been preached as a duty of unconditional obedience, including in defense of slave laws. The Tanakh knows no such duty (Exodus 1:17). In the other direction, the name <i>“Babylon”</i> has been fixed on one government after another and dates set from it, a label the Tanakh never puts on a later empire (Section IV-D).	Some schools taught patient obedience to an unjust ruler so long as he upholds the prayer, and others have declared rulers apostate and taken up arms. Neither is the path of the midwives, of Daniel, or of Esther (Section VII-E).
On the latter days	Rabbinic tradition reads Micah 4 and Joel’s promise of the spirit as belonging to the days of the Messiah, still to come. That agrees with the tests of Sections VIII and IX.	Acts 2:16–21 quotes Joel 2:28–32 and renders <i>“afterward”</i> as <i>“in the last days.”</i> On that reading the last days began in the first century and have continued for nearly two thousand years, which is itself a caution against naming any one generation.	The Qur’an teaches that the time of the Hour is known to Allah alone (Q. 7:187). That agrees with Deuteronomy 29:29 .
Covenant witness	“Righteousness, righteousness you shall pursue” (Deuteronomy 16:20) is the tradition’s own charter for every court.	Matthew 23:23 names <i>“justice and mercy and faithfulness”</i> as the weightier matters of the law. It is Micah 6:8 restated.	Q. 4:135 and the hadith of the word before the ruler stand with Proverbs 31:8–9 : open your mouth, and judge righteously.

XI. CORRECTIONS TO EARLIER LIBRARY MATERIAL

The Library’s rule is that its own earlier work is tested by the same standard as everyone else’s. In preparing this document, **Doc 142**, **Doc 181**, **Doc 215**, and **Doc 221** were read again. Three corrections of plain fact have been made in the Google Doc of Doc 181. The others change the wording of an argument and are set out here for the Founder’s decision.

Correction 1 — how often the phrase occurs (Doc 181, Sections I and II). Doc 181 said *acharit ha-yamim* (*the latter days*) appears fifteen times in the Hebrew Bible. It appears thirteen times in

Hebrew (**Genesis 49:1; Numbers 24:14; Deuteronomy 4:30; 31:29; Isaiah 2:2; Jeremiah 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezekiel 38:16; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1; Daniel 10:14**) and once in Aramaic (**Daniel 2:28**). Corrected in the Google Doc.

Correction 2 — the Second Temple (Doc 181, Section III-E). Doc 181 called Herod the Great *“the builder of the Second Temple.”* The Second Temple was built by the returned exiles and finished in the sixth year of Darius (**Ezra 6:15**). Herod rebuilt and enlarged it centuries later. Corrected in the Google Doc.

Correction 3 — the ram and the goat (Doc 181, Section III-D). Doc 181 placed the Greek and Persian conflict of **Daniel 8** in the second century BCE. Greece overthrew Persia in the fourth century BCE; the persecution usually connected with the chapter’s little horn came in the second. The date has been corrected in the Google Doc. One further point is left for the Founder’s decision. The chapter interprets itself: the ram is *“the kings of Media and Persia”* and the goat is *“the king of Greece”* (**Daniel 8:20–21**). Doc 181 raised the possibility of a further fulfillment in modern Iran and the Western powers. That reading is **Not in the text**.

Correction 4 — Jerusalem under Hebrew rule (Doc 181, Section IV). Doc 181 said that in 1967 Jerusalem came under Hebrew governance *“for the first time since approximately 586 BCE.”* The historical record does not support this. The Hasmonean kingdom governed Jerusalem as an independent Jewish state in the second and first centuries BCE, until Rome took the city in 63 BCE. The same section counts the years with no Hebrew sovereign from 70 CE, but Judea in 70 CE was already a Roman province. The dates should be restated. Left for the Founder’s decision, since the wording of the argument changes.

Correction 5 — Ezekiel 39:9 (Doc 181, Section IV and Scripture Index). Doc 181 described **Ezekiel 39:9** as *“fire from heaven”* and connected it with nuclear weapons. The verse says that the people of Israel’s cities will go out and burn the enemy’s weapons for fuel for seven years: shields, bows, arrows, clubs, and spears, *“so that they take no wood out of the field”* (**Ezekiel 39:9–10**). A nuclear reading is **Not in the text**. Left for the Founder’s decision.

Correction 6 — the doubled oracle (Doc 142, Section I). Doc 142 said there is *“no phenomenon quite like it in the entire Tanakh.”* Other passages stand twice in the Tanakh: **2 Kings 18–20** with **Isaiah 36–39**, **2 Samuel 22** with **Psalms 18**, and **Obadiah 1–6** with **Jeremiah 49:9–10, 14–16**. Doc 142 also called Isaiah and Micah *“independent”* witnesses while granting that one may have quoted the other. The text gives two witnesses; whether they are independent of each other it does not say. Left for the Founder’s decision.

Correction 7 — Micah 4:5 (Doc 142, Sections II, VI, and VII). Doc 142 read “all the peoples walk each in the name of its elohim” as a feature of the latter days, in which the nations keep their own gods inside the covenant order. That reading sits badly with the oracle it follows, where the nations go up to be taught the ways of the Elohim of Jacob (**Micah 4:2**), and with two other witnesses: “then I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of Yahweh” (**Zephaniah 3:9**), and “in that day Yahweh shall be one, and His name one” (**Zechariah 14:9**). Micah 4:5 reads more naturally as the resolve of the faithful in the present: the peoples now walk after their gods, “but we will walk in the name of Yahweh our Elohim forever and ever.” Left for the Founder’s decision.

