

KNOW WHO YOU ARE FOLLOWING. KNOW WHO YOU ARE VOTING FOR.

A Tanakh Standard for Discerning Religious Leadership and Civil Authority

Including a 23-Year Eyewitness Account from Inside a High-Control Religious Organization

Miqdash Bethel Covenant Assembly

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The Tanakh contains **two parallel frameworks** for discernment that every covenant person must master in this generation: the framework for evaluating **religious leadership** and the framework for evaluating **civil authority**. Both are grounded in the same Torah standard. Both are urgently needed. And neither can be properly applied without the other.

This study unifies both frameworks into a single document because the boundary between religious and political power has never been thinner. In 2026, religious leaders endorse politicians. Politicians invoke divine authority. Pastors fund campaigns. Governments dictate theology. The ancient distinction between the priestly and the royal has collapsed — and the result is the confusion **Yahweh** warned against in the Torah.

Part One of this document addresses **religious leadership discernment** — the Tanakh's tests for identifying false prophets, high-control religious organizations, and leaders who use the covenant community for personal enrichment and power. It includes Elder Kepha Arcemont's documented testimony as a 23-year insider in a well-known American religious organization — testimony that provides a real-world case study of every warning pattern the Tanakh identifies.

Part Two addresses **civil authority discernment** — the Tanakh's standards for evaluating political leaders, the covenant basis for a priestly community's non-participation in partisan politics, and the practical questions every citizen with covenant values should apply before casting a vote or lending support to any political movement.

Authority: The Tanakh — The Word of Yahweh Alone. Standard: Devarim 19:15 — Two or Three Witnesses.

PART ONE

KNOW WHO YOU ARE FOLLOWING

The Tanakh Standard for Discerning Religious Leadership

SECTION 1 — THE FOUNDATION: YAHWEH'S OWN WARNING

The Torah does not assume that everyone who speaks in **Yahweh's** name speaks for **Yahweh**. It assumes the opposite. **Yahweh** devotes two full chapters of Devarim (Deuteronomy) — chapters 13 and 18 — to the problem of false religious leadership. He does not treat this as an edge case. He treats it as one of the most dangerous threats the covenant community will face in every generation.

"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods' — you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For Yahweh your Elohim is testing you, to know whether you love Yahweh your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul." — Devarim (Deuteronomy) 13:1-3

Read carefully what **Yahweh** says here. The false prophet may produce **signs that come to pass**. Miracles may be real. Healings may happen. Prophecies may be

accurate. None of these things, by themselves, constitute proof that a leader is sent by **Yahweh**. The single overriding test is this: **where does this leader's teaching lead you?** Toward the covenant of **Yahweh** — or away from it?

This is the first and most important principle of religious discernment: supernatural activity does not validate a leader. The Torah says explicitly that **Yahweh** may permit a false prophet to produce genuine signs precisely in order to *test* the covenant community's fidelity. A community that follows signs rather than the covenant is a community that has already departed from the standard.

The Three Tests of Devarim 13 and 18

Test One — Torah Alignment — Does the leader's teaching lead the people toward the covenant of **Yahweh** as written in the Torah? Or does it gradually introduce teachings, practices, or loyalties that contradict, modify, or replace the Torah? Any leader whose core teaching departs from the written Torah — regardless of their charisma, their success, their following, or their supernatural credentials — fails this test. **Devarim 13:4: "You shall walk after Yahweh your Elohim and fear Him and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him."**

Test Two — Predictive Accuracy — When the leader speaks in **Yahweh's** name with specific predictions about the future, do those predictions come true? **Devarim 18:21-22: "When a prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that Yahweh has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously."** Note: Rashi, following the Talmud, limits this to positive predictions — not warnings of judgment, which can be averted by repentance as with Yonah (Jonah) and Nineveh. The standard is precise, not absolute, but false prophecies of blessing must be weighed.

