

פרשת

בהר

Parashat Behar

*Vayikra / Leviticus 25:1-26:2, Jeremiah 32:6-27
Luke 4:14-22*

Our Faith is something that is Practiced!

This week's Torah portion opens with *Vayikra / Leviticus 25:1-2*, א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר: ב דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם: *25:1 And the Lord spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying, 25:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the Lord. (KJV)* The Lord speaks about keeping His Sabbaths and speaks then of the law of release, the Land is to be fallow, no sowing of seed in the Land (*25:1-12*), all property is to revert back to its original owner (*25:13-28*), all slaves are to be set free (*25:39-54*), and all debts are to be released. Both the 7th year (Shmita, שמיטה) and 50th year (Yovel) of release are a very important times in the eyes of the Lord because this is the time the people get a second start, everyone's debts are canceled, and slaves are set free from bondage. The idea is one may be put into service as a child, spending 50 years, in his old age he may retire as a free man. There are many parallels which may be drawn to our lives in the Messiah and the forgiveness of sin, being set free, and being given a new start. Within this set of commands, the Lord says *25:14 'If you make a sale, moreover, to your friend or buy from your friend's hand,*

you shall not wrong one another. (NASB) This command speaks about sanctifying our lives and our transactions with one another and is consistent with the meaning of *Vayikra / Leviticus 25:12*, כִּי יוֹבֵל הוּא קִדְּשׁ, תְּהִיָּה לְכֶם תְּהִיָּה “*the Yovel (Jubilee), it is to be holy to you.*” The Masoretic Text states this year is to be Kodesh (קִדְּשׁ) “*Holy,*” where both the land and our lives are to be set apart for the Lord. The end of the Torah portion follows through with idea saying in *Vayikra / Leviticus 26:1* “*You shall not make idols for yourselves or erect an image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured stone in your land to bow down to it, for I am the Lord your God. 26:22 You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.* (ESV, א לא-תַעֲשׂוּ לְכֶם אֱלִילִים וּפְסֵלִים וּמַצֵּבֹת, בָּה לא-תִקְיִמוּ לְכֶם וְאִבֹן מִשְׁפִּית לֹא תִתְּנוּ בְּאַרְצְכֶם לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת עָלֶיהָ כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה: (יהוה אלהיכם: ב אֶת-שַׁבְּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וּמִקְדָּשַׁי תִּירָאוּ אֲנִי יְהוָה: This follows through by what we have been studying in the previous two Torah portions (Acharei Mot and Emor) on idol worship and those idols we place in our hearts.

The commentary Chizkuni states the following concerning *Vayikra / Leviticus 25:2*.

Chizkuni, Vayikra / Leviticus 25:2 Part 2

ושבתה הארץ, “*the land is to observe a rest, ‘Sabbatical;’*” seeing that we might understand this term as referring only to a prohibition not to dig in the land for treasure, not to dig irrigation canals, etc., the Torah spells out that we must not plough, put seed in the ground, nor dig for wells, either. Neither must we perform work for the betterment of orchards or vineyards, which do not need to be ploughed every year.

Chizkuni, Vayikra / Leviticus 25:2 Part 3

שבת לה, “*a Sabbath for the Lord;*” the legislation is not because the land is tired after producing crops six years in a row, but the Sabbath of the land is to remind you that the land belongs to Me, though you are its tenants.

Chizkuni, Vayikra / Leviticus 25:2 Part 4

לֵה שַׁבַּת; *Rashi understands these words as meaning: "a Sabbath in honor of My name;" what he means is that you are not to understand this law as designed to teach you how to farm efficiently by giving the land a breather every seven years, but you are to demonstrate that you observe the Lord's commandments.*

The commentary speaks about this year of release of the land in a parallel fashion to the Sabbath rest each week. No digging, ploughing, or work is to be performed in the orchards or vineyards. The comment states the command given is not in relation to the land being tired from producing crops the previous six years. The point is this year of release (every seven years) is meant to remind us that the land belongs to the Lord and He is only loaning the land to us. The idea of obeying this command is related to trusting in the Lord God of Israel and His promises. It is a way to bear the testimony of God before the world.