Correction 8 — a missing quotation (Doc 215, Section I-C). In the Google Doc the paragraph ends at the words “*with one significant addition at the close:*” and nothing follows. The words of **Micah 4:4** that belong there are given in Section VIII-C of this document. Left for the Founder to restore.

Correction 9 — Scripture Index (Doc 221). The index of Doc 221 lists **Proverbs 29:2**, **4** and **Isaiah 10:1–2** under its Section IV, but neither is quoted there. **Proverbs 29:4** and **Isaiah 10:1–2** are treated in this document (Sections VI-D and I-C). Left for the next revision of Doc 221.

XII. SEVEN COVENANT DECLARATIONS ON THE KINGDOMS AND THE GATE

Per the **Deuteronomy 19:15** standard, no doctrine may stand on a single text. Each declaration below draws on more than one witness.

#	COVENANT DECLARATION	BASIS
I	A throne can do its harm through law. The Tanakh names this: trouble framed by statute, and decrees of iniquity written to rob the poor of their right.	Psalms 94:20–21; Isaiah 10:1–2
II	Egypt and Babylon were real kingdoms, and they are also a way of ruling. The prophets lay the same charges on Israel’s own rulers. No later nation is named by prophecy; every nation is measured by the same line.	Exodus 1:13–14; Leviticus 25:43; Ezekiel 34:4; Habakkuk 2:12; Micah 3:10
III	The covenant’s court takes no gain from its cases, judges the stranger and the native alike, inquires diligently, measures its penalties, and pays the one who was wronged.	Exodus 23:8; Leviticus 24:22; Deuteronomy 19:15–18; 25:1–3; Numbers 5:7

#	COVENANT DECLARATION	BASIS
IV	A court or a town that lives on the fines it imposes stands under the prophets' charge. That charge, like any other, must be proven by witnesses and not carried as a report.	Amos 2:8; Micah 3:11; Proverbs 17:26; 29:4; Exodus 23:1
V	Law has been turned on those who keep Yahweh's law, in Egypt, in Israel, in Babylon, and in Persia. The faithful sought the peace of the city, refused only what commanded sin, took every lawful path, and left vengeance to Yahweh .	Exodus 1:17; 1 Kings 21:8–13; Daniel 3:16–18; 6:10; Esther 3:8; Jeremiah 29:7; Deuteronomy 32:35
VI	The latter days of Micah 4 and the afterward of Joel 2 are certain, and by the text's own tests they have not yet come. No date is given, and none may be set.	Micah 4:1–7; Isaiah 2:2–4; Joel 2:28–32; Deuteronomy 29:29
VII	Until Yahweh judges between the nations, the work of the covenant people is to return to Him, to do justice in their own gates, and to plead the cause of the poor.	Joel 2:12–13; Micah 6:8; Amos 5:15; Proverbs 31:8–9; Isaiah 1:17

XIII. THE COVENANT RESPONSE — WHAT THE TANAKH SAYS TO THE ONE WHO ASKS

Behind these questions there is usually a person who has stood in a gate and found it was not what it claims to be, or who fears the day it will be closed on him for keeping the covenant. Tanakh's answer is fivefold.

First: name the thing truthfully. Not every statute is Babylon, and not every court is bought. Lay the matter against the line of Section V and say what is proven, and no more (**Exodus 23:1**). The proven record of Section VI is heavy enough. An overstated charge weakens it.

Second: do not rebuild Egypt in your own house. The command “you shall not rule over him with rigor” was given to Israel (**Leviticus 25:43**). It covers how a covenant person pays those who work for him, judges a dispute in his own household, and leads a congregation. “**Speak the truth, each to his neighbor; judge with truth and the judgment of peace in your gates**” (**Zechariah 8:16**).

Third: answer the gate. Do not hide from it, and do not fight it. A summons, a charge, or a warrant is answered in the open, with the truth and with counsel. Daniel did not change his practice and did not conceal it. Jeremiah stood and gave his defense. “**The first to plead his case seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him**” (**Proverbs 18:17**), and “**in an abundance of**

counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14). The law of this nation gives an accused person more lawful paths than Persia gave Esther: counsel, a hearing, an appeal, and a Constitution that its own courts still enforce. The covenant person uses them, and seeks the peace of the city while he does (Jeremiah 29:7).

Fourth: stand with the poor in the gate. Job described a righteous man’s life this way: **“I delivered the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had no helper ... I was a father to the needy, and the cause of him I did not know I searched out” (Job 29:12, 16).** The rulings of Section VI that stopped courts from living on their fines were won by people who took up the cause of defendants who had no money. That work is covenant work.

Fifth: return, and wait for the Judge. Joel’s word to a people under the shadow of the day was **“yet even now, return to Me with all your heart” (Joel 2:12).** Micah, who saw the bought court and the plowed mountain and the latter days beyond them, ends where every person in the gate may end:

“But as for me, I will look to Yahweh; I will wait for the Elohim of my salvation; my Elohim will hear me ... He will plead my cause and execute judgment for me; He will bring me out to the light, and I shall see His righteousness” (Micah 7:7, 9).

“For Yahweh is our judge, Yahweh is our lawgiver, Yahweh is our king; He will save us” (Isaiah 33:22).

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“And He shall judge between many peoples and decide for strong nations far off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more. And they shall sit, each man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of Yahweh of hosts has spoken.”

Micah 4:3–4 — The Written Covenant of Yahweh

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

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