Test Three — Personal Conduct and Fruit — Does the leader live by the standard they proclaim? The Torah's standard of covenant leadership — established in **Devarim 17:14-20** for the king, and in the priestly standards of Vayikra — includes: not accumulating wealth through the position; not exalting oneself above the community; reading and following the Torah all the days of his life; not multiplying personal power. A leader whose personal life contradicts the

standard he requires of his followers has failed this test. This is not a minor concern. It is **Yahweh's** own standard.

SECTION 2 — PATTERNS OF HIGH-CONTROL RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Academic research on high-control religious groups (commonly called cults, though the academic term is *high-control group* or *new religious movement*) has identified consistent patterns that appear across cultures, decades, and belief systems. These patterns are not unique to any one religion — they appear in Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and secular contexts alike. When examined against the Tanakh's own standards, they map precisely onto the warning signs the Torah identifies.

The following ten patterns represent the most consistently documented markers of high-control religious organizations, corroborated by research from the Watchman Fellowship, BITE Model (Steven Hassan), Jewish cult research organizations, and the peer-reviewed literature on coercive control in religious settings. Each is answered by a specific Tanakh standard.

Pattern One: The Leader Claims Unique, Exclusive Access to Truth

The leader presents himself as the sole or primary channel through whom **Yahweh** speaks in this generation. Outside sources — including the written Torah itself — are filtered through his interpretation. Members who read the Torah independently and reach different conclusions are corrected, shamed, or disciplined.

The Tanakh standard: **Devarim 29:29**: "***The secret things belong to Yahweh our Elohim, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this Torah.***" The revealed word belongs to the entire community — not to one man's interpretation. Any leader who positions himself as the necessary mediator between the people and the written Torah has usurped a position the Torah does not grant.

Pattern Two: Questioning the Leader Is Treated as Questioning Yahweh

Criticism of the leader, his teachings, or his conduct is equated with rebellion against **Yahweh**. Members who raise legitimate concerns are labeled divisive, spiritually compromised, or in league with evil. The community is taught that submission to the leader equals submission to **Yahweh**.

The Tanakh standard: The Tanakh is full of people who questioned, challenged, and held leaders accountable — including Mosheh himself (Bemidbar 12), the prophets who rebuked kings, and Shoftim (Judges) who recorded Israel's failures without softening them. **Devarim 13:1-3** commands the community to *not* follow even a miracle-working prophet if his teaching leads them astray. Accountability is covenant responsibility, not rebellion.

Pattern Three: Control of Information — Shunning Outside Sources

Members are discouraged or forbidden from reading material that questions the leader or organization. Former members, critics, and alternative teachings are labeled spiritually dangerous. The flow of information is controlled so that members hear primarily what the leadership approves.

The Tanakh standard: **Devarim 19:15** — Two or Three Witnesses. The covenant research standard of Miqdash Bethel is built on this verse. No single source — including any single leader — is to be the sole authority on any question. The Torah requires corroboration, not monopoly.

Pattern Four: Financial Exploitation

Members are required or heavily pressured to give financially to the organization beyond any standard of covenant generosity. The leader and organization's lifestyle is funded by the community while the covenant rationale for those expenditures is never transparently documented. The leader's personal wealth is tied to the organization's funds.

The Tanakh standard: The Levitical system was the most precisely regulated financial structure in the ancient world — every tithe, every offering, every allocation was documented and publicly accountable (Bemidbar 18, Devarim 14). The priestly community was *prohibited* from land ownership precisely to prevent accumulation of

power. **Devarim 17:17** prohibits the leader from multiplying silver and gold. Any religious organization whose finances are not transparent and accountable to its community has departed from the covenant financial standard.

Pattern Five: Isolation from Family and Outside Community

The organization gradually separates members from family members, friends, and social connections outside the group. This isolation is rationalized theologically — those outside the group are spiritually unqualified, dangerous, or under judgment. Over time, the member's entire social world exists within the organization.