Midrash Tanchuma Buber describes the person who engages in business during the sabbatical year in the following way:

Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Behar 1:4

Another interpretation (of Prov. 28:22): [< AN EVIL-EYED PERSON > MOVES QUICKLY AFTER WEALTH....] This represents those who engage in business in the Sabbatical Year, in that they move quickly to become rich. They do not observe the Sabbatical Year but are intent on becoming rich. The Holy One said to them: You have moved quickly to become rich from the Sabbatical Year. By your life, you shall have a loss in the matter. But he only acted when he did not observe the Sabbatical Year. The curse began entering into his money, and he sold all that he had. What is written elsewhere on the matter (in Lev. 25:2): THE LAND SHALL OBSERVE A SABBATH FOR THE LORD. And after that it is written (in vs. 14): AND WHEN YOU MAKE A SALE.

The idea put forth here is that one is seeking wealth and disregards the commandment for the purpose of gaining greater wealth. The rabbis say a curse will enter into a man's wealth if he does such a thing. What is interesting, is how in the biblical account, we do not read Israel actually observing these things until the book of Ezra. (*Ezra sanctified Israel in the seventh year after the sixth year of Darius, when the Temple was dedicated (Ezra 6:15-16 and 7:7). The first cycle of shmita began with the sanctification of Ezra.*) It is interesting to note in Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Parashat Behar 2, Part 1 speaks of the sabbaths and one having to sell his land being due to the accumulation of his sins. (*i.e. He will have to sell his field, his house, as a Hebrew slave, and then as a gentile slave if he continues to be unrepentant.*) The Midrash continues saying:

Consider the case of Israel. The Holy One said to Moses: See how they will be sold to the gentiles because they profaned the Sabbatical Year. He said to him: Sovereign of the World, did you not say this (in Lev. 25:35): AND WHEN YOUR RELATIVE BECOMES POOR, [AND HIS STRENGTH FAILS NEAR YOU], < YOU SHALL MAINTAIN HIM AS A FOREIGNER AND SOJOURNER AND LET HIM LIVE NEAR YOU >? Fulfill what you said. [Israel is your brother (ah), as stated (in Ps. 122:8): FOR THE SAKE] OF MY RELATIVES (ah) AND FRIENDS. (Lev. 25:35:) AND WHEN YOUR RELATIVE BECOMES POOR, AND HIS STRENGTH FAILS NEAR YOU, < i.e., > when their strength fails before Nebuchadnezzar, the Divine Presence, as it were, will be with them. (Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Parashat Behar 2, Part 1)

The idea here is though the people sin and the Lord sends them into exile, His divine presence will go with them and preserve a remnant. This provides us with an image of the glory and mercy of God towards His people. The Lord is always seeking for the repentant heart, from both the Jew and Gentile (see book of Jonah for further study). Midrash Tanchuma states "*this text is related (to Prov. 28:22), "An evil-*

eyed person moves quickly after wealth, [and he does not know that loss will come to him].” This verse speaks about many people. “An evil-eyed person moves quickly after wealth.” This was Cain.” What the Torah teaches us about Cain was his desiring to inherit the world, and doing so by losing his life. What happened to Cain? He wandered about the world, as stated (*Bereshit / Genesis 4:12*), “*you shall become a ceaseless wanderer on the earth.*” Remember what Ezekiel’s servant Gehazi did according to *2 Kings 5:20*, he sought after wealth from Naaman and procured his wealth, but the Lord struck him with leprosy the remainder of his days. This is consistent with the midrashic interpretation which states “*By your life, you shall have a loss in the matter.’ Since he did not observe the sabbatical year, the curse began entering into his money, and he sells [all that he had]. What is written above the matter (in Lev. 25:2), “the land shall observe a Sabbath for the Lord.” And after that it is written (in vs. 14), ‘When you sell property.’”* The idea of the curse entering into the life of a person due to his greed is consistent with what we read in *2 Kings 5:20*. These are the ethical maxims known as the ‘*Fundamental Principles*’ that are derived from the high regard in which the Torah is positioned as the way of life for God’s people. The purpose of the Jubilee was to reveal to all of Israel the significance of God having ownership of not just the land and of their lives, but also of the significance of submitting to His will according to His word that is founded upon His mercy. Midrash Tanchuma Buber goes on to say “*The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel, “Just as I sold my people and returned again to reinstate them, as stated (Jer. 3:14), “Turn back, faithless children,” says the Lord; “for I am a master to you.”’ It is also written (in Is. 52:3), ‘For thus says the Lord, “You were sold for free, and you shall be redeemed for no money.”’ So too you should not sell the land absolutely, as stated (in Lev. 25:23), ‘[it] shall not be sold permanently.’ The Land [of Israel] is dear to me because I have made it holier than all the [other] lands in the world.” You yourself know, when the Land of Israel was distributed to the tribes, it did not pass from tribe to tribe. Rather [it was distributed] to each tribe separately.”* The prophet Isaiah says in *63:4* *For the day of vengeance was in My heart, and the year of My redemption had come. (NASB)* This speaks of a cycle of mercy, repentance, and redemption for those who are called by His name.