The Tanakh standard: The covenant's most repeated command is to honor father and mother (Shemot 20:12) — a command that cannot be fulfilled by a community that teaches members to cut off family who question the leader. **Vayikra 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."** The Torah's community was embedded in the broader society — the ger (stranger), the widow, the orphan were all present in the covenant community's life. A community that seals itself off from all outside contact has violated the covenant's fundamental social structure.

Pattern Six: Exit Penalties — Fear of Leaving

Members who leave the organization are shunned, publicly condemned, or threatened with spiritual consequences — often including declarations that they will face divine judgment, lose their salvation, or be subject to spiritual attack. The threat of exit penalties creates a cage of fear that keeps members who would otherwise leave from doing so.

The Tanakh standard: The covenant of **Yahweh** is entered freely and maintained freely. The Torah records no mechanism for spiritually coercing people to remain in covenant relationship. It records consequences of covenant violation — but these come from **Yahweh**, not from a human organization. Any leader who declares that leaving his organization carries divine punishment has appointed himself as the agent of **Yahweh's** judgment — a position the Torah does not grant to any human being.

Pattern Seven: Prophecy Used as Control

The leader uses specific 'prophecies' or 'words from Yahweh' about individual members to direct their lives — including whom to marry, what career to pursue,

where to live, or when to give financially. These personal prophecies create dependency on the leader and provide leverage over members' most intimate decisions.

The Tanakh standard: The Torah's governance of marriage is through the family and covenant community, not through prophetic direction from a centralized leader (Bereishit 24 — the pattern of Avraham's servant seeking a wife for Yitzchak through family, prayer, and practical discernment). The Torah's financial instructions are precise and written — not dependent on a leader's personal word to each member. Any leader who controls personal life decisions through claimed prophetic authority is exercising a form of control the Torah does not sanction.

Pattern Eight: Redefining Core Terms

The organization uses standard religious terminology — Torah, covenant, Israel, salvation, truth — but assigns those terms meanings that differ significantly from their plain text usage. This creates an internal language that sounds familiar to outsiders but means something different within the group. New members are gradually introduced to the redefined meanings after joining.

The Tanakh standard: **Devarim 4:2**: ***"You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it."*** The integrity of the text is a covenant requirement. Any system that systematically reinterprets the plain meaning of the Torah to support its organizational claims — whether through denying the meaning of Elohim, redefining the covenant community, or claiming unique interpretive authority — has violated this standard.

Pattern Nine: The Leader Is Beyond Accountability

The leader answers to no one within the organization. There is no elders' council with authority to discipline him, no membership vote that can remove him, and no external oversight that the organization recognizes. If concerns about the leader's conduct are raised, they are handled internally — by the leader's own chosen representatives.

The Tanakh standard: Even Mosheh — the greatest prophet in the Tanakh — was subject to the correction of **Yahweh** Himself and accountable to the covenant community. When he struck the rock at Meribah in anger rather than speaking to it, he

was held accountable (Bemidbar 20:12). No leader in the Tanakh operates without accountability. The covenant structure of Devarim 17 places even the king under the written Torah. A religious leader who answers to no one has positioned himself above the covenant framework that governs every person in the text.

Pattern Ten: End-Times Urgency as Manipulation

The organization cultivates a perpetual sense of crisis and urgency around end-times theology — the sense that this generation is the last, that events are accelerating, that leaving or slowing down is spiritually dangerous. This urgency is used to accelerate financial giving, to justify bypassing normal discernment processes, and to prevent members from thinking critically about what they are being taught.

The Tanakh standard: **Devarim 18:20-22** — the test of the prophet is fulfilled over time. The Torah does not reward panic-driven decision making. **Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 28:16**: ***"He who believes will not be in haste."*** The covenant community's response to crisis is prayer, wisdom, the counsel of the community, and the standard of the written Torah — not rushed obedience to a single voice claiming prophetic urgency.

SECTION 3 — AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT: 23 YEARS INSIDE A HIGH-CONTROL ORGANIZATION

The following is the personal testimony of **Elder Kepha Arcemont**, founder of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Assembly. This testimony is offered not as an accusation against individuals but as a covenant witness — a documented account of how the patterns described in Section 2 manifest in lived experience. The purpose is protection: so that others who recognize these patterns in their own situation have a witness that confirms what they are seeing.

Background: Elder Arcemont was a member of the House of Yahweh in Abilene, Texas — one of the most prominent Sacred Name organizations in the United States — for 23 years. He joined as a man sincerely seeking the covenant truth of the Hebrew

scriptures. He left after two decades of documented observation, having witnessed at close range the full cycle of how a high-control religious organization develops, consolidates power, and uses covenant language to control its membership.

The House of Yahweh was founded by Yisrayl Hawkins (born Buffalo Bill Hawkins) in Abilene, Texas in 1980. It operates from a large compound in rural Abilene, maintains a publishing operation, a radio and internet ministry, and at its peak claimed tens of thousands of followers worldwide. It teaches from the Hebrew scriptures — using divine names, observing the Sabbath and feast days, and grounding its teaching in the Torah. Its presentation appears covenant-faithful to sincere seekers of Hebrew truth.

What the 23 Years Revealed — The Pattern in Practice

On Exclusive Truth Claims

The organization teaches that it is the only genuine covenant assembly in the world — the fulfillment of the prophetic restoration of Yisra'el. All other religious bodies, including other Sacred Name organizations, are characterized as spiritually compromised or under the influence of the false religious system. Members are taught that their spiritual safety depends on remaining connected to this specific assembly and its leadership.

The Tanakh standard this violates: **Devarim 29:29** and the entire pattern of the prophets, who addressed the covenant community as a whole — never through a single organizational gatekeeper. **Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 29:7** tells the exiles in Babylon to seek the shalom of *the city* where they dwell — they were not directed to remain isolated in a single approved community.

On the Leader's Authority

Yisrayl Hawkins taught that he was the end-times witness prophesied in Devarim and Zekhariah — the specific prophetic figure sent to restore the covenant in the last days. His interpretations of scripture were presented not as one scholar's reading but as authoritative revelation. Challenging his interpretation was treated as challenging **Yahweh** Himself. The organization's magazine, newsletters, and broadcasts consistently elevated his position as uniquely chosen.

The predictive prophecy test of **Devarim 18:21-22** is particularly applicable here. The organization made repeated end-times predictions — specific dates and events — that did not come to pass. Rather than acknowledging prophetic failure, the organization consistently reframed missed predictions as reinterpretations or adjustments. By the Torah's standard, this pattern of unfulfilled positive prophecy is one of the clearest markers of false prophetic leadership.

On Financial Practices

Members were expected to tithe to the organization and to contribute beyond the tithe for special projects, publications, and broadcasts. The compound in Abilene — including the leader's residence, vehicles, and personal staff — was funded through the contributions of the membership. Financial transparency to the membership was not a feature of the organization's operations. Members who gave significantly did so on faith in the leader's claims of covenant mandate, without access to audited financial records.

This pattern directly violates the Levitical standard of transparent, accountable financial stewardship (Bemidbar 18) and **Devarim 17:17's** prohibition on a leader multiplying silver and gold through his position.

On Isolation and Shunning

Over the 23 years of Elder Arcemont's membership, the organization's teachings increasingly separated members from family members and friends outside the group. Interactions with former members — particularly those who had left critically — were discouraged. The theology of the organization positioned the outside world, and other religious communities, as spiritually dangerous environments. Social life increasingly centered on the organization's compound and calendar.

When members did leave the organization, the response from remaining members was typically shunning — the withdrawal of relationship and community. This pattern is not a covenant standard. It is a control mechanism designed to make the cost of leaving as high as possible, which is precisely why the Torah's covenant relationship model does not include it.