The Scriptures we are looking at for this week are from *Vayikra / Leviticus 25:1-22*.

Vayikra / Leviticus 25:1-22

25:1 The Lord then spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, saying, 25:2 ‘Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When you come into the land which I shall give you, then the land shall have a sabbath to the Lord. 25:3 ‘Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, 25:4 but during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard. 25:5 ‘Your harvest’s aftergrowth you shall not reap, and your grapes of untrimmed vines you shall not gather; the land shall have a sabbatical year. 25:6 ‘All of you shall have the sabbath products of the land for food; yourself, and your male and female slaves, and your hired man and your foreign resident, those who live as aliens with you. 25:7 ‘Even your cattle and the animals that are in your land shall have all its crops to eat. 25:8 ‘You are also to count off seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years, so that you have the time of the seven sabbaths of years, namely, forty-nine years. 25:9 ‘You shall then sound a ram’s horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day of atonement you shall sound a horn all through your land. 25:10 ‘You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family. 25:11 ‘You shall have the fiftieth year as a jubilee; you shall not sow, nor reap its aftergrowth, nor gather in from its untrimmed vines. 25:12 ‘For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you. You shall eat its crops out of the field. 25:13 ‘On this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his own property. 25:14 ‘If you make a sale, moreover, to your friend

or buy from your friend's hand, you shall not wrong one another. 25:15 'Corresponding to the number of years after the jubilee, you shall buy from your friend; he is to sell to you according to the number of years of crops. 25:16 'In proportion to the extent of the years you shall increase its price, and in proportion to the fewness of the years you shall diminish its price, for it is a number of crops he is selling to you. 25:17 'So you shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the Lord your God. 25:18 'You shall thus observe My statutes and keep My judgments, so as to carry them out, that you may live securely on the land. 25:19 'Then the land will yield its produce, so that you can eat your fill and live securely on it. 25:20 'But if you say, 'What are we going to eat on the seventh year if we do not sow or gather in our crops?' 25:21 then I will so order My blessing for you in the sixth year that it will bring forth the crop for three years. 25:22 'When you are sowing the eighth year, you can still eat old things from the crop, eating the old until the ninth year when its crop comes in. (NASB)

א וַיִּדְבֹר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר: ב דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי תִבְאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וּשְׁבַתָּהּ הָאָרֶץ שַׁבַּת לַיהוָה: ג שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שְׂדֶךָ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כְּרָמְךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת-תְּבוּאָתָהּ: ד וּבַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית שַׁבַּת שַׁבַּתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ שַׁבַּת לַיהוָה שְׂדֶךָ לֹא תִזְרַע וּכְרָמְךָ לֹא תִזְמַר: ה אֵת סְפִיֹת קִצִּירְךָ לֹא תִקַּח צוּר וְאֵת-עֲנָבֵי נְזִירְךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר שְׁנַת שַׁבַּתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ: ו וְהִיְתָה שַׁבַּת הָאָרֶץ לָכֶם לְאֹכְלָהּ לָהּ וּלְעֶבְדָּהּ וּלְאִמָּתָהּ וּלְשִׁכְרֶיהָ וּלְתוֹשֵׁבֶיהָ הַגֵּרִים עִמָּךְ: ז וּלְבִהֶמְתָּהּ וּלְחִיָּהּ אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרְצְךָ תִּהְיֶה כָל-תְּבוּאָתָהּ לְאֹכֹל: ח וְסִפַּרְתָּ לָהּ שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים וְהָיוּ לָהּ יָמֵי שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים הַשָּׁנִים תִּשַׁע וְאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה: ט וְהִעֲבַרְתָּ שׁוֹפָר תְּרוּעָה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּעָשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּיוֹם הַכַּפָּרִים תִּעְבְּרוּ