On Redefining Core Terms

The organization's most theologically distinctive position was its teaching that *EI* and *Elohim* — the foundational Hebrew divine names appearing in the very first verse of the Torah — were titles of pagan origin that cannot properly refer to **Yahweh**. The organization produced its own Bible translation — the Book of Yahweh — in which these names are systematically replaced throughout the text.

This position is refuted by every recognized authority in Biblical Hebrew scholarship. BDB (Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon), HALOT (Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament), Gesenius, TWOT, the Encyclopedia Judaica, Britannica, and every major Jewish scholarly tradition affirm that *Elohim* is the primary honorific for **Yahweh** throughout the Tanakh — appearing 2,570 times, including in **Bereishit 1:1** itself. The organization's teaching requires its members to reject the plain text of the Torah and the consensus of 3,000 years of Jewish scholarship in favor of the leader's interpretation.

The Covenant Conclusion of This Testimony

Twenty-three years of observation produced a consistent record: every warning pattern identified in the Torah — exclusive truth claims, resistance to accountability, financial opacity, isolation, exit penalties, unfulfilled prophecy, redefined core terminology — was present in this organization's operation. This testimony is not offered in bitterness or as personal vendetta. It is offered as a covenant witness, under the standard of **Devarim 19:15**, so that others who encounter these patterns have a documented account to measure their experience against.

The covenant community of Miqdash Bethel operates on the website themanbehindthename.com as a primary evidentiary archive documenting these patterns for the protection of anyone seeking the truth of the Hebrew covenant scriptures. The purpose has always been protection, not destruction — to place the documented record before those with eyes to see.

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest." — Hoshea (Hosea) 4:6

SECTION 4 — PRACTICAL DISCERNMENT: TEN QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE FOLLOWING ANY LEADER

These ten questions apply the Tanakh's standards directly. They can be asked of any religious organization, teacher, prophet, or ministry regardless of theological tradition.

Question 1: Does this leader's teaching consistently lead me toward the written Tanakh — or toward dependence on his interpretation of it? (Devarim 13:1-3; 29:29)

Question 2: When this leader has made specific positive predictions in Yahweh's name, have they come true? (Devarim 18:21-22)

Question 3: Is this leader's personal life — finances, family, conduct — consistent with the standard he teaches his community? (Devarim 17:14-20)

Question 4: Are the organization's finances fully transparent and independently accountable — or controlled exclusively by the leader and his appointed representatives? (Bemidbar 18; Devarim 17:17)

Question 5: Am I free to question this leader, read outside sources, and reach independent conclusions from the text — or does questioning carry social or spiritual consequences? (Devarim 19:15; the prophetic model throughout the Tanakh)

Question 6: Would leaving this organization result in shunning, public condemnation, or spiritual threats — or am I genuinely free to go if my conscience and the text require it? (The Torah's covenant is entered and maintained freely)

Question 7: Does this leader or organization control my significant personal decisions — marriage, finances, career, location — through claimed prophetic direction? (The Torah's governance of personal life is through family, community, and the written standard — not prophetic personal control)

Question 8: Is this leader accountable to anyone — a council, an external body, a documented process — who has genuine authority to correct or

discipline him? (Even Mosheh was accountable to Yahweh; the covenant structure requires it)

Question 9: Does this organization use any core Torah terms in ways that contradict their plain text meaning — and does it discourage members from consulting authoritative lexical sources? (Devarim 4:2 — do not add or take away from the word)

Question 10: When I am honest with myself — does my relationship with this organization draw me closer to Yahweh's written covenant, or closer to this leader's authority? (The ultimate test: *"You shall love Yahweh your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."* — Devarim 6:5)

PART TWO

KNOW WHO YOU ARE VOTING FOR

The Tanakh Standard for Discerning Civil Authority

SECTION 5 — THE COVENANT BASIS: WHY CIVIL AUTHORITY MATTERS TO YAHWEH

The popular notion that covenant people should stay out of politics — that governance is a worldly concern beneath the dignity of the spiritual community — has no basis in the Tanakh. The Hebrew scriptures are the most politically engaged ancient texts in existence. The prophets addressed kings directly. The Torah governed governance. **Yahweh** Himself had an opinion about Shlomo's alliances, Ach'av's economic policies, Yehu's military campaigns, and every covenant violation committed by every ruler of Yehudah and Yisra'el.

What the Tanakh does call for is a specific kind of civic engagement: **impartial, covenant-grounded evaluation of leadership** that does not submit to partisan loyalty,

tribalism, or the social pressures of political affiliation. This standard is expressed most precisely in the text that anchors Miqdash Bethel's entire civic position:

"You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is Yahweh's." — Devarim (Deuteronomy) 1:17

This is the priestly impartiality standard — given to the judges and officers appointed to govern the covenant community. It commands that neither the powerful nor the powerless receive preferential treatment in judgment. Neither the party you agree with nor the party you oppose is exempt from this standard. **Yahweh** declares: ***"the judgment is Yahweh's."*** That means every evaluation of civil leadership must be grounded in His standard, not in the evaluator's political interest.

The Covenant Basis for Electoral Non-Participation

Elder Kepha Arcemont has not voted since 1984. This is not political apathy or civic disengagement. It is a specific covenant position grounded in **Devarim 1:17** and the priestly impartiality standard of Shemot (Exodus) 19:5-6: ***"You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."*** The priestly function in the Tanakh required absolute impartiality — the kohen (priest) could not be beholden to any tribal, political, or economic faction. His judgment had to reflect **Yahweh's** standard regardless of who was asking.

Partisan political voting — by its nature — aligns the voter with one political coalition against another. It makes the voter a stakeholder in a political outcome, which structurally compromises the impartiality the priestly community is called to maintain. A covenant people functioning as a priestly nation among the nations cannot simultaneously be a partisan political force without compromising the very impartiality that makes their witness credible and their judgment trustworthy.

This is not a universal requirement for all believers — the Torah allows for full civic participation, and many covenant-faithful people vote with full integrity. It is a specific covenant calling, grounded in the priestly standard, that Miqdash Bethel holds and teaches as its institutional position. The document does not require readers to adopt

non-participation. It requires them to evaluate civil leadership with the impartiality the priestly standard demands — regardless of whether they vote.

SECTION 6 — THE TANAKH'S STANDARD FOR CIVIL LEADERSHIP

Devarim 17 contains the Torah's most specific governance standard for civil leadership — the laws of the king. These were given before any king existed, as **Yahweh's** standard for the office, not for any particular officeholder. They apply in principle to every form of civil governance in every generation.

"When you come to the land that Yahweh your Elohim is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, 'I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,' you may indeed set a king over you whom Yahweh your Elohim will choose... Only he must not acquire many horses for himself... And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law... And he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear Yahweh his Elohim by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers." — Devarim (Deuteronomy) 17:14-20

Five covenant standards for civil leadership emerge from this passage and from the broader prophetic record:

Standard One — Limits on Military Power — The Torah explicitly warns against leaders who build disproportionate military power for purposes of aggression or empire. Solomon's multiplication of horses (1 Melakhim 10:26-29) is recorded as a covenant violation. A civil leader whose governance is defined by military expansion and aggressive foreign intervention is departing from the covenant standard. The prophets from Amos through Yeshayahu spent their entire ministries addressing the consequences of this departure.

Standard Two — No Accumulation of Wealth Through the Office — The leader must not use the power of the office to accumulate personal wealth or to create financial advantage for his inner circle. The prophets' most consistent critique of Israel's kings was the combination of personal wealth accumulation and systemic economic injustice — **Amos 5:11-12, Mikhah 3:9-11, Yeshayahu 10:1-2**. A leader whose time in office produces extraordinary personal financial gain — or whose policies systematically benefit his own business interests — fails this standard.