שׁוֹפֵר בְּכָל-אַרְצְכֶם: י וְקִדְשְׁתֶּם אֶת שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה
וּקְרַאתֶם דְּרוֹר בְּאַרְץ לְכָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל יוֹבֵל הוּא תְהִיָּה לְכֶם וְשִׁ-
בְּתָם אִישׁ אֶל-אַחֲזָתוֹ וְאִישׁ אֶל-מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ תִּשְׁבוּ: יא יוֹבֵל
הוּא שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה תְהִיָּה לְכֶם לֹא תִזְרְעוּ וְלֹא תִקְצְרוּ
אֶת-סְפִיחֶיהָ וְלֹא תִבְצְרוּ אֶת-גְּזָרֶיהָ: יב כִּי יוֹבֵל הוּא קִדְשׁ
תְהִיָּה לְכֶם מִן-הַשָּׂדֶה תֹאכְלוּ אֶת-תְּבוּאַתָּה: יג בַּשָּׁנָה
הַיּוֹבֵל הַזֹּאת תִּשְׁבוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אַחֲזָתוֹ: [שְׁנִי] יד וְכִי-תִמְכְּרוּ
מִמֶּכֶר לְעַמִּיתְךָ אוֹ קָנָה מִיַּד עַמִּיתְךָ אֶל-תּוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת-אָחִיו:
טו בְּמִסְפַּר שָׁנִים אַחֲרֵי הַיּוֹבֵל תִּקְנֶה מֵאֵת עַמִּיתְךָ בְּמִסְפַּר
שָׁנֵי-תְבוּאָת יִמְכֶר-לָךְ: טז לְפִי | רַב הַשָּׁנִים תִּרְבֶּה מִקְנָתוֹ
וּלְפִי מְעוֹט הַשָּׁנִים תִּמְעִיט מִקְנָתוֹ כִּי מִסְפַּר תְּבוּאָת הוּא מִכֶּר
לָךְ: יז וְלֹא תוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת-עַמִּיתוֹ וְיִרְאֶת מֵאַלְהֵיךָ כִּי אֲנִי
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: יח וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת-חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת-מִשְׁפָּטַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ
וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וּשְׁבַתֶּם עַל-הָאָרֶץ לְבִטָּח: [שְׁלִישִׁי] [שְׁנִי
כַשֶּׁהוּן מַחוּבְרִין] יט וְנִתְּנָה הָאָרֶץ פְּרִיָּה וְאֶכְלֶתֶם לְשִׁבְעַ
וּשְׁבַתֶּם לְבִטָּח עָלֶיהָ: כ וְכִי תֹאמְרוּ מֵה-נֹאכַל בַּשָּׁנָה
הַשְּׁבִיעִת הֵן לֹא נִזְרַע וְלֹא נִאֶסַף אֶת-תְּבוּאָתָנוּ: כא וְצוֹיֹתַי
אֶת-בְּרִכְתִּי לְכֶם בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁשִׁית וַעֲשֵׂת אֶת-הַתְּבוּאָה לְשֵׁלֶשׁ
הַשָּׁנִים: כב וְזִרְעֶתֶם אֶת הַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁמִינִת וְאֶכְלֶתֶם מִן-
הַתְּבוּאָה יָשׁוּן עַד | הַשָּׁנָה הַתְּשִׁיעִת עַד-בּוֹא תְּבוּאָתָה תֹאכְלוּ
יָשׁוּן:

What these passages on the 7th year release and the 50th year release speaks of is going forth in faith and moving based upon our trust in the Lord. We do not read in the Tanach (תנ"ך, 39 books of the OT) of the people of Israel observing these years according to the command in the Torah. When we consider the deeper meaning of the Shmita and Yovel as being related to stepping out in faith and trusting in the Lord, is this the reason why these commands were not observed in the Land by Israel until the time of Ezra and Nehemiah? (*Israel had struggled with faithfulness to God throughout its biblical history, see 1-2 Kings for further study.*) The point of these mitzvot appear to be designed to implant the character traits of faith and trust in the God of Israel for the people of Israel. The rabbis say, *"Hashem was concerned what*

perhaps when they would come to the land they would work the soil in the natural way, and when they would be successful they would forget Hashem and remove their trust from Him. They would think that 'their might and the power of their hand have made them this wealth,' and the world goes along in its natural way. They would think that the land belongs to them; they are the masters and no one else." (Kli Yakar on Vayikra / Leviticus 25:2 Part 2) This teaches us something about the Lord's blessing upon our lives. He is doing so in the background while we are unaware of what He is doing! This is why Paul wrote what he did in *Romans 8:28* *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (NASB)* Even though we obey a command and do not know why this particular command was given, the Lord God is implanting the character traits of faithfulness and willingness to submit to His will. The Spirit of God is working in our lives to overcome this world, and walk according to the Spirit.