Standard Three — Accountability to the Written Law — The king was required to personally copy the Torah and read it all his days — so that his heart would not be lifted up above his brothers (**Devarim 17:20**). This is the foundational standard of constitutional governance: the ruler is subject to the law, not above it. Any leader who positions himself as above accountability to the rule of law — claiming immunity, dismissing legal oversight, or using the power of office to obstruct investigation of his own conduct — has violated the covenant standard of Devarim 17.

Standard Four — Justice for the Poor and Vulnerable — The prophets applied the covenant governance standard to economic policy with precision. **Amos 2:6-7: "They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals — those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted." Yeshayahu 1:17: "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause."** A leader whose governance systematically advantages the wealthy while dismantling protections for the poor, the immigrant, the disabled, and the vulnerable is failing the prophetic standard — regardless of the religious language used to justify the policy.

Standard Five — The Covenant Treatment of the Stranger — The most repeated single commandment in the Torah — 36 times — is the protection and just treatment of the stranger. **Vayikra 19:33-34: "The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."** Any political leader whose platform is built on the dehumanization, exploitation, or systematic mistreatment of immigrant populations — regardless of their legal status — is advocating for policies the Torah explicitly condemns. The covenant community

must name this clearly, even when the political leader uses religious language in their defense.

SECTION 7 — THE PROPHETIC INDICTMENT: WHAT THE TANAKH SAYS ABOUT BAD GOVERNANCE

The Hebrew prophets were not concerned primarily with personal morality. They were **political analysts** using a covenant framework. When Amos, Yeshayahu, Yirmeyahu, and Mikhah addressed the rulers of their day, they addressed specific policy failures — economic exploitation, unjust courts, militarism, false alliances, and the treatment of the vulnerable. Their framework was always the same: covenant faithfulness or covenant violation, and the specific consequences of each.

Three prophetic texts provide the clearest framework for evaluating civil governance:

Amos 5:21-24 — The Rejection of Worship Without Justice

"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer Me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them... But let justice (mishpat) roll down like waters, and righteousness (tzedakah) like an ever-flowing stream." —

Amos (Amos) 5:21-24

A government that holds prayer breakfasts, invokes divine blessing at public ceremonies, and uses religious language to justify its policies — while simultaneously dismantling the justice systems and economic protections that the covenant requires — is precisely the target of this text. **Yahweh** says explicitly: religious performance without justice is not acceptable. The test of governance is **mishpat** — righteous, impartial justice — flowing like an ever-moving stream through the legal, economic, and social structures of the society.

Mikhah 3:9-12 — Building with Blood

"Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money — yet they lean on Yahweh and say, 'Is not Yahweh in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us.'" — Mikhah (Micah) 3:9-12

This text names three interconnected actors: the civil ruler who takes bribes, the religious leader who teaches for pay, and the prophet who speaks for money. All three claim **Yahweh's** presence and protection while operating outside the covenant standard. The diagnostic question for any contemporary political-religious alliance: who is funding whom, and what is being sold in return for that funding? The merger of political bribery and religious endorsement is not a modern invention. The prophets named it twenty-seven hundred years ago.

Yeshayahu 10:1-3 — Legislation of Injustice

"Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and the writers who keep writing oppression, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of My people of their right, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey! What will you do on the day of punishment, in the ruin that will come from afar?" — Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 10:1-3

This is the prophetic indictment of **legislative injustice** — laws that are passed specifically to disadvantage the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the vulnerable while benefiting the powerful. The word translated 'iniquitous decrees' is **chikkei aven** — literally, 'statutes of wickedness.' Legislation is not morally neutral simply because it passes through a legitimate democratic process. **Yahweh** evaluates legislation by its effects on the most vulnerable members of society. The covenant community must do the same.

SECTION 8 — PRACTICAL DISCERNMENT: TEN QUESTIONS BEFORE VOTING OR ENDORSING

These ten questions apply the Tanakh's standards directly to any political candidate, elected official, or policy position. They are not partisan — they apply equally regardless of party affiliation, nationality, or political tradition.

Question 1: Does this leader operate within the rule of law — or does he claim to be above it? (Devarim 17:18-19 — the king is subject to the written law, not above it)

Question 2: Has this leader's time in power produced personal financial enrichment — for himself or his inner circle — at the public's expense? (Devarim 17:17; Mikhah 3:11)

Question 3: Does this leader's governance protect or erode the rights and safety of the most vulnerable — the poor, the immigrant, the fatherless, the widow? (Vayikra 19:33-34; Yeshayahu 10:1-3; Devarim 1:17)

Question 4: Does this leader tell the truth consistently — or does he build his political support on documented falsehoods? (Shemot 23:1 — you shall not spread a false report; Mishlei 12:17 — an honest witness tells the truth)

Question 5: Does this leader use fear, demonization, and dehumanization of specific groups to build political power? (Bereishit 1:26-27 — every human being bears the image of Elohim; Vayikra 19:18 — love your neighbor as yourself)

Question 6: Does this leader's religious endorsement network provide spiritual cover for policies that the Torah explicitly condemns? (Mikhah 3:11 — prophets who practice for money while claiming Yahweh is among them)

Question 7: Does this leader concentrate power in his own hands — dismantling checks and balances, dismissing oversight bodies, attacking an independent judiciary? (Devarim 17:20 — his heart must not be lifted up above his brothers; the separation of governance powers is the covenant structure)

Question 8: Does this leader use military power as a first resort rather than a last resort — and does he build alliances based on personal loyalty rather than national interest? (Devarim 20:10 — the peace offer comes first; Devarim 17:16 — do not multiply military force as an end in itself)

Question 9: Do the communities most affected by this leader's policies — the poor, minorities, immigrants, the sick — experience his governance as just or as oppressive? (Amos 5:24 — let justice roll down like waters; the prophets always evaluated governance from the position of its least powerful subjects)

Question 10: If Yahweh's standard of Devarim 1:17 — impartial judgment, hearing the small and the great alike — were applied to this leader's record in office, would that record stand? (The judgment belongs to Yahweh — not to political loyalty, not to tribal affiliation, not to the fear of consequences. To that standard only)

CONCLUSION — THE COVENANT COMMUNITY IN THE WORLD

The Torah gives the covenant community two foundational instructions for its relationship to the world's power structures. The first is the priestly standard of Shemot 19:5-6: **"A kingdom of priests and a holy nation."** Priests do not belong to any faction. They serve the whole. They are accountable to one standard. Their function is to carry the covenant into the world — not to be absorbed by the world's political contests.

The second is the prophetic standard of every prophet from Mosheh to Malakhi: speak truth to power without fear, without favoritism, and without regard to the political consequences. The prophet does not ask 'What will the king do to me if I say this?' The prophet asks 'What does **Yahweh** require of me in this moment?' And the answer is always the same:

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does Yahweh require of you but to do justice (mishpat), and to love kindness (hesed), and to walk humbly with your Elohim?" — Mikhah (Micah) 6:8

The covenant community does not have a political party. It has a standard. That standard judges every party, every leader, every organization — religious and civil — by the same measure: Does it produce mishpat? Does it embody hesed? Does it walk

humbly before **Yahweh**, acknowledging that His standard governs all human authority — not the other way around?

The words of **Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 40:8** stand over every human power structure that has ever claimed **Yahweh's** endorsement:

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our Elohim will stand forever."

Religious organizations rise and fall. Political leaders come and go. Empires are built and dismantled. The word of **Yahweh** stands. The covenant community's task is not to build the winning coalition. It is to stand on the word — clearly, impartially, and without fear of any human power — and to call every institution, every leader, and every community to account before the one standard that has never changed and will never change.

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