According to *Rabbeinu Bahya on Vayikra / Leviticus 25:2 Parts 1-3*, he says, "*A kabbalistic approach: The words 'וְשָׁבְתָה הָאֲרֶזְשָׁבֶת' do not refer to individual parcels of land belonging to individual farmers but refer to the earth as a whole and are an allusion to the seventh millennium following the six thousand years when our terrestrial universe functions normally. They are a reference to the 1000-year transitional period when the earth will be desolate, unfit as a habitat for living creatures (compare Rosh Hashanah 31). That millennium is one described as "eternal rest" (Tamid 7,4), a reference to the world to come after physical resurrection has occurred.*" The rabbinic approach to the Shmita is as a reference to the resurrection, where the 6000 years is a time for mankind, and the 1000 years that follows is a period of supernatural observance of the Shabbat following the resurrection. The instructions given on the Shmita and the Yovel years, Moshe says the penalties for not observing these years of rest is to cause Israel to lose their homeland and go into exile. These things teach us the greater concept that God has in mind based upon these commands, that the physical universe is imperfect and will be eventually transformed into a perfect universe. The shorter year of release helps us to focus upon the greater year of release and then upon what the Lord God has for us at a future time. The Torah lays the foundation for the future expecta-

tion of God's deliverance. The Lord God Almighty delivers in many ways, just as we are seeing here in the Shmita and Yovel years on the deliverance from debt. It was upon these principles that God had promised Israel a Messiah, an anointed one from Him, who would be their deliverer and their king. However, in 586 BC, Israel found herself in exile in Babylon because of her unfaithfulness to God due to her sin and idolatry. The exile led to the people being cut off from the temple services and worship. They were divested of a nation, a place to call home, and carried into the midst of a pagan nation being surrounded by pagan religious practices. They could no longer depend on traveling to Jerusalem during the moedim (appointed times) and to bringing sacrifices before the Lord in fulfillment of God's Word (His Torah). We learn, based upon history, that Israel carried the scriptures with them into exile, the Torah, the Prophets, the Writings (Tanach) (see [Acts 15:21](#)). We are told the people met together in community groups for worship and reading of the Scriptures in what we know as synagogues. As a result, Judaism became a faith that could be practiced wherever the Torah could be carried. This is a very important concept because this teaches us why studying God's Word and placing it upon our hearts is so important. Placing God's Word upon our hearts causes us to carry God's word to every place we go and our faith becomes something that is practiced. This practice of memorizing Scripture and carrying the Scriptures with the people preserved Judaism preparing the way for the future Messiah. The Rabbinic literature states before Moshiach comes, the Gemara in *Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 98b* advises us, *"If a person wants to be saved from the birth-pangs of Moshiach, he should involve himself in Torah and acts of kindness."* (*Talmud Bavli Berachot 5a*, *"regarding Torah and acts of kindness"* and *Tehillim / Psalms 18:51 He gives great deliverance to His king, And shows lovingkindness to His anointed, To David and his descendants forever. NASB, and Talmud Bavli Sotah 14a*)

The failure to observe the Shmita and Yovel years we are told led to the dispersion of Israel into the world. Therefore, the dispersion of Israel began with the exile and when Yeshua came there were Jewish synagogues literally in every land. We see this in the NT account as Paul went in his travels towards Rome. The Jewish people outside of Israel concentrated their religious lives in the study of the Torah and

the life of the synagogue and we learn how God-fearing gentiles also joined in studying and worshipping the Lord. This is how the disciples of the first century believers began teaching about Yeshua amongst the dispersed peoples using the weekly Torah readings in the synagogues as a meeting place for sharing the good news of Yeshua.

What we learn from this week's Torah portion is how disobedience to God's Word (unfaithfulness) leads to a curse entering into our lives due to sin and unrepentance according to the words of the Torah. The rabbis teach us the importance of carrying God's Word with us, in our hearts, for the purpose of putting our faith into action (this is the definition of faithfulness, to put our faith into practice). The Shmita and Yovel years reveals to all peoples the significance of God having ownership of not just the land, but also of all that we have, and even our very lives, and the breath of life. This is why we are to remember what God has done for us each day, living humble and repentant lives, and seeking to walk according to God's ways because of the mercy that He has shown us in His Son Yeshua the Messiah. These things we are learning today set the background for preparing the way for answering the prayers of the people for their Messiah to come and deliver them. In the confidence of trusting in God and in His Word, we too can receive answered prayer asking the Lord God Almighty to send His Spirit into our hearts and lives through faith in His Messiah Yeshua. And through faith in God's Messiah, the Lord will work in our lives to remain faithful, and break the curse of sinfulness in our lives. This is the power of the Gospel Message, and this is the truth that is taught in the Torah. This is how the Torah and the Gospel Message go hand in hand!